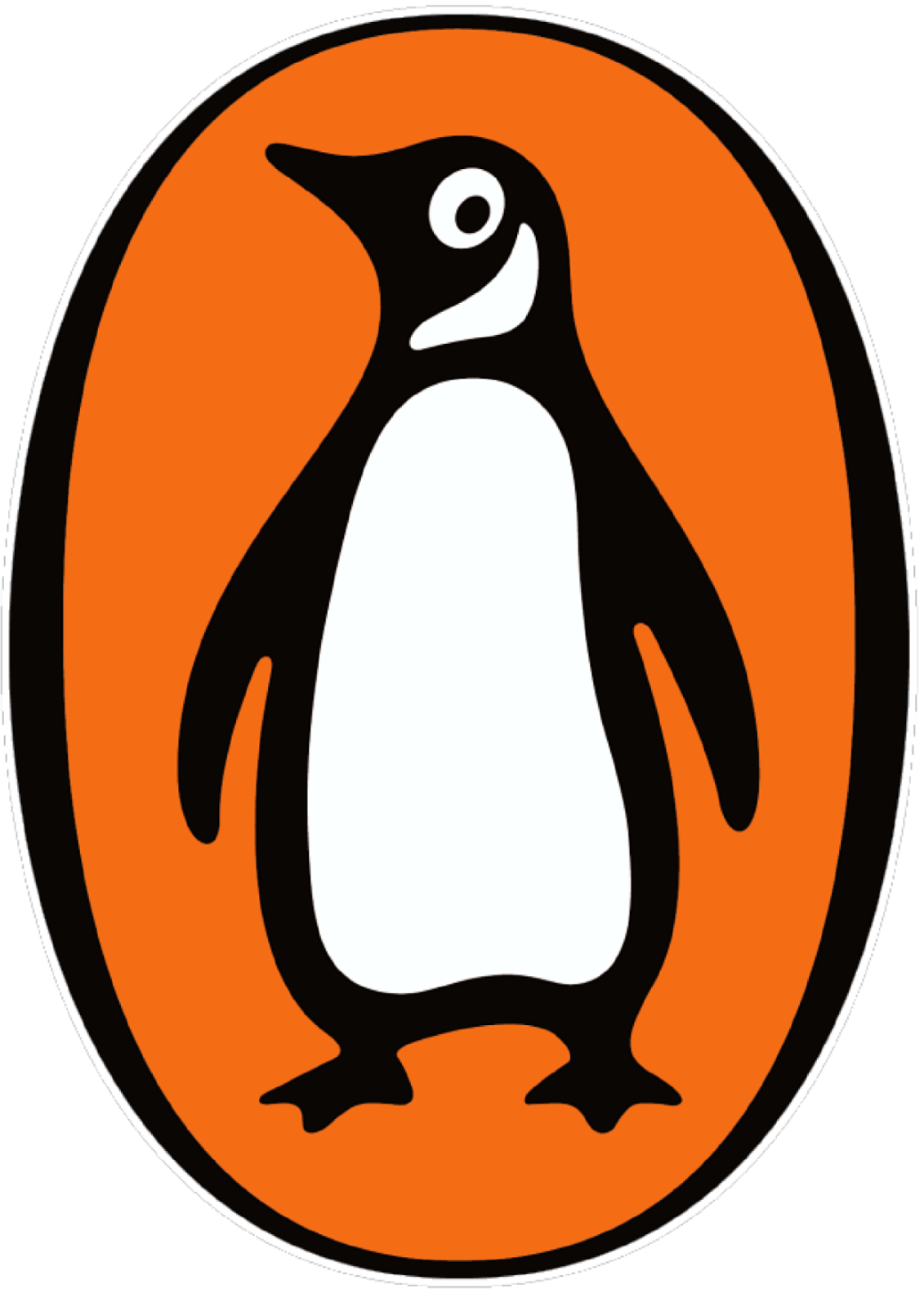

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About the Author

Paul Mason is an award-winning writer, broadcaster, and film-maker. Previously economics editor of Channel 4 News, his books include *PostCapitalism*, *Why It's Kicking Off Everywhere: the New Global Revolutions*; *Live Working Die Fighting*; and *Rare Earth: A Novel.*

To the memory of my mother, Julia Lewis (1935–2017)

The experience of my life ... has not only not destroyed my faith in the clear, bright future of mankind, but on the contrary has given it an indestructible temper.

Leon Trotsky[1]

Introduction

By the end of reading this book I want you to make a choice. Will you accept the machine control of human beings, or resist it? And if the answer is resist, on what basis will you defend the rights of humans against the logic of machines?

In the twenty-first century, the human race faces a new problem. Thanks to information technology, vast asymmetries of knowledge have opened up – creating vast asymmetries of power. Through the screens of our smart devices, both corporations and governments are becoming adept at exerting control over us via algorithms: they know what we're doing, what we're thinking, can predict our next moves and influence our behaviour. We, meanwhile, don't even have the right to know that any of this is going on.

And that's just the nightmare of the present. In the future, as artificial intelligence develops, it will become very easy for us to lose control of information machines altogether.

An algorithm is simply the instructions for solving a problem, devised by a human and written down. For example: when I present my passport, border control knows that, if my fingerprints match the ones stored on file, they should let me through; if they don't, I get detained for further questioning.

A computer program is an algorithm running without human intervention. In one sense it is just the latest achievement in a long process of automation. For the past 200 years one of our most successful strategies has been to move workers 'to the side' of an industrial process; to make them observers rather than controllers, giving machines temporary and limited autonomy. What we do with computers and information networks is only an extension of what we did with windmills, cotton-spinning machines and the combustion engine. But once machines can give themselves instructions, the risk is that humanity steps 'to the side' permanently, surrendering control.

Millions of people have become alert to the dangers of algorithmic control. But they assume it is a problem for an ethics committee, a tech conference, a science magazine – or for the next generation to solve. In fact, it is intimately connected to the urgent economic, political and moral crises we are living through now.

Here's why ...

Suppose I told you there was a machine that could run the country better than the government, think more logically than any single human and run autonomously? Suppose I asked you to hand control of all the important decisions in your life to that machine? Suppose I said you would be happier if you changed your behaviour to anticipate what the machine decides? I hope you would scorn the whole idea.

But try substituting the word 'market' for the machine. For three decades, millions of people have allowed market forces to run their lives, shape their behaviour and overrule their democratic rights. There is even a religion dedicated to worshipping this machine's power and control: it's called economics.

By elevating the market to the status of an autonomous, superhuman spirit guide during the past thirty years we have, potentially, prepared ourselves to accept machine control sometime during the next hundred years.

During the free-market era we learned to celebrate the subjection of human beings to market forces. We treated concepts like citizenship, morality and 'agency' (the power to act) as if they were irrelevant to the workings of the world, which was now run only by consumer choice and financial engineering.

Now, however, the free-market system has imploded. The logic of selfishness, hierarchy and consumerism no longer works. As a result, the religion of the market has given way to older gods: racism, nationalism, misogyny and the idolization of powerful thieves.

As we approach the 2020s, an alliance of ethnic nationalists, woman-haters and authoritarian political leaders are tearing the world order to shreds. What unites them is their disdain for universal human rights and their fear of freedom. They love the idea of machine control and, if we let them, they will deploy it aggressively to keep themselves rich, powerful and unaccountable.

It is not too late to stem the chaos and disorder, to stop the attempt to impose new biological hierarchies based on race, gender and nationality, and to refuse machine control. But the arguments for surrendering to them are all around us.

The idea that 'humanity is already over' is deeply embedded in modern thought, from the alt-right to the academic left. No matter how much you, personally, are trying to live by 'human values', the consensus is – from Silicon Valley to the HQ of the Chinese Communist Party – that human values have no foundation; that there is no such thing as human nature, no logical basis to privilege humans over all machines, no rationale for universal human rights.

With hindsight, free-market ideology looks like the gateway drug for a more pervasive anti-humanism. And we're about to find out just how damaging this harder drug can be.

'Compete and acquire' was the first commandment of the free-market religion. In the era of de-globalization and right-wing nationalism it will become: compete, acquire, lie, control and kill. If we don't place the new technology of intelligent machines under human control, and programme them to achieve human values, the values they will be designed around are those of Putin, Trump and Xi Jin Ping.

So I have written this book as an act of defiance. When you've read it, I hope you will begin to make acts of defiance yourself. They can range from bringing down dictators, to setting up human-centred projects in your neighbourhood, to simply defying machine logic in your daily life.

To resist effectively we need a theory of human nature that can survive in conflict with free-market economics, machine worship and the anti-humanism of the academic left.

We need, in short, a radical defence of the human being.

Part I

THE EVENTS

What the mob wanted, and what Goebbels expressed with great precision, was access to history even at the price of destruction.

Hannah Arendt[1]

1

Day Zero

Ross sprints past me, his camera rolling. He taps me on the shoulder and starts to speak but I point to the GoPro taped to my crash helmet and silently mouth the word 'live' – meaning 'don't say anything that could incriminate us'. Last time we filmed a riot together was in Istanbul. This is different.

Seconds later it is Brandon who hi-fives me as he weaves through the chaos, also filming. We've criss-crossed the riot world since 2011: Cairo, Athens, Istanbul. We extend our non-camera hands and grip fingers for a millisecond. Windows are getting shattered. An SUV is on fire. Flash-bangs thump the air and the CS gas is drifting.

About a thousand young people, masked up and dressed in black, are swarming across the city with the riot police in pursuit. And by total coincidence, in this few square metres of urban battlefield, we find each other: me, Ross and Brandon – veterans at filming countries that are going to shit.

The date is 20 January 2017. The place is Washington DC. The social war that's been raging at the edges of the global system has just arrived at its centre. We are two blocks away from the White House. Donald Trump's presidency is one minute old.

As the riot gathers momentum the police are clueless: they are trained for situations where people either obey them or get shot. Today neither shooting nor obedience is possible. So they jog breathlessly behind the protesters, their bodies weighed down by pointless equipment and bloated by a lifestyle of militarized sloth. When a girl pushing a bike trips over, accidentally taking three cops to the floor, some other cops rush up to baton her, and the bike itself, while others try to help her up. The soundtrack is classic riot music: police bullhorns; radios sizzling with panicked orders; the glass of a Starbucks window smashing; young Americans chanting 'No fascist USA!'

Eventually the cops attack, the CS gas vomiting out of their half-inch hoses. Instead of fleeing, some youths in black balaclavas form a tight wedge, black umbrellas opened horizontally for protection, and rush the police line. One protester, unmasked, lies face down on the tarmac as a cop pulls a taser on him. About twenty years old, he has blond curly hair: his face betrays not one single flicker of fear. He looks at the cop, and at the camera lenses zooming on him, and states calmly: 'Fuck Donald Trump. Fuck Donald Trump.'

As the riot breaks into fragments, the cops begin chasing small groups across the city. Everything intensifies: we sprint past the American Development Bank, past Joe's Stone Crab, past the soul-drained office blocks where Washington's lobbyists work. And as we run, this act of panicked flight from a slow, unthinking enemy – across the shattered landscape of normality – reminds me of something in the movies. But I can't place it.

The night before Trump is inaugurated I meet a 72-year-old farmer from Tennessee. 'What d'ya think'a that?' he says, jerking his head towards the words 'Fuck Trump' chalked onto a path in Franklin Square. He's wearing a thick, red cowboy shirt and a pained expression. Gazing at the demonstrators, who have gathered around a thrash metal band, he mutters: 'They don't want to work. They're sick.' Which is weird, because most of the demonstrators are clearly middle-class kids with degrees and jobs.

'Know what it costs?' he continues. 'Fifty dollars for a baseball cap. Hundred-fifty for a pair o' sneakers.' Again this remark seems strange, because – being mainly anarchists – almost none of the protesters are wearing branded baseball caps or sports shoes. 'All they want is mo-ney,' he pronounces the last word as whine, stroking his outstretched palm like a beggar. His face screws up as though he's smelled shit.

And only now do I realize: he is not actually seeing the demonstrators but – in his mind's eye – the people they remind him of: poor black people in Tennessee. 'You see 'em coming outta the supermarket ...' his eyes stiffen and bulge with anger ... 'white t-shirt twenty dollars, sneakers hundred-fifty ...' He is an expert on the price of the clothes black people wear.

When I try to object, his brain flips to another topic: climate change, which he believes is fake. 'Cows fart,' he exclaims, 'but now they say I gotta pay a methane tax?' He tells me that beneath the Antarctic there is a fossilized tropical forest containing the skeletons of camels, and that this proves climate change is temporary: 'What goes around comes around.'

As Washington fills up for the Inauguration I meet individuals like this on every corner. Trump has empowered them, and the US media has granted them permission to unleash what they want to unleash most: hatred. As one self-pitying racist after another unloads their story on me, it becomes clear what we are dealing with: people who've lost their power to compute logic, but for whom all the minor injustices and inconveniences in life are linked to an imagined threat posed by blacks, gays and liberated women.

We are asked by liberal commentators to understand what motivates such individuals: the economics that has impoverished them and the social change that has disoriented them. We are asked to sympathize with the unfulfilled lives they live among the motels and flyovers of the mid-West.

I prefer a harsher form of sympathy called reason, logic and science.

Asked to understand the problems of the 'white working class' I say, with the confidence of someone born white, and raised in a tough, English coal-mining town: it does not exist. 'White working class' is an identity constructed by rich people to oppress poor people, just as the identities of the 'coolie' and the 'savage' were constructed by colonial settlers to justify treating their victims as subhuman.

Let's confront the problem. If you want peace, freedom and social justice, people like the Antarctic Camel Guy are your enemies. They put a man in power – in the most powerful nation on earth – who is a racist and a tax-dodger, and who had bragged about 'grabbing women by the pussy'. In doing so they knowingly attempted to destroy the multilateral system known as globalization, reverse fifty years of progress on minority and women's rights, and replace the rule of law with that of a kleptocratic dynasty.

And such people are on the offensive in every continent. There's the Patriot Prayer demonstrators in Portland Oregon, calling for the heads of migrants to be 'smashed against the concrete'; there's the trolls from the ruling AK Party in Turkey, sending coordinated rape threats to female journalists; there's the mobs attacking Pride marches in Russia; and the neo-Nazis spouting Islamophobic rhetoric from the podium

of the German Bundestag. In India they are among the 'cow vigilantes' lynching Muslims while Prime Minister Narendra Modi – the Hindu Trump – refuses to lift a finger. In Brazil they are the footsoldiers of Jair Bolsonaro, the fascist president elected in 2018, who said of a female opponent that she was 'not worth raping' and suggested that black *quilonbolas*, the descendants of rebel African slaves, were 'not fit to procreate'.

On a wider level, their mental garbage is polluting the thoughts and social media timelines of rational individuals all over the world.

Opinion pollsters have dubbed their mindset 'authoritarian populism'.[1] They are united in opposition to human rights, which they see as rights for somebody else; to migration, which they see as polluting 'their' culture; and to all forms of multilateralism in global politics and economics, which they see as restraining the hand of a justifiably repressive state. If that was all they believed in, we could tell ourselves this is simply a surge in the kind of reactionary sentiment that always lurks within fast-changing societies.

But there is something deeper going on: a hostility to science, logic and rationality, which have been the guiding values of market-based societies for the past 500 years. As we shall see, whether or not the activists of the alt-right fully understand it, this attack on reason was theorized in advance by a section of the elite in crisis.

The eruption of learned stupidity into global politics is all the more terrifying because it's happening in the most information-rich era in history. We need to understand this situation, and work out ways of persuading as many conservative-minded people as possible to embrace rationality, restraint and the norms of democratic behaviour.

Where they cannot be persuaded, however, we have to resist them. They have declared war on evidence-based policymaking, prudence and a global system based on rules instead of naked force. Those who want to defend these values need to fight back.

To do this, we have to arm ourselves with more than just facts. We need, as the philosopher Tzvetan Todorov wrote, surveying the struggle against totalitarianism in the twentieth century, both hope and memory. But to remember what and to hope for what?

It wasn't long ago, in the early 1990s, that perfectly rational individuals believed history had 'ended'; that liberal democracy and free-market capitalism were states of perfection, making future upheavals impossible.

Since 2008 that illusion has collapsed. The financial crisis unleashed by the bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers has spiralled into a crisis of legitimacy for the free-market system, which has now turned into an attack on democracy and human rights and is placing new strains on the geopolitical system.

Trump rules America. Brexit has triggered the breakup of the European Union. The social media are awash with anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, fantasies of white supremacy and male victimhood. In Turkey, hundreds of journalists are in jail. In the Philippines, the president revels in the work of death squads. The Syrian War, which started with teenagers scrawling graffiti against Bashar al-Assad, has killed 470,000 and displaced 10 million people.[2] Over the next decade China is gearing up to place its 1.4 billion citizens under absolute digital surveillance and control.[3] This is not some dystopian fantasy from a graphic novel. It is reality.

As a journalist I used to envy the certainties of my younger colleagues, who'd been taught in the world's elite universities that the era of systemic crisis was over. I, by contrast, had spent my early twenties in Thatcher's Britain – an era of conflict,

recession and social disintegration. They, it seemed, would know only cool, calm, technocratic progress.

Now, I pity them. They are being forced to watch dramatic, unthinkable events cascade across their newsfeeds each morning, for which they have no theory. Trump flies to Moscow to side with Putin against the FBI. Austria's respectable conservative party switches overnight from an alliance with socialists to an alliance with neofascists. In China, Xi Jin Ping breaks with thirty years of consensus government and seizes total power. Private intelligence agencies we never knew existed turn out to be manipulating elections on behalf of the highest bidder.

Because it is happening to us in real time, and seen through devices in our pockets, this new global disorder is creating a bipolar response: hyper-sensitivity to the chaos but a mood of resignation when it comes to the possibility of ending it.

As for liberalism, once the dominant ideology of the Western world, it too has become bipolar. Among educated people it is routine to hear technological euphoria expressed alongside geopolitical despair: dark foreboding about what comes after Trump alongside business plans which assume a hi-tech, automation-driven, green future. Interrogate this attitude and the assumption is, even now, that something called the Fourth Industrial Revolution will put everything right.

The argument of this book is that it will not. To unlock the potential of new technologies to boost human wellbeing, there has to be something human left to defend. But each of the crises we face – economic, geopolitical and technological – is rooted in the erosion of what it means to be human.

Since the 1980s, free-market ideology has attacked our right to possess a self that is more than a collection of economic needs. As globalization falls apart, the very idea of rights that are universal and inalienable has come under attack. Meanwhile, technology has begun to undermine our ability to act autonomously, free of digital control and surveillance: we are increasingly subject to forms of algorithmic control that we are not allowed to see, nor to understand.

None of this is accidental: as I will show in the course of this book, overt theories of anti-humanism are today stronger than at any time in the past 200 years.

I believe, despite the fear and cruelty of the present, we can still achieve what the Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky once called 'the clear, bright future' of humankind. But as well as demystifying the sources of economic crisis and deepening our understanding of democracy, we need to defend the very concept of humanity and draw new practical conclusions from it.

After we'd escaped the police on Trump's inauguration day, I remembered what the scene reminded me of: a zombie movie. The first zombie movie appeared in 1932, but the genre remained niche until the 1960s.[4] In most of the early zombie flicks the monster is a reanimated black Caribbean man intent on ravaging white women. It's not hard to work out what fears those films were playing on.

Only in *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) did we meet the modern zombie: a corpse brought back to life, programmed to kill human beings and eat them. This new kind of monster is just your ordinary white neighbour gone crazy. After that the zombie movie went global. In 2010 alone there were twenty-seven zombie films produced, ranging from *Big Tits Zombie* in Japan, to *Santa Claus vs the Zombies* in the USA. The zombie is now a staple enemy in video games – the predictable, dumb target who multiply the more of them you kill. There are zombie weekend conventions; zombie 'walks', where people cover themselves in gore to raise money for charity. The zombie has become a trope: a narrative framework understood by all, whose rules and conventions allow

you to hang any other ideas inside it: so we get movies such as *Kung Fu Zombie*, *Biker Zombies from Detroit*, *La Cage aux Zombies* and *World War Z*.

Why are we collectively investing such a huge amount of concentration, emotion and mental energy into the zombie? What are we trying to say to and about ourselves?

Human cultures have always constructed myths and legends about undead beings or semi-humans, usually as a metaphor for some deep-felt human need – but the zombie is unique. Zombies are not vampires. The relationship between vampire and victim is a metaphor for illicit sexual attraction, plus you can reason with a vampire. Zombies are not ghosts. The metaphor behind the ghost story is grief, and ghosts can't kill you. Zombies are not werewolves: the werewolf is a metaphor for mental illness, or sociopathic violence – and becoming one is temporary, while becoming a zombie is irreversible.

Compared to the traditional monsters of Western folklore, the zombie has a superpower that sets it in a class of its own: it is self-replicating. One werewolf is not going to decimate London; one vampire will not depopulate Transylvania. One zombie, however, can – through an exponential process of killing or infection – take down an entire society.

So what is the real, deep fear that the zombie metaphor plays on? The most likely answer is: the fear that we are about to lose what makes us human – our rationality, our capacity to discern truth from lies, our ability to see other human beings as fellow species members, with rights equal to our own. Our agency. Our freedom.

Such fears are rational. We are facing the biggest attack on humanism since it was formulated in the days of Shakespeare and Galileo. Humanism was central to Western ideas of civilization, to scientific thought and to concepts of social progress for more than 400 years. But since the late twentieth century, opposition to humanism has been building from several directions at once.

The strategic threat is from technology. It is possible that within this century artificial intelligence will attain a level of sophistication that exceeds the capabilities of all human brains put together. At the same time bio-engineering has advanced to the point where one-off modifications to individuals and – if the taboos on it were lifted – irreversible changes to humanity's gene pool are possible. Belief in these possibilities is fuelling a strong anti-humanism among those thinking about the future: a defeatism about the value of human individuality; a conviction that *Homo sapiens* is a species destined to be eclipsed.

Second, developments in neuroscience and information theory have strengthened the belief that our behaviour is inescapably determined; that our brains are just biological machines, 'programmed' by their DNA and modified only by their physical environment, within a universe which itself now looks more and more like the product of a giant 'computer'. Though both propositions are disputed within science itself, the airport bookstands of the world are groaning with bestsellers that ignore the nuances and convey the straight message: we are already automata incapable of freedom.

Third, there is a simple demographic fact: the majority of the earth's population now lives in countries where the cultural concepts underpinning humanism are weak. When the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was signed in 1949, there were 2.4 billion people on the planet, a quarter of them living in developed, democratic countries with social elites shaped by the traditions of the Enlightenment. Today there are 7.5 billion – and the majority live outside stable democratic systems, in societies where human rights are denied. Worse still, the official ideologies of these states are thoroughly anti-humanist. This includes the mixture of Confucianism and accountancy

that is taught as 'Marxism' in China, the Hindu chauvinism of the Modi administration in India and the Great Russian nationalism that animates Putin.

Last but not least, there is the attack on humanism carried out over the past four decades in the name of free-market economics. By coercing us into new routines, forcing us to adopt new attitudes and values simply to survive; by reducing us to two-dimensional economic beings, the economic model known as neoliberalism has broken down our behavioural and intellectual defences against the subsequent forms of anti-humanism that are now coming at us in the early twenty-first century.

The inflection point, crystallizing all these dangers and accelerating them, was Trump's presidential victory, and the global wave of right-wing populism he helped unleash.

Trump launched himself like a wrecking ball against the multilateral institutions on which the globalized free market relied: the UN Human Rights Council, the World Trade Organization, the European Union and NAFTA. By stigmatizing the media as 'fake news' and by injecting gesture and unpredictability into diplomacy and domestic politics, Trump was not only trying to dismantle the post-1989 world order. He was actively trying to create disorder.

In his response to the Charlottesville violence in 2017, Trump gave a clear green light to a new form of fascism in the USA. The alt-right attacks the whole idea of universal human rights; it relentlessly questions the validity of scientific thought; it denigrates the institutions dedicated to producing objective truth, like universities or the publicly regulated media.

Meanwhile, the very tools Trump used to wage war on liberal, democratic values in the USA were machines that suck the lifeblood out of human choice and reason: the algorithms that Facebook supplied to Cambridge Analytica, so that Trump and his Russian supporters could manipulate the opinions and voting behaviour of US voters.

If this new alliance of right-wing authoritarians and techno-literate fascists get their way, large numbers of people are going to become like that farmer from Tennessee: dead-eyed, unthinkingly obedient, lacking any sense of agency, their behaviour controlled by Facebook algorithms and their thoughts merely an echo of last night's Fox News. Political zombies.

At the core of the authoritarian right's agenda is an attack on the possibility of truth. The aim of Trump and his imitators is to produce in the minds of millions the conviction that nothing is true: that all news footage is doctored; all images of war and torture are Photoshopped; all terrorist attacks are 'false flag' operations by some deeper and unguessed intelligence agency; all victims of war and torture are 'crisis actors'.

They want us to believe that the rule of law represents an attack by the 'deep state' against the popular will; that the professional news media are 'enemies of the people'; that political opposition parties are 'saboteurs'. Autocrats like Vladimir Putin and Narendra Modi were already operating from the same playbook, with fewer obligations to democratic principles, but Trump took the approach mainstream. His success, during the first twenty-four months in office, has inspired copycat projects in Brazil, Hungary, Italy and beyond.

We are even now underestimating the seriousness of the catastrophe that's unfolding. This is not some short-term political cycle. It's a global attack on methods of thinking, science and evidence-based policymaking which go back to the early seventeenth century.

And it is also a crisis for the dominant mode of thinking on the left. As you scroll through the obscene claims of the internet trolls – that the latest ISIS terror attack was staged by the CIA, or that some mutilated Syrian child is a 'crisis actor' – always remember that the groundwork for the attack on rationality was laid by a left-wing academic current called postmodernism.

'A theory', wrote the physicist Hermann Weyl, is a set of ideas that allow you to 'jump over your own shadow', using words and numbers to represent what cannot be physically seen.[5] The postmodernists replied: 'How can you jump over your shadow when you no longer have one?'[6] Jean Baudrillard, who wrote these words in 1994, believed our willingness to live as capitalism dictates, to the rhythms of money and self-interest, had hollowed out our humanity. We had become mere expressions of economic forces, unable to cast a shadow onto the world, incapable of thinking beyond the reality presented to us by mass media.

The academic left had theorized human helplessness long before the right turned it into a project. What began in the 1950s as an explanation for working-class passivity has now coalesced into a growing academic and philosophical movement called post-humanism. It is an outright rationale for our slavery to machines and, at its most extreme, our voluntary extinction as a species. One of this book's aims is to put the post-humanism industry out of business.

To defend rationality you have to defend what it is based on: the proposal that experience plus accurate observation can create verifiable truth inside our brains.

When you trust your life to an airliner flying at 40,000 feet, you do so because you believe there is a real world, independent of your senses, whose laws the aircraft engineer has understood. However complex that world is, however full of randomness, to retreat from the belief in the 400-year-old scientific method that guides the aircraft engineer would be a seriously retrograde step.

To debunk the new religions of irrationalism and fatalism we have to return to a way of thinking that has become deeply unfashionable, which places humanity at the centre of its worldview – not machines, not nature, and not subgroups of human beings with differential rights – but all of us as a species.

After the Holocaust and the Second World War, humanism was the liferaft the survivors clung to. In the aftermath of Trump's shock victory, a new generation delved once again into the great humanist writers of the antifascist era: George Orwell, Primo Levi, Hannah Arendt and the rest. But once you get beyond the similarities, and the comforting soundbites, it's clear that theirs was a worldview at odds with the assumptions of modern progressive thought.

Humanism became unfashionable because of its association with white, Eurocentric culture, its justifications for colonial domination and its alignment with male power. In the 1960s the black French psychiatrist Frantz Fanon called for a 'new humanism' devoid of the racism of the colonial past – but it didn't happen. Instead, from Vietnam to Iraq, devastating attacks on human life were carried out by politicians professing to be humanists. The French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss summed up the growing distaste for humanistic thinking when, in 1979, he claimed not only colonialism but fascism and its extermination camps were the 'natural continuation' of humanism as it had been practised for centuries.[7]

Then, towards the end of the twentieth century, neuroscience, genetics and anthropology all made claims that seemed to undermine earlier scientific assertions about what makes humanity unique. Meanwhile, some deep-green environmentalists concluded it would be better for the planet if we did not exist, while some radical supporters of animal liberation added: the sooner the better.[8]

The defence of rationality and science can succeed only if we return to a different form of humanism than the one espoused by Arendt, Primo Levi and their generation. There is, arising out of the same traditions of rationality and Enlightenment, an alternative and more radical form of humanism whose aim is complete liberation – including liberation from the identities imposed on us by poverty, racism and sexism.

Only one thinker in the humanist tradition combined *realism* – the idea that the world exists beyond our senses – with a definition of human nature that can withstand twenty-first-century theories of cognition and artificial intelligence. His name was Karl Marx. Despite all the flaws in his theories and all the crimes committed in his name, Marx was the only great philosopher who, had he been alive, would have gone masked up on that protest in Washington DC. He would have understood what it signified, too: Day Zero in the struggle to rekindle hope.

2

A General Theory of Trump

'Globalisation is dead. The American superpower will die.'[1] That's what I wrote in a column filed for the *Guardian* two hours after Trump declared victory. He had won, I suggested, 'because millions of middle class and educated US citizens reached into their soul and found there, after all its conceits were stripped away, a grinning white supremacist. Plus untapped reserves of misogyny.'

It was perhaps an extreme thing to write at a time when mainstream opinion writers were saying his victory had been an accident, the result of Clinton's campaign mistakes in four swing states, and would soon be remedied by Trump being smothered within the great federal bureaucracy and hogtied by the rule of law.

But Trump's victory was part of a pattern. This was the third tsunami to hit the liberal political centre in eighteen months. In June 2015 the people of Greece had voted to defy the EU, despite being held to ransom by the closure of their banking system. In June 2016 a clear majority of British voters opted for Brexit. And now, in November the same year, there was Trump.

I'd been warning since the 2008 financial crisis that, unless we ditched free-market economics, a major country would exit the multilateral system based on rules and common standards, and globalization itself would begin to die. The *Financial Times* called these warnings 'irritatingly shrill'.[2] Not shrill enough, as it turned out.

Trump's victory was not just an event in the political and economic history of the world, big enough though that is. It was a tear in the intellectual fabric of the world that, even now, most people have failed to understand.

Whether Trump is indicted, impeached or simply incapacitated through an overdose of cheeseburgers, his victory has irreversibly changed the world we live in. He declared war on the rules-based global system, started a trade war with China, pulled America out of the Paris climate change accord, destroyed the 2013 Iran nuclear deal, legitimized far-right violence, incited violence against the media, and brought organized lying into the mainstream of both politics and diplomacy.

His 'America First' strategy was not only about boosting US jobs and growth at the expense of China and Mexico, it was an attempt to shatter the existing global power structure and remake it, with America and Putin's Russia as co-beneficiaries. His tactics have included threatening North Korea with pre-emptive nuclear war, and putting migrant toddlers behind wire fences separating them from their parents. And, to date, he has succeeded.

To achieve the new order, the method Trump adopted was chaos: the outrageous statement followed by denial; the communiqué signed and then cancelled by mid-air Tweet; diplomacy conducted without diplomats, advisers, written records or accountability.

To orient ourselves amid this chaos we need a theory that explains how the new right-wing authoritarianism developed, who benefits from it and what it is aiming to achieve. That is exactly what most liberal-minded people did not have on the night of Trump's victory. They understood that this monstrosity signalled the potential end of liberal politics and of an orderly global system, but they could not comprehend it was the liberal order itself that had created Trump and empowered the activists who put him into the White House.

Even once we understand Trump we will only possess a theory of the wrecking ball. To complete the picture we will need to survey the fragile structures it has begun to wreck. These, it turns out, include not only the economic architecture of the world but the ideologies of liberalism, globalism and universal rights.

These ideas have become so fragile because they grafted themselves onto an economic structure that could not survive. During the thirtyyear rise and fall of the economic model known as neoliberalism, much of its thought-architecture was expressed through performances and rituals that did not require inner belief. By the end, just as with the Soviet Union before it collapsed, people were going through the motions but knew in their hearts the whole thing was bullshit.

To re-establish order and predictability in the world, we need to restore what the neoliberal era stripped out of it: the three-dimensional human being with a belief in restraint, kindness, mutual obligation and democracy; an army of individuals who can think independently and who mean what they say. As you can imagine, this won't be easy.

Trump declared his presidential run on 16 June 2015 from a podium inside Trump Tower. In a rambling and apparently unscripted speech he outlined the key planks of his platform. He attacked Mexican immigrants, saying: 'They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people.'[3] He promised to 'make America great again' by forcing the US corporate elite to move jobs back onshore and through punitive trade sanctions against China and Mexico. He would reverse US foreign policy in the Middle East, isolating Iran and backing Saudi Arabia. He would repeal Obamacare, which had brought 20 million of America's poor into the healthcare system; he would spend billions on upgrading America's decrepit infrastructure while at the same time (and miraculously) reducing the national debt.

The establishment laughed. Anti-racists went predictably and justifiably nuts. He polled just 6.5 per cent among Republican voters. But within six weeks Trump was scoring 20 per cent: double the ratings of his closest rival, Jeb Bush, and leaving a long tail of whey-faced Christian fundamentalists far behind.[4] Few understood it then, but Trump – through his racist, misogynist, economic nationalist and anti-elite narrative – had created a populist bandwagon more effective than all the other populists, and unmatchable by the establishment candidates.

If we had 20:20 hindsight, the question we should have asked as Trump gained momentum is: what fraction of the rich and powerful will move behind him? But at the time such questions seemed pointless. Because free-market capitalism in the USA had produced a political monoculture in which the very idea that different sections of the elite could use politics to fight each other seemed to belong to the days of sepia photographs. The norm for thirty years had been a socially liberal business elite oriented to finance, global corporations, carbon extraction and tech monopolies. Their general preference was for a government of the centre right but ultimately the party-political divide didn't matter. Most big corporations donated to both parties.

Sure, there were by 2015 tens of thousands of ruined small business people and laid-off workers in the right-wing Tea Party movement, clamouring for an end to globalization, human rights and immigration. But their agenda was so contrary to the interests of the corporate elite that it could find support only among cranky individuals such as Charles and David Koch, prepared to pour $400 million down the drain of libertarian lost causes.

This in turn shaped the accepted wisdom among the pollsters. In April 2016 I sat through a briefing by pro-Clinton analyst Stan Greenberg, in which he assured the *Guardian*'s political journalists that the coming election was 'edging towards an earthquake' that would destroy the Republicans and put Hillary Clinton into power. The reason was that a 'new American majority' comprising black people, Hispanics, millennials and single women now made up 54 per cent of the electorate and rising. That made it impossible for the Republicans to win on a programme of social conservatism. Republican right-wing activists weren't even trying to win the election, he told us: they just wanted to punish the Republican mainstream for failing to stop Obama.[5]

Trump won the nomination because he created, first, a new kind of conservative populist movement. With it, he opened up a split within the US ruling class over where its material interests lie, both in geopolitics and economics. And with these two forces he created what Hannah Arendt had labelled a 'temporary alliance between the mob and the elite'. Its aim was the destruction of an economic and political order that had been presented as both perfect and permanent.

In 2012 I attended a Tea Party meeting in Phoenix, Arizona. It was a collection of pleasant, analogue-era cranks. Before we went in, I gave my colleagues a team talk about respecting such people's views. At the end people queued up to hand me files, folders and CDs wrapped with handwritten notes. There was a large file on the Obama birth controversy; a well-researched timeline of the Benghazi fiasco, where four US personnel had just been killed; plus the usual stuff debunking climate change. I took the whole pile of CDs, files and leaflets detailing their nutty obsessions and made my cameraman film me dumping them in a bin. Here's why.

At the start, I'd taken them seriously. In 2008 I reported on the mass mobilization of right-wing voters that derailed the Bush administration's $780 billion bank bailout in Congress. While others wrote them off as 'astroturf' – fake grass roots – I treated them as a genuine force, motivated by justifiable grievances over the way Wall Street made ordinary people pay for the financial crisis. After that, I'd watched with growing fascination as the Tea Party colonized the Republican apparatus from below. I'd stood in their rallies, enduring their scowls, because I knew the existing order could not last and I wanted to understand what might replace it.

But by 2012 it looked like they'd hit a dead end – an impression shared by many people in that Phoenix meeting. Mitt Romney, a moderate, was the Republican presidential candidate. As a result, most said they would refuse to vote. True, his running mate, Paul Ryan, had tabled an alternative budget calling for tax cuts, cuts to health and welfare programmes and a shrunken state. But the Tea Party was never just about economics. It was also a revolt against modern life by evangelical Christians; a revolt against women's liberation by misogynistic men; a revolt against immigration, gay rights and diversity; and above all a revolt against President Obama by those who could not stand the colour of his skin.

From Romney's defeat in November 2012 to the moment Trump descended his golden escalator in June 2015, the Tea Party would remain trapped inside the political

ghetto I'd seen in Phoenix. Because alongside sacred America there is always profane America. In some states, along mile after mile of freeway, you see only adverts for roadside porn cinemas, liquor stores and the Confederate flag. Here the Jesus brigade could never become a popular movement. Their morals would not allow them to mix with the kind of people who sit glue-eyed on the slot machines at Trump's casinos or leering at the waitresses in the Hooters fast-food chain.

The Evangelicals were insistently nice people – even while waving plastic foetuses in the faces of frightened women outside abortion clinics. They had moral limits. But that was the problem Trump solved for the American right: he brought in the not-nice people, the amoralists and the self-described 'shitposters' of the online right.

In every Hollywood movie there is a text and a subtext. The subtext of the movie – which is never spoken – is what sends individuals out of the cinema prepared to join wars, save the planet or get divorced. Trump, like all demagogues, is a natural at manipulating text-vs-subtext.

The 'text' of the Trump campaign was Trump's life itself: a story of rags to riches. The riches were gained through speculative property investments and extensive business contacts with Russian oligarchs and Gulf oil sheikhs in an industry rife with organized crime. David Cay Johnston, a Pulitzer-Prizewinning journalist, writes that 'Trump's career has benefited from a decades-long and largely successful effort to limit and deflect law enforcement investigations into his dealings with top mobsters, organized crime associates, labor fixers, corrupt union leaders, con artists and even a one-time drug trafficker.'[6] By picking Trump to run for president, the Republican Party created a new and shocking subtext: the rich no longer have to even look clean to run America.

Once the campaign started, Trump inserted a second, equally shocking subtext into public life, about the irrelevance of facts. In July 2015 he insulted his opponent, Senator John McCain, saying: 'He's not a war hero. He's a war hero because he was captured. I like people who weren't captured.'[7]

When the remark provoked outrage, Trump denied he had ever said these words. The insult, its viral repetition across social media and then the flat denial told a story between the lines that would recur many times later: nothing Trump says is meant literally, nor should be taken seriously. Nor should any of Trump's utterances be held up against normal standards of truth or decency. This demonstration of blatant lying took Trump out of the league of previous US presidents and into the league inhabited by the standout kleptocrats of the twenty-first century: Russia's Putin, Turkey's Erdoğan, Hungary's Orban and Israel's Netanyahu.

A third layer of subtext was written at Trump's rallies. In the Tea Party movement, in front of the cameras at least, they usually tried to restrain outright bigotry. Trump thrust this nicety aside, saying to the racists, sexists and Islamophobes: go ahead and vocalize all the hate inside you. The rallies brought together a mixture of born-again Christians, amoralists from the alt-right movement and porn-addicted right-wing bigots – and created an atmosphere in which they could all yell the word 'cunt' every time he mentioned Hillary Clinton.

Trump is no fascist; nor were most of those at his rallies. Yet Trump played on a dynamic between speaker and crowd that was first theorized by the German sociologist Erich Fromm during the rise of Hitler. 'Psychologically,' wrote Fromm in 1941, people's readiness to submit to fascism 'seems to be due mainly to a state of inner tiredness and resignation', which he said was 'characteristic of the individual in the present era, even in democratic countries'.[8] Where this 'inner tiredness and

resignation' comes from, in the richest economy in the world and a society buzzing with cultural creativity, is one of the most fundamental problems those trying to resist the new right have to confront.

Trump understood that tired people don't want logic or principles; and they don't want the kind of freedom that the libertarian right offers. In fact they fear freedom. What they want is a leader who rises above logic and truth and tells them all their inner prejudices are right. There is no mystery as to why the people at the rallies bought Trump's offer. But why did part of the elite buy it, and what do they want to achieve?

For the first months of the 2016 primaries, the money that would put Trump in the White House was invested in the ultra-right conservative Ted Cruz. Hedge fund boss Robert Mercer – who would become Trump's biggest donor – had given him $11 million, while four members of the Wilks fracking dynasty had handed Cruz $15 million between them. Fronting the Cruz SuperPAC was Kellyanne Conway, later Trump's presidential counsellor.

But the Cruz campaign faltered and Trump's took off. When Cruz pulled out in May 2016, Mercer's group effectively engineered a reverse takeover of the Trump campaign. By August, Steve Bannon – into whose far-right news outlet, Breitbart, Mercer had already pumped $10 million – was installed as campaign chairman and Conway as manager.

Meanwhile, a niche group of more traditional right-wing business leaders came out for the Trump project. They included casino magnate Sheldon Adelson; Carl Icahn, a property boss and asset stripper; and Wilbur Ross – another asset stripper who together with Icahn had helped save Trump's casino business in the 1980s. These were property and casino guys – sharks from the same shiver as Trump. Alongside them came a few libertarian tech billionaires, notably PayPal founder Peter Thiel, who had declared in 2009 that 'I no longer believe democracy and freedom are compatible.'[9]

The Koch brothers, the most prominent elite businessmen associated with the Tea Party, kept their distance from Trump on ideological grounds. But they unleashed millions into Republican Congressional campaigns, mobilized their army of paid canvassers and placed key people into the Trump team, notably Indiana governor Mike Pence. The Kochs had bankrolled Pence as he turned Indiana into a laboratory for free-market cruelty – now they would make him vice president.

However, even as Trump attracted more elite support, the bulk of billionaire money was going to Clinton. Trump had the casino guys, big oil and big tobacco. But Clinton had most of Silicon Valley, most of Hollywood, most of Wall Street and most of the S&P 500. Even the heiress to the union-busting Walmart empire backed Hillary.

Once Trump won, of course, many of these business people fell over their own shoes to congratulate him, join his advisory boards and take part in the bonanza of deregulation he offered. But those given direct power were still drawn from the tiny right-wing circle that had driven the project. Betsy DeVos, the school privatizer, was put in charge of schools. Wilbur Ross, at the age of seventy-nine, was made commerce secretary. Rex Tillerson, whose Exxon Mobil had funded climate science denial, became secretary of state. Robert Mercer's daughter Rebekah got an executive role, while the Trump business empire itself was represented by Jared Kushner, the president's son-in-law.

So to describe this as a 'corporate takeover' of US politics, in the words of left-wing Canadian writer and thinker Naomi Klein, is too simplistic.[10] It was a takeover by a minority fraction of the business elite, its centre of gravity sitting squarely in the

world of private companies untroubled by stock market scrutiny, and with overlapping aims: massive deregulation, a trade war on behalf of domestic industries and a radically shrunken state. From Adelson to the Uber founder Travis Kalanick, these were executives prepared to hijack the state to deliver favours, contracts and privatized assets to their own businesses – rather than play the official game of stock market-listed companies operating on a level playing field.

Since the early 1990s this official game had delivered something close to what Karl Marx described as 'capitalist communism'.[11] It works like this. Through the quarterly financial disclosure required of companies listed on Wall Street, the average profit margin in a business sector becomes clear and predictable, especially if the sector is mature. Then the finance system begins to work as a sharing mechanism, in which everybody with capital can participate. When America was an industrial superpower, financial profits made up just 15 per cent of the profits. By the mid-2000s finance was generating 40 per cent of profits.[12] So long as everybody could dip into the financial cookie jar, and the state was seen to crack down on those stealing from it – as in the Enron case and the Wall Street analyst scandal – few rich people questioned the dominance of finance.

At the same time, corporations understood that their common interests were being represented globally by the American state. Since 1979 the USA had tirelessly imposed deregulation and free trade onto less powerful countries, and relentlessly borrowed money from them on terms rigged in favour of itself. Globalization worked in the interest of US business and the US government had used its power to enforce it on the world – even if that also meant the impoverishment of America's traditional industrial communities. That was the deal.

Then came the 2008 crisis. As the long-term costs of stabilization became clear – permanent state intervention, banking regulation and a giant debt – it tore apart political consent among America's rich, both for globalization and for the 'level playing field' between firms within the USA, mediated by the finance system. With growth stagnating, with climate regulations placing new burdens on carbon-heavy businesses, and with bank profits suppressed by increased regulation, a fraction within US capitalism broke with the political consensus.

Instead of globalization they wanted a form of 'national neoliberalism': free-market economics pursued not as a benign global strategy for all rich people in the world, but to enrich the US elite alone, if need be at the expense of their foreign counterparts. As for the cookie jar of finance, they wanted the right to dip in first and often, to the detriment of everyone else. Trump was not their chosen candidate: Cruz was. But Cruz was a dud and Trump was not.

Trump's mesmerizing incompetence and verbal brutality have framed the political situation so completely that, for many people, he 'is' the crisis. But he was, in a way, simply the accidental front-man.

In February 2016 the NFL staged the last Superbowl of the liberal era. The ad breaks featured the familiar mix of foreign automobiles and American carbohydrates. The half-time show starred Beyoncé, with a dance troupe dressed as Black Panthers from 1968: a clear reference to the Black Lives Matter movement, it was meant to symbolize the contrast between the bad old days and now. The USA is a multi-ethnic democracy, with a recovering economy and the political maturity to stop its police force shooting black people at will. That was the subtext.

By this point, the recovery that had begun in spring 2009 had created 17 million new jobs.[13] The Dow, which had slumped below 7,000 in March 2009, was now above 17,000

and rising. GDP stood at $18 trillion, 4 trillion higher than it had been at the start of the recovery. On top of that, the USA was on the point of signing major trade deals – the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) – each designed to create an even bigger market for American goods and services.

Why would a section of the elite put all this at risk for the sake of economic nationalism? Conversely, why did the corporations in whose interest it was for globalization and bipartisan politics to continue fail to fight for a clear alternative? To answer the first question we need to look at the coalition of interests represented by three very different Trump backers: Robert Mercer, the Koch brothers and Stephen Bannon.

Mercer has never made a public speech. But thanks to lawsuits and briefings by ex-employees we know some of what he is alleged to think: that the lethality of nuclear weapons is over-hyped; that radiation made Hiroshima's survivors healthier; that black people were better off before the Civil Rights Act; that climate change will improve life on earth. Mercer is said to have told colleagues that the state 'makes the strong people weak by taking their money away, through taxes'.[14]

Mercer is a computational linguist who used his expertise in data analysis to build a hedge fund that has generated $55 billion in profits. It has no investors other than the people who work for it – a couple of hundred quantitative analysts, known as 'quants'. They pay no taxes, as their profits are invested in a pension fund. The profits are generated by advanced mathematics – but nobody knows how, because Renaissance Technologies (RenTec) is what financiers call a 'black box': it is a machine that works without explanation.

RenTec makes profit by exploiting its ability to see patterns in the numbers generated in financial markets, which in turn are generated by trillions of transactions in the real world. Its analysts found, for example, that global markets perform better on sunny days. So they built a model to exploit that. The return on money invested in a good year like 2008 was 98 per cent; and across all the years of crisis between then and now, Mercer's Medallion fund has never made profits of less than 28 per cent.[15]

All businesses have a narrow interest, which they have to pursue at the same time as compromising with the wider needs of capitalism. What is RenTec's material interest? Well, if Wall Street is like a ranch where the cows are ordinary businesses, RenTec is like a ranch where the cows are Wall Street plus every financial market in the world. It can 'farm' the financial profits of other companies and investment banks because it owns a machine that can think faster than everybody else.

As long as there is a market, and unpredictability, and some capital to invest, real-world factors such as the tax rate, US trade policy or the quality of public healthcare simply do not matter to a company like this. It has technically no social obligations or interests. RenTec's ultimate material interest lies in knowing more than everybody else and there being enough unpredictability for this to matter. Its ideal environment, therefore, is chaos.

Koch Industries is a more traditional antisocial business empire. The wealth of its owners, Charles and David Koch, was built on oil and industrial processing, and maintained through the usual means: avoiding taxes.[16] Their narrow material interest is more traditional: the removal of obstacles to profitability – like the minimum wage, corporate taxation, publicly owned land, environmental protection laws and carbon emission caps, the public healthcare safety net and the tax-funded pension system. They want it all swept away.

However, it would be wrong to see the Kochs merely as the spearhead of a US corporate deregulation drive. Their goal is effectively a form of capitalism without government. When, back in 1980, David Koch stood as the Libertarian Party's candidate for vice president, he called for the abolition of the federal authorities regulating air transport, electoral law, environmental protection, food standards and the energy grid, together with all state provision of education, basic healthcare and retirement pensions.

That is not the project of traditional 'small-state' conservatism: it is capitalism without a state, in which the most powerful are left free to accumulate wealth and coercive power, buy votes, poison the waterways and exploit the old, sick and poor, for whom there is no safety net whatsoever. The Kochs' conservative critics called it, at the time, 'anarcho-totalitarianism'. A shorter word for the project might, again, be: chaos.

If you're wondering how the libertarianism of the Kochs fits in with the techno-mysticism of Mercer and the avaricious ego of Donald Trump, the missing link is Steve Bannon. A former Goldman Sachs executive turned Breitbart News executive, Bannon is an economic nationalist. In pursuit of American nationalism he has, through Breitbart, promoted a panoply of racist, Islamophobic and white supremacist views, titling a whole strand of Breitbart's output 'Black Crime'.

However, what defines Bannon's project beyond these ordinary prejudices is a theory of history known as the Fourth Turning. According to its authors Neil Howe and William Strauss, political systems typically rise and fall in four phases: in the first there is exhilaration and strong identification with the state; then comes an 'awakening', during which people connect with deeper principles; then comes disorder, where loyalty to institutions falls apart. Finally, in the 'fourth turning' there is a systemic crisis – a revolution – triggered by a survival-level threat. If you see the post-1945 boom as phase one, 1968 as the awakening and the post-Nixon turmoil as the disorder, you might conclude that we've been waiting a heck of a long time for phase four. But, in Howe's words: 'If history does not produce such an urgent threat, Fourth Turning leaders will invariably find one – and may even fabricate one – to mobilize collective action.'[17]

Finding such urgent threats has, effectively, been Bannon's mission since the mid-2000s. The threats he has invoked include jihadi terrorism, China (with whom Bannon has predicted war), Mexican immigration, 'black crime' and the US national debt. But since none of these threats has actually mobilized masses of Americans to stage a revolution, there was always the ultimate option – as Howe suggested – to fabricate something. What Bannon fabricated was the chaos of the Trump presidency. Once it started, it didn't need Bannon's guiding hand for long: Bannon got himself kicked out of the White House and switched to amplifying the impact of Trump's chaos strategy across the Western world, by attempting to build an alliance of ethno-nationalists committed to destroying the European Union.

For Bannon and his alt-right followers, what we're heading for is an event paralleling the run-up to the American Civil War of 1861 – except, this time, with global consequences. In this scenario, America's long-simmering culture war becomes a low-level armed conflict with parallels in the 'Bleeding Kansas' crisis of the 1850s; meanwhile, external threats are invoked to justify suspending aspects of the rule of law; finally Trump or his replacement starts a major conventional armed conflict. The resulting destruction of the post-1945 world order then re-sets the mass psychology of the USA, giving legitimacy to a new, authoritarian, nationalist ruling elite.

In this model – an economy dominated by finance topped by a stable, bipartisan political system – corporate leadership became depoliticized. It was commonplace in the era of globalization to hear that corporations 'dictate' to national states. But if that's the case, they did so via strictly technocratic methods: political donations, lobbying, the tame think-tank and the box at the opera house. On the other side of the conversation they expected to find – because they had created it – a technocratic state: a civil service governed by rules and laws, a relatively level playing field when it comes to competition, and a meritocracy when it comes to leadership. It was not necessary for senior managers of Boeing, Nissan, GE or Google to depict themselves as a liberal 'fraction' of US capital, because their project had relied on the absence of an opposing fraction, and indeed the subservience of the state to business as a whole.

If one segment of the business elite has become a show dog and the other an attack dog, it is a one-way fight. Anybody expecting the technocrats who run the global corporations to become counter-attack dogs on behalf of democracy and human rights may have a long time to wait.

So Trump represents something bigger than a takeover of the federal government by one fraction of US capital devoted to protectionism and the small state. He represents the triumph of a reactionary theory of human nature in which inequality – of race, sex and economic status – is determined by our genes. This, as we will see, is the problem that's going to be hardest to overcome, because it is deeply rooted in the economic practice of the past thirty years.

That 'the Russians did it' was a comforting illusion for Clinton-supporting liberals in the aftermath of defeat. As evidence continues to emerge, it is clear that the Russian state made a major effort to help Trump achieve power, to drive the popular bigotry that sustained him, to feed intelligence to his campaign that had been obtained through hacking, and to place sympathetic people inside his team. But it is clear that, in each case, the Kremlin was exploiting a systemic weakness of US capitalism itself.

The first weakness was the soft isolationism pursued under Obama. When he failed to respond firmly to Russia sending troops to Syria, to the Syrian chemical weapons attack in Aleppo, or to the Russian annexation of Crimea, Obama sent a signal about the future direction of the world. There may be sanctions against Russia now, Putin could assume, but in the long term there would be accommodation. The West would remain hospitable to Russian money and a sitting duck for Russian organized crime – whatever rules the Kremlin might break.

All of which created the climate in which Trump associate Paul Manafort could run, from inside the USA, a business promoting the interests of the Russian puppet government in Kiev.[24] It created the climate in which Russia Today, the Kremlin's propaganda channel, could pay former US general Mike Flynn $34,000, and in which Flynn could fail to disclose that money, even as he prepared to become Trump's national security adviser.[25] In the same climate Trump staffer George Papadopoulos could establish covert links with Russian agents offering to supply 'dirt' on Hillary Clinton. Meanwhile, Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner could stage a meeting with a Russian intelligence asset, together with Manafort and Donald Trump Jr in Trump Tower, ostensibly to discuss the same idea.[26]

Security experts had warned for at least a decade that Russia was evolving a 'hybrid warfare' strategy, using a mixture of corruption, propaganda and organized crime alongside more traditional methods, to destabilize the West.[27] On current evidence it looks as if, once Trump's bandwagon began to roll, Russian intelligence stuck to his

team like a humid day, and found numerous people on the US right prepared to wield influence on behalf of the Kremlin.

A second weakness they exploited was systemic financial secrecy designed to hide elite wealth from the tax authorities and help global finance evade regulation. This, indeed, is what allowed all the major intermediaries between Trump and Russia to hide their activities until after they gained office.

The same culture of secrecy allowed major businesses in the tech world to hand the Russians the means to intervene in the 2016 US presidential election. Facebook, Twitter and Google together provided the platform for fake accounts, bots and advertising manipulated by Russian intelligence to the tune of $100,000. Facebook in particular, whose algorithms are precisely tuned to reinforce the prejudices of its two billion users, was turned into a machine for spreading Russian lies.

Some 120 fake pages set up by Russian intelligence offshoots produced 80,000 posts, reaching up to 126 million people. On top of this the Russians spent tens of thousands of dollars on advertisements promoting 'distrust in political institutions and [to] spread confusion'. Facebook, which had willingly shut down the pages of Syrian human rights defenders, allowed Russian intelligence to play it like a pipe organ.[28]

Now let's do a thought experiment. Imagine you are a Russian intelligence boss: what is your analysis of US democracy's strategic weakness? At the root of everything is the same problem – deregulation and secrecy – which brought down the banking system in 2008. America's people are split by a culture war. Plus, parts of its elite actually have a material interest in creating chaos. Meanwhile, in the shape of Cambridge Analytica and Facebook (among others) they have created opinion control algorithms that allow their democracy to be manipulated by anyone with money. Though officially a rules-based democracy, the USA had become, after decades of free-market economics, a rules-free environment for anyone with technological or financial power. All Russia had to do was to use it.

Trump represents a triple catastrophe: a victory for racism and economic nationalism; a geopolitical slam-dunk for Vladimir Putin, triggering the breakup of the rules-based global order; and the first 'proof of concept' that corporate technology platforms can be used to shape the behaviour of a mature electorate. All this remains true despite the indictments, resignations, investigations and disarray attending Trump's first term in office. None of it will disappear automatically if he is indicted or defeated at the polls.

At the same time, Trump's victory dramatized a deeper crisis facing all advanced democracies. Even with strong economic growth, the system no longer delivers enough wellbeing and security to ordinary people to win their consent for it. Support for democracy and human rights is fading. Meanwhile, the secretive algorithms of the tech giants have become a deadly weapon against the very progressive values these firms are supposed to embody.

If the populations facing this threat were grouped into resilient organizations and had a strong sense of their own social power, the task for people like Putin, Erdoğan, Salvini and Trump would be harder. Their predecessors in the 1930s resorted to fascism because they had to smash an organized, politicized working class with a strong attachment to democratic rights, and a resilient liberal middle class inspired by the moral values of Christianity. That's what fascism was: the militarization of a lower-class mob to defeat the organized working class by force, take the state, merge it with the fascist militias and enforce rule by terror on behalf of big business.

This time round they probably don't need fascism. Solidarity has been atomized, our belief in collective action eroded, our sense of self hollowed out by the routines of

market behaviour – and with that, so has the moral basis for liberalism. If you wanted to choose a moment to unleash an attack on democracy, reinforced by machine control of human behaviour, this would be it.

None of the forces that put Trump in power are invincible. History tells us that even billionaires can go to jail; that Russian despots can be overthrown. As for armed plebeian racism in America, it was defeated in 1865 – though only after five years of civil war.

The problem is, Trump was produced by a broken economic system and a geopolitical instability that are only going to intensify. Even if Trump were swept from office, we are now in a world where every four years a new, crazier, more vicious version of Trump is possible. A world in which the torchlit marches of the alt-right don't go away; in which the ideology of violent misogyny can spread from one generation of frustrated young men to the next.

To prepare ourselves for the blow-up that is coming we need a better understanding of what happened over the past thirty years – not just to the economy but to our collective human psyche, our sense of agency, our belief in reason. In 2008 we began to understand what damage neoliberalism had done to the economy; only in 2016 did we begin to see the damage it had done to our selves.

Part II

THE SELF

Only when a world order collapses does thinking about it begin.

Ulrich Beck[1]

3

Creating the Neoliberal Self

One of my earliest memories is of going to the Leigh Miners' Gala in the 1960s, when I was about five years old. Amid the tight throng of people in a field, there was a boxing ring in which a local slugger was taking on all-comers. One challenger had blood on his face, another a deranged smile: they were mostly drunk, their flesh raw from the fighting. What I remember most was my dad's hand sliding over my forehead to cover my eyes.

That scene took place at the height of the long post-war boom. Most of those in the crowd had experienced year after year of rising real wages. Many of the men, being miners, worked for the state. Their kids were educated by the state for free; healthcare was free; the water people drank, the energy they consumed and – for many – the homes they lived in were all provided by the state at low cost.

It was a world structured around an explicit deal between capital and labour. It feels like a lost civilization now, but a version of it was present throughout the industrialized world. If you want to understand why so many voters over the age of sixty yearn to go back to it, and why so much of the support for right-wing populism comes out of the ruins of it – from Northern France to Western Australia – you must understand that deal was unique, in what it delivered and the kind of person it created.

My grandfather went down Astley Green Colliery at the age of fourteen, at the outbreak of the First World War. My dad went down the same pit at the age of eighteen, in the final months of the Second World War. So, as far back as I can trace it, my paternal family tree goes: hat-maker, hat-maker, miner, miner, miner, economics editor. The post-war economic system, in short, delivered a lot more than an end to poverty and unemployment, and a bit of dignity at work. It delivered spectacular upward social mobility in your lifetime.

What replaced it has delivered a social catastrophe.

When I campaigned in Leigh for Labour, during the 2017 general election, what struck me was the large number of disabled and elderly people among the small crowd of activists who had turned up in the town square. Many were, as they readily explained, suffering from work-related disabilities or long-term mental illness. Most of them looked ten or fifteen years older than me. But when I looked closer at this rickety, grey regiment I realized they were my exact contemporaries.

In the 1960s a new glass and concrete office block had been built on Leigh's Victorian main street, signalling the arrival of white-collar work and the technocratic culture. Now it was a ruin. As we gazed up at its dust-caked, broken windows, a local councillor whispered to me: 'We're dealing with 10,000 cases of domestic violence a year.' The population is just 50,000.

'You can feel the despair, the absolute lack of hope and ambition, it's just been destroyed,' a sixty-year-old energy worker told me. A childhood friend who'd spent his

In the first phase, the countries driving the change were Britain and the USA. Both adopted economic policies that made the 1979–82 recession worse, in a way designed to destroy jobs, slash wages, shrink public services and above all erode the power of trade unions. Then they imposed these policies on other countries, using the IMF, a new global treaty on trade, direct political pressure and indirect pressure via the newly deregulated financial markets.

The new way of thinking was imposed on the electorate through punitive actions, much in the way a rogue dog-trainer uses violence. Every crack of the whip was meant to teach millions of people a lesson, not through newspaper articles or speeches, but through them seeing the results.

The first whip-crack was inflicted through monetary policy. In place of human outcomes – like employment or poverty – both Thatcher and Reagan focused economic policy onto achieving abstract mathematical goals, such as the money supply or inflation targets. The result was the rapid and severe destruction of entire industrial sectors. That taught us Lesson #1: in economic policy *humans no longer matter.*

To understand why the elite voluntarily destroyed entire towns and factories in the 1980s, you have to understand the social power of the people I'd seen at the Miners' Gala. By forming a movement of its own, and maintaining it for over a hundred years, the working class in the industrialized world had created a permanent counter-power, both to capital and the state. When he took me into that throng around the boxing ring and then covered my eyes, my dad was telling me a moral story. We have to coexist with the brutality of the industrial lifestyle, be part of it, learn to love its rhythms, smells and sounds – and at the same time we have to nurture the belief in something better.

Organized labour was, until the 1980s, the main humanizing force within capitalism, far exceeding philanthropy and religion in its material achievements. It brought us the weekend, the eight-hour day, the vote for those who don't own property, equal pay legislation for women – and it was the labour movements which, from Warsaw to Turin to Paris, took up arms to topple Nazism at the end of the Second World War.

The aim of neoliberal policy in the early 1980s was to inflict a slump so hard it would destroy the bargaining power of trade unions, the culture that incubated them, the values of solidarity they spread, the socialist ideals they nurtured and the workplaces they organized in. To break their will to resist, millions of skilled working-class people of my father's generation would be subjected to the very thing that had haunted their nightmares since childhood: the humiliation of poverty and long-term unemployment.

But even that was not enough. You also had to break people's belief in something better. You had to change their way of thinking.

The next crack of the whip was against France, which in 1981 had elected a socialist–communist coalition government, led by François Mitterrand. Mitterrand pledged to resist neoliberalism: he hired 200,000 civil servants, raised the minimum wage by 39 per cent and nationalized twelve industrial groups together with thirty-six banks.[4] In response, money equivalent to 2 per cent of French GDP left the country in the first three months. Three sharp devaluations of the franc against the German mark followed – and the final one, in March 1983, forced Mitterrand to abandon state-led growth and instead adopt austerity.

Mitterrand's government was forced, effectively, to occupy its own country on behalf of an outside power – the global financial markets.[5] Though it was Thatcher who said 'there is no alternative', it was the drama of France between 1981 and 1983

that drilled home Lesson #2: *left-wing alternatives to neoliberalism will always fail, because the financial markets will always sabotage them.*

The third lesson was taught through mass privatization programmes, either adopted voluntarily or, as in the case of Latin America, imposed by the IMF. Spain for example, sold or gave away thirty-four publicly held companies in the mid-1980s – almost always to foreign firms. In order to convince Volkswagen to buy the car maker SEAT, the Spanish government spent $1.5 billion writing off its debts, and $3.2 billion more absorbing losses and in state aid.[6] The workforce in the privatized firms was slashed by one third.[7]

The privatization process created a new group of people with a stake in neoliberalism's success: individuals who'd been given shares or allowed to buy them cheaply on privatization. They now had a new kind of logic in their heads: you, the SEAT worker, must lose your job or work more flexibly so that I, the shareholder, can see my investments grow. That taught us Lesson #3: *privatization is good for everyone, even if it destroys your world.*

The fourth task was to impose neoliberal logic onto the rest of the world. During the state capitalist era, the IMF, World Bank and GATT (the predecessor to the World Trade Organization) had played a back-seat role. But now the IMF kicked into life, subjecting most of Latin America, most of Africa and large parts of Asia to privatization programmes in return for debt bailouts.[8]

Mexico was the guinea pig. In August 1982 it threatened to default on $80 billion-worth of debts. The IMF's own history of the episode admits: 'The system was now at risk. The major US and Japanese banks were threatened for the first time and the European banks faced major new risks.'[9] In return for a $4 billion bailout, Mexico was forced to impose its own version of Thatcherism: hike interest rates, cut public spending and begin a privatization programme that would sell or close 80 per cent of all state-owned factories.[10] By 1986 unemployment hit 15 per cent. The foreign debt mushroomed to $100 billion. Real wage levels fell by at least 40 per cent in just three years.[11]

Mexico, which had staged a series of struggles for economic independence from the USA in the twentieth century, was now once again an economic colony of Washington, with a string of cheap labour factories serving the US market clustered along the border. Through Mexico, the IMF taught us Lesson #4: *economic sovereignty is impossible.*

The final challenge was to cement neoliberalism's control in Europe. In 1985, Margaret Thatcher – who had always blocked further integration in the European Community – switched track. Europe, she said, could have its parliament, its partially pooled sovereignty and its flag, on condition that it wrote neoliberalism into its key treaty, the Single European Act of 1986.

France, Mitterrand wrote, had been 'divided between two ambitions: that of the construction of Europe and that of social justice'.[12] Thatcher succeeded in imposing that choice on the entire continent. From the mid-1980s the European Community, for all its theoretical commitments to welfare provision and full employment, was practically committed to neoliberalism. At its heart stood not only Thatcherite Britain but a Germany whose elite had long ago swallowed the idea of 'as much market and as little state as possible'. Lesson #5 was that *even countries committed to the welfare state would have to deliver it using neoliberal methods.* If you want a social-market economy, you must accept privatization, outsourcing and enforced competition, and turn a blind eye to the tax-dodging of large corporations.

In fewer than ten years, the neoliberal project had reshaped the world economy. But its true achievement lay in the changes it made to the way human beings think and

behave.

'The community was poor,' writes urban sociologist Janice Perlman, 'but people mobilized to demand improved urban services, worked hard, had fun, and had hope. They watched out for each other, and daily life had a calm, convivial rhythm.' That was her description of a Brazilian *favela* in the 1960s – but it could just as easily describe most working-class communities in the world back then.

When Perlman returned to Rio de Janeiro in 1999 to document the aftermath of the neoliberal transformation, things were different: 'Where there had been hope, now there were fear and uncertainty. People were afraid of getting killed in the cross fire during a drug war between competing gangs ... They felt more marginalized than ever.'[13]

From the late 1970s onwards neoliberalism reinvented the urban slum, and forced a billion people – one in seven on the planet – to make their homes there.[14] Collapsing agricultural prices accelerated the move from the land into the cities. The state's near-bankruptcy meant there was no one to stop the new arrivals building shacks among the waterways and rubbish dumps. Slum-clearance programmes broke down: they were designed on the assumption that slums were a remnant of the past; now they would be the future.

Perlman's account of what happened in a *favela* called Nova Brasília tells the story in depth. After 1985 the major factories close down, unemployment rises massively, policing evaporates and the drug gangs move in: by the early 1990s they not only control the streets but the residents' association, after executing its last uncorrupted leader.[15] After this, she observes, the gangs effectively become the state.

What kind of person prospers in a community destroyed by drugs, violence, poverty, unemployment and insecurity? The answer is: people who can adapt to its dog-eat-dog dynamics. Those who can accept constant insecurity not as an aberration but as normality; people who are prepared to 'live for the present' and above all are prepared to look after themselves, forget community obligations, tolerate lawlessness and participate in it.

Such people were rare in the era of state capitalism, even in a poor country like Brazil. But neoliberalism created a new social archetype: the rootless, self-centred individual, focused not on the collective struggle or community activism but on the personal struggle for survival. A drug runner in the Rio *favela* might be destined to die before the age of thirty – but they could earn in a week what it would take months to earn in a factory on the minimum wage. Once you had bought your gun, looked after your family and paid for sex, what else was there to spend the money on but branded sports shoes and cheap jewellery?

As the old industries collapsed, this lifestyle, pioneered in the slums of the global south, quickly spread among young people in the devastated cities of the developed world. Rap music transmitted the new ideals of gangs, drugs and sexual violence into poor, black and Hispanic communities in the USA, but this 'bling' culture developed across many different countries and music types, becoming a kind of international neoliberal style. Ten years into the Thatcher era it was no surprise to find 'gangsta' morals, values and behaviours appearing among the disaffected young people of my home town.

By the late 1980s you have two kinds of subjectivity: a group of embittered survivors from the old system living alongside enthusiastic early adopters of selfishness, individualism and conformity. But in a world of chaos and poverty, the memory of the good times under state capitalism is strong, so the prevailing mood in working-class