ALSO BY GARY LACHMAN

Lost Knowledge of the Imagination

Beyond the Robot

The Secret Teachers of the Western World

Revolutionaries of the Soul: Reflections on Magicians, Philosophers, and Occultists

Aleister Crowley: Magick, Rock and Roll, and the Wickedest Man in the World

The Caretakers of the Cosmos: Living Responsibly in an Unfinished World

Madame Blavatsky: The Mother of Modern Spirituality

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Turn Off Your Mind: The Mystic Sixties and the Dark Side of the Age of Aquarius

Two Essays on Colin Wilson

AS GARY VALENTINE:

DARK STAR RISING

Magick and Power in The Age of Trump

Gary Lachman
To the Seekers of Truth:

The systematic use of imagination . . . will be requisite in the future, not only for the increase of knowledge, but also for saving the appearances from chaos and inanity.

—OWEN BARFIELD
SOME YEARS AGO I wrote a book that looked at the influence of certain “occult” or “esoteric” ideas on politics in the modern world. Occult means “hidden” and esoteric means “inner,” and in general both refer to aspects of reality that in some way exceed our standard, rational, scientific way of looking at things, what we can loosely call the “magical.” While mainstream science generally wants to debunk such notions, declaring them superstitious and absurd, they persist, and as I have tried to show in other books, they have formed a kind of countertradition of “rejected knowledge” that has informed Western culture and its history practically since they began.1

One aim of my book Politics and the Occult was to show that while the popular view, promoted by writers like Umberto Eco, is that any kind of “occult politics” was distinctly on the right side of the political spectrum, this was not really the case.2 I argued that, on the contrary, there was a “progressive” occult politics too, whose influence on history could be found if we looked for it. It could be found, for example, in people and movements like the Rosicrucians of seventeenth-century Germany and the influence the Theosophists Helena Petrovna Blavatsky and Annie Besant had on India gaining independence from the British Raj.

Blavatsky is a good example of the bad reputation the occult has when it comes to politics. As author of the esoteric classic The Secret...
Doctrine, an immense occult history of mankind and the universe, she is often tagged as the source for the theories that, through their misappropriation by Aryan supremacist thinkers, fed the odious racial ideas of National Socialism. What is less often pointed out is that one of the most important influences on Mahatma Gandhi was his meeting with Blavatsky not long before her death and his introduction to the Hindu spiritual scripture the Bhagavad Gita by some Theosophist friends. As I show in my book about Blavatsky, the Gita became the most important book in Gandhi’s life and until his death he was thankful to Theosophy for his introduction to it. Even on the very day he was assassinated he wrote approvingly of Theosophy in his journal Harijan. This alone should suggest that a view of occult politics that places it solely on the right is inaccurate.

I still believe this is the case, and that a view of the occult that automatically links it to the political right wing is inadequate, presenting only half the picture. But this book will be different. Unlike Politics and the Occult it will focus on the link between the occult and far-right politics, not in the past but in the present, that is, today. Why is such a book needed, when I have gone out of my way to argue that occult politics should not be immediately shunted over to the far-right side of the political spectrum? Because in recent times it seems that the occult has entered politics again, and by most accounts it has not been invited in by the left.

Why do I say this? The pages that follow will, with any luck, present the evidence for what seems to be a new incursion of far-right occultism into the contemporary political landscape. But perhaps the best way to introduce this development is by explaining how I first came across it. It came, as most things do these days, through social media.

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On Facebook one afternoon, I came across something that Harvey Bishop, the New Thought blogger, had posted. New Thought, as readers may know, is a generic name for a variety of different beliefs,
philosophies, and practices that have as their central theme the idea that the mind can influence reality directly, that through mental effort alone we can “make things happen.” Starting in its present form in the early twentieth century, it has had many revivals and is by now in some version a mainstay of New Age and spiritual belief. Some readers may be aware of New Thought through Rhonda Byrne’s *The Secret*, a bestselling book and film of some years back. As Mental Science, Science of Mind, and other names, New Thought teaches methods of visualization and creative imagination, through which one can envision a future reality and make it come true. Imagined with enough will, persistence, and commitment, the envisioned future will, it affirms, come about.

Bishop and other New Thought practitioners emphasize the positive aspects of New Thought and its links to spirituality. Indeed, one of its most popular claims is that through the “power of positive thinking”—the title of an immensely successful book about New Thought—one can achieve one’s aims, accomplish one’s goals, and in general secure a good and fulfilled life. But Bishop’s post was not about this. It concerned something much darker.

One of the most disturbing aftereffects of billionaire Donald Trump’s victory in the November 2016 United States presidential contest occurred at the annual meeting of the National Policy Institute, held in the Ronald Reagan Building, not far from the White House, shortly after the election. “National Policy Institute” seems an innocuous name for what many believe is a white nationalist organization. Trump’s ascendancy has been seen by the far right—in the United States and also in Europe—as a sign that liberal dominance was over and that it was their turn in power. During Trump’s campaign a loosely connected new far-right movement emerged on the internet, christened by the National Policy Institute’s leader, Richard Spencer, as the “alternative right,” or “alt-right,” to differentiate it from its unsophisticated predecessors. Delighted by Trump’s victory, Spencer greeted the NPI meeting with a chilling cheer, which was received with an even more ominous response. As Spencer declaimed, “Hail Trump, hail our people, hail our victory!”
the crowd responded with enthusiastic applause and not a few Hitler salutes—or, as Spencer later explained, Roman ones. What is more disturbing is that Spencer and his followers took credit for Trump’s victory. He called it “a victory of the will,” and declared, “We willed Donald Trump into office, we made this dream our reality.”

As Bishop pointed out, making dreams a reality is a central aim of New Thought. It takes an ardent wish and, through the power of willed intention, materializes it. In his post Bishop expressed concern that Spencer and his followers may have taken a leaf from New Thought’s book and turned the power of positive thinking to something that Bishop, and many others, did not consider very positive.

Exactly how Spencer and the alt-right “dreamed” Trump into office—if indeed they did—will be examined further on. Here I can say that it seems to have involved what is known as “meme magic.” Meme is a term that comes from the biologist Richard Dawkins, of “selfish gene” fame, who argued that memes serve the same function in culture as genes do in organisms. Memes are ideas, behaviors, styles, images, symbols, slogans, or any other cultural development that can be transmitted to and imitated by others. Memes are flexible and are influenced by their transmission, rather like a game of “Chinese whispers” or “telephone,” in which a message gets distorted as it is whispered from one person to another, and in the end winds up very different from how it began. When Dawkins first coined the term back in 1989, the main media for the dispersal of memes were books, art, music, television, and films—old-school stuff. Today they spread through the internet, rather like the similarly biologically rooted idea of “computer viruses.”

The “magic” end of meme magic comes from its link to what is known as “chaos magick.” What chaos magick is—it adopts the spelling favored by Aleister Crowley, the most famous magician of the twentieth century—will be explained further on. For now we can
say that rather than stick to the spells, grimoires, rituals, ceremonies, and symbols of traditional magic, it prefers a “do-it-yourself” creative approach that favors the magician’s personal initiative and imagination, his ability, that is, to make it up as he goes along. Rather than fuss over wands and bells and incense, and getting the name of that particular demon just right, the chaos magician uses whatever is at hand. For today’s chaos magician, this means the memes that are propagated across the internet.

For chaos magicians and many other contemporary occultists, the internet serves the same purpose that the “astral plane” does for traditional magicians, as a kind of psychic ether that can transmit their willed intentions. Meme magic happens when something created on the internet bleeds into the “real world” and changes it. In effect it is a kind of induced “synchronicity,” the psychologist C. G. Jung’s term for the phenomenon of “meaningful coincidence,” when what is happening in our inner world happens in our outer one too, without any apparent causal relation. If you substitute “internet” for “inner world” you can see the connection.

When it comes to the alt-right “magicians” who willed and dreamed Trump into the White House, the meme in question is a frog who goes by the name of Pepe. This may sound a bit confusing, but then the magick we are considering is interested in chaos after all.

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Now, if all of this were limited to a small group of far-right enthusiasts who in their excitement over a Trump victory let ideas about the power of positive thinking go to their heads, we could safely relegate it to the lunatic fringe along with believers in a flat earth, fake moon landings, and other conspiracies. But that would be leaving out a key ingredient to the story. The president that Spencer and Co. believed they willed into office was, as I said, Donald Trump.

It is no secret that Trump himself is a keen believer in and promoter of conspiracy theories, with his advocacy of the birther
myth, his acceptance of “chemtrails,” and many other equally dubious propositions. What has also come out is that Trump himself is a devotee of “positive thinking.” As he himself said, he is the “greatest student” of the man who popularized the phrase, the Reverend Norman Vincent Peale. Peale’s book *The Power of Positive Thinking*, as mentioned earlier, appeared in 1952 and was an immediate success, appropriate for a book that told its readers how they too could succeed in life. From Peale, Trump learned the great secret, that “the mind can overcome any obstacle.”7 It seems that the president the alt-right “willed” into office through the power of positive thinking does quite a lot of positive thinking himself.

Yet what is also strange about this very strange development is that Trump seems to be something of a “natural” chaos magician too.

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One thing that came through during Trump’s campaign, and which was made even clearer during the first months of his presidency, was that Trump did not operate as other politicians did. Many say this is what attracted voters to him. Opponents of Hillary Clinton’s bid for the White House complained that with her, it would be “business as usual,” meaning the standard bureaucracy and all that came with it would remain solidly in place. Trump said that with him, it would not be business as usual, and he was right. If one word captures for many the character of Trump’s time in office so far, it would have to be “chaos.”8 Yet while many believe the random, “nonlinear,” contradictory, and frankly confusing atmosphere that has accompanied Trump’s time in office suggests a president out of control, a look at his previous career suggests something different.

“I play it very loose,” Trump admits in his self-help book *The Art of the Deal*, a work from beginning to end full of positive thinking. “You can’t be imaginative and entrepreneurial if you’ve got too much structure. I prefer to come to work each day and just see what develops.”9 “Sometimes it pays to be a little wild,” Trump confesses. He is always confident of success, but if situations seem to pose
problems, he will take his chances and rely on his chutzpah. He’ll “wing it and things will work out.”¹⁰

Trump’s faith in his instincts and his ability to “move quickly and decisively when the time is right” go hand in hand with his perception of the fundamentally fluid nature of things, their volatile character, an insight that reaches back to the ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus and which informs recent developments in science, like chaos theory. It also provides the basis for chaos magick.¹¹ “Anything can change, without warning,” Trump believes. “And that’s why I try not to take any of what’s happening too seriously.”¹²

That Trump does not take things too seriously can be gleaned from his many gnomic late-night tweets and non sequitur–style interviews, which if nothing else reveal a flexible view of things like “truth” and “reality.” If, as one chaos magician tells us, for chaos magick “reality becomes a playground,” a make-believe world “chaoticians” temporarily take for real, Trump’s often outrageous pronouncements give the impression that for him reality is a kind of playground too. Yet what is also interesting is that like New Thought, chaos magick is interested in results, in “making things happen.” It pursues “visible results by which the magician demonstrates to himself that he can do things which, a short while ago, never entered his mind as possibilities.”¹³ Getting a candidate into office might be one of those things. This is called “shifting the boundary of Achievable Reality,” which seems another way of expressing the desire to create reality itself.

Another characteristic that Trump seems to share with chaos magick is that he is a product of postmodernism. He is, in fact, the first “postmodern president,” in the same way that chaos magick is a kind of “postmodern occultism.”¹⁴

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as Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger, both of whom cut away at the notion of a stable, “objective” truth, the kind we use in everyday life and in science. Simply put, the essence of postmodernism—although it would deny that it has an “essence”—can be summed up in the phrase “anything goes.” For postmodernism the kind of scientific, rational certainties that built the modern world, as well as traditional values such as truth, no longer apply; at least they are seen to be much less certain than was believed. Well before it became a political buzzword, postmodernism knew all about being “post-truth,” and was aware of the “alternative facts” and “fake news” that accompany that condition. It could even be said that postmodernism and related schools like deconstructionism prepared the ground for the epistemological skepticism pervading Western consciousness today, which Trump both abets and profits by. Rarefied notions of a pliant, flexible, relative “truth” trickled down from the metaphysical heights, and infected the popular mind with what the philosopher Paul Ricoeur called the “hermeneutics of suspicion,” a kind of cynical nihilism that we take for granted as part of everyday life, and which Nietzsche, more than a century ago, predicted was on its way. Hence our conspiracy-ridden world, to which Trump himself contributes. For postmodernism, the dictum “Nothing is true, everything is permitted,” attributed to Hasan bin Sabbah, “the Old Man of the Mountain,” leader of the ancient Islamic sect of Ismailis called the Hashashin, or Assassins, is taken as given. The same goes for chaos magick.

As I read through the posts and newspaper articles that came in the wake of Trump’s election, one stood out among the others as a clear indication that what we were engaged with was certainly not business as usual. One of the clearest signs that with Trump’s election the political world had veered in a very strange direction, taking the rest of us with it, was the report in The New York Times
that Steve Bannon, Trump’s chief strategist and for a time a member
of the National Security Council, was a devotee of the twentieth-
century Italian occultist and esoteric philosopher Julius Evola.\textsuperscript{16} 
That \textit{The New York Times} would mention Evola at all was
surprising. That it did so in the context of the forty-fifth president of
the United States was, I think, a game changer.

“Baron” Julius Evola, author of books on the Holy Grail, alchemy,
and other arcane subjects, belongs to the school of esoteric
philosophy known as Traditionalism. This began in the early
twentieth century with the work of the French savant René Guénon.
Traditionalism has influenced respected intellectuals such as the
historian of religion Mircea Eliade, the philosophers Huston Smith
and Jacob Needleman, and the economist E. F. Schumacher, author
of the classic \textit{Small Is Beautiful}. The central theme of Traditionalism
is that a primordial revelation of the truth about reality was given to
mankind in ages past, from which all the major religions have
emerged. Since the golden age of that primal revelation, mankind, at
least in the West, has descended into decadence, our own modern
age being the darkest and lowest stage of descent. As Guénon and
Evola repeatedly point out, we are in what the Hindu tradition calls
the \textit{Kali Yuga}, or what the ancient Greeks called the “Iron Age,”
having got here after passing through the ages of gold, silver, and
bronze.

The modern world revolted Evola—Guénon had no time for it
either—and he promoted his own brand of militant Traditionalism in
opposition to it. Since his death in 1974, Evola’s “warrior”-style
Traditionalism has informed some peculiar variants of far-right
politics, aimed at taking down the modern liberal civilization he
detested. Evola had an interesting career mixing esotericism with
politics. He tried to curry favor first with Mussolini, then with Hitler,
and is enjoying a posthumous revival today with esoterically inclined
readers who find themselves on the political right. With his forceful,
articulate, intelligent writing and refined, aristocratic image—
photographs show him sporting a monocle—Evola is celebrated by
the alt-right as one of the “intellectuals” whose ideas make them different from “old school racist skinheads.”

As a wide-ranging esoteric scholar and practitioner, in the 1920s Evola edited an occult journal called *UR*, which focused on a number of magical themes. Evola contributed many articles to *UR*, under several pseudonyms, and one of the themes he came back to regularly was the magician’s ability to *alter reality* through the power of the mind alone, something we’ve seen that both New Thought and chaos magick are interested in. For Evola, the aim of the magician is to develop his own personal power, his *will*, which is a kind of force that he can exert in order to refashion the world as he would like it.

That Bannon, Trump’s close adviser, and the alt-right are readers of Evola is curious enough. Things become even more curious when we recognize that it was through the “platform” that Bannon provided for the alt-right during his time at the ultraconservative website Breitbart.com that they were able to propagate the meme magic that Richard Spencer believed helped “will” Trump into office.

As I tried to assimilate this growing web of connections, strands of it radiated out, linking it to other developments, leading into further strangeness. One of them headed east. I remembered some articles I had seen in *Fortean Times* not too long ago, about the strange postmodern politics that the Russian president Vladimir Putin had been presiding over for some time. The Russians are believed to have attempted to influence the U.S. presidential election via some cyber-sabotage, and by all accounts this is not just a paranoid idea. After looking back at the articles and following them up with several hours on the net, it struck me that Trump and the people around him were playing catch-up with the kind of postmodern politics that Putin had been busy with for years. With Trump’s apparent close ties to Russia, he may even have gotten the idea from Putin. Where Trump seems to be putting on a kind of one-man show aimed at undermining the
electorate’s sense of reality, Putin has had a team of “political technologists” busy at work, using a variety of media to create his own reality, aimed at keeping his subjects entertained with electronic bread and circuses and enthused with patriotic nationalist sentiments. And where Trump has Steve Bannon, who name-checks Evola, to advise him, Putin has his very own Traditionalist on board, the geopolitical savant Alexander Dugin.

Dugin, who started out as a teenage Soviet dissident and is now part of the establishment, is interested in Evola too. He seems a kind of ideological quick-change artist, adopting and discarding political ideologies—like National Socialism and fascism—and mixing them up in the same way that postmodernist art and architecture picks and chooses from an assortment of styles. Dugin has a kind of Lego approach to ideologies, taking them apart and putting them together in different ways, adding a bit of Heidegger here and some Nietzsche there to see what happens. This is also very much how chaos magicians make use of beliefs, not to be taken seriously but as “tools” to effect some outcome, and it came as a kind of expected surprise when I learned that Dugin was keen on chaos magick too. I say “expected surprise” because by this time in my journey down these rabbit holes I had come to expect just about anything to turn up.

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One thing that did turn up was the European Union’s place in all this. Many saw Brexit, Great Britain’s exit from the EU, as the opening act for Trump’s election, and nationalists in the UK and Europe took it as a sign that the union was on its way out, something they looked forward to happily. As an American living in London I could feel the rise of British nationalism, as did the Europeans I knew who lived here as well. For many nationalists here and “on the continent,” the EU is an agent of globalization, which they see as a means by which the capitalist elite—mostly in America—will turn the world into a giant shopping mall, reducing the peoples of different backgrounds and cultures to the bland uniformity of consumers.
Hence the rise in recent times of “identity politics,” which is driven not by ideology or economics, but by a fear of losing one’s national identity either through mass immigration or through global consumerism. Russia too was not happy with the EU (hence the business in Ukraine and the Crimea in 2014), and Dugin’s remarks about globalization are often little short of hysterical.

After Trump’s “America First” inauguration speech, which spelled out an isolationist policy that seemed to put an end to America’s role as policeman of the world—although later developments indicated a change of mind—the EU was held up by some as the last remnant of the New World Order that emerged after the chaos of World War II, and which had secured peace and stability in Europe since then. Something about this rang a bell and made me go back to Politics and the Occult.

I recalled that I had written about something that seemed connected to these developments. When I found what I was looking for, I saw that I was right. There was reason to suspect that the EU itself had its roots in a kind of occult politics, in a strange esoteric sociopolitical movement called synarchy.

Synarchy came to the world’s attention through the obscure writings of a mysterious nineteenth-century French occultist named Alexandre Saint-Yves d’Alveydre. Synarchy means “total government,” as opposed to anarchy, which means “no government.” After a period of popularity in the years leading up to World War I, in the 1930s and ’40s a covert synarchic movement reached well into the centers of French government, at least according to some reports. It may even have been the hidden hand behind a new “psychogeography” of Paris, responsible for the pyramid in the courtyard of the Louvre Museum and the strange “stargate” at the towering Grande Arche de la Défense. Synarchy’s aim was a kind of United States of Europe, and some of those who had written about it suggested that it was an echo of this idea—and perhaps more than an echo—that lay at the foundation of the European Union.

Synarchy was informed by the same vision of a primordial revelation that was at the root of the Traditionalism that inspired Julius Evola, whose ideas were finding a place for themselves where
Evola always wanted them to, in the corridors of power. One name that came up in the context of synarchy was that of René Schwaller de Lubicz, the maverick Egyptologist and esoteric philosopher whose ideas about the true age of the Sphinx have, through bestselling authors like Graham Hancock, inspired a whole genre of alternative “ancient civilization” literature. In his early career Schwaller de Lubicz had moved in the same Parisian occult circles that were familiar to Guénon and which had seen the birth of both Traditionalism and synarchy.

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Far-right magical ideas at work in American and Russian politics? With an esoterically based European Union between them, the last redoubt of the by now old New World Order, defiantly hanging on? I am not conspiracy minded, although conspiracy consciousness will play a large part in the account that follows. But as I looked at all this and the other material that gathered around it, I began to wonder. Are Order and Chaos gearing up for a magical battle that will change the political landscape of the world? Is some kind of occult war on its way, or has it already begun? Evola seemed to have thought so, and other esoteric thinkers like Rudolf Steiner thought so too. Are the end times near?

One may well ask, given that Steve Bannon and Alexander Dugin both have apocalyptic visions of some coming decisive conflict and the ears of the men who could make them a reality. This is a shuddering thought, given how accommodating reality seems to have become in our “post-truth” times. If meme magick can put someone in the White House, what else can it do? Does positive thinking work? What part does it play in all of this? Which side is it on? And what can we do about it?

What follows is a kind of interim report on the occult politics at play in the world today. Given that it concerns events that are still unfolding, much may be different by the time it appears. Writing about contemporary events, one always runs the risk of being out of
date by the time one’s work reaches readers, and the pace at which change takes place has in recent times accelerated. This is not out of keeping with chaos magick and postmodernism. “We live in a world that is rapidly changing,” writes one of chaos magick’s founders. This may be disorienting for some, but chaos magicians are “profoundly at home in the accelerating shift and fragmentation of daily life,” a sentiment shared by postmodernists and by Trump.¹⁹ I have often felt overwhelmed as new material came my way, sent to me by friends and correspondents, and links to one site and then another seemed to form an endless chain. But at some point research must stop and a writer must put pixels on the screen if he wants to get his message across.

As my subtitle suggests, occult politics today have much to do with magick and power. These are things of interest to both magicians and politicians. The two seem unlikely neighbors, but they have more in common than we might think. Clearly one thing magicians and politicians are both interested in is power. The power of positive thinking, yes, but also the power over others.

In some ways political leaders share some characteristics with gurus and other spiritual leaders, and the difference between them and magicians is often blurred. Aleister Crowley, for example, was a magician and a guru teaching others how to discover their “true will,” and he also tried to exert political influence. A guru holding sway over his disciples is doing on a smaller scale what a charismatic leader does with a nation. In both cases the power involved can get out of hand, bringing harm to both the guru and his disciples. On the larger scale of politics it can lead to war and the destruction of nations. What is this strange need to lead, and the equally strange one to follow? What is this will to power? Why do we pursue it? Must it always corrupt? Charismatic leaders cast a spell over their followers in the same way that a magician casts one over those he wants to enchant. The power of the image, of glamour, of one’s self-confidence, is at work in both—as it is in the confidence trickster. The medium is the imagination, whether in its traditional forms or in its new electronic version.
If the imagination is simply about “make-believe,” an unreal substitute for an unwieldy reality, then we can take adequate steps to protect ourselves and ignore “positive thinking” as a lot of nonsense. But what if reality is not so unwieldy, and imagination is about “making real,” as magicians have asserted for centuries? What if positive thinking works?

Politics and the occult may seem strange bedfellows. But in a post-truth world what’s strange anymore? If reality today is up for grabs, shouldn’t we take hold of it before someone else does? Let us look out on the horizon, then, and see what dark stars are coming into view.
CHAPTER ONE

“I’m a Winner”

BILLIONAIRE DONALD J. Trump’s victory in the November 2016 U.S. presidential election came as a surprise to many, but surely not to Trump. “I am a winner,” he said throughout his campaign, and it seems he was right. Winning is important for Trump; as more than one commentator has pointed out, it’s no exaggeration to say that it is practically the only important thing for him. As he wrote in his self-help book The Art of the Deal, designed to help its readers become winners too, “I’m the first to admit that I am very competitive and that I’ll do nearly anything within legal bounds to win.”¹ Most people who know Trump would agree with this self-assessment, although some might suspect that when necessary, he wouldn’t be averse to stretching the acceptable boundaries of achieving success just a bit.

But business is one thing. Surely politics is another. Or is it? Trump’s victory left many reeling and set the political pundits pondering on the reasons for his upset. Scrambling for answers, they looked to white middle-class dissatisfaction, Russian intervention, and Hillary Clinton’s bad reputation, among other things, for clues. But one sure contribution to Trump’s ascendancy must be his positive self-image, his certainty that, as he told his supporters over and over, he is a winner and that he will get what he wants. “People may not always think big themselves,” Trump tells his readers, “but they can still get very excited by those who do.”²

Trump is one of those who do. He thinks big. There is nothing small about him.³ From Trump Tower to his aborted plans to build the largest building in the world to his massive Atlantic City casino,
practically everything Trump turned his hand to was on a large scale, driven by a desire, with him from an early age, to “make a statement . . . to build something monumental,” to take on what he called the “big challenge.”

What accounts for this strident self-confidence, this unshakeable assurance of success and driving need to stand out from the mediocre many? Narcissism, megalomania, egomania, selfishness, insensitivity to others, and other personality traits have been offered as explanations for Trump’s unswerving optimism and self-belief. To be sure, Trump’s psychological profile can accommodate these characteristics and more; as I will try to show, he strikes me as an example of what the writer Colin Wilson called a “Right Man,” someone who under no circumstances will admit to being wrong, and who will stop at practically nothing to get his way. But in the flurry of news reports, articles, posts, and tweets that followed in the wake of Trump’s victory, one possible reason that could account for Trump’s perpetually upbeat demeanor rose out of the mass of sound bites and caught my attention. According to some reports, Trump’s at times ruthless belief in his own powers and abilities may lie in his interest in an obscure and somewhat “magical” philosophy known as New Thought, Mental Science, or, as it is sometimes also called, “the power of positive thinking.”

Trump’s mentor in positive thinking was the man who popularized the phrase, the Reverend Norman Vincent Peale. In 1952, Peale’s book *The Power of Positive Thinking* appeared and immediately became a success, spending ninety-eight weeks at the top of the *New York Times* bestseller list and making its author a wealthy man. It is still a healthy seller in the self-help and self-improvement market. Peale read earlier New Thought writers such as Ernest Holmes, Charles Fillmore, and Napoleon Hill and absorbed their fundamental insight, that the mind can influence reality directly, or, as its most basic formula has it, “thoughts are causative.” This means that by merely thinking we can change the world around us. If that isn’t magical, I don’t know what is.
Peale took this idea and, as the historian of New Thought Mitch Horowitz put it, “reprocessed mind-power teachings through scriptural language and lessons.”⁶ According to Peale, one could achieve both spiritual and material success in life—he believed that contrary to much ancient wisdom the two are not mutually exclusive—and thinking positively was the way to do it. Trump started attending Peale’s sermons as a boy in the 1950s and he took this message to heart. Later he transferred it to the bank.

Peale played a large role in Trump’s life. His parents attended Peale’s services at the Marble Collegiate Church on New York’s Fifth Avenue and Trump himself was a familiar face among the parishioners there for more than fifty years. Trump was married to his first wife, Ivana Zelníčková, at the church, and rumor had it that he met his second wife, the model Marla Maples, there too. Trump denied this but he did admit to seeing Marla at the services often. In any case, his marriage to Marla was performed in the church by Peale’s successor, the Reverend Arthur Caliandro.⁷

Peale’s doctrine of “positive thinking” appealed to Fred Trump, Donald’s father, another successful businessman, who said that there was “nobody else like Peale,” an estimate Donald agreed with. Trump admitted to two mentors in his life: one was his father, the other was Peale.⁸ Given Trump’s great respect for his father, this was admiration indeed. Trump called Peale “a great preacher and a great public speaker” and admitted that after hearing one of his sermons he could have “sat there for another hour.” What religious or spiritual import Trump absorbed from Peale’s sermons is debatable, but Trump was clearly impressed by the Reverend’s “speaking ability” and “thought process.”⁹

What did Peale speak of? What were his thoughts about? Mainly about success, in the world of the spirit, yes, but in the material one even more. As Gwenda Blair, a biographer of the Trump family, said in a podcast, Trump’s obsession with winning may be rooted in the kind of this-worldly advice he absorbed at Peale’s sermons. The idea that winning was everything was brought home in those Sunday
services. “That’s a very Norman Vincent Peale notion,” Blair said, “that notion of success above all.”

If Trump thought highly of Peale, the admiration was mutual. In 1983, to congratulate him on the opening of Trump Tower, a fifty-eight-story multimillion-dollar contribution to Manhattan’s skyline, Peale sent Trump a note predicting that he would be “America’s greatest builder.” Peale was always impressed by successful people and effective self-promoters, and he was drawn to Trump after seeing him on television. What Peale may have thought of Trump’s political success is unknown—he died in 1993—but given that he backed Republicans throughout his life we can imagine. Richard Nixon sought solace at Peale’s church after losing the 1960 election to John F. Kennedy, and was later consoled by Peale during the height of the Watergate scandal; Ronald Reagan was a fan too. With Trump in the White House, the idea of being “America’s greatest builder” takes on a new meaning.

Trump took Peale’s teachings as a kind of scripture and suggested that he won the approval of his mentor. “He thought I was his greatest student of all time,” Trump, no practitioner of false modesty, reported. Peale taught Trump to think only of the best outcomes—to, in the words of an old song, “accentuate the positive, and eliminate the negative.” “The mind,” Trump believed, “can overcome any obstacle. I never think of the negative.” No wonder he’s convinced he’s a winner.

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It is easy to see New Thought or “positive thinking” as a scam, a metaphysical snake oil sold to the losers in life’s scramble for success. Or as a self-serving religion to its winners, like Trump. Or, as Barbara Ehrenreich does, as a puritanical philosophy that denies valid cause for sorrow or sadness and demands of its practitioners “perpetual effort and self-examination to the point of self-loathing,” not to mention cheerfulness on tap. But a closer look reveals something much more interesting.
As mentioned, the philosophy of New Thought is based on the idea that the mind can influence reality directly, that mental effort alone can make things happen. In all of its different versions, whether as Mental Science, Science of Mind, Creative Visualization, and others, it emphasizes the same idea. If we can imagine an outcome clearly enough, persistently enough, with enough confidence and commitment, it will materialize. The mind, it affirms, can create reality. We need only believe firmly and it will be so.

New Thought’s insistence on the power of the imagination to create reality seems harmless, if absurd. Most of us accept that reality is not so accommodating and reject the idea outright. Experience, we say, tells us that it just can’t be true. But the beliefs of New Thought are rooted in ancient occult ideas, insights into the magical nature of the mind and reality that informed the philosophers of second-century Alexandria and the geniuses of the Renaissance, and which today are seen to be more and more in line with our understanding of physical reality at its most fundamental level.

Ever since the rise of quantum physics, we’ve known, as the physicist Werner Heisenberg tells us, that the observer influences the observed. Around the same time as the first forays into the quantum world were being made, in the early twentieth century, the philosopher Edmund Husserl came to a similar conclusion. Husserl’s fundamental insight, which informed later developments such as existentialism, is that perception is intentional. That is, for Husserl, consciousness does not merely reflect a world that is already “there,” as a mirror does, whether we want it to or not, but actively reaches out and “grabs” it, rather like a mental hand, and, as it were, molds it into shape.

On a different track, a bit earlier than Husserl, and taking a hint from the German poet and scientist Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, the esoteric teacher Rudolf Steiner, most known today as the founder of Waldorf Education, argued that our minds are not mere witnesses but cocreators of the world around us. And today, some of the most respected and successful people on the planet even suggest that the entire world we know is really a kind of collective dream, a
simulation, maintained by a secret elite, aware of reality’s plasticity and equipped with the knowledge and will to manipulate it—an idea that itself goes back to the beliefs of an ancient mystical sect known as the Gnostics.  

So if people adhering to the philosophy of New Thought, as Trump does, maintain that the mind can create, alter, or affect reality, they seem to be in good company.

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It really should be no surprise that a president who declared himself for “America first” should be a devotee of New Thought. The phrase “new thought” itself was coined by one of America’s greatest thinkers, the nineteenth-century poet, essayist, and orator Ralph Waldo Emerson. Emerson was the leader of a school of philosophy known as Transcendentalism, which is a good candidate for the first homegrown American intellectual movement. Another famous Transcendentalist was Henry David Thoreau, author of the classic *Walden*. In an essay aptly named “Success,” Emerson wrote: “To redeem defeat by new thought, by firm action, that is not easy, that is the work of divine men.” The notion of success must have been important to Emerson, as he also wrote a poem about it, although some believe the poem attributed to him was really written by Bessie Anderson Stanley. Either way, the kind of success the poem and Emerson’s essay aspire to is not the kind we associate with Trump, having more to do with achieving a kind of inner harmony and leaving the world a better place than building monumental skyscrapers.

Transcendentalism had its roots in German and English Romanticism, which itself was rooted in notions of the mind and its relation to reality associated with a school of German philosophy known as Idealism. Rudolf Steiner, mentioned above, was deeply influenced by German Idealism. The two philosophers most associated with Idealism were Immanuel Kant and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel.
Idealism’s view of the world reached Emerson through English thinkers like the historian Thomas Carlyle and the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge, both of whom were readers of German metaphysics. The simplest way to understand Idealism is to say that it is the polar opposite of the materialism that was the prevalent view of reality in Emerson’s time and remains so today. That is to say, where materialism says that “matter,” the hard stuff of the physical world, is the fundamental truth about reality, Idealism says that what is “really real” is the mind, consciousness, or spirit, and that the physical world is ultimately an expression of this.

Kant, for instance, believed that the physical world we see, the universe of space and time, is actually a product of our perceptual apparatus. For Kant our minds somehow organize the raw data of reality into the world perceptible to our senses. Kant did not mean, as some think he did, that we create the world out of whole cloth, that it is a pure fabrication. He is not saying that everything “is in our heads.” Such a route leads to solipsism, the belief that “you” are the only thing that you can know, which leaves one in a kind of epistemological bubble, in touch with nothing else. There is a “real world” out there, but we never see it as it is “in itself”—that is, as it appears when we are not perceiving it—but only as our minds deliver it to us. For Kant, it is through the mind’s action on the raw data of existence that anything like a “world” appears for us to experience. Hegel got over the hurdle of Kant’s verboten world “in itself” by saying that the entire universe, ourselves included, is participating in a vast process of evolution, in which Mind or Spirit, the ultimate reality, comes to awareness of itself through human consciousness.

There are other aspects of Idealism, and Edmund Husserl, mentioned earlier, was a late exponent of it. The general idea is that for Idealism, the mind is not some accidental passive product of a blind material universe—something many scientists and philosophers persist in insisting on today—but is in fact in charge and at the center of things.

Transcendentalism had roots in other schools of thought that emphasized the mind over matter. One was Hinduism, especially the spiritual scriptures of the Upanishads, which see the material world
as a kind of illusion or dream called “Maya” from which our minds must awaken. Another was the teachings attributed to the mythical founder of magic, Hermes Trismegistus, “thrice-greatest Hermes.” As the historian Frances Yates argued, the philosophers of second-century Alexandria and the geniuses of the Renaissance mentioned earlier were devotees of the teachings of the thrice-greatest one.\textsuperscript{18}

Emerson’s journals make more than one reference to Hermetic philosophy, which has come down to us in a collection of philosophical, mystical, and magical texts known as the \textit{Corpus Hermeticum}. Central to Hermetic philosophy is the power of imagination. In Book XI of the \textit{Corpus Hermeticum}, Nous, or the Universal Mind, tells Hermes that “within God everything lies in imagination.” He tells his awestruck student, who receives this revelation in a kind of waking dream, that “if you do not make yourself equal to God you cannot understand him.” Such is the power of the imagination that if Hermes were to command his soul to go anywhere, Nous tells him, it would be there “quicker than your command.” With imagination he can “grow to immeasurable size,” “be free from every body,” and “transcend all time.” And in a belief that will echo throughout the history of New Thought, Nous counsels Hermes to “Suppose nothing to be impossible for yourself.”\textsuperscript{19}

The educator Bronson Alcott, another leading Transcendentalist, introduced Hermetic ideas to the Boston literary crowd at his salons in the early 1850s. One historian of esotericism has argued that Transcendentalism primed America not only for the Theosophical Society, which was founded in New York in 1875 by Madame Blavatsky, Colonel Henry Olcott, and William Quan Judge, but also for the New Age, which has been with us since the 1970s.\textsuperscript{20} I should point out that Samuel Taylor Coleridge, as mentioned an influence on Emerson, had ideas about the mind that were informed by Hermetic thought. For Coleridge, as for Hermes, the imagination was “a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM.”\textsuperscript{21} That is to say, for Coleridge as for Hermes, the power with which God produced creation also resides in our own minds.
Another American intellectual giant was an enthusiastic advocate of New Thought. The philosopher and psychologist William James had the same independent exploratory attitude as Emerson, and we should remember that the essay, the literary form for which both Emerson and James are famous, is an attempt at articulating something, a shot at trying it out. James certainly tried out a lot. He was interested in mystical experience and to have one he inhaled nitrous oxide. He was interested in spiritualism and so attended séances. He was interested in “psychical research” and so investigated psychics. He was interested in religious experiences and went through his own “dark night of the soul” and a kind of “conversion” experience through which he was convinced of the reality of free will. James believed that our attitudes and beliefs affect our performance in the world. In “Is Life Worth Living?” he argues that a firm conviction of success is a deciding factor in whether we achieve a goal or not, an example of what he called “the will to believe.” He gives the example of having to jump across a chasm from one cliff edge to the other. We have more of a chance of getting to the other side, James argues, if we believe we can make it than if we think we can’t.

James was an exponent of Pragmatism, a hands-on, can-do American school of philosophy; his thinking aimed at getting what he called the “cash value” out of beliefs, an American ideal if there ever was one. What James meant by “cash value” and what Pragmatism in general focused on was how a belief affects our existence in the world, if it helps us in the struggle of life in some way. That is, its practical consequences. Although something of a simplification, for Pragmatism what is true is what works.

Among the many things that James tried were the various practices that in the early twentieth century were referred to under the umbrella term “mind cure.” Under this rubric James placed readings from the gospels, Transcendentalism, Idealism, Spiritism, and the “optimistic evolutionism” of his day as sources of inspiration. But for James the “most characteristic feature of the mind-cure movement was an inspiration more direct.” This was an
“intuitive belief in the all-saving power of healthy-minded attitudes,” the “conquering efficiency of courage, hope, and trust.” Along with this came a “correlative contempt for doubt, fear, and worry” and other “nervously precautionary states of mind.” James recognized that much of the mind-cure literature was so “moonstruck with optimism and so vaguely expressed” that most educated people would dismiss it, as they do today. But the results argued in favor of not rejecting wholesale America’s “only decidedly original contribution to the systematic philosophy of life.”

And results there were. Armed with their belief in its efficacy, according to James the blind have regained sight, the lame have walked, and invalids have discovered new vitality, all through the power of New Thought. These were some of the practical results of what James called “the philosophy of healthy-mindedness.” James was so convinced of their validity that he practiced this philosophy himself, resorting to a program of mind-cure treatments for angina, insomnia, depression, and other ailments.

James was always fascinated by the untapped powers of the human mind. In “The Energies of Men” he argued that people “habitually use only a small part of the powers they actually possess and which they might use under appropriate conditions.” “We live subject to arrest by degrees of fatigue which we have come only from habit to obey.” “There seems no doubt,” he wrote, “that we are each and all of us to some extent victims of habit-neurosis.”

For James the limits to our powers that we accept as “natural” or “normal” are nothing of the kind. They are merely “habits” of thought, and breaking those habits and developing new ones is the common aim of a variety of psychological and spiritual practices. If we altered these habits, James argued, we would be amazed at what we could do, in the same way that a successful chaos magician “demonstrates to himself that he can do things which, a short while ago, never entered his mind as possibilities.” James was so convinced of the importance of exploring the potentialities of mind-cure practices that when attempts were made to minimize the availability of these ideas through state legislation, in order to protect the public
from supposed quacks and hucksters, he lobbied successfully in support of nontraditional medical practices.\textsuperscript{33}

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\textbf{YET BEING ROOTED} in the beliefs of two of the greatest American thinkers is not the sole reason why New Thought is often considered a peculiarly American style of thinking and why it has never caught on in Europe in quite the same way.\textsuperscript{34} It’s the success angle that does that. “Nothing succeeds like success” may have been first written by an Englishman, but it is an American dictum through and through.\textsuperscript{35} The importance of thinking positively, of having a “can do” attitude and an “affirmative” outlook on life seems as American as apple pie. Ronald Reagan, as mentioned, like Trump, a proponent of positive thinking, had a similar aphorism that he used in practically all his speeches, “Nothing is impossible,” a saying that would not be out of place in the \textit{Corpus Hermeticum}. At least Reagan believed this was true of America and Americans. During his time in the Oval Office, Reagan had a plaque on his desk that said “There is no limit to what a man can do or where he can go if he does not mind who gets the credit.” Next to this was a sign reminding Reagan that “It CAN be done.” As the website of the Reagan Foundation tells us, these affirmations were there to remind Reagan and any of his visitors that “in America, anything was possible—that we are limited only by our dreams.”\textsuperscript{36}

“It CAN be done” is a perhaps more cautious affirmation than “Just Do It,” Nike’s tempting mantra to help us purchase more sportswear, but it is of the same ilk. And “Just Do It” is not that far removed from Aleister Crowley’s indulgent maxim “Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law,” a writ of permission that has fueled many a magician—chaos or otherwise—since the Great Beast first uttered it in the early twentieth century.\textsuperscript{37} Other exhortations to not be stymied by false limitations include the U.S. Army’s recruiting slogan “Be All You Can Be,” some version of which can be found in
scores of self-help, motivational, and self-improvement teachings, calling on us to actualize to the full our many potentialities.

A life without limits and the will to pursue it seems part of the American dream of success. And when the desire to be, as Jim Morrison once sang, “limitless and free” is translated into more spiritual efforts, the goal of “being all we can be” becomes no longer a purely American concern. Yet even here the admonitions to be upbeat, cheerful, forward looking, and dismissive of any “negativity” can lead erstwhile deep spiritual pursuits into shallow practical waters. And the dangers of a will refusing to recognize any boundaries can be many.

Yet New Thought did not always have success as its central goal, even if today that seems to be the concern with which it is most occupied. In his engaging history of New Thought, *One Simple Idea*, Mitch Horowitz shows that in its early stages New Thought was more focused on health than anything else.

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That the mind can affect the body was known to the ancients. In classical Greece, for example, many people suffering from an illness went to spend the night at the temple of Asclepius, the Greek god of healing, at Epidaurus. After a day spent in meditation and ritual purifications, they hoped to receive a “healing dream” that night, a visitation from the god that would effect a cure or point the way to one. Often the belief that one had had such a visitation was enough to inspire a recovery. The teaching of the Stoic philosopher Epictetus that “what disturbs men’s minds is not events but their judgments on events” is an axiom of positive thinking, and a similar sensibility informed the other “self-help” philosophies of Epictetus’s contemporaries, the Epicureans and Skeptics. All sought a kind of inner calm, *ataraxia*, a state of imperturbable tranquility, free from worry, that would promote healing and maintain health, something that many of today’s mind, body, and spirit proponents equally pursue.
In the sixteenth century the alchemist and healer Paracelsus anticipated much modern medical insight in his book *Opus Paramirum (Work Beyond Wonders)*, which, among many other things, discusses what he calls the “illnesses of the imagination.” Such psychosomatic ailments were earlier thought to be the work of evil spirits, but Paracelsus was adamant that what was really at work was the patient’s own mind. Paracelsus was also convinced that the imagination can affect other bodies as well. He affirmed that “It is possible that my spirit . . . through an ardent will alone, and without a sword, can stab and wound others,” a confirmation, it seems, of the dangerous power of the “evil eye.”

Paracelsus’s contemporary the magician and sage Cornelius Agrippa concurred with Paracelsus’s belief in the remarkable powers of the imagination over the body. In *On Occult Philosophy*, his classic three-volume work on magic, Agrippa wrote, “The fantasy, or imaginative power, has a ruling power over the passions of the soul.” This means that our moods are influenced by our imagination, that what we think affects how we feel. But there is more. “Imagination does,” Agrippa continues, “of its own accord, according to the diversity of the passions, first of all change the physical body with a sensible transmutation, by changing the accidents in the body, and by moving the spirit upward or downward, inward or outward. . . .” The language may be obscure but the meaning seems clear. Agrippa is saying that not only does the imagination affect our moods, when through autosuggestion we can think ourselves into depression, but it can also directly affect our body. Like much else Agrippa wrote, this may seem pure moonshine; *On Occult Philosophy* includes some standard magical “spells.” But it is something that contemporary medical science increasingly recognizes.

The medical roots of New Thought as we know it, however, begin somewhat nearer to us in time.

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In 1833 a New England clock maker named Phineas P. Quimby was suffering from tuberculosis. The state of medicine in America at the time meant that Quimby’s sufferings were double. The treatment he received was as bad as the ailment. Standard procedure back then was what was called “heroic medicine,” a way of battling an illness rather than healing the patient. From most accounts, the only thing heroic about this were the patients, who had to put up with what seems to us something akin to torture.

“Heroic medicine” aimed to relieve the body of sickness by draining it of its fluids. To this end Quimby took calomel, a mercury-based purgative that caused excessive salivation and even foaming at the mouth. He was also subjected to bloodletting and other methods of emptying him of fluids. The results were not encouraging. After months of ingesting calomel, Quimby had lost most of his teeth and was suffering from a general toxicity. At one point things had gotten so bad that he had resigned himself to what seemed an inevitable early death.

He took a last chance on the suggestion of a friend, who said he had cured himself of a debilitating illness through horseback riding. This too was something the ancient Greeks had prescribed for some ailments. Quimby was too weak to mount a horse so he settled for a carriage. Yet the horse proved unwieldy and would stop soon into a trot. It finally refused to move unless Quimby ran beside it. After a taxing uphill sprint, Quimby collapsed into the carriage and would have been stranded if he hadn’t called to a farmer in a nearby field. The farmer got the horse going again, but Quimby felt too weak to even raise the whip. But then something came over him and he began to drive the horse as fast as he could. By the time they reached the stable, some miles away, Quimby’s strength had returned. In fact, he felt better than ever. “From that time,” he wrote, “I continued to improve, not knowing, however, that the excitement was the cause. . . .”

Quimby’s remark that the “excitement” of his wild carriage ride was the cause of his recovery is a kind of pre-echo of a similar insight that came to William James. In “The Energies of Men,” mentioned
earlier, James pondered over what can trigger the release of our unused energies. What pushed some people beyond the limits they have accepted as normal? James’s essay is full of accounts of people exhibiting remarkable powers of endurance and strength under exceptionally demanding conditions. James concluded that in these cases, “Either some unusual stimulus . . . or some unusual idea of necessity induces them to make an extra effort of will. Excitement, ideas, and efforts in a word, are what carry us over the dam.”

James developed a means of putting this insight into practice, which he called the “bullying-treatment.” It involves the doctor forcing his patient to make efforts he refuses to make. Such “hyperesthetic” patients are subject to artificial limits of strength more extreme than those from which we all suffer. The doctor insists the patient make some effort that he complains is impossible, often something as simple as getting out of bed. The patient puts up a fight, but if the doctor wins, something unexpected occurs. As James writes: “First comes the very extremity of distress, then follows unexpected relief.”

James’s essay examines the phenomenon of “second wind,” the sudden inrush of energy that comes to athletes who feel they are already running on empty. Pushed to the extremity of their resources, in making one final effort, they often experience the equivalent of an extra gasoline tank suddenly kicking in. James’s “bullying-treatment” is a way of inducing second wind, of forcing patients to make an effort they feel is impossible. When they do, the relief seems miraculous. In Quimby’s case, he seems to have subjected himself to a form of self-bullying, first by running up the hill and then by driving the horse as fast as it could go, producing the kind of “excitement” James saw could trigger our dormant powers.

It took a while, however, for Quimby to understand exactly what he had stumbled upon. One clue came to him through a form of healing called “mesmerism.” For most of us, mesmerism is another name for
hypnotism, and while the two are related, they are really quite different. Franz Anton Mesmer was an eighteenth-century German doctor who believed that the universe was full of a kind of tenuous vital fluid, what he called “animal magnetism,” animal here meaning “animated,” that is, living. The Chinese notion of chi, or the Hindu idea of prana, is something similar, as is the “orgone energy” of the maverick Freudian psychologist Wilhelm Reich. For occultists it is the “astral light,” and Mesmer originally got his idea from a study of astrology; our word influence—“in flowing”—comes from the astrological notion of some subtle force reaching us from the stars. Ill health was a result of a kind of blockage of this animal magnetism in our systems, and Mesmer believed he had devised a method of releasing the blocks and allowing the vital fluid to flow. This involved a series of passes and movements Mesmer made with his hands over a patient’s body.

Mesmer achieved some celebrity in Vienna and then Paris, and “mesmeric baths” and the banquet, a kind of group therapy, became very popular just before the French Revolution. His celebrity waned after an examination by the French Academy of Science declared that Mesmer’s “animal magnetism” did not exist. And it has to be said that the frequent dishabille of Mesmer’s attractive female patients, together with the orgy-like ambiance of the mesmeric salons and the orgasmic-like “crisis” that signaled a recovery, did not help his reputation.

The French Academy was right. “Animal magnetism” did not exist, or at least it was not responsible for Mesmer’s many cures. It was a disciple of Mesmer’s, the Marquis de Puységur, who discovered that what actually effected the cure was not an invisible vital fluid, but the ability of the “magnetic passes” to put the patient into a trance. Mesmerism was really hypnotism, but it wasn’t until the Englishman James Braid coined the term in 1841 that it was rechristened.

Quimby encountered two mesmerists, in fact, in 1836 and 1841. Benjamin Franklin had been part of the panel of the French Academy of Science that condemned Mesmer, but another hero of the Revolution, the Marquis de Lafayette, was one of Mesmer’s most
ardent students. While it had faded in France, by the 1830s mesmerism was a popular form of “alternative medicine” in America, and was often combined with the teachings of the eighteenth-century Swedish scientist and religious philosopher Emanuel Swedenborg, who wrote of his contacts with the spirit world. By the 1840s mesmerism and Swedenborgianism were so popular that Edgar Allan Poe wrote about them in some of his stories.

Quimby was not entirely impressed by mesmerism. But it gave him the insight that the mind can have an extraordinary control over the body. He watched as one mesmerist put a teenage boy into a trance. He fell into a “magnetic sleep,” but a sleep very different from a normal one. Rather than become limp and relaxed, the boy’s body became perfectly stiff, statuelike. This was a phenomenon that would occur throughout the history of hypnotism, when a hypnotist would have a subject lie with his head on one chair and his feet on another, and his body would not bend when a member of the audience sat on his stomach. Hypnotized subjects could do remarkable things with the human body. They could, for instance, hold live coals and not burn their hands. In *Frankenstein’s Castle*, a book about the right and left brain, Colin Wilson writes of a doctor who observed a dentist using hypnosis on a nervous patient. Once the patient was in the trance the dentist told him that not only would he feel no pain, but he would also *not bleed*. “This seemed preposterous. How can the mind control bleeding?” Wilson writes. “Yet when the tooth had been extracted, no blood came out of the cavity.” Somehow, while under hypnosis, the body is able to do things it seems unable to do in our “normal” state.

Quimby saw that one needn’t be mesmerized in order for the body to respond to the mind. He had shown that with his carriage ride. The excitement he had felt, the *change in attitude*, seemed to have gotten him over his weakness. He didn’t need a mesmerist; he had somehow done it himself. Yet when he decided to put his ideas into practice, Quimby did use a clairvoyant for a time, placing an assistant into a mesmeric trance from which he would diagnose illnesses, a method Quimby had witnessed in the mesmerists he saw.
But he came to see that it was not “animal magnetism,” or the herbal remedies his assistant prescribed, or any outside element that did the trick. What worked was the patient’s own mind. Quimby prompted a sense of confidence in the patient, and it was this that triggered his cures. The belief itself seemed to do it.

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Quimby’s work planted seeds from which a variety of “mind cure” philosophies sprouted. He had a vague belief in a kind of universal mind—not unlike the Hermetic Nous—from which all life and intelligence emanates and which was ultimately responsible for his cures. But human belief was the conduit of this power. “Our happiness and misery are what follow from our belief” was one of his maxims. In some way, Quimby was able to vitalize in his patients a belief in his effectiveness, and it was this confidence that made the difference.

One of Quimby’s inheritors was the Methodist minister and Swedenborgian Warren Felt Evans, who sought Quimby out and studied with him for a time. Evans seemed to combine Swedenborg’s ideas about the “correspondence” between the spiritual and the physical world, or that between the mind and the body, with Quimby’s insights into the mental element in health. Swedenborg argued that everything in the physical world corresponded in a precise way with a higher, spiritual reality, and that this same correspondence existed between the body and the mind. As the physical world is only a shadow or image of the spiritual one, so too the body is only a kind of echo of the mind. This suggested that if the body is ill, there must be something wrong in the mind.

For Evans this seemed to argue that right thinking would naturally lead to a healthier and happier life. Evans linked this insight to his religious belief and came up with a formula that in one way or another has proved durable throughout the history of New Thought. “Faith is a force,” he concluded, that produces an “actual realization of what I am praying for.” “Believing that I have the thing
for which I am praying causes me to have it.” If faith is “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen,” as the New Testament tells us, then for Evans it is also the fundamental “stuff” out of which reality is made real. As Horowitz points out, Evans here has grasped the power of positive thinking in a nutshell. “Mental certitude and visualization, backed by faith, is the engine of creation” is Horowitz’s reformulation of Evans’s revelation. A clear picture of what you want, combined with the certainty that you already have it, will bring it about.

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Evans had the basic idea but he still needed God to supply his faith. He was still short of arguing that it was the human mind itself that had the power. This was something at which the most famous “mind cure” proponent also stopped short. In fact for Mary Baker Eddy, it was the mind that was the seat of our problems.

The religion of Christian Science, which Eddy founded in 1866, believes that the only reality is the Mind of God. Sickness and disease are merely our mistaken perception of God’s infinite goodness and intelligence. It is our own mind, misunderstanding the true Reality, that is at the root of our problems. When Madame Blavatsky wrote that “the Mind is the great Slayer of the Real,” she was echoing a conclusion that Mary Baker Eddy had come to some years earlier.

Eddy’s road to founding a worldwide religion began when a series of personal and physical hardships led her to Quimby’s door. She visited him several times between 1862 and 1865, and gained strength and confidence from her “doctor,” as she called him. But when Quimby died suddenly in 1866, she was desolate. She had already lost two husbands; one had died and the other was an absentee wastrel. Her father had recently died, and some years earlier she had had to give up her son for adoption. She suffered from a chronic spinal disorder, and just after Quimby’s death, a slip on an icy pavement left her bedridden, her nerves exhausted. Life had not treated her well. When a disciple of Quimby’s refused to take
on his mantle and give her guidance, Eddy decided to take things into her own hands. This meant putting them into God’s.

What was the idea that led Eddy, against whom fate seemed to have stacked the deck, to go on to have “worldwide influence” through a “doctrine counting its adherents by the myriad,” as her biographer the Austrian-Jewish writer Stefan Zweig wrote? Simply that illness was an illusion, foisted upon us by our own minds. If we can free ourselves of this illusion, and experience God as pure love, then we will be healed, as Jesus healed those who put their faith in him.

Christian Science went on to be the most successful of the early mind-cure philosophies, and it remains an important belief system for many today. Yet its insistence that the human mind is the source of unreality, not reality, places it outside our scope. It was, however, one of Eddy’s most able students, who soon broke with her and went on to develop her own approach to New Thought, who supplied the burgeoning “Mental Science” with fundamental insights that it still employs today.

Emma Curtis Hopkins was a forthright freethinking woman with an interest in metaphysics, Eastern religions, and the occult, and after hearing a lecture on Christian Science, she dedicated herself, body and soul, to Eddy’s doctrine. But Eddy was an authoritarian who wanted followers, not creative minds who could interpret her insights in new ways. She certainly did not want disciples who, in however humble a manner, could express insights of their own. Hopkins, however, had several of these, and they soon led to her expulsion from Christian Science.

It was the best thing that could have happened, both to Hopkins and to New Thought. When she was free from Eddy’s censure, Hopkins’s interest in occult and metaphysical ideas blossomed and she combined a variety of esoteric teachings stemming from Hermeticism, Kabbalah, Theosophy, Egyptian religion, and other sources into a heady brew. Echoing Warren Felt Evans’s insight that “believing that I have the thing for which I am praying causes me to have it,” through lectures and instructions in mental visualization
Hopkins introduced her followers in Chicago to the power of thought to “make things happen.” Illness was no longer her central concern, but something more like fulfillment or, as we would say today, “self-actualization.” And what this entailed for Hopkins was understanding and employing the powers of the mind.

Affirmations to that effect were part of her approach. “The day is plastic to you,” she told her audience, declaring the compliant character of reality in a phrase that would not have been out of place during the “revolt of the imagination” staged by Parisian students in May 1968. “Power to the Imagination” and “Take Your Desires for Reality” were some of the slogans that brought Paris to a standstill then. And where Eddy had insisted on the delusory character of the mind, Hopkins had turned in the opposite direction, stating, in various ways, that the mind can indeed create reality. As Horowitz remarks, her life and thought are testaments to a key New Thought tenet: the power of a deeply felt wish. We can achieve what we want in life, but only if we want it ardently enough. It was this message that Hopkins got across to her students, many of whom, like Charles and Myrtle Fillmore, Ernest Holmes, William Walker Atkinson, and Ella Wheeler Wilcox, among others, went on to become New Thought teachers themselves.

Gradually, as New Thought began to be accepted in American culture, its emphasis shifted from health to a central American pursuit enshrined in the Declaration of Independence: happiness. This took two forms which have remained a part of New Thought ever since: the drive to self-improvement and the right to prosperity. Both involve the power of the mind to alter reality.

The idea of self-improvement or “character building” harkened back to Emerson’s essay “Self-Reliance”: “A man should learn to detect and watch that gleam of light which flashes across his mind from within,” Emerson wrote, “more than the lustre or firmament of bards and sages.” In other words, we should rely on our powers
rather than lean on the achievements of others. It was an admonition that suited a still young nation and it still suits much of New Thought today. Its basic aim is “self-mastery,” a mainstay of much motivational literature. Through the work of improving ourselves, we become masters of our fate, and captains of our soul, as the poet William Ernest Henley in his poem “Invictus” declared.\footnote{53}

With self-improvement, the reality one wants to affect is oneself. One “builds one’s character” through conscious choices. As Ralph Waldo Trine, one of the leading inspirational New Thought writers, argues, these ultimately mean what one thinks. Trine agreed with the import of the title of another highly popular New Thought work, James Allen’s \textit{As a Man Thinketh}, which was inspired by a misinterpretation of Proverbs 23:7, “as he thinketh in his heart, so is he.” In the biblical context it is a warning against duplicity, but Allen and his readers saw it as a confirmation of the idea that what we think determines our life.

Trine’s \textit{In Tune with the Infinite}, his hymn to the universal mind supporting all creation, was one of the most popular works of New Thought, and it is still a healthy seller today. In \textit{Character Building Thought Power}, Trine turned his attention to how we can remake ourselves through the power of our thoughts. “Your dominating thoughts,” he tells us, “determine your dominating actions.” What we think determines what we do, and what we do determines our character.

Trine gives the example of someone gradually drifting into bad company and losing himself to drink. At first the idea of sharing a drink with some acquaintances seems harmless, but a little voice may warn us of danger. If we harken to it, there is no harm. But having once given way, it is easier for us to do so the next time, until, imperceptibly, we may find ourselves caught by demon rum. Trine counsels that what we need to do is to catch the thought of having a drink as soon as it appears and cast it out of our mind. We should also fill the empty space with a new thought, say, of the benefits of not drinking. Gradually, the new thought will dominate.
This seems like a remarkable presage of cognitive behavioral therapy, or mindfulness, two very popular therapeutic approaches today, both of which work by paying attention to what we think. “The greatest strength and nobility of character,” Trine writes, “lies always in taking a firm stand on the side of right.” “The great and strong character is the one who is ever ready to sacrifice the present pleasure for the future good.”  

If we want to live a good and healthy life, Trine tells us, we should fill our minds with good and healthy thoughts. Yet while Trine believed that “there are no shortcuts to wealth honestly made,” his own work was an inspiration for more straightforward proponents of what would come to be called “the prosperity gospel.” This was the belief that, in the words of one classic of the genre, one can “think and grow rich.” Napoleon Hill, the author of the very successful *Think and Grow Rich*, was a reader of Trine, as was Henry Ford. Ford was a close friend of Trine’s and attributed both the conception of the motorcar and his own success to Trine’s ideas. 

Self-improvement and character building were enough for Trine and for Elbert Hubbard, author of *A Message to Garcia*, a once popular inspirational work aimed at motivating personal initiative. But it was not long before the belief in improving oneself also included improving one’s finances. Along with health, personal improvement, and the variety of social issues that concerned early advocates of New Thought—as Horowitz makes clear, many were devoted to social reform and what later would emerge as women’s liberation—the idea of abundance soon became part of the canon of positive thinking.

A journalist named Prentice Mulford seems to be the one to clearly make the leap from the pursuit of happiness to that of wealth. Before becoming the founding father of the “prosperity gospel,” Mulford had been a hotelier, a whaler, a prospector, a reporter, and an editor who published Mark Twain and Ambrose Bierce, among other occupations. Weary of his rollicking life, Mulford attempted a Thoreau-like stint “off the grid” in a cabin in the New Jersey woods,
but found solitude not to his taste. But his failure at using New Thought techniques to defeat his depression led to his last and most successful self-reinvention, as a pamphleteer for what he, and many others, would call the “Law of Success.”

From 1886 until his death in 1891, Mulford produced a series of pamphlets—later bound into a book, *Your Forces, and How to Use Them*—aimed at telling his readers how they could use the power of the mind to increase their fortunes. Drawing on a clutch of sources—Spiritualism, Swedenborg, and earlier mind-cure advocates—Mulford developed a repertoire of New Thought mantras that are still vibrating today. “Thoughts are things,” he told his readers, an insight that reaches back to Paracelsus, but which Mulford, in a breezy, readable manner, communicated clearly. For Mulford, and for practically every “prosperity evangelist” who followed, this meant that thought has as palpable an effect on reality as anything else. Grasping that “the mind is a magnet” is the essential key to the Law of Success. The strictures of that law are simple: your mood or frame of mind has more to do with success than anything else. Attitude counts. “Your mind is a magnet. It has the power, first of attracting thought, and next of sending that thought out again.” What you think, you will attract. “Your every thought is a force, as real as a current of electricity. . . .” What Mulford taught his readers to do was to direct that force toward the acquisition of wealth.

Mulford’s pamphlets worked—at least they were commercially successful for him. But he seems to have been plagued by recurrent depression. At the height of his popularity—even William James wrote approvingly of Mulford in his mind-cure essay “The Gospel of Relaxation”—Mulford died under suspicious circumstances. He had decided to journey from Sheepshead Bay, Brooklyn, to Sag Harbor, Long Island, on his sailboat. But when the boat remained near Sheepshead Bay for several days, concerned friends went to investigate and found Mulford’s body. There was no sign of a struggle or anything else to account for his death, and it is possible his depression got the better of him and he took his own life.
Yet Mulford’s ideas lived on. The Law of Success proved very successful. And Mulford’s notion that the mind is a magnet soon morphed into another law, which he was the first to clearly proclaim but which has echoed along the annals of New Thought down to our own day: the Law of Attraction. From Mulford to Rhonda Byrne’s very well-known secret, the belief that what we think, the ideas, images, expectations, and attitudes housed in our heads, determines the circumstances of our lives, formed the basis of practically all versions of the gospel of prosperity. That the idea of a Law of Attraction was another misunderstanding of a spiritual insight, this time one of Swedenborg’s, did not matter. It set the template for practically all the teachings to come that affirmed that by thinking in the right way, one could grow rich. Or if that seems too straightforwardly acquisitive, how through one’s thoughts one could share in the abundance that was rightfully one’s own.

From Dale Carnegie’s *How to Win Friends and Influence People* to Florence Scovel Shinn’s *The Game of Life and How to Play It*, Ernest Holmes’s *Creative Mind and Success* to Joseph Murphy’s *The Power of Your Subconscious Mind*, the prosperity gospel told those who had ears that if they used their minds in the right way, success would be theirs. All they needed was a little positive thinking.

It was a doctrine that Donald J. Trump heard from an early age, and the message seemed to take hold.
CHAPTER TWO

Positive Chaos

WHAT EXACTLY DID Trump hear at those sermons at Marble Collegiate Church? If they were anything like what Norman Vincent Peale told the readers of The Power of Positive Thinking, it must have been something like this:

Believe in yourself! Have faith in your abilities! Self-confidence leads to self-realization and successful achievement. Believe in yourself and release your inner powers. Formulate and stamp indelibly on your mind a mental picture of yourself as succeeding.¹

To give these calls to self-confidence and belief in our inner powers some biblical support, Peale would very likely have quoted from Philippians 4:13: “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me,” or referred to some other suitable passage from scripture. As readers of The Power of Positive Thinking discover, there are many of these. As mentioned, Peale was able to take the basic principles and techniques of New Thought and repackage them in a modernized, Christianized version. To be sure, much New Thought and mind-cure teachings were already rooted in religious faith, but Peale’s own self-confidence—born of a difficult battle with a debilitating inferiority complex—somehow informed his biblical references and homely anecdotes with an infectious enthusiasm. His gospel was not one of sin and retribution, but of sharing in the power of faith to achieve anything, and he had many examples on offer to show that it worked. Many people leaving Peale’s sermons must have
felt, as Trump did, that if they could just adopt the right attitude and
think positively, nothing could stop them.

The chapter titles in *The Power of Positive Thinking* offer more
clues to the message Peale delivered from the pulpit: “A Peaceful
Mind Generates Power,” “Expect the Best and Get It,” “I Don’t
Believe in Defeat,” “How to Create Your Own Happiness,” “Try
Prayer Power.”

“Prayer power” is very important for Peale; we can say it is the
central idea behind all his work. *The Power of Positive Thinking*
is full of testimonials from people about the power of prayer to solve
any problem or remove any obstacle. But not any old prayer will do.
We are told to pray “big, deep prayers,” and that there are different
prayer techniques for different problems. For Peale, prayer is a
“manifestation of energy,” a scientific allusion that the founder of the
prosperity gospel, Prentice Mulford, also made when he compared
thought to a substance which, “in the chemistry of the future,” will be
recognized “as much as the acids, oxides, and all other chemicals of
to-day.”

If faith can move mountains, according to Peale the right
prayer applied in the right way is like a laser beam, a tightly focused
current of faith that can achieve its end with pinpoint accuracy. Peale
tells of a fitness expert who had a sign on his wall on which were
written the letters APRPBWPRPRAA. Asked what they stood for the
expert said “Affirmative Prayers Release Powers By Which Positive
Results Are Accomplished.” As in many fairy tales, with positive
thinking it pays to be very specific about exactly what you are
wishing for.

Peale writes that the purpose of the book is to “suggest techniques
and to give examples which demonstrate that you do not need to be
defeated by anything.” By channeling spiritual power through your
thoughts,” he writes, “you can rise above obstacles which ordinarily
might defeat you.” “You need be defeated only if you are willing to
be. This book teaches how to ‘will’ not to be.”

If we absorb the book’s teachings, assimilate its principles, and
apply its techniques properly, Peale tells us, we can change the
circumstances of our lives. We can assume control over them “rather
than continuing to be directed by them.” Harkening back to the insight of the Stoic philosopher Epictetus—that what disturbs us are not events but our judgments about them—Peale insists that “any fact facing us, however difficult . . . is not so important as our attitude towards that fact.” He quotes the psychiatrist Karl Menninger for support: “Attitudes are more important than facts.” While thinking negatively about some troubling fact can defeat us prematurely, “a confident and optimistic thought pattern can modify or overcome the fact altogether.”

I’m not sure if Norman Vincent Peale ever thought in this way or that he would have necessarily appreciated the connection, but his optimism about how to deal with recalcitrant facts has a certain postmodern ring to it, and seems to fit right into our increasingly post-truth world.

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BORN AND RAISED in Ohio, Peale began his career as an “ambassador of encouragement” in 1932 when he took over an ailing Marble Collegiate Church. He was ordained as a Methodist minister in 1922 and had to change his religious affiliation to the Reformed Church of America to take on the job. The church was failing, attendance was low, and Peale faced a difficult task getting his new parish back on its feet. Undeterred by the challenge, Peale applied some of the positive thinking he would motivate in others and soon turned things around. Word quickly got out about the glad tidings coming from the church on Fifth Avenue and West Twenty-ninth Street. The congregation steadily grew, drawn in by Peale’s adamant faith in the power of prayer.

Soon after he arrived at the church, Peale met the positively named psychoanalyst Smiley Blanton, who had studied with Freud. The two decided that a blend of psychology and religion might be a useful combination to deal with the many problems facing people during the Depression. As he would emphasize in his writing, Peale thought that in the modern age, religion should look to science for
guidance, and taking a leaf from Rudolf Steiner, he thought of himself as a “scientist of the spiritual life.” Blanton saw a successful psychoanalysis as triggering a kind of religious conversion in the patient, with revelations from the unconscious having an equal transformative power to those from the divine. The Religio-Psychiatric Clinic was formed in 1937 and worked out of the church’s basement, offering its clients a religious or psychologically based therapy, or a combination of both. Blanton, however, balked at Peale’s increasing interest in “prayer power” and its ability to arrange the circumstances of one’s life. When *The Power of Positive Thinking* appeared, Blanton distanced himself from it and declined to defend Peale when he and the book came under criticism. Nevertheless, the Religio-Psychiatric Clinic was a success and continues to see thousands of patients today.

Peale had many irons in the fire, and before his literary success he was a radio celebrity with his program *The Art of Living*, which he broadcast for more than half a century, starting in 1935. When television became the dominant medium, he made the transition easily. Peale also founded and edited the magazine *Guideposts*, which featured stories in which the power of faith, prayer, or simply hard work helped someone overcome seemingly insurmountable difficulties. He had also written a few earlier self-help books, but these had neither the philosophy nor the impact of *The Power of Positive Thinking*.

For someone interested in helping people deal with the grim realities of the Depression, Peale was a critic of Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s New Deal, seeing it as an attack on individual liberties. If Peale was outspokenly positive from the pulpit, his political pronouncements often had a harder ring. In the early 1950s, he supported a campaign by hard-line conservatives to put General Douglas MacArthur in the White House. His antipathy to liberal politicians came through during the 1956 presidential campaign in his denunciation of the urbane Democrat Adlai Stevenson for being divorced. But Peale’s most controversial political statements were

Peale joined forces with a group of Protestant ministers who believed that Kennedy’s Catholicism would make him a kind of Vatican “Manchurian Candidate,” taking his orders from the pope and steering America into papist ways. Peale’s remark that a Catholic in the White House put American culture at risk and that Kennedy would serve papal interests over American ones brought much criticism on his head. Many newspapers dropped his syndicated column and there were calls for him to leave the pulpit. Peale weathered the storm and was eventually able to pour oil on troubled waters, but it took some doing and henceforth he kept his political counsel to himself.

Yet it wasn’t only his political broadsides that alarmed critics. Peale’s positive thinking may have been welcomed by his readers, but there were many who had a much less positive response to it. Like critics of New Thought today, their main criticism was that positive thinking simply didn’t work and that readers taken by Peale’s book were setting themselves up for a depressing letdown. Peale’s claims to the contrary, they said, were unsubstantiated, and one has to admit that throughout the book Peale refers to a “famous psychologist” here or a “scientist” there who according to him confirms his findings, without telling his readers exactly who they are. Worse than making unprovable claims were criticisms saying that Peale was peddling a form of self-hypnosis that could lead to serious mental problems. This was a charge made against him by the psychologist Albert Ellis in his book *How to Make Yourself Happy and Remarkably Less Disturbable*, which, one has to say, has its own “self-improvement” philosophy to proffer.

Religious leaders were also less than positive about Peale’s philosophy. Theologians and churchmen thought that Peale sold his readers and parishioners a kind of feel-good Christianity aimed at success that avoided the deeper issues of life. God became a career adviser, helping one to get on in the world. Fundamentally, they argued that Peale put oneself over others and God and saw “prayer
Power” as a means of using religion to achieve the “good life,” a criticism brought against the prosperity gospel as a whole.

Yet another criticism brought against Peale concerns us more directly. This was that positive thinking was really a refit of the Mental Science and New Thought philosophies of the earlier part of the century. With its echoes of “mind power” and the miracle of “visualization,” many were concerned that Peale was a kind of closet occultist and that positive thinking was a kind of Christianized magic.

These criticisms had some substance. Peale had been a reader of Ernest Holmes in his younger days and credited Holmes’s Creative Mind and Success with helping him overcome his shyness and inferiority complex. Holmes was one of the great New Thought figures, founding the movement he called “Religious Science,” which promulgated a philosophy known as “Science of Mind.” He founded the movement’s journal, Science of Mind, whose title came from Holmes’s best-known work, The Science of Mind. Holmes was a great reader of Emerson and Mary Baker Eddy, as well as other New Thought writers, and was a student of Emma Curtis Hopkins. In 1914 he left the Maine of his childhood and relocated to California. There with his brother Fenwicke, his ministry in Religious Science began. Holmes was a popular speaker, and he soon collected admirers in the early Hollywood scene, such as Cecil B. DeMille; later fans included Elvis Presley.

The basic idea behind the Science of Mind is that what we picture in our thoughts passes into reality. The world we see is an “out-picturing” of the one inside our heads, an idea going back to Swedenborg. Thoughts, as Prentice Mulford said, are things, and they form the backdrop to the world we inhabit. If we discipline ourselves and gain mastery of our thoughts, we can be the architect of our world. If we fail to do this, we will be at the mercy of whatever vagrant thought slips into our head, and such random uncontrolled ideas will dictate our reality. Peale benefited from Holmes’s ideas personally and his doctrine of positive thinking was informed by them too.
Other New Thought thinkers influenced Peale. The Reverend Arthur Caliandro, who succeeded Peale at Marble Collegiate Church, recalled that Peale was a great reader of Napoleon Hill. The author of *Think and Grow Rich* looked to the ideas of the Scottish American steel magnate Andrew Carnegie in order to grasp what he called the “Law of Success.” Peale himself was drawn to such successful characters. Charles Fillmore, founder of the Unity School of Christianity; Emmet Fox, whose services with the Divine Science Church drew thousands during the Depression; and the self-improvement and public relations guru Dale Carnegie, author of the still popular *How to Win Friends and Influence People*—and no relation to Andrew—were some of his other favorites.

Peale’s notion of “prayer power” harkened back to Mesmer’s ideas of a kind of subtle force that could be directed at people. While recognizing the reality of hypnosis, psychologists had dismissed the notion of some Svengali-like radiation, emanating from the hypnotist’s eyes, through which he impressed his “will” upon his subject. Peale was no Svengali—whatever his critics might think—but he did believe that prayer was an actual energy, and he admitted that he often prayed for people unaware of his solicitation. In some cases he was certain they felt it. Prayer for Peale was a way of becoming “in tune with the infinite,” a phrase he borrowed from Ralph Waldo Trine. “All of the universe is in vibration,” Peale believed, and prayer was a way of aligning our vibrations with those of the person we were praying for, as well as with God, the source of all vibrations.

The idea that the universe is made up of vibrations has a long and varied history, ranging from the ancient Greek sage Pythagoras to the modern esoteric teacher Gurdjieff. It appears in scientific dress in contemporary superstring theory, which contends that the fundamentally “really real” things making up existence are oscillating one-dimensional “strings,” an image that gives new meaning to Pythagoras’s famous sensitivity to the “music of the spheres,” another phrase employed by Peale.
Peale most likely came across the idea of prayer as a way of harmonizing vibrations through the work of Florence Scovel Shinn, an artist and illustrator who spoke of “universal vibrations” in books like *The Game of Life and How to Play It*. Shinn came upon the idea herself in what was probably the most straightforward “Hermetic” work of New Thought. This was *The Kybalion*, a book purporting to be a study of a lost work of Hermes Trismegistus written by the mysterious “Three Initiates,” and which gave a distinct esoteric spin to the Law of Attraction. *The Kybalion* was not part of the *Corpus Hermeticum*—the closest it got to anything Greek was its title, which sounds like a Hellenized rendition of Kabbalah—and the “Three Initiates” were actually one William Walker Atkinson, a veritable one-man occult society. In Chicago in the 1900s, Atkinson, a lawyer and student of Emma Curtis Hopkins, wrote dozens of occult-oriented New Thought works using several pseudonyms, such as Yogi Ramacharaka, Theron Q. Dumont, and Magus Incognito, published by his Yogi Publications Company.13

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**Peale was familiar** with the occult current in New Thought and he condensed much of it into a simple formula. Along with the general rule of thinking positively, of keeping good, healthy, and success-oriented thoughts in one’s head, he proposed a more direct, specific approach. Its three steps call us to “prayerize,” “picturize,” and “actualize.”14 Fundamentally this is a way of visualizing a desired outcome with enough conviction to make it come to pass.

To “prayerize,” for Peale, means to keep the problem or concern constantly in mind, talking it over with God—the source of prayer power—as one goes about one’s day. It’s unclear if Peale knew that this seems a variation of the Russian Orthodox “Jesus prayer” or “Prayer of the Heart,” in which, as St. Paul advises in 1 Thessalonians 5:17, one is to “pray without ceasing.”15 In Peale’s version, through this unceasing prayerizing God becomes present to us, and his
“Presence” finally comes to dominate one’s conscious and unconscious mind.

“Picturizing” is visualizing what Peale calls a “realizable wish,” which is rather of the same stuff as chaos magick’s “achievable reality.” It won’t do to picturize something manifestly impossible, or so improbable that its chances of happening are practically nil. It also helps to picture an outcome of which God would approve. Once decided, we should picturize the outcome intently, and assume that it has already come to pass. Keeping the picture in our mind, holding it firmly in consciousness, we then let it sink into the unconscious, so that it reaches God’s “Presence.” Peale tells us to visualize the desired outcome as we work at helping to bring it about.

The last step is when what we have prayerized and picturized happens, when one’s realizable wish is actualized. How it actualizes may surprise us. God, we know, works in mysterious ways. But Peale insists that it will. “Go about your business on the assumption that what you have affirmed and visualized is true. Affirm it, visualize it, believe it, and it will actualize itself.”

It’s not clear if Peale was aware of the work of another New Thought proponent, one who shared his mix of biblical references and Mental Science, and whose approach to “manifesting reality” shares much with Peale’s “three step” program. Neville Goddard, or Neville, as he was known, turned to the Bible to get his message across. But he had a peculiar interpretation of it, and his occult leanings were more up front than Peale’s.

Neville Goddard had a more racy and exotic background than most New Thought teachers. He was born into a British family in Barbados in 1905 and his first career was on the stage. He left the British West Indies in his late teens and went to New York, where he was successful as an actor and dancer, although to what degree is unclear; like many mystic teachers, Neville’s autobiographical account is a mixture of exaggerated fact and impressive fantasy amid
some solid truth. But on a trip to England he became interested in occult and esoteric ideas and sat in on some séances.

When he returned to New York, he became involved with a Rosicrucian society. The original Rosicrucians were a supposed secret society in early seventeenth-century Germany who were interested in Hermetic philosophy and also in what we would call “progressive” social ideas; I mention them in the Introduction. By the early twentieth century, there were different occult groups claiming a descent from the Rosicrucians, and it is unclear which one Goddard joined. Whoever they were, Israel Regardie, a student of Aleister Crowley, who writes about it, did not think highly of them. Although he eventually left them, during his time with the Rosicrucians, Neville underwent a kind of spiritual training leading to some unusual experiences with “astral projection” and clairvoyance.

But his real spiritual path opened when he met an enigmatic “Ethiopian rabbi” named Abdullah. Exactly who Abdullah was—or if he even existed—remains debatable, although Horowitz suggests that a good candidate may be Arnold Josiah Ford, a black nationalist mystic of the 1920s and ’30s. Neville’s meeting with Abdullah has all the tropes familiar to such fateful encounters. Neville went to see Abdullah speak, and at the end of his talk, the mysterious Ethiopian walked up to him and said that he was six months late. Neville had no idea what he was talking about and said so. Abdullah then explained that “the brothers” had told him of his coming and that he had been waiting six months for him to arrive.

With Abdullah, Neville studied Hebrew, scripture, numerology, and metaphysics. Abdullah taught him how to read the Bible symbolically, an approach going back to the Alexandrian Jewish philosopher Philo. Abdullah showed Neville that the Bible should be seen as a work of psychological symbolism, depicting the secrets of consciousness. In this sense we can say that Neville carried on a tradition of “esoteric Christianity.”

But it is Neville’s own approach to “prayerizing, picturizing, and actualizing” that concerns us here. With the poet William Blake,
Neville believed that the world we see around us, and which we take to be stubbornly “outside” and “objective,” is really a projection of our inner mind. “All Things Exist in the Human Imagination,” Blake tells us, echoing the ancient Hermetic philosophy which teaches that “within God”—Nous—“everything lies in imagination.” As Blake wrote in *Jerusalem*, “In your Bosom you bear your Heaven and Earth & all you behold; tho’ it appears Without, it is Within, in your Imagination. . . .” As Ernest Holmes and Swedenborg, an early influence on Blake, taught, our thoughts determine the world we see—or at least they can nudge it in a direction we would like it to go.

Neville had an experience of this during a difficult time in New York. He wanted to see his family in Barbados for Christmas but lacked the money for a ticket. Abdullah told him to act as though he was already there, and he would be. This depended on creating in himself the feeling that he was indeed in Barbados, as well as the conviction that he was. He imagined the warm sun, the ocean breeze, the familiar sounds of his family. He “picturized” being there with the vividness of those peculiar dreams we call “lucid,” in which we briefly know we are dreaming and yet the dream continues with crystal clarity. Neville did this with perseverance. Just before the last ship for home sailed, he received a letter from a brother he hadn’t heard from in years; with it was fifty dollars and a steamship ticket for Barbados.

Neville’s picturizing arranged reality for him, but it might just as easily have sent him to Barbados on its own. In his classic work *The Occult*, Colin Wilson recounts several stories of “bilocation,” in which a person appeared in one location while physically being in another. The Swedish playwright August Strindberg wrote of an experience of bilocation when, like Neville, he wanted to be with his family. Ill in Paris, Strindberg imagined the living room of his home in Sweden. Suddenly, he lost awareness of where he was and felt that he was indeed standing near his piano at home. Strindberg writes that his mother-in-law saw his “apparition” and wrote to him to ask if he was ill. On another occasion, Strindberg was describing a past experience in some detail to a friend when he again suddenly felt as if he were transported back to the time and place in question. It was something
more than a vivid memory; he was actually “in” the place he was describing.21

Strindberg was a good subject for picturizing, because its effectiveness depends on the emotional intensity with which we visualize an objective. Strindberg had both a powerful creative imagination and was known for his emotional intensity. Other examples of bilocation Wilson gives in *The Occult* involve the novelist John Cowper Powys and the poets W. B. Yeats and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, all highly imaginative individuals, and all interested in the occult. With visualization, a peculiar emotional state is necessary for results. In his own writings on magic, Regardie often calls on his readers to “invoke often” and to “enflame thyself with prayer,” counsels known to his mentor Crowley. Neville’s background in theater and dance—two art forms very useful in magic—would have provided him with access to the kind of emotional intensity necessary to actualize what he had picturized.

Like Peale, Neville relied on the Bible to illustrate his ideas, but his conception of God was more like Blake’s. God was the Imagination, or, as Neville called it, the fundamental “unconditioned awareness of one’s being.” Neville expressed this notion using the phrase “I AM,” part of the answer God gave Moses when he asked his name (“I AM THAT I AM” is the usual translation from Exodus 3:14). Before we are anything else, we are. I am a writer, a father, an expat American, and some other things. But before all these, I simply am. I exist in some way before any limitations or conditions of my existence come into play, even the fact that I have a body. “I-ness” is sheer identity. Someone suffering from amnesia may not know his name, but he still knows that he is. For Neville, human beings do suffer from a kind of reverse amnesia, remembering all sorts of things, except the fundamental fact that we are.22 Like other esoteric teachers, Neville wants to bring our awareness back to this inexplicable miracle.

The idea of God or the ultimate reality existing in some unconditioned, unmanifest way—even a way that paradoxically precludes existence—is part of many spiritual traditions, of both East
and West. Hinduism has the notion of neti-neti, which means that the ultimate reality is “neither this nor that.” Buddhism speaks of sunyata, the void or emptiness of true reality. Neoplatonism and Hermeticism speak of the One, the fundamental source of existence, which is beyond our rational comprehension. The Gnostics spoke of what they called the Pleroma, a formless source of all forms. In Kabbalah we hear of the Ain Soph, another name for the same idea. Early church fathers like Origen spoke of God as being without predicates or attributes. Even contemporary science speaks of a time paradoxically “before” the Big Bang, before existence that is—paradoxically because it is with the Big Bang that time, along with everything else, supposedly began, so prior to this there could presumably be no “before.”

What Neville told his readers and the audiences at his lectures was that our fundamental sense of existing, our rock-bottom “I AM,” is this unmanifest ultimate reality, a common insight in much spirituality. We are God, or rather we are fragments of the divine that have forgotten our identity, parts of the ultimate reality that suffer from an existential amnesia. What he also told his readers is that, as the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge believed, within us resides the same creative power that the unmanifested reality used to manifest creation.

How did creation come about? Through imagination. Why did God or whatever we want to call ultimate reality create it? Because he (she or it) imagined it and desired to make it real. Unlike Buddhism, which sees desire as the source of all suffering, Neville sees it as the source of all creation, the driving force behind reality.

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Philosophers like Arthur Schopenhauer, who was informed by Buddhist thought, saw reality as ultimately a mistake, the product of an ever craving “will” that, propelled from boredom to satiety and back again, perpetually creates a world that never satisfies it. For Schopenhauer, such an arrangement was deplorable and never
should have happened. With Aristotle, he agreed that under such conditions, it was best not to be born, and second best to die young.

More optimistic thinkers saw things differently. In his play *Back to Methuselah*, a work of what, borrowing from the philosopher Henri Bergson, he called “creative evolution,” George Bernard Shaw argued in favor of the world and the desire that creates it. Echoing Coleridge and Blake, Shaw wrote that “Imagination is the beginning of creation. You imagine what you desire; you will what you imagine; and at last you create what you will.”

We can say Shaw was a proponent of New Thought, although he didn’t call his philosophy that. In *Man and Superman* he argues against the Darwinian notion of evolution as a blind, mechanical process. With Bergson, Shaw saw it as the work of a purposeful “life force,” the élan vital, struggling against the resistance of dense matter in order to master it and infuse it with new freedom, as a sculptor masters stone. Shaw’s hero declares that “as long as I can conceive of something better than myself I cannot be easy unless I am striving to bring it into existence or clearing the way for it.” That sounds like self-improvement with a vengeance. “The artist’s work,” Shaw tells us, “is to show us ourselves as we really are. Our minds are nothing but this knowledge of ourselves; and he who adds a jot to such knowledge creates a new mind as surely as any woman creates new men.”

“New mind” is not the same as New Thought, but it is pretty close. Shaw’s remarks about art and creation bring us back to Neville. Reality, existence, the world, Neville tells us, is the reflection of God’s imagination. The same is true of ourselves. Our world is a reflection of our imagination. But as we are now, sunk in our amnesia, we are more like shards of the great cosmic mirror, reflecting only a tiny bit of our true reality. The world we see is a reflection of our shattered imagination, if I may extend the metaphor. If we could see the mirror whole, Neville argues, it would show a different picture. We would be able to reflect in this magic mirror any reality we chose.

The way to do this, Neville says, involves three steps, just as Norman Vincent Peale’s formula for “prayer power” does.
First we have to reach that bedrock awareness of our own existence, the “I AM” we share with the primal reality. Readers can go to Neville for the details, but this is done through a process of relaxation. Essentially it means stripping away the several layers of what we assume we are until we reach that level of ourselves that just is.  

Once there we need to work up an enthusiasm for whatever reality we want to create. As Israel Regardie says, this is where Neville’s experience as an actor and dancer comes in handy. A certain emotional intensity is required. We recall that our word enthusiasm comes from the ancient Greek enthousiasmos, which means “divinely inspired,” a state of ecstasy, in which a god enters into us. Creative, dramatic types like Neville find this easier to muster than less spontaneous characters. But as in all magic, the chaos kind or otherwise, this energy and excitement is essential. It is the fuel that powers the will. It is through this ecstasy that the magician invokes whatever god he or she wants to contact, and does so by becoming that god, temporarily at least. Friedrich Nietzsche, a reader of Schopenhauer until his inborn evolutionary thinking made him turn away from his mentor, said that “the great man is the play actor of his ideal.” The same is true of great magicians.

Having worked up this ecstasy, we must then focus it intently on our already being what we want to manifest. We need to imagine ourselves as what we want to bring about. As A. R. Orage, a follower of Gurdjieff’s, a contemporary of Shaw’s, and an early interpreter of Nietzsche, wrote, “Evolution is altogether an imaginative process. You become what you have been led to imagine yourself to be.” We do not, however, focus on specifics—in this he differs from Peale. If we are in need of money to pay the rent, we do not think of a specific amount. Rather we concentrate on the idea of “abundance” or “wealth” or some other general idea that would satisfy our need. We do this because it would not become a god to request $1,000 or a similar figure. That would be beneath her. And in any case you, as the god, do not “request” anything. You are abundance, plenty, wealth, good fortune, etc. From your state of unconditioned
awareness of being, you temporarily take on the predicates and attributes of the reality you want to manifest. So from simply “being” nothing in particular, you “become” what you desire. And as Neville believed, “if a desire is intense enough, and can be reinforced by sufficient feeling . . . it must necessarily manifest itself objectively.” Creation is inevitable. What is created is the question.

I should point out that what is essential with Neville, and with Peale, is that our desire reaches down into what for sake of convenience we can call the Unconscious Mind. This is not the same as the Freudian unconscious, although desires aplenty inhabit that part of our being, mostly unfulfilled ones. It is something more like how C. G. Jung, Freud’s onetime heir apparent, saw the unconscious. Jung’s Collective Unconscious is something more along the lines of the Gnostic Pleroma or the Hermetic One—at least when he wrote about it from a more “mystical,” rather than a racial, biological, or even neurological perspective. We must reach down into that unconscious Will that Schopenhauer saw as the root of all our problems. We do this not to inhibit it, but to give it a direction.

In one sense Schopenhauer was right. The unconscious Will is the source of our problems. This isn’t because it is motivated by desire, but because we allow it to be driven by random thoughts and vagrant desires. Desire itself is not bad, contrary to much spiritual wisdom. But what we desire matters deeply. The unconscious creative will is powerful, but it receives directions from us. If we want more fulfilled lives, we need to be more serious about what we want and what we tell the unconscious will to do about it. Neville’s approach is a notch above much other New Thought, but in essence this is what it is about.

HERE IT MIGHT be good to turn to the other “occult” occupation with which the new president of the United States seems to have an affinity. If Trump absorbed the doctrine of positive thinking from Norman Vincent Peale, chaos magick seems to have come to him
naturally. The odd thing is that these two forms of magic, which seem far apart, actually have much in common.

Like much New Thought, chaos magick is rooted in nineteenth-century occultism. We can place its start in the work of the not always reliable French occultist Éliphas Lévi. Born in Paris in 1810, his real name was Alphonse Louis Constant; when his interest turned to the Kabbalah, the ancient Jewish mystical tradition, he adopted Éliphas Lévi as a Hebrew transliteration of his name. It was not exactly correct and gave an early sign of the liberties Lévi took with a language he did not really know. Constant started his career studying for the priesthood; like many French esotericists, he mixed his occultism with sizable doses of Catholicism. Constant did not last long with the church; by most accounts his exit was due to an ineradicable interest in sex. Like Neville, Constant then took to the stage. He was also a talented artist and earned a crust providing illustrations for magazines and books.

Constant was drawn to the radical politics of the time; in Politics and the Occult I write of his account of the start of the revolution of 1848. He wrote socialist pamphlets, more passionate than persuasive, and was imprisoned for his tract The Gospel of Love. It was love itself, or the loss of it, that led him to the occult. Constant wrote for a leftish newspaper, and while scribbling tirades against the system, he was oblivious to the affair his young wife was having with his editor. When she left him, he was devastated, but a new passion came into his life.

Constant had become the disciple of the eccentric Polish thinker Jósef Maria Hoene-Wronski, whose ideas about the universe were so strange that he was forced to leave his post at the Institute of Marseille. Hoene-Wronski’s messianisme, his synthesis of philosophy, science, religion, and politics, impressed Constant, and led him to his idiosyncratic study of Kabbalah. This resulted in his first occult work, Dogme de la haute magie (Dogma of High Magic), which appeared in 1854. Its second part, Rituel de la haute magie (Ritual of High Magic), appeared in 1856. In 1896 the two appeared in English as Transcendental Magic, translated by the British
occultist A. E. Waite. Constant himself had been translated too, into the magician Éliphas Lévi.

Lévi promoted an idea embraced by Traditionalism, that of a primal revelation that informs all religions and is at the base of all occultism. He spoke of a “doctrine which is everywhere the same and everywhere concealed,” but which could be deciphered in the Hindu Vedas, in the Egyptian Sphinx, in alchemy, in the initiations of secret societies, and in much else. He is also responsible for popularizing the idea of the “astral light,” mentioned earlier when speaking of Mesmer’s “animal magnetism.”

What places Lévi at the fount of chaos magick is his championing of two faculties essential for any successful magic: imagination and will. The “astral light” was for Lévi another name for the imagination. One mastered this magical light through a discipline of the will. With Lévi magic shifted from a fastidious attention to detail—getting the demon’s name exactly right—to the power of the will to control the creative imagination. It was this more “artistic” approach to magic that influenced French symbolist poets like Baudelaire and Rimbaud and surrealists like André Breton.

But what truly places Lévi at the start of chaos magick is his inspired mistake about the Tarot and the Kabbalah. Lévi linked the twenty-two “paths” of the Kabbalistic Tree of Life, symbolized by the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet, with the twenty-two Tarot trumps, the “major arcana.” He also linked the four suits to the four letters of the Tetragrammaton, the unpronounceable name of God.

Most modern historians of the Tarot recognize that Lévi was wrong and that there is no connection between the Tarot and Kabbalah, or with ancient Egypt for that matter, another of his beliefs—hence his idea that the Tarot is the ancient Book of Thoth, the Egyptian god of magic. Academic students of Jewish mysticism point out that he is often woefully incorrect about the Kabbalah. But Lévi’s inspired mistake is at the heart of practically all the magic that followed him. If magic is about the imagination, then Lévi’s imagination was powerfully creative and, what’s more, it worked.
From the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, the most famous magical society of the nineteenth century, down to practicing magicians today, Lévi’s mistake has proved remarkably fruitful, as anyone who has done “pathworking,” a kind of Kabbalistic “inner journeying,” knows. It seems that in magic, “Is it right?” is less important than “Does it work?”

Aleister Crowley went a step further. In my book on Crowley I tell of how he performed an intricate magical procedure while on horseback in China. Crowley was gripped with a need to continue a magical ritual he had left uncompleted back in Britain. The necessary tools were back home. Crowley felt he had two choices. He could astral travel back to Scotland and perform the ritual there, in his astral body. Or he could visualize his magical temple and everything else he needed in his mind and perform the ritual there. Crowley decided on the latter and as he rocked in the saddle somewhere in Asia he did all that was necessary with what he had at hand—namely, his imagination. Crowley later developed a system of sex magick that substituted the ecstasy of sexual orgasm for the more laborious efforts of ceremony, a tactic employed by many chaos magicians today.

Another chaos magick pioneer was the artist-magician Austin Osman Spare. Spare was a contemporary of Crowley and an enfant terrible of the English artistic fin de siècle. He briefly belonged to one of Crowley’s magical societies, but soon lost interest in the Great Beast and went his own way. Spare went Crowley one further by devising a magical system entirely his own that did away with the usual magical implements. He had a strong dislike of ceremonial magic and ridiculed those, like Crowley, who still made use of it.

Spare developed a system of making sigils, magical symbols used for invoking powers, that relied more on his own creative instincts and insights than on any formal magical apparatus. He would write down a wish—a “realizable” and “achievable” one—on a scrap of paper, then cancel out any repeating letters. He then designed a sigil out of the remaining letters—what he called “the alphabet of
desire”—and then “charged” it with his imagination, often, like Crowley, using sex, not infrequently masturbation, as an excitant.

As Neville did, Spare believed the wish needed to reach deep down into the unconscious mind, which he believed was the source and executant of all magic. Spare spoke of reaching what he called the “Neither-Neither,” a variant of the Hindu neti-neti. This is what Neville called the “unconditioned awareness of being.” Spare practiced what he called “death postures” in order to enter the state of consciousness in between sleeping and waking. This is known as the hypnogogic state, a condition of consciousness thought to facilitate psychic experiences.31 “Unconditioned” is synonymous with “unformed,” which is a state of chaos; as Genesis 1:2 says, before creation, all was “formless and void,” what in Hebrew is called Tohu wah-bohu. One student of chaos magick writes, “chaos magick is the art of forming the unformed energies of creative chaos into a pattern leading to the outcome of the magician’s desire.”32 As with Neville, in chaos magick, desire is the fundamental motivation for “making things happen.”

Kenneth Grant, a onetime student of Crowley’s, brought Spare’s work to a new, wider audience and made his own contribution to the prehistory of chaos magick. As Lévi did with the Tarot, in The Magical Revival Grant fused a nonexistent connection between Crowley’s magick and the weird fiction of H. P. Lovecraft. Lovecraft was an avowed materialist who dismissed any kind of magic or occult reality, but the terrifying inhabitants of his Cthulhu Mythos have spawned more than one magical cult, with rituals and ceremonies designed to attract and propitiate these cosmic horrors. This is an example of how chaos magick uses culture—or memes—for its own purposes.

Chaos magick finds other predecessors in the “cut-ups” of the Beat writer William S. Burroughs and the artist Brion Gysin. These “literary” works, such as The Soft Machine and The Ticket That Exploded, mix Burroughs’s own words randomly with those culled from other writers, newspapers, magazines, and advertisements in order to undermine rational, logical thought and enter some liminal
“Neither-Neither” state. Burroughs was following in the footsteps of early twentieth-century anti-art movements like Dada, which owed their impact to their illogical, contradictory products. (Even the name Dada means nothing; it is a French term for “hobby horse.”) In the 1970s, the writer Robert Anton Wilson promoted a kind of “chaos philosophy” through his *Illuminatus!* trilogy—written with Bob Shea—a hilarious spoof on conspiracy theories which featured Eris, the Greek goddess of discord, known to the Romans as Discordia. RAW, as he was known to his readers, continued the joke in other books like *Cosmic Trigger*, which were influenced by the work of Aleister Crowley, Timothy Leary, and an assortment of other countercultural icons.

But the real start of chaos magick proper was in London in the 1970s.

As the historian of modern magic Dave Evans points out, the idea of a history of chaos magick is, aptly enough, oxymoronic, given that, like postmodernism, chaos magick affects an atemporal, ahistorical character, picking and choosing from the past, present, and, often enough, the future. And as with postmodernism, for chaos magick the idea of “truth” or “facts” is anathema. As Evans writes, “by their very nature Chaos magicians (or Chaotes) are fond of deception, playing with words and demolishing the nature of beliefs”—they were, it seems, way ahead of “post-truth.” With their penchant for pseudonyms and for referring, as Lovecraft did, to nonexistent literary sources, the information chaos magicians provide is at best “open to academic suspicion.” The histories of figures like Crowley, Madame Blavatsky, Gurdjieff, and even Neville are filled with tall tales and false trails, but chaos magicians seem to make a point of providing ample disinformation.

Most accounts place the appearance of chaos magick with a group of North London occultists known as the Stoke Newington Sorcerers circa 1976. Among these was Peter Carroll, whose book *Liber Null* is
the acknowledged first “how-to” work on chaos magick. “Null” means zero, and Julian Vayne, another chaos magician, calls chaos magick “empty handed.” Carroll was familiar with the work of Spare and was a contributor to New Equinox, an occult magazine, and he and its editor, Ray Sherwin, were both tired of the traditional magical scene. Most magic then was of the Crowley/Golden Dawn or pagan variety, concerned with achieving the “knowledge and conversation” of one’s “Holy Guardian Angel” or harmonizing with the powers of nature. Carroll and Sherwin wanted stronger stuff. They weren’t concerned with getting their pentacles correct or being at one with nature but with “making something happen,” that is with magick as real power. Sherwin himself wrote a tract called The Book of Results, which sounds like a New Thought title. Like pragmatism and positive thinking, chaos magick was interested in what works.

Something known as the Deptford Olympic Goat Roast, coinciding with the 1976 Montreal Olympics, seems to have been chaos magick’s “foundational” event. Carroll lived in Deptford in South London, an area associated with the early days of punk rock, and as might be expected the event included a spitted roasted goat, a punk music ensemble, and a fireworks display put on by some of the local anarchists. Chaos magick arose in the atmosphere of the Sex Pistols, whose debut release in November 1976, “Anarchy in the U.K.,” set the tone for what was to come. It’s not surprising that Chaotes earned a reputation as “punk magicians.” The idea behind punk was “do-it-yourself” and about creating as much havoc as possible, at least in the UK version. Chaos magick was not far behind. And just as Johnny Rotten sneered at earlier rock groups like the Beatles or Pink Floyd, chaos magicians blasphemed against their magical predecessors. As Carroll wrote, “Magic will not free itself of occultism until we have strangled the last astrologer with the guts of the last spiritual master.” “Shocking” statements like these earned chaoticians a reputation as magick’s bad boys.

Carroll formed a loosely knit collective called the Illuminates of Thanateros, known as the IOT, “Thanateros” being a portmanteau name made up of the Greek names for the gods of death (Thanatos)
and sex (*Eros*), linking the two in typical romantic fashion. An organized anarchical group is something of an oxymoron, but it was precisely this kind of logic that chaos magick wanted to overthrow.

Carroll was an efficient mover and shaker, and branches of the IOT sprouted in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and Australia, as well as in other parts of Britain. Chaos magick’s collective international character, based on earlier “street radical” groups like the 1960s Situationists, was part of its appeal. Chaotes around the world kept in touch in pre-internet days via the *Chaos International Magazine*. The incorporation of cultural icons that characterizes chaos magick was in place early on. A major influence came from the British fantasy writer Michael Moorcock, whose Eternal Champion series depicts an ongoing timeless battle between the forces of Order and Chaos. The symbol of Chaos in Moorcock’s books, an eight-pointed star, became a brand logo for the movement. One has to say it got around. Alexander Dugin, Vladimir Putin’s Traditionalist adviser, is a Chaote himself, and photographs of him on the net show Moorcock’s “chaos star” in the background.

Another novel that chaoticians found useful was William Gibson’s *Neuromancer*, an influential work of early cyberculture. A group in the UK midlands city Lincoln called itself the Lincoln Order of Neuromancers, or L.O.O.N. It brought together then cutting-edge technology with old-time magic—*neuromancer* echoes *necromancer*, one who speaks with the dead—but if critics called the members “loonies,” they wouldn’t have minded. Their method of banishing unwanted spirits is typical of chaos magick. Rather than perform the traditional ritual, they shouted, “Fuck off you bastards.” On a less crude note, many chaoticians employ a method known as “banishing with laughter.” This playful approach says much about chaos magick’s appeal.

Probably the most famous chaos organization was Thee Temple Ov Psychick Youth (TOPY), formed by the performance artist Genesis P-Orridge. P-Orridge was part of the “industrial” music group Throbbing Gristle, which spiced their performances with hard pornography and Nazi imagery. TOPY was a kind of cult-cum–fan
club and magical organization, geared toward exploring the “transgressive” side of magic. Among its antinomian influences were the Process Church of the Final Judgment—big in the 1960s—Burroughs, Gysin, Crowley, Anton LaVey of Church of Satan fame, the “love and death” guru Charles Manson, and chaos magick. P-Orridge is a proponent of “occulture,” a portmanteau expressing the blend of occultism and popular culture that has come to characterize chaos magick. The meme magick that helped put Trump—himself a popular culture icon—in the White House was, we can say, a work of occulture.

But enough history. How does it work?

THE FIRST THING to understand is that chaos magick is in tune with the times, not with the infinite. “While other magical systems promise stability, an anchor into fixed time and an ordered universe,” writes Phil Hine, “chaos magick moves with the fusion and fluidity of modern life.” Unlike Traditionalism, chaos magick accepts the modern and postmodern world. In fact, it positively revels in it. It embraces its sense of flux and transience and its plethora of images. It recognizes that “we live in a world that is rapidly changing . . . where the application of high technology and media saturation enables us to mix styles endlessly, where elements of the past, present, and possible futures are conjured up in most aspects of everyday life.” Rather than retreat from this, as some “spiritual” people do, chaoticians want to learn how to steer it toward their own ends, much like, we might say, a jujitsu master who uses his opponent’s force against him rather than his own.

As with Austin Osman Spare, chaos magick wants to sink a desire down into the deep unconscious, to the “Neither-Neither” or “unconditioned awareness of being” that Neville spoke of, our inner primal chaos. It wants to widen the borders of Achievable Reality. It does this by grasping the flow of events and “nudging” it toward what is wanted. The stability and constancy of “consensus reality,” what
we usually accept as normal, is really an illusion; as with postmodernism and much of New Thought, for chaos magick reality is what we make of it.

Chaos theory, which chaos magick draws on, speaks of a “sensitivity to initial conditions.” This is the source of the famous “butterfly effect,” which makes a butterfly’s wings flapping in China responsible for rain in Wyoming. Chaos magick works on a similar principle. It recognizes that the right tap at the right time in the right place can move a situation in the way it wants. Magick comes in because there is no obvious causal relation between the chaos magician’s tap and the outcome, just as there is no obvious link between a Chinese butterfly and a thunderstorm in Cheyenne. We can say that chaos magick works by inducing synchronicities, by somehow purposefully creating meaningful chance events.

If we accept the reality of synchronicity, of events in the inner and outer world happening in a synchronized manner, with no apparent causal relation but a very significant meaningful one, then we have no reason to deny a priori the possibility that chaos magick, and New Thought, can work. That they do work is a different question. If this is so, then the idea that a cartoon frog appropriated by a far-right group helped to put the positively thinking Donald J. Trump in the White House is not beyond the realm of possibility. And one has to say that is precisely the sort of thing—and through precisely such methods—that a chaos magician would like to bring about.

How one does this, according to Julian Vayne and Greg Humphries, is to “take one particular variable in a situation and magically ‘nudge’ it so that the situation develops in a way that turns to your advantage.” How does one “nudge” the situation? Through a ritual that puts one in touch with the primal creative chaos, Spare’s “Neither-Neither” or Neville’s “unconditioned awareness of being.” Here the chaos magician has a free, or rather empty, hand. There are no constraints on what he or she can use, and most chaos magick rituals are rather like recipes with many novel and unusual ingredients. And as with cooking, the proof of the pudding is in the
eating. Here it shares much of its “how to” character with New Thought.

A ritual is seen as any structured series of events designed to bring about a specific end. The paraphernalia are up for grabs. So there are instructions on how to make a talisman, an energized ritual object, out of a fridge magnet, or using a picture of the singer PJ Harvey as an image of the Hindu goddess Kali. There is even a ritual in which the part of Harpocrates, the Egyptian god of silence, is played by Harpo Marx, the mute Marx brother. Chaos magick, like punk rock, is “a return to basic principles.” It does this by stripping away all the excess baggage of tradition to reach the fundamentals. Anything that excites the imagination and stirs the magical will is fair game.

Like much New Thought, a magickal work starts with a “statement of intent,” what you want to do. As in positive thinking, it should be something one could achieve through “normal” means, only one’s idea of what constitutes “normality” is widened. The “art of making coincidence happen” begins with “changing our state of mind.” Through this we can “change the patterns of events in our lives” and so “control our destinies.”

If we think differently we will act differently and so will those around us. What is necessary is to break out of our “existing cognitive habits” and make the “creative leap beyond what is already known.” If we can free ourselves of the “tyranny of Consensus Reality” by creating an inner Temporary Autonomous Zone, we can achieve the “deep certainty that one’s sorcery will yield the desired result.” As with Neville and Norman Vincent Peale, chaos magick works by convincing yourself that it already has. It aims to “form an intent in one’s mind, and simply know that the purpose is already achieved by the formation of thought.”

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\text{\textbf{It seems that}} positive thinking, New Thought, and chaos magick all work on the power of belief. As William James knew, the will to
believe can accomplish remarkable things. But is it always a power for good? Let’s see.
CHAPTER THREE

Gurus and Demagogues

The creative power of belief is not limited to devotees of New Thought or to adherents of chaos magick. It is also not a power exclusively for good. The road to hell, we know, is paved with good intentions, and many a true believer has helped lay out its tarmac. Self-belief, we can say, is a necessary ingredient in any successful creative effort, any act of will. As William James saw, believing that you can do something is an indispensable aid in actually doing it. And it is a truism of practically all self-help and personal improvement philosophies that if you believe in yourself, other people will believe in you too. In some cases, they will be absolutely desperate to do so.

With this in mind, consider the following quotations:

Be assured, we too put faith in the first place and not cognition. One has to believe in a cause. Only faith creates a state.

We want to believe, we have to believe; mankind needs a credo. Faith moves mountains because it gives us the illusion that mountains do move. This illusion is perhaps the only real thing in life.¹

The first quotation comes from Adolf Hitler, who said this to his followers in 1927. The second comes from Benito Mussolini, who wrote it in 1912, and whom Hitler was consciously echoing.
Both Hitler and Mussolini wanted people to believe in them, and both found that this was precisely what many people wanted to do. They, it seemed, were made for each other. How Hitler and Mussolini got millions of people to believe in them was by believing in themselves and their respective causes, in Hitler’s case National Socialism and in Mussolini’s fascism. They did not win this belief through argument, persuasive reasoning, or a convincing display of facts. They didn’t force people to believe nor did they buy their compliance. Something much deeper and more immediate was at work. Something that is a part of the very fabric of our being.

Mussolini and Hitler gathered the masses behind them by fulfilling a need, a very powerful one, and also by meeting a desire. The need is to believe that our lives have some meaning and purpose beyond that of fulfilling our basic animal appetites. This is the essence of all religion. We need to feel there is some reason for our existence. The lack of this belief leads to nihilism, the belief in nothing, a condition that postmodernism seems to have saddled us with today. Man, we know, does not live by bread alone; if he did, any feasible plan for the equitable distribution of the planet’s resources would solve the world’s problems overnight. As George Orwell, a witness to the rise of populist demagogues in pre–World War II Europe, wrote, “Hitler . . . knows that human beings don’t only want comfort, safety, short working hours, hygiene, birth control and, in general, common sense; they also want struggle and self-sacrifice, not to mention drums, flags and loyalty parades.”

Orwell is critical of such romantic longings, but he knows that if they aren’t met in some legitimate way, they will be satisfied by other means. We all have a need to feel that our lives are part of something larger than ourselves—every devoted football fan or pop star follower knows that—and Hitler and Mussolini were adept at providing many people in Germany and Italy with the sense that they belonged to some larger reality beyond their everyday lives. This is why all attempts to explain Hitler’s success through economic, class, or some other “rational” reason are ultimately inadequate. They leave what we might call the “existential” element out of their reckoning, the
need for a meaning to life more significant than a full stomach. How we fulfill that need is a serious question. Authoritarianism, whether in the form of a demagogue or a guru, is a dubious means of doing so. But that this need exists is without doubt. And this leads to my second point.

The desire Hitler and Mussolini met in millions of people was a simple one: to be free of the burden of giving meaning to their lives themselves, of fulfilling their hunger for “struggle and self-sacrifice,” for some greater purpose than the satisfaction of their own appetites, through their own efforts. This is a temptation we all face at some time. As Laurence Rees writes in his analysis of Hitler’s “dark charisma,” “the desire to be led by a strong personality in a crisis, the craving for existence to have some kind of purpose, the quasi-worship of ‘heroes’ and ‘celebrities,’ the longing for salvation and redemption,” have much more to do with the success of populist dictators like Hitler and Mussolini, and, we might say, Trump, than any rational argument.

Something more, some sense of adventure, however misguided or misplaced, is necessary for human beings to feel that their life is not pointless. People need food, water, a place to live, and some kind of relationship to others. But what they need more than anything else is meaning, something Nietzsche and psychologists like Jung, Viktor Frankl, and Abraham Maslow said long ago. And if they cannot find that sense of meaning in themselves or create it through their own efforts, they will get it from someone else. As Colin Wilson writes in his study of “rogue messiahs,” such people “want to find someone in whom they can believe as unreservedly as saints believe in God, and on to whom they can transfer all their longings for a golden age and a life without moral responsibility.” But as Wilson points out, such a relationship more times than not proves disastrous, for both the disciples and the leader. The leader fulfills a need in the disciples, but the disciples grow more and more necessary to the leader. His dominance over them becomes a kind of psychological crutch. The need to lead and the need to follow often find themselves in a dysfunctional relationship.
There seems to be an inverse ratio between a people’s lack of self-belief and the enthusiasm with which they embrace a belief in someone else, provided he displays enough self-belief to fill the void within them. The examples above refer to how “charismatic leaders,” as the sociologist Max Weber called them, do precisely this. For Weber such figures are set apart from ordinary men and are often seen as superhuman or supernatural. Charisma is of Greek origin and means a “gift of grace.” According to the psychologist Anthony Storr, charismatic people have “a special magical quality of personality” that sets them apart from ordinary men and women. They immediately impress and influence others and attract followers easily. If they operate in the political world, their politics is less about shorter working hours or common sense, as Orwell noted, than about the “broader, almost spiritual goals of redemption and salvation,” what in Politics and the Occult I called “illuminated politics.” They do not represent a political party but a way of life. As Laurence Rees wrote of Hitler’s democratic election, “it was almost as if the German people were voting for an emotional state, one which was physically manifested in the charismatic person of Adolf Hitler.”

Charismatic political leaders often take on a quasi-religious character. And if we look at the careers of other charismatic individuals, we find many similarities between the two. Gurus and demagogues have much in common, and both share certain characteristics with magicians like Aleister Crowley, who was also a guru and who had clear political views, some of which exhibit a strange similarity with those making the news in our post-truth time.

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According to Anthony Storr in his study of gurus, Feet of Clay, both charismatic leaders and gurus feel they have a peculiar mission and that they possess the unique powers needed to fulfill it. Throughout his campaign, Trump insisted that he was the only one who could heal “crippled America,” in the way that a guru might tell a disciple
that it is only through him that he may reach enlightenment. Both gurus and demagogues tend to gather disciples or followers but not to make real friends. Both exercise an authority over others, a dominance they maintain by appearing to forgo all common human needs for intimacy, rest, relaxation, even food and drink and other “guilty pleasures,” the weaknesses that make the rest of us “only human” and set them apart as supermen.

“A leader can have no equals, no friends,” Mussolini said, “and he must give his confidence to no one.” Like Hitler and Trump, Mussolini claimed that he “did not need advice and rarely felt the need ever to discuss policy with anyone.” Gurus and demagogues rarely enjoy small talk, and tend to avoid one-to-one conversation. They feel most at home addressing a crowd, when they can have complete control over their self-image, the persona they present to the world and through which they can influence it. It is here also that their dominance can express itself most clearly. The leader becomes the voice of the crowd, his speech giving form to the dreams and longings of the people in it. But the crowd also serves as a kind of mirror for the leader; in it he sees his own self projected large and receives confirmation of his own self-belief. As Storr points out, many gurus exhibit narcissistic traits, and the same is true of charismatic leaders.

Charismatic leaders also tend to be unpredictable. This is true of Trump, but it was also a part of Hitler’s and Mussolini’s personalities, and is axiomatic for chaos magick. It is also true of the kind of gurus who exhibit “crazy wisdom.” Here the teacher performs unconventional acts, at least from the perspective of the nonbeliever, like the Zen master arbitrarily whacking his pupil on the head. The crazy guru’s motives, incomprehensible to the average person, are beyond scrutiny. Hitler, Mussolini, and Trump all said they favored their instincts over reason and came to decisions suddenly, with firm resolution. According to his biographer Denis Mack Smith, Mussolini liked to give the impression that he knew exactly where he was going, but he also liked to be seen as “incalculable, inscrutable, always taking others by surprise.” He set small store in coherence, again
much like Trump, and “knew the value of violent effects and contrasts and was enough of an illusionist to revel in the way they baffled the . . . audiences he met every day.”

Hitler too made sudden, snap decisions and kept his entire program “deliberately vague on detail.” National Socialism was a “movement,” in German a *Bewegung*, rather than a political party. This gave it a religious character. People did not join the movement; they were swept up by it. The philosopher Jean Gebser witnessed the rise of Nazism in Germany in the 1920s and concluded that the “group mind” emerging at the rallies was an expression of what he called the “magical structure of consciousness.” Jung believed the German people were overwhelmed by an archetype from the Collective Unconscious. And while there is no evidence that Hitler used “occult powers” to gain control of Germany—much literature on “occult Nazism” aside—as the historian Hans Thomas Hakl cautions, “to abandon the myth of the ‘occult roots of Nazism’ does not mean that the genesis of National Socialism is explicable in purely materialistic terms.”

Hitler’s vagueness allowed for flexible and multiple interpretations and let his followers fill the gaps with their own projections. It allowed for a hazy sense of broad, overall meanings that Hitler could allude to with an inflection of his voice or a gesture of his hands. It did not matter that, when read in the cold light of day, Hitler’s speeches lacked almost any concrete content. He was not presenting ideas but stimulating an emotion. The great leader is antinomian, that is, not held back by the rules and not responsible to anyone but himself. He is beyond good and evil, and logic too, or at least is the author of their definition. It is this presumed infallibility that gives him his power over a flock or a nation.

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**The Guru’s** or charismatic demagogue’s absolute certainty in his judgment radiates out to his followers and puts them in a kind of ecstatic trance, temporarily lifting them beyond themselves. Earlier
we saw that one of the aims of chaos magick was to achieve “visible results by which the magician demonstrates to himself that he can do things which, a short while ago, never entered his mind as possibilities.” Such is often the effect of a powerful guru or demagogue. A follower of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, one of the gurus Storr studied, said that his guru “seemed to radiate energy and to awaken possibilities in those who came into contact with him.”

Similarly Hitler’s followers gained great confidence and self-esteem through their belief in him. Through him their lives became special. They became special because Hitler gave his followers a powerful sense of a “release from the limitations of all conventional restraint.” This is not far removed from what New Thought and chaos magick aspire to, with their desire to re-create reality. If what is fundamental in chaos magick is to break out of our “existing cognitive habits” and make the “creative leap beyond what is already known,” and if, as positive thinking tells us, “attitudes are more important than facts,” then we must recognize that the magical effect of demagogues and gurus can also manage this.

In the case of Hitler and Mussolini, the “release from all conventional restraint” led to heinous acts of violence, in which neither chaos magicians, for all their punky rhetoric, nor positive thinkers are interested. But even with less dangerous characters, such as the magician Aleister Crowley, the release from “all conventional restraint” led, more times than not, to questionable, if not tragic consequences. “Do what thou wilt” can too easily turn into “Do what you like,” or even “Just Do It,” and such an ethos often spells disaster.

This power to entrance, to project a vision of the world and of himself, is part of the guru’s and demagogue’s appeal, as it is of the magician’s. It is his glamour, his allure, his ability to conjure realities, to provide a spectacle of power, to draw his magic cloak around himself and “make things happen.” Glamour, style, image, appearance, the confidence they instill in the magician and the belief they inspire in his audience are important parts of chaos magick. Hence its penchant for changing beliefs as one would a set of clothes.
Mussolini had a similar taste for self-dramatizing and for casting a self-image. In his early socialist days, he would appear “ill-dressed, dirty, and unshaven” when appearing in public as a “proletarian leader,” but change into “patent leather shoes and a silk-lapelled coat” in private. He reminded some who knew him of a “burlesque actor” and he admitted that he once wanted to be a famous writer or musician, much as a young Hitler had artistic aspirations. Mussolini soon found he lacked the talent to fulfill his dreams, but he was nevertheless determined to be a “great man.” As with Hitler, what might have found a safe home in some creative pursuit was let loose on the world with savage fury.

Hitler also early on knew the importance of keeping up appearances. He was one of the first to grasp the central importance of propaganda and to make use of the new media of radio and film, much as today’s meme magicians use the internet. He also knew that because of these media, propaganda must not be boring. It must entertain, something Hitler’s spin doctor, Joseph Goebbels, reminded him of repeatedly.

Trump has an advantage here over his charismatic predecessors in that he spent years entertaining millions of viewers through reality TV. The crossover between the “real” world and the televised one helps make the union of politics and entertainment more effective. All becomes spectacle, postmodern bread and circuses, that serves the familiar purpose of directing attention elsewhere. Radical thinkers like the Situationist Guy Debord and the postmodernist Jean Baudrillard have spoken of the “society of the spectacle,” built on the media-saturated public’s taste for endless distraction. Baudrillard even remarked on how the 1991 Gulf War “did not take place,” a comment on how its reality was overshadowed by its media representation, its “simulacrum.”

Street hustlers do the same thing. The confidence trickster gains his power over his victim by making them feel good about believing him. The audience mystified by the magician’s tricks wants to be fooled—does anyone ever get angry at Derren Brown for doing this?—just as the disciples of a guru want to jettison their critical minds
and accept the new reality he gives them. The appeal of all three is ultimately an emotional one.

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THE GURU AND DEMAGOGUE’s complete conviction in himself gives him this power. Through it he is able to reduce life’s complexity to a simple duality of good and evil, black and white, sacred and profane, winners and losers, “us” and “them.” Hitler, Mussolini, and Trump all share a very bleak vision of life, a dog-eat-dog outlook in which the strong prosper and the weak go under, an outlook that Crowley shared. A strict yes or no guides them. This simplicity is reassuring and accounts for the rise of fundamentalisms of different sorts, whether religious, social, or gender based, on either side of the political spectrum. It relieves followers of the painful business of navigating the difficult waters of life on their own and provides them with a map to chart their way through any situation. This is as true of convinced Marxists as it is of dogmatic Scientologists. All arguments to the contrary are undermined in advance by the simple knack of having all answers to all questions ready at hand. “Listening to Bhagwan, I gradually came to realize that he knows, he has the power, that if only I can say, ‘Yes, I leave everything to you,’ everything will be taken care of.”

Such a safety net for life sounds tempting. In the face of an increasingly complex world, who would not want the burden of having to decide what was right and what was wrong, what to think and what to do, even what to eat and what to wear, lifted from them? But this relief comes at a price. One must never question the guru.

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“GURUS,” ANTHONY STORR writes,” tend to be intolerant of any kind of criticism, believing that anything less than total agreement is equivalent to hostility.” As Storr points out, such an outlook is profoundly narcissistic and easily bleeds into paranoia; the illogic
that he who does not agree with me must be against me has led to many dark deeds. Such criticism could be met with meaningful silence, a torrent of abuse, rage, or excommunication. But the kind of complete loyalty and acceptance of infallibility common to some gurus is also required from demagogues. “There is something mystical, inexpressible, almost comprehensible about this one man. . . . For us the Führer is simply infallible in all matters political and all other issues concerning the national and social interest of the people,” said Hermann Göring, one of Hitler’s main apostles. And if for some reason someone was foolish enough to mutter a word of caution about the leader’s decision, he would be lucky if all he received was a blistering rebuke. With Hitler or Mussolini, he would most likely be shot.

Such instances suggest that many gurus and charismatic leaders are examples of what Colin Wilson calls the “Right Man,” a term he borrowed from the science-fiction writer A. E. van Vogt. A “Right Man”—or Right Woman, for the phenomenon isn’t limited to males—“will never, under any circumstances, admit that he is in the wrong.” If faced with evidence to the contrary, he will do everything to deny it, including resorting to violence, even murder. He responds to criticism in this way because he is “characterized by a deep, nagging sense of inferiority, a feeling that he is ultimately inadequate to meet the challenges of life.” Van Vogt first came upon the Right Man through studying divorce cases, in which the husband treated his wife and family as if he were a dictator—or the leader of a cult of which they were members. That, of course, was bad enough, but what happens when the Right Man is a dictator? “When Right Men also happen to possess real power,” Wilson writes, “like Hitler or Stalin or Mao Tse-tung, they are perfectly capable of ordering the deaths of millions of people. The slightest show of opposition . . . fills them with murderous rage; it seems self-evident that such people deserve to die.”

Gurus rarely have the power to express their “rightness” with such savagery, although some of the cases that Wilson examines in The Devil’s Party reach sufficient enormity. The sarin attack on Tokyo
commuters launched by the Aum Shinrikyo followers of Shoko Asahara in 1995, the forced deaths of hundreds of followers of the Reverend Jim Jones in 1978, and the murders committed by the self-proclaimed prophet of the Reformed Latter Day Saints Jeffrey Lundgren in 1989 can serve as gruesome examples. And as Storr points out, the followers of Rajneesh were not reluctant to resort to crime and violence when they seemed expedient. But even on a smaller scale, the abuse of power that often comes with the supreme self-conviction characteristic of gurus and demagogues makes itself known in a discouraging number of cases.

Storr and Wilson do not say that all gurus or spiritual leaders are abusive, just as not all political leaders are corrupt. It is the leader/follower dominance syndrome and its often disastrous consequences that interests them. What seems to happen is that the power gurus have over others—and, less often, over themselves—usually leads to their downfall. When used to actualize and overcome oneself—one’s limited egocentric viewpoint—power, meaning strength of will and character, is a good. When indulged in as a means of dominating others—always a risk—the will to power becomes something altogether different.

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POWER IS PERHAPS the greatest intoxicant because it is linked to the feeling of life itself. Nietzsche knew this, and it helped him to outgrow Schopenhauer’s pessimism. “What is good?” he asks in The Antichrist.

All that heightens the feeling of power, the will to power, power itself in man.

What is bad?—All that proceeds from weakness.
What is happiness?—The feeling that power increases—that a resistance is overcome.
Nietzsche’s rhetoric is powerful itself and is too often quoted out of context to support attitudes and beliefs he did not share; that is an occupational hazard of a good writer. Nietzsche is not advocating power over others, as he is often said to be, but power over oneself. Life, Nietzsche tells us, is that “which must overcome itself again and again.” His Übermensch—usually mistranslated as “superman”—is not a demigod or member of a master race lording it over the rest of us, but someone who has “overcome” himself, an “overman.” When Nietzsche’s prophet Zarathustra addresses the people in the marketplace and says, “Man is something that should be overcome,” he means exactly what Bernard Shaw meant in Man and Superman when he says that “as long as I can conceive of something better than myself I cannot be easy unless I am striving to bring it into existence or clearing the way for it.” The greatest sense of power comes from overcoming one’s own weaknesses and strengths, from growing beyond oneself. This is what creative evolution is about.

But Nietzsche the psychologist knows that often this will to power finds other more immediately stimulating channels and that it is all too easy to develop the habit of following those rather than developing the more legitimate means of heightening our sense of power, that is of growth. Indeed, one sign of self-mastery is that one outgrows the temptation to get a quick, cheap thrill at the expense of one’s development. But this is a trap that many gurus and demagogues enter, some unaware, others quite willingly.

As Colin Wilson discovered, one of the avenues for this is sex. Both Jim Jones and David Koresh—leader of the Branch Davidian sect involved in the Waco tragedy of 1993—demanded and received sexual liberties among their flock that rivaled or exceeded those of any despotic sultan. Both exhibited characteristic Right Man traits and both used sexual dominance over their followers as a means of shoring up their own perpetually threatened sense of superiority. In terms of the psychologist Abraham Maslow’s “hierarchy of needs,”
characters like Jones and Koresh, and other less murderous gurus, are stuck at the “self-esteem” level. Their natural dominance places them over their followers, but their constant need to bolster their sense of self-worth compels them to find more and more ways to exert their authority. In the small world of a cult, in which they lived like dictators, their every whim was quickly gratified; they were free from “the limitations of all conventional restraint” and quickly deteriorated, with horrific consequences. Maslow’s next level, that of “self-actualization,” in which the approval of others is no longer needed or desired, escaped them. Their will to power over others was an addiction that eventually destroyed them.

Other instances of a guru’s use of sex as a sign of dominance may manifest less crudely or dangerously. In 1991 the Traditionalist philosopher and spiritual teacher Frithjof Schuon, most known for his book *The Transcendent Unity of Religions*, was indicted by an Indiana grand jury for child molestation. Although the case was subsequently dropped, controversy remains over what exactly took place at the “primordial gatherings” where the alleged offense supposedly happened. These gatherings were special ceremonies in which the eighty-four-year-old Swiss Schuon sat naked, or practically so, in the middle of a circle of naked or scantily clad dancing women followers, among whom were some underage girls. Although no sexual acts took place between Schuon and the girls, they were said to come into close contact with his genitals. At different times during these gatherings Schuon is said to have worn a Native American warbonnet, a horned headdress, or a turban, and they were “primordial” in the sense of entering that space of transcendent being that Traditionalists believe is the source of all revelation.

At the time of the gatherings, Schuon had come to see himself as, if not divine, then not far from it, a belief he shared with Rajneesh, who often dispensed gifts of his hair or nail parings, considered sacred, to his devotees. According to the historian of Traditionalism Mark Sedgwick, Schuon had moved away from his original adherence to Sufism—something he had shared with René Guénon—and had become obsessed with creating a “form of
universalism that placed increasing emphasis on Schuon himself.”
He was convinced that he was “the human instrument for the
manifestation of the Religio Perennis at the end of time,” a final
religion bringing the different scattered strands of revelation
together. Animals were said to recognize his divinity, an insight
they apparently shared with the archbishop of Strasbourg. Those
who did not were said to be “frozen in their tracks.”
He died in 1998.

Schuon’s supporters were quick to come to his defense, arguing
that his interest in nudity and his appreciation of the female body
were elements in a profound spirituality. Eyebrows may rise at the
image of a naked octogenarian guru amid a bevy of devoted naked
beauties, but Schuon’s interest in “sacred nudity” went back many
years and involved the Virgin Mary. In 1965, on a ship heading
across the Mediterranean to Morocco, Schuon was depressed at his
lack of spiritual progress; the asthma he suffered from did not make
things better. It was then that the Virgin Mary came to him, and he
felt “the heavenly comfort that gushed from the essential
feminine.”
To get closer to this, Schuon believed he needed to be
naked, as the baby Jesus was. From then on, Schuon went unclothed
as often as possible.

Not long after this he saw a statuette of the Virgin in a store
window and was compelled to buy it. In 1966, he had another vision.
The statuette began to “quiver and stir slightly,” and the Virgin
appeared to him, naked. From then on he believed he had been given
a “universal mission” and enjoyed a special relationship with the
Virgin and God. Part of this special relationship included paintings
he made of the Virgin in which she is naked with her genitals in full
view. After this Schuon believed that “everything he did had a sacral
character.” A further vision in 1973 filled him with “the
overwhelming consciousness that I am not as other men.”

In one sense this was clearly true. Like other gurus, Schuon took
more than one wife. One was his wife on the “horizontal” plane, the
sort most other men have. The other three—he had four in all—were
what he called “vertical” wives, with whom he had a relationship of a
purely spiritual nature. But Schuon’s conviction that he was “not as other men” and was the “human instrument” or avatar of a new universal religion was so powerful that it convinced the members of his Bloomington, Indiana, community—some would say cult—that they were in the presence of a spiritual prophet of unique character. His wives and the other members of his spiritual community, the Maryamiyya, whose devotees included the composer John Tavener—although he participated from afar in England—were expected to revere Schuon.49

Someone less convinced was a boyfriend of one of Schuon’s vertical wives, who when told that their relationship must end, spoke to the authorities about the “primordial gatherings.” It is unclear exactly why the case was dropped or how much influence Schuon’s followers brought to bear in this. In the end, the boyfriend came to feel that the primordial gatherings were not so much about sex in itself as about “serving the power needs of Schuon.”41

Sometimes sex isn’t the way in which a guru’s power is expressed. This seems to have been the case with the one guru I met and had some contact with. In 1986, in Lucknow, India, Andrew Cohen, then thirty-one, met the guru H. W. L. Poonja. Cohen had been seeking spiritual enlightenment for some time and he was in luck. Practically as soon as they met, Poonja declared that Cohen was enlightened. His initiation avoided the usual years of effort. Poonja taught that to achieve enlightenment, one must simply realize that one already had it. Cohen considered this, and when Poonja said that he was now his successor, he agreed.

Cohen’s spiritual quest, which began with an experience of “cosmic consciousness” at sixteen, had ended. Poonja, too, felt relieved; he said he had been “waiting for Andrew all his life,” rather as Abdullah had been waiting for Neville. From then until 2013, Cohen taught a system of spiritual development he called “evolutionary enlightenment.”
Over twenty-seven years Cohen created a successful international following and organization, known as EnlightenNext, whose philosophy combined Eastern teachings with the evolutionary ideas of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Sri Aurobindo, Ken Wilber, and others. It differed from other spiritual teachings anchored in Advaita, or nondualism, by seeing “enlightenment” as an evolutionary process rather than a once-and-for-all event. Over the years Cohen garnered endorsements from prestigious names in the “mind, body, spirit” milieu, like Deepak Chopra, Jean Houston, Michael Murphy—one of the founders of the Esalen Institute—and Barbara Marx Hubbard, and he was keen to bring others into the fold.\footnote{42}

But the philosophy of “evolutionary enlightenment” was only part of Cohen’s attraction. What clinched it for devotees was Andrew himself. Like Rajneesh he was said to have a special quality, a unique radiance of deeper consciousness which he was able to transmit to others. Proximity to Cohen was a desired state. Those in his immediate surroundings shared in his spiritual glow.

At least this was what some of his followers told me on New Year’s Eve 2010, at the impressive EnlightenNext headquarters in Islington, a trendy up-market area of North London. I had contributed a few articles to Cohen’s magazine, \textit{What Is Enlightenment?}, later called \textit{EnlightenNext}, and toward the end of 2010 was asked if I would take part in a “trialogue” on New Year’s Eve with Andrew and the writer on mysticism Mike King.\footnote{43} The topic was time and how our consciousness now relates to the future.

It turned out to be a pleasant evening. I met some very interesting and intelligent people, and my conversation with Cohen was friendly and engaging. But I did not find him as impressive a spiritual teacher as many of his devotees had. I had no contact with him after this, and in 2011 \textit{EnlightenNext} stopped publishing.

It wasn’t until a few years later that I saw articles on the internet asking “Whatever happened to Andrew Cohen?” In 2013 Cohen closed up shop on the EnlightenNext movement, off-loaded property and other assets, and stepped down from his guruship. This was precipitated by allegations of physical and psychological abuse,
financial intimidation, and dubious cultish behavior made by people who were part of the EnlightenNext ashram Cohen had set up in Lenox, Massachusetts. In the face of these allegations, in a public apology Cohen relinquished his twenty-seven-year reign as a “perfectly liberated spiritual master.”

It had taken some time for Cohen to abdicate. Reports of abuse and spiritual domination had been gathering for years. Even Cohen’s mother, who had given up her life to be with him in India in the early years, had turned against him. In her book *The Mother of God*, Luna Tarlo said that she had gone from seeing her son as Buddha or Christ to thinking him another Jim Jones or Hitler. She told Jill Neimark of *Psychology Today* that “my son has become a monster to me,” and that “the sweetest, sensitive kid had changed into an unrecognizable tyrant,” although she later revised her opinion of him.

There was an assortment of accusations against Cohen. He had tried to fend these off, and a loyal band of followers had done what they could, but the dike had burst and the flood came. He had taken quite a fall. Only a year before his abdication he was ranked number 28 on the *Mind, Body, Spirit* magazine’s top 100 most spiritual people of 2012. Now his reputation was shredded. Years earlier he had denounced his erstwhile mentor Poonja for not meeting the standards of flawless behavior that he believed were required of a guru. Now Cohen was hoist by his own petard.

The list of abuses was depressingly familiar. They included accusations of physical violence, hitting, slapping, and punching, either by Cohen himself or at his command. Some students were ordered to attack others, or were restrained while Cohen hit them. One woman was forced to enter a freezing lake and had to be treated for hypothermia. One student had paint poured over his head, another was forced to visit prostitutes and relate the experience in detail to his guru. Students were kept in isolation and had their passports, credit cards, or car keys withheld. Those trying to escape had to do so “in the dead of night.” Those caught were subject to harassment, public embarrassment, or made to stay in an unused sauna that had been set up as a kind of “behavioral modification”
cell. The walls were decorated with letters from students splattered with red paint, to symbolize the guru’s blood, and with drawings of ex-students falling off cliffs or meeting other sad ends.

Sex was not a means of abuse, although the control of it by Cohen apparently was. Marriages were broken up, children separated from their parents, and some couples were forbidden to have children, with reports of enforced tubal ligations and vasectomies. Heavy fines were imposed for the infringements of rules that changed without notice. Monetary gifts were accepted as penance for wrongs. There were also reports that Cohen used the organization’s money for his own purposes. Students were coerced into making their own funds available for Cohen’s use.

The list goes on and makes for sad reading. One rationale for Cohen’s actions was that everything was part of the “crazy wisdom” approach, and that Cohen was doing it for the students’ own good. It helped to break down their ego and get them beyond themselves, a version of William James’s “bullying treatment.” Bullying may be helpful in some situations—Gurdjieff was notorious for making life difficult for his students—but Cohen’s behavior suggests a descent into a dominance/submission cesspool. This went with the usual requirement that no one question his actions.

As one former student wrote, “disagreeing with or challenging Andrew about anything was simply not permitted, and would be met with public humiliation and scorn. . . .” Letters addressed to Cohen had to begin “Dear Lord.” Colin Wilson wrote of the Right Man that “colleagues of such people were totally unaware of this paranoid behavior; they found him sociable and normal, a ‘nice guy.’ It was only in the privacy of his family, where he felt he had total control, that he would behave like some eastern potentate.” Gurus are the heads of very extended families, but they often seem to act like the little Caesars of the home.
The kind of behavior Cohen seems to have exhibited is unquestionably unacceptable, but one has to ask why so many of his followers put up with it for so long. In some cases the abuse went on for years. Why do so many disciples “seem to enjoy being bullied and batted upon”? Why do so many accept the lessons of “crazy wisdom”? We might say that people attracted to spirituality, esotericism, “cosmic consciousness,” New Thought, or “eastern wisdom” are weak-minded, naïve fools to begin with, so it’s not surprising that they put up with abuse any rational person would immediately reject. But what happens when the guru teaches an extreme rationalism herself?

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Ayn Rand may not seem to fit the model of a guru, but accounts from her close followers suggest that she was the head of a cult. Rand came to fame in 1943 with the publication of her novel *The Fountainhead*. It tells the story of Howard Roark, an architect with a mind of his own who refuses to compromise or to pander to public taste, preferring independence and integrity to popular success. Unusual for American fiction, it was a novel of ideas, and Rand’s fast-paced narrative, filled with striking characters, brought to life questions about the individual’s relation to society, about the clash of creativity and conformism, and about the conflict between freedom and security. It was filmed in 1949 with Gary Cooper in the lead role. *The Fountainhead* received strong praise and became a bestseller. But it was Rand’s next novel, her 1957 mammoth follow-up *Atlas Shrugged*, that turned her readership into a huge cult following. Critics panned it but it became a popular success, selling millions of copies, and laid the foundation for her philosophy of life, what became known as Objectivism. This was based on three central themes: reason, individualism, and capitalism, or as we might say, Aristotle meets Andrew Carnegie.

*Atlas Shrugged* takes place in America in an unspecified dystopian future when excessive regulations and government control...
lead many “captains of industry” to abandon their factories and disappear from public view. As the world’s economy steadily shrinks and conditions worsen, it gradually becomes clear that the world’s men of genius and invention are “on strike,” refusing to contribute to a society that hinders them through collectivism and state interference. Where in *The Fountainhead* one man of integrity bucked the system, here a whole cadre of them do it. They are led by John Galt, a visionary determined to bring the system down and initiate a new world order.

Rand’s pro-capitalist views were rooted in her early years in Russia. She was born Alisa Zinov’yevna Rosenbaum in St. Petersburg in 1905 to a Russian-Jewish family; she later took Ayn Rand as her pen name. Her father was a successful pharmacist and good businessman who eventually owned his own pharmacy. The bourgeois life Rand enjoyed as a young girl came to an end with the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. Her father’s business was commandeered and the family home lost. Rand was “purged” from the school she was attending. In 1926 she got a visa to visit relatives in the United States. She never returned.

Rand’s experience of life under Vladimir Lenin fueled an almost religious devotion to free-market capitalism and a vehement rejection of societies that subjugate the individual to the mass. The symbol uniting conspirators in John Galt’s new order is the dollar sign. Rand believed that reason was the sole means of securing knowledge and she rejected religion and mysticism; she preferred Aristotle over Plato. After years working in Hollywood, Rand’s breakthrough came with *The Fountainhead*. After *Atlas Shrugged* she abandoned fiction and devoted herself to spelling out the details of her philosophy of Objectivism. She died in 1982.

Objectivism denies the reality that New Thought and chaos magick embrace, of a world and mind somehow intermixed. Reality exists independently of consciousness. We know it through reason and the senses and our aim in life is the pursuit of happiness through rational self-interest. Rand’s outspoken rejection of altruism—by which the unproductive many profit by the productive few—makes her anathema to socially minded people. Her forthright advocacy of
laissez-faire capitalism, the free market, and the rights of the individual makes her an avatar of libertarianism.

Her influence has been far-reaching. Devotees include the late Apple wizard Steve Jobs, former chairman of the Federal Reserve Alan Greenspan, and the cocreator of Spider-Man and Doctor Strange, Steve Ditko. Other close Rand readers included Aleister Crowley and Donald Trump. Both Trump and Crowley identified with Howard Roark, the hero of *The Fountainhead*. Of the two, Trump is a closer match, given that Roark, a great builder, has orange hair. Trump even proposed a reality-TV show, *The Tower*, about his own life, inspired by *The Fountainhead*. Yet Crowley’s libertarian philosophy, spelled out in his *Liber Oz*—written during World War I while he was living in New York writing pro-German propaganda—strikes a Randian note. “Man has the right to live by his own law,” Crowley wrote. He has the right to work, play, and love as he will, and he has the right “to kill those who thwart these rights.”

Ironically, following *The Fountainhead*, a group of Objectivist true believers known as the Collective gathered around Rand. Alan Greenspan was one of them. Celebrating reason, individualism, and rational self-interest, according to Jeff Walker in *The Ayn Rand Cult*, much of what the Collective got up to was mimicking Rand as much as possible. This was based on the belief that Rand, like other gurus, was the exemplar par excellence of human virtue. As one ex-follower said, “Ayn was never wrong . . . about anything having to do with any aspect of thought or of dealing with human beings.” This meant that “Ayn Rand is the greatest person that has ever lived or ever shall live.” For a guru promoting rationalism, this seems a rather unreasonable belief.

Rand’s reaction to any criticism suggests that she was a Right Woman. Those around her saw “how very quickly Rand could whip out the iron fist behind the velvet glove and just tear a person to ribbons.” “She’d become incendiary over some small thing,” another
ex-follower said. As in the Stalin show trials of the 1930s, members were made to accept guilt for nonexistent crimes, or were excommunicated and turned into “nonpeople.” It’s doubtful Rand caught the irony. She had little sense of humor and didn’t like surprises, a characteristic she shared with Hitler and Mussolini.

According to Nathaniel Branden, Rand’s lover and onetime second in command, the Collective “were a group organized around a charismatic leader. Our members judged one another’s character chiefly on our loyalty to that leader and to her ideas.” Members were expected to like the things Rand liked and to live as she lived. Many smoked because she did, even using cigarette holders as she did. Many followed her tastes in literature. This ran from Victor Hugo to Mickey Spillane, author of hard-boiled detective fiction featuring the tough guy Mike Hammer. Spillane’s work, like *I, the Jury*, depicts a brutal world of black-and-white good or evil. Spillane’s Manichean vision appealed to Rand’s Aristotelian either/or logic, something that Steve Ditko portrayed in his underground comic character Mr. A. For Aristotle something is either A or not-A; there are no in-betweens, which suggests that Austin Osman Spare would not have taken to Rand. For Ditko, Spillane, and Rand, something is either good or it is not. Another Ditko creation, The Question, has, like Howard Roark, orange hair.

This black-or-white approach colored life around Rand. As Barbara Branden, another intimate, wrote, “innumerable times her shocked friends witnessed her verbal flailing of those she felt had failed her.” One of those who failed her was Nathaniel, who having left Barbara for Rand—a much older woman—then left Rand for a younger woman. The scandal led to the Brandens’ excommunication and a crisis in Objectivism, with Nathaniel labeled an apostate and his name stricken from the official Objectivist record. He went on to become a successful motivational guru in his own right, specializing in self-esteem.

But “the dogmatic absolutism of her certainty” and the “blind conviction of her own rectitude” were not limited to the inner circle of the Collective. Rand’s fury was most disturbing at the public
lectures that Branden and others had arranged, in order to bring the Objectivist word to a wider audience. This was especially true when someone asked a question that Rand found irrelevant. “If she did not believe the question to be valid and intelligent,” Barbara Branden wrote, “she was scathing in her denunciation.” She justified her anger rationally, as an expression of “moral indignation,” “lashing out furiously at the hapless questioner.” Rand’s tirades cowed her listeners and led to an absence of questions. Her impatience with her audiences’ stupidity convinced her to give up lecturing.

As with other gurus, the loyalty she demanded from her followers gradually became a prison, both for Rand and for the Collective. “Her need to know that they would never betray her,” Barbara Branden wrote, “became a demand impossible to meet.” Her “moral condemnation of any deviation from the principles of Objectivism”—which, as with other gurus, led Rand to decide who should marry whom, among other things—led to a feeling that “everyone in our group was always on trial.” But it also left Rand trapped, a fate not uncommon with gurus. She had little social contact outside the Collective and only heard from them what they thought she wanted to hear. Her “need to know . . . that they would remain unfailingly and unswervingly the consistent denizens of her world”—as if they were characters in her novels—led to an environment in which people perpetually walked on eggshells while not mentioning the emperor’s new clothes.

When Nathaniel Branden broke off his long affair with Rand, her vituperation reached new heights. She even insisted that her literary agents drop Branden, whom they also represented, and who had become something of a success himself. They did not, but the Collective suffered a loyalty purge that spared no one and set longtime friends, even husbands and wives, against each other. Rank-and-file Objectivists were left disoriented, now having to see Branden, hitherto second only to Rand herself, as a nonperson.

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Looking at these various characters, where does Trump fit in? Is he a guru, a demagogue, or both? Much that has been written about Trump suggests that he is a Right Man. He is not known to admit to being wrong and has said that he never apologizes. As he told the talk show host Jimmy Fallon, “I will apologize in the distant future if I am ever wrong.” His reaction to criticism is generally aggressive. As a colleague remarked, “Trump’s style was to lash out when things weren’t going well.” Much of his ire is directed at the press. In the 1980s, Spy magazine took aim at Trump and put him in their pillory several times, calling him among other things one of the “Most Embarrassing New Yorkers.” Their worst insult was that he was a “short-fingered vulgarian.” When Trump’s The Art of the Deal appeared, he sent Spy a copy, with his fingers circled in gold on the cover. Inside was a note: “If you hit me, I will hit you back a hundred times harder,” a philosophy he learned from his lawyer and role model Roy Cohn. Cohn himself had cut his teeth in the 1950s as a protégé of Senator Joseph McCarthy during the Communist conspiracy paranoia that gripped America then.

This is a common theme with Trump: he knows how to hold a grudge. This came out during a series of motivational lectures he gave at seminars hosted by the self-help guru Anthony Robbins. He told the crowd that paranoia was crucial to success. “You have to realize that people are very vicious,” he said. “When a person screws you, screw them back fifteen times harder.”

It was advice he took himself. When Fortune magazine’s assessment of Trump’s wealth disagreed with his own, he inundated their office with dozens of telephone complaints. When New York Magazine criticized one of his buildings, he wrote to the critic, calling him a loser and bad dresser, an insult he used on more than one occasion. A New York Times columnist received a copy of her criticism with her face circled and annotated “The Face of a Dog,” a rebuke that would have pleased Crowley. When the Daily News ran a story about Trump cutting ahead of the line at an Aspen ski lift, Trump said whoever told them was a “motherfucking liar” and that he would “beat the fucking shit out of” him.
Journalists were not the only ones to witness Trump’s wrath. Colleagues were on the receiving end too, and were often humiliated in public because of some perceived fault, much as Ayn Rand did with backsliding Collectivists. When he fired his first wife, Ivana, from running one of his casinos, he added to the insult by berating her before the staff for crying. When a contractor told him they’d be behind schedule on some building, Trump kicked a chair across the room. During divorce proceedings with Ivana, Trump was so outraged at a proposed settlement that he told the judge he was “full of shit” and stormed out.

Trump’s “Rightness” came out in his treatment of his ex-wives. He forced Marla Maples to quash a book she had written about their relationship and prevented Ivana from giving any “revealing” interviews. Like many who want to create reality, Trump needs to control the story, and he is determined to “break” those who don’t bend to his will. “My general attitude, all my life,” he says, “has been to fight back hard.”

His TENDENCY TO rage started early. He was known as a bully in school and had little regard for others. On one occasion, builder and bully appeared together. Ignoring his protestations, Trump once glued his younger brother’s building blocks together, because he liked what he had made with them. As he liked to say years later, he built to last. Apropos of this, we might mention that with Hitler, Mussolini, and Stalin, Trump seems to revel in gigantomania, “the creation of abnormally large works,” something associated with totalitarian societies. Trump, we know, likes to think big, and so did Hitler, who told his architect Albert Speer that he would erect buildings for him that had not been made for millennia. Trump once said that what he created was the closest thing in modern times to anything like the palace of Versailles. Trump Tower, symbol of his success, has an almost religious significance for him. “Through some blend of design, materials, location, promotion, luck and timing,
Trump Tower took on a mystical aura.” Walking through the atrium, he said, “is a transporting experience.” Look up, look up,” he says in Crippled America, “and you’ll see the Trump building rising skyward. I’ve done things nobody else has done!”

Like most charismatic leaders, Trump the showman prefers addressing crowds to individuals and he has no talent for small talk. He is at his best before an audience where his talent for creating reality or, as he calls it, “truthful hyperbole,” can shine. This came through during his years promoting pro wrestling, itself a very profitable kind of unreality. As one of his co-promoters said, “he knew how to read a crowd and manipulate them.” Yet like other demagogues and gurus, Trump’s love of an audience and his effect on them—his obsessions with television ratings is well known—leaves him stuck at Maslow’s “self-esteem” level, perpetually needing the esteem of others. At the end of Crippled America, his plan for making America great again, where most authors have a paragraph about themselves, Trump has fourteen pages. In them, like a tyrant of old, he trumpets his many accomplishments. One can’t help but wonder: Is he trying to convince others that “there’s nobody like me,” or himself?

LIKE CHAOS MAGICIANS and postmodernists, Trump is playful with reality, a characteristic that others label more straightforwardly as “bullshitting.” As his biographer Wayne Barrett wrote, Trump “was born with bullshit capacities beyond what you and I could possibly imagine.”

This has even been confirmed academically. The Princeton University professor of moral philosophy Harry G. Frankfurt is a bullshit expert, having written On Bullshit, a philosophical analysis of the part it plays in modern life. In Time magazine, Frankfurt wrote that Trump’s eyebrow-raising tweets and other public statements, which are “neither well-informed nor especially intelligent,” are not examples of his lying but of his bullshitting. The difference between a
liar and a bullshitter, Frankfurt writes, is that “the liar asserts something which he himself believes to be false,” and thereby “misrepresents what he takes to be the truth.” The bullshitter “is not constrained by any consideration of what may or may not be true.” He is indifferent to that. “His goal is not to report facts” but to “shape the beliefs and attitudes of his listeners in a certain way.” Where the liar knows the truth and respects it—he does not want to get caught in his lie—the bullshitter couldn’t care less about it. He isn’t interested in the truth, which for him is in the eye of the beholder, as beauty was for Keats. He is interested in the effect his bullshit has on his audience. In other words, like positive thinking and chaos magick, in what works.

If we remember Norman Vincent Peale’s belief that “attitudes are more important than facts,” and chaos magick’s aim to escape our existing “cognitive habits”—not to mention Hitler’s power to release his followers from the “limitations of all conventional restraint”—we can, I think, see a connection between Trump’s “bullshit” and much of what we have been considering so far. If we bring in postmodernism’s rejection of any notion of an “objective” truth—all truth for it being strictly relative—we can see why Trump is the “post-truth alternate fact” patron saint par excellence. For chaos magick and postmodernism, whether something is true or false simply no longer matters. Truth or falsehood are beliefs which we can take on or put off as need be. This is why confronting Trump or his followers with proof of his mistakes, inaccuracies, and downright lies has so far had little effect. Pointing out that Trump is bullshitting makes no difference. He knows he is. He is doing it on purpose and has done so throughout his career. For him it is “truthful hyperbole,” what he calls “an innocent form of exaggeration—and a very effective form of promotion.”

Sometimes Trump’s hyperboles slide into magic, or at least illusion, or, as chaos magick has it, “glamour,” a show. When the board of directors of Holiday Inn asked to see what work was being done on a project that had stalled, Trump arranged for his construction team to pretend to work, with a digger clawing up tons
of earth and dumping it on the other side of the site. The board saw what they wanted to see and were duly impressed; Trump got their approval. Like all good illusionists, confidence tricksters, and demagogues, Trump knows how to read his audience. It is a trait indispensable for his success and gave him a leg up on his competition. “My leverage,” he writes, “came from confirming an impression they were already predisposed to believe,” something demagogues make much use of. Hitler, Mussolini, and other charismatic leaders were successful because they convinced their listeners that what they already felt about the state of things was right; they only confirmed this. Illusionists do much the same.

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It may be difficult to see Trump as a guru, yet his many self-help books aim at showing readers how they too can be winners like Trump. His philosophy of success is not that far distant from advice one can find in other positive thinking tracts of the “prosperity gospel” stamp. Fundamental is a clear idea of what you want and persistence in pursuing it. “One of the keys to thinking big,” he tells his readers, is “total focus.” He calls it “controlled neurosis,” a quality he found in other successful men. “They’re obsessive, driven, single-minded . . . almost maniacal,” but it all goes into the work. It is “great when it comes to getting what you want.” It is also important to present a powerful image, to conjure a “glamour” of success. “People want to believe that something is the biggest and the greatest and the most spectacular,” and Trump’s job is to tell them it is. They will do the rest. He conveys this message by surrounding himself with symbols of the fantasy life he is selling.

In doing this he has had some help from two personalities or identities that at different times in his career Trump has adopted. Posing as “John Baron” or “John Mills,” Trump would call gossip columnists and society journalists, telling them about the beautiful women who were dying to sleep with Trump, or had slept with him, or whom he could get into bed if he wanted to. These ranged from
Madonna to Princess Diana, and the stories were invariably untrue. Aleister Crowley adopted different identities when the mood struck him—and, like Trump, did his best to keep his name in the newspapers—and chaos magick asserts that one’s identity is malleable, that one should “reinvent” oneself often, play different roles.\textsuperscript{89} We should pretend to be someone else, to envision a “magical self” possessing all the qualities that we desire, something that some New Thought advocates also suggest.\textsuperscript{90} Chaos magick also promotes the idea of using “shock tactics,” saying something “outrageous” in order to “enhance personal power,” something that, as with much else about chaos magick, seems to come to Trump naturally. One also wonders about the odd hand gestures he makes when addressing a crowd, which often seem like the \textit{mudras} used as meditation devices in Hinduism and Buddhism.

And guru or not, Trump can dole out “crazy wisdom” with the best. Once, spying a soda can outside Trump Tower, Trump called the project manager at two a.m. and demanded she come and remove it. She did, but he called again at six a.m. just to make sure.\textsuperscript{91} And as in the case of some of the other gurus we’ve looked at, as Trump’s power increased, so did his paranoia, as he has surrounded himself with yes-men who applaud his every decision rather than questioning his logic. “The show,” as he said, “was Trump and it is sold-out performances everywhere.”\textsuperscript{92}
So far we’ve seen Trump as positive thinker, chaos magician, guru, and demagogue. What about the people who say they helped put him into power? Who are the meme magicians? What is the alt-right and what did Richard Spencer mean when he said that he and the other members of the National Policy Institute had “dreamed” Trump into the White House? And what does a cartoon frog have to do with it?

The alt-right or “alternative right” is the brainchild of white supremacist Richard Spencer, and it came to national if not global prominence when Hillary Clinton inadvertently gave it the best publicity it could ask for. In her campaign speech in Reno, Nevada, on August 25, 2016, Clinton spoke out against her opponent, Donald Trump. She accused him of basing his campaign on “prejudice and paranoia,” of supporting anti-Semitism and white nationalism, and of bringing what had until then been a “paranoid fringe” in American politics into the mainstream.

This “paranoid fringe,” she said, was the “alt-right,” or “alternative right,” a “loosely organized movement, mostly online,” that—as she quoted from The Wall Street Journal—“rejects mainstream conservatism, promotes nationalism and views immigration and multiculturalism as threats to white identity.” They may call themselves “racialists” rather than “racists” and speak of “white nationalism” rather than “white supremacy,” Clinton said. But don’t let that fool you. We’ve heard it before.

Clinton spoke of the “de facto merger” between the alt-right and Trump brought about by his campaign manager, Steve Bannon, who,
through the right-wing website Breitbart.com, gave the alt-right a place to air its views. As Bannon said, he gave the alt-right a “platform.” Through this she believed that “a fringe element has effectively taken over the Republican Party.” This was, Clinton said, part of a “rising tide of hard-line, right-wing nationalism around the world.” She included in this the far-right British politician Nigel Farage and Vladimir Putin.¹ We get an idea of what concerned Clinton. “There’s always been a paranoid fringe in our politics,” she said. “But it’s never had the nominee of a major party stoking it, encouraging it, and giving it a national megaphone.” Now with Trump it did.

Clinton spoke out against Trump’s endorsement of conspiracy theories and his intransigence when criticized for accepting the support of people like David Duke, head of the KKK. She complained of his retweeting white supremacist propaganda and giving his approval to the ideas of talk show host Alex Jones of InfoWars infamy, who, among other things, claimed that the Sandy Hook massacre was a fake.² But Clinton’s understandable condemnation of these and other of Trump’s “truthful hyperboles” had an unexpected effect. It took the alt-right out of online obscurity and told everyone about it. Before this they were mostly talking to themselves, but now they had an audience. They were in the news. And that was exactly where Richard Spencer wanted them to be.

Spencer watched Clinton’s speech in a hotel room in Tokyo, and nothing could have made his holiday better. He could not believe it. No sooner had he heard her words than he saw his inbox overflow with interview requests. He had been spreading the alt-right word since 2008, the year he said he coined the name, mostly to deaf ears, and now his dedication to his cause had paid off. As he told a journalist for the online political magazine Slate, he had “made it.”³ At a press conference he held in Washington, D.C., soon after Clinton’s speech, Spencer told reporters that the alt-right was for
“conservatives who don’t have anything to conserve anymore.” He decried the idea that the American Founding Fathers believed that all races were equal, regardless of what the Declaration of Independence said. “Race is real, race matters, race is the foundation of identity,” he told the crowd. While chaos magick and postmodernism see identity as fluid and up for grabs, for Spencer and his alt-righters, it’s something we need to defend to the death.

Following Spencer’s notorious Hitler salute, celebrating Trump’s victory, which Spencer called a “victory of will,” Trump told The New York Times that he “disowned and condemned” the alt-right. This rejection disappointed Spencer, but he understood its political necessity. But that was after Trump’s victory. During Trump’s campaign they were fellow travelers. “Trump thinks like me,” Spencer once remarked, curiously echoing a strange pronouncement made by Alexander Dugin, Russia’s own far-right visionary. “The more Putin becomes Dugin,” Dugin said, “the more he will become himself.” That Spencer’s estranged wife, Nina Kouprianova, has translated Dugin’s work, under the name Nina Byzantina, suggests that when Hillary Clinton warned of the rise of a “hard-line, right-wing nationalism around the world,” she wasn’t kidding.

Spencer and Kouprianova have appeared on Russia Today, Putin’s English-language news and propaganda program, and Spencer thinks well of Russia’s president. Russia, he says, is the “most powerful white power in the world,” and he supports Putin’s authoritarianism. Like Dugin, Spencer has a vision of a white ethnostate—a term Dugin has helped popularize—a “white homeland” for the “dispossessed white race,” and in Spencer’s world, Russians would be most welcome.

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Richard Spencer was born in Boston, Massachusetts, in 1978 and grew up in Dallas, Texas, the son of an ophthalmologist and a cotton heiress. He went to an up-market conservative prep school in the 1990s and, like Trump, was good at sports. Although Spencer says
that he wasn’t racist in school, some ex-classmates recall some remarks that struck them as questionable. At the University of Virginia, Spencer majored in English and music and went through a few ideological makeovers, embracing and rejecting a variety of ideas. Nietzsche, Napoleon, and the composer Richard Wagner were role models; he later wrote a thesis on how the neo-Marxist philosopher and musicologist Theodor Adorno, doyen of the New Left, hid the fact that he loved Wagner’s music because Wagner was an anti-Semite and had fans among the Nazis.

Spencer’s views on race did not come to full bloom until he reached the University of Chicago, where he came across the work of Jared Taylor, a white nationalist, a “race realist,” and an editor of *American Renaissance* magazine. Taylor argued that blacks and Hispanics pulled white Western society down, and Spencer was inclined to agree. After some time at Duke University, Spencer dropped out of academia and, in his own words, embarked on a “life of thought crime.” Works like the Harvard professor Samuel Huntington’s *Who Are We?*, which argues that Hispanics are biologically less suited to assimilate to American culture than are European immigrants, sent him on his way.

Spencer’s life of thought crime led him first to *The American Conservative* magazine, where he became an assistant editor until his conservativism proved too radical and he was fired. He then went to *Taki’s Magazine*, the online organ of Greek journalist Taki Theodoracopulos. Taki had founded *The American Conservative* with other right-wingers like Pat Buchanan, and Spencer found a home for his increasingly racist views with him, steering *Taki’s Magazine* into purely white waters. In 2009 Spencer left Taki and founded AlternativeRight.com. It was here that the alt-right was born.

Not long after this Spencer became executive director of Washington Summit Publishers, a white supremacist publishing house specializing in books on race and intelligence, eugenics and anti-Semitism. A related effort was Spencer’s *Radix Journal*, in which, like a good chaos or meme magician, Spencer co-opted a
scene from the film *The Matrix* to symbolize the effect his racial “awakening” had on him.

In the scene, Morpheus, played by Laurence Fishburne, presents Neo, played by Keanu Reeves, with two pills and one choice. If he chooses the blue pill, he can go back to sleep and return to the world he knew, which, in *The Matrix*’s Gnostic narrative, is the false world created and controlled by sentient machines, living off human beings. If he chooses the red pill, he will awaken from this and know “true reality.” In the Gnostic myth the “real world” is the spiritual reality of the true, unmanifest God. The “false world” is the one created by an upstart demiurge, who has usurped the true God’s authority. In a sense we can read this as chaos magick’s aim of breaking out of our “existing cognitive habits.”

Spencer would agree. In Spencer’s take, the real world is one in which “race matters” and those who have awakened to this have been “red-pilled.” The false world is the one of liberalism, multiculturalism, and multiracialism. For Spencer and his followers practically everyone in modern Western society has opted for the blue pill. Only he and his alt-righters have swallowed the red.

AlternativeRight.com caught the attention of William Regnery II, an ultraconservative publisher and “race realist” who was the money behind the National Policy Institute. Regnery’s grandfather, William Regnery I, had funded the America First campaign in the 1940s, which lobbied against American intervention against Nazi Germany. Regnery II’s uncle, Henry Regnery, founded Regnery Publishing, which finds among its authors Ann Coulter, a post-truth alternate fact spokesperson and champion of Trump.

Trump’s inauguration speech, when he announced that “from this day forward it is only going to be America First,” set alarm bells ringing. The original America First movement included the reader of Ralph Waldo Trine, Henry Ford, and the aviation hero, Charles Lindbergh, both of whom showed evidence of anti-Semitism. Ford was a staunch believer in *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, a fraudulent text originating in Russia in 1905, claiming to unveil a Jewish-Masonic-Communist plot to rule the world. It was required
reading in Nazi Germany. In a speech given on September 11, 1941, Lindbergh argued that fighting the Nazis was neither in the American nor Jewish interest, and that Jews presented a “danger” to America because of their “large ownership and influence” in the media, a complaint still common among red-pillers.9

Spencer gained some attention as an alt-right martyr in 2014 when he spent a few days in a Budapest jail for ignoring a ban on an international white supremacist conference to be held there, organized by Jared Taylor. Hungary’s ultraconservative strongman Viktor Orbán, whom the alt-right thought a fellow traveler, banned the event, hoping to show himself as more moderate in upcoming elections, and he meant business. When William Regnery II showed up, he was immediately sent back to the States. Spencer and some other diehards carried on, and when Spencer tried to hold an informal gathering at a Budapest pub, he was arrested.

He relayed his three-day ordeal through emails, and in the end the conference, now downsized to a dinner, went on, with red-pillers from the UK, Norway, Germany, Sweden, and, strangely enough, Mexico coming together to talk about the future of white Europe. Spencer’s arrest merely convinced them of the righteousness of their cause.10 It also made Spencer a kind of internet sensation while, because of the Schengen Agreement, banning him from twenty-six European nations.

Spencer’s Hitler-style haircut and conservative dress make for good media copy, and like Trump and other political self-seekers, he is anxious to be in the news. He has an eye for the telling moment. He launched his new website, AltRight.com, on January 15, 2017, Martin Luther King’s birthday. A few days later, during Trump’s inauguration, Spencer was punched by an “antifa,” an antifascist. Spencer said that he “reached a stage of being a public figure where I am going to be recognized and then attacked” and that he would have to increase his security. Yet the blow was turned to his advantage; the video of it gave him more publicity than ever. “I’m afraid,” he said, “that this is going to become the meme to end all memes.”
On February 27, 2017, Spencer was kicked out of the Conservative Political Action Conference because the members found his views “vile” and “repulsive.” Another alt-righter whom the CPAC had first invited then changed their minds about was Milo Yiannopoulos. An outspoken red-piller, Yiannopoulos lost not only this invitation, and his position at Breitbart.com, but also a lucrative book deal because of remarks he made that seemed to sanction pedophilia.\(^\text{11}\)

Spencer should not have felt too bad about the CPAC snub. Just two days earlier a meeting in Stockholm, Sweden, made possible the international gathering that was aborted in Budapest. Three hundred red-pillers attended and pulled an alt-righter. Held in a secret location, according to the *International Business Times* it was “the most important alt-right conference in Europe.”\(^\text{12}\) Attendees included Russian television host Lana Lokteff; Henrik Palmgren, whose Red Ice media network is Sweden’s answer to Breitbart.com; and Jason Reza Jorjani, editor in chief of Arktos Press, publishers of Alexander Dugin and Julius Evola. Jorjani hailed the meeting as “momentous.”

Jorjani’s Ph.D. in philosophy from Stony Brook University has come under scrutiny because of his association with Spencer, the NPI, and other alt-righters.\(^\text{13}\) His book *Prometheus and Atlas*, which argues that Western rationalism has purposefully marginalized elements of reality considered “paranormal”—the kinds of things New Thought and chaos magick are interested in—is seen by some to harken back to the occult interests of some National Socialist sympathizers. Jorjani agrees. “National Socialist Germany,” he said, “was the only political regime to seriously consider the implications of mainstream scientific recognition and widespread cultivation of those latent human capacities hitherto marginalized as ‘paranormal’”—although how Hitler’s arrest of astrologers and Freemasons and his closure of theosophical and anthroposophical activities squares with this is unclear. Jorjani’s advocacy of “Indo-European, or Aryan, cultures” as “uniquely worthy of affirmation, since they are the roots of almost every great discovery and world historical development in spirituality, the sciences and the arts,” has
also not helped his reputation. Such views open the unwieldy can of worms that defending “freedom of speech” in the era of post-truth has become. This has led to some university students acting like Nazi youth, in shouting down professors whose opinions they do not share and whom, ironically enough, they accuse of being Nazis.

Trump was the man of the hour at this secret location in Sweden, his election being seen as unifying the “New Right” with a mainstream power structure. But something else was even more significant, Jorjani said. This was a development that was central to “the redemption and revitalization of our world”: Spencer’s AltRight.com. Here we might recall Laurence Rees’s remarks about charismatic leaders and their appeal to a hunger for “salvation and redemption.”

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One meme the alt-right did launch was Pepe the Frog. Spencer was wearing a Pepe badge when his antifa hit him. In fact, Spencer was in the process of explaining Pepe’s importance at the time. Although now seen as a symbol of “redemption and revitalization,” at least for alt-righters, Pepe offered little protection to his high priest. But perhaps this is too much to ask of the little fellow. Indeed, how an innocuous cartoon amphibian came to be known as a kind of postmodern swastika requires some telling.

Pepe came into the world through the work of the artist Matt Furie, who put him in his 2005 comic strip Boy’s Club. Furie pictured Pepe as a kind of millennial slacker, and in his first appearance he is urinating in public. When asked why he was acting so deplorably, Pepe answered, “Feels good man.” The sentiment caught on and images of Pepe quickly appeared voicing similar feelings. He was a Sad Frog, a Smug Frog, an Angry Frog, and soon there seemed to be a Pepe for all seasons. Pop singers Katy Perry and Nicki Minaj posted images of Pepe, spreading his appeal. But in the world of the internet once a meme is launched it’s beyond its
creator’s control, and it wasn’t very long before Pepe found his way to the dark side.

He got there via users of internet sites like Myspace. But he found a real home on the 4chan site. 4chan is a Japanese internet message board adapted for Western users. Its greatest appeal is that people can post items anonymously. This and the absence of any rules on what can be posted made it a haven for individuals eager to air controversial views, while avoiding responsibility for them.

4chan grew out of an earlier internet message board called Something Awful. This was mostly concerned with Japanese anime, and allowed for anonymous nonstop posting. When Christopher Poole, a fifteen-year-old anime fan and Something Awful user, adapted his Japanese bulletin board software, 4chan was born.\(^{17}\)

Soon into its existence 4chan became a kind of breeding ground for a form of pop nihilism characteristic of postmodernism, although the teenagers “living in their parents’ basements”—as 4chan users describe themselves—most likely never heard of postmodernism. Millennial “whateverism” slid into a peevishly sour irony, a kind of personal “plausible deniability” aimed at everything at large. It was the standard adolescent shrug at the elders, but now it had a wider brief and greater reach. What used to turn up on toilet stall walls found a new life as electronic graffiti. It was a kind of cyber *Fight Club* scenario with a shared ethos “to hate, to deny, to shrug, to laugh at everything as a joke.”\(^{18}\) Users were most likely unaware of postmodernism, but they were certainly expressions of it.

Chaos magick suggests saying “outrageous” things as part of its “shock tactic” approach to enhancing “personal power.” 4chan users did the same. The easiest way to be shocking today is to go against political correctness, just as the easiest way to be authoritarian is to go with it. Trump didn’t give a hang about being PC and that’s why he became a hero of 4chaners. A kind of introverted cyberbully personality emerged from this, a character withdrawn from the world and taking pot shots at it from the safety of his parents’ basement. The “anything goes” atmosphere of 4chan allowed users to express as many politically incorrect sentiments as they wanted, with
racist and anti-Semitic ones topping the bill. As one 4chan user remarked, it was a “bullying and anarchic society of adolescent boys,” suffering from what the Japanese call *hikikomori*, a “pulling inward” and “being confined” within a world of video games and chat lines.\(^{19}\) Or as another user remarked, “Here you’ll find the lonely and depressed, the socially inept, the generational dropouts, and all shades of disenfranchised youth.” It was a space open to an “underdog mentality,” where “society’s status quo is mercilessly challenged.”\(^{20}\) It was also a space given over to chaos.

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**But 4chaners had reach and, estranged from the “real” world or not, they found they could affect it. First they infiltrated other sites and caused havoc, simply because they could. They covered their tracks by laying the blame on someone else, usually a nonexistent site they summarily invented. The idea was to keep 4chan secret. These “raids” grew more ambitious. Anonymous, the online “secret society” of international “hacktivists” that sabotage government and corporate sites, grew out of one. It emerged out of a prank 4chan users played on the Church of Scientology in 2008. Anti-Scientology videos were made by “Anonymous,” which at that point didn’t exist, being merely a name 4chaners used for a fictitious secret society. (As practically all 4chaners were “anonymous,” it could have meant anyone.) Then a “fake protest” against Scientology by Anonymous was arranged, a kind of “flash demonstration.” Here 4chaners really flexed their muscles. Word got out. They were taking on the “real” world.**

On the morning of the “demonstration,” hundreds of 4chaners wearing masks and carrying signs saying “Scientology Kills!” were cordoned off from the Scientology building on West Forty-sixth Street near New York’s Times Square. Most of the masks were of the Guy Fawkes face popularized by the film *V for Vendetta*—made by the makers of *The Matrix*. Scientologists thought they were under attack by terrorists. But the whole thing was a joke. The 4chaners
had no real grievance against them, other than that they had taken a video of Tom Cruise, a celebrity Scientologist, that they found funny off the net. 4chaners liked the video because it gave good “lulz” and the true believers had no right to deny them this. Their political philosophy was libertarian: they wanted to do what they liked, and they didn’t take kindly to people who tried to stop them.

The protest was a joke, and had antecedents in the artistic hooliganism of the Futurists and Dadaists and the “street politics” of the Situationists. But it raises the serious post-truth question: When does a joke protest become real? When would a “fake terrorist” act slide into reality? Most likely the 4chaners involved didn’t think about this, and if they did they didn’t care. What was important was that they discovered they could act effectively. They had breached the “reality barrier.”

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The interphase between the “fake” world and the “real” one, between jokes and seriousness, looked wide open. And this is where “meme magic” comes in. Meme magic is when what happens in cyberspace has an effect on the “real” world. This, as mentioned, is an updated techno-literate take on the old magical belief that what happens in imagination can have real consequences. Thoughts are things. According to meme magicians, internet memes are too.

Users began to notice odd synchronicities between the bits and pieces of pop culture they posted about on the net and events in the “real” world. They called this “synchromysticism.” Synchronicity, we remember, is Jung’s name for a “meaningful coincidence,” when something happening in the mind seems to be mirrored in the outer world, with no obvious connection. Synchromysticism substitutes the internet for the imagination. Nowadays, the internet has come to be seen as a kind of “exteriorized” imagination, just as iPads and other electronic devices supply a kind of exteriorized interiority. That synchronicities may occur within it makes a kind of sense.
At least it did to the 4chaners. It began with their noticing odd coincidences between the crash of German Wings flight 9525 in 2015 and a scene from the 2012 film *The Dark Knight Rises*. Fans of the film had a thread, “Baneposting,” and they began to comment on the many similarities between it and the disaster. A post pointed out that “Bruce Robin” was the name of one of the crash investigators, and that a nearby town in the French Alps was called “Bain.” Bane is the villain in the film, Batman’s secret identity is Bruce Wayne, and Robin is Batman’s sidekick. Bane causes the flight to crash and the evidence suggests that Flight 9525’s copilot crashed the plane deliberately. There are other coincidences, and readers can get an idea of them at the knowyourmeme.com site. 4chaners began to joke that their posts were somehow responsible for the crash, an example of their “dark,” “shocking” humor. Oddly, Bane turned up again when many people noticed some strange coincidences between Trump’s inauguration speech and Bane’s speech when returning Gotham City to “the people.”

Granted, this is a stretch. But it was enough to get the memes going. If reality is not as “objective” as we believe, and if it and the mind somehow interpenetrate, then what was to stop them? If life imitates art, and “art is what you can get away with”—as Oscar Wilde and Andy Warhol tell us—then it should follow that, as Robert Anton Wilson said, “reality”—another word for life—“is what you can get away with.” The users of 4chan were discovering they could get away with a lot.

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*Pepe got into* this act when a 4chaner posted an image of him looking over the U.S.-Mexican border. Trump got the cue and tweeted an image of Pepe as himself. Then the meme took hold. Donald Trump Jr. posted a meme based on the film *The Expendables*. *The Deplorables* featured Trump, Milo Yiannopoulos, Alex Jones, Trump Jr., some others, and Pepe. Hillary Clinton had
called Trump’s supporters a “basket of deplorables” and they agreed. Once again she had given her opponent a stick to beat her with.\textsuperscript{25}

Images of Trump and Pepe began to flood the net with the alt-right and 4chaners spreading the meme. Pepe became the unofficial mascot of the alt-right movement, with Trump the charismatic leader they were all rooting for. For them, he was the ultimate internet troll, the personification of the cynicism they felt toward everything. He was a kind of spite incarnate. But if all Pepe amounted to was an amphibious postmodern swastika, a “symbol of hate” as Clinton had said, he would be annoying, even deplorable, but we could do our best to avoid him. But what if he was something more? Some 4chaners and alt-righters thought he was—or wanted others to think so.

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One of the strange things about synchronicities is that if you look for them you will find them. Some devotees of Pepe did just that, finding a number of odd coincidences featuring their mascot. This could be accounted for in a number of ways, as sheer invention, a version of Trump’s “controlled neurosis,” or simply people’s imagination getting carried away. But it could also mean that somehow Pepe’s fans were making them happen. Or that something else was.

In esoteric tradition there is something known as an \textit{egregore}, a Greek term for “watcher.” It is a kind of thought form or imaginal entity created and fed by the devotion of a group of followers. The prayers, thoughts, and imagination of the followers create a kind of psychic being, a group mind or spirit, that is kept alive and helped to grow through their attentions. At some point it can take on a life and consciousness of its own, rather as what some AI enthusiasts look forward to happening with computers.

The \textit{egregore}’s power can be used for the aims and purposes of the group. But as Valentin Tomberg, now recognized as the author of \textit{Meditations on the Tarot}—one of the truly esoteric works of the twentieth century—remarks, there are no “good” \textit{egregores}, only
“negative” ones. They can be “engendered by the collective will and imagination of nations,” but the aims of an egregore are always selfish, centered exclusively on gaining power and growing stronger at the expense of its creators. Once it is created, the group can “rely” on the egregore. With it, they have found “an efficacious magical ally.” Yet the egregore’s help comes at a price. As the historian of esotericism Joscelyn Godwin remarks, its creators must meet its “unlimited appetite for their future devotion.” Once brought into existence, an egregore is difficult to control and much harder to put down than to raise up.

A similar phenomenon is known in Eastern magical traditions, the tulpa. This too is a thought form but it is generally the work of a single person. In Magic and Mystery in Tibet, the Buddhist and explorer Alexandra David-Neel tells of her own experiences with a tulpa. Such a thought form, she says, is “tangible and endowed with all the faculties and qualities naturally pertaining to the beings or things of which they have the appearance.” A tulpa may be an image of a person or thing already existing. David-Neel says that “when he fled from Shigatze, the Tashi Lama left in his stead a phantom perfectly resembling him who played his part so thoroughly and naturally that everyone who saw him was deceived.” (The Tashi or Panchen Lama is Tibet’s second-in-command; his departure from Shigatze followed a dispute with the Thirteenth Dali Lama in 1924.)

Tulpas can also be “original creations,” as it were. David-Neel writes of how, after months of concentration and performing certain rituals, she created a tulpa of a monk from scratch. She says that the “monk” became “a kind of guest, living in my apartment.” The monk was mostly visual, but David-Neel says that on occasion he had a tactile presence; she could feel his robe brushing against her and once felt his hand on her shoulder. After a while, the tulpa outstayed his welcome, but like an oblivious dinner guest, she found it almost impossible to get rid of him. It took six months of hard work, David-Neel said, to “de-materialize” him.

Alexandra David-Neel was a remarkable woman endowed with considerable mental powers. If she found it difficult to dissolve a
thought form created by her own efforts, how much harder must it be to get rid of the result of a collective effort?

The magician Dion Fortune experienced a *tulpa* sent by a rival magician to terrorize her, a story she tells in her book *Psychic Self-Defense*. Fortune had gotten on the bad side of Moina Mathers, widow of MacGregor Mathers, onetime head of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. A rivalry grew up between them and at one point Fortune and Mathers got into an astral battle. At the headquarters of Fortune’s own magical society, the Fraternity of Light, demon faces appeared and the building was overrun by mobs of black cats. “The horrible stench of the brutes” filled the place, and some members found that “the same penetrating reek of the tom-cat” followed them home or to their workplaces. Astral cats appeared as well, and one morning Fortune was confronted on the stairs by “a giant tabby” that was “twice the size of a tiger.” Following an etheric wrestling match with Mathers, Fortune discovered that her back was covered with the scratch of a “gigantic cat.”

Madame Blavatsky, who knew about thought forms and, according to many accounts, was able to create one of herself on occasion, had a word of caution about people dabbling in astral adventures. Blavatsky became Public Enemy Number One with Spiritualists because she argued that the “spirits” that visited séances were not those of friends or relatives who have passed on, as most spiritualists believed. They were instead thought forms emanating from the people at séances, who were unaware of their involvement. These thought forms combined with the etheric “shells” of the dead, a kind of astral skeleton left behind as their souls moved on to greener pastures, and became the “spirits” of one’s departed mother or child. Mediums add their own psychic matter to these shells, rather as devotees of an *egregore* add their imagination to the growing entity, and give them a kind of life. Blavatsky considered this a form of black magic, a kind of psychic slavery, with low “larvae” of the astral realm taking possession of the medium’s mind and will, rather as if etheric hobos broke into your house while you were away for the weekend.
When we read of how Hitler was able to “possess” an entire nation, suspicions about how he was in league with “dark forces,” however unlikely, seem to make a kind of sense. Hitler would not need to perform rituals and consciously aim at creating an *egregore*, nor would he need to consciously make himself the willing “medium” of some astral entity, in order for the one to come into existence or the other to use him as a means of absorbing the imaginative energies of the German people. The constant devotion to the Nazi cause and Hitler’s ability to make himself the mouthpiece for the “will of the people” could do the trick.

Jean Gebser, we remember, saw in the rise of National Socialism an expression of what he called the “magical structure” of consciousness, which he related to “group consciousness” and the “vegetative intertwining of all living things.” This “vegetative intertwining” is, for Gebser, behind Jung’s synchronicities. Writing about the Nazis, the cultural critic Morris Berman remarked that “an entire culture can eventually undergo very serious changes as the result of the slow accumulation of enough psychic and somatic changes on an invisible level.” A nation’s “possession” does not happen overnight. Gradually, by gaining a toehold on the imagination, the process can take place and be well established before those out of sympathy with it can offer adequate resistance.

Am I saying that Pepe the Frog is an *egregore* or *tulpa* or is on his way to becoming one? Perhaps. Or that he and his devotees are being used by some supernatural entity for its own purposes? Again, perhaps. Is Trump himself a *tulpa* or *egregore*, brought into existence by his fan base? It is not inconceivable. Pranksters are amused when their jokes are taken for real, a tactic employed by many alt-righters to show that “social justice warriors” can get into a panic about practically anything. But perhaps they themselves are being pranked by some unknown power for its own purposes? Perhaps some entity’s entry into our plane is facilitated by agents unaware of their participation, who think their activities are just for “lulz”? Is Cthulhu calling? Whatever may be the case, strange coincidences have happened around Matt Furie’s disaffected
amphibian. These suggest that it may be a good policy to keep an open mind about the matter.

PROBABLY THE STRANGEST ideas that have gathered around Pepe are those that relate him to an ancient Egyptian god.\textsuperscript{33} As one website puts it, Pepe is “the modern-day avatar of an ancient Egyptian deity accidentally resurrected by online imageboard culture.”\textsuperscript{34} How this association was made is as follows.

Users of 4chan grew tired of the ubiquitous LOL—“laugh out loud”—to express their finding something funny. In its place they began to substitute “KEK.” Where did KEK come from? It is a mistranslation of LOL found on the World of Warcraft video game. (Strangely this involved the Korean language; Trump’s and Kim Jong Un’s saber rattling about nuclear war seems to add another ominous layer to the mix.) Gamers found that when they wanted to write LOL it came out KEK. They decided to go for it and use KEK from then on. So when one of Trump’s tweets tickled them, they burst out kekking.

I should point out that it was in the gaming culture that ex-Breitbart.com writer Milo Yiannopoulos came to prominence. Yiannopoulos was Breitbart’s technology editor and he promoted a conspiracy theory known as “Gamergate” that started in 2014. This was centered around the idea that a few feminists in the video game industry—aka “social justice warriors”—appalled at its supposed overly masculine character were using games to promote a gender-equality agenda and that journalists in the industry were colluding with this. It was a techno-tempest in a teapot, but it led to online harassment, much abuse, even death threats, and gave the alt-right community another target in its campaign to reveal the truth about liberalism and its progressive aims.\textsuperscript{35} Dubbing himself the “most fabulous supervillain on the internet,” Yiannopoulos was also banned from Twitter for his “campaign of hate” against the actress Leslie Jones for her performance in the Ghostbusters remake.\textsuperscript{36}
Users on 4chan are anonymous, but each post is given an eight-digit number to place it in its thread. Sometimes these numbers contain duplicate, triplicate, and even quadruple digits, which appear at random. So a post may receive, say, 76563444. The three 4s are a “trip.” Users don’t know what number they’ll receive until they post, and many began betting on whether they would get a dub or a trip, rather like rolling dice or playing a one-armed bandit in Atlantic City. Dubs, trips, etc., are considered lucky and “special,” and when one arrives, it’s called a “Get.” When a user got a “Get,” he would type “KEK.”

What began to happen was that many Trump posts were “Gets,” with many getting dubs, trips, and even “quads.” There seemed to be something special about them. But this was just the beginning. The number of Gets surrounding Trump seemed to suggest that he was receiving some kind of divine, or at least magical, help. This was confirmed for many users when one of them noticed something odd indeed. Pepe, Trump’s alt-right mascot, was, it seemed, a postmodern online version—or incarnation—of an ancient Egyptian frog-headed deity whose name was—wait for it—Kek. And to make things even stranger, what is Kek the god of? Chaos.37

In the ancient Egyptian Ogdoad cosmogony—Ogdoad means “eightfold”—Kek is an androgynous deity personifying the power of “primordial darkness” and the coming forth of day. (One wonders if 4chaners notice the repeating eightfold motif? Eight gods and eight random posting digits?) With his feminine form Keket, he is seen as one half of the duality of day and night. The two can appear with the head of a snake, a cat, or a frog. The gods of the Ogdoad are very ancient, reaching back to what is known as the Old Kingdom in the third millennium BCE. In later texts, from what is known as the Late Period—664–332 BCE—and in Greco-Roman times—305–30 BCE—all of the male gods of the Ogdoad were depicted with frog heads, the feminine form being snake-headed. So Kek was not the only frog-headed Egyptian god. Even so, the chances of a cartoon amphibian, a mistranslation of an acronym, and an Egyptian god coming together meaningfully do seem rather slim.
But it is Kek’s peculiar significance that puts the icing on this synchronistic cake. Most authorities agree that Kek represents “primordial darkness,” but that with his feminine aspect he personifies the shift from darkness to light, or night into day. We’ve seen that another name for “primordial darkness” is chaos, and that such darkness is both the “Neither-Neither” that chaos magicians want to reach and the “unconditioned awareness of being” that Neville said was necessary to achieve in order for one’s desire to manifest. So in one sense, we can say that Kek symbolizes the fundamental basis of both chaos magick and at least one version of New Thought. We know that Trump is a devotee of Norman Vincent Peale. But another part of this synchronistic puzzle is the odd fact that a reissue of one of Neville’s books, *At Your Command*, seemed to coincide nicely with Trump’s “victory of the will,” at least to one blogger.\(^{38}\) As Peale was a New Thought reader who repackaged its basic ideas in a mainstream acceptable way, I think we can take this connection for what it’s worth.

But Kek is not the only god of chaos making an appearance these days. Trump, we’ve seen, is an avatar of this particular state too, or at least of confusion, or, less politely, of a mess. For many on the alt-right, Trump is only the beginning. For them his ascendancy marks the end of the Old World Order. For many alt-righters, Trump is seen as the force of change. He is the agent who will bring down the system, bringing on the night of “primordial darkness” in order for a new day to dawn.

One other item in the Kek experience makes an association that would, I think, have done Erich von Däniken proud. One Pepe/Kek devotee came across a statuette of what was thought to be Kek, although it was actually of an Egyptian frog goddess named Heqet. What was striking was that the hieroglyphics on the statuette seemed to depict someone sitting in front of what looks like a computer screen, accompanied by a kind of DNA spiral. This, to the initiated, was a depiction of what postmodern Kek devotees are doing: posting images of Pepe/Kek on the internet as sigils designed to bring forth the primordial darkness as the precursor to a new day.
In chaos magick, practically anything can be a sigil, as long as it is effectively charged with one’s desire. Pepe has become what is known as a “hypersigil,” one used by many people—he’s even appeared in the form of Aleister Crowley. That Trump too appeared as Pepe seems somehow suggestive. With thousands of alt-righters and 4chaners posting images of Pepe, saturating the internet with them, the idea was that their focused desire that Trump should win was bound to have an effect. And according to them, it has. Trump went from being a kind of clown without a chance of success to first winning primaries, then getting the nomination, to becoming president. He is now one of the most powerful men on the planet, and people like Richard Spencer and his associates feel they have had a hand in getting him there.

And it seemed to them that Trump’s enemies were feeling the effect too. When Hillary Clinton apparently fainted during a ceremony marking the fifteenth anniversary of 9/11, many Pepeists believed it was because of their efforts. She got on the wrong side of Kek and suffered the consequences. Following Trump’s election, others in the occult world began to take notice of his “efficacious magical ally” and began to take steps against him. Such was the “mass spell” cast by witches around the world, begun in February 2017, “binding” Trump and all his associates, which seemed to have some effect. If that isn’t occult politics, I don’t know what is.

In many ways one man is responsible for all of this happening. Like Trump, 4chaners, and the alt-righters, Steve Bannon, Trump’s chief strategist, seems to have a grudge against the system and would like to take it down. As with some of the charismatic leaders we’ve looked at, it may be that with Bannon a frustrated creative drive turned sour in some way and fueled what became a kind of pop apocalyptic thinking. On more than one occasion Bannon has voiced the opinion that some catastrophic global conflict is approaching, a huge upheaval that will change everything, and that he is looking forward
to it. He’s described himself as a “Leninist,” someone who wants to dismantle the state, to “bring everything crashing down and destroy all of today’s establishment.”

Bannon was born in 1953 into a working-class Irish Catholic family and started his career as an officer in the U.S. Navy. Like Trump he went to a military school, a background he shares with Vladimir Putin’s adviser Alexander Dugin. Following his navy service, Bannon, who went to Harvard Business School, found a place at Goldman Sachs and was later at the center of the subprime financial crisis of 2007–8. Working in the mergers and acquisitions department, Bannon became rich during the years of hostile takeovers. In 1990 he started his own investment company, specializing in media. As a fee for negotiating the sale of Castle Rock Entertainment to CNN, Bannon received shares of several television shows, one of which was *Seinfeld*. Not long after this, Bannon became acting director of Biosphere 2, an ecological and environmental experiment in Arizona. As we will see, this linked him in other ways to his Russian counterpart.

Bannon began to find his real métier in Hollywood, when he became an executive producer, writer, and director in the film industry. Some early efforts featured name actors, like Sean Penn (*The Indian Runner*, 1991) and Anthony Hopkins (*Titus*, 1999), and received critical nods if not box office acclaim. But it was in documentaries that he showed his real flare, both for disturbing, overwrought imagery and for ultraconservative, far-right politics. *Occupy Unmasked* (2012) depicts the Occupy movement as a group of drug addicts, rapists, and vandals intent on destroying the American government. It was described by *The Nation* as a “total fantasy.” In *Battle for America* (2010) Bannon tries, in his own words, to “weaponize film.” The fact that it has many explosions must have helped. Stock footage of Roman centurions, African slaves, meteors exterminating dinosaurs, and buildings imploding, to voiceovers by Ann Coulter and Newt Gingrich, aimed to motivate conservative voters. It was a follow-up to his paean to women conservatives, *Fire in the Heartland* (2010), and a warm-up to his

Described as a “horror film” about the U.S. economy, *Generation Zero* “weaponizes” one of Bannon’s pet ideas. This is the notion that every eighty years, America experiences a generational crisis, a “turning,” that changes everything, for good or bad, a theory he absorbed from the book *The Fourth Turning* (1997) by historians William Strauss and Neil Howe. The film’s villains are the baby boomers—Bannon’s own generation—who, in the 1960s, abandoned their parents’ values, “let it all hang out,” and forgot about history. Filled with apocalyptic scenes, the film was designed to scare its audience into realizing that the next “turning” was upon them. “Fear is a good thing,” Bannon said. “Fear is going to lead you to take action.”

It was in the 1960s that the liberal, permissive, progressive ideas that, for Bannon and the alt-right, have become the new establishment, took root. *Generation Zero* aims to convince its viewers that it is time to pull them up.

But it was Bannon’s tribute to Ronald Reagan, *In the Face of Evil: Reagan’s War in Word and Deed* (2004), that set the stage for what was to come. Bannon became a Reaganite after watching President Jimmy Carter’s handling of the Iran hostage crisis (1979–81) on a navy destroyer anchored in the Arabian Sea. The crisis cost Carter a second term and put Reagan into office. It also made Bannon one of Reagan’s biggest fans.

Bannon’s film made a fan for him as well. Andrew Breitbart was another Hollywood wannabe, a “Brentwood brat” who in the 1980s listened to post-punk and grunge while driving scripts around Los Angeles. A fan of right-wing radio talk show host Rush Limbaugh, Breitbart heard in him “the professor I always wanted.” He proved a good student. According to one commentator, what Breitbart and Bannon shared was a “deep-seated and ineffable alienation from the products of the entertainment industry,” a resentment that being “just out of reach” of one’s object of desire can often trigger.
Breitbart and Bannon made the same psychological transference from anti-Hollywood to antiprogressive, a displacement that the industry’s excesses, combined with its often ostentatious do-gooderism and social justice advocacy—read political correctness—helped along. It was from this stew of profligacy, debauchery, and on-your-sleeve liberalism that the evil of “the Progressive Left” was born. As National Socialism was to “degenerate art,” Breitbart was to Hollywood’s dream factory.

Breitbart’s views led him to working at the conservative Drudge Report and from there to Arianna Huffington’s new Huffington Post. His forte was “minimalist blogging,” slapping a few links together with a catchy headline. It worked. Soon Breitbart had the wherewithal to launch his own neoreactionary organ. In 2005 Breitbart.com was born.

In 2004 Breitbart met Steve Bannon at a screening of In the Face of Evil. He liked Bannon’s work, calling him the Leni Riefenstahl of the Tea Party movement—Riefenstahl made Triumph of the Will (1935), a film about Hitler’s 1934 Nuremberg rally. Breitbart went on to finance several of Bannon’s films. He also introduced him to the Mercer family, a wealthy and influential supporter of conservative causes, and gave him a place in his new rebel media empire.

Bannon quickly became a leading light at Breitbart News, a far-right website Breitbart founded in 2007 which aligned itself with the European New Right and promoted a number of conspiracy theories. Its aim was to “change the world” through the “destruction of the old media guard.” Rather than defeat the Progressive Left through direct political action, the idea was to change the culture, to open the “Overton window,” the gauge of public acceptability of “radical” ideas, so that it would allow in what had hitherto been unthinkable. It was a media version of chaos magick’s aim of dismantling our “existing cognitive habits.” It led to a far-right version of the “new normal,” a cultural milieu that aided and abetted the rise of Trump.

Much of this new normal amounted to racial slurs and antiliberal attacks on women, birth control, transgender people, and other embodiments of the despised Progressive Left.49 As in the Hitler era,
Jews were a standard target. Bannon said the Trump era would be “as exciting as the 1930s,” and for many it seems that’s true. One sign of this is the lulz many get from “naming the Jew,” pointing out commentators and critics with Jewish-sounding last names and placing them within (( )), a kind of identity “echo chamber” that precludes any need for argument. Linked to this is the idea of a kind of “ethnic determinism,” which amounts to the belief that one’s ethnicity determines one’s behavior. Like it or not Jews can’t help being Jewish, even if they wanted to, something the Viennese Jewish philosopher Otto Weininger, who found a fan in Adolf Hitler, believed. This would mean of course that non-Jews of whatever background can’t help their behavior either, which begs the question of why the alt-right and its fellow travelers are still a minority, or why the majority of non-Jews are not “ethnically correct.” Trump’s own ideas about genetics suggest a similar sensibility. His own family, he believes, are the carriers of “superior genes.”

In 2012 Andrew Breitbart died and Bannon took over, a position he maintained until he became Trump’s chief strategist in 2016. It was then that Breitbart.com, a new, streamlined, user-friendly revamp, became, in Bannon’s words, “a platform for the alt-right.” As Trump did with the NPI, he would backpedal from this announcement soon enough. Bannon’s politically necessary distancing has cost him some street cred with his erstwhile fan base. Many see him now as a voice for the “alt-lite,” not as bad as the “cuckervatives”—conservatives not as radical as the alt-right whom they despise as much as liberals—but no longer quite in the trenches with them. But before this Bannon raised the alt-right flag high. According to former Breitbart editor Ben Shapiro, with Bannon in charge the comment section turned into “a cesspool for white supremacist meme makers.” Now that Bannon has left the White House and returned to Breitbart, in order to fight “from the outside for the agenda President Trump ran on,” it remains to be seen how his relationship with the alt-right will develop.

One cause they did share was was anti-immigration, a banner Bannon applauded vigorously, as did others. Many of Bannon’s ideas
about the danger of immigration—mostly of Muslims—came from a controversial novel published in France in 1973. The Camp of the Saints by Jean Raspail depicts an “invasion” of Europe by a “flotilla of refugees,” not from the Arab world but from India.

Geography aside, this very readable fiction depicts the effect of a “vanguard of an anti-world bent on coming in the flesh to knock, at long last, at the gates of abundance.” When well-meaning muddleheaded liberals refuse to repel the invading armada of the wretched, the result is the collapse of Western civilization. The 800,000 invaders encourage “people of color” within the white world to rebel. Chaos ensues and tables are turned. There are some defenders. A gentleman of old French blood shoots a hippie welcoming the horde. As he does so he thinks of other Western defenders: Charles Martel, Godfrey of Bouillon, and Baldwin the Leper King, defender of Jerusalem. As he does he reflects, “I’m sure I would have shown a certain zeal poking my blade through Arab flesh.” Some members of the Charles Martel Society, a revamp of the anti-Arab Charles Martel Group of the 1970s, founded by Henry Regnery II in 2001, might agree.

What troubles Raspail’s defender of the West is the “mixture of races, and cultures, and life-styles,” which for him would mean “the end of France as we know it; the end of the French as a nation.” Such worries occupy old-school far-right politicians like Marine Le Pen and the new breed of nationalists concerned with “identity politics.” The members of Génération Identitaire share many of Bannon’s concerns. Bannon’s stamp is on Trump’s executive order banning travelers from seven Muslim countries entering the United States, an edict that may have hit an astral wall erected by the “binding spell” cast by anti-Trump witches.

Bannon, an ex–military man, seems keen on war. We are fighting a war on “Islamic fascism,” a war to “save American jobs,” and will, sometime in the next decade, be at war “in the South China Sea.” Bannon even wrote a letter to then President Obama, praising the atom bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and berating him for “apologizing” for them. His bellicosity echoes that of Alexander
Dugin, who is also looking forward to some global conflict. It isn’t surprising then that Bannon, like Trump and others we have looked at, shows Right Man tendencies. When Bannon took control of Biosphere 2 he immediately changed all the locks and erased the computer and telephone codes. He called a female scientist who objected to this a “twenty-nine-year-old bimbo.” When she showed him a list of safety problems, he threatened to “ram it down her fucking throat.” One of his ex-wives accused him of violence and more than one woman has done so for abuse. According to one critic, his rhetoric is “infused with the reactionary militaristic jargon of blood and horror,” an assessment with which viewers of his films might agree.

Bannon’s time in the navy may have primed him for this military turn of mind. But the “warrior ethos” goes a long way with the alt-right. One intellectual heavyweight informing their views elevated the warrior to a high spiritual standing. In “An Establishment Conservative’s Guide to the Alt-Right,” Milo Yiannopoulos and Allum Bokhari give the uninitiated a quick rundown on the thinkers who set the alt-right apart from “old school racist skinheads.” What distinguishes the alt-right from its predecessors, they say, is their intelligence. This is also what makes them “dangerous.”

At least one of the thinkers they refer to as a “must read” was described as exactly that. In 1935 in a letter to his publisher Peter Suhrkamp, the German novelist Hermann Hesse—pacifist and prisoner of war advocate—spoke of someone as “a dazzling and interesting, but very dangerous author.” He was referring to Julius Evola.
On February 10, 2017, The New York Times ran a story about a speech Steve Bannon gave to a select group in the Vatican in 2014. On a summer’s day Bannon spoke from Los Angeles via Skype to members of a conference hosted by the Human Dignity Institute, a group founded by conservative factions within the church in order to promote a “Christian voice” in European politics. Bannon spoke of many things: the “global Tea Party movement,” which included members from the European far right, like UKIP’s Nigel Farage and Marine Le Pen of France’s National Front; the dangers of secularization; the coming cataclysmic conflict between the Judeo-Christian West and “Islamic fascism”; and the looming crisis of capitalism, among others. But what stood out for the Times was that, while expressing his mixed admiration for Vladimir Putin, whom he considered “very intelligent,” Bannon dropped a name that set off some alarms. Talking about one of Putin’s “advisers”—Alexander Dugin—Bannon said that he “hearkens back to Julius Evola and different writers of the early twentieth century who are really the supporters of what’s called the traditionalist movement.”

Bannon repeated what is usually said about Evola, and which always gets his serious readers up in arms, namely that Evola’s Traditionalism “metastasized into Italian fascism,” which is not exactly correct. And his linking of the “traditional values” that Putin supposedly espouses with Evola’s Traditionalism is perhaps even further off. But the fact that Bannon mentioned Evola at all seemed to suggest something, at least to those who knew who Evola was and what he stood for.
For Richard Spencer, Evola is “one of the most fascinating men of the twentieth century,” praise we might expect, given that Evola provides much of the dialectical finesse that separates Spencer’s alt-right from the “low IQ thugs” of the primitive old far right. Alexander Dugin thinks well of him too, and shares Evola’s vision of “modernity” as “the cause of the future catastrophe of humanity.” But not all praise for Evola comes from such expected quarters. Writing for *Parabola* magazine, Richard Smoley, a scholar of esotericism not associated with Traditionalism, said Evola was “one of the most difficult and ambiguous figures in modern esotericism.” Joscelyn Godwin, another respected esoteric scholar, said of Evola that “such an encounter with a totally original mind is a rarity in these days of bland consensus.” Reading Evola’s description of intense spiritual states, Godwin said, is “like watching a champion mountain-climber on a vertical glacier.”

This would have pleased Evola, who was a mountaineer and whose ashes were deposited in a crevasse on Monte Rosa in the Pennine Alps in 1974. Throughout his life Evola strove to keep a strict distance between himself and the world of common humanity, and he regarded society’s lowlands with what is usually called a “Nietzschean” disdain. As he wrote in his intellectual autobiography, *The Path of Cinnabar*, “I have kept myself free from the constraints of the society in which I live.”

This stringent differentiation is the key to Evola’s life. He was always *l’uomo differenziato*, “one who is different.” For him “mountainous peaks” and “spiritual peaks” “converge in one simple and yet powerful reality,” and both are equally far afield from the average run of things. And just as the mountaintop is reached only by the persevering few—except where a ski lift has been put in—so too the spiritual peaks are available only to those infrequent individuals possessed of the necessary will and daring to master them.

To his admirers, Evola is such a one. Others have a different point of view. For *The New York Times* Evola “became the darling of Italian Fascists, and Italy’s post-Fascist terrorists of the 1960s and
1970s looked to him as a spiritual and intellectual godfather.” What the Times says here is only half true. Evola was not as influential on Italian fascism as he would have liked to have been, but he was and remains an influence on far-right politics in Europe, and if the alt-right have their way, this will be true in the States too.

Gábor Vona, leader of the far-right Jobbik movement in Hungary, wrote an introduction to a collection of Evola’s essays, entitled Manual for Nationalist Youth. The Greek neo-Nazi movement Golden Dawn—no relation to the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn—puts another Evola collection at the head of its mandatory reading list. In the 1990s, manuals on how to live the Traditional life, inspired by Evola, appeared in Italy. These promoted values that could form a “bulwark against the onslaught of profoundly disruptive forces” coming, more times than not, from the liberal side of the political divide. These manuals were written by members of Raido, “a community of individuals ready to uphold Traditional values in society and politics.” Their aim was to educate “young political militants in the ranks of the Italian radical right.” This was in service of a “jihad to be waged at every moment against the enemies within.”

These and other similar writings were aimed at readers ready not only to embrace new and radical ideas, but to do something about them.

Given such military sentiments, that Bannon, prophet of war, should name-drop Evola seems natural. Yet while Evola’s warrior spirituality might appeal to Bannon, the kind of “economic nationalism” that Bannon professes would have left Evola cold. Evola’s political and social views ran to caste systems and monarchies, and the populist appeal that put Trump in power would have nauseated him, as would Bannon’s gestures to forces within the Vatican. It was these same mistakes of Mussolini that convinced Evola that fascism in Italy was heading in the wrong direction.
Mussolini depended too much on the mob and was too ready to make deals with the church to insure his position. But this did not put Evola off fascism; it was only Mussolini’s brand that left a bad taste in his mouth. For Evola, what Il Duce had in place was simply not Fascist enough. His illuminated politics went way beyond it.


Did Bannon think of this when he name-checked Evola?

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Traditionalism, we’ve seen, believes in a primal revelation given at the dawn of history, which was subsequently obscured by the accretions growing around the great religions. How did it become associated with fascism? How did the idea of the perennial philosophy come to underwrite notions of a totalitarian society? How did a belief that began in the Renaissance come to inform an ideology that sees the Renaissance itself as the source of our modern woes? Is Traditionalism, as Umberto Eco believed, a kind of Ur-fascism, or is that true of only some expressions of it?

To address these questions we need to go back to the beginning. And this, in fact, is exactly what Traditionalism itself wants to do.

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Although it places its origin in the dim past, Traditionalism as it is known today has its roots in the occult revival of the late nineteenth century. London, Vienna, St. Petersburg, and other European cities were filled with a mystical excitement, even an occult hysteria. None were as exciting or fashionable as Paris. It was into this milieu that a twenty-year-old René Guénon arrived in 1906 and it is with him that Traditionalism begins.

Guénon’s introduction to the Traditionalist faith came through his association with Gérard Encausse. Under his pseudonym “Papus,” Encausse, a doctor and surgeon, was the doyen of occult Paris during
the fin de siècle. Barely read today, even in the French-speaking world, in the years before World War I, Papus was the authority on practically all aspects of the esoteric path. Encausee took his pseudonym “Papus” from a physician mentioned in one of the works of Apollonius of Tyana. Under that name he wrote dozens of books on everything from the Tarot to Freemasonry and was at the heart of practically every occult society in France active at the time. When a young René Guénon decided to enter the Parisian occult world, he came to the right place.

René Guénon was an eccentric character, a personality of fastidious exactitude who was obsessed with “getting it right.” He was born in 1886 in Blois in central France, and spent most of his early years ill, being cared for and tutored by a spinster aunt. Like many drawn to the occult path, he spent much of his time alone. Possessed of a sharp critical intellect, early on he developed a taste for mathematics, a preference for the stable and immutable over the changing and transient. This need for certainty precluded an appreciation of the imagination, a lack that another advocate of tradition, the poet and Blake scholar Kathleen Raine, noted in Guénon. What concerned him was the “transcendent.” He had no interest in history. For him, the last two thousand years were “relatively unimportant.” This dismissal of history was linked to a profound antipathy to the modern world, a dislike shared by Traditionalists to come.

Another trait that surfaced soon was his “rightness.” Once Guénon had arrived at his conclusions about anything, no argument could shake him, and he refused to admit he could be wrong. This certitude produced at times certain paranoid tendencies, which informed later beliefs about “black brotherhoods” and “counter-initiates” conspiring against him.

...
frequented by many artists and writers in fin de siècle Paris. Claude Debussy, J. K. Huysmans, Odilon Redon, Erik Satie, and others would gather there with occultists like Stanislas de Guaita and Joséphin “Sâr” Péladan, head of a modern Rosicrucian order. *L’Initiation*, Papus’s journal, was their occult reading material, as was *Le Voile d’Isis* (The Veil of Isis), Papus’s other journal, which would later become *Les Études Traditionelles* (Traditional Studies).

Papus started out a Theosophist but left to focus on his own interests, which were more Western oriented. He started his own independent group for esoteric studies, what he called the Hermetic School. And he also started a Martinist order, based on the work of Louis Claude de Saint-Martin, who wrote books of mystical insight in the early nineteenth century under the pseudonym of the “Unknown Philosopher.”

There was one other esoteric tradition that Papus carried on, a strange form of occult politics known as “synarchy.” What is synarchy? The easiest way to understand it is to see it as the opposite of anarchy. If anarchy means “no government,” synarchy means “total government.”

Papus inherited this tradition from the eccentric French occultist Joseph Alexandre Saint-Yves d’Alveydre. Saint-Yves acquired it himself, he said, from astral journeys he had taken to the underground city of Agartha.

Where is Agartha? That is a good question.

... 

By most accounts Agartha is somewhere under the earth, perhaps below the Gobi Desert. Guénon himself would ponder this and write about it in his book *The Lord of the World*. Wherever Agartha is, it is governed under the laws of synarchy, a totalitarian caste-bound organic social ordering headed by a Sovereign Pontiff known as the Brahmatma, Guénon’s Lord of the World. He is the supreme leader, the spiritual and political head of a theocratic state. Synarchy is the sort of government many Traditionalists would approve of. It is a
kind of literalized “body politic,” based on universal principles in which everyone has his or her proper place and in which there is little room for what we think of as democracy. It is, depending on one’s perspective, a stable or rigid social arrangement, something along the lines of Plato’s *Republic* or the Hindu *Laws of Manu*. Fundamentally it means a society based on the threefold division of the human being into intellectual, emotional, and instinctive functions.¹⁷

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**Saint-Yves had an** interest in the occult, and like Éliphas Lévi, he combined this with an ardent Catholicism—his title “Marquis d’Alveydre” was given to him by the pope. Also like Lévi, he embraced the idea of an ages-long tradition of secret knowledge, handed down through the centuries, much as Traditionalism does, something he found in the work of Antoine Fabre d’Olivet, who wrote of the “primal language” at the dawn of history. The legend of Agartha came to Saint-Yves through his Sanskrit tutor, Haji Sharif, who, he discovered, could also teach him the unknown ancient Agarthian language of Vattan. Within the Agarthian tongue many secrets of the universe were concealed, Haji told him. Saint-Yves soon agreed.

Saint-Yves would also have heard about Agartha or Asgartha from a book by the French traveler Louis Jacolliot, from whom Madame Blavatsky borrowed judiciously, *Le Fils de Dieu* (The Son of God). In it Jacolliot speaks of a hidden prehistoric city, Asgartha, which lies somewhere in Central Asia and is the home of the Aryan race. Many people later came to know of Agartha when it formed part of the grab bag of occult misinformation making up the bestselling *Morning of the Magicians*, the book that set off the occult revival of the 1960s.¹⁸ But Saint-Yves’s most detailed knowledge of Agartha most likely came from his own visits there, which he took in a kind of waking dream, a journey into the “Neither-Neither” of the hypnagogic state.¹⁹
SAINT-YVES WROTE of his astral adventures in Agartha in his book *Mission de l’Inde* (The Mission of India). He described a vast, subterranean technologically advanced empire whose millions of inhabitants are in perfect harmony with their place in the social hierarchy. They are fitted into their social slot as a cell is to a human body. And like cells, they cannot rebel against their fate without making the entire body politic ill. Ages ago, all of the earth shared in this harmonious rule. But a schism circa 4000 BCE fragmented the world into a plurality of states and marked the start of the *Kali Yuga*, our present dark age, and forced the Sovereign Pontiff and his people underground. There he and they have waited ever since. When the upper world returns to harmony and accepts the rule of synarchy, Saint-Yves tells us, the Brahmmatma will be happy to share his greater knowledge and wisdom with it. In the meantime he is patient.

Saint-Yves, however, was so eager to accept the Brahmmatma’s generous offer that he wrote letters to Pope Leo XIII, Queen Victoria, and Tsar Alexander III, pressing them to see the benefits of synarchic rule. Saint-Yves went on to campaign very successfully for the synarchic cause, drawing large crowds to lectures, lobbying government ministers, and distributing synarchic literature widely. In 1893 he was made a Chevalier of the Légion d’honneur for his work in promoting synarchy as a response to the threat of anarchist terrorism that was as much a part of everyday European life then as it is today, with anarchist bombs exploding left and right in many capitals. Saint-Yves promoted the synarchic cause vigorously, but he did have second thoughts about his source for synarchist wisdom. No sooner had his account of his astral journey to Agartha seen print than he ordered all copies of the book destroyed. Only two survived, Saint-Yves’s own and a copy his printer secretly hid. It is because of this hidden copy that we know of Saint-Yves’s adventures in the underworld.

Saint-Yves never explained his action, which has left room for others to speculate about it. One suggestion was that he had simply
fabricated the story of Agartha from earlier sources, like Lord Edward Bulwer-Lytton’s tale of an underground super-civilization, *The Coming Race*, and then had a change of heart. But perhaps the Brahmatma, hearing of his account, compelled him to recant it.

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Yet even without the benefit of Saint-Yves’s account synarchy seemed to flourish. In *The Sion Revelation* Lynn Picknett and Clive Prince argue that during the years *entre deux guerres* synarchy made its way through French right-wing politics. It then found a home in Vichy France, went underground, and may even be seen in the occult landscaping of François Mitterrand, who created a new “psychogeography” of Paris. The pyramid in the courtyard of the Louvre, familiar to readers of *The Da Vinci Code*, and the “stargate” at La Grande Arche de la Défense, along with other sites, were created by Mitterrand during his time as French president. These were laid out according to an esoteric design that, Picknett and Prince argue, ultimately leads back to synarchy.

Picknett and Prince even argue that the European Union, which we can say began with the establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community in 1950, is an outgrowth of synarchy. Saint-Yves had lobbied vigorously for a Europe united into a single, synarchic state, with a hierarchical structure not dissimilar to that of the church. This aim was echoed, say Picknett and Prince, by Winston Churchill when in 1946 he called for the establishment of a “kind of United States of Europe.” The gradual dominance of the EU over more and more of its individual member states’ autonomy—as the EU’s critics see it—may be evidence, Picknett and Prince suggest, of a slow fulfillment of the synarchy plan.

With this in mind it is curious to reflect that the warm-up to Trump’s “victory of the will” was the referendum in Great Britain in 2016 to leave the European Union, otherwise known as Brexit, which won by a close majority. The man most responsible for this was Nigel Farage, whose United Kingdom Independence Party is a member of
Steve Bannon’s “global Tea Party Movement.” Like Bannon, Farage is a staunch nationalist and an advocate of “traditional”—if not Traditionalist—values. Trump himself has expressed mixed messages regarding the EU and, as we will see, Vladimir Putin does not have its best wishes at heart. For Alexander Dugin, the EU is an expression of the global neoliberal hegemony which, as an agent of chaos, he is determined to bring down.

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IN 1906 GUÉNON joined Papus’s Martinist Order and also found a place in his Independent Group for Esoteric Studies. Like Papus he backed away from Theosophy and would soon attack it and other forms of modern occultism as “counter-initiatic.” Spiritualism too would suffer his disdain but not before he himself dabbled in it. Spirits were in fact the reason Guénon parted from Papus. During one séance with his fellow Martinists, a spirit claiming to be that of Jacques de Molay, the last leader of the Knights Templar, instructed Guénon to establish a new Templar Order.

The Knights Templar was a religious military order formed in 1118 to ensure safe passage for pilgrims in the Holy Land. They later rose to great prominence and power but were suppressed by Pope Clement V in 1307. According to Saint-Yves, the Templars organized themselves along synarchic lines. They are a classic expression of Evola’s “holy warrior.” Guénon later would argue that their suppression marked a singular phase of the Kali Yuga, signaling the abdication of spiritual rule to secular power.

The spirit Guénon contacted commanded him to start an Order of the Temple Renewed and Guénon complied. The Knights Templar are often suggested as the founders of Freemasonry, with which Guénon had an ambivalent relation, writing anti-Masonic tracts for Catholic journals while he was still a Mason. Guénon’s Renewed Temple, however, did not last long. One reason was that Papus did not take kindly to the fact that in order to swell its ranks, Guénon had availed himself of his mailing list. Catching wind of this, he
expelled Guénon from his groups. The etheric Jacques de Molay seemed to agree with this development; not long after Guénon’s expulsion, he ordered him to disband the renewed Templar order too.

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Guénon found a literary home for a while in the Catholic journal *Regnabit*, associated with the Cult of the Sacred Heart, which Picknett and Prince argue played an important role in promoting a form of synarchy. He became involved with Charles Maurras and the Catholic, nationalist, royalist right-wing movement Action Française, some of whose later members found common cause with the new National Front. He also became a bishop in the Gnostic Church of Jules Doinel and started the journal *La Gnose*, where he published articles on spiritualism and esotericism. But the most important influence on Guénon after Papus was a Swedish-French painter turned Sufi anarchist named Ivan Aguéli. Aguéli was an eccentric character who often gave anarchist speeches wearing a turban and Arab dress. Aguéli’s anarchism did not rub off on Guénon, but his Sufism did.

Guénon was in search of a “living tradition,” a vital connection to the transcendental truths revealed to mankind in the dim past, which he believed could still be found hidden within the great religions. In an increasingly secular world this was hard to come by. Guénon first believed he had found what he was looking for in Catholicism. He was soon disenchanted with the church and turned his attention to Hinduism. His first book, *Introduction to the Study of Hindu Doctrine*, based on a doctoral dissertation rejected by the Sorbonne, was published in 1921. But after meeting Aguéli, Guénon switched allegiance to Islam. He may have been initiated into a Sufi order then, or this may have taken place only later in Cairo. In 1927, Guénon abandoned an increasingly decadent Europe for Egypt, where he would live in practical seclusion until his death in 1951.
Either way, Guénon became in many ways a model Muslim and an exemplar to later Traditionalists.

...Before leaving France, Guénon was a familiar figure in the occult Paris of the 1920s. He was a close friend of Paul Chacornac, of Chacornac Brothers, a publisher who ran an occult bookshop near the Seine in the shadow of Notre Dame de Paris. They published Guénon’s work and took over publishing Papus’s *Le Voile d’Isis* after his death in 1917, which Guénon had a hand in turning into *Les Études Traditionnelles*. Another important esoteric meeting place was Pierre Dujols and Alexandre Thomas’s wonderfully named Librairie du Merveilleux (Bookshop of the Marvelous), which served as a headquarters for Papus’s Martinist order. One of the many occult figures it counted among its clientele was the then alchemist and later maverick Egyptologist René Schwaller de Lubicz.

Schwaller de Lubicz is known to contemporary readers through the work of Graham Hancock, who, in books like *Fingerprints of the Gods*—written with Robert Bauval—popularized Schwaller’s belief that the Sphinx is thousands of years older than the official estimate. At this time, Schwaller had yet to turn his attention to Egypt, and was deep into his alchemical research, carried on, he says, with the enigmatic alchemist Fulcanelli. His main focus was on the mysteries of the Gothic cathedrals about which Fulcanelli—his real identity remains unknown—would publish a book stolen, Schwaller de Lubicz said, from him. There’s no record of Schwaller de Lubicz and Guénon ever meeting, but we may assume their paths may have crossed in the occult underworld along the Seine.

Schwaller de Lubicz would head to Egypt in 1936, but before then he dabbled in a kind of occult politics that would have appealed to Guénon and Evola. Indeed, the kind of “pharaonic” cosmology and psychology Schwaller de Lubicz later found among the monuments at Luxor would appeal very much to Evola’s own interest in a “regal” esotericism. But in 1917 Schwaller’s political ambitions were more
modest and were centered around a group he had formed called Les Veilleurs, “the Watchers.” This was a select group who felt the same distaste for the modern world and the “revolt of the masses” that Schwaller de Lubicz shared with Guénon.

The Watchers’ numbers were not large. Included among them was Schwaller’s wife, Isha, author of *Her-Bak* and other books about ancient Egypt; the Lithuanian mystical poet and statesman O. V. de Lubicz Milosz; Gaston Revel, editor of the journal *Le Théosophe*; and Vivian Postel du Mas, whom we will meet again shortly, along with a few others. Some famous names who occasionally attended meetings were the astronomer Camille Flammarion and the painter Fernand Léger.

The Watchers were opposed to the modern world and espoused the traditional values associated with esotericism. They rejected democracy and socialism, all forms of mass culture, and materialism, and thought in terms of some kind of theocratic state. They were linked to a group called the Apostolic Center whose motto, “Hierarchy-Fraternity-Liberty,” gave a synarchic twist to the battle cry of the French Revolution, commonly accepted as an event ushering in the age of modern politics. The Apostolic Center espoused an “occultist synarchy . . . inspired by the ideas of Saint-Yves de’Alveydre.” In some accounts the Apostolic Center acted as a kind of “exoteric” form of the Watchers, with suitable applicants moving from one group to the other.

As their name suggests the Watchers were not activists, but they did publish a journal, *The Watcher*, the most objectionable aspect of which was its strain of anti-Semitism. This was a trait of Schwaller de Lubicz’s that André VandenBroeck discovered to his dismay. Like many who study esotericism, VandenBroeck found that one’s search for inner wisdom does not always agree with one’s politics. VandenBroeck, who spent more than a year with Schwaller de Lubicz in the early 1960s, saw that, for all his mystic insight, his guru was in many ways a “typical bourgeois French gentleman,” a “man of the right” who suffered from a “xenophobia coupled with religious intolerance.”
This hit home especially when VandenBroeck read an article Schwaller de Lubicz had written for the initial issue of *The Watcher*, in which members of Schwaller de Lubicz’s elite declared the group’s aims and values. VandenBroeck was troubled that when announcing the Watchers’ existence to the world, Schwaller de Lubicz’s contribution did not concern esoteric insights or deep interpretations of alchemical symbols. It was instead a “Letter to the Jews,” urging them to “Go build your country and construct a square tower in Zion.” In other words, leave France, which is not really your home, a sentiment not altogether different from that informing Raspail’s *Camp of the Saints*.

VandenBroeck said he saw much value in some of Schwaller’s political views, but that this was overshadowed by the “propensity for demagogism” and “fascism” that too often accompanied them. VandenBroeck felt that once again he had encountered “the pernicious weed that grows at the extreme political right,” which is often offered “in the name of spirituality.”

Yet even more sinister was a casual remark Schwaller made about the Watchers’ dress code. Part of their irritation with cultural decline included a distaste for modern dress. Noting the idiocies of the fashion industry—difficult to miss—Schwaller casually remarked that this wasn’t the case with the Watchers. The men there, he said, “all wore the same attire: boots, riding pants, and a dark shirt.”

This getup would not have raised eyebrows except that in the same breath Schwaller added: “Ce qui plus tard est devenu l’uniforme des SA.” “This later became the uniform of the SA.” The SA, or Sturmabteilung, were the brown-shirted paramilitary thugs who were wiped out once they helped Hitler to power. That Schwaller could mention a link between his esoteric haute couture and Nazi rabble-rousers without a pause was one thing. But how did the SA know how a Watcher dressed?
VandenBroeck discovered the answer years later, after his apprenticeship with Schwaller had ended. Maurice Girodias, infamous publisher of the Olympia Press—which featured erotic works by Henry Miller, Vladimir Nabokov, and others—knew Schwaller and VandenBroeck, and visiting VandenBroeck once he left a book behind. In *La Synarchie*—he mentions no author—VandenBroeck read about Vivian Postel du Mas, as mentioned, one of the early Watchers. The book said she was an advocate of Saint-Yves’s synarchy and had written an *Outline of an Archetypal Society* as well as a *Synarchist Pact*, which described a society based on the “four orders that correspond to the caste system.”

VandenBroeck had heard of synarchy as a shadowy movement in France in the 1930s and ’40s, especially during the years of Nazi occupation. The book also made a reference to the Watchers and VandenBroeck suddenly saw the connection between them and the SA. One of the members the book mentioned was Rudolf Hess, future deputy Führer of Nazi Germany and one of the few top-ranking Nazis with real occult interests.

VandenBroeck later read Girodias’s autobiography, where he describes meeting some synarchists at a Krishnamurti lecture in Paris sometime in the 1930s. Referring to their riding boots, Girodias asked if they were “God’s own Storm Troopers.” Girodias also saw du Mas at the founding of a Synarchist Order, where he presented a contemporary version of the caste system, a hierarchy and government based on the “differences between distinct categories of human beings.”

VandenBroeck soon connected the dots. Did Rudolf Hess copy the Watcher apparel and import it to the SA? Was Schwaller de Lubicz really the inspiration for a uniform that has come to symbolize the worst elements in human nature, an example of what the political journalist William Pfaff called the “counterfeit chivalry” that characterized the fascism entre deux guerres? Like Evola, Schwaller de Lubicz had a taste for chivalry and heraldry, which was for both a sign of their aristocratic temperament. Hess we know was a member of the notorious Thule Society, a pro-Aryan Munich group
that melded with Hitler’s German Workers Party, and whose founder, Rudolf Sebottendorf, is sometimes counted among the Traditionalists. The German Workers Party would eventually become the National Socialist German Workers Party, or Nazis for short. Do clothes make the man?

... 

Schwaller de Lubicz soon abandoned any political ideas and moved on, leaving the Watchers behind. Guénon was one step ahead of him—at least he never believed any good would come from politics. The Western world was on its way out. We simply need to stand aside and watch it fall.

Guénon made this point clear in The Crisis of the Modern World, which, with The Reign of Quantity, is probably his most influential work. The Crisis of the Modern World appeared in 1927, a time when a sense of decline was in the air. Oswald Spengler’s Decline of the West had been a bestseller a decade earlier. Martin Heidegger’s Being and Time, published the same year, concerned with the West’s “forgetfulness of being,” hit a similar note, as had T. S. Eliot’s epochal poem “The Waste Land,” published in 1922. But Guénon’s work had a peculiar ferocity. As “the primordial spirituality becomes gradually more and more obscure . . . the purely material character” of our era, he writes, turns the modern world into “a veritable monstrosity.” It is the “abomination of desolation” of the gospels. It is a complete “inversion”—one of his main concepts—of the caste system, the aim of which is to “eliminate every principle of higher order.” One of the central ills responsible for this is “individualism,” which he sees as “the mainspring for the development of the lowest possibilities of mankind.”

Guénon’s view of history was of irrevocable decline from a primordial golden age, accelerated at certain points by particularly irredeemable developments. One such development was the Renaissance, the flowering of humanism, which set the stage for what we know as the modern world. As Mark Sedgwick in his history
of Traditionalism points out, the irony here is that it is with the Renaissance itself that Traditionalism really begins.

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The idea of a primordial revelation at the heart of all the great religions appears in history during the Council of Ferrara-Florence (1438–45). It was introduced by Gemistos Plethon, a Byzantine Neoplatonic philosopher who, to keep busy while his fellow attendees split theological hairs, gave a series of lectures on what he called the *prisca theologia*, or “ancient theology.” In Plethon’s version this was preserved by the Persian mage Zoroaster and other adepts at the dawn of time, and it was at the heart of all religions. Plethon urged this idea on his audience in order to persuade them to see the newly rediscovered Plato not as a threat to Christianity, but as a precursor of and complement to it.  

Not long after Plethon, the Renaissance Platonist Marsilio Ficino would add the mythical Hermes Trismegistus to the members of the *Aurea Catena*, or “Golden Chain of Adepts,” the bearers of the primordial revelation handed down through the ages. As the historian Frances Yates argued, Ficino’s Hermeticism and belief in a perennial philosophy shared by all religions informed much of the Renaissance genius and made important inroads in an attempt to steer Christianity toward a kind of “multi-faith” consciousness. In 1540 the Catholic scholar Agostino Steuco coined the term *philosophia perennis* as a name for the original source from which both Christianity and Platonism emerged. It was some form of this idea that led Éliphas Lévi to believe in a secret universal doctrine. In another form it reached Guénon.

Traditionalism Guénon-style accepts the basic premise of a primordial revelation, but it argues that since that noble beginning, mankind has steadily gone downhill, away from the spiritual and increasingly toward the secular. That in a nutshell is the *Kali Yuga*. The Renaissance saw the rediscovery of the ancients, and the valorizing of the pristine past over the present, which is at the heart
of Traditionalism. But it also saw the rise of the human over the
divine. The past rediscovered in the works of Plato and the Corpus
Hermeticum empowered the human, a development expressed in
Pico della Mirandola’s Oration on the Dignity of Man, which
jettisons the medieval idea of human beings as wretched sinful
creatures. With the rise of science shortly after, this humanism—or
hubris, depending on your view—soon challenged the divine’s
primacy. By the beginning of the twentieth century, this process had
become complete, with materialism and “scientism,” “all too human”
philosophies, supporting the “reign of quantity” over quality that
Guénon saw in power everywhere.44

Politically this decline was expressed in the rise of democracy,
socialism, communism, and other manifestations of the “people”
geared fundamentally toward a high secular, not spiritual, standard
of living. Guénon rejected these because “the higher cannot proceed
from the lower.”45 Yet the modern world accepts this inversion, and
where “all that really matters is in fact in decline”—the truths of the
primordial revelation—“people foolishly suppose they see progress,”
with the increase of “freedom,” “equality,” individualism, and
material prosperity.46 Guénon’s synarchic tutoring is evident in his
observation that in the modern world “nobody any longer occupies
the place that he should.” Caste, for Guénon, is nothing more than
each person’s predisposition to “the fulfilment of one or another
particular function,” as Papus believed, like a cell in the body.
Opposition to this, as in Saint-Yves’s synarchic Agartha, leads to
disharmony, an illness in the body politic. As far as Guénon could
see, the body politic of the modern West was pretty ill.

There was one slight chance of recovery, or at least of briefly
slowing the decay and preparing for the return of the golden age.
Guénon believed that a small, spiritual elite, recognizing the need to
preserve the truths of Tradition, could take steps to do so. The “living
tradition” is not palatable to the masses, its discipline is too
demanding, its requirements too severe, an indictment most of us
would accept. But a small band of devotees can assimilate it and
disseminate it, as it were, behind the scenes in a way in which the
masses would be unaware. “The true elite,” Guénon believed, “would not have to intervene directly in these spheres”—that of politics and society. But “it would direct everything by an influence of which people were unaware.” “If there were a numerically small but powerfully established elite,” he argued, the masses would “obey its suggestions without suspecting its existence, or having an idea of its mode of action,” a situation that many, and not all of them readers of Guénon, in fact believe exists today.47

Guénon himself believed that there were similar elites, working on the opposite side. They were in league, he suspected, with “some directing will whose exact nature must remain rather enigmatic.”48 One might think this paranoid, but for Guénon, nothing else could account for the state of things. One of his readers agreed with him completely, although he thought that action on a larger scale could be beneficial.

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BARON JULIUS EVOLA was introduced to Guénon’s work by his onetime occult mentor Arturo Reghini, who edited two important Italian occult journals, *Atanòr* and *Ignis*, in the 1920s. In 1927—the same year as Guénon’s *Crisis*—Evola and Reghini collaborated in what was known as the UR Group, a magical association which, like New Thought and chaos magick, saw magic as “the science of the ego.” “UR” stood for the “primordial,” the “original,” and symbolized the belief that the magical traditions they were investigating were part of an ancient science, handed down through the centuries. Evola wrote several articles for the group’s journal—it was over control of this that he and Reghini eventually fell out—and not a few of them concentrate on the same notion of “creating reality” that we have looked at throughout this book. We can say that with Evola the will to power, in both a magical and a political sense, manifests in a uniquely instructive manner. One of his earliest books, on Tantra, is called *The Yoga of Power*. He would look for this commodity in the outer world too. Where Guénon was content to wait for the modern
world’s inevitable collapse, Evola was impatient to help bring it down. To do this, he would break bread with some questionable potential allies.

Giulio Cesare Andrea Evola was born in 1898 to a noble Sicilian family. This nobility featured largely in Evola’s life. As mentioned, he distanced himself early on from the others around him. He would later write, “I have long felt rather detached from what is merely human.”\(^4^9\) One form this detachment took was a dismissal of Christianity, which for him, as for many others, was a religion of the weak and ignorant masses.

Like Guénon, Evola leaned toward the precise, an exactitude that aided his studies in industrial engineering. Scholarly inclined, Evola would, like Guénon, distance himself from academia. Also like Guénon, Evola came to what he called his “personal equation” early on. This blended an impulse toward the “transcendent”—which he admits led to a “certain insensitivity and cold-heartedness”—with a preference for the “warrior” over the “priest,” or, in terms of the Hindu caste system, the *kshatriya* over the *brahmin*, a predilection he speculates he may have inherited from a past life.\(^5^0\)

This would ultimately distinguish Evola from Guénon. Where Guénon the sage favored detached contemplation, Evola the warrior wanted action. This expressed itself early on as his “tendency to take a clear-cut, uncompromising stand: a kind of intellectual intrepidity” about some issue, which he defended with a powerful “logical rigor,” much like Guénon. And like Guénon, Evola showed signs of “rightness,” and the intellectual and personal rigidity characteristic of it. As the scholar Joscelyn Godwin, who has done much to bring Evola’s work into the fold of “acceptable” esoteric thought, remarked, Evola’s “character and ideals were fully formed before he was out of his twenties, and he remained true to them for the rest of his life.”\(^5^1\) This was recognized by others. A. James Gregor, a political analyst with no interest in the esoteric, said that “what is evident in almost everything that Evola wrote was that his ideas had been fixed in his early manhood and never substantially changed over the next half-century.”\(^5^2\)
Depending on your point of view, such steadfastness can be seen as evidence of remarkable integrity or arrested development.

Evola’s way to the UR Group led through routes that seem curious for a Traditionalist who saw value only in the primordial past. In fact, they led through swaths of modern art. Ironically, Evola started out as a Futurist, one of F. T. Marinetti’s artistic pranksters who blended a love of speed, machines, and war into a new modernist aesthetic. Futurism’s celebration of cold, ruthless efficiency, technology, and martial virtues at first appealed to Evola, as it did to Mussolini. But Marinetti’s brash championing of the modern world soon tired Evola, as it did many others, and a brief stint in the army in the last days of World War I, in which he saw no action, gave him an idea of war’s reality. Like another literary man of the right, the Japanese novelist Yukio Mishima, Evola’s warrior ethos had more to do with fantasy than with fact.53 Evola enjoyed military discipline and missed it when back in civilian life. This disorientation led to an existential crisis, a continuation of a series of “experiences” Evola had while stationed in the mountains and in which he discovered that “thunder, thunderbolts, and storms are not limited to the physical world.”54 He found “normal” life “insufferable,” and saw the “flimsiness and vainness of ordinary human aims.”55 He was hungry for “intensity and absolute values,” and sought these in experiments with drugs, but what came of these were thoughts of suicide. This despair was dispelled by a Buddhist text that Evola came upon which granted him even more detachment than he already had. Through it he said he “acquired a steadfastness capable of overcoming all crises.”56 He would later write about this development in The Doctrine of Awakening, his work on Buddhist “self-mastery.”

From Buddha Evola next went to Dada, the anti-art movement that influences chaos magick. Where Futurism, for all its noise, had by definition a positive outlook, Dada spoke to Evola’s aristocratic
pessimism. Its sophisticated absurd disdain for everything, for meaning itself—an attitude it shares with postmodernism—appealed to his sense of spiritual decline, common at the time. Dada offered a “harsh necessity free from all discipline or morals.” Evola performed Dada poetry and painted Dada canvases; one of his works hangs in a museum in Rome today. He even painted his fingernails violet. But even Dada wasn’t enough, and after writing an important essay on abstract art Evola moved on.

Evola next turned to philosophy and devoted himself to grasping what he called the “absolute individual,” exploring themes that connect with what we’ve looked at in New Thought and chaos magick. From 1924 to 1927, Evola worked on *The Theory of the Absolute Individual*. He couldn’t find a publisher for it, and as with Dada and Futurism, he soon abandoned the idea of a career in philosophy. But the ideas behind his “absolute individual” informed Evola’s plunge into magic and the occult.

Precisely what Evola meant by the “absolute individual” is not clear, but we can get some idea of it from his remark that such an individual enjoys “the ability to be unconditionally whatever he wants,” something both chaos magicians and positive thinkers aspire to. Evola was influenced by the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, who in *The World as Will and Representation* argued that the world “I” perceives is a representation of an unconscious Will—the same Will we looked at when discussing Neville’s ideas about manifesting reality. For Evola the “absolute individual” is a condition of self-awareness that perceive the identity of itself and this Will. For him, “I” am the Will become conscious.

This he saw as but a short step from magic. “One could envision,” he writes, “a gradual process whereby the power of an ‘I’ expands from being the power of thought to that of magical imagination and self-persuasion: to that of persuading others and, ultimately, of persuading and altering reality itself.” The “I,” then, for Evola is as much about power as it is about identity. As he wrote, his “unbalanced affirmation of the ‘I’” served as a “doctrine of power and autarchy.” Fundamentally it was concerned with “the prospect of
the individual actually shaping the world,” an idea that we know attracts positive thinkers and chaos magicians.63

Evola’s metaphysics of the “absolute individual” are reminiscent of a once popular but now little-read work of German philosophy, *The Ego and Its Own*, by Max Stirner. Stirner was an influence on Rudolf Steiner, whose book *The Philosophy of Freedom*, like Evola’s metaphysics, is concerned with the reality of the “I” and its ultimate freedom. Stirner wants to liberate the individual from the constraints of family, society, the church, and other forces, a theme later shared by Ayn Rand and Aleister Crowley. Evola takes this to an ontological extreme and argues that each individual is actually free to create his own world, but is unaware of this freedom or too timid to discover it. It is not difficult to see that Evola’s “absolute individual” and Neville’s “I am” are practically identical.

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Evola’s ruminations on the “absolute individual” served him well as a member of the UR Group. Several members contributed to the journal *UR* on a variety of occult topics. Contributors used magical pseudonyms and Evola wrote under a number of these. Although the subjects might vary, from alchemy to astrology, the central concern of the group in general and Evola in particular was to raise the individual’s consciousness to such an intensity that it would be able to act “magically” on the world, a goal shared by positive thinkers and chaos magicians.

It was clear to Evola that what was at stake was power, the capacity to “make things happen.” Writing as “Arvo” in “Conscious Thought-Relaxation-Silence,” Evola says, “To know very well what one wants, to fix and will its plastic image without interruption... is to gather a system of occult forces into a power of realization.”64 This would not be out of place in one of Neville’s books and is not far removed from Norman Vincent Peale’s “prayer power.” The aim of Arvo’s article is to stimulate “thought that is power”; again it could be Neville or any number of New Thought authors speaking to us.
“By thinking you are,” a realization arrived at through the mantra “I THINK! I AM!” “In me there is a force that is power and command. . . . Here lies the principle of magical force, rather than in ordinary ‘will.’” Evola seems to have anticipated Trump’s “controlled neurosis”: “Thinking is realized as power when only one thought dominates the mind and directs it unfailingly . . . toward only one purpose.”65

Other articles echo similar variations on the central theme of affecting or even creating reality. “What is phenomenal,” Evola, writing as Ea in “The Nature of Initiatic Knowledge,” tells us, is “merely that which characterizes a certain degree of experience and a certain state of the self, while what is ‘absolute’ is that which is correlative to another degree of experience and to another state of the self. . . .”66 This means that our experience of reality is determined by our inner state. If we change our state, reality too will change, something that chaos magick and positive thinking agree upon. Gaining “initiatic knowledge”—knowledge, that is, of occult powers and realities—is a means of accomplishing this. On the “initiatic path the acquisition of knowledge parallels the acquisition of power.”67

This power can be put to many uses. “Active identification with a cause,” Evola argues, “virtually confers a power over that same cause,” a dictum that the devotees of Pepe the Frog might consider. But the central focus is on the sense of power and will in oneself. In “On the Magical View of Life,” again by Ea, this results in a “renewed, heroicized perception of the world . . . the sensation of the world as power” and a vision of the world which perceives “everywhere beings made of strength.” “You must perceive yourself as a center of strength” and when you do a “superior calm will ensue” which will give rise to “pure and purifying action.”68

Evola did not like to relinquish control, a personality trait he shares with Trump and other gurus and demagogues. He was always in the driver’s seat. This meant a kind of self-obsession. “The only possible dichotomy,” he wrote, is “between self-centeredness . . . which on an objective level becomes power; and non-self-
centeredness, which is to say: leaving one’s internal throne empty or occupied by ghosts.”

For him the absolute individual embodies “the supremacy of will over spontaneity,” something he sought to achieve in his magical practice.

Everything, all goals, came only from his own self-will. “These truths must penetrate the soul,” he writes. “There is no place to go, nothing to ask for, nothing to fear. The world is free: goals and reasons, ‘evolution,’ fate or providence—all that is fog, an invention by beings who did not yet know how to walk on their own and needed crutches and supports.” In other words, just do it. Evola’s depiction of the “magical view of life” is curiously reminiscent of postmodernism’s relativity of values and chaos magick’s flexible beliefs. But it is under such conditions that Evola believed one can perform a “true act, namely an action that begins directly from the Self.”

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The action Evola most had in mind was to influence the turn of events in Italy, much as the meme magicians of the alt-right wanted to influence Trump’s election. Mussolini’s “march on Rome” put him and his Fascist Party in power in 1922. Evola had his reservations—for one thing he was not a nationalist like Marinetti—but he sympathized with Mussolini, as he would have with any enemy of democracy or left-wing politics. He agreed with Mussolini’s ideal of a “Roman State and Imperium,” which he hoped would give birth to a “new type of Italian, disciplined, virile, and combative.”

Ethiopia would soon encounter Mussolini’s combative Italians, but the renaissance of the other Roman virtues was slow in coming. Evola and other impatient UR members hoped to speed things up with rituals designed to instill these in Mussolini’s followers. Like a good chaos magician, Evola wanted to work “behind the scenes in order to ultimately exert an effect on the prevailing forces in the general environment.” In chaote-speak, he wanted to give things a nudge.
That Evola took to more overt attempts to influence Mussolini suggests that the UR magic didn’t work, something the history of Italian fascism confirms. After his contretemps with Reghini, Evola started his own journal, *La Torre*, “The Tower.” This would serve as an organ for what Evola called “various expressions of the One Tradition.” *La Torre* took to pointing out that while Mussolini had the right idea, his fascism was not quite Fascist enough. What was needed was a “more radical, more intrepid Fascism, a really absolute Fascism, made of pure form, inaccessible to compromise,” a point Evola made in his article “Fascism Is Not Enough.”

We can get an idea of what Evola had in mind from a remark he made late in life. In an interview in 1964 for *Ordine Nuovo* (New Order), the journal for a far-right group of the same name, Evola envisioned what his ideal state would be like. He advocated an “organic and hierarchical civilization in which all human activities are both ordained from above and directed toward it and defined by more than merely human values.” The synarchic note here is difficult to miss. Evola did not reject fascism for the usual reasons most people would, as they would other forms of totalitarian government. Evola thought he could do it better. Mussolini didn’t, and after Evola wrote critically of his relations with the Vatican, Il Duce sent him a warning. Evola stood fast, but after only ten issues *La Torre* was forced to stop publishing.

Evola’s magical politics saw print in his book *Pagan Imperialism*, which argued that a kind of Roman paganism, rather than Catholicism, should be the spiritual heart of fascism. The book aimed to give fascism a “soul.” Evola was critical of Mussolini’s regime, but he also attempted several times to find a place within it and on some occasions did. He wrote on “problems of the spirit” for Fascist newspapers and had contact with Mussolini more than once. Evola said that he never joined a political party or voted in an election. Yet according to one Evola scholar, he did try to join the Fascist Party but was rejected.

Evola’s relations with the Italian Fascists were never as cozy as some writers have suggested, but he most likely would not have
minded if they had been. It is true that, as A. James Gregor remarks, “Evola’s relationship to Fascism . . . was always, and throughout, highly problematic.” But to say that “it is difficult to see Julius Evola as any kind of fascist at all” suggests the kind of hair-splitting favored by academics. Technically Evola may not have been a Fascist, as he was not a party member, a point that served him well in 1951, when he faced charges of inspiring neofascism. But he didn’t exactly run away from fascism either.

Evola’s call for fascism to embrace paganism and install a caste system, so that it could be directed from “above” and not “below,” did not sit well with more mundane Fascists who wanted power pure and simple. Evola recognized that “Italy seems to have been incapable of providing adequate and suitable human material for the superior possibilities of Fascism,” and acted accordingly. He turned his attention to Germany. A German edition of Pagan Imperialism, augmented to suit Aryan readers, proved a success, and he was invited to lecture in the Fatherland. Two books on race Evola had written, Aspects of the Jewish Problem and Outline of a Racist Education, also aligned him with sensibilities prominent in National Socialism.

Ironically, Evola’s ideas about race were influenced by the Jewish philosopher Otto Weininger, who, as mentioned, had a fan in Hitler. In Sex and Character, Weininger argued that Jews embraced a hatred of things of a “higher” character—hence Marx’s “religion is the opium of the people”—something they shared with women; in The Metaphysics of Sex, Evola would draw on Weininger’s views again. But while noble Aryans might agree with this, Evola’s racial thought was more subtle than theirs. “Race” for him was more spiritual than biological. This meant that while one might be biologically Jewish, one could nevertheless be “spiritually” Aryan. While this mitigates somewhat accusations of anti-Semitism against Evola—his championing of The Protocols of the Elders of Zion and other efforts,
however, seem to make up for it—it did not sit well with Nazis, who had trouble accepting that while one had pure Nordic blood, one might still have a Semitic soul.\textsuperscript{81}

Ultimately the Nazis rejected Evola’s ideas, finding them too impractical. The official view of him was unfavorable.\textsuperscript{82} To his credit, Evola was not a thug like the Nazis, but he nonetheless blackened his hands in his dealings with them. Some of this can be chalked up to a kind of idealism. Naïvely Evola believed that he could “improve” Nazism by adding a pinch of Traditionalism to it, or that he could use it to establish a synarchy-like organic state. At some point he must have known with whom he was supping, although in his autobiography, he claims ignorance about the Nazis’ worst deeds.\textsuperscript{83}

Some Nazis no doubt enjoyed his company. He met SS Führer Heinrich Himmler, who treated him to a tour of Wewelsburg, the castle and ceremonial headquarters of the SS Ordensburg, Himmler’s secret “knightly” order, to whom Evola lectured. The SS uniform and death’s head insignia—possibly inspired by Schwaller de Lubicz— appealed to Evola’s severe aesthetic and chivalric romanticism, but after an investigation into his ideas ordered by Himmler and carried out by the occultist Nazi Karl Maria Wiligut, he was deemed undesirable.\textsuperscript{84}

Evola had more success with talks he gave to Berlin’s prestigious Herrenklub, whose members were part of what was known as the Conservative Revolution. These were right-wing politicians, intellectuals, and industrialists who rejected Weimar democracy but found Hitler too crude. The writer and war hero Ernst Jünger and the jurist Carl Schmitt belonged to this group, and with the historian Oswald Spengler they are finding new readers among the alt-right and others today.\textsuperscript{85} Some of them too found themselves out of favor with the Nazis, but compared with their fate, Evola got off easy. Some were eliminated, along with the SA, in July 1934 during the Night of the Long Knives. Others were hanged as accomplices in the failed assassination attempt on Hitler on July 20, 1944. Evola also had success addressing Vienna’s influential Kulturbund, an Austrian version of the Herrenklub. But following the Anschluss of 1938,
uniting Austria with Germany, these conservative gentlemen too fell from favor. One, Walter Heinrich, a Traditionalist himself, was immediately arrested.\textsuperscript{86}

It may have been Evola’s success in Germany that led to a brief victory for him in Italy. When Mussolini, wanting to appear more than Hitler’s puppet, enacted his own racial laws, he looked to Evola as a guide. Evola had already written quite a bit about race.\textsuperscript{87} In \textit{The Myth of Blood} he produced a kind of encyclopedia of racist thought, emphasizing Nordic superiority, and in \textit{The Defense of Race} he developed a racial theory based on Tradition. In \textit{The Synthesis of Racial Doctrine} he produced a work that, in Mussolini’s words, was “just what he needed.” With it he could “conform” to Hitler’s ideas, but also add his own twist, as a token of independence.\textsuperscript{88}

Evola believed his synthesis had “engaged with the issue of race from a superior, spiritual perspective.” He did his best to avoid “vulgar anti-Semitism,” but his assessment of the Jewish influence on modern culture as “corrosive”—a Nazi buzzword—met with the expected approval.\textsuperscript{89} Mussolini ordered newspapers to review the book favorably and approved of Evola’s idea for an Italian-German journal called \textit{Blood and Spirit}. Less Traditional advisers in Il Duce’s cabinet were not so keen and talked Mussolini out of it. The project was abandoned.

Mussolini in any case would soon be out of a job. In the summer of 1943, following major victories by the Allies, the Grand Council of Fascism removed Mussolini from office and had him arrested. He was rescued a few weeks later by SS Captain Otto Skorzeny in a daring operation, and Evola was among those greeting a liberated Il Duce at Hitler’s Rastenburg headquarters. For a time Evola found a place in Mussolini’s short-lived Fascist Salò republic, but by May 1945 both Mussolini and Hitler were dead. Evola spent the last days of the war recruiting volunteers for an “international SS brigade” that would fight on to the end. He himself suffered severe injuries during the Soviet shelling of Vienna. As he walked the blasted streets, “calmly questioning” his fate, a Russian shell shattered his spine and left him paralyzed below the waist. For the remainder of
his life, Evola was confined to a wheelchair. For a mountaineer ready to scale physical and spiritual heights, this must have been a bitter fate.90

THE COLLAPSE OF the thousand-year Reich convinced Evola that “really absolute Fascism” would have to be realized in another way. Like Guénon he now concentrated on standing aside from the despised modern world and observing its demise, rather than trying to establish a Traditional authoritarian state. But the kshatriya in him still wanted action, and in the postwar years he engaged in a kind of esoteric guerrilla war against modernity. Books like Men Among the Ruins appealed to l'uomo differenziato, “those who were different,” who rejected both “Coca-Cola and Marx,” American capitalism and Soviet communism. He called on them to embody individually what he called the “legionary spirit” and the “warrior ethic,” and to drag their feet against the modern tide. One influential “closet Traditionalist” who embraced the legionary spirit was the historian of religion Mircea Eliade, who was greatly influenced by Evola and shared with him an appreciation of Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, leader of the Romanian far-right “chivalrous” Legion of the Archangel Michael, later known as the Iron Guard.91 It was around this time that Evola faced charges of attempting to revive fascism. His eloquent defense and the fact that he hadn’t joined the party cleared him of these, but he was considered a dangerous influence from then on.

Evola’s guerrilla war took the form of what he called apoliteia, a kind of active nihilism or philosophical terrorism that regarded every aspect of the modern world as a legitimate target for its scorn. In Ride the Tiger, one of his last and most engaging books, Evola cast the withering gaze of apoliteia on modernity’s latest developments—existentialism, the Beat Generation, drugs—in very readable and incisive prose, designed to provide “those who are different” with a kind of Rough Guide to the last days of the Kali Yuga.
By this time Evola had gathered a group of followers, out of sympathy with postwar democracy and contemptuous of the rising “Americanization” of Europe. Suddenly his books were selling to a new young radical right that the rise of the New Left had prompted. He was christened “our Marcuse” by the Italian far-right leader Giorgio Almirante, a nod to Herbert Marcuse, the far-left Frankfurt School philosopher taken up by the 1960s counterculture.

In his small apartment in Rome, Evola spoke to a new generation of “spiritual aristocrats,” eager to hear his memories of Mussolini, Hitler, and Himmler. His words reached some ardent ears. When he said “Nothing in this system deserves to be saved” or “It is not a question of contesting and polemicizing, but of blowing up everything,” some took this very seriously. By the 1970s neo-Fascist groups like the New Order, the National Vanguard, the National Front, and others tried, in different ways, to put Evola’s apoliteia into action, with an “armed spontaneity” aimed at “corrupt and bourgeois” democracy that was strangely reminiscent of the antics of Evola’s old alumni, the Futurists. With the Kali Yuga coming to a close, this form of licensed mayhem seemed made to order.
EVOLA’S MOST INFLUENTIAL and controversial work, Revolt Against the Modern World—which I’ve so far omitted mentioning—has to be one of the most unremitting attacks on Western modernity ever written, an assault even more blistering than Guénon’s Crisis of the Modern World. It serves as a kind of blueprint for everything the alt-right and their Traditionalist fellow travelers find wrong with the modern West. As such, it deserves some attention.

Revolt Against the Modern World is “a study in the morphology of civilization and history,” an account of the West which depicts the modern era as “the final phase in a vast process of general devolution.”¹ The notion of a “morphology” of civilization—a study of its forms—came to Evola from Oswald Spengler, whose Decline of the West he translated into Italian. Spengler believed in a kind of “organic” view of history, which sees civilizations as living organisms that are born, mature, and die. There is not one common linear history, of which all the various civilizations—Egyptian, Babylonian, Greek, and so on—are episodes, the standard, modern view since the Enlightenment. Instead, for Spengler, civilizations are self-enclosed totalities, with irreducible characters that set them apart from one another, an idea that sits well with much of postmodernism’s relativity of values and rejection of “grand narratives.”

It is also an idea that appeals to various critics of Western “hegemony,” because it liberates them from Eurocentrism. There is not, say, one “history of art,” which reaches from the earliest cave paintings to the latest audience-friendly museum installation, but the different “art” of each different civilization, unique and
incommensurable with others. And the same is true for each civilization’s science, philosophy, politics, religion, and social norms. Spengler is the grandfather of today’s “cultural relativism.” Our modern versions of these things, according to him, are not “better” or more “advanced” than earlier models, as we naïvely believe, only different. Each civilization is like a flower in a garden; each has its own petals and fragrance and there is no ideal outside itself at which it is aiming. Flowers do not “progress.” For Spengler, neither does history.

This pluralistic view will turn up later, as an alternative to what many anti-Western thinkers see as the totalitarian character of modern liberal “globalization.” For Spengler the “Faustian” civilization of the modern West, which begins with the Renaissance and humanism, was on its way out, and a harder, more ruthless society was approaching. A look at today’s world might suggest that Spengler was right. Evola certainly thought so, although the reasons he gives for the decline of the West have less to do with biological metaphors than with metaphysical intuitions. Where Spengler saw each civilization as a world unto itself, with its “decline” part of its natural life cycle, Evola posited a “primordial” beginning from which all subsequent history has gradually drifted away, until it has reached the confusion and corruption that he saw rampant today.

Revolt’s two parts are divided into an account of how Evola envisioned the Traditional world of the past and a depiction of the evils of the modern, fallen world. It was published in 1934 and was written during Hitler’s rise to power and with an Aryan readership in mind; it was in fact the German edition of Revolt that prompted Hermann Hesse to call Evola “dangerous.” Nothing in Western secular society is spared Evola’s withering analysis. Many who find fault with the modern world appreciate Evola’s views. But having Evola in your antimodern arsenal comes at a price. It requires adopting a perspective that is in many ways based on amplifying Evola’s “personal equation” until it becomes the arbiter of reality.

The central theme of Revolt, and of the rest of Evola’s work, is what he calls “the doctrine of the two natures.” These are “being” and
“becoming.” Being is the world of the eternal, the immutable and unchanging, the fixed point of perfection and power beyond space and time. In a word, the “transcendent.” Becoming is the ever-flowing flux of phenomena, the fluid, shifting world of sensory reality and human history. Nietzsche contrasted these in *The Birth of Tragedy* in the Greek gods Apollo and Dionysus, beauty and intoxication. They are in fact at the root of the Western philosophical tradition, with the pre-Socratic philosophers Parmenides and Heraclitus saying that all is one and immutable and all is change and transitory, respectively. In *The Yoga of Power* Evola writes of them as Shiva, “the static, luminous, and masculine form of the divine,” and Shakti, the “feminine, dynamic, and life-giving form,” or as *purusha*, the “purely spiritual principle,” and *prakriti*, “nature.”

A similar polarity can be found in different forms in practically all religions, the Taoist notion of yin and yang being the most well known.

Tradition affirms that the “higher” or “transcendent” must rule over the transitory, that the unchanging principles of Truth must govern the inconstant flux of things, otherwise chaos will ensue. In short, the spiritual must dominate the secular. All “organic, differentiated and hierarchical civilizations,” Evola writes, are informed by a “transcendent influence . . . embodied by an elite or leader possessing an authority that is unconditional, legitimate and impersonal.” One recalls the infallibility that Hermann Göring ascribed to Hitler or that members of the Collective did to Ayn Rand.

This “transcendent influence” was the meaning of the Great Chain of Being, the ladder of reality reaching from the Absolute to the sublunar world that dominated cosmological thought until the modern period. According to Evola, a parallel arrangement was in place in the social ordering of the past, at the time of the primordial revelation. But since then the forces of “becoming” have gradually taken over, until we have arrived at the rapidly changing flux of contemporary post-truth life that chaos magicians and postmodernists celebrate.
Evola accounts for this predicament with his own version of the myth of the Fall. In ages past, a noble Nordic-Aryan people lived in a strange land near the North Pole called Hyperborea, which means “beyond the north wind.” The “Thule” of Rudolf Sebottendorf’s Thule Society refers to a similar polar land, and Evola got the idea of an Arctic origin of the Aryan race from a book by the Hindu militant nationalist Bal Gangadhar Tilak, *The Arctic Home in the Vedas*. This “lost continent of the European imagination,” as the anthropologist Richard Rudgley calls Hyperborea, was a land of temperate climate, a perpetual summer, and in Greek mythology it was the home of the sun god Apollo. For Evola it was also the home of the “primordial revelation.”

The Hyperboreans worshiped a patriarchal solar deity and embraced a “virile spirituality,” the kind of warrior ethos embodied in the *kshatriya*. They were devotees of the way of being, valuing a transcendent immutable reality beyond the senses. They lived in a stable, castelike hierarchical social order, led by a supreme leader, rather like the synarchy of Saint-Yves’s Agartha. In this organic society, everyone knew his place. It was the kind of society that Evola wanted to create with his “absolute fascism.” But a sudden catastrophe changed everything. A shift in the earth’s axis, which gave it its tilt and started our four seasons, forced the Hyperboreans to leave their polar home and head south, rather as the Brahmatma’s descent into Agartha began following a similar disaster.

This is when the trouble started. Leaving their homeland, the migrating Hyperboreans encountered a southern race, with values different from theirs. These southern people were nature oriented and followed the way of becoming. They worshiped a moon and earth goddess, were peaceful, lived collectively in communes, and embraced a kind of egalitarianism. In Evola’s terms, they were Telluric—earthly—while the Hyperboreans were Uranian—of the sky. If the Hyperboreans were warriors, these southern folk sound rather like hippies or “social justice warriors.” Evola based much of his account of this southern lunar race on the work of the nineteenth-century Swiss cultural theorist Johann Jakob Bachofen, whose book
Das Mutterecht ("The Matriarchy") argued that prehistoric civilization had been matriarchal, rather along the lines of how Evola saw his southerners.

Gradually miscegenation took place between the northern solar types and the southern lunar types. Over time the "virile spirituality" of the Hyperboreans was diluted, and the southern, feminine virtues dominated. What this amounted to, as Guénon recognized, was a gradual "inversion" of the Traditional caste system, with the higher, transcendent, nonhuman spiritual values that should be guiding society losing their importance while the "all-too-human" values of materialism and individual "liberty," embodied in specific races such as the Jews, take pride of place.

In this descent, power has moved from the priesthood to kings to the bourgeoisie, until now it resides in the mob—or, less dismissively, the "people." This turns on its head the Traditional hierarchy of brahmin, kshatriya, vaishya, and shudra, or priest, warrior, merchant, and worker. Were Evola to include criminals and other disenfranchised members of society, whose "human rights" are often vigorously affirmed, he might have said that even the Chandalas, or "untouchables," were more important today than ever before.10

The end result of this decline is our secular world today, with the higher transcendent values ignored if not actively denied and the lower values dominating. Atheism, materialism, consumerism, individual "rights" and "liberties," mob rule (democracy), hedonism, mass education, perpetual entertainment, eroticism, "scientism," interracial marriages, gender swapping, and a variety of other distractions take the place of the spiritual realities that according to Evola, Guénon, and other Traditionalists should be at the heart of civilization. As Guénon said, today we live under the "reign of quantity," and the immediate prospects of this changing anytime soon seem rather slim. We have reached what the Greek poet Hesiod called the "Iron Age," a time of confusion and fear when "the center cannot hold" and "every man is for himself." It is a time of a "war of all against all."
One reader of Evola took this idea of a “war of all against all” very seriously. In the Russia Alexander Dugin emerged from, it was almost the order of the day.

DONALD TRUMP MAY be the first postmodern U.S. president, but his counterpart in Russia, Vladimir Putin, has been involved with post-truth and alternative facts for some time now. Trump seems in many ways to be modeling his administration on the kind of system Putin has had in place for years, in which the business of politics entails not only the practical concerns of running a government, but the wider, more inclusive activity of creating reality. If Trump’s personal style and modus operandi suggest similarities with chaos magick, the kind of reality Putin and his “political technologists” have been busy manufacturing seems in many ways very much like the kind of shifting, transitory world that chaos magicians find appealing. It is a world in which one can be “lewd and refined, cunning and naïve,” without breaking step, and in which the aim to “try on every persona the world has ever known” seems a matter of course. It is a world in which, according to one witness, “nothing is true and everything is possible,” and “life is one glittering masquerade, where every role and any position or belief is mutable.”

This state of affairs has its roots in the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s. When perestroika and glasnost helped to bring down the Berlin Wall and end the Cold War, hopes were high for a liberated Russia enjoying the political freedoms and economic opportunities known to western Europe. But the idealism and optimism of the first few post-Soviet years turned to disappointment and disillusionment when Western notions of democracy and liberal capitalism did not take hold. There were already tensions between Russians drawn to Europe and those who rejected the West, a split that had run through the Russian soul for centuries and which is still in place today. Many embraced the new freedoms. Others found
themselves adrift in a strange, bewildering, and insecure world, and nostalgia for the old Communist regime quickly set in.

The collapsing Soviet structures could not contain the new developments, and soon the vacuum created by the end of communism led to a kind of anarchy. The West it began to resemble was more like the American Wild West than anything else. Police authority was replaced by private security firms. Government services collapsed, gutted by political corruption. Political gangsterism became the norm, with powerful, wealthy, ruthless bosses cutting out fiefdoms from the carcass of the USSR, with the Kremlin just one more gang among the rest. Organized crime thrived. It was the time of the rise of the oligarchs, with executive and economic power falling into the same very corruptible hands.

When the ruble collapsed in 1998, the Russian economy went into free fall, taking everything else with it, destroying “all faith in the liberal market model of society.” The chaos that followed was the perfect environment for a strongman to emerge. He would take charge of the situation, stop the rot, bring stability to a confused, directionless people, and make them great again. Enter ex-KGB operative Vladimir Putin.

PUTIN’S ROAD TO becoming de facto tsar of twenty-first-century Russia was made clear through the work of his postmodern spin doctor and PR man, Vladislav Surkov, who served as Putin’s deputy chief of staff and deputy prime minister from 1999 to 2013. Described as a “cynic in velvet,” Surkov combined his political technology with a love of gangsta rap, Beat poetry, and writing postmodern fiction. Almost Zero, a 2009 bestselling satiric novel about twenty-first-century Russian life, was published under a pseudonym but was almost certainly written by Surkov, although in the preface he does put his name to, he denies being its author. The odd thing is that the milieu of cynicism and self-promotion that the book satirizes, in which “everything is PR,” is one that Surkov himself created. Such
ambivalence epitomizes Surkov’s character. He is a real twenty-first-century hipster, with posters of Che Guevara and John Lennon on his walls and a photo of Tupac Shakur topping his desk, next to one of Putin. He writes essays on modern art and the occasional rock lyric and can be seen at the best galleries in town wearing a leather jacket and white shirt that is “part Joy Division and part 1930s commissar.”

Known as Putin’s “gray cardinal,” Surkov was considered a “natural at PR because he was used to half-truths.” His media savvy and talent for prevarication were put to good use in his project of making cynicism the main business not only of Russian politics, but of Russian life itself. While politicians have always had a penchant for double-talk, Surkov refined the policy of eloquently saying nothing into a kind of conceptual art that satisfied political expediency while providing first-class entertainment. In Surkov’s Russia, “to believe in something and stand by it . . . is derided,” while “the ability to be a shape-shifter [is] celebrated.” Post-truths, alternative facts, and manufactured reality were Surkov’s stock in trade, and with him at the political dashboard, a whole host of personae, “mutable beliefs,” and ideological chameleons took center stage. Trump may be America’s first reality-TV president, a telly-tulpa, as it were. But Russia à la Surkov was one long season of Big Brother.

BORN ASLAMBEK DUDAYEV in a Chechen village in 1964, Vladislav Surkov had a Russian mother and Chechen father. His mother was a schoolteacher and his father, who soon abandoned the family, was one too. A brilliant student and a charmer with girls, Surkov later moved to Moscow, where he tried out various pursuits, including metallurgy and drama, before spending a few years in military intelligence. (Once again a military background.) Like others we’ve seen, Surkov had a tendency toward “rightness” and violence; he was given to physical altercations and was expelled from drama school
for fighting. As Surkov went through changes, so did Russia, from post-Communist elation and economic collapse to the rise of the oligarchy and the “mafia state.” In such a shifting, uncertain environment, to stick to any stable belief was a liability, and a talent for adopting and abandoning ideologies—cherished by chaoticians—an asset.

Surkov was drawn to Moscow’s arty set, and the “performance art” popular then was a good warm-up for his real forte, public relations. He started his career at twenty-three, when he became the bodyguard of Mikhail Khodorkovsky, one of the original Russian oligarchs. They met at a martial arts class. Years later Putin as president had Khodorkovsky arrested on charges of fraud, which many suspect were trumped up; he was eventually released in 2013. Khodorkovsky is one of many who discovered that money was little protection if you got in the way of Tsar Vladimir’s plans.

Khodorkovsky recognized Surkov’s intelligence—something he prided himself on—and decided to make use of his brains rather than his brawn. In 1992 Surkov launched the first advertisement on Russian television, a commercial for Khodorkovsky’s Bank Menatep. Khodorkovsky, soon to become Russia’s richest man, was shown with fistfuls of cash, assuring people that they too could become rich, rather like a Russian Trump. For a people brought up to believe capitalism was evil, to have wads of rubles thrust in their faces must have been something of a shock.

Surkov soon fell out with Khodorkovsky and went to work for a rival bank. When Khodorkovsky was later arrested, Surkov was typically cynical about it. He was by then in charge of the media campaign about the arrest; now instead of pictures of the oligarch’s riches, Khodorkovsky was seen behind bars. Asked about his treatment of his old employer, Surkov replied, “There are no limits to a man’s flexibility,” a neat gloss on “being all you can be.”

Surkov found work as head of PR for Ostankino, the Russian television center, and it is here we can say that Putin’s Russia began. Russian media was then in the hands of Boris Berezovsky, an engineer and mathematician who had rejected academia to use his
talent with numbers to profit from communism’s collapse. Berezovsky had masterminded Boris Yeltsin’s reelection in 1996, through the help of Gleb Pavlovsky, the Kremlin’s then top political technologist and spin master. While in the hospital Berezovsky was visited by Surkov, who had by then found a perch on Yeltsin’s presidential staff. Yeltsin, who was ill and alcoholic, had suffered from the Chechen war, and a successor to his office was needed.

The successor would start as prime minister. Several people were up for the office, but a poll showed that the people’s choice would need to be like the hero of a World War II–era KGB television series of the 1970s, Seventeen Moments of Spring. Vladimir Putin, who had entered politics after the KGB closed shop, had joined Yeltsin’s staff in 1996 and seemed made for the part. He may not have been a TV star like Trump, but he looked like one.

When Surkov visited Berezovsky in hospital, the oligarch told him of his idea for a new political party, centered in the Kremlin, that would gain power and keep it. This was the start of United Russia, the largest and most powerful political party in Russia today. It is no exaggeration to say that United Russia occupies nearly the same political space in twenty-first-century Russia that the Communist Party had in the Soviet past. As one political technologist remarked, “United Russia is not a party . . . it’s just a mechanism for controlling people.” With Surkov in charge, that is certainly what it was.

In 2000 a landslide victory made Putin Russia’s second president. One of the first things he did in office was to seize control of the national television, press, and other media outlets. The era of post-truth and alternative fact Surkov-style had begun. From then until 2013, when he retired from frontline politics, Surkov the political technologist ran the country as “a wonderful postmodern theatre,” full of “experiments with old and new political models.” What Surkov mastered was the use of a democratic and liberal vocabulary in the service of a totalitarian government. His aim was to create a
“postmodern dictatorship that uses the language and institutions of democratic capitalism for authoritarian ends.” His term for this is “managed democracy,” one of several Orwellian coinages that fuse antithetical ideas in true postmodern fashion. Others include “illiberal capitalism” and “conservative modernization.” People know it is not a true democracy, but the “stability” that Putin brought to a collapsed society, resulting in a much higher standard of living than in the Soviet days, compensates for the loss of freedom, and most are willing to accept this.

To some this is hypocrisy. To Surkov it’s simply being realistic. In a world where everything is PR—or, as chaos magicians might say, “glamour”—notions like “truth,” “freedom,” and “reality” are negotiable and generally give way before pragmatism. Such cognitive manipulation accounts for the cachet that NLP—neuro-linguistic programming—and postmodern philosophy have acquired among Russia’s power elite, each of whom wants to be the next master of reality. That chaos magicians also look to NLP for inspiration suggests that both camps share a common interest.

From the beginning Surkov knew the truth of Goebbels’s dictum, that propaganda must be entertaining. The kind of “politics as entertainment” that Americans are experiencing under Trump was the order of the day at the Kremlin, and Surkov delivered. He was the grand vizier who, through the miracle of television and the press, performed magic for millions of Russians, creating reality for them anew each morning. The task was to “synthesize Soviet control with Western entertainment.”

To manage democracy efficiently, the people must be kept amused, and Surkov did this through television talk shows, news broadcasts, political announcements, all geared toward getting the message across in the most entertaining way, with an assortment of colorful speakers creating a simulacrum of real discussion and feeding emotions of nationalism and fear. Media hysteria about fake foreign foes complemented images of Putin as a kind of magician, transforming from macho outdoorsman and commando to postmodern tsar and global leader, star of the nation’s most popular
reality-TV show. It was “factual entertainment,” a blend of “show business and propaganda, ratings and authoritarianism.”\textsuperscript{25} One reason it worked is that the media machine that Surkov directed “always thoroughly researched the desires of the consumer.”\textsuperscript{26} Like Trump, another television president obsessed with ratings, Surkov made sure he knew his market. Through polls and surveys, Surkov discovered what his audience wanted and he guaranteed they got it.

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The kind of authoritarian state that, under the guise of a democracy, Putin was erecting dealt with opposition rather differently from its Soviet predecessor. Rather than suppress or oppress criticism, it got “inside all ideologies and movements, exploiting and rendering them absurd.”\textsuperscript{27} By believing in nothing, Surkov could pretend to believe in everything, as chaotes do. His control of Russian media allowed him to create fictitious opposition parties and give the appearance of freedom of speech by allowing them to “debate” issues while really being nothing more than pawns in the reality he was creating. Any real opposition was shut out of mainstream media, leaving only liberal journals of small circulation and online sites that many if not most Russians do not or cannot access as a means of disseminating its views.

As a true postmodern politician, Surkov blatantly played both sides of the fence, funding and promoting opposing movements and allowing the clash between them to produce the impression of true discussion, while, like the Wizard of Oz, manipulating everything behind the screen. He would fund human rights organizations and promote civic discussion about them, then support nationalist movements that condemn human rights as Western propaganda. He would sponsor avant-garde art festivals featuring the most outrageous work, then promote religious fundamentalists who condemned the artists as decadents.

He created a Hitler Youth–style movement, \emph{Nashi} (“Ours”), teenagers fed on patriotism and nationalism who burn “subversive”
books and harangue Western diplomats, but then he would write the kinds of novels that were going up in smoke. He would tell television heads whom they should support and whom they should criticize, who can be on their shows and who can’t, and what language they can use, often finalizing his directives with bribes. Words like “stability” and “effective” are echoed in choruses praising Putin for dragging Russia out of chaos, while vague references to “enemies” and “foreign powers” create an atmosphere of indistinct threat coming from the West, pulling the people together with patriotism. The main aim was to eliminate any word of “opposition” that did not emanate from the Kremlin itself.

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Perhaps the strangest thing about Surkov’s “managed democracy” were the eccentric figures who paraded across Russian television screens. There was Anton Vaino, Putin’s new chief of staff, who is thought to be the author of a strange paper, “The Capitalization of the Future.”28 This by all accounts impenetrable work presents a new system of government, designed specifically for the postmodern age. It features a device called a “nooscope,” which is somehow able to access global consciousness—what Pierre Teilhard de Chardin called the “noosphere”—and “detect and register changes in the biosphere and in human activity.” What this amounts to is a claim to be able to “read the mind” of the planet, something that Steve Bannon, with his links to the data mining and analyzing firm Cambridge Analytica, knows all about. Cambridge Analytica helped Trump’s campaign as well as the Brexites and is funded by Robert Mercer, who also funded Breitbart News.29

The idea of the “noosphere” has been compared to Jung’s Collective Unconscious and Theosophy’s Akashic Record, yet its more immediate model is the internet. With more and more “smart” devices feeding data into this stream, the ability to chart trends and predict and control movements in the “noosphere” will be more and more desirable and possible. This will be important, especially as
Vaino’s new model of social management resembles “some kind of all-embracing system of government that has to be enforced by top officials,” an assessment that strikes a sinister synarchic note.39

Other colorful types provided more factual entertainment. There was Vyacheslav Skylarov, a homeless character in and out of mental homes who wrote about conspiracy theories and had visions of utopia; Anatoly Kashpirovsky, a hypnotherapist who “charged” viewers’ drinks with “healing energy” through their television screens; Grigory Grabovoy, who claimed to raise the dead; Bronnikov, who gave the blind vision through an “inner sight”; Vladimir Zhirinovsky, the nationalist demagogue who offered to impregnate lonely women and to flood Germany with nuclear waste; and Vissarion, an ex-mailman who believed he was Christ returned. Others believed this too, and with his thousands of followers Vissarion built a colony in the mountains near the Mongolian border where, like many other Russians, they await the coming apocalypse.

Boris Zolotov, an ex-Soviet physicist turned consciousness guru, spoke about materializing dreams—a good New Thought pastime—and of turning reality “into segments you can travel through.” This was achieved through experiments with re-creating reality through language, undertaken while participating in what were called “sweating orgies,” designed to stimulate the new consciousness, which Zolotov believes can emerge only in Russia. The Night-Wolves, Russia’s answer to the Hell’s Angels, are a patriotic biker gang who blend devotion to Putin with a fervent religious sentiment. Their leader, Alexey Weitz, an ex-actor, trains politicians to “manipulate public consciousness” with NLP-like “verbal and non-verbal forms of influence,” and leads his followers in the propaganda battle between Holy Russia and the Foreign Devils. Surkov funded their annual bike show and rock concert, in exchange for their calls to restore Holy Russia by taking back Ukraine.
It was during the 2014 war in Ukraine that Surkov’s mastery of reality may have reached a peak. He was brought out of semiretirement just for it. It was what he called the first “nonlinear war,” one in which physical confrontation is only a part, and in which opponents would change sides and form alliances in such rapid succession that the idea of “taking sides” would become redundant. As one account suggests, the conflict may have been “a giant testing-ground for the military conquest of other nations’ noospheres, in a new programme of quasi-physical propaganda wars without limit.”

When Ukraine’s Putin-friendly president Viktor Yanukovych was ousted during the pro-EU revolution of 2014, Putin responded by annexing Crimea and beginning a covert war in Ukraine. A pro-Russia “revolt” in eastern Ukraine backed by Putin led to the declaration of two “people’s republics” in the Donbass region and a civil war that continues today. The pro-Russia Ukrainian “patriots” battling against oppressive Kiev were really Russian special-forces troops, fighting incognito. Putin first denied then tacitly affirmed this, promoting the sense of ambiguity and frankly reveling in it.

This was enhanced by propaganda back home. An online film showing Putin’s secret forces as “crooks and thieves” was banned because, following medical advice, media watchdogs argued that “hearing criticism of Vladimir Putin was harmful to children.” When Malaysian Airways flight MH17 was shot down in 2014 by Russian-backed eastern Ukraine “rebels,” Russian television aired “leaked” images of a Ukrainian jet targeting the flight. Experts knew the images were faked, but most Russians watching the “news” weren’t experts. A 2014 work of “factual entertainment,” The Furies of Maidan, not far removed perhaps from one of Steve Bannon’s products, broadcast on Russian television, claimed that the Ukrainian uprising was the work of Western lesbians, who had somehow channeled their sexual frustration into promoting warfare. Scenes showed Russian women sending dildos to appease the raving sapphists. One psychiatrist interviewed said that women interested in politics were perverts, and claimed that the pro-Ukrainian U.S. diplomat Victoria Nuland was also a lesbian because of her “mannish
voice” and “broad shoulders.” The fear was that Ukraine would fall victim to the pro-gay EU and, like the rest of the West, turn decadent.34

Even stranger was the rash of fictional characters standing for office in local elections. At least fifteen Darth Vaders and other Star Wars figures campaigned for votes across Ukraine; one “Emperor Dmitry Palpatine” even won a seat on the Odessa council, and a Chewbacca was arrested at a rally in the city.35 The spate of Vaders may only be the kind of postmodern joke that groups like Anonymous get up to, a kind of 4chan nose thumbing to the “establishment,” a half-serious “destabilizing tactic.” But as Odessa is a prime port figuring in Putin’s plans for the “Russia of tomorrow,” something more Sith-like may be in the cards.

And even where real-life people were looking for votes, the elections were a joke. In Donetsk, capital of the newly invented country Putin called Novorossiya, or “New Russia”—although Alexander Dugin christened it first—Aleksandr Zakharchenko, an electrician turned warlord, won hands down against his “opponent.” This was not difficult, as his rival did not campaign and agreed with Zakharchenko’s policies. Most appealing of these was the promise that he would raise pensions so that the elderly of New Russia would be able to “travel to Australia at least once a year to shoot a dozen kangaroos on safari.”36 Aptly, Zakharchenko’s swearing in was held in a theater.

The strange blending of fact and fiction that 4chaners saw in their “Banepostings” was also at work in Ukraine. Fyodor Berezin was for a time Donetsk’s deputy defense minister. He is also an acclaimed science-fiction writer whose nationalistic novels promote the fear of some imminent invasion by “Yankee devils, neo-fascists, and Euro-gays,” something along the lines of The Camp of the Saints.37 Like Elon Musk he believes that reality is a simulation created by what he calls a “black calculator,” which can “count the entire universe,” and which is itself somehow ensconced in a black hole.

Prior to 2014 Berezin and his fellow anti-West writers wrote much about a coming war between Russia and NATO, leaving Ukrainian
analysts to suspect that these fantasies of “future war” primed the public for the conflict. When fiction turned to fact, Berezin quickly took arms against the invading “gaymocracy.” He claimed to be protected by occult forces that made him invulnerable to the enemy’s bullets. He also believed that as the creator of imaginary worlds, he has a special knack for profiting from the “glitches” in the “cosmic matrix”—in other words, for shifting the boundaries of acceptable reality and giving it a nudge when needed.

Even Putin himself is not fazed by the weirdness. On a live nationwide webcast in 2006 he was asked if he thought H. P. Lovecraft’s giant squidlike horror Cthulhu would rise from his Pacific Ocean slumber anytime soon. Putin responded seriously; he advised to proceed with caution and suggested reading the Bible for guidance. Viewers voted this the fourth most interesting question, following those about the president’s sex life.38

If Steve Bannon wanted to “weaponize” film, Surkov went one better and weaponized reality.

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But perhaps the strangest and most disturbing figure to surface in Surkov’s nonlinear Russia is someone else for whom the idea of a “war of all against all” is appealing.

Alexander Dugin’s journey from teenage punk Soviet dissident to Putin’s geopolitical adviser, via waystations as neo-Nazi and Communist reactionary, could have happened only in Russia, a place where extremes, contradictions, and downright absurdities that would cripple anyone else find personalities wide enough to contain them. In an essay on Dostoyevsky, Hermann Hesse wrote of what he called “Russian Man,” a strange protean personality who is not only a hysteric, drunkard, criminal, poet, or holy man, but “the simultaneous combination of all these characteristics.” He is at once “murderer and judge, ruffian and sensitive soul,” “the complete egoist and a hero of total self-sacrifice.” In him, Hesse says, “good and evil, outer and inner, God and Satan are cheek and jowl.”39
Alexey Weitz, leader of the Night Wolves, Vladislav Surkov’s patriotic biker gang, might have read Hesse. According to him, “We can fit everything inside us. . . . That is why we can have Stalin and God together. . . . The Russian soul is holy. It can unite everything.”

Uniting everything inside the Russian soul—or at least its borders—is something that Alexander Dugin would very much like to do. He has called for a Russian Fascist state, along synarchic lines, stretching from Vladivostok to Dublin, and for the American “empire” to be “destroyed,” although with Trump’s victory, his tone toward the United States, usually venomous, has grown less aggressive. Trump’s election, Dugin said, was “incredibly beautiful—one of the best moments of my life,” a feeling, we’ve seen, that far-right advocates in other parts of the world also shared. He is now following developments in the United States “with great interest” and has asked Trump to “call me.” Given the trouble Trump and his team have had with talking to the Russians, it might be a while before Dugin hears from him.

This sudden political mood swing is characteristic of Dugin, who takes Surkov’s tactic of adopting contradictory political positions to new extremes, something his training in chaos magick must have facilitated. His approach to politics is rather like a chaotician’s to ritual: throwing disparate elements together to see the effect, deconstructing National Socialism, picking out the good bits, and Velcroing these to Stalin-style authoritarianism to see what happens. This is something he pursues in his confusing and often incoherent work *The Fourth Political Theory*, which cherry-picks from the authoritarian politics of the previous century in order, with a pinch of Heidegger, to steer the postmodern world into the postapocalyptic future. For Dugin, Trump’s ascension suggests that his dream of a Russian super-state, absorbing its ex-Soviet satellites and expanding beyond them, is becoming a reality, or at least is made more “achievable.” For a political theorist savvy about hypersigils and forms of New Thought, this is a good thing. It also suggests a new meaning to the idea that Russia was somehow behind Trump’s election.
So far Dugin has had some success, much more than Evola, of whom he is a great reader, ever had. It is no exaggeration to say that Putin’s annexing of Crimea and incursions into Ukraine have been motivated in no small part by a strange theory of geopolitics that Dugin promotes, and which itself is in no small way influenced by the idea of a perennial war between “solar” and “lunar” types that Evola advances in practically all his work. Geopolitics is the study of how geography influences world politics—a discipline at which some Nazi theorists excelled—and Putin’s push into Ukraine and covetous glances at the Baltic states and other neighbors are informed by Dugin’s take on this. Dugin’s vision of a new civilization, along Spenglerian lines, rising up from the great “heart land” of which Holy Russia is the center, calls for a global struggle between the maritime forces of the “lunar” Atlanticists, citizens of the “world island,” and the continental-based forces of what he calls “solar” “Eurasia.”

Readers of Orwell’s *1984* will recall the name of one of the world states occupied in perpetual war. Dugin’s vision of the coming end times includes the kind of nonlinear war that Surkov, a sometime ally, initiated in Ukraine, which resulted in sanctions being imposed on both by the United States for their activities in the conflict. Dugin, who is looking forward to these being lifted, no doubt accepts that this is a small price to pay for helping the end of the world along, which he sees as imminent and necessary and which will entail the kind of “war of all against all” that looms over Orwell’s novel—an example once again, perhaps, of fact and fiction fusing into something simultaneously more *and* less than either. The end of the world will not happen by itself, he tells us. We must give it a push or, as chaos magicians would say, a nudge. This is our “task,” our “practice,” what he calls “active metaphysics,” something that in various forms we have been occupied with throughout this book.

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Alexander Dugin was born in Moscow in 1962 to an upper-middle-class family. His father was an officer in Soviet military intelligence.
and his mother was a doctor. Dugin came to the authorities’ attention in 1983 when he was detained by the police for singing at a party an anti-Soviet song he had written, which called for the elimination of the Soviet leadership (“our revolvers will not misfire”) and for Russian—not Soviet—soldiers to conquer the world. He was arrested at home and taken to the Lubyanka, the notorious KGB headquarters, for questioning. Dugin’s father was demoted because of the incident, and Dugin himself was banned from then on from working at anything more than menial jobs.

Early on, the military strain we have found in others appeared in Dugin, as well as the tendency to “rightness” and violence that often accompanies it. He was once almost shot by an angry driver after drunkenly kicking in his taillight—Dugin was a heavy drinker—and during the occupation of Ostankino, the national television station, by anti-Yeltsin protesters in 1993, he felt “the breath of spirit” blowing through the chaos as troops loyal to Yeltsin retook the building, massacring several demonstrators in the process. He is known to storm out of interviews if his statements are questioned, and has called for a new Russian political party, a “party of death, of the total vertical” that would be the equivalent of Hezbollah, the Lebanese militant Islamist group.

Probably his most violent remarks concerned the war in Ukraine. When asked his view on events, he said, “Kill them, kill them, kill them”—the Ukrainians, that is. The outburst cost him his job in the Department of Sociology at Moscow State University. Dugin is also believed to be responsible for the fake news story that Ukrainian soldiers “crucified” a young boy in Slovyansk, in eastern Ukraine. As an expert on “conspirology,” the study and propagation of conspiracies, Dugin no doubt recognizes that the truth of some statement is no longer important, only its effectiveness, an insight he shares with Trump.

By the time of his arrest Dugin had already been expelled from the Moscow Aviation Institute because of his interest in various neo-Nazi ideas. His fascination with the Third Reich started early and was nurtured in the bohemian occult–science fiction scene he entered in
his late teens. One book popular with this set was *The Morning of the Magicians*, which spoke of Hitler as “‘Guénonism’ plus tanks.” While this is not quite accurate, it did set the mold for the blend of occultism and far-right radical politics that attracts Evola’s readers and colored Dugin’s career.

He was taken under the wing of Yevgeny Golovin, an alcoholic alchemist also obsessed with Hitler. Another older bohemian who guided the young Dugin was Geydar Dzhemal, a Russian Islamist who, like Evola, promoted a kind of religious radicalism. It was a milieu in which Satanism, séances, Ouija boards, occultism, drugs, sex, alcohol, role-playing, and fascism came together into a heady brew.

Golovin was something of a Svengali, “zombifying” his followers and leading them through a variety of “performances,” directing them in fantasies as sailors, poets, Knights of the Round Table, and, invariably, Nazis, an early outing in the role-playing that characterizes Dugin’s career. Dugin soon became another dominant figure on this scene, zombifying others himself, as gurus and demagogues do. With his pudding-bowl haircut, hippie guitar, cavalry breeches, and aristocratic manner, he presented a striking persona, one with “a dash of fascist imagery and a repertoire of occult songs.” “Dash,” however, does not quite cover Dugin’s Nazi obsession. He called himself “Hans Sievers,” after the director of Himmler’s Ahnenerbe, Wolfram Sievers, who researched “Aryan history,” and once smashed a bottle of port at a train station while shouting “Sieg Heil!” In 1947 the real Herr Sievers was hanged at Nuremberg.

Dugin later claimed that his Hitlerism was only an expression of his anti-Soviet feelings, a manifestation of the “transgressive” stance that included his interest in the dark poetry of the Comte de Lautréamont’s *Songs of Maldoror*, whose beautiful sadism inspired the Surrealists. He was, we might say, a kind of “Fascist dandy.” Years later, when questioned about his Nazi behavior, he would claim, in standard postmodern fashion, that it was a joke, a bit of irony, implying that those who took him seriously had the problem,
something that alt-righters and 4chaners rely on today. This “plausible deniability” is difficult to square with the neo-Nazi atmosphere in which he came of age and the politics he pursued.

It was in this milieu that Dugin came upon Evola, whose books, oddly enough, were available off the shelf in the Lenin Library, not far from where he and Golovin’s other zombies would meet. Dugin, who taught himself French and other languages, grabbed a copy of Evola’s *Pagan Imperialism*, the German edition, and quickly produced a samizdat edition of the work. This was the beginning of a career that would unite occultism with far-right politics in an often dizzying mix. He would later write books about Evola and Guénon, linking them to the Russian Orthodox Church, in which he is a firm believer. In fact, he is an Old Believer, joining the branch of the faith that maintains the rituals and practices prior to the reforms of the seventeenth century. As Guénon advised, he stuck close to the roots of tradition, even to wearing the beard and peasant dress associated with the sect.

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In 1986 Dugin joined Pamyat, an organization dedicated to restoring old monuments. This innocuous aim was soon overshadowed by the anti-Semitism of its leader, Dmitry Vasilyev, a paranoid actor who believed the Jews were destroying Russia’s patrimony and had sent Zionists to kill him. Pamyat attracted more hooligans, crypto-Fascists, and nationalists than art restorers, but it stirred a patriotic sense in Dugin; he began to wear a black shirt, leather belt, and shoulder strap, the garb of the Black Hundred, a patriotic tsarist movement of the early twentieth century. The historian Walter Laqueur, who wrote a book about the Black Hundred, noted Dugin’s activities as early as 1993; with Dugin, he wrote, “we move from the realm of a quasi-rational approach to the depths of irrationality.” Readers of Dugin out of sympathy with his ideas may agree.

Dugin soon left Pamyat and began his ascent as a quick-change ideologue, a careerist radical looking for an “elevator to the top” and
finding it in fascism. He jumped from different political affiliations and movements as easily as other twenty-somethings change their girlfriends or join rock bands. If in postmodern Russia being a shape-shifter was an asset, Dugin became a kind of political chameleon. He adjusted his beliefs with the prevailing wind, but always kept his tack toward the desired port, the “corridors of power” that had evaded Evola.

After a fling with Vladimir Zhirinovsky’s Liberal Democratic Party of Russia, in the early nineties Dugin made several trips to Europe. It is unclear how he afforded these or obtained the necessary visas, given his dissident past. Dugin claimed that his books sold in enormous numbers, with print runs of 100,000 copies, but this is difficult to verify. Some have suggested that Pamyat had affiliations with the KGB and that they somehow funded Dugin’s journeys. He met several figures on the European New Right, the most eloquent of whom was Alain de Benoist, but he also met with less sophisticated characters, one of whom was Claudio Mutti, a disciple of Evola linked to Italian right-wing terror groups.

Alexander Prokhanov, an ex–rocket scientist turned bohemian with links to the military, was introduced to Dugin and invited him to write for a new nationalist, ultraconservative newspaper he was starting, Den, “The Day.” Den’s editorial policy ran to xenophobia, anti-Semitism, Soviet nostalgia, and conspiracy theories. Prokhanov, a beatnik militarist, hired Dugin as a “professional conspiracy theorist.”

Dugin took to it, churning out articles exposing the machinations of the Western “global elite” who aimed to create a “world government,” threatening Russia in the process. Like Andrew Breitbart, Alex Jones, and Trump, Dugin served as an “aggregator” of wild fantasies, with a variety of secret agents, conspirators, and revolutionaries infiltrating one another’s organizations à la G. K. Chesterton’s The Man Who Was Thursday.

Some conspiracies, however, had a basis in fact, like the failed coup of Soviet hardliners against Mikhail Gorbachev in 1991. When opponents of Gorbachev’s reforms failed to seize power, it was the de
facto end of the Soviet Union. Dugin, whose wrist was slapped by the KGB for singing an anti-Soviet song, now experienced a political enantiodromia—becoming one’s opposite—turning from Fascist dissident to nostalgic Communist. As the USSR became nonexistent, Dugin realized that he was a “Soviet man.”

Yet the fall of communism meant more work for Dugin. With the collapse of Marxism, an ideological vacuum opened. As Russia fell through social, political, and economic trapdoors, it also suffered an identity crisis. Without Marx, what did it mean to be Russian? Prokhanov introduced Dugin to members of the Russian Academy of the General Staff, who were happy to hear his opinions on the matter; not long after, he would be lecturing to them regularly.

Others, like the viewers of Red Square, a popular television talk show, were interested in Dugin’s opinions too; later they would also be interested to hear about the failed coup of 1993 and the events at Ostankino. Dugin was shifting once again, from a “marginal intellectual” to a “respectable political personality,” whose views on current events were taken seriously. Through books, articles, magazines, journals, radio shows, lectures, and later websites and podcasts, a prolific Dugin quickly became a familiar figure on the national scene, and his opinions on matters of state carried weight.

It may have been the seriousness of his new persona that led Dugin to form the National Bolshevik Party in 1994 with the ex-dissident writer Eduard Limonov, whom Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn once described as an “insect who writes pornography.” Like Dugin, Limonov had military pretentions and had taken part in the shelling of Sarajevo with Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadžić; his punk novel, It’s Me, Eddie, was a hit with the French. This “red-brown” movement combined a nostalgia for Stalinist Russia with Nazi chic and seemed a mash-up between Himmler’s SS and the UK’s Raving Monster Loony Party, with some Temple of Psychic Youth thrown in. Dugin designed the flag: a black hammer and sickle on a white circle on a red background, reminiscent of the Nazi swastika. Like Hitler, Dugin is keen on striking symbols—or sigils—as his appropriation of the “Star of Chaos” shows. The NBP salute—a
straight raised arm and fist—and slogan, “Da, Smert!” (“Yes, death!”), suggests that Dugin’s Nazi fascination was still in place.

But once again it was all a joke, a kind of postmodern art project, a faux movement like the Anonymous Scientology protest. It was so “obviously” over the top that if you took it seriously, you had been “punked.” As such it undermined any criticism, much as Trump’s blatant contempt for truth and facts undercuts any chance of pinning any charges of lying or dishonesty on him. This kind of Fascist Dada enables one to have it both ways: as with 4chan, you can make your “transgressive” statement, yet avoid responsibility for it.

Yet “coming events cast their shadow before them,” and the kind of authoritarian counterculture that Dugin’s NBP embodied in a political pantomime seems a pre-echo of the kind of far-right chic Richard Spencer and the alt-right meme about today. The aim then was, as it is today, to open the Overton window, to widen the sphere of acceptable reality, to think the unthinkable and have others think it too. In a word, to become fashionable.

The NBP also initiated the kind of “youth leagues” that Vladislav Surkov would shortly organize: neighborhood gangs, skinheads, football hooligans, punk bands, and other disaffected teenagers mobilized to control the streets, break up “unpatriotic” demonstrations, and take on whichever enemies of the state it was most politically profitable to harass. The NBP itself intimidated the authorities into giving it a headquarters. It finagled an office below a police station which one habitué described as a “boarding school for sociopathic children.”

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DUGIN’S OCCULT AND esoteric interests were not forgotten during this time. He produced two magazines, *Elementy* and *Dear Angel*, which helped fuse the disparate elements of his extremist palette in a weird alchemy of politics and the occult. His Arktogeia publishing house—named after the supposed Arctic home of the solar Aryan race—produced his own books and others and fed a wide new audience,
hungry for anything that had until only recently been forbidden. Russians in the 1990s had an immense appetite for the esoteric, the occult, the hidden, for religion, spirituality, magic, everything that had been contraband under the gray dictates of communism. An occult revival took place then, rather like the one the West enjoyed in the 1960s and '70s. Russian man—and woman—inhibited by Soviet rule, was back. The messianic streak in the Russian soul, always ready for the millennium, had returned.

In “The Great War of the Continents,” written in the early nineties, Dugin talked about an idea that would occupy him for the rest of his career. Fundamentally it argues that with the end of the Cold War, the tensions between the East and the West have not ended, but merely changed their form. What used to be the struggle between capitalism and communism now exists as the struggle between land-based and seafaring powers, between Russia and the West. There had always been this struggle, and during the Soviet period it had taken on the form of an ideological and economic confrontation. But what was prior to this—primordial, we might say—was the everlasting war between land and sea.

This may sound like yet another weird idea coming out of postmodern Russia, but it originates with a British Edwardian historian, Sir Halford Mackinder. In a lecture to the Royal Geographical Society in 1904, Mackinder argued that Russia was Britain’s main strategic opponent in world politics, not Germany, as was believed. This was because Mackinder believed that the whole sweep of history pivots on an eternal battle between land-based, continental powers and those of the sea. In “The Geographical Pivot of History,” Mackinder argued that the vast Russian heartland was locked in perpetual combat with the maritime nations of the “world island,” and that this unending struggle is the motor of history. It was a sort of global, unending war of all against all that kept the cycles of history turning around.

Mackinder could not have known it, but this seems rather like the eternal battle between Evola’s northern solar types and the southern lunar ones, or Michael Moorcock’s never-ending war between Chaos
and Order—points not lost on Dugin. He equates the land-based peoples with Evola’s solar race and the seafarers with the moon. Even the elemental character of the polar opposites echoes Evola, with the land-based civilization (earth) associated with static “being” and the maritime peoples (water) citizens of fluid “becoming.”

Dugin sought out other geopolitical thinkers and found confirmation of his ideas in the work of two Germans, the jurist Carl Schmitt and the geographer Karl Haushofer. Both thinkers contributed ideas that supported Hitler’s rule and justified Nazi expansion, notions of Lebensraum (“living space”), the organic state, autarky (self-sufficiency), and the legitimacy of the Führer. They too saw the struggle between land and sea as fundamental to world history and recognized the central idea of geopolitics, that a civilization’s culture and character are inextricably linked to the land in which it arises. It is, we might say, a product of that land as much as its vegetation is. This is a rather different view from our abstract, rational ideas about the modern state based on “mutual self-interest.” But Dugin’s most influential precursor in articulating the world-historical import of the great struggle between the seafaring Atlanticists and the land-based Eurasians was homegrown and, like himself, a rather paradoxical “Soviet man.”

THE HUNGER FOR forbidden, alternative, and often downright irrational ideas that came with the collapse of Soviet restrictions brought to prominence the work of an earlier Eurasianist, who had spent many years as a guest of the government in some of its worst gulags. One of the ironies in the history of Eurasia is that two of its most popular and prolific exponents began as Soviet dissidents and ended as vociferous champions of the system they first opposed. In the case of one of them, it was a system that had actively persecuted him. And yet one of the main aims of the Eurasian idea today is for Russia to regain the lands once held by Soviet rule and put them
under its banner. In a sense we can say that the Eurasian idea, once suppressed under Soviet rule, has come back to absorb its oppressor. Many different ideas about language, ethnography, race, geography, ecology, and even the cosmos find a home in the notion of Eurasia, which makes it at once frustratingly vague and head-achingly complex. The basic theme is that the vast Russian heartland, its enormous continental mass, is the home of a new, independent, organic civilization, rooted in beliefs, customs, and a relationship to the earth radically different from those of Europe and the West, meaning America. It sees its ancestry in the Mongol hordes of the unending steppes, rather than in the logic and reason of the Enlightenment. It is not a distant cousin of Europe, but a close relative of Asia. As such its peoples have an inherent preference for collectivist societies, vast families of nations held together under a supreme ruler, rather than the atomistic, individualistic, “me-centered” societies of the West.

We remember that Oswald Spengler believed that history was not linear and progressive but made up of the birth, maturity, and death of different, irreducible, organic civilizations. It was not a straight line, but a series of self-enclosed circles. Eurasianists today believe that as the West enters its sunset years, a new Eurasian civilization is rising that will embrace peoples and nations that are in sympathy and contiguity with it and form an immense super-state that will take its place as a major global power.\textsuperscript{63} When Dugin envisioned a Fascist Russia, from Vladivostok to Dublin, he had this in mind. After all, Eurasia is a portmanteau, bringing Europe and Asia together.

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The idea of a “Russian Asia” has a long history. Following the defeat in the Crimean War in 1855, Prince Alexander Gorchakov advised Tsar Alexander II to forget Europe and look east as the direction in which Russia should expand. In the years leading up to the Bolshevik Revolution, the “White Tsar” Nicholas II—who had his own Dugin in the form of Rasputin—had designs on a Russia East, and his court
was open to figures like Zhamsaran Badmaieff, who practiced Tibetan medicine, and Prince Esper Ukhtomsky, an Orientalist and practicing Buddhist and Theosophist. Ukhtomsky even visited the Theosophical Society headquarters in Adyar, India, with the young tsar-to-be, and he is sometimes identified as the model for Gurdjieff’s Prince Lubovedsky in *Meetings with Remarkable Men*. Agvan Dorjieff, a Buryat Russian and tutor to the thirteenth Dalai Lama, built a Buddhist temple in St. Petersburg. This was the time of the “Great Game,” the chess match between Britain and Russia over political influence in the Himalayas, part of what was known in the Russian court as “mystic imperialism.”

In the early twentieth century, the Russian painter and mystic Nicholas Roerich twice tried to create an independent Buddhist state in Mongolia, what he called Shambhala, drawing on the ancient Buddhist legends of a secret city—which, incidentally, is often confused with Agartha. At different times, Roerich managed to get both Soviet and U.S. aid for his plans—the secretary for agriculture under Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Henry Wallace, was a devotee and supporter—but they eventually came to nothing.

64 These and other ideas looked for an Asia under Russian influence. But the Eurasia project is something different. It seeks a Russia under Asian influence, not in the present—as if Moscow would take directives from New Delhi—but in the past.

The idea started in the 1920s when White Russian intellectual émigrés, opposed to the Bolsheviks and stranded in Europe, began to think of new ideas about their homeland that could guide it into the future once the Communist experiment collapsed, as they were sure it would. They saw the revolution as a kind of “mystical catharsis” bringing on the “end of history.” In an atmosphere of “eschatological expectations” they wanted to have a new vision of the future to bring back to their country.

66 As many Russians experienced in the 1990s, these thinkers faced a kind of identity crisis. They asked themselves: What sense can we give to being Russian that won’t be Marxist or tsarist? The idea was that Russia should look to its Asian roots for renewal, and should
give up its attempts to “Westernize” itself, which began with Peter the Great in the seventeenth century. Russia was not European and not suited to European values, but presented the possibility of a “Third Way,” a “median world,” a “Third Rome,” following the ancient Eternal City and Constantinople.

Slavophiles, like Fyodor Dostoyevsky, were anti-Western; they rejected Peter the Great’s ideas and envisioned a great pan-Slavic people. But Eurasianists rejected these Slavic dreams and looked to their Turanian roots in Central Asia. Tensions between pro- and anti-Western Russians continue today, as events in Ukraine make clear. The argument boils down to whether Russia should try to find a place within a European, Western vision of civilization—which so far it has not quite managed to do—or to celebrate and affirm its unique civilizational difference. Eurasianists today, among them Vladimir Putin, opt for door number two.

As history moved on and the Bolsheviks secured and cemented their power, the Roaring Twenties entered the Dirty Thirties, with Hitler, Mussolini, and Stalin, and the dreams of the early Eurasianists faded, swallowed up by a world that ignored them. But Eurasia would rise again, this time from the most Soviet of Soviet places, the gulag.

LEV GUMILEV was born in 1912, the son of the poets Nikolai Gumilev and Anna Akhmatova. In 1933, like Dugin he was arrested by the authorities for reciting an anti-Soviet poem, this one a criticism of Stalin by the great poet Osip Mandelstam. So oppressive was Stalin’s regime that, as in Ray Bradbury’s Fahrenheit 451, banned works weren’t copied and people had to memorize them. Gumilev was eventually released but soon after he was arrested again and sent to a labor camp at the White Sea–Baltic Canal; later he was sent to Norilsk, beyond the Arctic Circle. He was released and served during World War II, but was arrested again in 1949 and sent to labor camps in Karaganda, Kazakhstan, and Omsk, Siberia. He was finally
released in 1956, during Russia’s “de-Stalinization” period. The specific charges against him varied, but the idea was that with her son in prison, Akhmatova, a powerful and much-loved poet, would toe the party line.

In the late 1980s, with glasnost and perestroika, Gumilev’s luck changed, and for a brief time—he died in 1992—he enjoyed remarkable national celebrity and success. From victim of the regime, banned from universities, denied doctorates, and openly denounced as anti-Soviet, Gumilev became a “cult figure” and his ideas were perceived as “dogmas that are above criticism.”

His books, languishing in libraries, became bestsellers, mandatory reading in the humanities and social sciences. Today his vocabulary dominates history, ethnology, and related disciplines in Russia, and his face adorns a postage stamp in Kazakhstan, where a university is named after him. As one commentator remarked, the validity of his ideas is rarely questioned; his cachet as a victim of the old regime is sufficient insurance against this. Strangely, in the last days of the Soviet Union, Gumilev emerged as a vociferous supporter of the regime that had oppressed him and suffered a nervous breakdown with its collapse—evidence, perhaps, of a kind of “Stockholm syndrome,” when the captive identifies with his captors.

As a boy Gumilev is said to have been given a book about the great tribes of the Russian steppes, the Mongols, the Tartars, and the Huns, as a present by his father. This was the start of his great love of the people of the steppes, like the vast empire of the Golden Horde that ranged across the Russian heartland in the Middle Ages. Because of his father—who was shot by the Cheka, the Soviet secret police, in 1921, when Lev was nine—Gumilev was banned from university, but he read history and in the 1930s he came across the ideas of the Eurasianists. But it was during his time in the gulag that his central vision came to him.

While in the camp he saw that the prisoners “naturally” formed themselves into small groups that ate together and became a kind of “family.” They took care of each other and kept each other company, and would even sacrifice necessities if others in the group needed
them. This was not out of shared interests or a sense of friendship, or a feeling of universal brotherhood or common humanity. It was, Gumilev came to believe, an irreducible biological impulse, an unconscious, instinctual urge to distinguish one’s own group—“us”—from others—“them.” It was as if a kind of force drew people of similar types and ancestry together, an attraction that like had for like, which set them apart from the others around them. What distinguished these groups from each other, small enclaves, or, as Gumilev would later argue, entire nations, races, or larger bodies he called “ethnoi,” was not any conscious identification, or rational idea of mutual self-interest, or religion or belief of any kind. It was the possession of a strange vital energy he called “passionarity.” This was a kind of life force that drove peoples to expand, to create, to push themselves beyond their immediate needs—with the tribes of the steppes, it is what sent them out to conquer. It was an irrational drive to forgo comfort and security and make enormous sacrifices for values and goals beyond reason or logic, something for which the Russian people had a great capacity and which underwrote their love of tyrants like Ivan the Terrible. It was the sort of thing George Orwell recognized in the German people who voted for Hitler, who wanted “struggle and sacrifice” and not just punctual trains. It could also account for a chela’s devotion to an abusive guru.

Different peoples had more or less passionarity, and passionarity itself went through a fixed cycle, rising to its greatest strength and then declining. As Gumilev would later argue, the passionarity of the West was at a low ebb, but that of the Russian and Arab peoples was still fresh and heading toward its peak. Gumilev also spoke of another force, “complementarity,” which drew peoples of different but related groups together to form what he called “super-ethnoi.” Although different, they shared enough to be considered part of the same family, just as a brother and sister are different but related.

Gumilev came to believe in these “forces” as real, objective, physical facts, like electricity and magnetism. He believed he could chart the amount and character of passionarity available at a given time, and quantify it in terms of what he called Pik, a symbol he used
on graphs, something the maverick Freudian Wilhelm Reich did with a similar life energy he called “orgone,” and Mesmer might have done with “animal magnetism.” And like Reich and Mesmer, Gumilev came to believe that the ultimate source of passionarity was outer space.

Gumilev believed that ethnoi are created by sudden bursts of “bio-energy” emitted by the entire environment, unpredictable upsurges generated by the land, vegetation, animal life, the sun, and even the stars. Human groups, races, and ethnoi are a kind of “crust” formed on the surface of the earth, and are as “natural” as forests or herds of antelope. We are really little more than a skin on the planet. He borrowed the idea of a “bio-energy” from Vladimir Vernadsky, a scientist who was part of the Cosmist school of pre-Bolshevik Russia. Vernadsky was interested in the interaction between humanity and the rest of the biosphere, and he popularized the notion of the noosphere, mentioned earlier. This was the thin coating of mind that covers the surface of the globe.

Vernadsky came to believe that humanity served an absolutely natural role in the cosmic economy—as much as trees and minerals do—as a receiver and transmitter of “cosmic energy,” an idea that Gurdjieff, a contemporary of Vernadsky’s, shared. For Vernadsky, “episodes of intense human activity are in some way connected to solar and cosmic radiation.” Gurdjieff says this himself. Ultimately, for Vernadsky and Gurdjieff, this means that what we believe are decisions arrived at through our intelligence and free will are really the result of cosmic forces acting upon us. Humanity is pushed by the cosmos as clouds are by the wind, and its conscious rational ego has little to say about it.

Vernadsky’s ideas were central to Biosphere 2, the environment experiment that Steve Bannon took over in 1993. The polymath John Allen, who initiated the project in 1987, used as a guide an English translation of Vernadsky’s book *La Biosphere*. This argued that the earth can be seen as composed of three “spheres”: its physical body, the “geosphere”; the life-forms on it, the “biosphere”; and the consciousness arising in humans, the “noosphere.” Vernadsky
argued that just as life altered conditions on the planet, so too human consciousness is altering the conditions of life. The translation was taken from a manuscript in the possession of a student of Maurice Nicoll’s, himself a student of Gurdjieff’s. Jacob Needleman, a philosopher influenced by Gurdjieff—and also by Traditionalism—and the physicist David Langmuir, another student of Gurdjieff’s “work,” made the translation. Allen was influenced by the ideas about the link between organic life and cosmic forces of another student of Gurdjieff’s, J. G. Bennett, and to prepare for Biosphere 2, he studied conditions in the Russian steppes, Gumilev’s childhood inspiration and where Gumilev did research himself.73

Gumilev brought all this together with his love of the great nomadic people, spreading out across the vast Russian spaces, and began to write about it. He saw himself as a scientist, grasping facts as indubitable as gravity, reached, however, through a poetic imagination inherited from his parents. Gumilev was as convinced of the rightness of his vision as Evola or Guénon were of theirs, and he relied on inspiration and sudden insights as they did, which he defended with an equal superiority and intransigence. His vision of a Russia rooted in the Mongols, Huns, and Tartars, the great barbarian ethnoi brimming with passionarity, sweeping across the infinite plains, required at times the kind of creative attitude toward facts that we have encountered throughout this book. He was a historian and a poet, a kind of novelist writing epic accounts of his hero Russia. “Fantasy and even direct ‘fiction’ play a paramount role in [his] work.”74 Yet often enough he was right and his imagination enabled him to “‘guess’ secret, discreet, moments of history.” Ethnogenesis and the Biosphere of the Earth, his rejected doctoral dissertation on the rise of ethnoi, banned from publication, finally appeared in 1989 and was a huge success. His many readers were gripped, but those, a small minority who rejected intuition and required documentation were less so.

Yet at this point the requirements of academic credibility hardly seemed to matter. A Russia looking for a new identity was less interested in documentation than inspiration, and Gumilev’s new
version of Eurasia came at the right time. It provided the ideological—if not scientific—support for the idea of Russia, not as a backward appendage to Europe, but as a new Spenglerian civilization in its own right. Russia was not lagging behind in its attempts to keep up with the West, whose passionarity was empty. It was chock-full of the stuff and raring to go it alone.

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Dugin put all this into his geopolitical blender and in 1997 published The Foundation of Geopolitics. It too came at the right time. Conspiracy consciousness gripped the nation; its economy was on the brink and it had just suffered defeat at the hands of Chechen rebels. Foreign powers were obviously at work and it was time for Eurasia to retaliate against its Atlanticist enemies, who were plotting against it. The United States and NATO aimed to thwart Russia’s rightful rise to global power. The fractured USSR must reform as the Eurasian Empire and oppose the West. The conflict now was not between capitalism and communism, but between the decadent West, eager to spread its permissive liberal ideology through “globalization,” and a rising new Holy Russia that stood for order and tradition and a “multipolar” world. The book sported a Star of Chaos on its cover, showed fascism and National Socialism in a favorable light, and its six hundred–plus pages, covered in runes, graphs, maps, and references to obscure sources, promised to tell its readers the “truth”—hitherto hidden from them—about geopolitics.

It was a success, both in sales and in influence. The book got rave reviews. Copies were placed at supermarket checkouts, a strange venue for a book described as the most “curious, impressive, and terrifying” effort to emerge from post-Soviet Russia, as well as a “primer on world domination.” Dugin had by this time been lecturing on his ideas to members of the Russian general staff; with the Cold War over, military men were happy to hear of other global tensions to keep them busy. To some extent Machiavellian motives were at work; Dugin’s acknowledgment of help from the top brass
served to give the book some establishment ballast, and also curried favor with the generals. But it would not be long before Dugin underwent another ideological metamorphosis.

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When Putin took office, Dugin went from hard-line opposition theorist to fervent supporter of the nation’s new leader. Dugin soon pledged the kind of absolute fealty to Putin that Russians of old did to their tsars and that Hermann Göring did to Hitler. They do not always see eye to eye. Differences of opinion have led Dugin to speak about a “Solar Putin” and a “Lunar Putin”—no mystery which one he prefers. But slowly, through the Surkov years and beyond, Dugin’s Eurasian vision became something like national and international policy for Putin’s Russia.

And Putin himself? Was he becoming more like Dugin, as Dugin believed? Was Dugin zombifying the president, as his pre-Bolshevik precursor, Rasputin, was said to have done with Tsar Nicholas II, or at least the tsarina? As the new century began, the Eurasian vision grew and soon found itself a player on the world stage, taken seriously in a way that none of Dugin’s earlier political personae had ever been. What had started out as a “simulacrum,” it seemed, Dugin reflected in an interview, was becoming “more and more real”—which is precisely the sort of thing that practically everyone in this book is interested in.
CHAPTER SEVEN

The Politics of Chaos

The Eurasia meme proved very successful. If we can grant Pepe the Frog the kind of power devotees such as Richard Spencer give him—that of making someone president of the United States (who, it seems, used positive thinking to help things along)—then I think we can say that Eurasia has surpassed even this. Granted, it has had a longer life—practically a century—and has had the time and the attention paid to it to enable it to grow into a powerful egregore. Trump has only just begun, and in a sense he has a harder road. Russia was already in chaos when the Eurasia meme took hold. Trump—or his tulpa—has been busy at work, creating chaos, bringing on the “old night” before the new dawn, but this may take a while. Yet poor Pepe, having achieved his purpose, seems something of a fifth wheel, rather as the United Kingdom Independence Party, having forced a successful referendum on Britain’s exiting the EU, more or less put itself out of business. There is not much left for these memes to do, while Eurasia, because of its success, seems to have new opportunities opening before it.

Of course we can say that Eurasia resurfaced at the right time and in the right place, as ideas that come before their time often do, when later events create the proper conditions for them. The early Eurasianists couldn’t compete with Lenin, although they dreamed they could. Lenin quickly eliminated competitors, and there are suggestions that the first-wave Eurasianists were themselves infiltrated by the OGPU, the early Soviet secret state police. But for a floundering post-Soviet Russia, shorn of Marx and desperate for a new self-image, Eurasia seemed made to order. Its prophet was a
martyr, a victim of the old evil regime, and at that time anyone with those credentials could practically write his own ticket. As the USSR faded, “challenging any orthodoxy was a sure route to popularity and scholarly fame,” and “ideas that no one took seriously a decade ago” were “suddenly being enunciated from the tribune of Kremlin power.”

Dugin, the professional conspiracy theorist, took advantage of the situation. He brought all of his fascinations together into an impressive if obscure and often confusing mosaic of ideologies which carried the Eurasian impulse further, beyond academia and into politics. His aim was, like Evola and the alt-right, to “break the reality barrier” and “make things happen.” I think we can say he’s had some success.

As the new century entered its second decade, the appeal of Surkov’s cynical hyperreality wore thin, and the need for something more solid was felt. Perpetual entertainment no longer sufficed and, ironically, a taste for something “real” appeared in Russia, a purpose to hold the people together and provide a stimulus to the urge for “struggle and sacrifice,” which is the sign of a surfeit of passionarity. Dugin was able to move this hunger, to nudge it in the right direction, for his purposes. It gained momentum and carried on and is still growing today.

There was no shortage of Machiavellian incentive or strategy in this. Here Dugin is more astute than his master Evola, who merely knocked on the doors of power that opened wide for his student. Dugin’s interest in power is no secret, and his protean political personae have moved steadily if circuitously toward his goal, taking him from beyond the pale to where he finds himself now, at the “radical center,” another of his Orwellian coinages. We can say that through patience and persistence Dugin has achieved what others failed to do through more ostensible coups. He has been able to do what Hillary Clinton accused Steve Bannon of doing, of enabling a
“fringe element” to infiltrate mainstream politics. But Dugin has gone Bannon one better. He hasn’t infiltrated mainstream politics. He has become mainstream politics.

Dugin himself hardly takes credit for how things have turned out, and what their consequences will be—and for anyone alert to what is taking place, it is clear they are not by any means over. As he sees it, events are playing out not according to the design of this or that political intriguer or through the usual give-and-take of world politics. A more insistent hand is guiding matters. Not the iron rule of the dialectical laws of history, as laid down by Karl Marx. Marx was just an agent of the real forces at work, a tool for the true motor of events. Like Marx, Putin, Trump, and other world leaders taking part in this drama today are, according to Dugin, “simply acting according to the logic of Russian history and the laws of geopolitics.”

Going by this logic, the Soviet Union and the Russian empire that preceded it were just temporary manifestations of a kind of spiritual, mystical unity that has characterized the Russian soul for ages and which arises from the vast open plains of the inner continent in the same way that its topographical features do. Spengler said that Europeans look up at the night sky and say “I”; Russians look out across the endless steppes and say “we,” an expression of what the Russian existential philosopher Nikolai Berdyaev called sobornost, a sense of spiritual “belonging.” The one emphasizes the individual, the other the community, and for Dugin the contrast exemplifies a fundamental rift in the world. Russians are saying “we” again, and by “we” they mean Eurasia.

Behind the tsars and their downfall and the Soviet Union and its collapse lay larger world-historical necessities which now, in the early twenty-first century, are emerging clearly for what they are. What drove these events and will drive those to come is the looming great confrontation between the Atlanticists, who seek to conquer the world through neoliberalism, individualism, and globalization, and the defenders of religion, order, and tradition, the people of Eurasia. We can call this a “clash of civilizations” on an epic scale.
“Oceania is at war with Eurasia. It has always been at war with Eurasia,” Orwell tells us at the start of 1984—although, of course, as in Vladislav Surkov’s “nonlinear war,” here the sides change according to the directives of Big Brother. With Dugin, however, they remain stable, although for Oceania we should read the Atlanticists; the maritime character is the same. Eurasia has always been at war with the Atlanticists, and if the way in which Dugin’s meme has gone from simulacrum to reality is any gauge, some of the most exciting stages in this battle are to come.

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It is instructive to observe how the Eurasia meme spread. Dugin had been writing about it throughout the nineties, but by the end of the decade and with The Foundations of Geopolitics it really took off. By 2000 he and Putin had met and Eurasia had begun to enter political discussions. On a state visit to Kazakhstan in 2000, where he visited the Lev Gumilev Eurasian University, Putin endorsed the idea, a development that Dugin saw as “epochal.” By 2001 Dugin formed the Eurasia Party, the political entity to emerge from his larger Eurasia Movement. Dugin spread the Eurasian message through television talk shows, like that of Mikhail Leontyev, a presenter close to Putin, where millions of viewers heard of his “scientific patriotism,” a love of the homeland rooted in Lev Gumilev’s ideas about ethnoi and geopolitics. Several trips Dugin made to Turkey, Kazakhstan, and Belarus in 2003—all countries that find a place in his Eurasian vision—were highly publicized. In response to the pro-Europe “Orange” Revolutions in Ukraine and Georgia in 2003–4, in 2005 Dugin formed the Eurasian Youth Union, whose symbol is the Star of Chaos, emblazoned on their black T-shirts. That their founding took place in the Alexandrov Kremlin, home to Ivan the Terrible, should tell us something about Dugin’s inspiration.

The EYU targets pro-Western diplomats, stages sit-ins at Western embassies, vandalizes symbols of Ukrainian independence—
something Dugin himself has been guilty of—and engages in “culture wars,” meaning they attack pro-Western or anti-Putin protesters and act out “for real” the kind of Fascist street politics Dugin’s National Bolshevik Party only parodied. These “Duginjugend”—“Dugin youth,” as the novelist Vladimir Sorokin called them—are vehemently pro-Putin and pro-Russia, and are a Russian version of the “political militants” that the Evola-inspired Raido manuals aimed to reach. Like them, the EYU is involved in a “jihad to be waged at every moment against the enemies within.”

They are also concerned with the enemies without, particularly the United States—or at least they had been until lately. The “Program of the Eurasian Youth Movement: Our Enemy” makes this clear. “Our Union has one absolute enemy. It is the USA. This is the beginning and the end of our hatred.” As mentioned, attitudes may have changed since Trump took office, although over the months that I have been writing this book, the “bromance” between Trump and Putin has gone through a few bad patches, and it is nowhere near settled just how relations between the two postmodern presidents stand.

In 2007 in a speech at the Munich Conference on Security Policy, Putin claimed that a new Cold War was starting and that the West, and specifically the United States, was using its dominance in a new “unipolar” world to ensure its control of the planet. This is something with which many others, who are not necessarily pro-Russian, may agree. Earlier, in an address to the Russian nation in 2005, Putin had claimed that the collapse of the USSR was “the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century,” a remark with which Dugin wholly agreed, saying it had “colossal philosophical and historical significance.” Not only had it fostered separatist movements in what remained of Russia, it also left “tens of millions” of Putin’s fellow countrymen “beyond the fringes of Russian territory”—like those stuck in Ukraine and Crimea, for example.

But the larger significance of the collapse of the Soviet regime is that it left the world in a perilous state of unbalance. What remained, Putin said, was: “One single center of power. One single center of
force. One single center of decision making. This is the world of one master, one sovereign.” For Putin, this could not be good—not for Russia and not for the world. It has left the United States and its allies able to use force whenever they see fit; what’s worse, in most cases such force has not resolved situations, but only exacerbated them—again, an assessment with which many might agree, although they need not be pro-Putin.

Western delegates were quick to ask if Russia’s autocratic turn—meaning rule by Putin—was going to accelerate. How much real concern about a lopsided distribution of global power informed Putin’s speech is debatable; the need to show voters back home that he could stand up to the West and make Russia great again was certainly important too. But the message was clear: Russia would not allow for a unipolar, purely Western world. In Dugin-speak, the Atlanticists could not have it all their own way.

Soon after this some of Putin’s fellow countrymen languishing “beyond the fringe” began to head back home. In 2008 pro-Russian movements in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, near the Black Sea, broke away from Georgia, a former Soviet state that became independent in 1991. Russia backed its “fellow countrymen,” sending in armed forces; the result was a “free” pro-Russian South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and a reduced Georgia. Dugin and his EYU were on the scene, ostensibly attending a kind of ethnographic summer camp, researching Russian links with the ancient Sarmatians, a warrior people of Iranian descent, but also engaging in military training themselves.

In 2012 Dugin addressed a huge crowd in Moscow’s Victory Park, gathered in opposition to anti-Putin protests and in support of Tsar Vladimir, who was returning for another term as president after sitting one out as prime minister. Protesters claimed the election was rigged—a by now common complaint—but the Putineers wouldn’t have it. Dugin warned his 120,000-strong audience about the Western powers that were trying to keep Russia in check, telling them of “fifth columnists” who were undermining Russia’s sovereignty and of Russia’s mission to resist the atomizing of society
forced upon them by Western agents of individualism, concerns that Putin himself had voiced in his victory speech.\textsuperscript{9} The Russian people were different. They worked for the good of the whole, the community, the country, not their “precious personalities,” as Putin himself would say, picking up Dugin’s rhetoric.

In his speech to the Valdai Summit in 2013, Putin criticized the West for its loss of morality, its decadence, its rejection of its Christian roots, especially on matters of homosexuality and gender. He affirmed the “traditional values” that Steve Bannon sees in him, in language that could have been scripted by Dugin, although Putin assured his audience that he had written it himself.\textsuperscript{10} Putin had by then formed strong ties with a revived Russian Orthodox Church, many of whose new recruits were, like the president, ex-KGB men. Dugin’s place among the Old Believers was another link to the new, religious Russia, where a strong state and a strong church go hand in hand. Through him far-right political radicals and staunch upholders of the faith could meet and move in a milieu that also included members of the persuasive Russian mafia.

By this time the Eurasia meme had become the focus of Western concern. As she would with the alt-right and Pepe the Frog, it was Hillary Clinton who introduced it to a wider audience, at once legitimizing it and providing Putin and Dugin with more evidence of the Western conspiracy against Holy Russia. At a news conference in 2012, the then secretary of state told reporters that in Russia there is “a move to re-Sovietize the region.” They are not going to call it the USSR again, she said, but a “customs union,” or a “Eurasian Union.” And in rhetoric similar to how she would speak about the alt-right, she warned, “But let’s make no mistake about it. We know what the goal is and we are trying to figure out effective ways to slow down or prevent it.”\textsuperscript{11} Small wonder that Putin would much rather have Trump in the White House, and that many assume that he would take steps, if he could, to ensure this.

Clinton’s attempts to slow down the Eurasian snowball were not successful. The most spectacular display of the Eurasia meme exploded—literally—two years after her remarks. Vladislav Surkov
may have stage-managed the conflict in Ukraine, but Dugin predicted it. We may even say he “picturized” it. It was something he wanted to happen and it did.

Long before Putin did, Dugin spoke of the pro-Russian eastern part of Ukraine as Novorossiya, “New Russia,” a name for the region going back to the Russian Empire, before it was “given” to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic following the Bolshevik victory. (Putin even questions the reality of a country called “Ukraine,” saying it is something “we”—the Soviets—“gave” to Ukrainians in the 1920s.) In 2009 Dugin drew a map of a dissected Ukraine, giving the eastern provinces the name “Novorossiya.” In a YouTube video he gave a detailed account of how the country would disintegrate and predicted that the 2010 elections would be the last Ukraine enjoyed as a unified nation. And in a book we will get to shortly, he wrote that the “western border of the Eurasianist civilization” included the eastern part of Ukraine, “making that newly-formed government a fortiori fragile and not viable.”

Five years later Dugin predicted that the breakaway “republics” of Donetsk and Lugansk would declare independence weeks before they did. He also predicted that Putin would send in ground troops well before the unmarked Russian special forces turned up. Perhaps most striking was his prediction of the design of the Donetsk Republic flag; it would be red, he said, with a blue St. Andrew’s Cross.

He was right about the flag and everything else. We could chalk this up to intuition, a reasonable educated guess—Dugin is, after all, a geopolitical strategist—or simple coincidence. But the fact that Dugin believes that magic is involved in this should give us pause for thought. Like Marx, Dugin is not interested in a philosophy that only interprets the world. He wants to change it. “We do not just study what exists,” he writes. “We follow the process and try to affect it,” a remark that would not be out of place in a book on chaos magick. “Wishful thinking and self-fulfilling prophecy,” he tells us, “is quite legitimate and welcome here,” sentiments that can be found, I think, in more than one text on New Thought. And in a phrase that would not be out of place in one of Evola’s essays for UR, he writes, “We live
in the creation of the external world by the internal self.”  

“Thoughts,” he tells us, “are magic.” This is something on which Swedenborg, Blake, Neville, Norman Vincent Peale, Trump, Austin Osman Spare, and others we have looked at could agree.

In 2008, writing of Dugin’s dissemination of “the myth of Russia as a great power, accompanied by imperialist, Aryanist, and occultist beliefs,” Marlène Laruelle, an expert on Russia and international studies then at John Hopkins University, concluded that the scope of Dugin’s enterprise was at that point unclear, but that it “cannot remain without consequence.” Six years later events in Novorossiya may have convinced Laruelle that she had been right.

In 2015 the treaty creating the Eurasian Economic Union, signed by the republics of Belarus and Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation the year before, came into effect, making concrete an idea that, in different forms, had been discussed since 1994. The republics of Armenia and Kyrgyz were also party to the agreement, and more than likely other states on the fringe of Russia’s borders will follow suit. This suggests that on both the diplomatic and geopolitical fronts the idea of a rising Eurasia is gaining more ground—literally in Ukraine and Crimea—and making the important transition from dream to reality—something, once again, with which all the players in this book are concerned.

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Yet clawing back ex-Soviet satellites in order to make Russia great again, though important, is not the limit of the Eurasian dream. This is really only the prelude to the main event. For Dugin this is the inevitable, absolutely necessary showdown between the awakening Eurasian giant and its Atlanticist foes. Trump’s election may have put this on hold, but the détente between the United States and Russia seems fragile, suspicions that the recriminations between the two leaders are really a pantomime distracting from their true relations notwithstanding. Like his antecedents, Dugin has the
genuine Russian millenarian spirit, and topping the list on his political agenda is nothing less than bringing on the end of the world.

This was a project he put forth in his apocalypse-rich book *The Fourth Political Theory*. Its central thesis is that in the twenty-first century, liberalism remains as the seemingly only viable political and social reality. It has gone from being one political and economic choice, among others, to becoming a way of life, even, to a great extent, an unquestioned “natural” state of affairs. To question it is considered an aberration, its “good” too obvious to doubt. Its two main rivals, communism and fascism—with which Dugin includes National Socialism—did not meet the challenge of modernity, and collapsed: fascism with the end of World War II, communism with the collapse of the Soviet Union. (Dugin’s concern is with the West, so he ignores communism’s survival in places like China and North Korea.)

The conservatism of the Republican Party or the British Tories is, from his perspective, still a form of liberalism; it is simply not quite as liberal as its opponent, an assessment that informs the alt-right’s condemnation of the “cuckservatives”—cuckolded conservatives—who lacked the nerve to get behind Trump. Aside from some critics sniping at its edges, Western liberalism has emerged as the only possible political, social, and economic choice for sane human beings. There are still some holdouts, but time is against them and eventually they will see the light.

This in effect is the same scenario that Francis Fukuyama presented in his influential book *The End of History and the Last Man*. Fukuyama argued that with the global spread of democracy and the free market, Western civilization had triumphed and was in the process of culminating in a united free world. The philosopher Hegel saw the movement of history as the progressive embodiment of freedom in human life. With a world permeated by notions of “human rights,” democracy, and the increasing reach of a free market–style economy, Fukuyama argued that Hegel’s vision had been accomplished and that the world spirit, manifesting itself through human action, had reached its goal. History, then, at least in a Hegelian sense, had reached its end.
But while for Fukuyama, liberals, and capitalists this was good news, it did not go down well with Dugin. For him it was the worst possible news. What Fukuyama and other liberals saw as freedom was for him the worst kind of slavery. Western liberalism and laissez-faire capitalism, spreading over the planet through globalization, meant the reduction of human beings to consumers, the leveling of all life to economics, and a bland homogenization of cultures, as “underdeveloped” countries embraced Western progress and “oppressed” peoples fought for democracy—which in the end meant a larger market for multinational corporations.

This is not a particularly new complaint. The West itself has produced many critics of the same developments that have Dugin up in arms; going by this book, this fact seems to have escaped him. But Dugin’s vehemence is a few notches above what most of us would take as passionate but reasoned argument. His revulsion at the modern world equals Evola’s or Guénon’s, but his rhetoric reaches heights of vituperation that even these masters of condemnation missed. Perhaps the fact that he is Russian and that Russians have a tendency to take things to extremes, to exceed the limits—as Hesse saw in his essay on Russian Man—is at work here. Whatever the reason, what comes across more than anything else from this book is Dugin’s hatred of the West and of the modern and now postmodern world that it has produced.

If its “absolute enemy,” the United States, was “the beginning and end” of the Eurasian Youth Union’s “hatred,” here Dugin appeals to other anti-West, anti-U.S., and antiglobalization movements, however different their final goals, to join with him and share in the energizing effects of their common “hatred of the present social reality.” The enemies of my enemy are my friends, so the thinking goes—until, as usually happens, the common enemy is gone and the friends start squabbling among themselves.

Hatred can bring people together. Orwell knew this; “Hate Weeks” and a daily “two minutes of hate” are mandatory in 1984. As Eric Hoffer in The True Believer said, “Hatred is the most accessible and comprehensive of all unifying agents,” something that Hitler
knew very well. An enemy unifies a nation more than anything else, whether he exists in fact or in fantasy. The Jew was the enemy for Hitler, and his hatred of him informs the rabid pages of *Mein Kampf*. A similar hatred informs the pages of Dugin’s book. But while hatred may serve as an excellent cohesive, it is a poor fuel, and fires started with it burn out quickly and produce an ugly smoke. There is much smoke in *The Fourth Political Theory*. In a gentler analogy, it is rather like a cappuccino: more froth than coffee. But through the fustian and foam, some basic ideas get through.

One is the need for a new political theory that could seriously challenge liberalism. To that end Dugin “deconstructs” liberalism’s failed rivals, fascism and communism. This amounts to cherry-picking what he sees as positive in National Socialism and Stalinism, rejecting the rest as out of step with the times. What good there might be in regimes responsible for the deaths of many millions of people I leave the reader to discover. The main idea is that precisely because fascism and communism did not meet modernity’s requirements, they are, as it were, Traditionalist by default.

We know Evola saw some Traditionalist aspects in Hitler, but seeing them in communism seems a stretch. Allusions like these have led some critics to wonder just how traditional Dugin’s Traditionalism is. Yet Dugin’s trick of fitting together ideologies like Lego blocks should suggest that, like the postmodernism he ostensibly despises, he, like chaos magicians, is not fussy about technicalities. What appeals to him about totalitarian regimes is that they emphasize the collective over the individual. And where the Jew served as Hitler’s all-purpose bête noire, the individual fulfills that function for Dugin.

The individual is what is wrong with the West—the “hissing, rhizomatic, twittering sub-individual,” to be exact. He is the Frankenstein monster let loose—liberated—by its loosening of restrictions. The freedom rampant in the West, which it wants to export, Dugin sees, is only a freedom from some constraint or other. It has no positive value; it is not freedom for some purpose or goal. As Nietzsche said, “many lost what was best in them when they lost
their chains,” meaning that without an aim or purpose, freedom is merely license—or, as existentialists like Jean-Paul Sartre saw, a burden. And as noted, it is precisely this burden that gurus and demagogues offer to take from us. This is what has happened in the West. The individual “I,” once held in check by the restraints of religion or morality, has, in the modern world, been for the most part released from these. This is in fact part of the definition of modernity. We can do what we want—and that is precisely the problem.

What we want to do is consume, not only goods but, as Dugin argues, reality itself. The Western liberated ego knows no boundaries, and the assertion of the “I,” or rather, the “me,” demands that everything give way before it. Our “human rights” ensure this. This has led to developments like “gender fluidity,” in which men or women believe that because they “self-identify” as the opposite sex, they “magically” are whatever gender they desire. Biological realities are negligible; everything is socially constructed. What the free individual wants is what matters, and, as Dugin sees it, notions of human rights are trivialized in order to accommodate this. Even more, these rights will soon, he argues, be extended to forms of artificial life and intelligence, to computers and cyborgs. The Western “me” will soon find its own physical embodiment a limit that it should be liberated from and want the “right” to merge with machines or even other species. In the past, religion taught that there was an “essence” to created things, to minerals, plants, animals, and humans. The postmodern Western “me” rejects this idea: anything, it says, can be what I want it to be. Or rather, it should be.

This unboundedness has, paradoxically, led to notions of “equality” that, like liberalism, are practically unquestioned. The dissolution of barriers, of difference, of any notion that some things are “better” than others, has led to a leveling of values in which perceptions of “high” and “low” are dissolved and the mass of individual “me’s,” each pursuing its own desires, results in a vast, mediocre uniformity. Any expression of values that conflicts with
this is seen as an attack of the “rights” of others, and any manifestation of difference too obvious to ignore is chalked up to “privilege” or some other social factor that promotes “inequality,” which can be rectified through social engineering. Such is the aim of the “social justice warriors.” They believe that we will all really be free only when we are all really equal. It is this state of affairs that, from Dugin’s perspective, globalization and its agents want to spread across the planet. For him, as for William Blake, “One law for lion and ox is oppression,” and he rejects it.

It is not difficult to see these forms of “dissolution” as emblematic of the maritime, consuming Atlanticists, whose fundamental metaphysics of “becoming” knows no boundaries or limits. It is also not difficult to see that the organic, collective, hierarchical, totalitarian “traditional” forms of human life and society that Dugin champions embody the metaphysics of “being.” It is these that Eurasia defends.

Against this backdrop Dugin envisions a coming cataclysm that will either bring an end to the spread of Western “meism” or its total victory, in which the world, finally “globalized,” will become one vast shopping mall with not only goods but realities on sale. Here he looks to the philosopher Martin Heidegger, himself a supporter of National Socialism in its early days, for help. Where Hegel saw history as the gradual embodiment of freedom, for Heidegger it was something rather different.

With Traditionalism, Heidegger believed that in the distant past, Western man lost the plot. For Heidegger this meant that with the rise of reason in philosophers like Socrates and Plato, we eclipsed the mysterious fact of Being itself. In our desire to control the world and have it suit our purposes, we have cut ourselves off from authentic existence. With Gurdjieff, Heidegger believed that Western man suffered from “forgetfulness of being,” and that rationalism, science, technology, and the consumerism that accompanies them have left
us stranded in a false world, rather as the ancient Gnostics believed. Like Nietzsche, Heidegger saw that the West was heading into an age of nihilism and that the history of Being would end, to paraphrase T. S. Eliot, not with a bang but a price tag. It was out of what Heidegger called the “destruction of metaphysics,” his attempt to undo the damage, that movements like deconstructionism and postmodernism emerged.

Heidegger did see some faint hope. The drift into nihilism could be halted, he believed, if some event, what he called the *ereignis*, took place. This is something rather like the “singularity” that physicists speak of when referring to a black hole, or New Age visionaries do when dreaming of some millenarian “happening” that will change everything and restore the fallen world to innocence. Heidegger mistakenly saw National Socialism, with its “resolute” rejection of the false values of modernity and embrace of “traditional,” “authentic” values—blood and soil—as some version of this. He spoke of the *Volk* regaining the “truth” of its “will to be,” and saw Hitler as “incarnating” a “world-historical movement,” the “encounter between global technology and modern men.” He was a “man of destiny.” Dugin sees something similar in Putin. He wants him to bring on the event that he believes will throw the world back into the chaos from which it emerged.

Yet Dugin’s vision of a world free from the Western obsession with freedom hardly sounds appetizing. Just as Neville aims to return to an “unconditioned awareness of existence,” and chaos magicians to the “Neither-Neither,” Dugin too wants to achieve a condition in which the subject/object duality that characterizes our everyday experience—and is the basis of Western metaphysics—is dissolved, not in the individual, but collectively. We would then return to what Heidegger calls *Dasein*, or “being there.” This is our immediate experience of “being-in-the-world” before Western rationalism favored the rational ego as “the measure of all things.”

It does give pause for thought that, with all their differences, Guénon, Evola, Dugin, and Heidegger all see the Western ego, the “I,” as the source of all our problems. It is this animus toward the
individual that prompts Dugin’s vision of a post-egoic world, in
which we would be so immersed in a collective society that we would
be, as many antimodern activists think we should be, little more than
animals, completely “at one” with our environment. We would fill
our “natural” roles as the unselfconscious creatures of the forests do
theirs. This is a vision of a future informed by the organic,
hierarchical values of synarchy, and the cosmic biologism of Gumilev
and Vernadsky. We could, if we like, call it “enlightened fascism.”

What are we to make of this call to “immanentize the eschaton,” the
philosopher Eric Voegelin’s phrase for bringing about the last days?
As I write, the United States and North Korea are engaged in some
serious nuclear saber rattling. One hopes it stays at that and that
Dugin’s millenarianism is only another example of the excessiveness
Russian Man gets up to. Yet in a post-truth world it is hard to know
what to take seriously and what is only a pose. On September 12,
2001, the day after the attack on the Twin Towers, Dugin posted
about it on his blog. He sympathized with the victims but called the
jets crashing into the World Trade Center the “swallows of the
apocalypse,” likening them to the shot from Gavrilo Princip that
crushed Archduke Franz Ferdinand and started World War I. For him
the attack initiated a “war between unipolar globalism . . . and the
rest of the world” and marked the “end of history.” History, we know,
has been ending for some time now, yet given Dugin’s evident
militarism, it might not hurt to take him literally.

But then he, like Vladislav Surkov, knows that war today is not
linear, that it is a “war of all against all.” This could mean some final
conflagration, a real-life global conflict that would leave survivors
starting over from scratch. Or it could mean something else.
Apocalypse is a Greek word meaning “uncovering” or “revelation,”
and the sense of its meaning the end times comes from the idea that
with the final divine “revelation,” history and the world in the earthly
sense would indeed end and a new heavenly age begin. But this does
not necessarily mean some physical cataclysm. “Revelation” is linked to vision, and to the sense of something hitherto hidden being revealed. A revelation can change one’s life, but it doesn’t necessarily destroy it. In fact, it can make it better.

The phrase “a war of all against all” comes from the political philosopher Thomas Hobbes, who in his work *Leviathan* said that it characterized the state of humanity before civilization. In a series of lectures about the Apocalypse of St. John, recounted in the book of Revelation, given more than a century ago in Nuremberg, Rudolf Steiner spoke of a coming “war of all against all” that would mark the end of our spiritual epoch. Steiner spoke of a distant future, yet his words seem eerily prescient today. This war “must be pictured quite differently” from how we are accustomed to think of war, Steiner said, something with which Vladislav Surkov would agree.

The root cause of this war, Steiner says, is the “increase in egoism, of self-seeking and selfishness on the part of man”—by which of course Steiner also means woman. He speaks of the “I” as a “two-edged sword.” It is the reason that man “hardens himself” and wants to use everything, to have it at his “disposal.” Here Steiner anticipates Heidegger’s warnings about technology and its “utilizing” of the world. This “I” is interested only in its own satisfaction and in possessing for itself that which “belongs to all.”

To be at war with all other egos is one side of this “I,” and so far Steiner’s remarks seem to echo Dugin’s. Yet the other side of the “I,” Steiner sees, is of absolute importance. It is what gives us “independence and inner freedom” and “in the truest sense of the word” elevates us. It is the “basis of the Divine in man.” It is worth every effort to preserve and to develop the “I,” and it is our spiritual task to do so. “It would be wrong,” Steiner says, “to crave to go down again . . . into some sort of universal consciousness, some sort of common consciousness,” which Steiner argues we emerged from millennia ago, and which seems to be what Dugin has in mind. It would go against the current of evolution and waste the centuries of struggle during which humanity rose up from its unconscious animal beginnings.
We do not need to abandon the “I,” Steiner tells us, but to strengthen it until it can join with others in a “community of free and independent Egos.” But this isn’t easy. Egoism without love, “I” without the “other,” separates us and brings on the “great War of All against All.” Such egoism will lead “not only to the war of nation against nation,” only six years away for Steiner, who was speaking in 1908. This is because the “conception of a nation will no longer have the significance it possesses today,” something we know at first hand through globalization and which has sparked a resurgence of nationalism. But it will lead to “the war of every single person against every other person . . . of class against class, caste against caste, and sex against sex. . . .”

I think if Steiner were alive today he might reconsider the estimated time of arrival of his war of all against all. For what do we see today but people of different religions, classes, sexes, genders, ages, nationalities, and races “warring” with each other, fighting over their “rights,” over being “respected,” over their “identities,” which in the end means over their “I’s”? I would say that this war extends into ostensibly demilitarized zones, into social media. For what else are we doing when we compete with others for “likes” and other evidence for our online popularity? We push ahead of our “friends,” grasping for attention, seeking boosts to our self-worth. In *The Caretakers of the Cosmos* I argue that the rise of social media suggests that most of us in the West have reached what Maslow called the “self-esteem” level of psychological development, when what matters most is what other people think about us. Maslow believed that at the next level, “self-actualization,” such attention is no longer desired. How close we are to this is debatable.

If a “war of all against all” is nonlinear, could it include forms of magic and occultism? And would all the combatants be human? Steiner thought that occult forces were at work throughout history. At least on this point Guénon, Evola, and Dugin agree with him. We’ve seen that Guénon believed that “black brotherhoods” and “counter-initiates” were working against him, and that there was some “will” behind them whose exact nature must remain
“enigmatic,” an idea he passed on to Evola. Writing of this “occult war” in *Men Among the Ruins*, Evola spelled out various “tactics” and “strategies” by which the forces of “global subversion” waged an “imperceptible war” against the defenders of Tradition. These forces operate in a “subterranean dimension” and their influence, Evola believed, “cannot be reduced to what is merely human.”

Dugin seems to agree. Writing of “angelic politics,” he says that “the sphere of the political is starting to be controlled by and is starting to ground itself upon the confrontation between superhuman entities.” This development, he says, “possesses a huge potential to assign political roles without taking humanoids and post-humanoids into account.”

What this posthuman politics would mean for the people involved is unclear, except that it would spell the end of the “individual” as we know him. As Dugin says, “We propose the theory that every human identity is acceptable and justified, except for that of the individual.” “Man is anything but an individual.” In fact, such a creature does not really exist. What the individual is “is not derived from himself,” Dugin argues, but from “politics,” that is, the state.

This means that you, reading this book and considering the ideas presented in it, do not really exist as a separate “I.” Your sense that you do is only an illusion. What you are essentially is provided by the group of whom you are only a member. Without them you are nothing. How this differs from Rudolf Steiner’s notion of the individual should be clear.

But not only angelic or demonic forces participate in an occult war. We too are involved. Like others we have looked at, Dugin is aware of the power of thought. “Thinking,” he says, is “action.” Speaking of “activity as mentality,” he alludes to the “theurgic” power of the Neoplatonists, the ability to “animate” the inanimate that the ancient philosopher and magician Iamblichus ascribed to the “performance of mysterious acts” and the “power of unutterable symbols.” We could just as well say sigils. The idea is the same: through intention, word, and deed, reality becomes malleable.
Dugin knows this. “Thoughts,” he tells us, “can change reality.” They can “replace reality as fact,” something that Trump and every alternative fact advocate knows. He speaks of a “supranatural world,” in which there is “no barrier between idea and realization.” Echoing Evola he speaks of adopting a “magical view of the world” in which “thought is the only thing that crosses worlds, and everything we cross with is nothing more than a thought.” He speaks of “pure thought” and produces another portmanteau, “menactivity,” which he describes as the “transformation of spirit into body and body into spirit” and which he says was the “main problem of hermeticism.”

To read this in a book about magick, or New Thought, or esoteric philosophy would be one thing. To find it in a book that proposes a new political theory, based on salvaging what is good in National Socialism and Stalinism, and which in part anticipates events that would transpire five years after its publication, written by an adviser to the leader of a major power, seems something else. Well in advance of Trump, the alt-right, and Pepe the Frog, Dugin seems to have advocated a meme magic approach to politics. And as we’ve seen with the rise of Eurasia, he seems to have done quite well.

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Let me bring together some of the main ideas of this book so we can get some sense of where we stand.

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Imagination is one of the central themes of New Thought, positive thinking, chaos magick, and other forms of mental philosophy. But in one sense, it strikes me as noticeably absent today. In fact I would say that the entire postmodern phenomenon exhibits a curious lack of imagination, at least according to the definition of it given by the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

As mentioned, Coleridge believed that the human imagination was “a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in
the infinite I AM.” This is what Coleridge meant by “Secondary Imagination,” that of the great artists and thinkers, who create their worlds in the same way, but not on the same scale, as God. Coleridge also called imagination “the living power and prime agent of all human perception,” meaning that the very act of perceiving the world is really a “creative” one. Coleridge was not alone in believing this; Edmund Husserl, for example, the founder of phenomenology, developed a hugely influential philosophical method based on the same insight.

Coleridge also spoke of what he called “Fancy.” This is something different. Primary and Secondary Imagination truly create something “original,” in the sense that they reach into the fundamental source of all creation. Fancy doesn’t do this. Fancy, for Coleridge, takes what is already created and combines it in odd ways with other things. A unicorn and a flying pig are examples of Fancy but not, for Coleridge, Imagination, because they are only the result of an unusual combination of otherwise commonplace items. They add nothing “original” to reality, unlike, as Coleridge believed, true imagination does. In a sense, Coleridge relegates art movements such as Surrealism, which produced scores of sophisticated flying pigs and unicorns, into the category of Fancy. Others, I suspect, could find a place there too.

Postmodernism seems to me to be little more than an expression of Fancy. It allows us to pick and choose from a wide selection of different styles, attitudes, images, ideas, beliefs, ideologies, and characters, and mix and match them as we please. But for all the “freedom” it grants, postmodernism is not creative. It says that there are no restrictions on reality and that we can create whichever kind we like. But in actuality, along Coleridge’s lines, all it really leads to are slightly different unicorns and somewhat novel flying pigs.

I would say that Dugin’s talent for mashing up different ideologies is an example of Fancy, just as is chaos magick’s trick of adopting different beliefs. And the post-truth world, in which we can pick and choose from among different “facts,” seems to suit it well. The term postmodern itself is an example of the very portmanteau character I
am speaking of. It itself shows a lack of imagination: it simply means “the period after the modern,” which could be anything.

I think we can say that Fancy and postmodernism are both simulacra of true imagination, that they are, in fact, false versions of it. The “freedom” that comes with the liberating thought that “anything goes” is ersatz. As mentioned earlier, it is a “freedom from,” not a “freedom for.” We are free to put the bits and pieces of reality together however we like, but we can’t add to them; we can only play around with what we have. This suggests that sooner or later we will exhaust the possibilities and be stuck with the equivalent of watching reruns.

Yet one of the themes we’ve considered is the idea of “breaking the reality barrier,” of having the unreal pass into the real, the inner into the outer. This is the essence of the meme magic we’ve looked at. It is also at the heart of New Thought, positive thinking, and chaos magick. I started this book by asking a question: Could meme magick have helped Trump get into office? Could his own positive thinking have helped too? In other words, does it work? This is really the only reason to pay attention to it. Whatever the psychological or social consequences of practicing positive thinking or New Thought, what most concerns people who do is whether or not they are wasting their time. Trump, Richard Spencer, Alexander Dugin, and others seem to feel they are not. In this book we’ve seen some of the reasons for their confidence.

But “breaking the reality barrier” isn’t limited to magicians. Reality TV has primed a whole generation on the idea that there is little difference between what they see on the screen and what happens in their own life. The membrane separating “fact” from “entertainment” became very porous in Russia while Vladislav Surkov manned the controls. And in Trump we have the first reality-TV president. Somehow, as our entertainment became more “real,” through HD technology as well as Big Brother, reality became more like a television show.

Could obscuring the distinction between fact and entertainment somehow have aided other attempts to cross the “reality divide”? Could reality’s ambiguity in the cultural world have somehow seeped
through into actual Being, into what philosophers call its ontology, its fundamental “is-ness”? Could this be a case of life imitating art, or at least of reality imitating television? If so, then we may want to consider the possibility that in a world in which distinctions between “truth” and “representation” have dissolved, efforts to nudge reality in a certain direction may have more effect. Recalling that the president in question was for years a reality-TV star—and a practitioner of positive thinking for longer than that—may help in this.

In a sense I would say that Trump’s election may have been the kind of “event,” the “singularity,” that Dugin and many others have anticipated, which would end the old world and clear a path for the new. I say this because it does seem that with his victory—“of the will,” we recall—we have entered new terrain, a new “normal” in which long-held ideas about truth and reality no longer apply and standards and criteria once absolute are ignored. Trump we can say is the simulacrum that has become the reality, the tulpa created by his followers who is now on the loose. He has made the transition from representation to fact, from television screen to “real life,” like a meme warping off the internet and into reality. The portals are open, everything is negotiable, and soon “all things will be possible again,” as Ivanka Trump promised when she introduced her father to the Republican National Convention. With this many have felt the kind of “release from the limitations of all conventional restraint” that charismatic leaders often inspire—with debatable results. We may not have collectively returned to Dasein, our “authentic being,” as Dugin hopes, but reality after Trump’s election certainly seems different from reality before it.

We should also consider that for many years a variety of occult-friendly people, myself included, have argued against the limitations of a reductive, overly rationalistic “scientism,” and the limited notions of “truth,” “fact,” and “reality” that it champions. In a post-truth world, these restraints seem to have been lifted, but not necessarily with the result many envisioned. We wanted a more
“magical” world; now we seem to have one—or at least one in which the usual standards of proof and verification no longer matter.

The philosopher Jean Gebser, a contemporary of Evola’s, believed that in the twentieth century, the West was experiencing what he called the “breakdown of the mental-rational structure of consciousness.”\textsuperscript{36} Essentially this meant that the worldview based on logic and reason, which saw its greatest expression in modern science, had entered what he called its “deficient mode” and was taking itself apart. This was in preparation for the emergence of a new “consciousness structure,” what Gebser called the “integral.” He died in 1973 just as deconstructionism and postmodernism were beginning to dominate Western thinking. Had he lived to see their success, I believe Gebser would recognize them as symptoms of his breakdown, and that the post-truth world we now inhabit, and which makes possible a President Trump, is the “dark night of the soul” that Western consciousness must endure before any new light comes over the horizon. Gebser was hopeful it would come, but there were no guarantees.

If it is true that we have entered a time when the walls separating inner from outer have thinned, what does it mean? I am perfectly happy to accept that all this might be nonsense and that an economic, sociological, or some other rational explanation—like Russian intervention—can account for Trump’s victory. Such a conclusion would be preferable. But after considering everything I’ve read over the months spent writing this book, I have to say it is not completely satisfying. My own experience has shown that the partitions between the mind and the world are not always strong.

In fact, the book I finished just before starting this one dealt with precisely the place of imagination in human consciousness. In \textit{Lost Knowledge of the Imagination} I argue that, rather than being about “fantasy,” “escapism,” or “make-believe,” imagination is actually about making things \textit{real}, precisely the opposite of what we are usually taught. I examined this idea through the work of different philosophers, psychologists, and poets, Coleridge among them. The central insight is that imagination is a “way of knowing,” that we
learn truths about reality through it that would otherwise remain obscure, and that its relegation to “unreality” through the rise of science in the seventeenth century was a mistake with serious consequences. But not only this. We participate with the world through our imagination; even more, it is through it that we help bring the world’s reality into being. Readers will recall remarks to this effect from an earlier chapter in this book.

“Bringing reality into being” sounds very much like the aim of chaos magick and New Thought. In *Lost Knowledge* I look at this idea historically, outlining how the true nature of imagination was obscured with the rise of rationalism and later “scientism.” Here I’ve considered it in more specific terms, but the principle is the same. The mind does not simply “reflect” a reality that is “out there” and “ready-made.” In some way we don’t yet understand, it is intimately involved in shaping that reality, in “creating” it. If philosophers like Kant and Husserl, poets like Blake and Coleridge, esoteric teachers like Swedenborg and Steiner, scientists like Werner Heisenberg, and magicians like Aleister Crowley agree that, in some way we do not yet fully grasp, our minds interact with the outside world, then there is no reason to deny that positive thinking or meme magick is possible. Anyone who has practiced it and gotten results knows this already.

Assuming this is so, the way in which we use this power becomes crucial. Exactly what do we “bring into being”? If positive thinking can put someone in the White House and chaos magick can help in the rise of a new Russia, then this power is considerable. Esoteric tradition has long recognized this, as we’ve seen with the dangers of *tulpas* and *egregores*. “Don’t call up what you can’t put down” is good magical advice. The poet Goethe warned that we should be careful what we wish for in youth, as we will receive it in middle age. And W. B. Yeats, another poet and practicing magician—Goethe himself practiced alchemy—echoed him when he said that “Whatever we build in the imagination will accomplish itself in the circumstances of our lives.” When devotees of New Thought tell us that “thoughts are things,” we may shake our heads, but we should remember that Goethe and Yeats would agree with them.
Even Evola recognized that pursuing the “absolute individual” who can be “unconditionally whatever he wants” was hazardous. The “chances of an individual ruinously going haywire after embracing such a dangerous doctrine,” he wrote, “appeared all too evident.” Evola is talking about the solipsism that threatens a completely self-generated consciousness, the maddening idea that you are the only reality, and not only in a narcissistic sense. But a less extreme version of this can accompany a consciousness occupied solely with asserting its will. And this I would say is the main drawback of New Thought, positive thinking, chaos magick, and other forms of “mental philosophy” or “science of the ego.”

It is good and necessary to pursue and achieve goals, to keep the will taut and active. We need to use it or it will go flat, like the battery of a car left in the garage too long, and such a condition is dangerous. It can lead to depression, even suicide, what Colin Wilson calls “life-failure.” But some “goods,” perhaps the most important ones, come to us when we are not concerned with ourselves and satisfying our desires. Positive thinking, New Thought, and chaos magick seem to leave out of account the impersonal meanings and values that appear when we see the world objectively, and not through the lens of our needs. This is the “newness” or “otherness” that comes to us when we see things free of our wants, as realities in themselves, and not as objects of desire or obstacles in our way. Great music, art, literature, or thought can give us a sense of this. We can get it through a spring morning, a starry sky, a sunset, even a glass of wine; these convey to us a sense of what the poet Wordsworth called “unknown modes of being,” the sheer strangeness, complexity, and interestingness of the world.

Focusing on our goals, keeping our “eyes on the prize,” we may achieve our aims. But without the breath of objective reality, its freshness and vitality—what the literary scholar George Steiner calls the “sovereignly useless”—what we want may dwindle to trivialities. We may become so used to getting our way, to expecting it, that like the gurus and Right Men we have looked at, our slightest whim becomes all important. Becoming absorbed in something that has
nothing to do with you, but for its own enigmatic sake, is something peculiar to humans. It makes us curious about the world and its mysteries as an end in itself, not as a means to some more personal end. It is the essence of wonder. Early advocates of New Thought, like Emerson or William James, knew the importance of this. But it strikes me that somewhere along the line, it’s been lost.

But there is a more immediate danger. The French philosopher and scholar of mysticism Henry Corbin wrote extensively on the imagination and what he called the Imaginal World, a kind of realm in between the physical world and that of pure thought. It is the realm in which dreams take place and hypnagogic visions, and in which the “picturizing” that leads to the “actualizing” of our prayers goes on. Like many others, Corbin saw the inadequacies of our usual notion of imagination as a kind of “substitute” for reality. It was precisely this error that led him to use the term Imaginal to differentiate it from the “imaginary.” The Imaginal is real, Corbin argued, but it’s a different reality from what we are used to.

Yet Corbin also recognized that the alternative to inadequate ideas about the imagination was not to let the imagination run riot. He argued that without some guidelines, such an unrestricted imagination—or, as Coleridge might say, Fancy—would be “out of focus” and its “recurrent conjunctions with our will-to-power” become “a never-ending source of horrors.” Corbin died in 1978, and what he might have thought of our post-truth world, full of meme magick and visualization, we can only guess. Curiously, the kind of guidelines Corbin had in mind would not have been unknown to Evola, Dugin, and other followers of Tradition. He spoke of a “cosmology” reflecting a “plurality of universes arranged in ascending order,” a common idea among many spiritual traditions. Whether we accept Corbin’s suggestion or not, the meaning is clear. A philosophy of “anything goes” is not the answer to a too limited notion of the imagination.

Exactly what guidelines we impose on our imaginations is, of course, a serious question, and one I must leave for another time. But the very power involved suggests we should proceed with
caution, as anyone of any seriousness would; only children play with matches. This does not mean timidly, but with care and an awareness of the responsibility involved. The future perhaps is not only in our hands, but in our minds, and the reality that awaits us in the time ahead may be germinating there now. Let us hope that when it arrives we will be equal to it and that it will bring clearer skies and brighter stars on the horizon.

London, May–August 2017
Afterword

SINCE DELIVERING the manuscript of Dark Star Rising and subsequently editing the proofs prior to its publication, it became clear that many changes had taken place in the world that the book explores. This was only to be expected. A week, we know, is a long time in politics, but in the shape-shifting post-truth, alternative fact milieu of Trump and his entourage, as well as in that surrounding Vladimir Putin, that period of time reduces to hours, sometimes even to minutes. We all know how quickly things change today—that in fact is the central truth of our time—and to keep adequately up-to-date requires media other than books. But one significant development that seemed important to point out is the departure of Steve Bannon from Trump’s team, amid alleged power struggles between him and other of Trump’s advisers. After leaving the White House Bannon first returned to his original port of call, Breitbart News, but then in a surprise move, left there as well.¹ He has come under fire for comments he reportedly made to Michael Wolf—included in his book Fire and Fury, an account of Trump’s presidency—alluding to the Trump/Russia election-collusion scandal, and he has also lost the patronage of Rebekah Mercer, billionaire daughter of Robert Mercer, who supported Bannon’s political efforts.² At the time of writing—March 2018—Bannon had embarked on a tour of Europe, addressing far-right and populist audiences in France, Germany, and Italy.³
Acknowledgments

Several hands helped in making this book possible. I’d like to thank Mitch Horowitz for commissioning it and also for help with materials; his history of New Thought, One Simple Idea, was indispensable. David Jones of New Dawn magazine was a veritable river of information regarding Julius Evola and Alexander Dugin. John Morgan, late of Arktos Press, very kindly sent me books by Dugin and Alain de Benoist that proved essential. Hans Thomas Hakl and Guido Mina di Sospiro were also very generous in sharing their insights into Evola. Once again I must thank the staff of the British Library, where most of the research was done. My thanks also go to my old philosophy professor, Henry Mendell, for alerting me to the work of Harry G. Frankfurt. James Hamilton was once again a helpful friend. My sons, Maximilian and Joshua, and their mother, Ruth Jones, were, as always, an encouragement. And my very special thanks go to Anja Flode Bjorlo, without whose support and contribution these dark stars couldn’t rise.
Notes

INTRODUCTION: NEW WORLD DISORDER

10. Ibid., pp. 5, 11.
11. Ibid., p. 20.
12. Ibid., p. 43.

CHAPTER ONE: “I’M A WINNER”

2. Ibid., p. 41.


16. [www.chebucto.ns.ca/Philosophy/Sui-Generis/Emerson/success.htm](http://www.chebucto.ns.ca/Philosophy/Sui-Generis/Emerson/success.htm).

17. There was an earlier English exponent of Idealism, Bishop George Berkeley, who argued that *esse est percipi*, which means “to be is to be perceived.” In essence Berkeley argued that there is no unperceived reality. Nothing exists that is not being perceived by some consciousness; all reality is therefore mental. The reason why the objects in my room, for example, do not disappear when I or someone else is not perceiving them, Berkeley argued, is because God is perceiving them.


22. I am using New Thought as a general term to refer to a variety of different schools—Mental Science, Science of Mind, positive thinking, etc.—that shared the same philosophy but appeared chronologically at different times.


26. [https://archive.org/stream/islifeworthlivin00jameuoft/islifeworthlivin00jameuoft_djv](https://archive.org/stream/islifeworthlivin00jameuoft/islifeworthlivin00jameuoft_djv).
James wrote about “mind cure” methods in his classic _The Varieties of Religious Experience_ (1902). One expression of “optimistic evolutionism” that James refers to, I suspect, is the idea that mankind was evolving into a higher form of consciousness, as the Canadian psychologist R. M. Bucke argued in his book _Cosmic Consciousness_ (1901).


Ibid.

Ibid.


Which is not to say that it has no European exponents. Probably the most well known is the French psychologist Émile Coué, who developed a system of therapy based on autosuggestion. Coué’s famous affirmation “Every day in every way I am getting better and better” is still used by millions of people today.

It is attributed to the aptly named nineteenth-century English writer and Cambridge Apostle Sir Arthur Helps, who included it in his philosophical dialogue _Realmah_ (1868), but was most likely popular in the oral tradition prior to this.

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Ibid., p. 237.

Quoted in Horowitz, _One Simple Idea_, p. 20.

James, _Writings of William James_, p. 674. Italics in original.

Ibid., p. 675.

In _Beyond the Robot: The Life and Work of Colin Wilson_ (New York: TarcherPerigee, 2016), p. 202, I point out that C. G. Jung and the esoteric teacher G. I. Gurdjieff both employed a version of James’s “bullying.” Gurdjieff spoke of what he called “accumulators,” a sort of energy tank inside us. We have small “accumulators” for our everyday tasks, but more serious efforts require drawing on a much larger one that we rarely use. We can access this large accumulator through what Gurdjieff called our “emotional center,” that part of the “human machine” that deals with our feelings and values. Gurdjieff’s “emotional center” would, it seems, be responsible for the “excitement and ideas” that James believed lead us to make the effort necessary to break into second wind. See P. D. Ouspensky, _In Search of the Miraculous_ (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1949), pp. 234–35. Gurdjieff, it seemed, was able to tap into his large accumulator when needed and was also able to access something he called the “Great Accumulator,” some reservoir of energy only a few could draw on. He was also able to send this energy to others. See Colin Wilson, _G. I. Gurdjieff: The War Against Sleep_ (London: Aeon Books, 2005), pp. 13–23. Wilson’s chapter also includes a discussion of James’s “The Energies of Men.”
52. [www.emersoncentral.com/selfreliance.htm](http://www.emersoncentral.com/selfreliance.htm).
54. [newthoughtlibrary.com/trineRalphWaldo/characterBuilding](http://newthoughtlibrary.com/trineRalphWaldo/characterBuilding).
57. Swedenborg believed that after death, our spirits are drawn to either heaven or hell because of what he called our “true affections,” our real loves and affinities. In this case, it is we who are attracted to our rightful place in the afterlife. A similar idea was proposed by the American spiritualist Andrew Jackson Davis. Swedenborg’s version is not wholly different from the more popular New Thought take, however, in that he believed that heaven and hell are states of mind that we already inhabit, here on earth. Heavenly thoughts bring us closer to heaven, and hellish thoughts bring us nearer to hell. And the heaven or hell we inhabit in the afterlife is fashioned from the “affections” we have in this one. So we do create our own reality. But Swedenborg did not think in terms of attracting wealth or any other earthly goods (Lachman, *Swedenborg*, p. 115). A more esoteric version of the Law of Attraction can be found in what Gurdjieff called “magnetic center.” This is a kind of deeply felt genuine interest in esoteric ideas that draws information about them to one and leads one to seek them out. Again, it has nothing to do with abundance, etc. (Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, pp. 200–204.)

CHAPTER TWO: POSITIVE CHAOS

2. Ibid., p. 7.
5. Ibid., p. vii.
6. Ibid., p. viii.
7. Ibid.


13. Atkinson may have taken the name Theron from the mysterious Max Théon, whose real name was Louis-Maximilian Bimstein. Théon was one of the “Grand Masters” of the enigmatic Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor, a nineteenth-century magical society that offered what seems the first “occult correspondence course.” See Lachman, *Madame Blavatsky*, pp. 79, 117–18.

14. Ibid., p. 60.


16. Ibid., p. 16.


19. Horowitz, *One Simple Idea*, pp. 171–76. As Horowitz shows, Carlos Castaneda was a reader of Goddard, and his own mysterious magical teacher, the Yaqui Indian Don Juan, may be based on Abdullah. Joseph Murphy also claimed to have been tutored by Abdullah.


22. On a more sophisticated level this amnesia is the concern of both Gurdjieff and the existential philosopher Martin Heidegger, both of whom focus their work on our “forgetfulness of being.” See Lachman, *Secret Teachers of the Western World*, pp. 401–2.


24. Ibid., pp. 385, 341.

25. Again, in a more sophisticated context, this is rather similar to what in phenomenology, the study of the structures of consciousness, is known as “bracketing the natural standpoint.” See Gary Lachman, *Lost Knowledge of the Imagination* (Edinburgh: Floris Books, 2017), pp. 69–71.


28. Space does not allow me to pursue this here, but a remarkable book by Thomson Jay Hudson, *The Law of Psychic Phenomena* (1893), discusses in detail the incredible powers of the unconscious, which Hudson called the “subjective mind,” and its relation to what he called the “objective mind,” our everyday consciousness. In *Beyond the Robot: The Life and Work of Colin Wilson*, I discuss Wilson’s analysis of Hudson’s work. His essential insight is that for all its seemingly miraculous power, the “subjective mind” takes its cues from the “objective mind,” that is, the unconscious follows the directions of the conscious ego. If the conscious mind gives it positive messages, it will respond accordingly (pp. 195–99).


See the famous Liebestod (love death) aria from Richard Wagner’s opera Tristan und Isolde (1859).

Evans, The History of British Magic After Crowley, p. 359.


Humphries and Vayne, Now That’s What I Call Chaos Magick, p. 64.


Humphries and Vayne, Now That’s What I Call Chaos Magick, p. 123.

Hine, Prime Chaos, pp. 15, 23.


CHAPTER THREE: GURUS AND DEMAGOGUES


3. Rees, Dark Charisma, p. 5.


6. Rees, Dark Charisma, p. 5.

7. Ibid., p. 78.


9. Ibid., p. 129.


15. Rees, Dark Charisma, p. 175.
I should point out that although chaos magick and New Thought share a “results-based” attitude to their practices, and that the practices themselves show similarities, there are also profound differences between them. For one thing, New Thought and positive thinking do not hold to the “anything goes” approach that informs chaos magick. They find guidelines and limits in gospel teachings. For some this may make them too tame; for others it is a healthy alternative to the formlessness that can overcome the chaotician.

In 1947 the Frankfurt School cultural critic Siegfried Kracauer published *From Caligari to Hitler*, in which he argued that German films of the early twentieth century, such as *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* and *Dr. Mabuse*, primed the German public for the rise of National Socialism. It is not too far-fetched to say that Trump’s years on *The Apprentice* primed the American public for his own administration.


Ibid., p. xiii.

Rees, *Dark Charisma*, p. 131.

Wilson, *Devil’s Party*, p. 12.

Ibid., p. 13.


Storr, *Feet of Clay*, p. 54.


Ibid.

Ibid.


Ibid., pp. 152, 170.


http://lecturelist.org/content/view_lecture/9122.
http://whatenlightenment.blogspot.co.uk.
Wilson, Devil’s Party, p. 12.
Last reports say that Cohen is making a comeback. After a time in India spent in penance, doing a form of social work, he has recently announced that he has learned his lesson and wants to carry on with his work. A petition has been started to prevent this.
Lachman, Revolutionaries of the Soul, p. 297, and
www.theguardian.com/books/2017/apr/10/new-age-ayn-rand-conquered-trump-white-house-silicon-valley. Oddly, Trump and Crowley share some striking characteristics. Both are fond of ostentatious excess, both have an insatiable hunger for attention, both have a contempt for truth, both are sexist, both have a great appetite for power, both are unconcerned with how their actions affect others, both are vindictive, both are prone to hold grudges, and both like to spend other people’s money. For more links between Trump and Crowley, see James Wasserman’s interview here:
Kranish and Fisher, Trump Revealed, p. 220.
Ibid., p. 31.
Nathaniel Branden, My Years with Ayn Rand (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999), p. 171.
Ibid., p. 227.
Ibid., p. 232.
To give an idea of Rand’s other tastes, she thought Thomas Mann’s The Magic Mountain, one of the great novels of the twentieth century, a “pretentious piece of nothing at all,” and detested Mozart and Beethoven, preferring light opera (Branden, My Years with Ayn Rand, p. 278).
Ibid.
Ibid., p. 268; Branden, My Years with Ayn Rand, p. 171.
Kranish and Fisher, Trump Revealed, p. 150.
Ibid., p. 114.
Ibid., p. 260.
Ibid., p. 112.
Ibid., p. 108.
73. Ibid., p. 137.
74. Ibid., p. 157.
75. Ibid., p. 170.
76. Ibid., p. 40.
77. Trump and Schwartz, Art of the Deal, p. 41.
79. Rees, Dark Charisma, p. 175. Another example of Trump’s gigantomania was the “mother of all bombs” (MOAB)—the largest nonnuclear weapon in the U.S. arsenal—that he ordered dropped against ISIS in Afghanistan on April 13, 2017. www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/trump-drops-the-mother-of-all-bombs-on-afghanistan.
82. Kranish and Fisher, Trump Revealed, p. 262.
83. Trump, Crippled America, p. 74.
84. http://time.com/4321036/donald-trump-bs. Some have gone beyond Frankfurt’s “bullshit” and see Trump’s loose concept of truth as what in hip-hop lingo is called “fuckery.” www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/fuckery-donald-trump-lies_us_588126a8e4b096b4a230a23f.
85. Trump and Schwartz, Art of the Deal, p. 41.
86. Ibid., pp. 142–43.
87. Ibid., p. 38.
88. Ibid., p. 34.
89. Lachman, Secret Teachers of the Western World, p. 69; Hine, Prime Chaos, pp. 21–22.
92. Ibid., p. 101.

CHAPTER FOUR: ALT-RIGHT NOW

4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
7. In The Secret Teachers of the Western World I show how this Gnostic narrative is paralleled in the usurpation of dominance by left-brain consciousness, which subjects the right brain to its tyrannical control.


16. Ibid.


18. Ibid.

19. Ibid.


24. An earlier example was the “Slender Man” phenomenon.


27. There were others. An obscure track found on YouTube featured an instrumental recording, “Shadililay,” by the group P.E.P.E. The image on the old 45 is of a green frog holding a wand bursting into a flare with the words “Magic Sound” within it. P.E.P.E. stands for “point emerging probably entering,” which Kekists say means that Kek “emerges” through the “laws of probability” associated with generating “Gets.”


31. One of the earliest and best books on the subject was written by Annie Besant, who became head of the Theosophical Society after Blavatsky’s death, and C. W. Leadbeater. Thought Forms, originally published in 1905, is available at www.archive.org/stream/thoughtforms16269gut/16269.txt.

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It did not work so well with Marine Le Pen, whom the alt-right would have liked to have seen as the new French president. She lost in May 2017 to the centrist Emmanuel Macron.

No causal connection can of course be proven, but it was after this “binding” that Trump had difficulty getting any of his legislation passed.

"Cuckservative" is another portmanteau, a Velcroing of “cuckold” and “conservative.”
A similar remark was made by the actor Oliver Platt in his role as Carl Anheuser, White House chief of staff, in the 2009 film 2012, an end-of-the-world extravaganza based on a variety of “2012” apocalyptic ideas popular at the time. Both Bannon and the fictional Carl Anheuser express “realistic” views about the catastrophe, indicating perhaps that Bannon’s quip suggests a seriousness about taking steps to survive the coming storm. His interest in Biosphere 2, an experiment in creating a man-made environment that could sustain life, may have had more than a monetary or scientific motivation.


29. It was from O. V. de Lubicz Miłosz that Schwaller was granted the right to bear the title “de Lubicz.”


32. Ibid., p. 25.

33. Ibid., p. 170.

34. Ibid., p. 166.

35. Ibid., pp. 274–75.

36. Ibid.


40. Ibid., p. 17

41. Ibid., p. 55.

42. See Lachman, *Secret Teachers of the Western World*, pp. 231–35.


48. Ibid., p. 17.


50. Ibid., p. 7.


56. Ibid., p. 16.

57. Ibid., p. 19.

58. *Inner Landscape at 10:30 a.m.*, National Gallery of Modern Art, Rome.


60. It is curious that Schopenhauer, like Evola, came to his central themes early on and stuck to them, unchanged, until his death. Like Evola, he was a man of fixed habits,

61. Evola, Path of Cinnabar, p. 53.
62. Ibid., p. 7.
65. Ibid., pp. 252–53.
66. Ibid., p. 27.
67. Ibid., p. 31.
68. Ibid., pp. 156–57.
69. Ibid., p. 54.
70. Ibid., p. 21.
71. Ibid., p. 156. This passage is reminiscent of Crowley's dictum “Enough of because, be he damned for a dog.” See Lachman, Revolutionaries of the Soul, p. 116.
72. Ibid., p. 31.
73. Evola, Path of Cinnabar, p. 81.
75. Evola, Path of Cinnabar, p. 246.
76. Hansen, Introduction to Julius Evola, Men Among the Ruins, p. xiii; Sedgwick, Against the Modern World, p. 107; Evola, Path of Cinnabar, p. 112.
77. Evola, Path of Cinnabar, p. 80.
79. Gregor, Search for Neofascism, p. 84.
83. Evola, Path of Cinnabar, p. 178.
84. Wiligut himself was also found undesirable when it became known that he had spent some years in an asylum in Salzburg. He claimed he was heir to a line of German kings descended from God. Sedgwick, Against the Modern World, p. 107.
86. Sedgwick, Against the Modern World, p. 106.
87. Gregor, Search for Neofascism, p. 104.
88. Evola, Path of Cinnabar, p. 173.
89. Ibid., p. 177.
90. Evola, in fact, wondered if “occult forces” were responsible for his injury, an expression of the paranoia he shared with Guénon. He spoke with Guénon about this, and his old guru agreed. Evola, Path of Cinnabar, p. 184. Mircea Eliade thought it significant that Evola was wounded “in the third chakra.” Joscelyn Godwin, Arktos: The Polar Myth (Kempton, IL: Adventures Unlimited Press, 1996), p. 61.
92. Evola’s name was mentioned as an influence on the Nuclei Armati Rivoluzionari, thought to be responsible for the 1980 bombing of a Bologna railway station, resulting in eighty-five deaths. Sedgwick, Against the Modern World, p. 5.

**CHAPTER SIX: A WAR OF ALL AGAINST ALL**

2. Spengler took the term *Faustian* from Goethe’s play *Faust*, whose eponymous hero sells his soul to the devil in exchange for secret knowledge. In Faust’s hunger for knowledge that does him no good, Goethe saw the characteristic problem of modern man.
10. Oddly, someone with whom Evola has much in common is the American weird fiction writer H. P. Lovecraft. Lovecraft also embraced “tradition,” not Evola’s version, but that of an eighteenth-century Anglo-Saxon gentleman. Like Evola, Lovecraft was racist, believed in Aryan superiority, had a great fondness for ancient Rome, read Nietzsche and Spengler, and had a less than liberated view of women. See S. T. Joshi, *H. P. Lovecraft: A Life* (West Warwick, RI: Necronomicon Press, 1996).
12. Ibid.
20. Ibid., p. 95.
23. www.lrb.co.uk/v33/n20/peter-pomerantsev/putins-rasputin.
24. chaos-magick.blogspot.co.uk/2008/08/nlp-can-be-considered-as-chaos-magick.html.
26. Ibid., p. 9.
27. Ibid., p. 79.
30. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
33. Conspiracy theories surrounded the disaster. One claimed that the flight had taken off from Amsterdam filled with corpses. Clover, *Black Wind*, p. 329.
34. Tucker, “War and Peace.”
35. Ibid., p. 52.
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid., p. 53.
43. [www.ibtimes.co.uk/putins-rasputin-has-message-donald-trumps-white-house-call-me-1607981](http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/putins-rasputin-has-message-donald-trumps-white-house-call-me-1607981).
47. Ibid., pp. 212, 217.
49. [https://medium.com/war-is-boring/putins-mad-philosopher-sacked-from-top-post-38c6d14b3a2](https://medium.com/war-is-boring/putins-mad-philosopher-sacked-from-top-post-38c6d14b3a2).
56. Igor Dudinsky, a friend of Dugin’s, quoted in Clover, *Black Wind*, p. 162.
Oddly, Limonov spent some of the 1970s in New York and was a regular at Studio 54 when Trump was also making the scene.


Clover, Black Wind, p. 228.

https://openrevolt.info/2013/02/03/alexander-dugin-the-great-war-of-continents.

Haushofer is regularly misidentified as a member of the Thule Society, as a student of Gurdjieff’s, who taught him the secret of the swastika, and as instigating a mysterious Vril Society in Berlin—pearls of misinformation gathered from The Morning of the Magicians. He was none of these things, but a student of his, Rudolf Hess, was a member of the Thule Society. It is believed that it is through Hess that some of Haushofer’s ideas reached Hitler, although Haushofer himself denied having any influence on Nazi policy.

I should point out that the original German title for Spengler’s masterpiece is Der Untergang des Abendlandes, the “Undergoing of the Evening Lands,” so named because it is in the west that the sun sets. It rises, as we know, in the east.


Lachman, Politics and the Occult, pp. 144–53.

Laruelle, Ideology of Empire, p. 20.

Ibid., p. 10.

Ibid.

Ibid., p. 51.

Ibid., p. 78.

Clover, Black Wind, p. 125.

P. D. Ouspensky, In Search of the Miraculous (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1949), pp. 24–26. Gurdjieff told Ouspensky some curious things about how the planets affect life on earth, and about how the moon is “the chief, or rather, the nearest, the immediate motive force of all that takes place in organic life on the earth.” “All movements, actions, and manifestations of people . . . depend upon the moon and are controlled by moon,” he said (pp. 85–86). In the weeks leading up to and immediately following the November 2016 U.S. presidential election, the moon entered what is known as a “perigee full moon” or “supermoon.” This is when it is both full and at its closest to the earth. The supermoon of November 2016 was closer to the earth than it had been since 1948. In Gurdjieff’s system, the moon “eats” the souls of unconscious human beings. That the supermoon coincided with Trump’s election may give followers of the Fourth Way, as Gurdjieff’s teaching is called, pause for thought. www.theguardian.com/science/2016/nov/10/the-science-of-supermoons-the-lunar-lowdown-on-the-biggest-and-brightest-in-60-years.


Clover, Black Wind, p. 122.

Ibid., pp. 12, 233.

Ibid., p. 259.


Clover, Black Wind, p. 298.
CHAPTER SEVEN: THE POLITICS OF CHAOS

2. Ibid., p. 13.
11. <http://www.ft.com/content/a5b15b14-3fcf-11e2-9f71-00144feabdc0>.
15. Ibid., p. 199
17. Ibid., p. 181.
24. Readers of Rudolf Steiner may see in this a similar polarity to Steiner’s ideas about Lucifer and Ahriman. The danger of Lucifer is limitless expansion; the danger of Ahriman is static materialism. Steiner finds a creative union of the two in Christ, or, as he called him, the Representative of Humanity. Dugin offers no mediating agent between his two poles.
25. Heidegger was not alone in thinking some good might come from National Socialism. Jung felt the same at first. See Lachman, *Jung the Mystic*, p. 168.
30. Ibid., p. 52.
31. Ibid., p. 169.
32. Ibid., p. 181.

**AFTERWORD**

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About the Author

Gary Lachman is the author of many books on the links between consciousness, culture, and the Western inner tradition, including *Lost Knowledge of the Imagination*, *Beyond the Robot: The Life and Work of Colin Wilson*, and *The Secret Teachers of the Western World*. He writes for different journals in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Europe, where he also lectures, and his work has been translated into several languages. He has appeared in several documentaries and is on the adjunct faculty in Transformative Studies at the California Institute of Integral Studies. In a former life he was a member of the pop group Blondie and in 2006 was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. Born in New Jersey, he has lived in London since 1996. His website is garylachman.co.uk.
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