CHAPTER 16

EXTREMISM AS IMMANENCE AND PROCESS

The Trump Transmutation

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Extremism is a concept that is broadly negative or pejorative in meaning or sense. Applied to political action it is that which breaks or goes beyond accepted or defined limits. Extremism is unruly. It is action that is in some way or another conceived to be excessive, exclusive, overriding, doctrinaire, intolerant. Extremist politics are typically founded on ideological closure that admits no authority outside itself. It is dictatorial and uncompromising. So much so that there is no legitimate outside. Extremist groups tend to regard those who are not members to be potential antagonists, to be swept aside or else converted. There is a strong affinity between much political extremism and religious dogmatism, fundamentalism and messianism. Extremist politics, in much opinion, is given to authoritarianism and totalitarianism. There is a tension to violence in extremism towards anything that confines, limits or resists it.

The foregoing are common typifications of extremism, rather than definitions. We say this to underline the concept as highly relative, very much dependent on position and perspective within processes and structures of social and political relations.

These attitudes directed towards extremism (which is not to deny their factuality in experience throughout history) operate ideologically, often to legitimate oppressive action and/or to disguise, hide, the extreme potential (even extreme foundations) of orders and processes that do not recognize their own extremism.

A feature of extremism is that it often elicits extreme reaction or response. Thus, state orders all too frequently crack down on what they conceive as threatening to its control and have labelled extremist. Indeed, extremist activity legitimates the ongoing and increasing authoritarian actions against it. The reaction against extremism is *itself* extreme, and this refracts the foundation of the state in a violence that is excited by the extremism that contests its authority.

Our concern in this chapter is with the circumstances for the emergence of what is recognized to be extremism as well as that of a more hidden unrecognized kind that shares some of the properties. More especially, we address the role of such extremism in effecting sociopolitical transformations or transmutations. The strong implication here is that extremism, or what is defined and perceived to be extremism, is a cause as well as an effect.

Our argument focuses on the years of the presidency of Donald Trump, himself filling the extremist bill in the opinion of many in appearance and demeanour, and especially on the events following his election defeat, such as the invasion of the Capitol, followed by President Joseph Biden's accession. The happening at the Capitol gave vent to extremism in the negative vision of the concept, but it and subsequent events, particularly, reveal a more hidden kind of extremism that Trump can be seen to mediate.

The happenings[1] forming around Trump are a dynamic in and of themselves. They express the chaos of transition of the moment, but they are also and at the same time forces in the transformation and transmutations of capitalism and its effects in world history: perhaps, with the complications of the Covid-19 pandemic, virtually an axial moment, a switch or turning point of crisis.[2]

This involves some reconsideration of what is becoming the master narrative concerning Trump, with ideological implications of its own. Trump's extremism is presented as a spectre of a fascist past rather than a foretaste, a mediation into the potential of an authoritarian totalitarian future, a less evident extremism perhaps, involving major transmutations in capitalism.

An Extremist Situation: Night of the World, Pandemonium at the Capitol

The events at the Capitol, which have evoked so much outrage, occurred on the ritualistic day of the confirmation of the new president's victory. The confirmation is the closing rite in what can be conceived as the liminal (Turner 1969) transitional period conventional in the American democratic cycle.[3] Such a liminal space is a relative retreat and suspension of the state political order as the presidency is renewed or changed. This is often a festive time given to all kinds of political excess when the people vent their potency

in the selection of those who are to rule them (Kapferer 2015). Trump encouraged and intensified the potential chaos of liminality at its peak when, ideally, it should subside and political order be fully restored. He aimed to disrupt this critical moment and to maintain his uncertain presence as the Lord of Misrule, if not necessarily to effect a coup. Named as 'God's chaos candidate' by some evangelicals who supported him, Trump promoted, even if unwittingly, a moment of extreme chaos that was all the more intense for the liminal moment of its occurrence when the participants themselves blew out of control.

In the nightmare of the event, newscasts presented visions of a fascist future (imagined as a continuation of the past) filled with Fascist and Nazi images and other commonly associated symbols. There was a strong sense of dialectical collapse along the lines of Hegel's 'Night of the World', disconnected flashes of the demonic when forces in opposition dissipate against each other and lose their meaning. The representatives of the nation cowered under their desks fitting gas masks, while those who would challenge them, in festive mood and drunk with brief power, put their feet up on desks aping their masters, and carried off the mementos and spoils of their invasion. Exuberant chants of 'This is our house' echoed down the corridors of power.

Shades of the past paraded in the present, foremost among them that of the enduring trauma of the rise of Nazi Germany. What Sinclair Lewis had warned in *It Can't Happen Here* – a Hitler-esque rise to power at the centre of the democratic world – anticipated by all sides from the early days of Trump's apotheosis, seemed to be actually materializing. This accounts for the excitement on the steps of the Capitol – 'this is America 2021, y'all!' Videos taken inside the Capitol show a slow moving disorganized and scattered crowd of people roaming through the building enjoying themselves, taking photographs posing beside paintings like tourists on a holiday. Voices can be heard warning not to 'break anything, respect *our* house'. They were claiming their 'anarchic title' as Jacques Ranciere might observe. The people flooding into the centre of power at the Capitol were, in fact, expressing the violent, confusing and anarchic egalitarian energy – the unpredictable force of the demos – that lies at the foundation of all democracy[4] (Ranciere 2014).

Arlie Hochschild captured the millenarian, messianic Nuremberg feel of Trump's campaign rallies when researching *Strangers in Their Own Land* (Hochschild 2016), her excellent ethnography of the white far right and their sympathizers in Louisiana, America's poorest state and a Donald Trump heartland. Hochschild recounts at a lecture to the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation in Berlin a scene, reminiscent of the opening frames of Leni Riefenstahl's *The Triumph of the Will*, when Trump's plane, 'Trump Force One', appears through the clouds and, as if from heaven, it descends 'down, down,

down' to the waiting crowd electrified in expectation of the saviour's endlessly repeated sermon of redemption of the deep resentment that they felt for having been pushed aside from the promise of the American Dream.

But here is the point: the immediate reaction to the storming of the Capitol gave further confirmation to the real and present danger of Trump's fascist threat, fuelled in the rumblings of class war which Trump has inflamed and exploited. It is a liberal fear, mainly of the Democrats but including some Republicans, who are the chief targets of Trump's attacks. His demonization of elite liberal value (marked by accusations of moral perversities aimed at unmasking the claims to virtue) is at one with his condemnation of the liberalism of Federal political and social economic policies, which he presents as contributing to the abjection of mainly white American working-class poor, and to be seen in the rapidly increasing power of global corporations, the policies of economic globalization, and the privileging of minorities, refugees, recent immigrants, and so on. It might be remembered at this point that the violence of the Capitol invasion, the marked involvement of military veterans, the carrying of weapons (baseball bats, and reports of pipe bombs), which shocked so many, reflects the fact that all modern states are founded on violence.

This is particularly the case in the United States, where the Constitution's Second Amendment protects the right to bear arms in defence of democratic rights.[5] In an important sense, the violence of those invading the Capitol refracts back at the middle class and especially the ruling elite the very violence that underpins the structure of their rule. If liberal virtue was shocked by the events on 6 January it was also confronted with the violent paradox deep in its democratic heart (Palmer 2021). Thus, this paradox slips into paroxysm at this critical moment in American political history.

The transitional figure of Trump feeds on the prejudices of his intended constituencies, and exploits an already ill-formed class awareness building on ready commitments and vulnerabilities – the well-rehearsed fascist and populist technique – creating indeed a false consciousness (there is no other way to say it) that is not only destructive but in the hands of the likes of Trump integral to intensifying the feelings of impotence and the miseries that give Trump his relative popularity. Slavoj Zizek says as much in what he describes as 'Trump's Greatest Treason' (Zizek 2021) – his betrayal of the working class even as he represents them.

Arnold Schwarzenegger, 'The Governator', was quick to counter the white supremacist, macho, Proud Boy, Oath Keeper and Three Percenter elements highly visible in media newscasts with a Conan the Barbarian Performance.[6] This was his take on the dominant brand of 'Make America Great Again'. (Really, all those along the political spectrum participate in MAGA – Democrat Party badges and hats from the recent election read 'Dump Trump,

Make America Great Again'.) He focused on his own immigration away from his native Austria and its Nazi associations to the liberated American world of his success. For Schwarzenegger, the Capitol invasion and its vandalism equated to Kristallnacht. Noam Chomsky likens the storming with Hitler's Beer Hall Putsch of 1923, observing that it effected a greater penetration to the heart of power than did Hitler's failed attempt. But Chomsky, with characteristic acuity, adds that the fascist danger lies in the anti-democratic class forces (including electoral and political manipulations on all sides) that provide the fertile ground for fascism.

At this point we take brief stock.

The Capitol invaders or rioters or protestors were a cross-class assemblage, but overridingly white. Their whiteness gave them a coherence, especially in an America where the politics of class refracts major divisions of race and colour, affecting most specifically African Americans, whose enslavement acts as a continual reminder of the basis of American democracy and capital in the subversion of the highest democratic and egalitarian ideals. Such a scandal is behind much of the outrage at the Capitol events, and particularly in the context of ongoing Black Lives Matter activism. The participants in the Capitol were from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, from the wealthy to the poor, with multiple affiliations and not just those of the right-wing militias that provided the dominant images for the news media. Nonetheless, their whiteness indicated the cross-class force of colour in America as a major ongoing contradiction of the democratic ideal, a fascist potential. Trump exploited such racism, even as he denied it, and provided a point for its crystallization. But we suggest that the assemblage character of his following is also his weakness. While his fan of appeal extended beyond marginalized extremist groups, the ties linking them were not strong and easily dissipate as a function of the conflicts and contradictions of class alone.

Jacob Chansley, QAnon Shaman, whose image went viral, embodies the very idea of the assemblage (and certainly the fascist potential) and an internal tension to dissolution.[7] Indeed confronted by the reactive power of the state, a scapegoat, perhaps, for the evasive criminality of Trump at the edge of impeachment, the Shaman began to dissolve and fragment, to pixilate, just as Trump's so-called movement may also fade.

What we stress is that the QAnon Shaman's body was a plane of extremism. It expressed the full range of American extremism from the leftist hippie folk rock pacifist but rebellious sixties, through the primitivist mysticism and religious cultism often fundamentalist in orientation of working-class and middle-class America, to the radical overtly macho and violent rightist groups. The Shaman manifests America as overall a plane of extremism in which Trump worked, and that was subject to his magic in the context of the

challenges and changes confronting capital within the American democratic ideology.

But the point must be taken further. New class formations are in the making right now, and they are being driven in the explosive nature of technological revolution. This is something Marx himself was very much aware of, and was why he wrote more than one hundred pages on the machine and the human in *Capital*. This is also the concern of Marcuse in *One Dimensional Man* (2002) and the continued focus of today's accelerationists such as the Deleuzian Nick Land (1993) and Nick Srnicek (2017) with his idea of platform capitalism.

Creative Destruction, the Transmutation in Capital, and Corporate State Formation

The Rise and Fall of Trump (not discounting the possibility that Humpty Dumpty[8] might come together again, which is the fear of the master narrative) may be understood as expressing a transition between two moments of capital during which one formation morphs into another. Trump is the embodiment, instrument and anguish of this transition, a tragic figure in a theatre of the absurd. Grand Guignol almost, but in Gothic *American Horror Story* style. The accession of Biden is the apotheosis of the new, in the hopes of most, he is a vehicle for healing the divisions in America that Trump brought to a head and are still very much present. But Biden's rise has ominous oppressive indications of its own.

These events have all the hallmarks of the crisis and rupture of transformation or, better, *transmutation*. The millenarian spirit that Hochschild captures in her account is one born in the capitalist ideology of the American Dream, fortified in the religious fundamentalism of Trump's many followers that revitalizes their hopes in the Dream in the face of abject failure. The rallies and the impassioned actions of those invading the Capitol are filled with revitalizing energy. Such millenarian explosions, distinct in their own historical contexts, occur at many other points in global history. It was apparent at the dawn of capitalism in Europe, at later moments of crisis and redirection in capital up to the present – indeed at the inception of the Nazi horror, and at points of the disruptive expansion of capital in the Western imperial/colonial thrust as in the Cargo movements of the Pacific (Worsley 1970; Lanternari 1963; Cohn 1970).

The rupture of transmutation in capital, the crisis that the Trumpian progress manifests, is an instance of what Marx and others have understood to be the creative/destructive dynamic of capital whereby it reproduces, renews, revitalizes its potency against contradictions and limitations to its profit mo-

tive that capital generates within itself, as well as those thrown up against it, in the very process of its own expansion and transformation.

The circumstances underpinning the current transmutation in capital relate to the revolutions in science and technology (those associated particularly with the digital age and advances in biotechnology), to a large extent driven by capital and motivated in profit. The rapid development of capital (and especially that of the still dominant, if declining, American form) was driven in the innovations in knowledge and technology (something that Marx and many others admired in America). What became known as the nation-state (the dominant political form that nurtured capital) and the class orders that were generated in capital and necessary to it (not to mention the over-population and ecological disasters that grew in capital's wake) also constituted barriers and limitations to capital's growth.

The new technological revolutions are a response to the limitations on capital emergent within its own processes. Technological innovations enabled revolutions in production and consumption (creating new markets and increasing consumption, reducing the need for human labour and the resistances it brings with it, overcoming problems, and opening up novel lines, of distribution), forcing the distress of unemployment (especially among the erstwhile working class), creating impoverishment and uncertainties reaching into once affluent middle classes (as captured in the neologism, the precariat), shifting class alignments, redefining the nature and value of work, of the working day (the expansion of zero hours and its returning sense of a bygone era).

The current technological revolution is a key factor in the extraordinary growth in the monopolizing strength of corporations such as Google, Amazon and Tencent. The dot.com organizations (the flagships and spearheads of capitalist transformation with huge social transmutational effect) have wealth that dwarfs many states, and they are functioning in areas once controlled by the state (e.g. in the current race to colonize space). Indeed the corporate world has effectively invaded and taken over the operation of nation-states (Kapferer 2010; Kapferer and Gold 2018). This is most noteworthy in those state orders influenced by histories of liberal social democracy in Europe and Australia, for example, which tended to draw a sharp demarcation between public interest and private enterprise. The nation-state and its apparatuses of government and institutions for public benefit have been corporatized, so much so that in many cases government bureaucracies have not only had their activities outsourced to private companies but have also adopted managerial styles and a ruthlessness along the lines of some business models. The corporatization of the state has aligned it much more closely with dominant economic interests in the private (now also public) sectors than before, and enables a bypassing of state regulation, even that

which once sustained capitalist interest but which became an impediment to capitalist expansion.[9]

These changes have wrought socio-economic and political disruption and distress globally, and most especially in the Western hemisphere. This is not merely collateral damage. The revolution in science and technology has been a key instrument in effecting social and political changes via destruction, for the regenerative expansion of capital. It has been central to the re-imagination of capital in the opening years of the twenty-first century.

This is particularly so in the United States whose sociopolitical order is historically one of corporate state formation, which accounts for its long-term global political economic domination. Some renewal in leftist thought (e.g. with Bernie Sanders) is an index of the depth of distress that is being experienced, although the ideological and counteractive potency of the American Dream, fuelled especially in fundamentalist Christianity, suppresses such potential contributing to the intensity and passion of the Trump phenomenon. The ideological distinction of the Trump event aside, its dynamic of populism is reflected throughout the globe.

One common feature of this is the rejection of the political systems associated with nation-state orders and, to a marked extent, the largely bipartite party systems vital in the discourses of control and policy in nation-states. Trumpism and other populist movements (in Europe notably) complain of the alienation of the state and its proponents from interests of the mass. The expansion of corporatization and the further hollowing out of the state, the corruption of its public responsibilities by corporate interests, is effectively what Trump was furthering in his presidency. It is a potent dimension of the Trump paradox and a major irony of the Capitol invasion that, for all the apparent fascist tendencies, it was the spirit of reclaiming democracy (admittedly of the freebooting kind) in an already highly corporatized establishment (subject to great corporate capitalist interest) that Trump's actions were directed to expanding. An important figure in this respect is the Silicon Valley venture capitalist Peter Thiel. The tech billionaire, an early investor in Facebook and founder of Paypal, was an early Trump supporter and was part of Trump's transition team in 2016. His book, *Zero to One*, based on his lecture courses at Stanford University, argues for a corporate-technocratic governance beyond older systems of government (Thiel 2014).

From Panopticon to Coronopticon

Covid-19 has highlighted the social devastation of the destructive/creative dynamic of capitalism's transmutation. The class and associated ethnic inequities have everywhere been shown up and probably intensified

by a pandemic that is starting to equal, if not surpass, the depressing and devastating effect of two world wars. Like them, it is clearing ground for capitalist exploitative expansion – something like Naomi Klein's disaster capitalism (Klein 2007). Under the shadow of the virus, labour demands are being rationalized, the cutting back of employment and its benefits legitimated, governments are pumping capital into the economies in a way that protects consumption in an environment where there is declining occupational opportunity and income. The idea of the Universal Basic Income is being seriously discussed, which would offset some of the contradictions in a transformation of capitalism that is reducing the dependence on labour and endangering consumption through automation and digitalization. While the poor are getting poorer the rich are getting richer, most notably those heading the revolutionary technologies of the digital age and biotechnology, the competitive race to secure viable vaccines against the virus being one example.

There is a strange synchronicity linking the pandemic with the dynamic of capitalism's transmutational corporatization of the state. The virus reproduces and spreads in a not dissimilar dynamic. Indeed, Covid-19 in some ecological understandings is the product of the acceleration of globalization effected in those processes of capitalism's transmutation associated with corporate expansion and the corporatization of the nation-state. As a crossover from animal to human bodies, the virus is one manifestation of increased human population pressure on wild animal territory, the closer intermeshing of animal and human terrain. The scale of the pandemic is, of course, a direct consequence of the time–space contraction and the intensity of the networked interconnections of globalization.

State surveillance has intensified as a by-product of combatting Covid, which is also its legitimation, with digitalization as the major surveillance instrument. The digital penetration into every nook and cranny of social life – see Shoshana Zuboff's *Surveillance Capitalism* (2019) or Netflix's *The Social Dilemma* – is interwoven with the commodification of the social and personal for profit, with economizing individuals calculating the costs and benefits of their social 'interactions' (the YouTube or Kuaishou 'influencer', the hype TED talker as Foucault's entrepreneurial self, cut, pasted, uploaded and remixed). The management of Covid, demanding social isolation and the disruption of ordinary social life, has exponentially increased the role of the digital as the primary mediator of the social and a commanding force in its very constitution. Covid has been revealed as a kind of social particle accelerator. As such, and evermore exclusively so, the real of the social is being re-imagined, re-engineered and re-mastered as a digital-social, a 'Digisoc' or 'Minisoc', constrained and produced within algorithmically preset parameters. Here is Peter Weir's film, *The Truman Show* radically updated.

And, as with Truman, the space of freedom is also and *at the same time* experienced as a space of unfreedom.[10] This manifests itself in the deep ambivalence many feel about the new technologies they daily live with and through. The digitized social is often presented as a new agora, a liberating 'space' in which new, progressive ideas and directions are enabled, operationalized and indeed optimized. The internet has become a site of multiple struggles in which class forces and new potentials for social difference and proliferating identity claims are continually emerging. The freedom of the internet has provided exciting opportunities for many. Such freedom also and at the same time contributes to conspiracy on all sides. As has been made clear in the two elections featuring Trump, the superpower of corporations like Google and Facebook threatens to install a domain of hyper-control. Digital walls and electronic fences are appearing everywhere in the age of the global 'splinternet'.

A Digital Fascism – Towards the Machinic Materialization of Being

An essay by Thomas Klikauer and Norman Simms on the new 'digital fascism' argues along similar lines to us – they claim that the internet makes a new form of fascism possible in an emerging and original sociohistorical dispensation (Klikauer and Simms 2021). They make the simple and important point that social media and online sociality is not itself socially created. We develop and extend: online sociality is truly a corporate zone.

Digi-sociality is a strange, uncanny new form of 'sociality' that is engineered through a still barely understood and technically complex process whereby huge masses of individuals are collected as 'big data', digitized and algorithmically ordered – 'dividualized' – by software engineers building and designing mega-corporate platforms and new multimedia 'environments' or 'spaces' (for want of much better words).[11]

Unlike older forms of fascism and totalitarianism, the reformatting of human existence creates an open horizontal and de-hierachialized plane that is decentralized and leaderless – it is a totally equalized and individuated plane or any-space-whatever in which truth is radically relativized – your truth, my truth, any-truth-whatever – and facts become fictions or fictions become facts, and reality becomes indiscernible from fantasy – this is what Gilles Deleuze has called the crystalline 'power of the false' (Deleuze 1989). As we move into the new space-times of what may be called a crystalline capitalism, we learn to live with and adjust our senses to the emerging digital domain. And the digital domain is the domain of fake news. The platforming of human lives flattens sociality, fragments individuals into 'dividuals' or 'bits' of individuals – byte sized chunks – organizes them into sets and

groups them according to tastes and likes and clicks, and then folds and refolds according to the needs of various corporate interests – human being as commercial dataset.

It is this radical datafication of the world that humans are currently learning to live with and adjust to. And it is this 'world' or non-world or night of the world that provides the fertile ground for new mythologies that attempt to grasp it, control it and bring it to order. Truth collapses into lies and lies into truth. This is a context that is ripe for Klikauer and Simms's digital fascism, and ripe for the era of conspiracy. On this flattened and individualized or personalized plane, new theories and myths, each as good as any other, multiply and proliferate wildly. Trump operates on this plane. And he is as much a product or symptom of this as he is an expert player within it – he 'games' this system certainly, but, equally, anybody can.

The hegemonic and totalizing potential for the ruling bodies of the corporatizing state who control the digital is as never before. This is so not just in the global scale of the network reach but in the heightened degree to which controlling bodies can form the ground of the social; they can radically remodel, engineer and design reality in accordance with dominant interests – and if motivated can shut out that which threatens their order. The awareness of this has driven the fury of censorship and self-censorship on all sides – Trump's threatened TikTok ban becomes Twitter's actual Trump ban.

A Fascism of the Future: From 1984 into a Brave New World

Trump and Trumpism are moments in the transitional, transmutational process of capitalism outlined above, and of the formation of new social and political orders. Echoing the past, they express its transmutation (and its agonies) rather than repeat it. Trump and Trumpism manifest the contradictions of such processes, agents and agencies for the transmutations in the social and political circumstances of life that are in train, themselves forces in the bringing forth of a future that, in some aspects, is already being lived.[12]

Trump himself can be described as an in-betweener, a bridge into the new realities, both a force in their realization and a victim. His manner and style, the brutal no-holds-barred amorality, is familiar from the captains of industry and robber barons of an earlier age, who built capitalist America and crushed working-class resistance by all means, more foul than fair. Trump maintains the style but in reverse redemptive mode. In his shapeshift he presents as supporter of the working classes not their nemesis as did his forerunners. However, his authoritarian business manner, of *The Apprentice*'s 'You're fired!' fame, matches well the managerialism of the present. He

is an exemplar of contemporary venture capitalism, and most especially of profit from non-industrial production (often anti-production) gained from real estate, property transfer, asset stripping, and the expanding gaming and gambling industries (symptoms of the crises of transformation in capital) from which some of Trump's key supporters come.

Trump's reactionary anti-immigrant nationalism and Make America Great Again rhetoric not only appeals to the white right of his constituency but is an engagement of past rhetoric to support new political and economic realities. Trump's economic war with China stressed reindustrialization, but it was also concerned with counteracting China's technological ascendancy, especially in the realm of the digital, a major contradiction born of the current globalizing transmutation in capitalism involving transfers of innovatory knowledge.

Trump anticipated the risk to his presidential re-election, and it manifested the dilemmas of his in-betweenness. His inaction with regard to the pandemic was consistent with the anti-'Big Government' policies of many Republicans and the American Right, who are so much a part of QAnon conspiracies but also concerned to reduce government interference and modify regulation in capitalist process – a strong emphasis in current transitions and transformations of the state and of capital.

Trump's cry that the election was being stolen was excited in the circumstances of the pandemic. His attack on postal votes related to the fact that the pandemic gave the postal vote a hitherto unprecedented role in the election's outcome by bypassing and neutralizing the millenarian populist potency of his mass rallies, already reduced in numbers by fear.[13] Trump sensed that the Covid-inspired move to 'working from home' and 'voting from home' would challenge, fence in and fence out his base of support.

Trump has always taken advantage of the digital age, his use of Twitter and Facebook the marked feature of his style of rule. His practices looked forward to the politics of a future ever increasingly bounded and conditioned in societies of the image. Following the events at the Capitol, Trump's own Custer's last stand to allay his fate, his cyberspace and internet accounts were switched off. He has been cancelled by the new digitally authoritarian corporate powers, who arguably benefited the most from the Trump era and profited greatly under pandemic conditions,[14] and who are behind the growing new society of the image, in which he was a past master and within which he had in the main established his identity (Kapferer, R. 2016).

The overriding image of the Capitol invasion and carried across most networks is that of the occupation of the heart of American democracy by those who would threaten its ideals. The media have concentrated on what was the dominating presence of the extremist macho white American far right violently parading symbols of a racist past combined with clear references to

the not-so-distant memories of fascism and Nazism. There were others there more moderate in opinion, and representative of other class fractions, if still mostly white, whose presence does not reduce the fear of fascism, possibly as in Nazi Germany when what seemed to be small groups of extremists hijacked power to unleash the horrors that followed – and the events of the Capitol evoke such memory (Palmer 2021). Something similar could be said for what happened in Russia leading to Stalinism. These were the worlds of George Orwell's 1984, in which some of the major ideals of the time flipped in their tragic negation. Such events were very much emergent in realities of the nation-state, its imperialist wars and the class forces of that particular historical moment in the history of capitalism and the formations of its social and political orders. There is no statement here that this could not happen again.

What we are saying is this: a different authoritarian and oppressive possibility may be taking shape – not of the fascist past but of the future. This is a future that Trump was mediating but that may be coming into realization, despite the great hope to the contrary, in the accession of President Biden. Perhaps this prospect can be seen as more akin to Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* born in the current transmutations of capital (and its agonies of class) and in the circumstances of the radical technological revolutions of the digital era, involving the apotheosis of the corporatization of the state, the corporate state emerging out of the ruins of the nation-state.

Aldous Huxley depicted a world centred on production and efficiency, a biotechnologically conditioned global system of perfect rational, optimized order. The class conflicts of the past are overcome here; everyone accepts their predetermined place. It is a post-human reality in which the foundation of human beings in their biology and passions is transcended. It is a somatized, artificially intelligent world of the image and promiscuity – indeed, the American Dream. Those who do not fit or who resist are fenced out. Time and space are being reconfigured, incurving around the individual and 'personalized'.

Biden's inauguration for all its upbeat ceremonial spirit had some intimation of such a future, taking into full account the security constraints of its moment: to protect against the murderous unchecked rampage of the virus and the threat of the attack of right-wing militias. The stress on this, it may be noted, had an ideological function to distance what was about to come into being from, for example, the definitely more visceral world of Trump, and thoroughly evident in the invasion of the Capitol – what Biden in his inauguration speech called an 'uncivil war'.

The scene of the perfectly scripted inauguration was virtually devoid of people. Apart from the dignitaries and all-important celebrities, the highly selected order of the society of the corporate state. Where the general popu-

lace would normally crowd was an emptiness filled with flags and protected by troops, more than currently are stationed in Afghanistan. Those who might disrupt, Hilary Clinton's 'deplorables' and Aldous Huxley's 'resistant savages' were fenced out. It was a totalizing and constructed digital media image presenting a reality of control, harmony, and absolute surveillance.

We claim that something like Trump and the events surrounding him would have happened regardless of the specific phenomena we have focused on here. The events are a moment, perhaps among the most intense, in the transitional transmutation of the history of capitalism and the socio-economic and political orders that build and change around it. The apparent chaos indicates a major axial moment in world history – a chaos driven in the emergence of a cybernetic techno-capitalist apparatus on a global scale (see notes 2 and 3). What might be augured in the Biden accession is already taking vastly different shape in China and elsewhere around the globe. New and diverse formations of totalitarian authoritarianism are emerging. The Trump phenomenon is crucial for an understanding of some of the potentials of a future that we are all very much within, and that an overconcentration on the parallels with the past may too easily obscure.

Afterthought: Towards Further Considerations on Extremism

We have written of the Trump events as a whole, and especially the closing scenes of his drama, as a situation of extremism born in a liminal and transitional moment. The underlying idea is that such extremist situations or extended times of extremism (as in the four years of Trump's presidency), often characterized by agonized conflict, can be expected at times of crisis or rupture, marked especially by social and economic disruption and expanding class distress. This may be all the more so during periods in world history of radical civilizational shift involving the collapse of overarching systems of order and the emergence of new ones. There are indications that the current historical moment is one such period: characterized by a major transmutation in capitalism in the context of extraordinary revolutions in science and technology that may be penetrating into the very being of human being. The consequent seismic shocks for political and social orders constitute major liminal periods of transition.

We sound a note of caution. Our argument presents extremism as being a phenomenon associated with the breakdown and transformation of the orders and patterns of social life and the conditions of existence. We have highlighted extremism as not merely an expression of such processes but as an agent force in them. The emphasis is upon extremism being about social and political life at its limits and at its points of turning. The extreme is born

and comes into its own at such moments. This is when extremism can be at its most potent, and given the circumstances and its objectives it can overcome all that is around it. This was the fear of Trump and the energy behind the fascist cries. There was much cause for such fear.

The perspective we advance runs close to various functionalist approaches, especially of the organismic kind, from which we aim to depart but whose insights cannot be too easily dismissed. The discussions on extremism tend to focus upon it as a deviant or pathological phenomenon: extremism as ultimate contradiction whereby it manifests as radical negation in the dehumanization of social processes and values – the ideals, especially, of that which is its ground. This is the point of both Orwell, for the present past, and Huxley, for the present future. Their centring of destructive extremism in dominant orders rather than something at the margins is their major contribution.

The approach we take aims to go further, beyond that functionalism caught in a dualist order/disorder dynamic. Discussions of extremism tend to place it on the disorder side and largely at the margins or peripheries of social existence. We stress extremism, whether perceived as extreme (in which the negative is usually asserted) or not so perceived, to be integral to the dynamic of social and political processes rather than a phenomenon marginal to them. At the start of this chapter, we indicated that extremism is not only difficult to define but a highly relative concept, most definitions better grasped as typifications, reflecting theoretical persuasions and cultural orientations.

Following the above line of thinking, we see the cultural field of the United States as given to extremism, even though it is not necessarily recognized as such. The world of the US can be conceived, as we indicated earlier, to be a plane of immanence (Deleuze and Guattari 1980) for the emergence of extremism of all kinds.

The concept of the plane of immanence is used to focus attention on the synergic interaction between the ideology of American democracy (see De Tocqueville 2003), which can be described as egalitarian individualism on the one hand, and capitalism and the diversity of its practices on the other. We stress that these are not to be conceived as separate, static or unchanging. In the historical formation of the United States, they were intertwined from the word go, in dynamic changing evolution. Their dynamic is such that extreme forms and practices are constantly being thrown up across the plane of immanence that is the continual and diversifying cultural field of America, implied in the concept of American exceptionalism and in which extremism plays as much a positive role as it may be negative.

What we indicate is that a new plateau of extremism is being reached on America's plane of immanence, both in ideology (egalitarian individualism

of American democracy) and in the capitalist practices associated with it. Thus, in the context of America's technologically regenerated capitalism (itself motivated in the creative energy of American individualism), individualism is gaining greater intensity, perhaps even more fractionalizing and fragmenting than hitherto.

Broadly, America might be described as a celebration of the extreme, a dimension of its bizarre fascination to those outside America, but also inside – for example, Louis Theroux's many television series. Perhaps a generative field of expanding differentiation, involving a continual individuating explosive domain of virtually cultic profusion (typically centred around charismatic personalities and social media influencers), evident in religious and political action. The reductionism in action and in thought that are dimensions of egalitarian individualism and of capitalism (especially in synergy) encourage a particular fundamentalizing energy, typically associated with extremism, which contributes to its cultic quality and dynamic of exclusionary competitiveness.

Individuals are increasingly broken up and isolated within various bubbles or single information 'pods'. See, for example, the recent proposal to 'fix the internet' by its one of its creators, Tim Berners-Lee (Lohr 2021), and algorithmically distributed or combining in private Facebook groups or in invitation-only Clubhouse meeting rooms, and linking up or networking peripatetically. The LinkedIn corporate network model has become the structure of daily social existence. Such a network society is an extremist society reflecting a transmutation in the very understanding of what constitutes an individual. The free individual as the supreme American value is transmogrifying and being reimagined as a continuous range of mutant possibilities, potentials and powers – an empowered and continuously self-making, self-creating individual, always in transition. The online system enables a situation in which humans can constantly create and then abandon new 'selves', slipping in and out of digital skins. America is conceived more than ever as always at the limit and on the frontier, an exceptional and fugitive order. This has long been celebrated in Westerns and science fiction. But now the techno-capitalist machine weaponizes the individual, and institutes the individual as a multiplicity – a sheaf of many selves engaged with its own security and futurity. 'I am large, I contain multitudes', says Walt Whitman, the early poet of American individualism. Liberty is conceived as multiplicity. There is no essential essence but a flickering set of images that refracts the screens and metastable networked existences that people anxiously live today.

Thus, America is a society of extremes, of excess – excess wealth, poverty, health and sickness, consumption, sexuality, bodies. Extremism in America is everyday and everywhere and possible at all times; a land of ongoing

and pulsing extremist potentials. This is central to its extreme creative and destructive power. The key inventions of the military-corporate complex, the internet and the networks it makes possible, are acting as intensifiers and multipliers of an ever-expanding and increasingly wild individualism – Silicon Valley mega-corporations currently engaged in a rapid endo-colonization of American subjects. Here an American Romanticism is reinvigorated and remythologized in the Marvel Universe and the Netflix image (the development of binge-watching as a form of techno-bulimia) and on social media platforms, and achieves a specifically technical and infinitely reproducible form. The rupturing and fragmenting of social worlds as a result of the institution of platform virtual digital sociality unleashes and generates a plane of extremism in America.

The dynamism of the extreme is America; it is the name of the game as it were, with extraordinary positive and negative effects. When Biden speaks of an 'uncivil war' and that democracy must be fought for, these are in all senses appropriate to a cultural reality that gives the extreme, and an orientation to the limits or beyond, a central position and value in the continually unfolding scheme of things. Extremism is at the heart of America and permeates almost every part or mode of existence. It is a continual focus of debate.

Extremism, or what may in different register be recognized to be extreme, is present in all societies. It is integral in some way or another in the dynamic of their process – there is always an extremist tendency or potential in any social order. The distinction is in the way the extreme is recognized and the value that is attached to it. Indeed, extremism as a problematic issue is a dimension of our own positioning in European and North American history.

The general position we are suggesting is that extremism is more than that which is recognized as such, and not to be limited to that which is ultimately destructive of human existence, the extreme as ultimate contradiction. Extremism in this sense is the potential of all or most orders, a dynamic in their formation and deformation, inherent in their ordering as in their disordering. In our understanding, extremism must be opened up and not limited to its highly negative, fascist potentials, despite the importance of recognizing these. Extremism operates as a plane of pluri-potentiality in all social orders. It is the very energy and volcanic power of the emergent social process. We begin and end at this gateway moment – on the absolute horizon of human possibility.

The fascist authoritarian potential is in the movement against immanence, that slips out of immanence, transcendentalizes and lifts out of the plane itself. This is what a state does. A state rises up out of immanence and establishes itself as the overarching hegemonic, authoritarian and totalizing form. At certain moments, as with the Trumpian situation, immanence is no

longer entirely within and becomes 'immanent *to*' a transcendence. This is the religious tendency and what has now become the economic tendency, with giant American corporations such as Google, Amazon and Microsoft full of fascist potential. Over the last century, the economic has come into a fully determining position and, as we have been discussing, this is most especially the case with the corporate state. It may be that this is the tendency in America over the longue durée, and this is what we have seen with the Biden–Harris administration – a corporatizing process that received significant impetus throughout the Trump situation. On the other hand, things may take a rather different turn and the proliferating fragmentation and individualist fissure occurring in the United States – the cultic emphasis on the extreme individual and the continual movement of immanence – may prevent a fascist state and render it impossible. This is an open question.

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NOTES

This chapter was originally published in *Extremism, Society and the State*, ed. Giacomo Loperfido (Berghahn Books, 2022).

1. The revelry in the Capitol might be conceived as a 'happening' in the sense of the art happening – a term initially coined by Allan Kaprow in the late 1950s in reference to the artist Jackson Pollock's 'action-painting', and becoming famous in the radical countercultural events of the 'swinging sixties'. Happenings were usually performance events with an a-logical diverse character that abandoned the structure of story and plot, and emphasized chance and incident. The idea was for artists to resist the structure and order of the art market, and many developed a resistance to the confinement of the system. Connected to Dada and other movements, this was an extremist art pushing against the limitations of gallerist order. The Burning Man festival, attended by many of the elite and Silicon Valley entrepreneurs, is often given as a contemporary example of a happening. And, as Burning Man shows, a

change can be traced from the early 1960s happenings into a corporatized and controlled activity. What we see in the Capitol riots is certainly a radical resistance to ordinary political process, but this time on the part of the right. Anti-systemic and revolutionary violence has been appropriated was originally published by extreme right groups and abandoned by a left that has lost its way – there is an interesting comparison to be made with the more left-wing oriented Occupy Now movement, which was in many respects much more pacified and contained and internal to the constraints of the system. The same might be said of the brand of left-wing criticism offered by Bernie Sanders and the facilitating, useful role he plays in the general orientation of the Democratic Party. Abstract Expressionism – the key invention of American artists – soon became a form of corporate art, being extremely expensive and hung in the lobbies of Wall Street head offices.

2. We refer here, of course, to the work of Karl Jaspers and his famous concept of the Axial Age. Jaspers claimed that a key moment in human existence or an 'axis of history' occurred around 500 BC, which is part of a spiritual process lasting between 800 and 200 BC. 'Man, as we know him today, came into being. For short we may style this the Axial Period' (Jaspers 1953: 1). Jaspers proposes that in this period a striking parallel occurs across many regions of the world; new ways of thinking – a grand 'spiritualization' – emerge in China, India, Persia and the Greco-Roman world. For the first time human beings appear to themselves as 'specifically human', take cognizance of themselves in relation to a whole, and lift themselves up to Being as a whole (there are obvious connections here to the ontological thinking of Martin Heidegger). At this axial point in history, human beings break out of their self-imposed and self-contained closed limitations, and begin to 'modify' humanity – such 'modification' is now being pushed to extremes in the context of advanced biotechnological gene-editing projects such as CRISPR-Cas9. With advances in Artificial Intelligence drawing on massive data pools, human being becomes a resource and a source of power for a machinic order. Humans now become uncertain of their position, and open up to new possibilities and new potentials for themselves. This is the beginning of speculative thinking, which is also conceived by Jaspers as 'an age of simultaneous destruction and creation' (1953: 5). It is a violent period. This is a grand time that begins the questioning of human activity and the imposition of new meanings upon such activity. Specifically, for our purposes and in the context of this volume on extremism, Jaspers understood the Axial Period as the breakthrough of principles that up until that time had been operating only at the limit of humanity and in 'borderline situations'. We are suggesting that what crystallizes around Trump but also around many other events in the world occurring today is the beginning of a new axis in world history, and one that profoundly transmutes the key categories central to Jaspers' existentialist vision of humanity. Even the notion of 'world history' central to Jaspers' argument comes into question at this extreme moment.
3. The pioneering work of Victor Turner on the concept of the liminal in his *The Ritual Process* (1969) is essential. But, for our purposes and more specifically, it is perhaps better to use the concept of the liminoid, which Turner himself developed as a way to rethink the liminal in the context of post-industrial systems. (Turner 1974). Developing his idea of the liminal into the liminoid, he insists on the anti-structural elements and the independence of liminoidal moments that are spaces of radical creativity. According to Turner, the liminoid is a much more individual form – less about obligatory community practice, more about individual innovation and cre-

ation. For Turner, the concept of the liminoid is his response to the condition of emerging large-scale post-industrial systems concomitant with an increase in wild subversive behaviour – what had previously been, in the small-scale situation, a 'subversive flicker' in 'the service of normativeness' now becomes quite something else, and ever-expanding. What he calls relatively late social processes – such as revolution or insurrection or new art movements with their emphasis on 'feeling' and originality – invert the original relation between the normative and the liminal in the small-scale society situation. In Western post-industrial societies, social criticism that had been pre-industrially liminal now becomes situationally central, and is no longer a matter of a brief interface between fixed structures. Turner suggests that this move to the liminoid may help us to think better about global systems and think about them in a holistic way. This, he says, is to move away from van Gennep's 'primary sense' of liminal phases and rethink the liminal in the context of a *totalizing* social historical shift. In a recent article, Genevieve Bell (2021) makes reference to Turner and van Gennep on liminality as a means of understanding the Covid-19 pandemic 'anthropologically'. She makes a facile use of the concept, simply using it to chat happily about passages through periods of state-imposed lockdowns. This is a kind of reactionary move that sucks all of the analytical force out of Turner's concept, and certainly misses its generative and creative sense. In another article for *MIT Technology Review*, 'We Need Mass Surveillance to Fight Covid-19 But it Doesn't Have to be Creepy', Bell admits the potentials for a Bentham-like digital panopticon developing as a result of the public health battle with the virus, but makes the case for a Singapore-inspired model of data collection that will allow a 'trade-off' between old models of privacy and a 'new social contract' negotiated in the digital age – a negotiation in which we will have to accept a 're-evaluation' of traditional notions of privacy. Such negotiation is a central platform of her 3A (Autonomy, Agency and Assurance) research institute based at the ANU in Canberra, Australia. Mass surveillance must be stripped of the notions of punishment and moralization previously associated with it, cleaned up and remade for successful public application. Far from anthropology as critique, Bell represents a corporate-anthropology totally complicit with the corporate-state transmutations we are discussing here. Her career trajectory, working between the corporate boardrooms of Intel and the Commonwealth Bank and university research institutes, captures the essence of the corporate-state direction. Her recent appointment as vice-chancellor at the Australian National University is the apotheosis of this movement – and hints at corporate interests, particularly in artificial intelligence and new digital technologies, moving into the heart of the university. This has some resonance with Martin Heidegger's sense that in the developing techno-capitalist order the key move is from scholarship to research.

4. In *Hatred of Democracy* (2014), Jacques Ranciere argues that democracy in essence acts as a supplement to the natural order of things and the titles people ordinarily possess. To the two great entitlements to govern – the right to govern by birth and the right to govern through power and wealth – Ranciere adds the supplementary title, or what he calls the anarchic title. This is, for him, the essence of democracy, 'this is what, of all things, democracy means' (ibid.: 46). The right to govern is based on a fundamental egalitarian equality, and the paradox of democracy is that no one has a legitimate right to govern – ultimately there is no real legitimate governor and all governments are in the end illegitimate. Those who govern must always be re-

minded of their ultimate illegitimacy. Thus, the inegalitarian nature of a democracy is always grounded in the egalitarian. Following this line of thinking, it would be possible to say that the political leaders at the Capitol on 6 January were exposed to the violent and terrifying anarchy of the people that is at the base of their power.

5. Max Weber classically defines the state to be founded on the monopolization of violence. This is broadly the circumstance of the USA, except that the Founding Fathers were aware of what can be called Rousseau's paradox, the capacity of the state to contradict the democratic rights of citizens in society. Elaine Scarry, in *Thermonuclear Monarchy* (2014), argues that the 2nd Amendment of the US Constitution was introduced to enable the citizenry to ensure their democratic rights against the overpowering potential of the state. Scarry discusses the fact that the state now has overpowering potency with its independent control of nuclear armaments, giving a single nuclear submarine the ability to exact global destruction of a virtually unimaginable kind. In her argument, the 2nd Amendment is virtually pointless against the current devastating capacity of the state. The people have little ability to contend the power of the state democratically, which those invading the Capitol were in effect demonstrating.
6. In a fascinating video he released after the events at the Capitol, Schwarzenegger ironically reaffirms the figure of the macho white violent male he is attempting to denounce! This is a good example of the way in which extreme authoritarian elements of the emerging American corporate state combine with and supplement the liberal-democratic, 'intersectional' notions that are also a fundamental aspect of the corporate state.
7. Jacob Chansley, the QAnon Shaman, embodies the core notion of the plane of immanence – his body and costume is a postmodern hybrid of multiple directions, a constellation that articulates heterogeneous elements: he wore American-flag face paint, a fur hat made up of coyote skins and bison horns, and he displayed a bare torso covered in various Norse tattoos and runic letters – a large Mjolnir or Thor's Hammer and an image of the Norse tree Yggdrasil. Above these was a Valknot, a symbol possibly related to Odin and fallen warriors at the extreme point crossing into Valhalla, but now deterritorialized by white supremacists and referred to by the Anti-Defamation League as a 'hate symbol'. Chansley proudly offered his body up to the assembled media, screaming and bellowing his celebration of America: 'Land of the free, home of the brave!' This is a body as a dynamic system or, as Deleuze and Guattari might say, a body that goes to the limit, that is deterritorializing and reterritorializing, in flow, and whose component parts are not fixed but selected according to exterior relations. This is an extreme body – the new American individual multiplied and in extremis. In the aftermath of the Capitol events, Chansley increased his infamy when he refused to eat prison food because of his delicate physical constitution – he refused to eat for seven days until he was provided with proper organic food. This was the subject of many memes, and many commented on the irony of his claiming constitutional rights after attempting to impede the constitutional recognition of the president.
8. Trump made an official state visit to the United Kingdom on 13 July 2018. He was greeted in central London by tens of thousands of protestors and a now famous 6-metre-wide caricature blimp depicting Trump as a baby wearing a nappy. Along with the 'trump baby', protestors installed a 16-foot-high Trump robot sitting on a golden toilet sending tweets. Protestors wore hats and T-shirts emblazoned with

Trump as humpty dumpty. The American actor John Lithgow released a poem entitled 'Trumpty Dumpty Wanted a Crown', which perfectly captured the liberal fear of what they felt would be Trump's post-constitutional and aristocratic power grab.

9. Some recent work, 'The Technopolar Moment' (*Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2021) by Ian Bremmer, a political scientist and founder of the Eurasia Group, argues for an emerging 'technopolar' order in which technology companies are recognized in their sovereignty and are given a central role in nation-state government – increasingly this is the meaning of the word 'governance', as Alain Joxe once pointed out in his classic text *Empire of Disorder* (Joxe 2002). More recently, Bremmer has written with Mustafa Suleyman, an artificial intelligence entrepreneur and founder of DeepMind, an artificial intelligence company acquired by Google in 2014. Their article 'The A.I. Power Paradox' (*Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2023) further develops the idea that technological companies are sovereign powers that must be given a central role in state systems, and that the development of AI – a domain almost entirely under the control of private companies – makes this absolutely necessary.
10. *The Truman Show* (1998), a film directed by Peter Weir, tells the story of Truman Burbank, an ordinary man living in a small town who discovers he is actually participating in a giant Big Brother style reality TV show – The Truman Show – and is surrounded by a world of cameras and 24-hour surveillance. His life is a television image. Human life is fully mediated and controlled at even the most intimate level by a giant corporation who sit outside in the sky manipulating and tweaking every moment of Truman's existence. The film is prescient. In a sense, human beings living their social relationships via social media have all become Truman, regularly tweaked and nudged by anonymous powers combing them for information. In an increasingly claustrophobic digital network plugged into Google Home or guided by Amazon Echo, and surrounded by police cameras and facial recognition technologies, the coils of the digital snake of control squeeze ever tighter (Deleuze 1992). As many on Facebook or the other digital platforms are finding today, Truman recognizes his apparent freedom to be total 'unfreedom' – highly controlled. In his final desperate attempt to escape from his home, which he now realizes is his prison, he battles his corporate masters who create storms and hurl lightning bolts like Zeus. Ultimately, he triumphs and manages to leave through a stage exit door located on the horizon of his giant movie-set world. Perhaps today the ever-increasing power of digital networks and a rapidly developing 'Google Earth' makes such escape much less likely. Weber's iron cage becomes a virtual data glove or a silicon universe.
11. It is possible that there has been too much focus on the notion of 'spaces' and 'worlds' as metaphors for understanding what is happening in the current convergence of human and machine. When the internet was first developing, the dominant metaphors were spatial – web-*sites*, cyber-*space*, the information super-*highway*, internet-*rooms* or town-*halls*. This radically new situation could only be made sense of using previous experiences. This was how the internet was made 'user-friendly'. The same can be said about the idea of digital 'worlds'. But just as the cinema was first limited by the theatre as a means of understanding it – strange new things called movies were shown as if they were theatrical performances or movie-*theatres* – more recent developments in technology seem to be leaning on previous systems to help people make sense of them. Perhaps the internet is not a space at all, or at least may not be fully attended to if understood as a place or a space? Software developers

and computer engineers who design platforms and apps are designing augmented sense organs, and perception is being augmented or transmuted by new technologies. And when perception is augmented and stimulated in these strange new ways, certain shifts in human relations must occur. The internet is merged and entangled with hyper-stimulated nervous systems and bloodshot retinas, and may well be restructuring basic human orientations.

12. John Lanchester (2019) writes of the 'overlapping warnings' in the dystopic visions of both Orwell and Huxley in relation to the Trump presidency. He concludes that we exist today in a strange mix of Huxley's soma-like anti-depressants and sexual promiscuity combined with Orwell's post-sexual celibacy, never-ending war and increasingly authoritarian political leaders. In a sense, the different presidencies push out to greater extremes. If the Obama legacy was Donald Trump's anti-presidency then Trump's legacy is the Biden–Harris 'Community. Identity. Stability', which appears to be a return to the normalcy that many crave but promises, more, a hyper-normalization (see Adam Curtis).
13. There were 65.6 million postal votes cast in the 2020 election, many more than ever before. Overall, 159.7 million people voted. So 94.1 million voted non-virtually, which is only 25.8 million more than voted by post. The overall number of people eligible to vote was 257.6 million. Of course, a substantial number of eligible voters did not vote at all – 94.1 million. Many states are starting to limit voting to only postal votes – Colorado, Hawaii, Oregon, Utah and Washington no longer have any other means of voting except by post. Clearly there will be a move over the next few years to entirely virtual systems. There is an effort to move states toward postal voting despite the fact that the National Vote at Home Institute recently found that 32 states are missing major policies, infrastructure and best practice that will ensure secure mail ballot. 15 states cannot even verify voter addresses before they are sent out. 17 states do not have a voter verification system. And 30 states do not have options to fix problems in voter signatures and often voters have no way to fix signature mismatch.
14. A pandemic of profit. In the 2021 financial reports on tech company profits, Apple went beyond all analysts' expectations, reporting a record revenue and a net profit of $28.8bn. Sales rose in all regions, most of all in China. Apple's quarterly sales exceeded $100bn for the first time. Microsoft reported record sales. Facebook also reported record quarterly revenues and Tesla recorded its first ever profit of $721m on news of Biden's election. Amazon of course still maintains the biggest annual revenues. See *The Economist*, 30 January 2021.

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