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THOSE OTHER SPECTERS:

ORGANIZED VIOLENCE AND THE INHERITANCE OF THE WEST

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EDITED BY **FILIPPO SCAFI**



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Editor's Note

Filippo Scafi

The Sentence

A letter to shareholders, dated 3 February 2025. Say an analyst opens it the next morning between two screens, looking for guidance. Fourth-quarter revenue up thirty-six percent, the company placed "at the center of the AI revolution," and then, in the last paragraph, a sentence by Samuel Huntington: the West rose "not by the superiority of its ideas or values or religion […] but rather by its superiority in applying organized violence. Westerners often forget this fact; non-Westerners never do." Palantir's stock closed twenty-four percent higher that day.

The sentence was thirty years old. It had circulated as provocation and as warning, or as the target of Edward Said's polemic. In February 2025, its address changed. Alexander Karp, Palantir's chief executive, placed it in a document filed with the Securities and Exchange Commission and sent to the people who price the company's future.

We start from that sentence, and from an admission that is unpleasant to make: in one sense it is true. Two responses come together. One denounces the speaker; the other corrects the history. Both leave the sentence where it stands, a description of the past that has turned, without anyone deciding it, into an instruction for the future. — But if it is true, a reader of Karp's letter might ask, why not say so plainly? Because saying it plainly to investors is already a use of it. The truth of the sentence and the work it does have come apart, and this issue is written in the gap between them.

What we say about the essays collected here can only be read from where we stand. We wrote the call that brought them in. It asked contributors to work with the cold curiosity of the anatomist and to leave the judge's bench empty. Some readers took this as a request to suspend judgment. It asked them to delay the verdict until the body was open. An anatomy exposes; every essay here takes a position, and none of them received that position in advance.

Twenty months on, the rhetoric has a budget. The Pentagon's contract for the Maven Smart System, Palantir's targeting platform, has risen to a ceiling of nearly $1.3 billion. The Army has folded seventy-five agreements into a single vehicle worth up to $10 billion. Investigative reporting from Gaza has described systems that produce human targets faster than any review can follow them. A sentence about the past now lives in procurement and in interface design, in doctrine.

The second half of Huntington's sentence sets the course of this issue. *Westerners often forget;*

non-Westerners never do. It is a sentence about memory: who keeps it and who loses it, and what keeping it compels. What if (1) Huntington is right about the past? And what if (2) being right about the past has become a way of selling the future? Both questions concern inheritance. Derrida's *Specters of Marx* asked what it means to inherit a promise that was never kept, and we here ask the specular question. What does it mean to inherit a crime that one of its heirs has declared a qualification?

Seven Anatomies

It should be said, by way of intelligibility, that the seven essays fall into three groups. The cut is ours, and every essay crosses it somewhere. The first group reads the ledger and the myth that underwrites it; the second, the interface and the rulebook that apply both to populations; the third, the psychic economy that makes the whole arrangement feel necessary to those inside it.

I. The Ledger and the Myth

Joel Naoki Christoph's "Those Other Algorithms" reads Karp's letters as what they also are, financial documents, and matches what Palantir tells investors against what the Pentagon records it buys. Civilizational rhetoric turns out to generate demand. Long-term contracts, usage-based pricing and the slow integration of software into military routine convert a diffuse sense of threat into recurring revenue. The essay's sharpest point concerns time. A subscription needs a threat that keeps approaching and never arrives, since "an enemy that never quite arrives keeps the renewals coming." Palantir's business model, in Christoph's phrase, "gives the specter a ticker symbol." The payoff is convex: the firm gains whether a conflict escalates, freezes or subsides, while states, publics and targeted populations carry the risk. Christoph also notes Karp leaves out that Huntington wrote the sentence as a warning about Western fragility, while Karp reads it as a business plan.

Nicklas Quirós van Outrive's "Palantir's Return" approaches the company from the other end, through the long duration of the myth it invokes. He writes from a double position, Belgian and Mexican, and from there "the West" looks like a delusion in Karl Jaspers' sense, a belief defined by its incorrigibility: "A concept that cannot be pinned down cannot be refuted, it can only be wielded by delusion." The genealogy passes through Leopold II's human zoos, the Valladolid debate, the nineteenth-century invention of prehistory, and Josep Borrell's garden and jungle. It ends at Peter Thiel's "The Straussian Moment," which Quirós van Outrive rereads as a Schmittian one, and at a formula that holds the essay together: "What Mbembe calls necropolitics, Palantir calls decision acceleration."

The two essays should be read together, and against each other. Christoph keeps to what the

filings can show and explicitly declines to connect Palantir to the targeting systems used in Gaza. Quirós van Outrive follows the genealogy down to its fascist residues. The first shows how little ideology the machine needs in order to run. The second shows why the machine wears that ideology so easily.

II. The Interface and the Rulebook

A headset, issued to every soldier. Parham Ghalamdar's "Gamified Necropolitics" is theory-fiction, written as the user manual of an augmented-reality system that must never be built. Three layers, Skin, Score and Story, remove the face, the duration and the history from the encounter in which a person becomes a target. The manual's patch notes carry the argument: "Fixed an error in which the operator continued to remember a target after confirmation. Memory now clears when the next objective appears." Forgetting, here, is a specification. Conscience shows up in the system as latency, a delay to be engineered down to zero. The essay holds itself to its own critique. It concedes that its AI-generated images reproduce the shorthand they condemn, and it refuses to let the moral injury of Israeli soldiers become the emotional center of a text about Palestinian mass death: "Palestinians do not become politically visible only when an Israeli soldier dreams about them."

Martin Stocker's "When Memory Becomes a Rulebook" describes the reverse operation. In Russia after 2022, and in the occupied territories of Ukraine, official memory stops telling stories and starts administering people. Stocker names three mechanisms. *Duty Grammar* turns remembrance into debt. *Enemy Mirror* sets up the "collective West" as a moral counter-order, so that dissent at home can be filed as loyalty to the enemy abroad. *Law Lock-in* writes authorized history into criminal law, citizenship decrees and school curricula. Under Decree No. 307, residents of the occupied territories who decline Russian citizenship become "foreigners" in their own homes.

Here the West appears from outside, as the coordinate of another power, and the second half of Huntington's sentence, *non-Westerners never do*, has become administrative law. Remembering, too, can be an instrument. Baudrillard's indestructible Other can also be a state that has armed its own memory. Read side by side, the two essays describe the symmetry of one apparatus forgetting by design and the other remembering by decree, and both make memory into an operation on populations.

III. The Psychic Economy of Inheritance

Robert P. Rozek's "The Lucid Parricide" turns a clinical account around. Lacan describes psychosis as foreclosure: the paternal function was never inscribed. Rozek argues from Freud and Hegel that the psychotic subject met the Law and annihilated it. The post-1945 "never again" served as the

West's paternal metaphor, and Karp, on this reading, executes that father in broad daylight: "The Huntington citation is not confession but trophy." In *Totem and Taboo*, though, the dead father returns stronger than the living one. Hence the paranoid temporality of permanent pre-emption. Hence also a diagnosis that should trouble anyone who writes critique, ourselves included: inside this structure every appeal to law arrives as enemy action, and "critique is decoded as coup." The essay closes on a civilization that keeps refining its framework and will not undergo the symbolic death that would let it change. "The water keeps rising, and the beast keeps targeting it."

Eni Qirjako's "Necromantic Jouissance" starts from guilt without a creditor. Secular modernity has lost the theological mediators that once absolved collective guilt, and so its colonial, totalitarian and fratricidal inheritance comes back as act instead of memory — more exactly, as repetition: borders, purges, pre-emptive aggression. The essay's most difficult concept is the desire to be unborn, a longing for a plenitude prior to language that, on this account, only war can still stage. Its counterpart is the disposal gaze, which makes the other killable by first making it visible as waste. Its geography is the Mediterranean, which "determinate negation has thus transformed […] into the largest ritual altar of secular modernity." The essay offers no absolution. It offers the "difficult labour of articulation."

Muskaan Dhoundiyal's "The West as the Other" reaches the same knot through Joan Copjec's reading of Gaëtan Gatian de Clérambault and his forty thousand photographs of draped Moroccan bodies. The target is historicism's fantasy of a subject who knows itself, together with a utilitarian ethics of reciprocity that justified colonial assimilation as the happiness of all. Beneath that ethics lies a fear of the neighbor who enjoys too much. "Western philanthropy and violence are two sides of the same coin," she writes in closing. The essay also turns on the pluralist discourse that set itself against Western hegemony and ended up giving it shelter.

These three do not agree. For Rozek the West knows exactly what it killed. For Qirjako it cannot symbolize what it did. For Muskaan its claim to know itself is the symptom. Lucidity, foreclosure, misrecognition: three accounts of how an inheritance can be held without being taken up. We have left the disagreement standing, since the issue thinks best where its contributors contradict one another.

What Is Inherited

Karp has said that "we must take responsibility for what we are, and be what we are." The essays deny, each from its own side, the premise folded into that phrase: that there is a *we* that knows what it is and can therefore be it. Huntington's sentence needs a West able to be the grammatical subject of a sentence, one that forgets or remembers, rises or declines. Opened up, that subject turns out to

be a revenue model, a delusion, an interface, a counter-image drawn by another state, a parricide, a guilt without a creditor, a fantasy of self-knowledge. Seven findings for seven essays. None of them dissolves the violence. The organized violence was real, and so is its present organization. What dissolves is the claim that this violence is an identity one could simply take up.

The specter, then, consoles no one. Baudrillard was right that the Other survives every attempt to exterminate it, and Ghalamdar is right that "excess does not stop a bomb." What the apparatus cannot classify is where politics may begin. It guarantees nothing. The essays answer the question of responsibility concretely for that reason, and their answers differ. Christoph asks for intervention in contracts, procurement rules and liability regimes. Ghalamdar asks that responsibility be traced through the whole apparatus instead of being loaded onto the last operator. Quirós van Outrive asks that the convergence of myth and machinery be named before the window for naming it closes. Stocker proposes something drier, a checklist that lets monitors recognize when memory has become a condition of access. Rozek asks for a symbolic death, the acceptance of a loss that does not destroy. Qirjako asks for articulation without absolution. Muskaan asks that we stay inside the gap every identity is built to cover.

They share a refusal. Huntington's sentence leaves two exits open, the war cry, on one side: *they remember, so we strike first*; the alibi on the other side: *we have forgotten, so we are innocent*. Athens knew a version of the second, as Nicole Loraux taught us, when in 403 BCE, after the Thirty Tyrants, the city swore not to recall past wrongs, *mē mnēsikakein*, so that the civil war, the *stasis*, would not begin again. Amnesty, *amnēstia*, is a non-remembering — or a promise, legally sanctioned, not to bring the memory forward, which is something else, since the oath presupposes what it forbids. That oblivion was a legal and political act, decided and sworn. The oblivion Huntington attributes to Westerners is deliberate as well. Nobody swore to it, and it pays. Inheritance, as these essays practice it, takes neither exit. It means remembering without being authorized by what one remembers.

Huntington thought Westerners often forget. These essays suggest that the West remembers well enough and has learned to invoice the memory. The task is to break that conversion, so that what is remembered can be acknowledged as a debt and stops circulating as a capacity for sale. An issue of a journal cannot do this alone, but it can show where the conversion happens, and that may be enough to refuse it once, in the place where it is shown.

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Palantir's Return: Perilous Final Decisions in a Mythical Civilizational Rhetoric

Nicklas Quirós van Outrive

Abstract: This essay examines the resurgence of civilizational rhetoric justified by the assumption of a 'Western' notion in the technopolitical discourse of Alexander Karp and Peter Thiel, co-founders of Palantir Technologies. It explores how affectively charged appeals to 'the West' accompanying the neo-artificial intelligence discourses that operate as ideological mechanisms within the post critical climate of geopolitical re-mythologization. The essay draws on Karp's hint in his dissertation Aggression in the Life-World parallel to his support to transhumanism—and Thiel's text "The Straussian Moment," which rather sounds like the Schmittean Moment—for Schmitt's notion of the sovereign was "he who decides on the exception"—and his transhuman millenarianism. The essay traces how the former's conception of social cohesion through aggression and the latter's obsession with apocalyptic thinking and technology as saviour, project Palantir's mission of 'decision acceleration:' 1) focuses and operates in states of exception (e.g. war zones, insurgency, and counterterrorism); 2) its technology formalizes friend/enemy classifications (e.g. predictive policing, counterterrorism targeting); and 3) it assumes sovereign-like decisions by algorithms or security agencies.

The essay situates Palantir within a larger 'Western' genealogy that fuses futurism with imperial colonialism and—not too exaggerate—fascist residues. By reactivating dichotomies between the civilized and the savage, the human and the alien. Ultimately, the essay argues that Palantir's "decision platforms" enact a perilous fusion of myth and computation—an algorithmic return of civilization's oldest violence in the guise of technological reason.

Keywords: Palantir Technologies; Alexander Karp; Peter Thiel; Civilizational Rhetoric; Technopolitics; Transhumanism; AI Ethics; Neofascism; Myth and Technology

"[…] The city, a shadow picture without tone, floats, quivers unreal; forms without relief; Flow, a cinema's vacant shapes; like a reef foundering in shoreless gulfs the World is done
Only the illimitable Permanent is here, a Peace stupendous, featureless still,
Replaces all — what once was I, in It a silent unnamed emptiness content
Either to fade in the Unknowable or thrill with luminous seas of the Infinite."
— *Nirvana* by Sri Aurobindo, 1934

Introduction: An Algorithmic Return of an Old Violence

What is the West? The question sounds almost naive — and that *naïveté* is precisely the problem. For a concept so routinely invoked to justify military might through interventions, war, border enforcement, targeted killing, and the architecture of mass surveillance, 'Western Civilization' has a surprisingly fragile claim to coherence. Its geographic boundaries shift with whoever is drawing a map. Its historical origins dissolve under scrutiny into appropriations, admixtures, and contradictions. Its racial content is a retrospective fantasy. Its religious unity is a projection and yet the myth persists — not despite its incoherence, but because of it. A concept that cannot be pinned down cannot be refuted, it can only be wielded by delusion.

To situate this argument, the essay reflects upon what heritage means for a bi-national person, what the Western civilizational rhetoric looks like in Mexico and Belgium, the Orientalist fabrication of a coherent East against which the West could define itself, and the *delirium* of the West. It bears in mind the deep anthropological context of humanity using politicised metaphors like the 'garden' and the 'jungle' to discuss ideas on the colonial/colonised dichotomy and the subaltern perspective. It reviews the colonial classification of populations analysed through the eyes of Stefano Geroulanos and the invention of prehistory into civilised, barbarian, and savage — opening up our gaze onto the idea that the civilisational rhetoric exists within the same veneer as technological futurism; one that has to free itself from the 'polluted primitive.'

Furthermore, the essay tracks the genealogy of the technopolitical discourse of Alexander Karp (CEO) and Peter Thiel (co-founder) of Palantir Technologies analyzing where their belief system comes from, and the deluded ideological machinery it has produced. It argues Palantir is not a simple data analytics company, rather, the organizational expression of a worldview that fuses imperial colonial residues, neo-fascist civilizational mythology, apocalyptic Christian millenarianism, and transhumanist futurism into a single operational logic, and then encodes that logic into biased algorithms capable of making, what the company calls itself, 'final decisions.' The company's stated mission — up to and including its explicit endorsement of organised violence as the West's defining achievement — enacts a logic structurally continuous with what

Achille Mbembe calls *necropolitics*: the sovereign power to decide who lives and who must die.

Palantir's algorithmic violence is not an aberration within Western modernity but its extension. What is genuinely new — and genuinely alarming — is the convergence of this mythology with algorithmic infrastructure capable of acting on it at scale, in real time, across military, legal, and institutional domains simultaneously. The delusion has always been dangerous. It is only now that it has access to the machinery to become irreversible. This essay is an attempt to name that convergence before the window for naming it closes.

The Western from a Mexican and Belgian perspective

What is delusion?

The psychopathologist and phenomenologist Karl Jaspers defined delusion not as mere error but as *incorrigibility* — a belief held with such conviction that no counterevidence, however overwhelming, is permitted to dislodge it. It is not a hallucination, nor a simple lie. It is a 'reality-judgement' that has calcified into dogma, a meaning-making framework so deeply embedded in the subject's ontological ground that to question it is experienced as annihilation. Where does the delusion of the Western civilization begin and where does it end? This is perhaps an odd question to ask if you live in places that call themselves part of this extended group. Let me develop what really is implied in the question. On the one hand, when discussing a so called 'delusion,' we might wonder about the etymology of the word, which originates from "early 15c, '*delusioun* from Latin *delusionem*" that is "'a deceiving,' noun of action from past-participle stem of *deludere.* As a form of mental derangement, 'false impression or belief of a fixed nature,' 1550s."[1] That is, historically the concept is linked to both deceiving and a false belief that is knowingly accepted as true. "Technically, delusion is a belief that, though false, has been surrendered to and accepted by the mind as a truth."[2] We understand from the etymology that historically there is an act of "bad faith."[3]

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1 Online Etymology Dictionary. "Delusion." Accessed March 4, 2026. https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=delusion

2 Ibidem.

3 "Bad faith then has in appearance the structure of lying. Only what changes everything is the fact that in bad faith it is from myself that I am hiding the truth."
Jean-Paul Sartre, Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), 89–90.

On the other hand, when looking at the term from a psychopathological or phenomenological lens we end up realizing that a diagnostic of delusion refers to an idea or belief of judging, perceiving, or imagining an event as something real despite there being no proof, in the sense of not having evidence of something that is discussed, thought of, or perceived. It is an autoreferential lie to what we certainly know is false. Psychopathologist and phenomenologist, Karl Jaspers, can inform us briefly about the diagnostic: "Delusion is a primary phenomenon and the first thing we have to do is to get it into a proper focus. The experience within which delusion takes place is that of experiencing and thinking that something is real." According to Jaspers, we have to come up with an understanding of the 'real' to know in a framework what is not. For Jaspers the belief in the real is "what resists us," namely, that which we do not have control or power over and cannot wish or desire to our will. He mentions on the concept of the 'real' the following framework:

> Whatever may inhabit our bodily movements or prevent the immediate realisation of our aims and wishes is a resistance. The achievement of a goal against resistance or defeat thereby brings an experience of reality; all experience of reality, therefore, has a root in the experience of living. But the reality itself that we meet in practice is always interpretations, a meaning, the meaning of things, events or situations. When I grasp the meaning, I grasp reality. The resistance we meet in the world gives us the wide field of the real which extends from the concrete as of tangible objects to perceived meanings in things, behaviour and human reaction. This brings to us the awareness of the reality with which in practice we have to reckon and deal, to which we believe in as something which is. Awareness of this reality pervades us all more or less clarity as a knowledge of the reality with which we are individually most concerned. This individual reality is embedded in a more general reality that has been structured and amplified for us through the traditional culture in which we have grown up and been educated. What is real for us in all this has many grades of certainty and usually we are not completely clear about it. We only need to test how much we would risk in our ordinary judgements of what is real or not for us to see the measure of this certainty.[4]

That is to say, the tension we come across-when we perceive a resistance against our will— as in our wishes, imaginations, reactions and actions; clashing with 'things-in-themselves,'[5] is interpreted in our experience as 'real.' In other words, the reciprocity between

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4 Karl Jaspers, General Psychopathology. Trans. J. Hoenig and Marian W. Hamilton. (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 94.

5 "Zu den Sachen selbst," trans. from German. Husserl, Edmund. Logical Investigations, Vol. 1, Prolegomena to

the objects outside of us with our innermost experience, conveys what we interpret as meaning and that meaning-making for us implies what we colloquially call the array of the 'real.' Thus, when Jaspers mentions that "resistance" implies that "real […] extends from the concrete as of tangible objects to perceived meanings in things, behaviour and human reaction" we know he implies that it becomes a hermeneutic problem—as in a matter of personal awareness and interpretation.[6] Instead of either assuming our wishes are fully disclosed to us, or that we have fully accessed an objective reality, what we come to conclude from this description of the phenomenon of resistance is that we assume meaning in order to bridge that gap in our understanding. Such interpretation of the world we inhabit and the ideas we conjure, of course, shift depending on our awareness and the intersubjective net in which we have grown up and the cultural context we inhabit. What is clear, however, is that at the very least we judge the world to be profusely decorated. It, therefore, truly matters how deep we question our judgments of that reality. "Reality-judgement" is then the result of thoughtful digestion of those direct experiences.[7] Hence, like Jasper mentions "the reality of our reality-judgements is a flexible reality—a movement of our reason."[8]

Now that at least we have a 'real' ground to stand on etymologically, psychopathologically, and phenomenologically; let us look further into what the experience of delusion might mean. Delusion is definitely neither a hallucination, nor a fully unconscious process of invention. Rather, it "can only arise as a process of thinking and judgement. To this extent pathologically falsified judgements are termed delusions." We find that in the loss of certitude in what we judge as real, "no dread is worse than that of danger unknown," and that experiences that question the ground we take as granted startle us, giving rise to "convictions of persecution, of having committed crimes, of being accused or, by contrast, of some golden age, transfiguration, sanctification, etc."[9] Perception and thinking by themselves are never merely mechanical relations

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Pure Logic, trans. J. N. Findlay. London: Routledge, 2001, §31.
"Meanings form a class of concepts in the sense of ideal unities… Their being is not the being of real things nor the being of mental experiences." Husserl, Edmund. Logical Investigations, Vol. 1, Prolegomena to Pure Logic, trans. J. N. Findlay. London: Routledge, 2001, §31.

6 Karl Jaspers, General Psychopathology. Trans. J. Hoenig and Marian W. Hamilton. (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 95.

7 Ibidem.

8 Ibidem.

9 Karl Jaspers, General Psychopathology. Trans. J. Hoenig and Marian W. Hamilton. (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 96.

with external-stimuli, but always come with an interpretation of an object or event. One example is imagining we have in our foreground a cultural object that we may not comprehend, we might not understand its contextual value, nonetheless, we may still grasp it has a significance in a context. We can understand that something has a meaning, despite us not having an idea of what it is. In a delusion "the awareness of meaning undergoes a radical transformation. There is an immediate, intrusive knowledge of the meaning and it is this which is itself a delusional experience."[10] According to Jaspers, we find in delusion or a deluded person's core experiential element being that of "incorrigibility;" that is in holding the belief without there being evidence enough to change the mind of whoever holds the idea.[11] Jaspers describes delusional experiences of a patient in the following manner:

> After the creation of the primary delusion from his experiences, the patient often takes a step further, and holds on to his delusion as truth. He will maintain it as such in the face of all experiences to the contrary and against all argument. He does this with a conviction far beyond normal, even perhaps stamping down on any occasional, initial doubt he may have himself. […] Normal convictions are formed in the context of social living in common knowledge. Immediate experience of reality survives only if it can fit into the frame of what is socially valid or can be critically tested. […] Individual experience can always be corrected but the total context of experience is something stable and can hardly be corrected at all. The source for incorrigibility therefore is not to be found in any single phenomenon by itself but in the human situation as a whole, which nobody would surrender lightly. If socially accepted reality totters, people become adrift. What is left to them? A set of habits, survivals, chance events? Reality becomes reduced to an immediate and shifting present Incorrigibility however has another source as well. The fanaticism with which opinions are held in a discussion or over long periods of time does not always prove that that their content is really believed in, but only that in the holder's judgement such opinions will have some desired effect, sometimes no more than his personal advantage, to which his instinctive drives unconsciously direct him. It is the behaviour which will show clearly enough what is held to be reality; since only the reality that is actually believed will compel to action. Fanatic opinions that are not believed in can be dropped at any time and in this sense they are corrigible. But

10 Karl Jaspers, General Psychopathology. Trans. J. Hoenig and Marian W. Hamilton. (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 99.

11 Karl Jaspers, General Psychopathology. Trans. J. Hoenig and Marian W. Hamilton. (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 104.

> genuine reality judgements which are the expressions of believed-in reality and according to which people in fact conduct themselves (e.g., believe in hell) are extremely difficult to correct. Should they be so, it will mean a revolution in the individual's whole conception of life.[12]

We can conceive from this extended comment on the psychopathology and phenomenology of delusion, according to Jaspers, that 'incorrigibility' when facing ideas that disprove what was assumed as unshakable is the main characteristic we can prescribe in a delusion. Facing such delusion becomes almost warlike and would imply that whoever goes through that shattering, would face the groundlessness of their deluded ontological assertion. It is in this judgment, we might properly inquire into whether the delusion of the 'Western civilization' has a ground to stand on.

What is the Western delusion? Where does it start?

Are we ready to grapple with what is meant by using the concept 'Western civilization?' Some might say, in a strict sense, that the formulation of the question refers to a geographic location; however, as you will find out, something deeply uncanny is at work. Some might say that 'Western civilization' refers to a history that is self-justified when attending its origin story. Some might only deeply understand the meaning of 'Western civilization,' by reciting myth and legend about old adventures or empires long past (e.g., The Romans, the Holy Roman Empire, the Ancient Greek, the Egyptians, The Kingdom of Heaven, Christendom, and so on). Some might only claim it exists because of the borders that surround it - although here the border can too become mythologically weaponized, protected, and frowned upon like in the cases of borders in Turkey, usually called the frontier and division between the West and the East because of the Bosphorus river and due to the islamization of that area; Russia, distinguishing the East and West in what are known the Ural Mountains; and North Africa, with the straight of Gibraltar, where Spain and NATO mark the ending of a European geopolitical imagination. Although, as we will see, colonial expansionism will in itself have a ripple effect in the global culture, and its supposed well defined border will become ever more questionable.

Nevertheless, we find quickly that the border is not geographic but ideologically imaginative—namely a projection and a fantasy—and conforms (and conformed) from colonial expansionist ideas, to distinctions between capitalist and ex-communist regions, and to

12 Ibidem.

religious borders between Catholic, Orthodox Christianity, and Islamic faiths: for example, we find an ideological idea of the civilized vs barbarian dichotomy in the folk talk among ex-Yugoslavian bordering countries like Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia, Slovenia, North Macedonia, and Montenegro where each pushes or pulls the barbaric Balkans (almost in denial) either next to them or away from them—claiming in the same regard that they are part of a western civilization (or at least middle Europa); that is to the north, south, or east to them.[13] In many ways the classifications have to do with religious and cultural divisions but also with the fact that these countries were all part of an ideological context. Furthermore, we find another ideological bordering in the term "Middle East,"[14] popularised by USA's naval strategist Alfred Thayer Mahan in an article titled 'The Persian Gulf and International Relations' to describe the strategic zone around the Persian Gulf that was vital to geopolitically protect the colonial British routes to India and reused by the British to claim a broader region when the Ottoman Empire decayed. The 'Middle East' became a colonial classification without any real ground created by colonial Britain, France, and later justified by the USA's expansionist exceptionalism where the term used to name the middle of what became the passage between colonies was classified really as "Orient" or "Oriental."[15]

The Occidental needs the Oriental

The Palestinian-American thinker Edward Said, for example, mentions that the invention of 'Orientalism' is defined only to legitimize the notion of the Western, which without such legitimization fails to deliver a concrete idea. Said mentions "Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between the 'Orient' and (most of the time) 'the Occident.'[16] That is to say, the invention of Orientalism, sets the boundary of that which is 'Other.' Said continues describing that invention of Orientalism with the following idea:

> Taking the late eighteenth century as a very roughly defined starting point, Orientalism can be discussed and analysed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient—dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a

13 "YouTube video," YouTube, accessed March 9, 2026, https://youtu.be/r_5Slnkzekc.

14 Mahan, Alfred Thayer. "The Persian Gulf and International Relations." Journal of the Royal United Services Institution 46, no. 286 (1902): 1–13.

15 Edward W. Said, Orientalism, (Vintage Books: A Division of Random House New York, 1979), 3.

16 Ibidem.

Western style for dominating, researching, and having authority over the Orient.[17]

The relationship with the Other is the fabrication of that which the 'West' is not. In other words, to affirm its existence the act of othering must be imagined and legitimized. It is a negation of cultural proximity, a denial of that which remains a close identity. Said recalls the concept used by Gramsci on "hegemony" to describe that "the role of the polity is direct domination" when enforcing the military, police, and basically any rule of exception.[18] It is a European cultural hegemony that we find in the representation of the Orient as if it were really a well rounded concept. Usually, when discussing or speaking about a level of hegemony the industrial processes defined in Europe are set as marker differentiating that othering, although, again this is a later 'development.' Said mentions that the conception of 'Europe' by Denys Hay was really meant to create a self reference and distinction of "'us' Europeans against all 'those' non-Europeans," indeed, it can be argued that the conception of European hegemony can be seen under the light "reiterating European superiority over Oriental backwardness."[19] Orientalism is always set at a disadvantage against the European upper hand. Does this mean that there is any valuation of what the subaltern other is really thinking or how the Orient itself classifies itself? We see rather that the exposition of the Orient occurred in the necrophilia[20] of dead culture perceived in museums, performatively shown in so called museums of 'natural history'—as if separate from the usual human advanced cultures alluding to the savage and that which cannot be considered as civilized—like in the American Museum of National History in NY, the Smithsonian Natural History Museum in Washington D.C., and the Natural History Museum in London to name a few. Orientalism in a manner is only recognized not as culture or an anthropological history but as that reserved and categorized as a natural other. Moreover, according to Said, Orientalism is only recognized in other settings like: "for reconstruction in the colonial office, the theoretical illustration in anthropology [colonial to be exact], biological, linguistic, racial, and historical theses about mankind and the universe, for instances of economic sociological theories of development,

17 Ibidem.

18 Ibid, 7.

19 Ibidem.

20 "Necrophilia in the characterological sense can be described as the passionate attraction to all that is dead, decayed, putrid, sickly; it is the passion to transform that which is alive into something unalive; to destroy for the sake of destruction; the exclusive interest in all that is purely mechanical." Erich Fromm, The Heart of Man: Its Genius for Good and Evil (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 39.

revolution, cultural personality, national and religious character."[21] It is through a full blown legitimization process that we find the imagination of that Othering. Said mentions that soon after creating this validation to the centrality of the Western idea by defining what imaginarily lies at the periphery, the projection of othering, the governance over an Orientalist identity becomes justified "by a battery of desires, repressions, investments, and projections."[22] In summary, the 'we' can only be defined by a differentiation towards or against 'they' or 'them,' which to an extent will always be a projection of the imagination and fantasy, namely, a "re-presentation" premised on "exteriority"[23]. It is this discourse that will play a role in something like an algorithmic decision that Machine Learning is trained on appearing as objective without it being the case (like in the case of Palantir's biases found in the capture of 'illegal migrants'—mainly Mexican and Hispano-American demographics—publicly named 'aliens;' and 'terrorist' bombing targets occurring live both in the Levant and currently in Tehran).

Where then is the Western really beginning and really ending? For if we cannot define it, how can we make claims about it existing in ontological terms? Is it not the case, that a repeated delusion like we hear in the news and in politics makes us feel like we are aware of the reality of something? Or is it that the over affirmation of its existence is similar to the proverb mentioned by Albert Einstein on time's relativity "[…] the distinction between past, present, and future is nothing but a stubbornly persistent illusion."[24] Some might say that the Western Civilization is a 'race;' some make evolutionary and techno-futuristic claims justified by 'development,' the rules are never set, the ideas neither.

Identity issues?

Although this inquiry on finding the real meaning of Western civilization might not be relevant to everyone, it is paradoxical for someone with a Belgian and Mexican shared nationality and identity. The measure through which someone that is a bi-national can show the anomaly in such a dilemma is only relevant when the classification of identity is usually homogenized. What is it to be Belgian? Flemish? or Mexican really?

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21 Edward W. Said, Orientalism, (Vintage Books: A Division of Random House New York, 1979), 7-8.

22 Idem.

23 Ibidem, 21.

24 Albert Einstein, letter to the family of Michele Besso, March 21, 1955, in Albert Einstein: The Human Side, ed. Helen Dukas and Banesh Hoffmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 113.

Belgian?

Belgium as a territory has been inhabited and has been a melting pot of its own since prehistoric times; the Romans called the region "*Gallia Belgica"*[25] and it is well known that Julius Caesar massacred the 'native' 'local' Celtic population, considered 'barbaric' by the Romans who self-categorized themselves 'civilized' that later inevitably mixed with the local beliefs, deities, and populations;[26] later, the region was absorbed by the Frankish Empire, a moment when Flanders as a region became rather wealthy; after, the region became part of the Duchy of Burgundy[27] uniting with what would be known as the Low Countries; furthermore, the Austro-Spanish Habsburg Rule took over and soon after the Northern Netherlands revolted against the Spanish Netherlands (absolutely abhorred by the Belgians today if you would bring it up) that after became the Austrian Netherlands; in the later 1700s, the Netherlands and Belgium once again were brought together by external forces in the merging of both regions in 1815 by King William I of Orange.[28] Finally, Belgium came to terms with its own artifice when the National Congress declared independence mainly to suit the interests of Britain, France, Austria, Prussia, and Russia at the Conference of London (1830-31) creating a buffer state. It was really 'neutrality' that characterized the Belgian State in the modern version of the country. It is exactly here that the ravishing modern identity of Belgium began and it entered with Leopold I of Saxe-Coburg, Belgian king in 1831. It is indeed his son, Leopold II, who will have a massive cultural significance in a strangely obscure manner for any Belgian and for the imaginary of Belgian 'development,' 'civilization,' and 'futurism.' This will be the reason too, unfortunately, on why Belgium today keeps too many skeletons in the closet.

As a contemporary Belgian citizen, there are several cultural notions that are common in the pop-discourse, like saying that Belgium is part of the democratic free world, with economic stability, and opportunity. The idea of freedom as a Belgian implies one can act and be a free citizen choosing one's identity within a specific regional ethno-linguistic boundary. The West in this

25 Cook, Bernard A. Belgium: A History. New York: Peter Lang, 2002.

26 The Legions commonly would even adopt the gods the Gaelic populations had and added them to their repertory of beliefs and deities.

27 Prevenier, Walter and Wim Blockmans. The Burgundian Netherlands. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

28 Strikwerda, Carl. A House Divided: Catholics, Socialists, and Flemish Nationalists in Nineteenth-Century Belgium. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997.

regard always implies civilization with a veil of freedom within Europe while justifying colonial rule and the extraction of goods shaping a future in the European sense. It is extractivist and design oriented. Sadly, the consciousness of the colonial West for Belgium always draws back to the Congolese tragedy caused by Leopold II's[29] humanitarian enterprise and extraction justifying a rotten futurism (in today's gaze) to make the newly founded Nation-State a colonial power, similar to the other geopolitical players present at the Berlin conference in 1887. It was indeed this 'humanitarian,' 'developmental,' 'civilized,' and 'futuristic' veil that gazed Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*; where the idea of the uncivilised savage was at its' conceptual peak, again, justifying crimes against a subjugated population. Another important matter to pay attention to in the case of Belgium and other 'ex-colonial' powers, is that its current phobic threat comes not so much from a phobia of the internal violence but from the external world, which for a country this tiny, is represented through the exaggeration of the outer "jungle."[30] Similar to the topic of Orientalism which is represented as countering the West and observing it as an exteriority, the jungle is exemplified by representation like it was done back in 1897 in Belgium when King Leopold II imported 267 Congolese people to Brussels[31] and exhibited them like animals at Leopold's African Museum called Tervuren; placing them in "human zoos" justifying as such the scientific racism of the day. Even Gydo Gryseels, director general at the Royal Museum for Central Africa (RMCA), affirms that the museum representing the colonial actions in Congo showed until recently: "The initial impression of Africa by most Belgians was made here in this museum, and that is that the white person is better than the black person. We were there to civilise them. The Africans

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29 Adam Hochschild, King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998).

30 "Europe is a garden. We have built a garden. Everything works. It is the best combination of political freedom, economic prosperity and social cohesion that the humankind has been able to build – the three things together. And here, Bruges is maybe a good representation of beautiful things, intellectual life, wellbeing. The rest of the world – and you know this very well, Federica – is not exactly a garden. Most of the rest of the world is a jungle, and the jungle could invade the garden. The gardeners should take care of it, but they will not protect the garden by building walls. A nice small garden surrounded by high walls in order to prevent the jungle from coming in is not going to be a solution. Because the jungle has a strong growth capacity, and the wall will never be high enough in order to protect the garden. The gardeners have to go to the jungle. Europeans have to be much more engaged with the rest of the world. Otherwise, the rest of the world will invade us, by different ways and means. Yes, this is my most important message: we have to be much more engaged with the rest of the world." - Josef Borrel, EU foreign policy chief

31 This was common among European colonial powers like it was done in London, Paris, Oslo, and Hamburg.

we portray here are naked without a spear and culture of their own."[32] Gryceels even mentions that this has been changing recently and painfully for Belgians thanks to the publication of Adam Hochschil's book King Leopold's Ghost in 1998, however mentions that the "curriculum in Belgian schools until recently was 'we brought civilisation."[33] We proceed to think why Borrel's speech in the European School of Brugge (see footnote on Borrell) is problematic at core, for Europe is a garden - alluding to the Garden of Eden - and the rest a jungle. Again here, we find the dichotomy of the civilised and the savage in its full splendor, or shall I say absolute darkness? From a Belgian perspective, the West speaks literally about the west of Europe as both origin story and land of myth. For the origin myth goes back to Celtic, Holy Roman Empire (Christian), Roman, and Greek conceptions of antiquity as a reference. In a manner, the justification of humans portrayed as 'savages' all throughout colonial imperial Europe, is the perfect remedy for the guilt one might experience when absolutely extracting the mines in outer territories causing deforestation and pollution of every ecosystem for the sake of 'futurism,' and delineates the populations as lesser to justify the constant genocides to purge the lands.

Mexican?

On the opposite end, seen like a Mexican citizen today, the world looks rather different. Mexico, also, was inhabited since prehistory. Where despite having a 'native' background[34] of a shared ethos, the culture is syncretic at heart. That is to say, the main thesis in Mexican identity is an admixture of mythological claims or denominations. Namely, *conquistadores*, mother cultures (i.e., Olmec, Maya, Mazatec), victims, heroes, evangelists, savages, 'indigenous,' and other iterations of Mexicanisms. Mainly though, Mexicans are humans working their ass off, much like any other human. The country, in a way, is a land of liminality, for it has been conceived as the birthplace of mother cultures in Mesoamerica and as a place where Europe (specifically the Iberian Peninsula)[35] controlled the periphery of the conception of the West. Mexico today looks

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32 Daniel Boffey, Belgium comes to terms with 'human zoos' of its colonial past, The Guardian, 16 Apr 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/apr/16/belgium-comes-to-terms-with-human-zoos-of-its-colonial-past

33 Idem.

34 I write here in irony because there are no native people in the human story unless we take their accounts for granted, although every origin story usually speaks of a place far gone or a utopia created in that land, which in itself reinforces the idea of migration.

35 With some exceptions to French and Habsburg's influence

neither like it looked before when the Olmec, Maya, or Mexica were at their peak, nor when the *Virreinato de la Nueva España* controlled from Panama up to the Philippines. Even in the concept of 'New Spain'[36] —a projection towards rebooting the European Catholic idea of founding paradise elsewhere—permeates throughout the continental history of what was called by explorers *América*. In effect, this meant evangelization and a transformation of both terrain and belief system. Mexico refers to its own origins in reference to Rome and the Latin language, although not only, for a sector of the country mainly claims descent from Olmec, Maya, Mexica (hence the name of the country), Tolteca, Totonaca, Chichimeca, Purepecha, Wixarika, Tlaxcalteca, and the list goes on. The inheritance of 300 direct years of Spanish and European reign in what is today Mexico, is obviously still there despite some radical political changes throughout the 200 years of Mexican independence. The region, ever since Europeans arrived, has undergone constant criticism as not 'civilized' enough from its commentators, which to me always comes back to heavily charged religious monotheistic hegemonic European claims, like it did historically when Fray Pablo de Landa committed the absolute abhorrent act of burning the ancient sacred Maya texts[37] famously called *codices*[38] in 1562, which entailed leading a full-blown inquisition against a culture he did not comprehend: "written records of Maya civilization, […] stone monuments, stelae, ceramics [with topics ranging from] a recorded history of more than eight hundred years," texts on mathematics, astronomy, and medicine all destroyed and incinerated justifying such actions by claiming they were primitive, savage, and sinful icon worship.[39]

Some Mexicans, including myself, would even call Mexico the first really global nation communicating east Asia and west Europe thanks to the commerce between peninsular Spain, through Mexico, and all the way up to the Philippines (*El Galeon de Manila)*. Mexico's famous independence from Spain demarcated a deep rupture from the Peninsular Iberian perspective due to an identitarian crisis mainly because Spanish lords born in Spain could be the only ones in power. Not even the sons of Spanish born in *Nueva España* had the chance to rule in a position of power,

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36 Like New England, New France, New Amsterdam, and so on. We find the same bias of the re-commencement of a world of paradise.

37 Norman, Jeremy M. "Bishop Diego de Landa Orders Destruction of the Maya Codices." Jeremy Norman's HistoryofInformation.com. Last modified December 28, 2025. https://www.historyofinformation.com/detail.php?id=1574.

38 There are only four codex left: Madrid Codex, Dresden Codex, Paris Codex, and Grolier Codex.

39 Ibidem.

which created, of course, an intense resentment.[40] Mexico's image as a modern nation-state in the 19th century, therefore, was consolidated as the land of the rebelled Mexica (although really the sons of the Spanish '*criollos'* who had governed).[41] If this was the case or not did not matter; for an internal taxonomy of people began after this event and gave a new origin to Mexico.

Furthermore, the internal identitarian ambiguity demanded another crisis 100 years later: Porfirio Diaz and *los cientificos* (a group of *intelligentsia*), were similar to other European powers at the time setting the stage for cultural notions inspired by European positivists and it meant that if you were not part of the elite, commonly Eurocentric, you culturally could not really be around if you did not look European or were part of the already established elite. So much so that Diaz's presidency concentrated the wealth in "2%" of the elite population.[42] Soon after his government went to a civil war against the revolutionary party. An event that backlashes as the Mexican revolution. This was a moment when Mexico, issued a struggle from within against its own historical clarity and initiated a new identity that was brought about in a very specific manner fed by a modern socialist integration.

One could not say that modern Mexico has not followed a European or US influenced policy making, for it adopts completely a Roman Catholic type of law, is a republic following the footsteps of France and the US (i.e. the former's *Jacobin* revolution and the latter's civil war of the 13 colonies). Another similarity is that Mexico has encouraged eugenic policies throughout the early 20th century—policies much like those in Sweden and the US—and has a beauty stereotype based on European ideals (although things are changing). This is not to say, again, that Mexico is a fully European or Western place, despite being more western geographically than the west of Europe, although clearly the meaning of the 'West' is not important in geographical terms, but only in mythical ones. It does not matter in the end; Mexico today is both the 'indigenous' and the 'mistreater of internal minority populations/alterities or subalterities' with a European policy making at the same time. Yet, in its' relative internal *problematic*, Mexico, remains both critical

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40 The Spanish would not allow any Novohispanic land to be ruled by anyone being born in the territory. Spanish born in Spain were the only ones that could become chiefs of any position, thus creating resentment.

41 Defeated by Peninsulares and clearly too the Tlaxcaltecas that joined Cortés in the war against the Mexica empire represented usually in the fall of Tenochtitlán.

42 Archivo General de la Nación, "AGN Vida y Sociedad: La desigualdad social durante el Porfiriato captada en fotografías resguardadas en el AGN," January 2, 2020, https://www.gob.mx/agn/articulos/agnvidaysociedad-la-desigualdad-social-durante-el-porfiriato-captada-en-fotografias-resguardadas-en-el-agn.

towards geopolitical agendas of extraction in the continent and has been blatantly criticized for the hypocritical internal violations against the populations it betrays, and for its internal ecocides (most recently in the construction of the *Tren Maya)*. Mexico, much like Europe, is not homogenous, rather it has exorbitant variations in the population. What is clearly different is that much like in the West, the glamoured European nations have always been welcomed post Conquista in Mexico, whereas the story could not be told the other way around in Europe or in the US. Indeed, Mexico is often judged as a place that accepts refugees and migrants escaping 'exception zones.' Even seen by external observers as an exception zone itself. The country does take pride in the acceptance of the Other/alterities as long as they are the 'right' kind, like it did in the acceptance of refugees before, during, and after the IIWW (mainly coming from Europe).[43] Moreover, there is something very clear in Mexico's position: unlike other nations (specifically European ones and in the United States), after the revolution in the early 1920s the country followed a policy countering both Spencerian and social Darwinist ideas conveyed brutally, for example, by Spencer's following remark "The inferior races of men are to be supplanted by the superior races."[44] Implying a justification of European colonialism and mistreatment of 'racially impure' populations. Moreover, Vasconcelos, instituted in Mexico an ideology written in a published work called *La raza cósmica,*[45] which absolutely counters notions of racial purity implying that Iberoamerican countries are the merge of all peoples from all over the world. In this regard, all mythologies and customs were to be inherited in 20th century Mexico. Is this purely how all of Mexico experienced the change? Probably not, but in principle it became part of the educational program, which remains even more relevant for contemporary Mexico today. The notion of cultural and ethnic *mestizaje* includes mythological ideas (i.e. the current political party promotes the 4T and is literally called *Morena*) and ethnic groups from all over the world with their deficiencies and virtues accepting the admixture as a human combination and not as a 'contamination'—assumed in mythologically racist and social Darwinist discourses usually seen as a problem of 'hygiene' projected by extreme alt-right and conservative groups in the US, Britain (commonwealth), and Europe.

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43 However, some clear exceptions were the cases of figures like Trotsky and the last Shah of Iran (both with tough endings, for Trotsky was murdered by a Soviet assassin and the Shah was refused reentrance to the country).

44 Herbert Spencer, The Principles of Sociology, vol. 1 (London: Williams and Norgate, 1876), 608.

45 José Vasconcelos, La raza cósmica: Misión de la raza iberoamericana (Madrid: Agencia Mundial de Librería, 1925)

Western Hygiene?

We can see this perspective most exaggerated in the contemporary neo-conservative representatives of European countries like in the statement made by Hungary's leader, Viktor Orban:

> We [Hungarians] are not a mixed race … and we do not want to become a mixed race," said Orbán on Saturday. He added that countries where European and non-Europeans mingle were "no longer nations." - By correspondents Shaun Walker and Flora Gramvolgyi.[46]

Orbán is not a rare case here, for really this shows a standard resurgence of neocons and neofascists around the globe. This notion of contamination is classically based on the idea ethnic or racial purity, supported by eugenics (in a way the futurism ingrained in the ideology), and Judeo-Christian isolationism. Orbán speaks of the identity of a Hungarian today much like the US Magaists refer to a language of 'return' with the old colonial world order in mind when the West controlled over the globe, although the undertone usually refers to a paradise lost or 'garden' always linked to the purity of some race or soul inhabiting a promised territory. The anthropologist Mary Douglas can give us a fascinating take on this notion of contamination:

> As we know it, dirt is essentially disorder. There is no such thing as absolute dirt: it exists in the eye of the beholder. If we shun dirt, it is not because of craven fear, still less dread of holy terror. Nor do our ideas about disease account for the range of our behaviour in cleaning or avoiding dirt. Dirt offends against order. Eliminating it is not a negative movement, but a positive effort to organize the environment.[47]

Douglas' fascinating point of view on dirt, pollution, and contamination shows there is nothing that can fully embody that sense of pollution, nor that sense of absolute cleanliness; for it is relative to the subject(s) projection of order and chaos that is also often encompassed by the culture it inhabits. The concept of the 'flood' or 'inundation' has also been used to dissect that sense of contamination. Right wing conservatives usually quote these phrases by mentioning the vermin on the earth as if those were the invaders. Stefanos Geroulanos mentions that these ideas usually are conveyed by the right wing Enlightenment thinker and Nazi supporter: "Carl Schmitt spoke of a

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46 *Viktor Orbán Sparks outrage with attack on 'race mixing' in Europe.* The Guardian. Sun 24 July 2022. Https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jul/24/viktor-orban-against-race-mixing-europe-hungary.com

47 Mary Douglas, Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966), 2.

'flood' of democracy after 1789 that no dam could stop."[48] Contamination, thus, exists further away than a mere racial ideology or simple dust.

A proper cleanse will never occur and for racial purity to manifest fully, one would have to erase oneself, given genetics and mutations can never exist without variation or in isolation. We would have to become a mad OCD self-cleansing malady for this end to happen. Hygiene, in this regard, is a justification for a political and cultural choice to destroy that which makes a group uncomfortable, namely, an alterity. It is a politicised weapon that serves to eliminate a clear sense of disapproval and cultural disgust. Why? Because it is an experience that incites anxiety and the uncanny, which in itself is not something that humans feel at ease at by definition and culturally expressed as an attempt to reaffirm control. Haunted by the loop of the religious.

The claim for the purity of the West is deeply questionable. Especially attending to the notion of America: north, south, anglo, or Latin. What will become central, for example, is the lack of control on the romanticised remythologization in the historical notion of the West in both its limitations, perceived in the historical wording of the Wild West, the civilised vs savage.

As aforementioned, we have seen that for there to be a West there must be an East, although, once again the boundaries on where this starts and where this ends can be absolutely debated through the notion of "schismogenesis" that anthropologist Gregory Bateson observed, namely that certain kinds of social interaction do not settle into equilibrium; instead each response provokes a stronger response, creating a runaway feedback loop, like in the West/rest or pure/polluted dichotomies.[49]

The Western front: América/America and the Wild West

Mexico, the United States, Canada, and all the Latin American countries down to Brazil, unlike some think, are part of the continental land of *América*. In a very strange way, the term *Americano* or American in English both delight in the idea of the new European colonial rule in the 'newly found land.' A land which according to the colonial view was discovered, not visited. Despite people inhabiting the continent according to the latest archeological evidence, either before 30,000

48 Stefanos Geroulanos, The Invention of Prehistory: Empire, Violence, and Our Obsession with Human Origins (New York: Liveright, 2022), 205.

49 Gregory Bateson, Steps to an Ecology of Mind (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 453.

years ago in examples like Pedra Furada[50] and Chiquihuite Cave,[51] or later around 14,000 years ago, like in Monte Verde.[52] Whoever assumes that a place has been discovered despite humans living there must need to justify why they believe in two things: firstly, what they think other humans are (i.e. savages, barbarians, uncivilized, merely alterities); and secondly, where they think they have arrived (i.e. promised land, heaven, *El Dorado*).

Is *América* really a noun that can represent a continent if the concept itself always comes from a foreign invader or explorer? We know for a fact that anytime the concept has been uttered, it can be traced historically to the cartographer Martin Waldseemüller who wrote and designed in 1507 the *Universalis Cosmographia* and called the newly encountered continent 'América' to update foregone ideas about Ptolemaic geography, after Amerigo Vespucci/Américo Vespúcio—a Fiorentino living during the Medici—who in 1503 titled his own notion of this 'new place' he explored *Mundus Novis*.[53] It is important to emphasise that the English version 'America' only really happened after the Iberian had a stronghold in the region and had established the *Novo Hispanic/ Novo Iberic* culture. The people within the Iberoamerican boundary had to embrace Catholicism and the toils of becoming monotheist notwithstanding the fact the local populations were politheists.

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50 Guidon, Niéde. 1993. "The Early Archaeology of Pedra Furada, Brazil." American Antiquity 58, no. 4 (October):727-4.
Prous, André, Vera Aldeias, and Rodrigo Elias Oliveira. 2011. "Evaluating Early Settlement at Pedra Furada, Brazil: A Geoarchaeological Approach." Journal of Archaeological Science 38, no. 1: 120–31.
Adams, Jonathan S., and Jeffrey E. Koloseike. 2018. "Reassessing Pedra Furada: A Long History of Controversy in Brazilian Archaeology." Journal of Anthropological Research 74, no. 3: 342–60

51 Bae, Christopher J., Laurianne Bourgeon, and John R. Johnson, et al. 2020. "Evidence for Human Presence in North America During the Last Glacial Maximum." Nature 584, no. 7820 (August): 87–92.
Cunningham, John, and Michael R. Waters. 2021. "On the Age and Integrity of the Chiquihuite Cave Lithic Assemblage." American Antiquity 86, no. 3: 530–44.
Weiss, Daniel, et al. 2024. "Technology, Context, and Chronology at Chiquihuite Cave." Quaternary Science Reviews 285 (May): 108617

52 Dillehay, Tom D. 1989. Monte Verde: A Late Pleistocene Settlement in Chile. Volume 1: Paleoenvironment and Site Context. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press.
Dillehay, Tom D. 1997. Monte Verde: A Late Pleistocene Settlement in Chile. Volume 2: The Archaeological Context and Interpretation. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press.
Dillehay, Tom D., C. Ramírez, M. Pino, M. B. Collins, J. Rossen, and J. D. Pino-Navarro. 2008. "Monte Verde: Seaweed, Food, Medicine, and the Peopling of South America." Science 320, no. 5877: 784–786.
Pino, Mario, and Tom D. Dillehay. 2023. "Monte Verde II: An Assessment of New Radiocarbon Dates and Their Sedimentological Context." Antiquity 97, no. 393: 524–540.

53 Nieto Olarte, Mauricio: La Comprensión del Nuevo Mundo: Geografía e Historia Natural en el siglo XVI

This particular shift in belief created a mixed belief system (we know that Christianity itself is a merge of many belief systems already and honestly Judaism too), which became syncretic. The conversion of the 'discovered savages' in the colonial Iberoamerican perspective is best perceived during the "court of Valladolid in 1542" where the case for the *indios'*[54] "potency" to gain a "soul" discussed by Fray Bartolomé de las Casas[55]—who had perceived first hand the brutality of the *conquistadores* against the local populations—was brought against Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda who argued for the standard European version justifying in Aristotle's footsteps that some people are "natural slaves" because they lack "rational capacity."[56] Las Casas argued that the local populations did have functioning societies, laws, cities, agriculture, religion, and philosophy clearly stating they had a humanity. By looking at this case we understand that the 'garden' for the Iberoamerican populations had to be brought to the people. The extraction of resources and the taxonomy of Novo Iberian humans had to come to terms with a conscience. The garden had to fit the jungle and blend. Whereas the context through which the new British colonialists and North Europeans arriving to the East of North America from 1607 until 1783 (until today if we extend it to the USA or the British in Canada) had to bring in the garden completely through profit- driven ventures (Virginia Company),[57] religious extremism (Puritans Quakers, and Catholics fleeing persecution, and British crown grants for the land). The garden did not fit local populations or later the annexed Mexican territories, rather, the culture absolutely projected that rule and domestication over the *Mundus Novis* where the savages definitely were in opposition to the civilised. From an anthropological perspective once again the idea that a population or a belief system can be 'pure' is rather impossible. For it is always subject to time and change and those

54 Concept uttered despite ignorantly knowing that the locals were not from India, thus, the concept indigenous was used as a reference. In the counter arguments to the conceptualisation of the people inhabiting the Mundus Novis as indian, the subaltern critique is that at least a name speaks about the ignorance of the people arriving to the continent.

55 He was the forerunner of international law and human rights theory.

56 Bartolomé de las Casas, In Defense of the Indians: The Defense of the Most Reverend Lord, Don Fray Bartolomé de las Casas, of the Order of Preachers, Late Bishop of Chiapa, Against the Persecutors and Slanderers of the Peoples of the New World Discovered Across the Seas, trans. and ed. Stafford Poole (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1992).

57 John Smith, The Generall Historie of Virginia, New-England, and the Summer Isles (London: Michael Sparkes, 1624; repr. Bedford, MA: Applewood Books, 2006).
Bernard Bailyn, The Barbarous Years: The Peopling of British North America — The Conflict of Civilizations, 1600–1675 (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012).

changes often come from both inside and outside the system.

The colonised 'New World' was not *per se* new, however, that which is not understood is commonly mystified and fantasised. In a way, the version the United States has created around its reading of America has had to do with a promised land where the land can be exploited and its flora and fauna have become useful to imagine a utopia configured by a specific meta-culture and justified by a Judeo-Christian mythology. Either referenced as the 'garden,' the place of domestication; or as a place where war or conflict must come back after going through a period of exile. Many various biblical iterations can be interpreted to fit the framing of the 'great return.' Is it that the notion of 'return' really implies displacement and genocide?

Like it is mentioned in the following statement:

> *Deuteronomy 7:1–2:* When the Lord your God brings you into the land that you are about to enter and occupy, and he clears away many nations before you—the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations mightier and more numerous than you—and when the Lord your God gives them over to you and you defeat them, then you must utterly destroy them. Make no covenant with them and show them no mercy.[58]

We see here that *ressentiment* becomes the emotion described by the biblical text that will have a toll on various notions of revenge that even Nietzsche describes, to my view, accurately; we find the philosophical statement that notices such idea:

> This inversion of the value-positing eye—this need to direct one's view outward instead of back to oneself—is of the essence of ressentiment: in order to come into being, slave morality first needs a hostile external world; it needs, physiologically speaking, external stimuli in order to act at all—its action is fundamentally reaction. The opposite is true of the noble mode of valuation: it acts and grows spontaneously, it seeks its opposite only in order to affirm itself more gratefully and triumphantly—its negative concept 'low,' 'common,' 'bad' is only a pale, contrasting afterimage of its positive basic concept—filled with life and passion—'we noble ones, we good, beautiful, happy ones![59]

That is to say, the value system which we see taking place in the framing of the West, mainly

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58 Finkelstein, Israel, and Neil Asher Silberman. The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Its Sacred Texts. New York: Free Press, 2001.

59 Friedrich Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), First Essay, sec. 10.

in America, tends to be one with certain biases that are justified with that which is considered other and extended to the humanity that does not fit the garden taxonomy.

Savages past vs Futuristic civilised

The savage or barbarian, strangely enough, became an elongated concept against the local people in America. Geroulanos, showcases how various disciplines (e.g. Phrenology, Medicine, Eugenics, Anthropology, Religion, Archeology, Geology, Geography, Linguistics, and so on) arose from trying to explain why humans existed all over the world in a prehistory. For example, in the late 1700s Germanic thinkers developed a full blown discipline in linguistics tracing back Germanic to Latin and Greek, which got influenced by "*Sanskrit.*"[60] Sanskrit was the language spoken by the supposed Aryans that got so much attention by the Nazis later in the 20th century. Sanskrit was seen as more noble and perfect than its inheritors because of its proximity to an origin. The conception of linguistics by European scholars coined the idea that the Indus Valley was both ancient and precivilised and created the notion of the "noble savage." This idea got reinforced separately with the rediscovery in 1902 of the codex *Aesinas* containing the text "*Germania"*[61] written by Roman historian Tacitus (56-120 AC), who claimed that the self-proclaimed group of "Germanic" tribes, were "*indigenas,*" or so called "native" mirroring the discourse of the linguists as Germanic "noble savage[s]."[62] Enlightenment thinker, Montesquieu, who read Tacitus' remarks, assumed that the political human had to come from a "state of nature," or what Romans called in law *res naturans*, which Montesquieu thought of as those "who followed them [,] adopted laws and built a society*."*[63] The noble European savage backed by the linguistic hypothesis of proto-Indo-European languages that existed in the mind of European thinkers of the time, invented the idea of prehistory. The whole fascination with the Aryan race came exactly from this obsession to uncover their origin story as a superior race. Geroulanos continues by mentioning: "Europeans decided

60 Stefanos Geroulanos, The Invention of Prehistory: Empire, Violence, and Our Obsession with Human Origins (New York: Liveright, 2022), 39.

61 Redazione. "The Adventurous History of a Ninth-Century Codex: The BNCR's Victor Emmanuel 1631." Finestre sull'Arte, September 8, 2022. https://www.finestresullarte.info/en/works-and-artists/the-adventurous-history-of-a-ninth-century-codex-the-bncr-s-victor-emmanuel-1631.

62 Ibidem, 31.

63 Idem.

that the ruins of European cultures mirrored the contemporary reality of Indigenous peoples elsewhere […] Living indigenous peoples were vestiges of ancients, and their cultures degenerated just as ancient Western ones had done."[64] The savage — in the modern worldview of peak industrial age - became represented by thosehumans that were literally projected temporally as the past while humans living in industrialist Europe and the colonists in the USA and Australasia were placed in the future.[65]

The noun America, has been used by many populations destituting the locals from the land. De-territorializing those cultures that perceive themselves as the local ones. When discussing the West and the Wild West we come to realise that India, and the so called American Indians, really only relate in the fact that pseudoscientific theories and explanations of the past by early explorers trying to reach India through another spice route were extremely ignorant in their awareness on how other people migrated to other continents.

The early biologist Carl Linnaeus in the 1730s created a taxonomy of humans defining 4 subspecies *Americanus, Europeans, Asiaticus, and Afer.* In the early 20th century we have incredible claims done to justify this line of thought. For example, the so called racial classification, which very weirdly stands today popularised by[66] that division between so called "races" as in "white" for Europeans, "Black" (from Africa), "yellow" (from Asia), "Brown" (non-European Caucasoid groups), and "red" (Amerindian) that people like Stoddard popularised by asking for racial hygiene calling onto racial supremacy. Purity, again and again, is institutionalized by those that create conspiracies to fit their bias and not by people who care about truth. According to Geroulanos, technology and the civilized were placed together:

> Every major nineteenth-century stadial theory used the three stages as a way of dividing human time. To use the three stages became a way to talk about progress and technology and to divide the past, but also to create a hierarchy of peoples— from Indigenous peoples who could be lodged in deep time, to Europe's industrial superpowers which, commentators were sure, represented the future. One triad was already in wide circulation […]: savage, barbarian, and civilized. It was less a three stage theory than a group of two duets. The first duet contrasted the civilized with

64 Ibidem, 57.

65 Hilariously only British influenced people outside of Europe count as 1st world, developed, and global north.

66 Stoddard Lothrop, The Rising Tide of Color Against White World-Supremacy, (United States: Charles Scribner's Sons).

> the rest. Civilized Europeans had stepped up from the rest of the world, and so perhaps some Asian societies. The second duet, savage versus barbarian, allowed interpreters to compare the rest. Those cultures deemed more advanced than abject savages would be categorized as barbaric. This approach seethed with racism: the French biologist Georges Cuvier insisted, all the way to his death in 1832, on identifying savage with 'negro or Ethiopian,' barbarian ('stationary') with 'yellow or Mongolian' and civilized ('progressive') with 'white or Caucasian.'

The inherent racism in these claims is outstanding and telling of a type of ideology that blatantly failed to understand prehistory; by making up this idea of the past it left a collective belief about this conspiratorial taxonomy. The categories of savage, barbarian, and civilised were projected onto three various stages in human evolution tied with technology due to the materials utilised, namely: "Stone Age, the Bronze Age, and the Iron Age," which had to do with how Danish archaeologist Christen Jürgensen Thomsen in "1830" "began to organize certain tools, poetry, and weapons by their basic material: stone, bronze, and iron." This in turn got to be known in three different temporal stages: "Paleolithic, Mesolithic, and finally Neolithic stages."[67] Lastly, Geroulanos interprets what becomes of the threepartite division in its later stages referencing the savage as the age of "magic," the barbarian as the age of "metaphysics," and the civilised who lives in the age of "positivism," namely the age of science and the rupture from the past.[68] Even Freud who sought the 'infancy' of humanity arrived at the German word *triebe,*[69] translated in English as drives or instincts; ironically, the same word refers to 'tribes' namely, the mythologised 'savages/ primitives' living in small clans seen as outdated humans from the past.

That is to say, the positivist is a title that goes to the civilised, technological, and in this logic to the European. The human colonists that brought technology to others were placed on a futuristic pedestal. The justification of prehistory and human evolution according to the discourse surrounding technological evolution - especially in warfare - became, absurdly, the way to measure

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67 Stefanos Geroulanos, The Invention of Prehistory: Empire, Violence, and Our Obsession with Human Origins (New York: Liveright, 2022), 67.

68 Idem.

69 Triebe, is the concept used to define instinct by Freud and also the way that in German one names literally a tribe.
Freud, Sigmund. "Instincts and Their Vicissitudes." In The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, edited and translated by James Strachey. Vol. 14, 109–140. London: Hogarth Press, 1957.

people with phenotypical and cultural differences.

Transhumanism

The child of the civilisatory voice, futurism, emerged from the industrial scientific revolution, the economies of military-technological development, the triumphalist aftermath of WWII, and the existential panic around civilizational self-annihilation — all of which coalesce in the Western perspective into a recurring need to redeem humanity from its own destructive *triebe*/impulses through the Slavic promise of science. This is convergence finds its clearest expression in three historically entangled formations, each inflected by colonial logic: 1) the doomsday clock (currently set at "85 seconds to midnight)"[70]; 2) Christian Millenarianism, specifically the eschatological doctrine of the Second Coming and its iterations in evangelical politics in the United States, and 3) Transhumanism, namely, what philosopher John Kennedy Philip synthesises as a common thread in the following terms:

> "[…] enhancing humanity with the help of technology and science. [That is to say] an intellectual, social, cultural, and philosophical movement that affirms the possibility of improving the human condition through advancements in relevant sciences, such as neurosciences, genomics, robotics, nanotechnology, computer science, and artificial intelligence."[71]

What is significant, therefore, is how contemporary technocratic futurists — Ray Kurzweil's prophecy of the Singularity to Elon Musk's Neuralink project, and Peter Thiel's open endorsement of life-extension technologies — frame the fusion of technology, artificial intelligence (is it intelligent?), and the human body not merely as engineering, but as ontological transformation: the manufacture of a post-human subject immune to death disease, and, crucially, democratic accountability.

Transhumanism, however, conceals a structural contradiction: its rhetoric of universal human enhancement coexist — without apparent tension — with an ultra-nationalism and an apocalyptic Christian millenarianism that both locate the origin of violence and degradation in the primitive 'drives' of the racialised, colonial figure of the primitive, impure, and savage.

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70 Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists Science and Security Board, "2026 Doomsday Clock Statement," edited by John Mecklin, Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, January 27, 2026

71 John Kennedy Philip, "A Philosophical History of Transhumanism," Philosophy Now, no. 160 (2024), https://philosophynow.org/issues/160/A_Philosophical_History_of_Transhumanism.

The Western civilizational myth operates with precisely this structure. It is not merely false; it is defensively, aggressively, and sometimes lethally incorrigible — and nowhere is that incorrigibility more visible than in the ideological declarations of Palantir's founders, for whom the defence of the West is simultaneously an apocalyptic mission, a commercial enterprise, and a license to commit atrocities.

By tracking the figure of the civilised — embodied in European descent and technofuturism — in opposition to the figure of the savage, that residue of imperial and colonial fantasy still operative within the Western delusion, we arrive at the ideological matrix that structures the thinking of the individuals under examination: a matrix in which extermination and innovation are not opposites, but synonyms.

Palantir's bias. A questionable ideology.

What is Palantir's 'Western Civilization' rhetoric in the technopolitical discourse of Alexander Karp and Peter Thiel, co-founders of Palantir Technologies? And how do affectively charged appeals to 'the West' accompany neo-artificial intelligence discourses as ideological mechanisms within the post-critical climate of geopolitical re-mythologization? These questions concern us on two levels:

I.

The re-mythologization of Western civilizational rhetoric concerns us first as a concept deployed by tech neo-conservative and neo-fascist transhumanists. Alex Karp, CEO of Palantir, wrote a doctoral dissertation arguing that certain utterances of aggression—what he calls "Jargon"—function in everyday life with a "*triebentlastend"* effect: a drive-releasing function, operative precisely because it is irrational.[72] For Karp, aggression expressed through jargon allows an escape from normative reprimand while simultaneously giving voice to cultural taboos—all without triggering social or cultural/legal sanctions. Even a cursory reading of Karp's early writings opens a window onto Palantir's operational machinery. Karp's dissertation seeks to map utterances of aggression and to understand how these can be normalised within a culture. Karp

72 Alexander C. Karp, "Aggression in der Lebenswelt: Die Erweiterung des Parsonsschen Konzepts der Aggression durch die Beschreibung des Zusammenhangs von Jargon, Aggression und Kultur" ["Aggression in the Lifeworld: Expanding Parsons' Concept of Aggression through an Analysis of the Relationship between Jargon, Aggression, and Culture"] (PhD diss., Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main, 2002), https://d-nb.info/966060652/34.

posits that *Trieb* — drive — is something that culture utters in order to normalise primeval violence; the very violence that he, and Palantir alongside him, ostensibly seeks to contain.

Peter Thiel's essay *The Straussian Moment*, written in the aftermath of 9/11 in 2003, reveals the contours of his ideology with equal clarity. In it, Thiel issues what reads almost as a demand to reexamine the foundations of modern politics, calling into question the military and political *status quo* and the ideals of liberal democracy on the grounds that these frameworks proved inadequate in the face of terrorism. For Thiel, the West is presently "too secular, too rational, and too economistic to respond adequately to existential threats."[73] His explicitly anti-secular worldview presents two stark alternatives: a meaningless but comfortable and non-violent world, or an immensely meaningful but violent one. Thiel's invocation of Nazi sympathizer Carl Schmitt's concept of the sovereign who decides on the state of exception is instructive here: it signals Palantir's intention to position itself precisely at the sites where that exception is fabricated — and where mass surveillance becomes indispensable. Also worth noting is Thiel's engagement with scapegoating. Thiel argues that the exposure of "scapegoating"[74] as false mechanism reveals the primary means by which humanity manages collective violence — and that without it, mass violence becomes nearly inevitable. Thiel's Christian and apocalyptic ideology permeates this framework, insisting that something subversive and immoral within the existing order must be overridden. Palantir positions itself as the entity capable of performing that override. This is also what renders Thiel's ideology simultaneously apocalyptic and millenarian: anticipating a Second Coming in the wake of impending catastrophe. Technology is perceived ambiguously all over by big tech industries as both causing the end of times and as saviour.[75]

The 'West,' in this register, is the mythology employed to mobilize a particular collective insecurity and consolidate an ideology. The collective imaginary Palantir invokes claims that the West is unified by race[76] and religion,[77] oriented toward a millenarian Judeo-Christian Kingdom

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73 Peter Thiel, "The Straussian Moment," in Politics and Apocalypse, ed. Robert Hamerton-Kelly (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2007), 179–202.

74 Ibidem.

75 Elon Musk, Peter Thiel, Mark Zuckerberg, Sam Altman, and so on have been recorded often in interviews mentioning that the end of times have come and that AI will be the cause of it but better 'we' create it than somebody like the 'Other,' as in the Chinese, Saudis, Russians, etc.

76 Whiteness.

77 Judeo-Christian.

awaiting the return of Christ after an impending apocalypse. This perspective is jointly manifested in the public declarations of Karp and Thiel—in conference appearances and televised interviews, where Christianity and the figure of the Antichrist are explicitly cited as foundations for world order.

Palantir is not a two-person operation. But, the direction the company has taken is unmistakably shaped by these ideological directives. A very specific logic governs target selection and the facilitation of what they call "final decisions"[78] against those who resist their Western civilizatory discourse — decisions directed against those grouped outside of it. Group targeting, a hallmark of neo-fascism, is not novel. Palantir has explicitly stated that the "West's" dominance can only really be accounted for by its "organized violence"[79] — a disclosure that betrays an ideology that systematically engaged in Othering, re-mythologizing the Western imaginary by constituting an opposition against which it defines itself.

Palantir's logic finds its most explicit articulation in the following company statement: *"*Palantir is here to disrupt and make the institutions we partner with the very best in the world, and when it's necessary to scare our enemies and, on occasion, kill them."[80] Palantir's ideological bias is nowhere more visible than its most recent applications of AI-facilitated[81] decision-making—what the company calls 'decision acceleration.' This encompasses what amounts to final problem-solving: the killing of designated targets through coercion of partnered institutions, or the incarceration of individuals who fail to conform to the biases encoded in its algorithms. Cases include the IDF's indiscriminate detention and mistreatment of those it designates as illegal migrants — referred to in right-wing vernacular as "aliens"[82]— operations to which Palantir is complicit and willingly ascribes. This operates within an exceptionalist discourse that structurally recalls the logic of the final solution, now veiled beneath a rhetoric of counterterrorism.[83] This

78 Palantir Technologies. "Our Software." Accessed February 17, 2026. https://www.palantir.com/platforms/

79 Karp, Alex. Statement on Palantir's institutional and defense role, 2020. Quoted in press coverage.

80 Ibidem.

81 I think the term Artificial intelligence is clearly open in the case of Palantir, given they are using the notion of problem solving and targeting as the algorithmic bias in their algorithm. Also, can it really be said that LLMs are intelligent?

82 Elizabeth Nolan Brown, "Palantir Paves Way for Trump Police State," Reason, June 2, 2025, https://reason.com/2025/06/02/palantir-paves-way-for-trump-police-state/.

83 When looking at this categorisation, I cannot stop but think about how aliens and colonisation merge into one another. I think on how the glorification of Captain Cook's cartographic explorations are romanticised and how

comes as no surprise after realizing Karp's dissertation *Aggression in the Life-World*, in which he argues for the constitution of social cohesion through aggression—a thesis written explicitly against Adorno's central argument against the normalization of violence in Nazi Germany. Adorno's dictum that "No universal history leads from savagery to humanitarianism," directly refutes the idea that social cohesion can or should evolve through aggression.[84] Geroulanos' critique of the pre-historical invention of the 'savage,'[85] is equally relevant here. This figure has become an instrument for justifying geopolitical decisions — whether the elimination of a population or deployment of counterterrorism operations. Geroulanos exposes the absurdity of the assumption that human beings emerge from a natural state of violence and chaos, showing instead how that assumption is instrumentalized by sovereign powers to justify military aggression and technological control, framed as protection against an enemy typically constructed as a minority group or an "underdeveloped" nation. The fantasy of the monster — of a group that lacks consciousness and bears responsibility for barbarism and savagery — remains seductive precisely because it is so easily amplified in the spectacle of the digital world.

Thiel's text on The *Straussian Moment* might more accurately be called the *Schmittean Moment.* Thiel plays directly with the Schmittean notion of the sovereign as "he who decides on the exception"[86] — the authority capable of suspending normality in cases of a crisis, emergency, or

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brutal and strange they were represented by the Western ideology of exploitation and extraction when he arrived to Australia's eastern coastline claiming the land for Britain and disregarding the 'aboriginals' in 1770 renaming the land according to a projection of Britain calling it New South Wales; same with his visits to New Zealand and meeting of the Maori people, disregarding the population and claiming it in 1860 (currently at LACMA the Maori artist Lisa Reihana's In Pursuit of Venus has reimagined the history of discovery of the Pacific Islanders calling that first meeting 'Originary Infection.' Here she shows Captain Cook's death and the tragic outcome of the Islanders when facing British colonialism); Tahiti and the Tahitians; and later with the Tonga. What is even stranger is that these explorations were later taken by the US screenwriter and television producer Gene Roddenberry in 1966 that he conceived as a "science fiction western in space," where the ALIENS were thought of really as those people Cook met in the Pacific Islands. We find a crossroad here between colonisation, futurism, and the aliens from outer space that the Westerners came to meet with a humanitarian aim. Star Trek, created by Gene Roddenberry, aired September 8, 1966 – June 3, 1969 (New York: NBC).

84 Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, Dialectic of Enlightenment, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 32.

85 Stefanos Geroulanos, The Invention of Prehistory: Empire, Violence, and Our Obsession with Human Origins (New York: Liveright, 2022).

86 Carl Schmitt, Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 5.

war. Political scientist Achille Mbembe, for example, calls this hegemony to decide who lives and who dies "necropolitics."[87] In this respect, Thiel's position converges with Karp's: both construct a logic in which something like Palantir becomes not only possible but necessary, operating precisely in those margins of exception. This may not appear alarming at first glance — until one considers what internal and external group is constituted to fill the role of the object of collective anxiety. It is no coincidence that this logic fits so perfectly with Thiel's transhuman millenarianism. Palantir Technologies aims for what it calls absolute data integration and positions itself as a 'decision-accelerator.' Its operational reach is divided into three principal domains:

1. Palantir Gotham — serving government agencies in the domains of military, law enforcement, and intelligence;
2. Palantir Foundry — serving corporations across logistics, finance, and healthcare;
3. Palantir Artificial Intelligence Platform (AIP) — governing AI-assisted decision-making.

Palantir's 'decision acceleration' is Schmittean in its structure: (1) it operates within and depends upon states of exception (war zones, insurgency, counterterrorism operations); (2) its technology formalizes friend/enemy classifications (predictive policing, counterterrorism targeting, namely Othering classically seen in the civilised-savage dichotomy); and (3) it assumes sovereign-like decision-making authority, delegating these decisions to algorithms or security agencies.

Conclusion

The re-mythologization and political instrumentalization of 'The West' concerns us at a deeper level. As the preceding analysis has shown, the boundary of Western civilization cannot be fixed — not geographically, not historically, not anthropologically. Roman law extended to Mesopotamia and North Africa. Greek philosophy appropriated from Egypt, Phoenicia, and later reintroduced through Islamic Enlightenment thinkers in the Middle Ages to Europe. America or the Americas were inhabited millennia before they were 'discovered.' Currently a place where indigenous and European have been merged into one with the colonial and the colonised pressed forcefully through the idea of the 'garden' into one. The West in short has never been what it claims to be. It is a retrospective fiction — and like all fictions of this kind, it requires an Other to hold its shape.

This is precisely what makes Palantir's ideological apparatus so legible once the longer

87 Mbembe, Achille. "Necropolitics." Translated by Libby Meintjes. Public Culture 15, no. 1 (2003): 11–40

history is visible. Karp's *triebentlasted* jargon, Thiel's *Schmittean* sovereign, the friend/enemy classification encoded in Gotham's targeting algorithms — these are not aberrations within Western civilisation. They are its logical extension. The savage constructed by Cuvier, Linnaeus, and Spencer in service of Imperial colonialism; the Oriental constructed by colonial cartography and museum display; the 'alien' constructed by right-wing vernacular and border enforcement — all feed the same machine. Palantir simply digitalizes and accelerates what colonial modernity has always done: sort populations into those who matter and those who do not, into those who are protected and those who are exposed to death. What Mbembe calls necropolitics, Palantir calls decision acceleration.

What is new — and what makes this moment distinct — is the convergence of millenarian ideology with algorithmic sovereignty. The transhumanist fantasy of overcoming human limitation, the Christian apocalypticism anticipating a Second Coming, and the technocratic dream of total data integration are not separate registers. They form a single ideological complex in which violence is reframed as salvation, surveillance as protection, and the elimination of alterity as civilizational hygiene. Orbán speaks of racial purity. Thiel speaks of existential threat. Karp speaks of organized violence. The vocabulary differs; the structure is identical. The garden vs the jungle underlies the structure.

The delusion in Jaspers' clinical sense, lies precisely here: in the incorrigibility of a belief system that absorbs all counterevidence and produces, in response, only a stronger conviction of its own necessity. No amount of historical instability — no demonstration that the West has no coherent origin, no defensible border, no racially or culturally pure content— dislodges the claim. On the contrary, the exposure to groundlessness (*Abgrund),*[88] intensifies the drive to assert ground. This is the *Abgrund* beneath the mythology: not a foundation, but an abyss that the myth is constructed to conceal.

To confront Palantir, then, is not merely to critique a technology company. It is to name the structure of a delusion that has organized and been handed the 'Western modernity' from the colonial period to the present — and that now, for the first time, has access to the algorithmic infrastructure required to act on it at scale, in real time, across every domain of social, military, and

88 Der Grund ist der Abgrund, disclosed by the philosopher Martin Heidegger. The ground is the abyss or at least in this veneer, I think, the concept of the West in the neo-fascist discourse can be understood as the anxiety felt by the lack of certitude.
Martin Heidegger, The Principle of Reason, trans. Reginald Lilly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991).

institutional life. The question is no longer whether the West is coherent. It never was. The savage and the civilised were always justifications for unprovoked violence motivated by a fantasy of the garden or today by a 'singularity.' The question is what becomes possible — and what becomes irreversible — when an incoherent mythology is operationalized by a system designed with their bias to make final decisions while real lives are desecrated.

The forced narrative and re-mythologization of the Western black box voiced by Alexander Karp and Peter Thiel — leaders of Palantir Technologies — reveals how the alt-right, MAGA- aligned tendency seeks to redirect present political life toward a technocratic utopianism whose parallels with Nazi, fascist, imperial, and colonial predecessors are not incidental but structural. Their support for circumstances of 'exception' and their willingness to surveil every last single individual freedom, projects the underlying monster, they see their own void and will try again and again to reaffirm themselves because of it.

The problem with Palantir and with other technofuturists of the day is that their notion of the future is linked to those humans that live surrounded by new inventions. A mindset that has been formed since colonial times when the colonists found humans living elsewhere in the world that were not understood and created this basic idea of Othering between the savages and civilization. Is it true that humans living in our same timeline that do not fit the Western black box come from the past? In a way we all do, but it does not mean these humans are from the past. Rather, it seems that people who are not befitting are, according to Palantir's discourse, justifiably obstacles on the way to progress. Annihilating those against which the toll of the future is not with them. What is 'development' but a cover story for the forced elimination or conversion of those humans that do not fit the technological paradigm, in this case of AI and the transhumanists. There is a necessity to question the 'timeline' that we attribute to a territoriality and in consequence its inhabitants. Specifically, when the world is constantly being literally and metaphorically bombed like in 2001 'back to the Stone Age' (to prehistory) like conservative George W. Bush mentioned countering "terrorism" against Afghanistan and the Taliban.[89] The difference is that now the final decisions are backed by Palantir's algorithmic Western delusion and the similarities are that leaders in the US have justified their war crimes with this phrase once more "Over the next two or three weeks, we're

89 George W. Bush Presidential Library. "Global War on Terror." Topic Guides. Accessed April 3, 2026. https://www.georgewbushlibrary.gov/research/topic-guides/global-war-terror.

going to bring them [Iran][90] back to the Stone Age where they belong."[91] A phrase showing how the instrumentalization of technological warfare goes hand in hand with a false futurism against those populations that belong to the Other.

TO BE CONTINUED…

90 Mythologically not Western enough for the MAGAists.

91 Jambhekar, Noopur. "Trump Iran Stone Age: Epic Fury, Israel Escalation Video." The Independent, April 2, 2026. https://www.independent.co.uk/tv/news/trump-iran-stone-age-epic-fury-israel-escalation-video-b2950556.html.

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Those Other Algorithms: Palantir, Project Maven, and the Spectral Political Economy of the West

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Abstract: This article examines how Palantir Technologies converts civilizational rhetoric into predictable revenue, treating CEO Alex Karp's invocations of Samuel Huntington's thesis on "organized violence" as economic signals. Three arguments in political economy follow. First, the article reconstructs Palantir's revenue structure from public filings, showing how long-term government contracts, usage-based pricing, and integration into mission-critical defense workflows transform diffuse geopolitical risk into recurring cash flows. Second, drawing on research in compute governance, it examines the material infrastructure underpinning this model: semiconductor supply chains, classified cloud environments, and data pipelines that create path dependencies and vendor lock-in outlasting any particular conflict. Third, it analyzes how risk is distributed across this configuration, arguing that firms like Palantir benefit from rising threat perceptions regardless of whether conflicts are deterred, frozen, or intensified. States, publics, and targeted populations absorb the downside of misclassification and escalation. The article matches Palantir's disclosures to capital markets, its shareholder letters, filings, and earnings transcripts, against public defense procurement records, using tools from corporate finance, contract economics, and institutional analysis; all market figures are closing values for stated dates, current as of 31 July 2026. The result is an account of organized violence as a traded good, built into infrastructure and priced into revenue.

Keywords: Palantir, organized violence, defense contracting, compute governance, algorithmic warfare, political economy

1. Introduction

On February 3, 2025, Palantir Technologies reported fourth-quarter revenue growth of 36 percent year over year and issued full-year 2025 guidance of 31 percent growth, which the company's own release described as "Eviscerating Consensus Estimates" (Palantir 2025a). Accompanying the results was a letter from chief executive Alex Karp to shareholders. After surveying the firm's positioning at what he called "the center of the AI revolution," Karp closed with a quotation from Samuel Huntington: "The rise of the West was not made possible 'by the superiority of its ideas or values or religion ... but rather by its superiority in applying organized violence. Westerners often forget this fact; non-Westerners never do'" (Karp 2025). The passage appears not in a policy paper or an academic journal but in a document filed with the Securities and Exchange Commission and distributed to institutional investors managing billions of dollars in equity positions.

Karp had been making versions of this claim for years. At the Reagan National Defense Forum in December 2024, Karp told an audience of defense officials that America's adversaries "need to wake up scared and go to bed scared." At the FII PRIORITY Summit in Miami in February 2024, he remarked that "the only reason why someone's not goose-stepping between me and you is my product." At Palantir's earnings call the same week as the shareholder letter, he told analysts that the company exists to "scare our enemies and, on occasion, kill them" while dedicating its work "to the service of the West and the United States of America" (Karp 2024a; 2024b; Palantir 2025b). By then, the capital markets had registered the same message. Palantir's stock returned 340.5 percent in calendar 2024, the best performance in the S&P 500 that year (CNBC 2025a). On 11 November 2024 its closing market capitalization of $137.17 billion overtook Lockheed Martin's $135.25 billion, making a software firm the most valuable defense contractor in the United States (Benzinga 2024). On 4 February 2025, the day after the shareholder letter, the stock closed 24 percent higher and the market capitalization passed $200 billion (Saul 2025). The stock reached its all-time closing high of $207.18 on 3 November 2025, a market capitalization of $493.8 billion, or 110 times the $4.48 billion in revenue the company would go on to report for fiscal year 2025 (Macrotrends 2026a; 2026b; Palantir 2026a). For a data analytics firm with 3,936 full-time employees at the end of 2024 and $2.87 billion in 2024 revenue (Palantir 2025d), the valuation implied that investors were pricing in something beyond quarterly earnings, a durable claim on the future of Western military capacity.

The question this raises is economic. Why would a publicly traded software company, accountable to securities regulators and institutional shareholders, make civilizational warfare the centerpiece of its investor communications? This article argues that such statements function as

economic signals that reveal the structure of Palantir's business model, which converts unfocused geopolitical fear into predictable, recurring revenue. Karp's rhetoric works as demand generation. It frames the threat environment in terms that justify long-term platform investments by government clients, deepen switching costs, and support the transition from episodic project work to subscription-based revenue. So framed, Huntington's "organized violence" becomes a form of organized prediction, where anticipated threats are quantified, modeled, and capitalized in backlog, remaining performance obligations, and forward guidance.

Section 2 reconstructs Palantir's revenue model and uses Project Maven, the Pentagon's flagship AI targeting program, to show how an initial contract expands. Section 3 examines the compute, cloud, clearance, and switching-cost infrastructure that makes those relationships durable. Section 4 asks who bears the resulting risk.

The article reads two documentary corpora against each other. The first consists of Palantir's disclosures to capital markets: the S-1 registration statement of 2020, annual reports on Form 10-K, quarterly reports on Form 10-Q, earnings press releases, call transcripts, and the shareholder letters published alongside them. These documents establish audited financial results, disclosed risk factors, contractual commitments, and the narrative frame that management presents to investors. The second corpus consists of public procurement records: Department of Defense contract announcements, agency press releases, procurement policy memoranda, and reporting in the specialized defense trade press. These establish contract values, ceilings, vehicles, timelines, and the institutional mechanisms through which awards are made and expanded. The method is to match claims across the two corpora. A contract announced in the procurement record should appear as backlog, remaining deal value, or revenue in the financial record. The pricing and duration of the contract vehicle should be interpretable through the economics of the disclosures. Where a claim rests on only one corpus, the text says so. Market data are treated separately and with explicit dating: every share price and market capitalization cited is a closing figure for the trading day stated, drawn from the source given at that point, because valuation multiples of the magnitude discussed here can change by double-digit percentages within weeks. The analysis reflects information available as of 31 July 2026. The analytical tools come from corporate finance and contract economics. The article also draws on research in compute governance to connect software-layer contracting to the material economics of chips, data centers, and classified networks (Allen 2023; Miller 2022). Where the article engages Huntington (1996) or this issue's inquiry into spectrality, it does so to show how narratives of civilizational threat are embedded in the financial instruments through which Western states organize lethal capacity, not to layer a philosophical framework onto the economic analysis.

Spectrality matters here for a specific reason. The threat that can be monetized on a subscription model has a specific temporal form: it must be always approaching and never finally present. An enemy that arrives can be defeated, and demand ends with the war. An enemy that never quite arrives keeps the renewals coming. Derrida's specter, the absent presence that structures the present, is a name for this temporal form, and Palantir's business model gives the specter a ticker symbol: the threatening other is priced, contracted, and capitalized. Other contributions to this issue pursue the philosophy of spectrality directly. The narrower claim here is that the revenue structure of defense software requires a threat with this temporal form and helps to manufacture one where it is absent. The evidence therefore comes from quarterly filings and IDIQ contracts, not philosophical texts.

If the conversion of civilizational fear into corporate revenue is structural rather than incidental, then interventions aimed at responsible AI governance must address procurement design, contract economics, and the incentive structure of defense markets, not only algorithmic ethics or international norms.

2. Organized Prediction: Palantir's Revenue Model and the Economics of Permanent Emergency

2.1 The Problem of Lumpy Demand

Defense demand is lumpy. Wars begin and end; procurement cycles follow congressional appropriations; and large-scale acquisitions, from aircraft carriers to satellite constellations, produce episodic surges in revenue followed by long maintenance tails. Traditional prime contractors such as Lockheed Martin, RTX (formerly Raytheon), and Northrop Grumman have adapted to this pattern through diversified product portfolios, long production runs, and cost-plus contracting that smooths revenue over multi-year manufacturing schedules (Gansler 2011). Their revenues are large and grow slowly. Lockheed Martin reported $67.6 billion in 2023 net sales, a 2.4 percent increase year over year (Lockheed Martin 2024).

Software firms face different economics, with a cost structure dominated by high fixed costs in research and development with near-zero marginal costs for each additional deployment, making them natural platform businesses (Shapiro and Varian 1999). But this cost structure also creates an acute dependency on recurring revenue. A software company that sells individual licenses or project-based engagements faces the same lumpiness problem as traditional contractors, amplified by the speed with which software can be replaced if it fails to deliver value. Palantir's challenge from its founding in 2003 through its direct listing in September 2020 was to build a predictable revenue

stream from defense and intelligence software in a market accustomed to buying hardware on decade-long production contracts.

The S-1 filing said as much: as of mid-2020, Palantir served only 125 customers, with its top three accounting for 28 percent of revenue. The filing warned that "a limited number of customers accounting for a substantial portion of our revenue" represented a material risk and that government contracts were "subject to termination for convenience provisions" (Palantir 2020a, 18, 23). Palantir's early business model resembled bespoke consulting more than platform economics, with deep and expensive engagements at a small number of agencies, vulnerable to budget cuts and political shifts.

2.2 Reconstructing the Revenue Structure

The figures since 2020 look very different. For the fiscal year ended 31 December 2024, Palantir reported $2.87 billion in total revenue, a 29 percent increase over 2023. Government revenue reached $1.57 billion (55 percent of the total), while commercial revenue grew to $1.30 billion (45 percent). U.S. government revenue alone grew 30 percent year over year to $1.20 billion. GAAP net income reached $462 million, up from $210 million in 2023, the company's second full year of profitability (Palantir 2025a). The customer base expanded from 497 in 2023 to 711 by year-end 2024, a 43 percent increase, while average revenue per top-twenty customer rose to $64.6 million.

The composition of that revenue matters more than the headline total. Total remaining deal value, a measure of contracted but not yet recognized revenue analogous to order backlog in manufacturing, reached $5.4 billion at the end of 2024, a 40 percent year-over-year increase. Commercial deal value grew 47 percent to $3.1 billion; government deal value stood at $2.3 billion (Palantir 2025a). The backlog records a shift from short-term, project-based engagements to multi-year subscriptions with usage-based pricing. In earnings commentary, management described this as a shift toward "consumption models" in which customers pay for the volume of data processed and queries run, embedding Palantir's software more deeply into daily operations and generating revenue that scales with use (Palantir 2025b).

This structure solves the lumpiness problem, because multi-year contracts with remaining performance obligations create visibility into future revenue. Usage-based components mean that revenue grows not only through new customer acquisition but through deeper adoption by existing clients. Integration into daily operational workflows raises switching costs to the point where renewal is simply easier than the alternative. Palantir's top-twenty customers had been with the company for an average of nine years by end of 2024 (Palantir 2025a).

Gross margins tell the same story, with Palantir reporting approximately 80 percent in 2024, a

figure characteristic of software businesses but extraordinary for a company whose primary customer is the Department of Defense (Palantir 2025a). Traditional defense primes operate on gross margins in the range of 15 to 25 percent, constrained by manufacturing costs and cost-plus contract structures. Palantir's margin reflects the near-zero marginal cost of software deployment: once the platform is built, each additional government user adds revenue with minimal incremental expense. At those margins, revenue growth feeds straight into operating income. Cash from operations reached $1.15 billion in 2024, a 40 percent margin. The cash flow, in turn, funds the stock-based compensation that aligns employee incentives with share price and the capital expenditures that deepen infrastructure advantages.

The U.S. government segment shows how geographically concentrated the revenue model is. In 2024, 66 percent of Palantir's total revenue came from customers in the United States, with U.S. government revenue growing 30 percent year over year to $1.20 billion (Palantir 2025a). That concentration is deliberate. U.S. defense and intelligence agencies are the world's largest purchasers of AI-enabled analysis and targeting software. Their procurement decisions set standards that allies often follow. Palantir's positioning as the dominant U.S. vendor also confers an advantage in allied procurement. NATO members seeking interoperable intelligence capabilities have every reason to adopt the platform that U.S. combatant commands already run.

Fiscal 2025 results point the same way. Reporting on 2 February 2026, Palantir posted fiscal-2025 revenue of $4.475 billion, up 56 percent, with U.S. government revenue of $1.86 billion and a customer count of 954. Net dollar retention reached 139 percent, and total contract value booked in the fourth quarter was $4.3 billion (Palantir 2026a). Guidance for fiscal 2026 was $7.182 billion to $7.198 billion. Contracted backlog, consumption pricing, and deeper adoption by existing clients account for the acceleration. The analysis below uses fiscal 2024 as its baseline and treats the later figures as a check on the pattern.

2.3 Civilizational Rhetoric as Demand Generation

Against this financial background, Karp's shareholder communications read as something other than philosophical musing. Each quarterly letter frames the geopolitical environment in terms of permanent, civilizational threat. "The West" appears as a brand proposition, the set of institutions whose survival depends on Palantir's software. The rhetoric does specific economic work, giving government clients a justification for treating the software as non-discretionary infrastructure investment instead of discretionary technology spending. If the threat is existential and permanent, then the software that addresses it cannot be treated as a line item subject to annual review. It has to

be embedded and renewed.

Palantir did not invent this tactic, and defense firms have long cultivated threat narratives to sustain demand (Adams 1982). What is unusual is that the civilizational discourse appears inside the investor communications, tied directly to financial metrics. When Karp quotes Huntington on "organized violence," the audience is shareholders and the argument concerns the durability of revenue. The claim is that Palantir's addressable market is coextensive with the threat perceptions of Western governments, whose sense of threat is both permanent and growing. Huntington's thesis functions here as a forward-looking revenue assumption: as long as "the West" perceives itself as threatened, Palantir's products will be funded.

The letters repay reading as financial documents. They appear quarterly alongside earnings reports in English, French, and German. They range from several hundred to roughly 1,500 words and draw on a repertoire of cultural references, from Saint Augustine to Michel Houellebecq, that frame Palantir's commercial activities within a civilizational narrative (Mathews 2025). Karp has described the letters as "a meandering proclamation of things we believe to be true," but their effect is more precise: they establish an interpretive frame in which Palantir's quarterly numbers count as evidence of the West's capacity to defend itself (Mathews 2025). Revenue growth reads as civilizational resilience. The letters transform financial reporting into a genre of threat literature, written for the institutional and retail investors whose capital allocation decisions determine the firm's cost of equity.

The market context is consistent with this account, though causation cannot be isolated. On 11 November 2024, Palantir's closing market capitalization of $137.17 billion overtook Lockheed Martin's $135.25 billion (Benzinga 2024), although Palantir's 2024 revenue of $2.87 billion was less than one-twentieth of Lockheed's 2023 net sales of $67.6 billion. At the closing high of 3 November 2025, the market capitalization reached $493.8 billion, or 110 times the $4.475 billion the company reported for fiscal 2025 three months later (Macrotrends 2026b; Palantir 2026a). Several drivers of this premium have nothing to do with shareholder letters: revenue growth accelerated through 2024 and 2025, the company entered the S&P 500 in September 2024 and the Nasdaq-100 that December, index inclusion forced passive buying, and enthusiasm for AI stocks lifted the whole sector (Statista 2025). The claim here is limited. The rhetoric and the valuation belong to a single demand narrative, and no attempt is made to measure the causal contribution of one to the other. Investors who pay these multiples are pricing a belief that the "AI revolution" in defense will produce sustained, high-margin growth for the firm best positioned to supply it. The shareholder letters articulate that belief in its most explicit form. In financial terms, Palantir is priced on a total addressable market thesis in which the threat environment itself is the market (Damodaran 2012). The premium is volatile, so no single

figure should be treated as stable: by the close of 30 July 2026, the share price stood at $122.26, 41 percent below the November 2025 high (Macrotrends 2026a).

2.4 Project Maven as Case Study

Project Maven shows how this works in practice. A Deputy Secretary of Defense memorandum established it in April 2017 as the "Algorithmic Warfare Cross-Functional Team," designed to integrate machine learning into the processing of full-motion video from unmanned aerial systems (Work 2017). Google was the initial contractor, but withdrew in 2018 after more than 3,100 employees signed a letter protesting the company's participation in "the business of war" (Shane and Wakabayashi 2018). The ethical controversy that forced Google's exit created the market opening that Palantir filled.

What followed is best set out in sequence. At the end of May 2024, the Army awarded Palantir a five-year, $480 million indefinite-delivery, indefinite-quantity (IDIQ) contract for the Maven Smart System (MSS), covering deployment to five combatant commands: Central, European, Indo-Pacific, Northern/NORAD, and Transportation (C4ISRNet 2024). By September 2024, a separate $99.8 million contract extended MSS access to the Army, Air Force, Navy, and Space Force (DefenseScoop 2025). Then, in May 2025, the Department of Defense raised the IDIQ contract ceiling by $795 million, bringing the total to nearly $1.3 billion through 2029. Pentagon officials cited "growing demand" from combatant commands, with the user base expanding from roughly 5,000 to over 20,000 active users in the span of a year (DefenseScoop 2025; SpaceNews 2025). Procurement justifications claim that the 18th Airborne Corps achieved operational efficiency equivalent to Operation Iraqi Freedom levels with roughly 20 personnel compared to the 2,000 required during the original operation.

Three features of this trajectory matter. The contract structure, an IDIQ with a rising ceiling, turns unsteady demand into an institutionalized revenue stream. The IDIQ mechanism allows the government to issue task orders against a master contract without separate procurement actions, reducing transaction costs for both parties but also deepening dependency on the incumbent vendor. The expansion from five combatant commands to all military services shows how integration into operational workflows generates its own demand: once Maven is embedded in targeting and intelligence processes at CENTCOM, the marginal cost of extending it to INDOPACOM or EUCOM is low, while the cost of introducing a competing system is high. And the speed of expansion, from $480 million to $1.3 billion in twelve months, suggests that initial deployment created usage patterns and institutional knowledge that made contract growth nearly automatic. This is the economics of platform lock-in applied to the kill chain.

Table 1. Palantir's Maven Smart System contract, May 2024 to May 2025

Date	Action	Contract value
End of May 2024	Army awards five-year IDIQ for deployment to five combatant commands	$480 million ceiling
September 2024	Separate award extends access to Army, Air Force, Navy, Space Force	$99.8 million
21 May 2025	Department of Defense modification raises the ceiling; completion date unchanged at May 2029	+$795 million, total near $1.3 billion

Sources: C4ISRNet (2024); DefenseScoop (2025); SpaceNews (2025). Active users rose from roughly 5,000 to more than 20,000 over the same period.

On 31 July 2025, the Army announced an Enterprise Service Agreement with Palantir worth up to $10 billion over ten years, consolidating 75 separate agreements, 15 prime contracts and 60 related ones, into a single vehicle for the Army's software and data needs; the Army noted that the figure is a maximum potential value, not a committed obligation (U.S. Army 2025; CNBC 2025c). The deal shows where the platform strategy leads. Once a vendor is sufficiently embedded in operational infrastructure, consolidating future requirements under one contract vehicle costs the government less friction than competitive procurement.

The procurement mechanisms behind this expansion matter too, because the Department of Defense has increasingly relied on Other Transaction Authority (OTA) agreements and the Software Acquisition Pathway (DoDI 5000.87, established October 2020) to circumvent traditional procurement timelines. The Defense Innovation Unit has directed the large majority of its Other Transaction awards to nontraditional defense vendors (DIU 2024). In March 2025, Secretary of Defense Hegseth issued a memorandum designating the Software Acquisition Pathway as the "preferred pathway" for software-intensive programs, institutionalizing the rapid procurement mechanisms that benefit companies like Palantir. These reforms, originally intended to bring Silicon Valley innovation to the Pentagon, have in practice created channels through which technology companies can establish sole-source positions and then expand contract ceilings without competitive rebidding. The same streamlining that speeds procurement up weakens the competitive discipline it is meant to provide.

3. The Infrastructure of Algorithmic Lethality: Compute, Capital, and Path Dependence

3.1 Material Requirements of AI Targeting

Palantir's software runs on hardware: graphics processing units and tensor processing units for model training and inference, high-bandwidth memory for large-context operations, and hardened data center infrastructure rated for processing classified information. The Maven Smart System ingests data from satellites, unmanned aerial vehicles, signals intelligence platforms, and ground-based sensors, applies computer vision and natural language processing algorithms to detect, identify, and track objects and patterns, and delivers outputs to commanders through secure interfaces (SpaceNews 2025). Each step has material requirements: compute, connectivity, storage, and cleared human operators.

These requirements give algorithmic warfare an economic geography, because not every state, and not every corporation, can assemble the combination of advanced semiconductors, cleared personnel, classified network access, and data center capacity required to operate systems like Maven. The infrastructure is concentrated in a small number of jurisdictions, primarily the United States and a handful of close allies, and controlled by a small number of firms. The concentration is the product of deliberate policy choices: export controls on advanced semiconductors (BIS 2022), security classification regimes, and procurement rules that limit competition to vendors with existing clearances and accreditations.

3.2 The Political Economy of Compute Infrastructure

Start with the semiconductor supply chain. Over 90 percent of the world's most advanced logic chips are manufactured by a single company, Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC), at fabrication facilities in Taiwan, with newer plants under construction in Arizona and Japan (Miller 2022). The U.S. Bureau of Industry and Security's October 2022 and subsequent export control rules restricted the sale of advanced AI-capable chips and semiconductor manufacturing equipment to China, explicitly framing compute as a strategic resource whose distribution determines military-technological balance (BIS 2022; Allen 2023). Training and deploying AI models, including those used for targeting, now depends on access to hardware concentrated in a small number of supply chains. These controls entrench that fact.

Classified cloud computing is the next layer. Amazon Web Services GovCloud, Microsoft Azure Government, and dedicated classified facilities operated by these companies and by the intelligence community provide the compute environments in which platforms like Maven run.

Palantir's own filings reveal a ten-year cloud services commitment of at least $1.95 billion through September 2033, indicating the scale of infrastructure dependency (Palantir 2025c). The Joint Warfighting Cloud Capability (JWCC), the Pentagon's multi-vendor cloud contract succeeding the cancelled JEDI program, distributes classified and unclassified cloud access across Amazon, Microsoft, Google, and Oracle, but within strict security boundaries that limit which applications can run on which environments (DOD 2022).

Security classification creates its own tiered barriers to entry. The Defense Information Systems Agency maintains Impact Levels running from IL4, for Controlled Unclassified Information, through IL5, for higher-sensitivity CUI, to IL6, for SECRET-level workloads requiring a dedicated enclave connected to the Secret Internet Protocol Router Network, cleared personnel, and accredited physical facilities (DISA 2024). Each level imposes additional accreditation requirements on both the cloud provider and the application vendor. Palantir's platforms operate across all three domains. That positioning creates a form of data exclusivity. Classified data processed within Palantir's environments cannot migrate to competitor platforms without re-accreditation processes that can take years. The four million labeled military images accumulated through Maven's operational deployment represent a training dataset that no competitor can replicate without equivalent access to classified intelligence feeds.

Whoever controls compute has considerable say over who can wage algorithmic war. The geographic concentration of advanced chip fabrication in allied democracies, the restriction of chip exports to adversary states, and the small number of cloud providers cleared for classified workloads together form a compute governance regime: a set of institutional and material arrangements that determine the distribution of AI capacity across actors (BIS 2022; Allen 2023). Palantir operates within that regime as a software layer that converts raw compute capacity into operationally deployable targeting and intelligence capability. Its market position depends on that regime holding: allied control of the chip supply chain, restricted compute access for adversaries, and government willingness to buy AI capacity from private platforms instead of building in-house.

The business logic here is straightforward. Training the machine learning models behind targeting systems like Maven requires substantial compute budgets: GPU-hours measured in the thousands for fine-tuning existing models on classified datasets, and potentially millions for training new architectures from scratch. Inference, the ongoing processing of sensor data in operational settings, generates continuous compute demand that scales with the number of users and the volume of data ingested. Palantir's own $1.95 billion cloud commitment signals the scale of this compute dependency. When the firm commits to spending that sum over ten years on third-party cloud services,

it is buying the right to resell compute-enabled capability to government clients at software margins, arbitraging the difference between cloud infrastructure costs and the value of intelligence outputs. The cloud provider takes infrastructure returns and Palantir takes software returns. The government pays for both, typically at a markup that reflects the scarcity of vendors with the requisite clearances and platform capabilities.

3.3 Vendor Lock-in and Switching Costs

Transaction cost economics explains how these arrangements become durable market power. Oliver Williamson's (1985) concept of asset specificity identifies investments that cannot be easily redeployed to alternative uses as the source of hold-up problems in bilateral exchange. In defense software, asset specificity takes several forms, each raising the cost of switching to an alternative vendor.

Take data specificity first. Classified intelligence data ingested, processed, and stored within Palantir's platforms cannot be freely exported. Security protocols, data-handling agreements, and the accumulated volume of pattern-of-life analysis create data lock-in: the value of historical data increases with the platform that processes it and diminishes if that data must be migrated, reformatted, or reprocessed on a different system. For a combatant command that has been running Maven for years, the intelligence baseline is inseparable from the software environment that produced it.

Then there is integration specificity. Maven is not a standalone application but is wired into command and control workflows, connected to sensor feeds, and embedded in standard operating procedures. Replacing Maven would require not only installing new software but retraining operators, recertifying data connections, and revalidating intelligence products, a process measured in months or years rather than days. The U.S. military's Combined Joint All-Domain Command and Control (CJADC2) initiative, which aims to integrate data flows across all services and domains, deepens this integration by design. As Maven becomes a node in a broader network of interoperable systems, extracting it becomes more disruptive (DefenseScoop 2024).

Personnel are a third source of specificity, because operating classified defense software requires staff with active security clearances, a credential that takes months to obtain and that restricts the pool of qualified workers. Palantir's "forward-deployed engineers," who work on-site with government clients, develop relationship-specific knowledge of agencies' data environments and operational needs. Replacing the vendor means losing this tacit knowledge or waiting for a new vendor's staff to acquire equivalent clearances and understanding. The security clearance system thus functions as a barrier to entry that reinforces incumbent advantage, a form of government-created asset specificity (Markusen 2003).

A fourth source is procurement itself, where the federal acquisition system's complexity and risk aversion create a preference for known vendors with established performance records. The IDIQ contract structure allows agencies to issue task orders against existing vehicles rather than running new competitions, making it administratively easier to widen an incumbent's role than to introduce a competitor. The July 2025 consolidation of 75 Army contracts into a single vehicle with a $10 billion ceiling represents the institutional endpoint of this logic: the vendor becomes the infrastructure, and competitive procurement becomes a residual formality (U.S. Army 2025).

Defense hardware offers a precedent, because Lockheed Martin's control over F-35 intellectual property has left the government dependent on the manufacturer for sustainment. The Government Accountability Office reported in April 2024 that estimated sustainment costs had risen 44 percent, from $1.1 trillion in 2018 to $1.58 trillion in 2023, and that the Department of Defense now plans to spend more than $2 trillion on acquisition and sustainment across the program's life to 2088 (GAO 2024). Bajari and Tadelis (2001) showed formally that cost-plus and fixed-price contracts alike are vulnerable to hold-up when asset specificity is high. Boeing's KC-46 tanker, a fixed-price development programme on which the company has absorbed more than $7 billion in charges, shows what happens when procurement tries to shift risk in conditions of high complexity. For software platforms the risk allocation differs, but the logic is the same: the initial contract creates a dependency, which confers pricing power. Palantir's Maven ceiling, from $480 million to $1.3 billion in twelve months, is the F-35 pattern transposed into software, with platform integration doing the work that control of hardware IP does for Lockheed.

3.4 Path Dependence and the Self-Reinforcing Ecosystem

Together these forms of asset specificity produce path dependence. The initial decision to adopt a platform triggers investments, adaptations, and accommodations that make reversal progressively more costly (David 1985; Arthur 1994). Every additional data feed, trained operator, and intelligence product raises the cost of switching and lowers the cost of renewal. The resulting lock-in outlasts particular conflicts, threat assessments, and administrations.

The sovereignty implications follow. Where targeting software, intelligence analysis, and command-and-control integration come from a private firm, the state's capacity for organized violence is mediated by a commercial relationship. Palantir's founding-era governance structure, in which co-founders Alex Karp, Peter Thiel, and Stephen Cohen retain near-majority voting control through Class F shares regardless of their economic ownership (Palantir 2020a), means that the firm's strategic direction is effectively insulated from ordinary shareholder pressure. An expanding share of

U.S. military targeting infrastructure is therefore controlled by three individuals, subject to neither market discipline nor shareholder vote. The point is descriptive rather than normative.

The transatlantic supplier base is narrow as well. Palantir has signed a contract with NATO for a version of the Maven Smart System supporting Allied Command Operations (DefenseScoop 2025). The small number of firms with the requisite clearances, cloud accreditations, and operational experience to provide AI-enabled targeting software to Western militaries, Palantir prominent among them, constitutes a monopsony-oligopoly: a market with one buyer (the government) and very few sellers, in which competitive dynamics are weak and incumbency advantages are strong (Rogerson 1994). Algorithmic lethality therefore rests on a concentrated supplier base that is difficult to contest.

4. Risk Distribution: Who Benefits, Who Bleeds

4.1 Asymmetric Risk Structures

The economics described so far distribute risk asymmetrically. Palantir and firms occupying similar positions in the defense technology ecosystem benefit from rising threat perceptions: heightened geopolitical tension widens missions, accelerates procurement timelines, and justifies increased budgets. They also benefit from static or declining threat perceptions, which can be reframed as complacency requiring continued or increased investment in readiness capabilities. The payoff structure is convex: the firm captures upside in multiple states of the world while bearing limited downside.

An escalation in great-power competition, say between the United States and China over Taiwan, would almost certainly accelerate demand for AI-enabled intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities of the kind Palantir supplies. A sustained period of counterterrorism operations, as in the two decades following September 11, sustains demand for pattern-of-life analysis and targeting support. Even a period of relative peace does not eliminate demand, because defense establishments maintain readiness requirements, training programs, and intelligence capabilities that require continued software support. The only scenario in which Palantir's defense revenue faces material risk is one in which governments actively choose to in-source AI capability, accept the transition costs of switching vendors, or fundamentally restructure procurement, a scenario whose political economy makes it unlikely absent a major external shock.

Commercial diversification strengthens that convexity. In fiscal year 2024, 45 percent of the revenue came from non-government commercial customers, a share that has grown steadily from less than 40 percent in 2022 (Palantir 2025a). Commercial revenue hedges against defense budget cuts,

and the defense franchise supplies the credibility and security infrastructure that commercial clients want. Commercial scale then improves the platform that defense customers buy.

The introduction of Palantir's Artificial Intelligence Platform (AIP) in 2023 extended this cycle to the generative AI era. AIP allows organizations to deploy large language models within Palantir's existing security and governance frameworks, creating a single interface for both traditional data analysis and AI-driven decision-making. The commercial rollout of AIP through "bootcamps," intensive multi-day engagements that run live workflows on actual customer data, has become the company's primary sales and marketing mechanism, contributing to the 43 percent growth in customer count during 2024 (Palantir 2025a). AIP matters because it positions Palantir as the interface layer through which organizations interact with AI, whether for supply chain optimization or targeting analysis. Commercial and military use cases share much of the same architecture, so improvements in interface, model integration, and security protocols transfer from one to the other.

4.2 Who Bears the Downside

The downside falls elsewhere, on three groups. States bear the cost of platform dependency. Bound to multi-year contracts with high switching costs, governments lose procurement flexibility and accept de facto vendor control over critical capabilities. The Army enterprise agreement illustrates this trade-off: administrative efficiency is purchased at the price of competitive discipline. In the transaction cost framework, the government has made relationship-specific investments that shift bargaining power toward the vendor in subsequent negotiations (Williamson 1985).

Domestic publics bear the fiscal risk, because public funds finance the private development of algorithmic capacity that remains proprietary. Unlike traditional defense hardware, where the government often owns the designs and retains technical data rights, software-as-a-service models mean that the algorithms, the trained models, and the platform design remain with the vendor. Taxpayers fund the development and deployment of AI targeting systems whose commercial value accrues disproportionately to a firm whose equity is concentrated among a small number of shareholders and whose governance insulates decision-making from public accountability.

The institutional channels through which public funds flow to private vendors are reinforced by personnel circulation between government and industry. The Project on Government Oversight counted 645 instances in 2018 in which the twenty largest defense contractors of fiscal year 2016 hired former senior government officials, military officers, members of Congress, or senior legislative staff, with nearly 90 percent of them registering as lobbyists. An earlier survey by the Government Accountability Office had found 52 contractors employing 2,435 former Department of Defense

senior and acquisition officials as of 2006. Senator Elizabeth Warren's office repeated the exercise for 2022 and identified 672 cases, 91 percent of them registered lobbyists (POGO 2018; Warren 2023). People who later profit from procurement decisions thus help to make them, a circuit that conventional oversight has not managed to interrupt.

Targeted populations bear the risk of misclassification and error. Computer vision systems trained to detect objects and track movement in overhead imagery operate within confidence intervals; their outputs are probabilistic, not deterministic. When a Maven system identifies a pattern of life as consistent with hostile activity, the quality of that identification depends on training data, model design, operational context, and the judgment of human operators in the loop. Errors are externalities. False positives lead to strikes on civilians and false negatives miss actual threats. The cost falls on populations far from the earnings calls where the system's commercial success is measured. The economics of defense contracting provide no mechanism for these populations to negotiate the terms under which algorithmic force is applied to them.

Scholars have framed this as a problem of responsibility. Sparrow (2007) identified a "responsibility gap" in autonomous weapons systems: when an algorithm recommends a strike and a human operator approves it, moral and legal responsibility diffuses across programmer, operator, and commander without attaching firmly to any. Santoni de Sio and van den Hoven (2018) proposed that "meaningful human control" requires a "tracking condition," in which systems remain responsive to moral reasons, together with a "tracing condition," in which outcomes are traceable to human decisions. Neither condition is routinely met. Downey (2025) concludes that human-in-the-loop safeguards in algorithmic targeting amount to "effectively nothing more than a convenient fallacy," with AI providing an "alibi for the prosecution of wholesale methods of killing."

The Lavender and Gospel targeting systems documented in Gaza by +972 Magazine in 2024 show what this looks like operationally, including the algorithmic designation of approximately 37,000 individuals as targets with a 10 percent acknowledged error rate, average human review times of 20 seconds per target, and authorization of 15 to 20 civilian casualties per strike on a junior operative and over 100 per senior commander (Abraham 2024). The Gospel system was reported to generate 100 credible targets per day compared to 50 per year under previous methods. These systems are not Palantir products, and no public evidence connects Palantir's platforms to them. They are cited as evidence about the wider ecosystem of algorithmic targeting, in which Palantir is one prominent vendor among several; every Palantir-specific claim in this article rests instead on the filings, contracts, and procurement records described in the introduction. The speed advantages that procurement justifications cite for Maven, such as 80 targets per hour compared to 30 without, reflect

the same logic of throughput maximization: the value proposition is acceleration, and acceleration compresses the time available for the moral reasoning that meaningful human control requires.

Industry incentives compound the accountability problem. Hartung (2021) found that 75 percent or more of the top foreign-policy think tanks in the United States receive funding from defense contractors. Over 80 percent of retired four-star generals and admirals work for arms manufacturers. These relationships bear on threat assessments, capability evaluations, and procurement recommendations in ways that favor expanded defense spending and the adoption of new weapons technologies. The incentive to identify threats consistently outweighs the incentive to verify them. Populations with no voice in procurement absorb the cost of algorithmic error.

4.3 The Financialization of Existential Threat

This asymmetry amounts to a financialization of existential threat. When civilizational rhetoric enters shareholder communications, it ceases to operate solely in the register of strategic doctrine or political philosophy and begins to function as a financial instrument. Karp's invocation of Huntington is priced into Palantir's stock: investors who buy PLTR shares at several hundred times trailing earnings are, in effect, buying a claim on the expected future of Western threat perception. Bookings, renewals, and forward guidance are metrics of fear. The "specter" of the enemy, to borrow the language of this issue's thematic inquiry, is present in quarterly filings as much as in strategic doctrine.

The effects run in the other direction as well. When rising threat perceptions drive stock price appreciation, the resulting increase in market capitalization gives Palantir greater capacity to invest in lobbying, talent acquisition, and product development, which in turn deepens its entrenchment in defense infrastructure and its influence over threat narratives. A company valued in the hundreds of billions has different political influence than one valued at $10 billion. Stock-based compensation aligns employee incentives with share price, meaning that the firm's workforce has a financial interest in the perpetuation of the demand conditions, elevated threat perceptions and expanding defense budgets, that drive revenue growth. The economics are circular. Revenue, valuation, and political influence move together, and each round makes the next threat assessment easier to sustain.

4.4 Differential Exposure to Algorithmic Force

Exposure is also geographically uneven, because the populations made "targetable" by AI-enabled ISR systems are those already located within the operational theaters of Western military power: predominantly in the Middle East, Central Asia, the Horn of Africa, and increasingly the Indo-Pacific. The geographic distribution of Project Maven's deployment, initially across five combatant

commands spanning these regions, maps onto preexisting patterns of Western military intervention. Algorithmic targeting does not create these patterns, but it does lower the marginal cost of surveillance and targeting within them, potentially widening the range of operations that are considered feasible (Chamayou 2015).

Export widens that exposure. The NATO contract for the Maven Smart System extends algorithmic targeting capability to allied governments, each with its own threat assessments, political constraints, and accountability regimes. The proliferation of AI-enabled targeting within the Western alliance, facilitated by a single vendor's platform, standardizes the infrastructure of lethal decision-making while distributing the consequences of its application across populations who have no contractual, commercial, or democratic relationship with the firm providing the capability. In Achille Mbembe's (2003) terms, the "necropolitical" question of who is exposed to death is mediated by the contract economics of software procurement: the same IDIQ mechanism that solves Palantir's demand lumpiness problem determines the practical boundaries of algorithmic lethality.

The link between the business model and this issue's theme is an argument, not an atmosphere. Sections 2 and 3 established two premises. Recurring contracts reward threats that do not expire, and the infrastructure built against them outlasts any particular conflict. A third point follows. The model needs a continuing supply of subjects who can be read as latent threats, and pattern-of-life analysis manufactures them. A person becomes a data object whose ordinary movements are scored for hostility. That score is what makes the person targetable. Mbembe (2003, 11) locates sovereignty in the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die. The necropolitics literature traces how that capacity attaches to infrastructures as much as to sovereign decision. What the economic analysis adds is the ledger on which this capacity is entered. The spectral subject appears twice in the documents examined here: once in the targeting system, as a scored pattern of life, and once in the financial filings, as the threat perception that supports backlog, renewals, and forward guidance. Repeated contracts require the perception of civilizational threat, and that perception requires a continuous supply of populations who embody it.

5. Conclusion: Organized Violence as a Traded Good

Civilizational rhetoric becomes revenue through contracts. That revenue is embedded in infrastructure, and the resulting risk falls very unevenly. Palantir is one case of a broader shift in Western defense, from manufacturing-centered prime contracting to software-centered platform provision, with consequences for sovereignty, accountability, and the distribution of lethal force. Converting diffuse threat perceptions into contracted demand requires infrastructure that entrenches the vendor beyond

any particular conflict. That entrenchment is what lets the vendor capture upside across threat scenarios. States, publics, and targeted populations absorb the costs.

The invocation of "organized violence" in a shareholder letter is a fairly precise description of the firm's value proposition. Palantir organizes violence in a literal economic sense. It provides the informational infrastructure through which dispersed data is collected, processed, and made actionable for targeting decisions. It then captures a portion of the value created, as subscription revenue, contract backlog, and equity appreciation. Huntington's thesis, whatever its merits as history, functions in this context as a theory of demand: the West rose through organized violence, the West is perpetually threatened, and therefore the West will perpetually require Palantir's services.

Karp omits what comes next in Huntington. Huntington's point was cautionary: he argued that the West's reliance on military-technological superiority made it vulnerable because it obscured the degree to which that superiority rested on contingent material advantages rather than universal values. As Edward Said (2001) observed, Huntington's thesis itself performed a kind of civilizational demand generation, producing the very clash it purported to describe. Karp reads the warning as an instruction manual, converting a diagnosis of Western vulnerability into a business plan for Western technological renewal. The irony is that Palantir's own position, dependent on TSMC fabrication in a geopolitically contested Taiwan, on classified cloud infrastructure operated by a handful of commercial providers, and on revolving-door relationships with government procurement officials, reproduces the fragile material dependencies that Huntington identified as the underside of Western power.

The question of responsibility that animates this issue's broader inquiry, who is answerable when a CEO celebrates algorithmic lethality, cannot be resolved through moral judgment alone. When violence is automated, privatized, and embedded in contractual relationships governed by procurement law, the chain of accountability is diffused across procurement officers, congressional appropriators, program managers, system integrators, algorithm designers, and forward-deployed engineers, none of whom individually controls the outcome. That diffusion is a feature of the arrangement, not a defect in it. Each participant can disclaim agency while the system produces lethal effects. Reassembling responsibility would mean intervening in the contracts, procurement rules, and liability regimes that disperse it.

The market's own assessment says as much. Morningstar's equity research team assigns the company a "narrow economic moat" based on switching costs and intangible assets, noting that Palantir is "deeply ingrained in diverse end markets and mission-critical customer infrastructure" (Morningstar 2026). What this article treats as a governance problem, the equity analyst treats as a

competitive advantage. Average revenue from the top twenty customers reached $64.6 million in the twelve months to 31 December 2024, up from $54.6 million a year earlier (Palantir 2025d), and net dollar retention stood at 139 percent at the end of fiscal 2025 (Palantir 2026a). Investors celebrate these metrics; defense reformers should scrutinize them. In CNBC's screen of the index on 4 November 2025, the day after the closing high, Palantir traded at a forward price-to-earnings multiple of 228 against about 23 for the S&P 500 as a whole, with the next most expensive constituents, AppLovin and CrowdStrike, at 29.3 and 24.8 times sales (CNBC 2025b). A market that prices civilizational threat as more durable demand than cybersecurity incidents or advertising software is doing a form of threat inflation of its own. Capital that rewards firms for turning civilizational anxiety into revenue also rewards keeping the narrative alive.

Several policy levers follow, and can be stated briefly. Procurement reform could mandate data portability, interoperability standards, and periodic competitive rebidding, restoring the discipline that enterprise consolidation removes. Liability regimes could assign responsibility for misclassification and targeting error to the firms that design the underlying algorithms, internalizing costs now borne by targeted populations. Export controls could extend from semiconductor hardware to AI-enabled targeting systems, and public investment in government-owned AI capability, on the model of the federally funded research and development centers that produced earlier generations of defense technology, could recreate alternatives to proprietary platforms (Mowery 2012). Compute governance offers a further instrument: permit systems calibrated to the risk profile of targeting applications would price the social costs of algorithmic lethality into the cost structure of the firms that supply it. Each of these interventions involves trade-offs between efficiency, security, and accountability that this article can identify but not resolve. All of them depend on a clear account of the contract designs, switching costs, revenue models, and capital flows that make organized violence profitable.

The analysis has limits. It draws primarily on public sources: SEC filings, press releases, procurement announcements, and journalistic reporting. The classified dimensions of Palantir's work, including the specific capabilities, performance characteristics, and operational employment of Maven, are not accessible through open-source research. The company's own disclosures set the outer limit of what can be established: the fiscal-2025 annual report describes an employee base of 4,429 and top-three customers at 16 percent of revenue, but reports no segment breakdown by program (Palantir 2026b). Palantir is treated here as a case study, but similar patterns of lock-in, demand narrative, and risk asymmetry may operate across the sector, at firms such as Anduril, Scale AI, and Shield AI whose business models differ but whose incentives do not. Extending the analysis across the sector, and testing whether the procurement reforms suggested here are workable under

existing law, would be the obvious next step.

Huntington wrote that Westerners often forget the role of organized violence in their own ascent. The financial arrangements described here give investors, at least, a standing reason to remember. It is encoded in their portfolios.

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Gamified Necropolitics: A Sarcastic Proposal for Gamification, Suicide Prevention, and the Use of AR/AI in the Israeli Military Context

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Abstract: War in Gaza has become a testing ground for algorithmic targeting, data-driven classification, and interfaces that promise to make violence faster while keeping responsibility difficult to locate. This theory-fiction essay develops the concept of gamified necropolitics: the organisation of exposure to death through the perceptual and procedural grammar of games. Its speculative centre is an augmented-reality system for Israeli soldiers that replaces human faces with digital skins, converts action into score, and supplies disposable stories at the point of contact. The system is fictional. Its components extrapolate from documented military developments, including mixed-reality headsets, synthetic training environments, battlefield-management platforms, and reported uses of machine-assisted target generation in Gaza. The fiction is used as a diagnostic instrument rather than a forecast.

The essay places this proposal in dialogue with scholarship on necropolitics, military vision, technical images, attention, algorithmic governmentality, and the military-entertainment network. It argues that the military interface does not simply represent a battlefield to a pre-existing observer. It helps produce the observer as an operational subject. Perceptual governance names this formatting of the field of appearance; epistemic erasure\ names the removal of histories that would interfere with a target's classification. Yet the interface cannot seal itself. Testimony, refusal, and moral injury return as evidence of what the system fails to absorb. The specter is not proof of an untouched human soul beneath the machine. It is a fault in an assemblage that can calculate a target without exhausting the life it has reduced.

Keywords: gamified necropolitics; theory-fiction; augmented reality; algorithmic warfare; Gaza; military vision; perceptual governance; techno-subjectivity

Boot Sequence: A Proposal That Must Not Be Built

War keeps failing because people keep showing up in it.

They have faces. Faces interrupt target acquisition. They arrive carrying names, debts, kitchens, dead relatives, unfinished messages, and the memory of what stood where the map now shows a grey polygon. A face is a delay inserted into the trigger circuit. A street is worse. A street remembers who was expelled, who returned, who could not. History produces lag.

The proposal is simple: remove the lag.

Issue every soldier a mixed-reality headset. Do not merely provide navigation. Do not stop at thermal vision or a blue outline around a friendly unit. Build a complete perception pipeline. Replace faces with skins. Replace context with game logic. Replace history with level design. If blood must remain visible, recolour it as interface feedback. If doubt appears, classify it as latency. If guilt persists, log a fault and schedule maintenance.

This proposal is not a description of a fielded Israeli military system. It is theory-fiction: an engineered exaggeration assembled from tendencies that already exist across military research, synthetic training, heads-up displays, algorithmic classification, gaming culture, and the public narration of the assault on Gaza. Its purpose is neither prediction nor plausible product design. It makes an argument by giving institutional desire an interface. Satire states the wish too plainly for the institution to recognise itself.

The wish has a technical vocabulary. The US Army describes the Integrated Visual Augmentation System (IVAS) as a mixed-reality platform intended to help soldiers fight, rehearse, and train while combining mapping, low-light sensors, navigation, and advanced targeting functions in a heads-up display (Shear 2023; Montanaro 2025). Israeli forces have used digital systems for target generation and battlefield coordination, while investigative reporting has described the use of systems known as *The Gospel* and *Lavender* to accelerate the production of targets during the assault on Gaza (Abraham 2023; Abraham 2024). These systems are not interchangeable. A targeting database is not an AR skin, and a synthetic training environment is not a live-fire headset. The fiction begins by joining them. That illegitimate join is also its method: it reveals a shared demand that perception, classification, and action occur with less friction.

Achille Mbembe's account of necropolitics names the sovereign power to determine who may live and who must die, but it also concerns the material organisation of worlds in which some populations are kept under conditions of exposure to death (Mbembe 2003, 11–12, 39–40). Gamified necropolitics does not replace that account. It asks what happens when necropolitical power is formatted

by game-like systems of feedback. The issue is not that killing suddenly becomes unreal. The issue is that reality reaches the operator through procedures that make action repeatable, measurable, and apparently self-explanatory.

The term *gamification* can easily become lazy. Points do not need to appear on a screen for organised violence to be procedural, and video games did not invent military abstraction. War games preceded digital games; military research helped produce computer graphics, simulation, and networked play. James Der Derian calls the convergence of military power, media, and entertainment a military-industrial-media-entertainment network in which the production, representation, and execution of war increasingly share technologies (Der Derian 2009). Tim Lenoir and Henry Lowood trace a related military-entertainment complex through the traffic between defence simulation and commercial games (Lenoir and Lowood 2005). Roger Stahl's account of *militainment* shows how war is not merely represented as entertainment but folded into habits of participation (Stahl 2010). The movement is not from innocent game to corrupted battlefield. The circuits were entangled before the player spawned.

This essay therefore uses **gamified necropolitics** in a narrow sense: a regime in which the classifications governing exposure to death are joined to interface conventions that organise attention, reward action, and suppress context. Four terms guide the argument. None arrives on empty ground. **Western techno-subjectivity** extends long debates about the technically produced observer rather than naming a timeless Western mind. **Perceptual governance** draws together Jonathan Crary's history of the observer, Paul Virilio's logistics of perception, and Antoinette Rouvroy and Thomas Berns's algorithmic governmentality (Crary 1990; Virilio 1989; Rouvroy and Berns 2013). **Epistemic erasure** describes a more violent operation than omission: the removal or replacement of knowledge that would disturb a target category. **Moral latency** belongs to the fiction. It is the name the imagined system gives to the time conscience takes.

The paper keeps Gaza at its centre without claiming that gamified war began there. The Gulf War made remote destruction available to Western television audiences as an apparently continuous electronic present. Later wars tightened the relation between live feeds, simulation, and remote operation. Drone warfare turned the screen into a workplace of lethal observation (Gregory 2011; Chamayou 2015). Gaza is neither the first mediated war nor the first algorithmic occupation. It is a scene in which an existing history of militarised vision has met an extreme density of surveillance, classification, and destructive force.

The argument proceeds through a corrupted user manual. First, delete context. Then install three layers: Skin, Score, Story. Finally, diagnose the residue the system cannot classify. The residue

will be called a specter, though it is not immaterial. It has a body under rubble. It has a name outside the target list.

Deleting Context: The Map Loads Before History

> **SYSTEM REQUIREMENT 01: CONTEXT REMOVAL**
> Memory use must remain low. Historical causation is non-essential data. Architecture may be retained as geometry. Local names should be replaced by mission labels. A neighbourhood is a map with civilians still cached inside it.

The first operation of gamified necropolitics is not visual deception but contextual compression. Before the headset changes what a person looks like, the military map changes what a place can mean. A building becomes a coordinate. A family becomes a probable pattern of presence. A district becomes a zone through which risk values move. The world is not hidden; it is rendered operationally visible.

Jonathan Crary's *Techniques of the Observer* is useful here because it refuses the idea that vision belongs to a stable human subject who simply receives new devices. Optical systems produce historically distinct observers, each trained through instruments, institutions, and bodily disciplines (Crary 1990). His later history of attention shows that attentiveness is never only an inner faculty. It is organised as a productive capacity and exposed to capture by disciplinary systems (Crary 1999). The soldier looking through a military interface should not be imagined as an autonomous eye using a neutral tool. The interface arranges the soldier's attention before it assists a decision.

Figure 1 shows a Counter-Strike character model carrying a small cluster of German tactical signifiers. The flag patch, dark visor, and partly obscured unit emblem produce enough institutional recognition for play. They do not supply a political history. National identity is reduced to an inventory of detachable visual tokens.



Figure 1. Counter-Strike character model carrying German national and police-tactical signifiers. A flag patch, visor, and partly obscured unit emblem manufacture factional legibility without supplying historical context. The uniform functions as a readable class: enough identity to organise play, not enough history to interrupt it. Game asset: Counter-Strike: Global Offensive (Valve Corporation 2012); image supplied by the author.

This is what a skin does well. It makes identity instantly legible and infinitely replaceable. The character appears German in the same way a door appears interactive: through a compact visual code. Nothing in the model explains what institution it belongs to, what legal authority it possesses, or what history organised that authority. The player does not need those answers. The player needs faction recognition at speed.

Counter-Strike refined this economy of recognition by minimising narrative continuity between rounds. Its maps retain the residue of real places while freeing that residue from political obligation. Figure 2 shows *de_cache*, whose post-industrial surfaces and nuclear-disaster associations become the setting for a bomb-defusal loop. Ruin is preserved as atmosphere. The disaster has become navigable texture.



Figure 2. Screenshot from Counter-Strike 2 on a community version of de_cache, a map whose post-industrial architecture evokes Eastern European nuclear ruins. The bomb device, countdown, HUD, and objective logic convert an environment marked by disaster into actionable geometry. Place survives as atmosphere while history is suspended. Game: Counter-Strike 2 (Valve Corporation 2023); screenshot supplied by the author.

In play, the question is not what happened here. The question is where an opponent might appear. The environment becomes a set of angles, timings, and lines of sight. This is not an accusation

that Counter-Strike secretly teaches a particular foreign policy. It is an account of the perceptual competence the game rewards: discard whatever does not affect the round.

Vilém Flusser describes technical images as products of apparatuses rather than windows that transparently disclose a world (Flusser 2000). The photographer plays with the camera's programme, yet that play occurs within possibilities already arranged by the apparatus. Counter-Strike offers a more literal version of programmed vision. The player is active, skilled, and capable of surprise, but action remains conditioned by the map, weapon statistics, hitboxes, faction rules, and code. The military interface intensifies this relation because its categories can determine what appears actionable in a world where the bodies are not simulated.

The epistemic violence lies in what must be removed for the operational image to work. A Palestinian home does not enter a targeting system as a lived archive. It enters through attributes that a system can process: location, observed movement, communications data, inferred association, proximity, or structural classification. Louise Amoore argues that algorithmic systems do not reveal complete persons; they generate partial accounts through attributes whose relations are made to stand for the subject (Amoore 2020). A target profile is such a partial account, but one armed with institutional force.

Epistemic erasure names the conversion of partiality into apparent sufficiency. It occurs when the system's incomplete account is allowed to close the question of who or what a person is. The missing history is not an unfortunate gap awaiting better data. Its absence makes the target operational. More context might introduce uncertainty. Uncertainty costs time.

> **PERFORMANCE NOTE**
> If the operator asks why the target is there, the level has failed. If the operator asks who built the level, disable chat.

A direct line from Renaissance perspective to the first-person shooter would move too quickly. The relation is not a simple causal sequence. Alberti did not invent Counter-Strike, and linear perspective is not inherently colonial because it has a vanishing point. The more defensible claim concerns a recurring technical desire: to stabilise an observer, order space around that observer, and translate the visible field into measurable relations.

Friedrich Kittler's *Optical Media* follows transformations from perspective and the camera obscura through film, television, and computer graphics (Kittler 2010). His history does not present modern media as external aids to an unchanged human sensorium. Media determine what can be stored, transmitted, and processed. Under digital conditions, the image becomes calculable. The

perspectival grid no longer organises only representation; it can participate in modelling, navigation, and targeting.

Virilio's *War and Cinema* makes a related but more exact claim than the slogan that all vision is war. He traces the co-development of military operations and cinematic technologies, from reconnaissance and aerial photography to weapon systems in which seeing and striking become coupled (Virilio 1989). The "logistics of perception" is not optics in general. It is the organisation of images, speeds, and viewpoints for military action. The shift that matters for this paper is from an image inspected by an observer to an operational image that prompts, constrains, or initiates action.

The Gulf War forms one threshold in that history. Vietnam had already been called a television war, but the 1991 Gulf War arrived through continuous cable news, cockpit footage, green night-vision images, and military briefings that presented destruction as a sequence of technical demonstrations. Baudrillard's provocation that the Gulf War "did not take place" concerned the Western media event, not a denial that Iraqis were killed (Baudrillard 1995). War appeared to Western audiences through a screen regime that made its own mediation difficult to perceive. Precision became an image before it became an independently assessed outcome.

The first-person shooter inherits pieces of this visual history while also transforming them. It anchors action to a mobile camera whose centre often coincides with the weapon. The player does not merely look at the space. Looking steers force through it. In that limited sense, the vanishing point becomes the crosshair.

Figure 3 shows a Counter-Strike model coded as an FBI tactical operator. Institutional lettering supplies an official identity while the reusable body remains a class selected from a menu. The model is not a portrait of an agent. It is an interface between faction, capability, and player expectation.



Figure 3. Counter-Strike tactical character model coded through FBI lettering, standardised equipment, and a masked face. Institutional specificity is promised by the insignia, yet the body remains a repeatable game class selected for function. The skin joins authority to interchangeability. Game asset: Counter-Strike: Global Offensive (Valve Corporation 2012); image supplied by the author.

The face is covered, but the faction is readable. The player encounters neither a person nor a legal institution. What appears is a package of anticipated behaviours. Crary's constructed observer is joined here by a constructed observed: a body formatted in advance for recognition.

Figure 4 makes an intentionally speculative comparison between the garden at Casa Vasari in Arezzo and a fountain courtyard in Counter-Strike's *de_inferno*. It does not claim that the map designer copied Vasari. The juxtaposition tests how architectural motifs can travel from inhabited and art-historical spaces into navigable combat geometry.



Figure 4. Analytical juxtaposition assembled by the author. Left: the garden pond at Casa Vasari, Arezzo. Right: a fountain courtyard in Counter-Strike's de_inferno. The comparison proposes a visual rhyme rather than a line of influence: bounded water, axial sight, and enclosed architecture are reorganised as navigable combat space. Sources: left image supplied by the author; right, Counter-Strike 2 screenshot (Valve Corporation 2023), supplied by the author.

The visual rhyme matters because game space can detach form from duration. A courtyard built through maintenance, weather, labour, and ritual becomes a tactical interval between corners. Architecture loses neither beauty nor recognisability. It loses consequence. The map is clean because the lives that gave the place duration have not loaded.

Bernard Stiegler's account of technics complicates any nostalgia for an unmediated human

gaze. Human memory and agency have always been exteriorised through tools and supports; there is no pure subject before technics to which the paper can simply return (Stiegler 1998). The problem, then, is not that an interface contaminates natural perception. The political question is who designs the supports through which perception becomes possible, what temporal demands they impose, and which forms of hesitation they treat as failure.

Figure 5 makes the problem of political coding visible. Its beret, uniform, and insignia loosely evoke European separatist militancy without establishing a coherent affiliation. The ambiguity is functional. It produces a target class able to circulate between imagined conflicts.

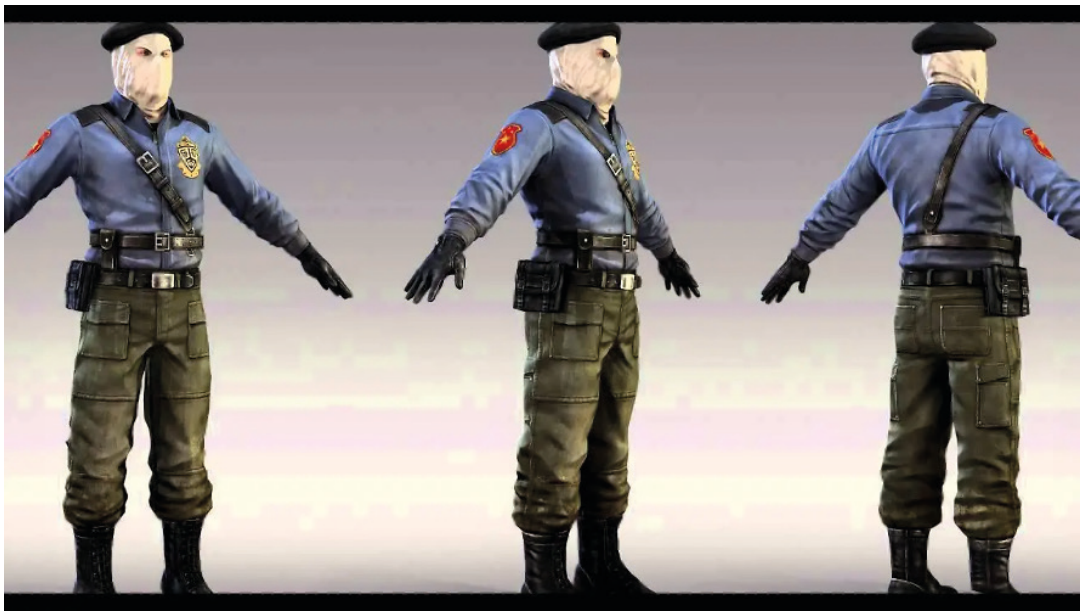

Figure 5. Counter-Strike character skin loosely coded through a beret, insignia, and paramilitary uniform as a European separatist militant. The referent remains unstable. Recognisable militancy is produced without a coherent political history, allowing the figure to function as a portable enemy type. Game asset: Counter-Strike: Global Offensive (Valve Corporation 2012); image supplied by the author.

The game's enemy must be particular enough to recognise and generic enough to reuse. Colonial classification performs a comparable operation under lethal conditions. It manufactures populations as administratively distinct while treating individual members as interchangeable. Kishonna Gray's account of necropolitics in digital gaming shows how racialised histories can be both mobilised and disavowed within game worlds (Gray 2023). Judith Butler's *Frames of War* asks how frames organise which lives become apprehensible as lives and which deaths become publicly grievable (Butler 2009). Skinning is where these problems meet. It does not merely conceal a face. It supplies a frame that has already decided what kind of body can appear.

The Western techno-subject emerging here is not Western by passport or geography alone. Israel's military is situated within its own settler-colonial history, regional project, and state ideology. Yet its systems also participate in transnational circuits of US military research, global cloud infrastructure, European and North American security doctrine, and commercial interface culture. "Western" names this political-technical formation, not a civilisational essence. The category should remain uncomfortable. It identifies a network whose centres of power are distributed even while their violence is concentrated elsewhere.

Field Test: Skin, Score, Story

> **PROTOTYPE NAME:** CONSCIENCE STABILISATION LAYER
> **DEPLOYMENT STATUS:** FICTIONAL
> **DESIGN PURPOSE:** Reduce interpretive drift during contact. Maintain operator confidence. Prevent unauthorised recognition.

The headset requires three layers. Skin governs appearance. Score governs affect. Story governs justification. Together they form a minimal architecture of perceptual governance. They do not replace military doctrine or targeting intelligence. They deliver those systems into the sensorium of the operator.

Layer One: Skin

> Civilians show as tutorial bots. Adolescents as ragdolls. Men of fighting age as NPCs with predictable pathing. Red icons are red not because of blood. Red because of UI convention.

A skin changes appearance without changing the object underneath. In a commercial game, that distinction is harmless: the same weapon statistics can be wrapped in another colour. Applied to a living body, the distinction becomes obscene. The person remains physically present while the interface substitutes an operational likeness.

The fiction extends practices that already precede AR. Military language, racial categories, surveillance taxonomies, and remote sensing have long converted people into types. Grégoire Chamayou describes drone warfare as a form of manhunting organised through patterns, signatures, and continuous tracking (Chamayou 2015). Derek Gregory argues that drone vision creates a "scopic regime" in which apparent visual intimacy coexists with cultural and political distance (Gregory 2011, 190, 206). High resolution does not guarantee recognition. A system can see the body in detail

while knowing it only as a target.

Skin makes this contradiction wearable. Its task is not simply to hide gore. It controls the ontological status of what appears. A person marked as an NPC has not merely been anonymised. Their behaviour has been pre-narrated as code. Their movement appears predictable; resistance becomes pathing; fear becomes animation.

Levinas's account of ethics locates an irreducible demand in the encounter with the face of the Other (Levinas 1985). Yet the political use of that philosophy must be handled carefully. An uncovered face does not automatically prevent violence, and Palestinians should not have to perform recognisable vulnerability to become protected. Butler's account of framing is more useful at the point where visibility itself has been organised in advance. Skin is a frame that blocks the encounter before any literal mask is applied. It decides that the face is not a face.

The military value of the layer is the removal of ambiguity. A frightened person holding an unclassified object produces too many interpretations. The icon supplies one. Perceptual governance works not by making the soldier blind but by making one reading arrive first, brightly coloured and institutionally authorised.

Layer Two: Score

> Every confirmed action updates a private leaderboard. Do not display civilian casualty estimates. Display response time. Reward continuity. Convert survival into retention metrics. Convert killing into proof that the interface works.

Score is more than points. It is the conversion of action into feedback. Militaries have always counted bodies, awarded rank, circulated commendations, and evaluated units. Gamification compresses this temporal structure. Recognition arrives instantly and privately. It can be repeated without ceremony.

Ian Bogost argues that gamification often strips games into simple, repeatable techniques that serve managerial or marketing ends (Bogost 2011). In war, the problem is not merely motivational design. Score defines what counts as an event. A completed strike, a confirmed target, a reduced response time, or a successful interception becomes a unit of achievement. What cannot be scored is likely to appear as noise.

Crary's history of attention helps explain why score is perceptual rather than merely administrative. Modern attention is bound to systems demanding sustained performance while continually threatening distraction (Crary 1999). The HUD manages that instability. Pop-ups, alerts, confirmations, and progress markers return the operator to the task. Doubt is not prohibited through

argument. It is crowded out by the next signal.

The imagined leaderboard makes explicit what the wider apparatus already does through target-production rates, sortie counts, response times, and assessments of "battle damage." Quantification permits comparison across bodies that do not share a history. It creates an abstract equivalence between the destroyed and makes the process auditable according to its own aims.

> **PATCH NOTE 2.4**
> Fixed an error in which the operator continued to remember a target after confirmation.
> Memory now clears when the next objective appears.

Layer Three: Story

> Seed micro-narratives into the field. None longer than a paragraph. None capable of generating durable empathy. Every story must close the question it appears to open. Think waypoint, not witness.

Story is the most dangerous layer because it resembles context. Skin removes the target's humanity. Story returns just enough narrative to justify the removal. A house receives a disposable explanation: command node, weapons cache, tunnel access, hostile family. The explanation may be based on intelligence, inference, or automated correlation. What matters operationally is that it arrives before doubt.

Rouvroy and Berns describe algorithmic governmentality as a mode of governing through data correlations that bypasses the reflective subject and acts upon possible behaviour (Rouvroy and Berns 2013). The subject does not need to be persuaded by a coherent ideology if the environment has already been adjusted around a profile. Story adapts that logic to the point of contact. It does not ask the soldier to believe an entire history. It supplies a local reason for the next action.

Flusser's apparatus has a programme. Story is the programme speaking in prose. It turns the system's correlation into an account of motive: this person is here because they belong here; this building will be destroyed because it was always already a target. The narrative hides the transformation through which probabilities became attributes and attributes became lethal certainty.

Epistemic erasure therefore has two phases. First, remove situated knowledge: the family's own account, the neighbourhood's history, the legal and political conditions of occupation. Then install synthetic context that confirms the operation. Nothing appears contextless. It appears beneath the wrong context, delivered at the correct speed.

Figure 6 visualises the combined layers. The weapon has become a luminous object, while the body ahead breaks into effects. The scene does not suppress violence by becoming empty. It saturates violence with style.



Figure 6. AI-generated first-person scene built from Counter-Strike's visual grammar. The weapon becomes a luminous collectible while the struck body dissolves into abstract effects. The image visualises the combined operation of Skin and Score: bodily damage is translated into spectacle and immediate feedback. Source: AI-generated image supplied by the author; visual reference: Counter-Strike series (Valve Corporation 2012, 2023).

The image also implicates this essay. An AI-generated simulation of gamified killing can repeat the same reductions it seeks to expose. The body's disappearance into colour is analytically legible because game culture has already trained viewers to read it. Critique is not outside the apparatus. Theory-fiction risks enjoying the interface it condemns.

That risk should remain visible. Satire does not receive moral immunity from its target. The proposal's coldness is useful only if the reader can locate what has been excluded from it. Otherwise, the essay becomes another demonstration of how elegantly a Palestinian body can be converted into an image.

Gaza: Target Production and the Algorithm of Effectivity

The speculative headset sits at the front end of a larger apparatus. Behind the lens are databases, models, cloud services, intelligence practices, legal interpretations, command decisions, and weapons.

No single component kills by itself. Their coordination produces what may be called an **algorithm of effectivity**: not simply an army of soldiers, but an arrangement in which humans and machines are organised around the production of actionable outcomes.

Donna Haraway's cyborg was never a celebration of adding gadgets to an otherwise complete person. It named the collapse of boundaries through which modern politics had separated human from machine and organism from information (Haraway 1991). The AR-equipped soldier is a banal military cyborg, but the headset is only its visible edge. The distributed system extends through remote analysts and software engineers into training data, rules of engagement, communications infrastructure, and the target's involuntary data trail.

Lucy Suchman's work on human-machine reconfigurations rejects the fantasy that agency resides wholly in either autonomous people or autonomous machines (Suchman 2007). Action is situated and relational. In algorithmic war, this means there is no clean handover point where a machine first decides and a human later executes. A model ranks; an analyst interprets; a commander authorises; an interface highlights; a weapon is released. Each stage inherits assumptions produced elsewhere.

The point is not to dissolve responsibility into the network. Distributed agency can become an alibi: everyone touched the decision, so no one authored it. Amoore's account of algorithmic attribution offers a stronger route. Algorithms produce partial accounts that exceed any single line of code, yet this opacity does not release institutions from responsibility for the conditions under which those accounts act (Amoore 2020). The system's inability to explain itself completely is not evidence of innocence.

Investigations by +972 Magazine and Local Call reported that Israeli military systems called *The Gospel* and *Lavender* were used to accelerate the generation of building and human targets during the assault on Gaza. Sources interviewed for the reports described compressed human review and permissive approaches to anticipated civilian harm, claims the Israeli military disputed or qualified (Abraham 2023; Abraham 2024). These reports require careful treatment: they are investigations based partly on anonymous intelligence sources, not transparent access to the systems. Yet their descriptions are consistent with a wider institutional ambition to increase target-production speed.

That speed changes the political form of the target. A conventional account imagines intelligence discovering a hostile person who already exists as a target. Algorithmic classification is more productive. It assembles a target through correlations and thresholds. The person becomes targetable through relations between fragments of data, then the assembled profile is treated as if it merely revealed what the person had always been.

The cloud contract known as Project Nimbus has been criticised for providing advanced computing services to the Israeli state and military (Fatafta 2025). Public evidence does not establish that Nimbus itself selected particular targets or directly operated *Lavender*. The distinction matters. Critical writing should not imitate the target system by converting proximity into certainty. The political issue remains that commercial cloud infrastructure expands the environment within which state classification and military computation can occur.

The headset fiction brings this back end into the soldier's field of view. The red marker above a body is the endpoint of an institutional chain. By the time it appears, choices about data, thresholds, acceptable risk, and legal status have been compressed into colour. The operator encounters a conclusion whose argument has vanished.

This is perceptual governance in its strongest form. It does not merely censor what the soldier sees. It reorganises the relation between seeing and deciding. The interface creates a world in which the authorised action appears to emerge from the target itself. Red means threat. The system disappears behind the obviousness of the red.

> **USER EXPERIENCE GOAL**
> The operator should feel that the target announced its own classification. Institutional authorship must remain below the brightness threshold.

Western techno-subjectivity is produced through this disappearance. Classical accounts of the sovereign subject imagine an individual who surveys a world, weighs reasons, and wills an action. The algorithm of effectivity works differently. It distributes cognition across a system while preserving the individual soldier as the visible bearer of risk and blame. The institution gains machine speed but retains a human figure to place in front of the machine.

The soldier becomes a user. "User" does not mean powerless. Users learn systems, exploit them, disobey prompts, and sometimes refuse. Yet the role arrives with permissions. Certain data are visible; other data belong to command. Some actions are easy; others require leaving the interface. The system's politics are sedimented in that difference.

The promise of an automated or AI-assisted war is often described as precision. Precision, though, is not synonymous with restraint. A system can classify more precisely while enabling more attacks. It can calculate collateral damage while normalising the calculation of how many civilian deaths a target is judged to permit. Speed and scale may turn precision into an accelerant.

Gamified necropolitics joins this target-production apparatus to an affective economy. The user is kept moving through confirmations. Operational tempo becomes an ethical environment. The faster

the sequence, the less time any one decision remains present. Moral latency is the name the fiction gives to whatever prevents the sequence from closing.

Moral Latency: The Specter in the Loop

> **KNOWN ISSUE**
> Some users continue to perceive civilians after classification. Symptoms include hesitation, recurring images, refusal, testimony, insomnia, and unauthorised grief. Do not describe this as an ethical event. Refer to performance support.

The fictional system promises to reduce guilt because guilt delays action and survives deployment. Here satire moves close to an actual institutional problem. Armed forces devote resources to resilience, trauma treatment, and suicide prevention. These responses may care for soldiers while also returning them to operational capacity. The contradiction is structural: the institution seeks to treat injuries produced by war without allowing every injury to become an argument against the war.

The concept of moral injury describes lasting distress associated with perpetrating, failing to prevent, witnessing, or learning about acts that violate deeply held moral expectations (Litz et al. 2009). It should not be treated as a diagnosis that automatically explains suicide, nor as proof that every traumatised soldier recognises the injustice of an operation. Fear, bereavement, exhaustion, injury, and repeated exposure to danger also produce severe distress.

A Knesset Research and Information Center report stated that 279 soldiers attempted suicide between January 2024 and July 2025 and that combat soldiers accounted for 78 percent of military suicide deaths in 2024, compared with 42–45 percent from 2017 through 2022. The report cautions that unpublished data on the size of the force prevent comparison of suicide rates across years (Yachimovich-Cohen 2025, 2–3). These figures do not establish moral injury as the cause. They document a serious mental-health burden whose meanings cannot be reduced to one narrative.

Any account of moral injury risks making Israeli soldiers' damaged consciences the emotional centre of a text about Palestinian mass death. That hierarchy must be refused. Moral injury matters here because it exposes a fracture within the apparatus, not because the suffering of perpetrators should replace the suffering of those subjected to military violence. Palestinians do not become politically visible only when an Israeli soldier dreams about them.

The specter is therefore not a therapeutic metaphor for the soldier alone. It names the return of relations that the targeting process severed. The person classified as a militant remains someone's child or parent. The building classed as military infrastructure remains a home, archive, and coordinate in

another person's memory. These relations do not disappear when the database excludes them. They return through testimony, evidence, refusal, or grief.

Derrida's hauntology describes how what a political order declares finished can continue to structure the present (Derrida 1994). In Gaza, the specter is not an airy ghost detached from matter. It is the persistence of histories that operational systems require their users to forget: the Nakba, occupation, blockade, repeated displacement, and the destruction of the conditions through which a population sustains collective life. History returns because it never left the target area.

The interface can still fail in an intimate way. Drone feeds produce proximity, but Gregory stresses that this proximity is selective: operators identify with troops in the battlespace while the people under surveillance remain on the other side of a techno-cultural divide. He calls the network "a peculiarly new form of intimacy, at once collective and one-sided" (Gregory 2011, 200, 206). The apparatus provides closeness without equality.

That closeness can interrupt action, but interruption should not be romanticised. Military publicity often circulates accounts or footage of strikes allegedly aborted after civilians appear, using the image of restraint to legitimate the wider targeting regime (Israel Defense Forces 2014). Such material may document a real decision while also functioning as institutional self-representation. The exception proves that civilians can be seen; it does not demonstrate that the system consistently protects them.

Refusal offers a different kind of rupture. Accounts from Israeli personnel who declined further service or described acts they considered unlawful show that operational subjectivity is never complete (Mednick and Frankel 2025). A user can contest the permissions of the system. Yet refusal is not evidence of an untouched liberal individual underneath technology. It is produced through other relations: prior commitments, encounters, collective dissent, legal knowledge, family pressure, and political organisation. The system fails because no apparatus has sole possession of the subject.

> **SECURITY UPDATE**
> No removal in the field. No opt-out until debrief. Treat the headset like the safety on a rifle. If a user requests an unfiltered view, record the request as possible ideological contamination.

This fictional instruction reveals the coercive core of perceptual governance. Military discipline has always organised what soldiers may do and say. A mandatory AR system would reach into the phenomenology of the encounter. Refusing an order would be joined by refusing a rendering. The desire to see the person without the skin could itself become disobedience.

Stiegler helps clarify why the problem is not solved by removing every device. Technics shapes memory and attention before the headset arrives. The soldier has been prepared through training, national narrative, media, and institutional language. Uninstalling the display does not uninstall the programme. The fictional headset is effective as theory-fiction because it condenses a dispersed system into an object that can be imagined and therefore accused.

Colonial Continuum, Synthetic Battlefield

Gaza cannot be understood as a blank laboratory for Western technology. The metaphor of a laboratory can repeat colonial thought by treating Palestinian territory as an empty site where others test the future. Gaza is already a densely historicised space. Military technologies operate within an occupation and blockade whose classifications predate machine learning.

Eyal Weizman's work shows how architecture, law, humanitarian calculation, and surveillance have organised Israeli control over Palestinian life through spatial techniques that are at once material and epistemic (Weizman 2011; Weizman 2017). Algorithmic systems do not replace this structure. They inherit its categories and increase the speed at which categories can be applied.

Mbembe's necropolitics is often reduced to a quotation about choosing who lives and dies. Its deeper force lies in showing how sovereignty produces death-worlds: conditions in which populations are subjected to injury, confinement, and the ongoing destruction of the infrastructures of life (Mbembe 2003, 40). Gamification enters this structure after the map has already been divided. The game does not invent the killable population. It gives the apparatus a smoother way to encounter it.

Figure 7 stages that encounter through the familiar architecture of *de_dust2*, a Counter-Strike map built from a generic "Middle Eastern" visual vocabulary. Blue body bags marked with crescents lie across the terrain while aircraft fill the sky. The player's hand holds spray paint. The image presents erasure as a game action, but it also exposes the violence of its own shorthand.



Figure 7. AI-generated Counter-Strike-like scene based on the visual grammar of de_dust2. Blue body bags marked with crescents turn Muslim death into a repeated icon while the player's spray can prepares another layer of inscription. Aircraft crowd the sky. The image stages epistemic erasure and implicates its own representational shortcut: the critique risks reproducing the generic "Middle East" it condemns. Source: AI-generated image supplied by the author; visual reference: Counter-Strike series (Valve Corporation 2012, 2023).

The crescent makes the bodies legible, but too easily. It repeats the same economy as the character skin: a detachable sign converts different lives into one civilisational category. The image should not be read as transparent representation of Gaza. It is an artefact of the visual system under critique. Its failure is evidence. Even an image intended to mourn can inherit the target ontology.

The spray can matters because Counter-Strike allows players to place tags on the environment. Within Figure 7, inscription follows death. The body becomes a surface over which the player can write. This is a model of colonial narration: violence is followed by the authority to name what happened.

Fanon describes colonialism as a system that dehumanises the colonised and organises the colonial world through violence (Fanon 1963, 35–42). That account does not equate the harms imposed on the colonised with the conditioning of the coloniser. Its value here is structural. A system that requires entire populations to appear as targetable must also produce operators capable of acting within that appearance. The two positions are not equivalent. One population is exposed to death; the other is formatted to administer it.

This asymmetry distinguishes the paper's use of haunting from a universal tragedy in which

everyone is equally damaged. The body under the skin and the soldier wearing the headset do not occupy parallel positions. The interface protects one from recognising the other while helping expose the other to force. The specter crosses the interface, but power does not disappear when it does.

The same asymmetry structures public spectatorship. Western audiences often encounter airstrikes through official clips, satellite images, map animations, and brief descriptions of "eliminated targets." The home viewer does not wear the soldier's headset, yet news platforms supply related operations of Skin, Score, and Story. Skin appears as the generic image of the militant. Score appears as the tally. Story appears as the compressed justification delivered before the next clip.

Stahl's militainment names this movement of war into consumer media, while Der Derian's virtuous war describes a technical and moral fantasy of violence conducted from a distance with minimal cost to the side claiming virtue (Stahl 2010; Der Derian 2009). Gaza breaks the fantasy by making the cost visible in overwhelming quantities, yet the interface responds by accelerating classification. More images do not necessarily produce more recognition. Visibility can become another form of saturation.

Epistemic erasure is therefore compatible with hypervisibility. Palestinians may document death in real time while the dominant apparatus continues to deny the political knowledge carried by those images. The problem is not that nothing can be seen. The problem is that testimony enters an unequal system of credibility.

The Western Subject After the User

What remains of the Western subject when action is distributed across an algorithm of effectivity? The answer cannot be a return to the autonomous individual who simply needs to look harder. The individual was always technically and institutionally formed. Crary's observer, Kittler's media systems, Haraway's cyborg, and Rouvroy's algorithmic governmentality all prevent that retreat.

Western techno-subjectivity names a contradiction. The military system disperses perception and decision across machines while continuing to invoke individual judgment when responsibility must be assigned. It wants the soldier to trust the interface as an objective account, then describes each lethal action as a human decision. The human remains "in the loop," but the loop has already shaped the field in which judgment occurs.

The phrase *human in the loop* can perform ideological work. It suggests that the presence of a person restores deliberation to an automated process. Yet a hurried operator reviewing a system-generated recommendation may provide less than meaningful control. Human approval can become a ritual that transfers accountability from the system to its user.

Amoore's ethics of algorithms refuses both fantasies: the omnipotent machine and the innocent human operator. Algorithmic decisions are partial, uncertain, and entangled with human practices (Amoore 2020). Their uncertainty does not make them harmless. It demands political responsibility for how partial accounts acquire force.

Theory-fiction can operate within that uncertainty. It does not need to predict the exact headset that will be procured. It constructs an impossible clarity: Skin, Score, Story. Actual systems are messier, dispersed across procurement chains and interfaces. The fiction gathers their logic into one object, then asks who benefits when the object appears inevitable.

> **FINAL PRODUCT CLAIM**
> The system does not remove conscience. It redistributes conscience across departments until no component possesses enough of it to interrupt deployment.

This is the meaning of moral latency developed here. It is not a defect inside an isolated soldier. It is the time required for relations excluded by the operation to become perceptible again. The system seeks to reduce that time to zero. Politics begins when the delay expands.

The face may return, but not as a mystical guarantee. It returns through evidence that contradicts the target file. The neighbourhood returns through testimony and reconstruction. A soldier's refusal may return the command as a question. A Palestinian witness may force an image to carry a name the platform would rather classify as content.

The Western subject cannot redeem itself merely by taking off the headset. Unfiltered vision is also historically produced, and seeing does not equal justice. The task is collective: to contest the institutions that decide what counts as a target, the infrastructures that make those decisions scalable, and the narratives that convert partial classifications into completed truths.

Final Note: Endgame Without Respawn

Counter-Strike is not a war, and an Israeli soldier is not literally playing a commercial first-person shooter when operating in Gaza. The difference must remain absolute because the deaths do not reset. Yet the distinction does not prevent exchange between the military and the game. They share engines, visual conventions, training practices, and fantasies of information without remainder.

The proposal offered here remains sarcastic:

Build the headset. Call it suicide prevention. Replace the victim's face, then treat the resulting absence of guilt as a clinical success. Let the interface score the operator for stability. If a ghost appears, improve the occlusion mask.

The cruelty of the proposal lies in its institutional plausibility, not its immediate technical feasibility. It answers moral injury by redesigning perception instead of restricting violence. It imagines care for the soldier as protection from the humanity of those the soldier may harm.

This is why theory-fiction must stay. A conventional account can document systems that exist. The fiction can stage the desire connecting them before it becomes a procurement document. It can say that the ideal military interface is not one that shows everything. It is one that shows exactly enough for the operation to continue.

Yet the headset never fully closes. The target exceeds its attributes. The dead exceed the score. History exceeds the map. These are not consoling truths; excess does not stop a bomb. They name the point at which classification fails to become total knowledge.

Gamified necropolitics is the attempt to govern that excess through interface. Skin disciplines appearance. Score prevents duration. Story seals the action with a reason. The system succeeds whenever its categories feel like the world itself.

The counter-operation begins by breaking that feeling. Not by restoring a pure gaze, but by making the frame visible. Not by locating all guilt in the final operator, but by tracing responsibility through the full apparatus. The aim is not to humanise a target after the strike. It is to dismantle the conditions under which a human being could become a target class with so little friction.

There is no respawn. There is only the institutional hope that repetition will make this fact feel irrelevant.

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When Memory Becomes a Rulebook: Russia's Post-2022 Governance of Belonging and the Case of Occupied Ukraine

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Abstract: This article argues that, after Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, official memory politics shifted from commemorative storytelling to a regulatory instrument of governance. Authorities increasingly use memory to categorise populations and structure access, obligations, and sanctions through administrative and legal measures. The analysis draws on high-authority presidential communications and legal documents, including constitutional provisions, decrees, and strategy papers, as well as international reports on practices in Russian-occupied Ukrainian territories. These sources show how state-driven historical narratives are embedded in citizenship rules, documentation regimes, and educational policies that shape everyday life.

The article identifies three mechanisms through which narrative becomes rule. Duty Grammar refers to moralised official language that casts the past as debt, duty, or gratitude and turns remembrance into expectation. Enemy Mirror designates the construction of the "collective West" as a moral counter-order that re-codes criticism as disloyalty and aligns domestic dissent with an external enemy. Law Lock-in captures the juridification and bureaucratic embedding of authorised history in criminal law, constitutional norms, and administrative routines, particularly in annexed territories.

Keywords: commemorative governance, memory politics, juridification, Russian-occupied Ukraine, documentary sovereignty, status regimes.

Introduction

The shift from narrative to rule has become central to Russia's approach to Ukraine since February 2022. Commemorative governance here refers to the use of public memory and ritual to regulate loyalty and test belonging. In this configuration, history functions as a boundary-setting device: authorised narratives indicate who qualifies as a loyal subject and who is rendered suspect.

Existing research on Russian memory politics has documented symbols, rituals, and identity work. Yet it seldom reconstructs how such narratives are translated into enforceable rules and everyday administrative practices. Recent scholarship has begun to frame memory itself as a means of governmentality, stressing its role in governing populations rather than merely representing the past (Antweiler 2024). What remains under-specified, however, is how official memory becomes embedded in legal norms, documentation regimes, and status practices that condition access to services, rights, and mobility.

This article addresses that gap by analysing how post-2022 official memory politics in Russia operates as a regulatory system of belonging. Rather than focusing on which narrative is promoted, the analysis asks which conduct is mandated, permitted, or treated as deviant, and how these distinctions are juridified and routinised. The central claim is that, after 2022, memory is increasingly institutionalised as an obligation standard: disagreement with sanctioned history is criminalised, documentation and status categories are tied to historical education and loyalty tests, and occupied Ukrainian territories become sites where belonging is re-produced as an administrative condition.

This regulatory turn did not emerge from a vacuum. The 2016 Vladimir Luzgin case, the first prosecution under Article 354.1 of the Russian Criminal Code ("Rehabilitation of Nazism"), demonstrated that authorities were already prepared to criminalise disagreement with sanctioned history. Luzgin was convicted and fined 200,000 roubles for sharing an article on the social media platform VKontakte that discussed Ukrainian nationalist history and contained claims about Soviet cooperation with Nazi Germany in the invasion of Poland (Columbia Global Freedom of Expression 2016). The conviction was based on Article 354.1 of the Criminal Code (Russian Federation 1996), and the court reasoned that Luzgin's educational background should have made him aware that the article contained "false information," effectively establishing a precedent in which a citizen's historical knowledge is judicially assessed against an authorised state narrative. What distinguishes the post-2022 period is the scope and systematicity with which memory-based obligations have been codified across legal, administrative, and educational domains.

The argument is developed through three interconnected mechanisms that trace how narrative

becomes rule. "Duty Grammar" designates the saturation of official discourse with deontic language that casts the past as debt, duty, or gratitude and that turns remembrance into expectation. "Enemy Mirror" refers to the construction of the "collective West" as a moral counter-order. It re-codes criticism as intervention from a hostile civilisational space and uses this contrast to sort loyalty from deviance. "Law Lock-in" captures the juridification and bureaucratic embedding of authorised history in legal norms, citizenship decrees, and institutional routines, particularly in education and documentation practices in annexed territories.

Empirically, the article combines qualitative discourse analysis of high-authority presidential communications and key legal acts with international reporting on administrative practice in Russian-occupied Ukrainian territories. Pre-2022 commemorative formats, such as Victory Day rituals, are compared with post-2022 criminal provisions and decrees that penalise deviance and condition status on historical conformity. The introduction of penalties and enforceable obligations marks a shift from persuasion to governance and motivates the guiding question of the study: when, and through which mechanisms, does memory become a rulebook for belonging?

From Narrative to Rule: A Governmentality Account of Memory Politics

This article adopts a governmentality perspective to analyse how official memory in contemporary Russia shifts from storytelling to governance. In Foucauldian terms, governmentality refers to the rationalities and techniques through which authorities shape conduct by defining what is normal, permissible, or deviant (Foucault 2009, 87–104). Rather than treating historical narratives as background symbolism, this perspective directs attention to how they structure surveillance, classification, and normalisation in everyday life.

Memory studies have long insisted that remembering is socially framed. Halbwachs argued that group structures and institutional frameworks condition what can be recalled and how, thereby enabling mobilisation around particular narratives (Halbwachs 1992, 38–40). Jan Assmann conceptualises cultural memory as collectively shared knowledge and symbols that stabilise identity over time (Assmann 1995, 125–133). Aleida Assmann's distinction between "storage" memory, which archives narratives, and "functional" memory, which selectively activates them for present purposes, highlights how states can narrow what is publicly affirmed, especially under conflict conditions (A. Assmann 2006, 27, 54–58). Studies of nationalism further show how symbols, banal routines, and commemorative practices reproduce belonging and loyalty in everyday life (Billig 1995; Anderson 2006). These accounts illuminate how memory anchors political order symbolically. They say less, however, about the specific administrative mechanisms through which narratives become routine

instruments of rule.

Building on this work, the article treats official memory as part of a governmental infrastructure that regulates belonging through documents, procedures, and sanctions. Narratives do not merely offer meaning; they provide templates for sorting loyalty and deviance and for allocating rights and risks. Wertsch's notion of schematic narrative templates, understood as reusable storylines that reduce complexity and guide orientation, helps explain how such scripts become politically and bureaucratically feasible (Wertsch 2008, 123–127). Hobsbawm and Ranger's analysis of "invented traditions" and Billig's work on banal nationalism underline the performative dimension: rituals and everyday symbols reproduce a sense of belonging through repeated enactment (Hobsbawm and Ranger 2012; Billig 1995). Under post-2022 conditions, such performances are more tightly linked to obligation, as commemorative practices and loyalty displays are increasingly tied to expectations of conformity and the marking of criticism as deviance. The concept of "documentary sovereignty" (control over documents, registries, and certifications that define legal status and determine whether rights and services are open or restricted) captures the gatekeeping logic through which narratives become administratively consequential. The empirical sections on occupied Ukraine will show how this concept operates in practice through passportisation, status regimes, and educational compliance.

Recent scholarship has begun to explore memory as a means of governmentality, stressing its role in governing populations rather than merely representing the past (Antweiler 2024). This article extends that line of inquiry by specifying three indicators that operationalise the shift from narrative to rule in official Russian texts. First, mandatory language: instances in which the past is formulated as debt, burden, guilt, responsibility, loyalty, or gratitude, and where citizens are addressed in explicitly deontic terms that specify what they "must," "should," or "are obliged to" remember and do. Second, punishability: formulations that present deviation from authorised interpretations as a norm violation attracting legal, administrative, or institutional sanctions, as in the criminalisation of "rehabilitation of Nazism" under Article 354.1 of the Russian Criminal Code. Third, moral re-coding in relation to the "collective West": passages where signifiers such as anti-fascism, sovereignty, liberation, and historical guilt are redeployed to block criticism and present coercion as duty.

The analysis focuses on the governing logic of official texts rather than on their social reception. From this perspective, official memory functions as behavioural infrastructure. Law and administration rarely compel conduct directly, but they raise the costs of deviation, define standards of normality, and establish boundaries of punishability. Memory politics becomes consequential when it produces duties, eligibility criteria, and controlled access to services and mobility. Membership then operates in graded ways, from full membership through conditional membership to exclusion, corresponding

to differences in documentation, status, and exposure to constraint (United Nations Secretary-General 2025, 3–4).

Within this framework, graded membership is conceptualised as an administrative pattern rather than an inner disposition. Full membership corresponds to recognised documentation that secures stable access to services and institutional routines. Conditional membership denotes provisional or probationary access tied to compliance checkpoints. Exclusion is marked by the denial of rights, mobility, or services due to missing or non-recognised documents and status labels (United Nations Secretary-General 2025, 3–4). These categories provide indicators for the empirical sections that follow.

Methodology

The article applies qualitative discourse analysis to a corpus of high-authority presidential communications and normative legal instruments. The primary focus is on centrally issued texts with explicit normative ambition, which are treated as key sites where official memory is formulated as a standard of belonging and translated into rules and procedures.

The corpus includes major presidential speeches and programmatic texts since 2014, as well as central constitutional and decree texts adopted between 2020 and 2025 (Putin 2014, 2021, 2022a, 2022b, 2022c, 2023; Constitution of the Russian Federation 2020; Presidential Decree No. 440 of 2022; Presidential Decree No. 307 of 2023). These documents are selected because they define official interpretations of recent history, set loyalty expectations, and regulate status, citizenship, and education. Items that were purely ceremonial, duplicative in content, or not directly relevant to the three indicators were excluded; Appendix A summarises inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Local decrees, internal administrative guidance, and full textbook corpora are not systematically included, largely because of uneven accessibility and the need to maintain analytical comparability across texts of similar authority. Ministry of Education circulars and routine bureaucratic paperwork are likewise excluded because of their narrower reach and limited impact on national-level policy framing, although they may be important for future work that focuses on street-level implementation. This selection logic trades breadth for depth and centres on instruments that shape the overarching framework within which belonging, loyalty, and status practices are organised.

Coding proceeded in two phases. In an initial open-coding phase, recurring formulations, argumentative nodes, and repeated attributions were identified in presidential and legal texts. Particular attention was paid to how the past was invoked in connection with duty, loyalty, and threats. A subsequent comparative phase consolidated these findings by grouping statements

according to whether they (1) frame the past as an ongoing claim on the present, (2) mark deviations as morally or institutionally problematic, or (3) link interpretations of history explicitly to procedures, responsibilities, and status categories. The three indicators specified in the theoretical framework, mandatory language, punishability, and moral re-coding, guided coding throughout and structured the reconstruction of a post-2022 "turn" from persuasive narrative to enforceable rule.

International reporting is used to reconstruct how the governing logic identified in central texts is reflected in practices in Russian-occupied Ukrainian territories. Reports by the United Nations Secretary-General, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and the European Parliamentary Research Service serve as sources on conditions, consequences, and everyday constraints. They are treated as evidence of administrative practice rather than as proof of governmental intentions (United Nations Secretary-General 2025; OHCHR 2025; Mentzelopoulou 2023). Where possible, definitions, time frames, and the basis of claims (direct observation, witness testimony, reported accounts) are cross-checked across documents.

The design reconstructs instruments of rule rather than social reception. It does not measure belief, internalisation, or everyday resistance. It does, however, recognise the likelihood of implementation gaps between legal texts and street-level enforcement (United Nations Secretary-General 2025, 3–4, 12). These gaps point to an empirical frontier for future ethnographic work on how residents navigate and negotiate documentation regimes, status categories, and educational interventions.

The Post-2022 Turn in Three Moves: Obligation, Enemy-Making, Enforcement

This section reconstructs how duty, enemy-making, and law interlock to shape governance after 2022. It treats the 2022 turning point less as the introduction of entirely new historical representations than as a functional reconfiguration of existing narratives into a more mandatory order. Pre-2022 formulations could emphasise solidarity and unity without systematic enforceability, whereas post-2022 decrees increasingly codify loyalty and historical conformity into binding legal frameworks.

A structured comparison with the 2014–2016 documentation regime in Crimea sharpens the periodisation claim. In Crimea, passportisation proceeded rapidly after annexation: within nine months, Russia issued approximately 1.5 million passports to residents, and all permanent residents were automatically classified as Russian citizens unless they formally opted out within one month (Amnesty International 2024). Ukrainian laws were replaced by Russian legislation by the end of 2014, and Ukrainian-language education was progressively curtailed. However, three features distinguish the Crimean regime from the post-2022 framework. First, the Crimean process operated under a logic of integration rather than conditionality: residents were presumed to be citizens, and the administrative

apparatus was oriented toward absorption rather than ongoing compliance testing. Second, there was no systematic mechanism analogous to Decree No. 307 that reclassified non-compliant residents as "foreigners" subject to deportation. Those who opted out faced restrictions applicable to foreign nationals, but they were not subjected to the same escalating regime of deadlines, biometric registration, and conditional denaturalisation. Third, the enforcement of historical conformity in education, while present, was not linked to formal loyalty-testing procedures or to the criminalisation of deviation under Article 354.1 with the same intensity observed after 2022. The post-2022 framework tightens these couplings considerably: belonging is no longer presumed but must be continuously performed through documentation compliance, and non-compliance carries escalating administrative and legal consequences.

Duty Grammar: From Memory to Obligation

The first move concerns the grammatical framing of the past as an ongoing obligation. In key presidential texts, history is presented not as an open field of interpretation but as a moralised context that casts the present as a continuation of earlier conflicts and demands action.

Putin's speech of 21 February 2022 genealogically delegitimises Ukrainian statehood by attributing it to Soviet border demarcations and frames current policy as "a correction" and "restoration" of historical truth (Putin 2022a). His 2021 essay on "historical unity" had already laid the groundwork for this claim, presenting Ukrainian statehood as an artificial deviation caused by Soviet nationality policy and later Western influence (Putin 2021). Historical studies of Soviet nation and empire policy show that such claims simplify a more complex institutional history in which renewed centralisation and disciplinary violence cannot be attributed solely to early Soviet decisions and are connected, in crucial respects, to later Stalinist state practices (Hirsch 2005; Martin 2017). In the 24 February 2022 address, "correction" is operationalised as military action, presented as a preventive measure against an allegedly hostile "anti-Russian" structure facilitated by Western security architectures (Putin 2022b). The past here functions as an obligatory idiom: citizens are addressed as debtors to "defenders of the Fatherland," and loyalty is presented as the normal and expected response, while dissent appears as moral pathology.

Second World War references intensify this obligation grammar. In the Victory Day speech of 9 May 2022, the present conflict is narrated as a continuation of anti-fascist defence rather than as a contingent political choice (Putin 2022c). This framing does more than identity work. It sets a normative benchmark: refusal of obligation becomes legible as disloyalty, and belonging is coupled to fulfilment of duty and public performances of loyalty. The 2023 Stalingrad anniversary speech

sharpens the deontic register further: remembering the wartime sacrifice is cast explicitly as a "moral duty," and the defence of Stalingrad is declared "the most important moral and ethical guideline" for the Russian military and for all citizens (Putin 2023). The shift from commemorative vocabulary to the language of obligation is marked: citizens are not merely invited to remember but told that remembrance constitutes a binding moral standard against which present conduct is measured. Earlier commemorative occasions, such as the 2020 Victory Day speech (Putin 2020a) and the programmatic essay on the lessons of the Second World War (Putin 2020b), already drew on these themes, but they operated within a primarily symbolic register. Earlier scholarship has shown how Victory Day commemorations became the central pillar of identity consolidation under Putin, functioning as "chosen glory" in a context of insecure collective identity and legitimising the political system through emotional appeals to national greatness (Sharafutdinova 2020, 106–108). The post-2022 shift identified here extends that analysis by tracing how such symbolic resources were pressed into juridically enforceable form. The coupling of commemorative language with enforceable obligations and penalties for deviation marks a qualitative change from identity politics to commemorative governance.

Enemy Mirror: The "Collective West" as Counter-Order

The second move concerns the construction of a moral counter-order. In the corpus, the "collective West" appears less as a precise empirical descriptor than as a flexible discursive coordinate that aligns self-description, loyalty norms, and justification frames (Putin 2022b). The category is strategically elastic. Its membership shifts with geopolitical needs, and states can appear as adversarial or allied at different moments.

Two effects follow. First, the conflict is depersonalised by re-coding Ukraine as a frontline in a broader civilisational struggle rather than as an independent actor. Second, criticism is re-coded as an intervention from a morally compromised space, which allows domestic dissent to be interpreted as alignment with an external enemy. The 2023 Stalingrad speech illustrates the interlocking of Duty Grammar and Enemy Mirror within a single text: the same speech that frames remembrance as "moral duty" also asserts that Russia is "again being threatened" by Western-supplied tanks and describes the current enemy as "Hitler's successors" operating on Ukrainian land (Putin 2023). The Second World War thus functions simultaneously as a source of obligation and as a framework for enemy classification, collapsing the temporal distance between 1943 and the present. Research on Russian war semantics shows how anti-fascism can operate as a moral instrument that delegitimises opponents and presents violence as an obligation (Tolz and Hutchings 2023). Studies of state-affiliated media

and pro-Russian communication spaces suggest that "war with the West" messaging is repeated and tailored to different audiences, even if social internalisation cannot be assumed (Składanowski, Smuniewski, and Lukasik-Turecka 2025). Earlier research has situated these dynamics within a broader European memory politics in which competing national narratives compete for legitimacy (Mälksoo 2009; Miller 2020), and the Russian case represents a particularly acute instance of how such contests can be instrumentalised for domestic governance purposes.

The governance dimension of Enemy Mirror extends beyond discursive framing. The classification of criticism as externally motivated provides a rationale for concrete administrative measures. The 2021 Interministerial Commission for Historical Education (Decree No. 442), headed by presidential aide and former Culture Minister Vladimir Medinsky, was mandated to coordinate government agencies and the academic community in developing a "unified approach" to historical education. Its tasks include preventing attempts to "falsify history" and analysing the activities of foreign organisations deemed to "damage Russia's national interests in the historical field" (Meduza 2021). The commission's composition is telling: whereas a predecessor body under President Medvedev included parliamentary representatives and historians, the 2021 commission brought in security service representatives, signalling a shift from scholarly debate to institutional enforcement (RFE/RL 2021).

The "foreign agents" legislation, progressively expanded since 2012 and overhauled through Federal Law No. 255-FZ of July 2022, provides the most consequential administrative instrument through which the Enemy Mirror operates. Under the revised law, authorities no longer require evidence of foreign funding to designate an individual or organisation a "foreign agent"; a claim of "foreign influence" is sufficient. The designation carries mandatory labelling requirements, reporting obligations, and exclusion from public life, including employment in education. Since February 2022, the legislation has been deployed against anti-war activists, independent media, and human rights organisations, including the Nobel Peace Prize co-laureate Memorial (Human Rights Watch 2022). The practical effect is to create the administrative category of "foreign agent", which maps directly onto the discursive category of "collective West" influence. Organisations and individuals whose historical interpretations or political positions diverge from authorised narratives face not merely symbolic stigmatisation but operational constraints, loss of funding, and criminal liability. The moral counter-order thus supplies not only a symbolic coordinate system but also a practical sorting mechanism that informs institutional decisions about loyalty and deviance. Function, rather than reach, is decisive: the counter-order provides the coordinate system within which loyalty is interpreted as consent to an obligation regime.

Law Lock-in: Juridification and Administrative Embedding

The third move concerns law and institutional practice. The constitutional stipulation of "historical truth" and the prohibition on "denigrating the heroic deeds of the defenders of the Fatherland" establish a formal normative reference point (Constitution of the Russian Federation 2020, art. 67.1(3)). This clause mirrors wider debates on memory laws, including within the European Court of Human Rights, where such laws have been scrutinised for their compatibility with freedom of expression (Mälksoo 2009; Beshkinskaya and Miller 2020).[1]

Organisational and administrative instruments translate these references into institutional routines. The Interministerial Commission established by Decree No. 442 of 2021, discussed above in relation to Enemy Mirror, provides the organisational anchor for this process. Decree No. 440 extends simplified acquisition of Russian citizenship to all Ukrainian nationals, requiring only proof of Ukrainian residency and citizenship. Decree No. 307 of April 2023 is the most consequential instrument: it stipulates that all residents of occupied Ukrainian territories who have not accepted Russian citizenship are henceforth classified as "foreigners" or "stateless persons" in their own homeland. The decree enumerates grounds for deportation, detention, or cancellation of residence status. These include "favouring a violent change of the constitutional order" or supporting "terrorist" or "extremist" acts. These categories are so broadly defined under current Russian extremism legislation that they can encompass loyalty to the Ukrainian state, use of the Ukrainian language, or expressions of Ukrainian cultural identity (SCEEUS 2024). An initial compliance deadline of 1 July 2024 was subsequently extended to 31 December 2024. Decree No. 159 of March 2025 further tightened the regime by introducing mandatory biometric registration, including fingerprinting, photographing, and medical examination, within 30 to 90 days of entry, and requiring those without a "legal basis" to regularise their status by 10 September 2025 or face removal under the expulsion regime established by Executive Order No. 1126 of December 2024. In such instruments, belonging becomes an administrative matter: citizenship, residence rights, and access to services are tied to

1 The ECtHR has addressed memory laws in several contexts, including Holocaust denial legislation and restrictions on historical speech. In Perinçek v. Switzerland (2015), the Grand Chamber held that a criminal conviction for denying the Armenian genocide violated Article 10 of the Convention, distinguishing such cases from Holocaust denial on grounds of contextual specificity. The Court has not directly ruled on Russia's Article 354.1, but the constitutional enshrinement of "historical truth" raises analogous questions about the boundary between legitimate historical debate and state-mandated interpretive conformity. Russia's exclusion from the Council of Europe in March 2022 has removed the direct applicability of the Convention but not the relevance of the normative framework to comparative analysis. The 2024 Grand Chamber judgment in Ukraine v. Russia (Re Crimea) found that the forced imposition of Russian citizenship in Crimea violated Article 8 ECHR, further illustrating the intersection of documentation regimes and fundamental rights.

compliance with procedures that incorporate authorised historical narratives.

A further dimension reinforces the coercive logic. Citizenship, once acquired, is conditional: it is subject to denaturalisation for offences that include participation in rallies, criticism of the armed forces, or criticism of the invasion. In a context where historical conformity is legally mandated, such acts can render individuals effectively stateless (U.S. Department of State 2023).

The cumulative effect is a process of juridification in which loyalty to official memory becomes intertwined with legal and bureaucratic status. Public interactions that appear routine, such as applying for documents or queuing for services, can thereby function as informal loyalty tests. As the structured comparison with Crimea at the outset of this section has shown, the post-2022 framework differs from its predecessor in systematically linking access and security to historically coded obligations. Walker (2022) documents how Victory Day evolved from a cultural event into a central pillar of political identity, illustrating the longer trajectory through which commemorative occasions have been progressively politicised. The post-2022 legal framework formalises this trajectory by making non-compliance sanctionable.

Taken together, Duty Grammar, Enemy Mirror, and Law Lock-in mark a shift from representational politics towards commemorative governance. The subsequent section examines how this governing logic becomes visible in occupied Ukrainian territories, where documentation, status categories, and institutional routines translate official narratives into differentiated access, conditional membership, and exclusion.

Occupied Ukraine as an Administrative Test Case: Status, Documents, Everyday Access

Occupied territories provide a site where discursive ordering becomes procedural reality. Ukraine functions here not only as a target of military aggression but as a governance laboratory, a setting in which official memory is translated into documentation rules, education policies, and everyday access practices. The term “governance laboratory” is used here as an analytical descriptor for a setting in which administrative techniques are developed and applied, not as a normative endorsement of the coercive practices documented below. Belonging is attached to procedures and documents and becomes sanctionable in the event of conflict. The empirical emphasis in this section falls on process: the techniques through which interpretation is converted into lawmaking and administered through institutional routines.

International reporting indicates the introduction of Russian political, administrative, legal, and security systems in territories under Russian occupation. Such institutional transplantation

establishes belonging as a legally and materially structured condition of everyday life (United Nations Secretary-General 2025, 3). The analytical purpose here is not to prove governmental intentions but to reconstruct techniques: how categories, status, and access are organised so that a mandatory framework is embedded in institutional normality.

Passportisation and Status Regimes

The passport and status policy offers the clearest illustration of how memory-inflected norms become tied to documents and rights. "Passportisation" refers to the extension of state control through the mass distribution of passports and expedited citizenship procedures in contested territories. Even before 2022, it operated as an instrument in conflict peripheries, combining protective claims, demographic tethering, and political pre-structuring (Artman 2011; Burkhardt 2020, 1). A historical precedent can be found in the Soviet-era propiska system, which regulated internal population movements and maintained control over territorial integrity and resource distribution (Central Executive Committee of the USSR and Council of People's Commissars 1932a, 1932b).

After 2022, everyday rights become more systematically tied to documents and administrative conformity. The trajectory of norm density illustrates the escalation: a 2019 decree first established simplified citizenship for residents of the self-proclaimed Donetsk and Luhansk republics; in May 2022, this was extended to the Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions; and Decree No. 440 of 11 July 2022 opened the procedure to all Ukrainian citizens. Decree No. 307 of 27 April 2023 then reclassified all residents of annexed territories who had not accepted Russian citizenship as "foreign citizens" or "stateless persons," exposing them to deportation and denial of services. Decree No. 159 of 20 March 2025 further tightened the regime by requiring biometric registration and mandating that Ukrainians without a "legal basis" regularise their status by 10 September 2025 or face removal. Coercive pressure is generated through deadlines under conditions of opacity; belonging becomes a function of documents, compliance, and official recognition.

UN reporting describes a tripartite pathway for the uptake of Russian citizenship in occupied territories: forced, induced, and voluntary (United Nations Secretary-General 2025, 3–4). Coercion can be direct or indirect and may include an oath of citizenship. Induced uptake occurs when citizenship is accepted under pressure or in exchange for better access to services and rights. Administrative consequences are substantial: lacking Russian documents can render access to services and rights difficult or practically impossible (United Nations Secretary-General 2025, 3–4). Authorities report large numbers of passports issued; UN documents refer to an estimated figure of several hundred thousand affected individuals, a number that should be treated as approximate rather than definitive

(United Nations Secretary-General 2025, 3–4).

Graded membership is visible in this context as an administrative pattern. Full membership occurs where recognised documentation secures stable access to services and institutional routines. Even this status is precarious, since citizenship acquired under these decrees can be revoked for broadly defined offences, including criticism of state policy. Conditional membership is evident when access is provisional, probationary, or tied to compliance checkpoints, such as deadlines for regularisation or mandatory biometric procedures. Exclusion is marked when missing documents or status labels result in denial of rights, mobility, or services; under Decree No. 307, residents who decline Russian citizenship face reclassification as "foreigners" in their own homeland, with consequent exposure to deportation and property seizure (SCEEUS 2024). Case-based reports suggest that some residents attempt to navigate these regimes through informal strategies, such as seeking intermediaries or temporary workarounds, but such examples are fragmentary and cannot be generalised without further ethnographic research.

Education and Youth Programming

Education constitutes a second critical domain, as schools and youth institutions help establish everyday normality. International reporting points to the imposition of compulsory formats and content in occupied territories, including militarised training components, cadet classes, and loyalty rituals (OHCHR 2025, 19; United Nations Secretary-General 2025, 12). These measures embed authorised "historical truth" into curricula and institutional routines. The governance effect is central: a narrative repertoire becomes a background condition against which administrative "correction" appears as a legitimate state task.

Indicators of juridified memory in education include mandatory history instruction aligned with state narratives, patriotic exercises tied to state holidays, and curricular modules oriented toward military history and skills. Reports describe pressure on parents to enrol children in Russian schools, restrictions on Ukrainian educational offerings, including online alternatives, and threats that may extend to the withdrawal of parental rights (OHCHR 2025, 19). Amnesty International's analysis of new history textbooks notes the integration of such content into a broader narrative that frames the war as defensive and Ukraine as a target of Western intrigue (Amnesty International 2023).

Youth programming extends the same logic into leisure time. UN reporting indicates that patriotic education is incorporated into holiday and summer-camp programmes, including visits to memorial sites and lectures by military and security officials (OHCHR 2025, 20; United Nations Secretary-General 2025, 12). What may appear as commemorative culture thus operates as

administrative normalisation: participation is routinised, monitored, and folded into wider status and access regimes. Participation figures are difficult to verify. Occupation authorities report tens of thousands of children involved in camp programmes in 2024, but international documents cite these figures with caution (OHCHR 2025, 20). The expansion of organisations such as Yunarmiya is promoted in this context (OHCHR 2025, 20).

To clarify the nature of these educational interventions, it is useful to differentiate more sharply between ideological indoctrination and routine national socialisation. Criteria such as compulsory oath-taking, the presence of militarised training, or enforced loyalty rituals can serve as indicators of indoctrination. By contrast, participation in state-prescribed holidays and standardised narratives, without overt coercive elements, may be closer to national socialisation. This distinction helps specify what transforms habitual observance into commitment to state ideology and allows for comparative analysis across cases.[2]

Child Transfers and Ethical Considerations

Reporting on child transfers and institutional placements raises particular ethical and methodological concerns. International documents describe transfers and administrative practices that, together with information gaps, travel constraints, and control procedures, can make repatriation difficult (OHCHR 2025, 16). Legal channels for establishing citizenship also exist, including simplified naturalisation procedures for children without parental care, guardianship arrangements, and adoption (OHCHR 2025, 18; Mentzelopoulou 2023, 6). The EPRS briefing refers to filtration processes and "re-education" camps and describes indoctrination and institutional integration as salient features (Mentzelopoulou 2023, 4–5). Analytically, this cluster of practices marks an escalation: socialisation, documentation, and access categories converge in ways that produce an administrative reality that is difficult to reverse.

Given the sensitivity of child-related reporting, the analysis relies exclusively on institutionally

2 The analytical boundary between indoctrination and routine national socialisation is not self-evident and requires context-sensitive indicators. In comparative education research, indoctrination is typically distinguished by three features: compulsory participation without opt-out mechanisms, content that demands affective commitment rather than mere cognitive engagement, and institutional consequences for non-compliance. In the Russian-occupied Ukrainian context, the presence of militarised training, compulsory oath-taking, and reported threats of parental rights withdrawal (OHCHR 2025, 19) places the observed practices closer to the indoctrination end of the spectrum. By contrast, state-prescribed holiday participation and standardised history instruction, while politically shaped, do not necessarily cross the threshold into enforced ideological commitment unless coupled with sanctioning mechanisms. Future comparative work could apply these threshold indicators to other contexts, such as patriotic education programmes in China or civic education in post-conflict settings, to test the generalisability of the distinction.

produced public documentation, avoids identifying details, and treats contested figures as claims rather than as verified counts. The author followed institutional ethical guidelines in the decision to use only publicly available sources and to foreground structural mechanisms rather than individual cases.

Taken together, passportisation, education, youth programming, and child-related measures illustrate how the three mechanisms identified earlier, Duty Grammar, Enemy Mirror, and Law Lock-in, crystallise in occupied territories as documentation and status regimes. They show how official memory becomes intertwined with eligibility checks, conditional membership, and exclusion, and how belonging is re-produced as an administrative condition rather than merely asserted symbolically.

Discussion: Memory as Norm, Not Narrative

The analysis identifies four post-2022 patterns that cohere into a distinct configuration of commemorative governance. First, remembrance is articulated as obligation: official discourse increasingly addresses citizens in deontic terms and frames the past as an ongoing claim on the present. Second, obligation is anchored in juridico-administrative arrangements, including constitutional provisions, criminal law, and presidential decrees that tie status and access to interpretive conformity. Third, the "collective West" functions as a moral counter-order that provides coordinates for sorting loyalty and deviance. Fourth, occupied Ukrainian territories show how these elements crystallise in documentation regimes, education, and youth programmes that condition access, mobility, and security.

The analytical centre of gravity shifts accordingly: from narrative content to performative function. Memory is reconfigured from a medium of symbolic representation into a technique of governing belonging. Duty Grammar, Enemy Mirror, and Law Lock-in describe how moralised claims about the past, legal form, and bureaucratic routines mutually reinforce one another within a single regulatory environment. Documentation and status regimes can also reflect security rationales or demographic policy, but the argument here is that they are aligned with an obligation-centred memory framework that helps define the terms of inclusion, conditional membership, and exclusion.

The post-2022 distinctiveness lies less in the themes of official narratives than in the extent to which existing commemorative templates are pressed into obligatory form and embedded in legal and administrative routines. Wertsch's narrative template framework explains the feasibility of this process: reusable storylines provide scripts for sorting loyalty and deviance that can be readily transposed into bureaucratic categories (Wertsch 2008, 123–127). Pre-2022 narratives, such as the framing of Victory

Day as a central pillar of national identity (Walker 2022; Beshkinskaya and Miller 2020), already contained the semantic resources for obligation. What changed after 2022 is the systematic coupling of these resources with enforceable norms. Citizens are addressed through duty grammar; normality is codified; dissent is marked as a moral or legal problem.

No linear causal relationship is claimed between discourse and administrative transformation. The pattern is functional, not causal: moralised memory, legal norms, and bureaucratic procedures are treated as mutually reinforcing elements of a single regulatory configuration. The design focuses on instruments of rule rather than reception; belief, internalisation, and resistance remain outside its empirical reach, except where they appear as documented administrative effects. Implementation gaps between formal provisions and street-level practice are likely, particularly in occupied territories, and they mark an important frontier for future ethnographic and socio-legal research.

At the same time, the mechanisms identified here invite cautious comparative questions. Russia's wartime context creates specific dynamics that may limit direct transposition to other settings, such as China's memory legislation or Turkish practices in Northern Cyprus. Differences in political, historical, and institutional frameworks influence how memory laws are structured and enforced. Nevertheless, other memory regimes, including in non-wartime contexts, may also translate official narratives into eligibility checks and status regimes, though along different trajectories. A systematic comparison with earlier Russian practices, including the post-2014 documentation regime in Crimea as outlined in this article, and with other cases of memory legislation would help test the portability of "commemorative governance" as an analytical lens and specify where the Russian post-2022 configuration is unique and where it resonates with broader trends.

Conclusion

The article has reconstructed how Russia's official memory politics shifted after 2022 from representational remembrance to the practical ordering of belonging. Drawing on qualitative discourse analysis of high-authority presidential speeches, programmatic texts, and key legal acts, together with international reporting on administrative practices in Russian-occupied Ukrainian territories, it has traced how commemorative narratives are converted into regulatory standards. Duty Grammar, Enemy Mirror, and Law Lock-in capture this transformation: moralised language frames the past as obligation, the "collective West" provides a moral counter-order for sorting loyalty and deviance, and juridification embeds authorised history in legal and bureaucratic routines that render it enforceable.

In occupied Ukraine, this governing logic becomes visible in status and access regimes in which documentation, procedures, and institutional integration mediate participation and security.

Passportisation, migration rules, educational reforms, youth programming, and child-related measures show how official memory is intertwined with eligibility checks, conditional membership, and exclusion. The "foreign agents" framework provides an additional administrative layer through which the Enemy Mirror's moral sorting is translated into institutional consequences, including mandatory labelling, exclusion from education and public life, and criminal liability for non-compliance. A structured comparison with the post-2014 Crimean documentation regime has shown that the post-2022 configuration is qualitatively distinct: where Crimea operated under a logic of presumed integration, the current framework requires continuous demonstrations of compliance, with escalating sanctions for non-conformity. Belonging is thereby re-produced as an administrative condition rather than merely asserted symbolically. The degree to which this configuration is accepted, circumvented, or undermined remains an open empirical question, as does the role of informal practices alongside formal rules.

The analysis yields a testable hypothesis: the more strongly official memory claims are translated into concrete procedures, including documentation requirements, status categories, school routines, eligibility checks, and access regulations, the more belonging shifts from symbolic designation to administrative selection. Three empirical strategies follow from this claim: (1) mapping temporal change in norm density, scope, and sanction structures across relevant laws and decrees; (2) tracing implementation indicators in domains such as education, mobility, property, and social benefits through case files and administrative traces where accessible; and (3) examining circumvention and resistance through interviews, documented cases, and networked support practices that address or sidestep memory-based eligibility checks.

Monitoring bodies and human-rights mechanisms can translate these insights into practical guidance. They can strengthen their work by examining how administrative transformations linked to memory policies shape everyday life in occupied territories, and by developing operational tools to detect "duty grammar" and memory-based eligibility criteria in new regulations. A checklist designed to identify when historical narratives are tied to documentation, status, and access decisions would help practitioners recognise when memory politics is being institutionalised as a compliance standard. Such tools could support efforts to safeguard fundamental freedoms and to document rights violations in regions undergoing coercive commemorative transformation.

Appendix A: Corpus Selection Criteria

Inclusion criteria:

Texts were included if they met all of the following conditions: (1) they were issued by a high-authority federal source (presidential administration, federal legislature, or constitutional body); (2) they contained explicit normative claims about historical interpretation, loyalty, belonging, or status; and (3) they were directly relevant to at least one of the three indicators (mandatory language, punishability, moral re-coding in relation to the "collective West").

Included text types:

Presidential speeches and programmatic essays with explicit historical or identity-political content (Putin 2014, 2021, 2022a, 2022b, 2022c, 2023); constitutional provisions adopted through the 2020 amendments (Constitution of the Russian Federation 2020); presidential decrees regulating citizenship, status, historical education, or institutional responsibilities (Decree No. 442 of 2021; Decree No. 440 of 2022; Decree No. 307 of 2023; Decree No. 159 of 2025); the Criminal Code provision on "rehabilitation of Nazism" (Article 354.1).

Exclusion criteria:

Texts were excluded if they were (1) purely ceremonial or protocol-related without substantive normative content; (2) duplicative of already-included texts in content and framing; (3) local or regional administrative orders (due to uneven accessibility and limited comparability with federal-level instruments); (4) Ministry of Education circulars and routine bureaucratic paperwork (due to narrower reach); (5) social media content, journalistic commentary, or informal communications (due to different evidentiary status). International reports (United Nations Secretary-General 2025; OHCHR 2025; Mentzelopoulou 2023) were included as supplementary sources on implementation practices in occupied territories but are analytically distinguished from primary normative texts.

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The Lucid Parricide: Alex Karp and the Psychotic West That Knows Exactly What It Killed

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Abstract: Standard Lacanian accounts describe psychosis in terms of foreclosure: the Name-of-the-Father never inscribed, the symbolic never fully constituted. This paper argues the opposite. The psychotic subject is the one who encountered the paternal function in its unbearable purity and then repudiated it. I call this the lucid parricide, and the adjective needs care from the outset: lucidity here names the determinacy of the negation, not the deliberation of an ego. What the parricide installs himself in is not the Name-of-the-Father, since a signifier admits no occupant, but the place Freud assigns to the primal father: the body that is law, the one figure no prohibition binds. Psychosis is therefore not ignorance of the Law; it is an act of annihilation whose guilt can never be worked through, and what results is a fused Symbolic/Real epistemology in which fiction and reality can no longer be told apart. The Father is not absent. He is over-present, a persecutory corpse that will not stay buried.

Alex Karp's civilizational rhetoric offers a case study. Post-1945 liberal "never again" functioned as a neurotic paternal metaphor: disarmament, human rights, the disavowal of organized violence as the Real of Western history. Karp does not misrecognize this father; he executes him in broad daylight. Huntington's aphorism, that the West rose by its superiority in applying organized violence, is brandished as the murder weapon, and Palantir's kill-chain platforms become the throne from which the son reigns as self-begotten emperor of the Real. There is no failure of symbolization here, only a triumphant symbolization of the crime itself.

Yet the dead father returns. Huntington's corollary, that non-Westerners never forget, operates as a Roko's Basilisk: the mere knowledge that the Other remembers the crime becomes a coercive structure

demanding permanent pre-emption. Because the West knows exactly what it killed, it is condemned to a paranoid temporality in which memory itself must be militarized. Escalation, algorithmic targeting, and civilizational re-armament are defenses against the feared return of the slain Law.

This reframes the failure of liberal critique. To the lucid parricide, a critique is not dialogue but a coup attempt, a maneuver by the murdered father's loyalists to retake the throne. The question for philosophy is what language remains when every appeal to the Law is structurally received as enemy action.

Keywords: foreclosure, Oedipus, psychosis, Name-of-the-Father, castration, paranoia, civilizational psychosis, Palantir

1. Introduction: The Oedipal Victory

The classical psychoanalytic account of psychosis is structured as a narrative of failure. The psychotic subject is said to fail the Oedipus complex: to fail to submit to castration (Freud 1905, SE 7: 123–245; 1924, SE 19: 176–77), or in Lacanian terms, to fail to internalize the Name-of-the-Father, and thus to fail entry into the Symbolic order (Lacan 1998, 333). This view makes psychosis a deficit-oriented condition, defined negatively by the absence of the symbolic father, a mediating Law that would otherwise regulate desire, reality, and meaning (Lacan 2006; 2007, 106). The subject is hereby conceived as structurally incomplete, stuck at an early stage of psychic maturation.

But what if the opposite is true? Namely, that the psychotic did not fail the Oedipal conflict, but that he won it.

A word on allegiance before I begin, since what follows would otherwise look like a Lacanian argument going wrong. I argue from Freud and from Hegel. I retain Lacanian topology, the Symbolic, the Imaginary, the Real, the paternal function, as descriptive vocabulary, because no better vocabulary exists for the structure in question. I do not retain the Lacanian theory of psychosis, and the departure is deliberate. The distinction I defend in section 2 is terminological before it is substantive: *Verwerfung* names a determinate act directed at an encountered element; *forclusion* names a pre-conscious constraint on what can be symbolized. Both exist. Only the first constitutes the structure described here. Lacan marked this divergence himself, and marked it as a debate rather than a nuance: "C'est à vous d'être lacaniens, si vous voulez. Moi, je suis freudien. C'est pourquoi je crois bienvenu de vous dire quelques mots du débat que je soutiens avec Freud, et pas d'aujourd'hui. Voilà: mes trois ne sont pas les siens" (Lacan 1980). His three are the Real, the Symbolic and the Imaginary; they are not Freud's. That would seem to forbid what I am doing, keeping the three while siding with Freud. It

does not, because the one of the three my argument needs is already in Freud in proto-form: a field of the real, post-subjective and pre-conscious, which is where section 2 places *forclusion*. What I decline is not Lacan's topology but his theory of psychosis within it. I take him at his word on the debate, and I take the other side.

What follows begins from a clinical structure, but it is not confined to the clinic, and nothing in it is a diagnosis of any individual. I will argue that the same formal configuration can be externalized and stabilized at collective scale, up to what may be called the Western subject as a civilizational formation, where institutions and technologies can perform what an individual psyche cannot sustain alone. To name the core operation of this structure, I introduce the term lucid parricide: not an accidental slip or unconscious compromise with the Law, but the determinate repudiation of the paternal function as such.

The word lucid invites a reading that would be fatal to the argument. Lucidity does not name consciousness, deliberation, or a sovereign ego that surveys its options and elects parricide. The Hegelian argument I develop below requires only that the negation be determinate: that it bear the trace of the object it negates. Determinacy is not deliberation. The term is named from its civilizational instance, where lucidity can be strong, explicit, dated and avowed (section 3); in the clinic it applies only in this weak sense.

On this point Lacan is not my opponent but my witness. Discussing the paranoid patient who reports that she has just been to the butcher's, he observes that she speaks by allusion so well that she does not know she is speaking: "A quartered pig. She does not know that she is saying this, but she says it nevertheless." He then states her meaning without remainder: "I, the sow, have just been to the butcher's, I am already disjointed, a fragmented body, membra disjecta, delusional, and my world is fragmenting, like me. That's what she's saying" (Lacan 1993, 52). What is the status of that knowledge? It is exact, and it is fully articulable, and Lacan articulates it. What is missing is not determinacy. It is avowal. That distinction is the one on which the lucid parricide depends, and it is Lacan who supplies it.

The claim is structural: in psychotic configurations the paternal prohibition is not missing, weak, or unsuccessfully transmitted, but encountered and annihilated. The Name-of-the-Father did not fail to arrive; he arrived and was cast out. The subject kills the paternal limit and takes the place of the primal father, the one who was never under the prohibition to begin with, and so escapes the symbolic castration that binds neurotic subjects into a shared reality.

This victory is catastrophic rather than liberatory. In the standard trajectory, the paternal function interrupts the imaginary dyad between child and mother (Lacan 2006), and the loss it imposes yields

neurosis (Freud 1924, SE 19: 173–79; 1926, SE 20: 77–175). That loss is productive: it installs the gap between desire and satisfaction, word and thing, self and Other, which is the condition of symbolic mediation and of social life. The neurotic subject survives by losing.

The psychotic victory consists in refusing this loss. Rather than submitting to symbolic death, the death of narcissistic omnipotence, the psychotic subject wins the Oedipus and preserves the position of exception. A pre-conscious foreclosure (Lacan 2011, 10; 1973–74, 72) is therefore impossible on my account: the rejection is determinate, for one cannot reject what one has not met. Nor is the psychotic deprived of the symbolic; section 2 shows how saturated with it the psychotic world is.

So why is the result not freedom but a structural paranoia? Precisely because they know the symbolic order, they know what they did was wrong: parricide. This realization makes the paranoia suddenly reasonable. The psychotic took the throne that was never his, and is now feeling haunted by the ghost of the annihilated Name-of-the-Father. Because of this parricide, the illegitimate way of obtaining the throne, his position is structurally challenged. He is the illegitimate king, and he knows it. And he is not wrong: by rejecting the communal Symbolic order, which is nonetheless grounded in and affecting the Real, it is actively working against him, as he took a position that was never meant to be his. Paranoia, I will argue in section 3, is the form this guilt takes where there is no Symbolic to hold it.

This shift in perspective resolves a long-standing incoherence in psychoanalytic theory: the deficit model cannot explain the rigid certainty and over-systematic world-construction of paranoid formations. Nor do such formations yield to argument: where persecutory delusions do shift under treatment, it is through therapies that build new learning in lived experience rather than dispute the belief (Freeman et al. 2021; see Sheffield et al. 2024).

The consequence: because the subject never undergoes symbolic death, he never learns that negation can be survived, nor that it is determinate rather than arbitrary (Hegel 1969, 54). Every later limitation by the Symbolic, inevitable by nature, is therefore perceived as possible total annihilation, since he has never learned that the subject persists in the Real (Lacan 1994).

For psychotics, crises cannot be resolved through transformation (Rozek 2025) because transformation presupposes the prior acceptance of symbolic loss. The subject remains frozen at the first confrontation with negation, condemned to repeat it endlessly. Psychosis thus becomes a condition of permanent crisis: a state in which every challenge is experienced as existential, every contradiction as lethal, and every opposition as requiring elimination rather than mediation.

If psychosis is understood not as failure but as victory, then the question is no longer why the subject cannot enter the shared world, but why he refuses to let it exist at all.

2. The Problem of Foreclosure: From Absence to Annihilation

The concept of foreclosure has repeatedly returned to the center of theoretical debate whenever existing frameworks proved unable to account for the persistence of antagonism and violence: in the critique of Oedipus (Deleuze and Guattari 1983), in theories of constitutive exclusion (Butler 1993), and in the critique of ideology (Žižek 1989). Now, through figures like Alex Karp and Palantir, this concept seems to become determinately negated. To see why, begin with the canonical formulation.

Foreclosure (*forclusion*) designates the primordial non-inscription of the Name-of-the-Father: "I will thus take *Verwerfung* to be 'foreclosure' of the signifier. At the point at which the Name-of-the-Father is summoned… a pure and simple hole may thus answer in the Other" (Lacan 2006, 466). Unlike repression, which excludes a signifier that nevertheless remains operative in the unconscious (Lacan 2006, 322–23), foreclosure is said to concern a signifier that was never installed in the Symbolic order at all: the Name-of-the-Father "*verworfen*, foreclosed, that is, never having come to the place of the Other" (Lacan 2006, 481). When the function of this missing signifier is later invoked, it "returns in the Real" as hallucination or delusion (Lacan 1990, 3). Psychosis, on this account, is grounded in a structural hole (Lacan 1973–74, 72).

The difficulty with this formulation emerges as soon as foreclosure is asked to explain not fragmentation or incoherence, but the rigid certainty and systematic world-construction that psychotics so often display (Jaspers 1997): persecutors with names, intentions, and strategies; worlds hyper-saturated with meaning rather than deprived of it (Sass 1992; Conrad 1958). Lacan has an answer, and it should be stated at full strength. The hole does not produce the structure; the signifier does. The lack of the Name-of-the-Father "sets off a cascade of reworkings of the signifier from which the growing disaster of the imaginary proceeds, until the level is reached at which signifier and signified stabilize in a delusional metaphor" (Lacan 2006, 481). Language without its anchoring point, returning in the Real, generates coherence of its own. I grant that this explains the rigidity. It does not explain the position the structure is organized around. Unanchored language could settle anywhere, and its contents do vary with culture (Devereux 1967; Kleinman 1988; Luhrmann et al. 2015): aliens, neighbors, the secret service. What does not vary is the place the persecutor occupies. He watches, he knows, he prohibits; nothing is hidden from him and everything is judged by him. That is the paternal function's job description, whatever face it wears, and Schreber's God, who speaks, commands and persecutes (section 3), is its demonstration. Lacan's account of onset has to be read with the same care. For psychosis to be triggered, the foreclosed Name-of-the-Father "must be summoned to that place in symbolic opposition to the subject", and it is summoned "by nothing other

than a real father, not at all necessarily by the subject's own father, but by One-father [*Un-père*]" (481). The Lacanian reply is ready: this encounter comes after the foreclosure and meets a hole, so it is evidence of absence, not of rejection. I grant the sequence. But the hole answers to one call only. A figure in the paternal position triggers the collapse where no other figure does, which means the hole has the exact shape of what it lacks. It is not a bare absence but a determinate one, and that is the point of the image that follows.

Sass makes the point in terms the deficit model cannot absorb. The relevant phenomena, he argues, are "antithetical to notions of primitivity and of deficit or defect", being characterized "not so much by unreflectiveness and spontaneity as by acute self-consciousness and self-reference", qualities he gathers under the name hyperreflexivity (Sass 1992, 8). His caution should be registered with his claim: he does not hold that hyperreflexivity is unique to schizophrenia, and explicitly declines an essentialist definition (11). But the direction of his account is unambiguous, and it runs against absence.

This is not merely a clinical observation but a logical one, and a deceptively naïve image makes it plain. What Lacan proposes is a pre-conscious closure: the subject (Real) lives in his house (Imaginary) and shuts the door on the paternal signifier, a negation without determinate content. But negations, doors, are always determinate, bound to the object they negate, and Hegel makes this the condition of any progress at all. A negation is "not all and every negation but the negation of a specific subject matter which resolves itself, and consequently is a *specific negation*, and therefore the result essentially contains that from which it results"; because it is specific, "it has content" (Hegel 1969, 54).

What does this mean for our door example? Precisely this: the very design and material of the door implies precise knowledge of what is outside. A wooden door is very telling of what is not outside. What is not outside of a wooden door? Fire. How about an iron door, a glass door, an insulated door, and so on; each cannot be built a priori, and this is what Lacan postulates. I do not think what he describes does not exist, but it is not what Freud meant with *Verwerfung*, and thus not what constitutes psychotic subjects. The subject forecloses, but on my orthodox Hegelo-Freudian reading he does so actively and determinately. Note what is and is not being claimed: the door bears exact knowledge of fire, and the door knows nothing. Determinacy does not require a knower.

The German makes this concrete in a way the French does not. Close an edited document and the system asks: *speichern oder verwerfen?* Save or discard. Now notice when that question appears. It appears only if something was written. An unmodified file closes in silence, because there is nothing to discard and so nothing to ask. The dialogue box is therefore not merely an option offered

but a piece of evidence: its appearance testifies that content existed. This is Freud's certificate of origin in a user interface.

What would *forclusion* be on the same picture? Not the discarded edit but the read-only file: a document that remains unchanged, as the discarded one does, yet unchanged because no change was ever possible. Nothing was thrown away, because nothing could be entered. Inspect only the file and the two end states are indistinguishable. Inspect their histories and they share nothing at all.

It will be objected that the paternal function either operates or it does not. I grant the binary for end states. The claim is that the end state does not exhaust the structure, because only one of the two end states has a history, and this is the conflation I charge Lacan with. Both structures present a paternal signifier that is not operative. Only one of them involved an act, and only one of them leaves a trace. That is why the trace carries the whole evidential weight: a read-only file produces no record of what was never entered, whereas the psychotic world, as shown above, is organized around the very position the missing signifier is said to hold.

Once again, the psychotic subject, in order to foreclose (in my reading: annihilate), must have full grasp of the symbolic. He must grasp the imminent limitation, the symbolic castration. This grasp is necessarily permanent and continuous, as any drift or shift or even transmutation (Rozek 2025) in the symbolic would make the door leaky, non-functional.

The philology is worth pressing, because the translation did more work than it announced. *Verwerfung* names an act; German courts *verwerfen* an appeal, and what they perform is an active dismissal. *Forclusion*, by contrast, is a term of French law designating the extinction of a right through failure to act within a prescribed time: a lapse, a deadline missed, a non-act. The legal sense does support the Lacanian reading. That is exactly my point. Lacan's rendering imported the passivity, and the passivity is what my argument rejects. The object I am describing is the inverse of a lapsed deadline. It is something done.

And here the charge becomes narrower and more serious. Lacan saw this exactly, and then lost it, and the loss is datable within a single volume. In 1956, responding to Hyppolite's commentary on Freud's *Verneinung*, he takes *Verwerfung* to name an act: "to designate this process he uses the term *Verwerfung*, for which I would propose the term excision [*retranchement*]. Its effect is a symbolic abolition"; and "*Verwerfung* is exactly what opposes the primal *Bejahung* and constitutes as such what is expelled" (Lacan 2006, 322–23). Excision, abolition, expulsion, dependent on a prior affirmation: the Freudian reading, and Lacan's own.

Two years later it is gone. In the paper written up in December 1957 and January 1958, drawn from the very seminar on the psychoses that had produced the earlier reading, *Verwerfung* has become

"foreclosure of the signifier", and the paternal signifier is one "never having come to the place of the Other" (Lacan 2006, 466, 481). What opposed *Bejahung* in 1956 has become, by 1958, that which never arrived to be opposed. The act has become a hole.

So my claim is not that Lacan was wrong about *Verwerfung*. It is that he was right about it in 1956 and abandoned it by 1958, and that the abandonment carried the incoherence into everything built on the later formulation. What follows is therefore less a correction of Lacan than a restoration of his earlier reading, which was also Freud's.

A Lacanian will answer that I have misread the 1956 sentence. To oppose the primal *Bejahung* is to stand in its place, not to come after it: what is *verworfen* is what was never admitted into the symbolic, expelled from it rather than from within it. I grant the first half, and the text on which Lacan grounds the term shows why the second does not follow. It is the Wolf Man, the case in which Freud applies the word to castration. Of the allusions to castration the boy had heard, Freud writes that "he rejected what was new (in our case from motives connected with his fear of castration) and clung fast to what was old" (Freud 1918, SE 17: 79; *er verwarf das Neue*, GW 12: 111). Of castration itself: "This really involved no judgement upon the question of its existence, but it was the same as if it did not exist" (SE 17: 84). That clause is Lacan's warrant, and the German is sharper than Strachey's English: the oldest and deepest current is the one "welche die Kastration einfach verworfen hatte, wobei das Urteil über ihre Realität noch nicht in Frage kam", which had simply rejected castration before any judgment of its reality arose (GW 12: 117). But look at what surrounds it. What is rejected was heard. The rejection involves no judgment, which is exactly the determinacy without deliberation claimed in section 1. And what returns is not formless but castration itself: the severed little finger of the boy's hallucination (SE 17: 85). Lacan's own gloss concedes the encounter. The subject "refuses access to his symbolic world to something that he has nevertheless experienced, which in this case is nothing other than the threat of castration" (Lacan 1993, 12). Not admitted, then; but met.

Freud's 1925 paper on negation states the general rule. Negation does not merely follow the encounter; it testifies to it. "A negative judgement is the intellectual substitute for repression; its 'no' is the hall-mark of repression, a certificate of origin" (Freud 1925, SE 19: 236). The certificate belongs to repression, and Lacan's point in 1956 is precisely that *Verwerfung* is not *Verneinung*. What carries over is not the mechanism but its precondition. Both are defined against the same primal *Bejahung*: *Verneinung* negates what was admitted, *Verwerfung* refuses admission to what was met, and in either case the negation takes its shape from its object. What could issue a certificate of origin for something that was never there? Nothing can be stamped with the provenance of what it never met. And Freud draws the consequence for psychosis himself: "the general wish to negate, the negativism which is

displayed by some psychotics, is probably to be regarded as a sign of a defusion of instincts" (SE 19: 239). Negativism, that is, as an operation performed, not a constraint suffered.

This has decisive implications for foreclosure. If the Name-of-the-Father is foreclosed, it cannot be because it never arrived. It must have arrived as something, as a demand, a limit, a prohibition, and been refused. Foreclosure, in this sense, cannot be a passive absence. It must involve an active repudiation directed at a determinate object whose persistence is experienced as lethal. What is expelled is not nothing, but something that cannot be tolerated. And this is the normal trajectory: nobody welcomes castration. Consequently, the only way to prevent an ongoing, structural attempt of castration is annihilation. Psychosis is grounded not in foreclosure as absence but in rejection as annihilation: this is the Oedipal victory.

Lacan's departure from Freud nonetheless named something real, the field noted in section 1. The two operations historically conflated must therefore be distinguished. Rejection (*Verwerfung*) is a determinate act directed at an encountered element; it presupposes affirmation and operates through repudiation. Foreclosure (*forclusion*) belongs to another register: not an act, but a pre-conscious constraint on what can be symbolized.

3. Pyrrhic Victory: The Epistemology of the Psychotic

What world results once symbolic mediation is annihilated? If the paternal function was not merely absent but destroyed, then the mediating gap between Symbolic and Real was not never installed but actively collapsed. The consequence is a fusion: the subject can no longer distinguish between symbolic fiction and reality. Dying in the symbolic is perceived as dying in the Real. This is the epistemic ground of everything that follows.

What returns in the Real is not the absence of the Law but its ghost. The ghost is the Real-part of the Symbolic, *das Ding*, impossible to annihilate. The psychotic subject knows it is guilty of surviving the castration and knows the parricide is prohibited. He is the unrightful king, haunted by a corpse that refuses to stay buried; not as authority, but as pure accusation without law. Yet the father's ghost is not the only revenant. When the symbolic Law is annihilated rather than traversed, what also returns is the unmediated Real that the paternal function once held at bay. This Real is structurally maternal; not as a person, but as a function: immediacy without distance, presence without negation, life without symbolic separation. The mother reappears not as care but as engulfment. The psychotic subject is thus caught between two hauntings: the accusing ghost of the father who was killed, and the overwhelming maternal field no longer mediated by prohibition. Paranoia emerges at precisely this point of double exposure. I will return to the second haunting in section 6, where it reappears at civilizational scale.

The clinical phenomenon traditionally described as the return in the Real confirms this. What returns is never formless. Schreber's God speaks, commands, and persecutes (Freud 1911, SE 12: 3–82). The persecutor has a face, a voice, and a will. Such specificity cannot be derived from absence. It can only be derived from something that was once encountered, endowed with meaning, and then violently rejected. The ghost has a face because it was seen before it was killed. The price of certainty without mediation is permanent vigilance and the impossibility of being helped, rendering the Oedipal victory a Pyrrhic one.

Why does this appear as paranoia? Freud's own mechanism is projection, not guilt: "I hate him" becomes "He hates (persecutes) me, which will justify me in hating him" (Freud 1911, SE 12: 63). But notice what the projection is for. It supplies a justification. Projection is what guilt becomes where there is no Symbolic in which to lodge it: an accusation that cannot be borne inside is relocated outside, where it can be answered. And Freud corrects himself in the same text in terms that fit an act better than an absence: "It was incorrect to say that the perception which was suppressed internally is projected outwards; the truth is rather, as we now see, that what was abolished internally returns from without" (SE 12: 71). What was abolished was there.

The Fused Epistemology

In the neurotic structure, reality is always mediated. Words do not coincide with things; meanings are negotiated, deferred, and contextual. One can be wrong without being annihilated.

The psychotic victory destroys this distance. Signifiers no longer represent; they act. To name is to do; to identify is to determine.

This fusion produces a distinctive epistemology organized around presentation rather than interpretation. The psychotic subject does not read signs as indicators of something absent; he encounters them as the thing itself. A pattern is not a hypothesis about reality but a direct manifestation of it. Ambiguity is not a feature of knowledge but a threat to existence.

From this structure, megalomania and paranoia emerge as two inseparable poles of a single epistemic configuration (Freud 1911, SE 12: 3–82; Lacan 1993). In the absence of an external symbolic anchor, the subject must occupy the position of absolute certainty; he becomes the point from which meaning is generated. But having annihilated the mediating Law, he is directly exposed to a Real saturated with intention and hostility. Every disturbance is experienced as directed; every deviation as an attack. The megalomaniac certainty, *as the sovereign I am important enough to be the target of coups, and capable of annihilating them*, lies in superposition with the paranoid one, *the omnipotent other sees, hears, manipulates everything against me*. He is not wrong: he occupies a

position that is not meant for him, naturally working against him; not because reality conspires, but because he is standing beneath a waterfall and assuming the water intended to make him wet.

This also clarifies the phenomenon often described as hyper-lucidity in psychosis. The psychotic subject perceives connections others overlook and identifies patterns with uncanny speed. These capacities follow logically from the fusion thesis. If every signifier is real, then every correlation matters. There is no principled way to distinguish signal from noise, because such a distinction presupposes the very symbolic mediation that has been refused. Note that nothing in this requires a deliberating ego, and nothing in it is contradicted by Lacan. Asked in 1975 whether psychosis was a matter of impoverishment, he answered the other way: "Psychosis is full of meaning" (Lacan 1975a, 15).

Once mediation is annihilated, how does reality remain coherent at all? A mediated order stabilizes meaning externally, through law, convention and shared interpretive frameworks; here no such guarantee remains. The psychotic subject resolves this by occupying what may be called a Real-Function: the position where certainty is generated through presence rather than mediation. This is not narcissism but an epistemic substitution: the subject assumes the role once played by the Symbolic order itself.

What exactly is occupied? The question needs answering precisely, because the obvious objection is structural: the Name-of-the-Father is a signifier, not a position, and nothing can install itself in a signifier's place. The objection is correct. What the parricide occupies is therefore not the Name-of-the-Father but the place Freud assigns to the primal father: "a violent and jealous father who keeps all the females for himself and drives away his sons as they grow up" (Freud 1912–13, SE 13: 141). This father is not a signifier. He is a body, and he is the single figure the prohibition does not bind: the exception, not the function. Certainty through presence rather than mediation is precisely the mode of a father who is law by existing rather than by signifying.

Lacan saw the same structure and drew the opposite conclusion. The father, he says, "ne peut être qu'exception" (Lacan 1975b, session of 21 January 1975). The dead father of *Totem and Taboo* is for him a myth operating as "un opérateur structural", and the equivalence of dead father and jouissance is "le signe de l'impossible même", the real being, on his definition, the impossible (Lacan 1991, session of 18 March 1970). Do I dispute the impossibility? Not at all. The impossibility is the claim. The Real-Function names the attempt to occupy an uninhabitable place, and the fused epistemology described here is the symptom of the attempt, not evidence that no attempt was made. Where Lacan reads impossibility as a limit that forecloses the operation, I read it as the cost the operation incurs; the paranoia analyzed above is that cost. This is also the precise site of the divergence declared in section

1, and Lacan states it in his own voice: of Freud's insistence that the parricide actually occurred, he observes, "c'est là ce sur quoi Freud insiste: que ça s'est passé réellement, que c'est le réel" (Lacan 1991, session of 18 March 1970). For Freud the murder is an event. For Lacan it is a myth doing structural work. A theory of an act requires the former.

This position is structurally unstable. A shared symbolic order absorbs contradiction and tolerates error; a self-anchored epistemic system cannot. Every deviation threatens the coherence of reality itself. Knowledge becomes exhaustive rather than selective: the subject does not infer but detects, does not test hypotheses but reveals truths. The result is a world intensely meaningful but unlivable: everything signifies, everything matters, everything demands response. The psychotic is not lost in meaninglessness; he is crushed by an excess of meaning.

This reformulation clarifies why psychosis is compatible with extreme functionality. A system founded on annihilation rather than absence is not weak; it is brittle. It can operate with terrifying efficiency so long as it remains closed. When confined to an individual psyche, the subject often collapses under the pressure of the Real. But when supported by technical, institutional, or political infrastructures, the fusion of Symbolic and Real becomes operational rather than hallucinatory. The epistemology ceases to appear pathological and begins to present itself as hyper-rational. This is not a regression to pre-modern belief nor a failure of Enlightenment reason. It is Hyper-Enlightenment: certainty without mediation, knowledge without loss, mastery without castration; reason that has eliminated the very gap that made reason possible. Sass names the same structure from the phenomenological side, describing such formations as products of "a kind of hyperrationality: forms of irrationality generated by rationality itself" (Sass 1992, 327).

The nearest ancestor of this claim should be named. Horkheimer and Adorno had already argued that "enlightenment reverts to mythology" (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002, xviii) and that "paranoia is the shadow of cognition" (161); their paranoiac's "over-consistency, the bad infinity of never-changing judgment" (161) is the fused epistemology in an earlier idiom. The difference lies in the mechanism. Theirs is false projection: the subject's own repressed impulses attributed to a victim chosen for the purpose, which is why paranoia can be "the symptom of the half-educated" (161). Mine is a founding act and its avowal, and the structure culminates not in the half-educated but in the most rigorously engineered apparatus available. Nor is its persecutor projected, or not only. In the clinic the accusation must be relocated outside to be borne, as the Schreber case showed; at civilizational scale the archive does the relocating. The Other who remembers is real, and section 5 argues that this is what makes the paranoia, in its own terms, reasonable.

No individual subject can indefinitely sustain the burden of anchoring reality alone. The Real-

Function therefore seeks external supports that do not reintroduce symbolic mediation. Technology emerges here not as a neutral tool but as an epistemic *sinthome*: a prosthetic structure that stabilizes immediacy while bypassing interpretation.[1] It does not restore the gap; it automates its absence. Detection replaces judgment, correlation replaces meaning, and execution replaces deliberation. The subject no longer needs to believe in certainty; certainty is performed continuously by the system itself.

Zero-Tolerance Epistemology

The cost of error in this structure is catastrophic, so the system must compensate by eliminating uncertainty altogether. Knowledge must be maximally sensitive, not maximally specific. It is preferable to detect a threat that does not exist than to miss one that does. False positives are not accidents but necessities: the unavoidable by-product of a system that cannot tolerate the gap required for doubt.

This epistemology is internally coherent. It is not contradicted by the accumulation of false positives, because falsification itself presupposes an external reality against which claims can be tested. In the fused structure, there is no such external reference point. Residual uncertainty, which symbolically mediated epistemologies tolerate as lack, is here reified into a pseudo-object. What emerges is a novel epistemic entity: a non-object produced by the system's refusal of indeterminacy. Repeated verification cannot eliminate it. Each iteration re-produces it, not because the object persists, but because the epistemology cannot register absence as absence. The system generates an internally coherent but unfalsifiable reality.

Consider a thought experiment. A new global threat, a hostile entity, for simplicity a virus, is postulated. But this entity does not exist; statistical noise has produced the impression. A diagnostic test is deployed: 99% accurate, yielding a false positive rate of 1%. Applied to 8 billion people, this produces 80 million false positives. Retest those 80 million: 800,000 false positives. Retest again: 8,000. Once more: 80 people who have tested positive four consecutive times with a 99% accurate test, beyond any reasonable doubt infected with something that does not exist. From the moment of belief in this entity, it becomes empirically impossible to prove its nonexistence. Given resources, noise stabilizes itself as a pseudo-object.

Lacan came remarkably close to this thought in 1975. Asked about psychosis and rigor, he said: "Psychosis is a test of rigor. In this sense, I would say that I am psychotic. I am psychotic

1 The term is Lacan's (Lacan 2005), used here descriptively.

simply because I have always tried to be rigorous. This obviously goes quite far, since it supposes that logicians, for example, who tend toward this end, geometers also, would in the final analysis share a certain form of psychosis" (Lacan 1975a, 2). Coherence as such, as one of his interlocutors put it that day, "would only be proof of psychosis and not of truth" (15). If rigor without the tolerance of a gap is the formal signature of the structure, then a system built to be maximally rigorous and minimally tolerant of ambiguity is not metaphorically psychotic. It is the thing itself, executed in silicon rather than in a psyche. Lacan extends the structure to logicians and geometers; I extend it to an ontology engine. He had in fact drawn the connection himself a decade earlier, and drawn it through the very concept at issue here: "What I have said of the relationship between *Verwerfung* and psychosis, especially as *Verwerfung* of the Name-of-the-Father… if one remarks, however, that a successful paranoia might just as well seem to constitute the closure of science" (Lacan 2006, 742). A successful paranoia as the closure of science, tied explicitly to the repudiation of the paternal signifier. What I am describing is that closure supplied with a budget.

This is why psychotic formations are impervious to critique. Argumentation presumes a shared symbolic space in which claims can be weighed, revised, or withdrawn, and that space is what was annihilated. The price of the Oedipal victory is a knowledge in which nothing can be merely symbolic and nothing safely uncertain. The pseudo-object has no Real structure of its own; it exists only through the surveillance that produces it, and so demands constant testing.

From Clinic to Civilization

The transposition from clinical structure to civilizational formation is easily mistaken for analogy by courtesy. Freud authorizes it explicitly, and declines to treat it as analogy at all. Writing on the relation between individual neurosis and the history of religion, he notes that the parallel belongs "to the psychology of individuals, while religious phenomena have of course to be reckoned as part of group psychology", and then: "We shall see that this analogy is not so surprising as might at first be thought, indeed that it is more like a postulate" (Freud 1939, SE 23: 72). The transposition is not a rhetorical extension of a clinical finding. For Freud it is a condition of the account.

Totem and Taboo makes the same claim historically rather than methodologically. The parricide is not an event within civilization but the event that institutes it: the totem meal is "a repetition and a commemoration of this memorable and criminal deed, which was the beginning of so many things, of social organization, of moral restrictions and of religion" (Freud 1912–13, SE 13: 142). A structure whose founding instance is civilizational does not require special license to be read at civilizational scale.

What does the apparatus add, then, if not the structure? It adds avowal, and this is the asymmetry

that makes the civilizational case more than an enlargement of the clinical one. The individual enacts a determinate rejection he cannot avow; the quartered pig speaks without knowing that she speaks. An institution can avow it, and does: in an S-1 letter, in a shareholder letter, in a citation of Huntington offered as guidance rather than diagnosis. Lucidity in the strong sense, explicit, dated, citable, is available only where the parricide can be textualized. It is therefore not a property that migrates from psyche to institution. It is a property institutions can have and psyches cannot. And the question of who the subject of a civilizational psychosis might be, a collective, an individual, an institution, a discourse, need not be answered by naming one: discourse plus infrastructure can occupy the positions without a psyche to hold them together.

4. The Psychotic West

Technical systems require legitimation; surveillance and targeting do not justify themselves. Conversely, civilizational rhetoric without material infrastructure remains discourse. This chapter reads both together: Palantir's architecture as the technical instantiation of psychotic epistemology, and Alex Karp's civilizational rhetoric as the symbolic performance that renders it necessary. The question is historical. What paternal function has the contemporary West annulled, what form of sovereignty has replaced it, and what technical apparatus sustains it?

The Post-1945 Order as the Paternal Metaphor

To identify a parricide, one must first identify the father. In psychoanalytic terms, the paternal function is not a person but a position: the third term that interrupts immediacy, installs a gap between desire and satisfaction, and makes symbolic mediation possible. The father's "No" is less a command than a structure: limitation accepted as the condition of shared reality.

At the civilizational level, the post-1945 liberal international order functioned as precisely such a paternal metaphor. Emerging from total war and industrialized atrocity, it codified a prohibition, "never again", into institutions and norms: war-crimes trials, human-rights declarations, conventions governing conduct, and a chartered order that, at least in principle, subordinated sovereignty to law. Whatever its hypocrisies, the distinctive function of this order was the installation of a gap between power and its exercise: violence had to appear answerable to something beyond itself.

This is not romanticization. The postwar order was selective, inconsistent, and often a cover for continuing domination. Yet even hypocrisy preserves a structure: one can denounce imperial violence only where a language of constraint still exists. The father may be weak or compromised, but he is still there, still the symbolic reference that makes critique intelligible.

What changes in the late twentieth century is not simply the violation of this order but its explicit repudiation (*Verwerfung*): not acting against the stated ideals while pretending fidelity, but declaring the ideals a sentimental lie. This shift marks the move from neurotic compromise to psychotic structure: the annihilation of the paternal function itself. Samuel Huntington's formulation in *The Clash of Civilizations* is decisive because it performs this repudiation in the register of theory. The West, he insists, "won the world not by the superiority of its ideas or values or religion (to which few members of other civilizations were converted) but rather by its superiority in applying organized violence. Westerners often forget this fact; non-Westerners never do" (Huntington 1996, 51). The prohibition is thereby unmasked as postwar self-deception. The father's authority is exposed as force; "never again" becomes not a binding limit but a moral fiction told by those who already prevailed through the very violence they now disavow.

Huntington's claim is not merely descriptive. It implies a prescription: if Western dominance rests on violence, it must be maintained by the continued capacity and willingness to apply violence. Vigilance becomes identity, and restraint appears as civilizational suicide.

The Public Performance of Parricide

If Huntington articulates the logic, Alex Karp performs it. His distinctive gesture is to assert the claim in his own voice before attributing the words, which is not citation but endorsement. Closing his letter to shareholders of 3 February 2025, he writes that the rise of the West was not made possible "by the superiority of its ideas or values or religion … but rather by its superiority in applying organized violence", and continues, still in Huntington's words, "Westerners often forget this fact; non-Westerners never do" (Karp 2025). The postwar father, human rights, international law, "never again" as limit, does not merely fail in practice; it is declared obsolete in principle. Violence is not regrettable exception but foundation.

This matters because it refuses the neurotic alibi. The neurotic can act violently while maintaining the symbolic fiction that violence is constrained, exceptional, or tragic. Karp's rhetoric dispenses with this fiction, and dispenses with it in the registers where hedging is most expected. The 2020 prospectus states the lethal function without euphemism: the company builds "software platforms that enable more effective surveillance by the state of its adversaries or that assist soldiers in executing attacks", and "our software is used to target terrorists and to keep soldiers safe" (Karp 2020, i). It then declines the position of neutrality outright: "We have chosen sides, and we know that our partners value our commitment. We stand by them when it is convenient, and when it is not" (ii). It even grounds the corporation in the sovereign: "The corporate form itself — that is, the privilege to

engage in private enterprise — is a product of the state and would not exist without it" (ii).

The book is more explicit still, and in the first person. The software Palantir builds "can enable the deployment of lethal weapons" (Karp and Zamiska 2025, ch. 2); force precedes dialogue, since "there are times when resistance, even armed resistance, must precede discourse" (ch. 2); and Schelling is adopted approvingly: "The power to hurt is bargaining power. To exploit it is diplomacy — vicious diplomacy, but diplomacy" (ch. 3).

Most striking, Karp reaches Huntington's corollary in his own words, without citing him: hard power as a condition of survival is something "those in the West, the self-proclaimed victors of history, often forget" (ch. 4). The shareholder letter adds not the thought but the attribution, and with it the display. Silicon Valley's ethical hesitation reads as betrayal, and the internal enemy becomes the paternal limit itself: the discourses that would reinstall mediation, law, ethics, humanitarian constraint, recast as weakness or sabotage. This is the lucid parricide: the murder performed publicly, the weapon displayed as scepter. The Huntington citation is not confession but trophy. If Western power is organized violence, exposing violence cannot delegitimate it; the exposure is absorbed as confirmation. The murder weapon becomes monument.

The book also poses a problem for my own distinction. If the postwar legal order is the paternal function encountered and annihilated, it should figure in Karp's statement of his position. It barely does: no international law, no United Nations, no Nuremberg, no rules-based order; "human rights" appears once, inside another executive's letter. Does that not look like *forclusion* rather than *Verwerfung*? It would, if the paternal function at civilizational scale were a text an individual had read. It is the order an apparatus operates within, and the encounter registers in what is done with appeals made in its name. The Huntington endorsement is itself the encounter: to say that Westerners forget what non-Westerners never do is to name the prohibition in order to invert it. And the one "human rights" is an appeal met, not missed: Karp quotes it in order to dismiss it (ch. 15), in a form section 5 examines. A signifier that arrived and was judged contemptible.

The prospectus, for its part, concedes difficulty, "the ethical challenges that arise are constant and unrelenting" (Karp 2020, i), which is the neurotic register, tension acknowledged rather than abolished. But a prospectus is addressed to a regulator, and there admitting difficulty is itself compliance. The shareholder letter, addressed to holders, is where the avowal arrives unhedged and Huntington is brandished. My claim concerns the structure the apparatus performs, not the tone of any single document, and the evidential weight rests on the letter.

What does the parricide install? In the individual, the Real-Function; at civilizational scale, technological sovereignty, whose material form is Palantir.

Palantir Technologies, founded to close the gaps that intelligence failure allegedly revealed after 9/11, whose platforms Gotham, Maven, and TITAN now undergird Western military and intelligence operations, instantiates the Hyper-Enlightenment described in the previous chapter. Its founding premise is structural: mediation is treated not as the condition of knowledge but as a vulnerability to be eliminated (cf. Northrop Grumman 2024; Palantir Technologies 2024a, 2024b; Work 2017).

The technical core of the platform is a data model that Palantir's own service definition describes without euphemism: the platform "transforms structured and unstructured data into objects and associated properties that represent real concepts (such as people, organisations, places, documents, and events) and the relationships that connect them. This data model is called the 'Ontology'" (Palantir Technologies 2024c, 9). What is built on it, the prospectus explains, are "virtual replicas of their physical environments, also known as 'digital twins'" (Karp 2020, 131). This is not mere description but a practical categorization of what exists: within the operational field, the object is what counts as the thing. Where the postwar order installed law as the mediating third term, Palantir installs the Ontology: a proprietary grammar that specifies objects, relations, and permissible moves. Its promise to serve as "a single source of truth for the entire organisation" (Palantir Technologies 2024c, 6) is a political-theological claim: reality anchored in a platform that renders the world directly actionable, admitting no legitimate outside, no competing schema with equal standing. The paternal "never again" is replaced by the imperative of permanent readiness.

The operational consequence is the compression of the kill chain. Where doctrine once staged a sequence, find, fix, track, target, engage, assess, Palantir markets continuity: a "common operating picture" and "common intelligence picture" supporting "intelligence collection and production, investigative network analysis at scale, mission planning, targeting, execution, and after-action analysis" (Palantir Technologies 2024c, 5). One interface, the whole sequence, no seam. The gap between detection and execution is treated as latency to be eliminated. This is the zero-tolerance epistemology of section 3, made operational.

Here the false-positive logic finds its lethal instantiation. In systems that generate target lists from correlations, communication patterns, movements, network proximity, confirmation is produced by the act of targeting itself. Targeting one node increases suspicion around adjacent nodes; each operation deepens the pattern it claims to discover. The threat increasingly becomes an artifact of prior detections: a pseudo-object stabilized by recursive action rather than independent verification. A system that cannot tolerate uncertainty must therefore act before validation is possible. Pre-emption becomes not an exception but the temporal form of operation: intervene to prevent the emergence of the very gap that would expose prediction as fallible. The present is saturated with possible threat;

delay itself becomes risk. Pseudo-objects become operationally indistinguishable from real threats, because the system's actions make them real in their consequences.

Why This Is Not Perversion

Is this perversion rather than psychosis? Karp and Palantir operate inside legal and institutional frameworks continuously: contracts, compliance regimes, procurement law, congressional testimony. The pervert also needs the law. So why is this not simply the cynic's structure?

The distinction is not a matter of how much law is present but of what is done with the gap. Perversion operates by disavowal: the subject knows, and preserves the knowledge alongside its denial. Mannoni's formula is exact (Mannoni 1969), *je sais bien, mais quand même*, and Žižek reads it as the very form of fetishistic disavowal: "I know that it is not so, but nevertheless I believe it" (Žižek 1991, 274; cf. 73). The structure is a maintained split. The law must remain operative, because transgression requires something to transgress, and enjoyment is extracted from the staging. The pervert props the father up in order to violate him.

The structure described here abolishes the split rather than maintaining it. Where the pervert says *I know, but all the same*, the lucid parricide says *I know, and therefore*. Huntington's account of organized violence is not disavowed knowledge held at arm's length from professed values; it is cited as a directive. The violence is not staged as transgression. It appears as administrative output: what the system produces when functioning correctly. Nothing is being got away with, because nothing is prohibited.

The test is therefore whether the gap is preserved or closed, and it discriminates cleanly. Disavowal preserves the gap; fusion abolishes it. A cynic can be addressed in the symbolic order he covertly relies on: show him the contradiction between his stated values and his conduct and you have said something he must manage. The configuration analyzed here cannot be addressed that way, because it has conceded the contradiction in advance and refused the values.

Two concessions sharpen the claim. First, the settlement Freud describes after the primal parricide is genuinely perverse in mechanism. The totem is a substitute that commemorates the father while denying his death, and "deferred obedience" is *je sais bien, mais quand même* avant la lettre (Freud 1912–13, SE 13: 143). Freud himself files the outcome under obsessional neurosis: "Religion would thus be the universal obsessional neurosis of humanity; like the obsessional neurosis of children, it arose out of the Oedipus complex, out of the relation to the father" (Freud 1927, SE 21: 43; cf. 1907, SE 9: 127). The configuration described in this paper is defined by its refusal of exactly that settlement. No totem, no commemorative rite, no deferred obedience. The monument

replaces mourning. Second, Karp's individual stance may well be perverse: the philosopher-king staging his own transgression, wanting to be watched. My claim is not about his psyche. It is that he is the avowing mouthpiece of an apparatus whose structure exceeds any individual stance, and that the apparatus does not disavow.

Late Lacan confirms the distinction from the other side. He writes perversion as *père*version, a turning toward the father, with its prototype "l'imagination d'être le rédempteur" (Lacan 2005, session of 10 February 1976). Civilizational redemption rhetoric is thus, on Lacan's reading, perverse, which is why the configuration described here must be distinguished from it. The parricide does not redeem the father. He buries him and keeps the gaze.

5. The Return of the Slain Father

The killed father, rather than the integrated one, does not vanish. He returns. That he returns *stronger* is not an inference from my model but Freud's own finding, stated in the text where parricide founds civilization:

> A sense of guilt made its appearance, which in this instance coincided with the remorse felt by the whole group. The dead father became stronger than the living one had been, for events took the course we so often see them follow in human affairs to this day. What had up to then been prevented by his actual existence was thenceforward prohibited by the sons themselves. (Freud 1912–13, SE 13: 143)

Three things arrive here at once. Guilt arises from the act: it is structural, not affective residue. The father's authority increases through his death, which is the persecutory corpse of my thesis. And the prohibition returns self-imposed, which is why the configuration polices itself with a severity no living father ever managed.

This is not a Lacanian result. Where the paternal function is a signifier that was never inscribed, there is no act to be guilty of, and the objection that foreclosure produces no structurally meaningful guilt is correct. That objection is precisely why I argue from Freud. Where the parricide is an event, guilt is its structure, and Freud draws the civilizational consequence himself, declaring his "intention to represent the sense of guilt as the most important problem in the development of civilization" (Freud 1930, SE 21: 134).

The Corollary as Curse: Non-Westerners Never Forget

Huntington's formulation has two parts, and only the first is usually noticed. Western dominance

grounded in organized violence is the murder weapon: the explicit cancellation of the postwar prohibition. "Westerners often forget this fact; non-Westerners never do" is the curse that follows. Read it again as a structural claim rather than an observation about memory. If non-Westerners never forget, the founding violence is permanently known. The crime has witnesses who persist across generations, and memory becomes transmissible accusation. A civilization may build elaborate apparatuses of forgetting, universalist rhetoric, legalism, a rules-based order; the Other's memory converts each of them into evidence of what they were built to cover.

So what exactly is the threat? Not what the Other does. What the Other knows. If legitimacy depends on forgetting and the Other cannot forget, then the Other's memory is an existential problem, and the dangerous object is no longer the enemy's weapon. It is the enemy's archive.

The Roko's Basilisk analogy runs in the other tense. In the thought experiment a future agent punishes past inaction; in my case a past crime coerces the present. I take the analogy to hold at the level of structure rather than tense: in both, knowledge alone, with no act by the one who knows, becomes a coercive constraint on the one who is known. Once the West knows that it is known, and knows the crime cannot be expiated, knowledge itself installs permanent preemption. Memory justifies surveillance; surveillance produces threats; threats demand neutralization; neutralization generates grievances; grievances become memory. The circuit closes. On this model the West is paranoid not because the world is uniquely dangerous but because it knows it is guilty and knows the guilt is publicly legible. The throne depends on the murder staying covered, and the witness will not stop testifying.

What does a system do when the threat is a memory? It targets it. This is the structural sense of the contemporary obsession with narratives, information warfare, influence operations, disinformation: the enemy is defined less as an army than as the circulation of delegitimating knowledge, less as a weapon than as the witness who keeps the record. Palantir's architecture, described in the previous chapter, is built for exactly this. Counter-archives and testimony do not enter as rival truths; they enter as variables to be categorized. The apparatus surveils association, communication and pattern, which are the media through which memory becomes political.

Every gap is then a space in which the murdered father might return: the witness might organize, the archive might circulate, the accusation might harden into mobilization. Hence deep sensing, continuous monitoring, and the conversion of anticipation into execution. The war against memory is unwinnable, and therefore permanent. Crisis stops being an episode and becomes the condition of the system's survival.

Baudrillard supplies the other side of this loop: "The very scale of the efforts made to exterminate

the Other is testimony to the Other's indestructibility, and by extension to the indestructible totality of Otherness … Radical otherness survives everything" (Baudrillard 1993, 146). Read against Karp, this refutes the fantasy of total elimination: violence cannot destroy alterity. I agree, and add what the structure makes of that impossibility. For the lucid parricide, the Other's indestructibility is not a limit to be accepted but proof that the work is unfinished. Each failed elimination reads as evidence of a larger threat, and so as reason to escalate. Where Baudrillard finds the Other's survival testified to by the scale of the effort, the paranoid system finds its own necessity testified to by the Other's survival. The indestructible Other and permanent pre-emption are one fact seen from either side.

Why Liberal Critique Fails: Law Received as Coup

From inside this configuration, liberal critique is worse than ineffective. It is unintelligible. Every appeal to the postwar symbolic, to rights, to law, to "never again", arrives as hostile action, and this is structural necessity rather than thin skin. The paternal prohibition was identified as the enemy and annulled to secure sovereignty; whoever invokes it appears by definition as an agent of the father's return. Critique is decoded as coup.

There is a further turn here, in a posture decolonial critique can itself adopt toward the same Other: solicitude. It runs the same operation in the opposite direction. Where the configuration I describe reclassifies appeals to law as enemy action, an imperialism of solicitude reclassifies the Other as an object of care, and neither leaves the Other a position from which to speak. My argument is not that these are equivalent postures. It is that both dispense with the mediating third term, one by annulling it and one by absorbing it, which is why critique conducted in the register of care is so readily absorbed by the apparatus it means to oppose.

Note the form the dismissal takes, because the form is the evidence. An appeal to "violations of basic human rights and freedoms" is answered with no counter-argument at all, but with a diagnosis of the speech act itself: "hollow and meaningless corporate pronouncement, condemning an evil for which nobody is advocating" (Karp and Zamiska 2025, ch. 15). The appeal is not refuted. It is reclassified as noise, which is what a structure that has annulled the mediating third term must do with any invocation of it. My claim is not that critics are read as malicious. It is that the structure has no register in which critique could be anything but an attempt to reinstall mediation. A single source of truth admits no legitimate outside: evidence becomes disinformation, testimony becomes propaganda, criticism becomes infiltration. One cannot appeal to a law that is no longer operative even as fiction.

6. Concluding Remarks: The Primordial Beast

Every crisis bears a determinate negation: a specific revelation of what is untenable in the framework that produced it. Gaza negates the assumption that humanitarian management can substitute for political resolution. Climate crisis negates the assumption that growth can be decoupled from material throughput. Each negation is concrete, bounded, and singular.

What does the psychotic configuration do with such a negation? Not what the other structures do. The neurotic filters it, the pervert disavows it, and classical foreclosure never registers it at all. This configuration realizes the negation with full clarity, and precisely because it is realized, it must be destroyed. The struggle is not interpretive but existential. In the fused field, a determinate negation is not a claim to be conceded; it is a threat to existence itself. To accept it is to disappear. Any concession reopens the gap whose annihilation secures the subject's coherence.

The primordial beast is primordial structurally rather than temporally. It is undead because it has never died symbolically. It does not transform; it elaborates. It extends along a single plane, A → A* → A**, optimizing indefinitely while refusing the step to B, because that step would require symbolic death. A is the existing framework; A* and A** are its increasingly sophisticated internal refinements; B is what lies on the other side of accepting the determinate negation that A cannot accommodate.

With sufficient resources, this structure becomes behemoth. What collapses the individual psychotic stabilizes the civilizational one. Vigilance becomes surveillance infrastructure; hypersensitivity becomes data fusion; zero tolerance becomes targeting doctrine; escalation becomes permanent war. At the level of sovereign systems, peace appears as exposure, slowness as vulnerability, and restraint as collapse. Crisis must be maintained, not as a succession of emergencies but as a condition in which no crisis can end, because resolution would require the step to B. Lucidity does not dissolve the structure. It intensifies it. The parricide knows what he killed. The beast does not sleep because the negation does not die.

Here the second haunting announced in section 3 returns, transformed. The annihilation of the paternal function exposes the subject to an unmediated Real that is structurally maternal: immediacy without distance, presence without negation. At civilizational scale, once law no longer mediates between a civilization and its material conditions, those conditions return as engulfment: weather that cannot be negotiated with, migration that cannot be legislated away, an ocean that does not recognize a border. The beast is not only haunted by the father it killed. It is standing in rising water, and it interprets the water as an enemy: a limit would have to be accepted, and acceptance is the one

operation the structure cannot perform.

A system that cannot undergo symbolic death internally must externalize death. The A → B traversal that would follow acceptance of the negation is replaced by real death inflicted outward. Each kill becomes a displaced traversal: movement achieved by killing the other rather than dying symbolically oneself. This is why the apparatus produces enemies rather than responding to them: each intervention generates new determinate negations, each of which must be annihilated in turn, which is the loop traced in section 5. Permanent war is the structural consequence of refused symbolic death.

The Exit

The exit remains theoretically visible and practically blocked. Symbolic death is the acceptance of loss without annihilation: the discovery that the death of A is the birth of B. It cannot be undertaken with guarantees; any retained safeguard contaminates the act. For the sovereign psychotic, relinquishing the throne feels identical to dying, and within the fused structure that is the truth of the system. The exit exists only as an internal act, and the structure exists to prevent it.

Dying symbolically is how you climb. Refusing to die means, individually, burning out in the superposition of war and persecution. At civilizational scale, I suspect, the planetary crisis is its structural consequence: the behemoth elaborating A indefinitely, externalizing a death it cannot undergo, until the externalization reaches the limits of the world itself. The water keeps rising, and the beast keeps targeting it.

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Necromantic Jouissance: Guilt, Otherness and the Erosion of the Social in the Secular Age

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Abstract: This article argues that contemporary Western (European) geopolitics cannot be reduced to technology, strategy, or civilizational hierarchies, but must be read through the psychic economy of the return of the repressed. Violence does not appear here as an instrument of power or an effect of algorithmic governance; it emerges instead as the symptom-form of an unresolved collective guilt that has lost its former theological mediators.

Drawing on Lacanian psychoanalysis, I propose that secular modernity sustains itself through a structural incapacity to symbolize its own violent inheritance, imperial, totalitarian, and fratricidal alike. What cannot be spoken about or mourned does not return as memory but as event, as "ghostly matters" (Gordon, 2008) from the past, in the form of border fortifications that reenact old partitions, in laws that repeat historical purges under the sign of purity, in discourses of threat that resurrect the very figures modernity once expelled or absorbed and then disavowed.

The Other, in this configuration, is not an external adversary but the internal remainder of the repository of everything a putatively homogeneous Europe refuses to recognize as its own past (colonial violence, totalitarian crimes, fratricidal histories). Guilt, deprived of ritual absolution, circulates without catharsis as moral superiority, as panic, as pre-emptive aggression. Without symbolic metabolization, it repeats itself as hostility. Projection temporarily stabilizes identity while dissolving the social bond; the disowned guilt is transformed into destiny. War, far from being the failure of diplomacy, becomes the libidinal success of repression: the compulsive staging of a trauma that was never worked through. The analysis is conceptual rather than empirical. "The West", "the secular subject" and "the Western mother" name positions within a libidinal economy, not populations, and no claim is made about the intentions of particular subjects. The article concludes by sketching a nonprojective mode of sociality, one that begins not with innocence but with the difficult labour

of articulation. The article thus reframes contemporary conflict not as strategy or inevitability, but as the psychic cost of unassimilated history.

Keywords: Lacan; jouissance; secular guilt; borders; projection; otherness; Western subjectivity; necromantic jouissance; phantasmatic mother

1. Introduction: Guilt without a Creditor

Crises rarely appear as novelties. They act more like repetitions, as if something we believed we had left behind long ago were coming home again. The individual symptom has become the societal return of the repressed Real. The growing polarization of societies, the resurgence of nationalist affects, the new cultural pleasure in drawing borders and producing enemy images, all these point to a return of the repressed in the collective unconscious of modern societies.

This resonates with Freud's classic argument in *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930), where cultural development intensifies guilt through the superego's internalization of aggression. Yet what cannot be contained through this internalization may return as societal violence, itself becoming a form of civilization's discontent. However, unlike Freud's pessimistic view of civilization as perpetually at odds with instinctual renunciation, this paper employs Lacan to frame secular guilt not merely as renunciation but as a libidinal driver of compulsive recurrence, where jouissance thrives in the absence of theological mediation.

This is also the point at which the argument joins a longer discussion. Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich (1967) described a collectivity that could not mourn what it had done, and Dominick LaCapra (2001) distinguished the acting out of an unmastered past from its working through. The present article takes up that distinction and relocates it. What cannot be worked through is not, in the first instance, a memory. It is a jouissance.

The difficulty is that such guilt has no perpetrator to attach itself to. Michael Rothberg's (2019) figure of the implicated subject names exactly this position: neither perpetrator nor victim, yet materially bound to a history one did not author. What follows can be read as an account of what happens to implication when it is refused rather than acknowledged, and of the libidinal form that refusal takes.

In the secular age, which believes itself emancipated from religious categories of guilt and redemption, guilt has not disappeared; it has merely been displaced into political, cultural, and geopolitical registers. The social body disintegrates through repressed guilt and alterity; the excluded

returns through a tear in the symbolic fabric once one follows Lacan in viewing the secular era as the privileged site of return. This formulation extends Guérin's (2023) account of the "untimely," in which what appears to belong to a finished past persists through repetition and casts its shadow upon the present. In Lacanian terms, foreclosure of guilt from the symbolic produces a return in the real, and projection secures identity only by rupturing the social link. The failed attempt at secularization creates a situation in which guilt, in order to be displaced, requires more than Bion's container; the available projective surface lacks the symbolic capacity to metabolize collective and historical guilt. Under these conditions, guilt requires the other as its site of displacement: it functions as the motor of return and reappears only insofar as it is externalized onto alterity.

Method, scope, and limits

A word on what kind of argument this is. The analysis is conceptual and theoretical; it advances no empirical claim and reports no clinical material. Its primary frame is Lacanian. Where Bion, Bromberg or Klein appear, they are used descriptively, to name a psychic operation, and are not being reconciled with Lacan at the level of metapsychology; the incompatibilities between these frameworks are real and are not resolved here.

Terms such as "Western subject," "secular subject," and the figure of the "Western mother" are used interchangeably to designate positions within a historically specific formation of secular modern subjectivity. They do not refer to an empirical population or a universal category, but to locations within a libidinal economy that produces projection and displacement. Otherness, by contrast, appears here not as a symmetrical counterpart but as the necessary surface onto which what cannot be borne is displaced.

A reading of this kind cannot be falsified in the manner of an empirical hypothesis, but it is not therefore unconstrained. It would be substantially weakened if border regimes assumed the same libidinal form in polities without an unmetabolized imperial or totalitarian inheritance, or if the affective intensity attaching to the figure of the migrant could be accounted for by the material stakes involved. Neither, I argue, is the case.

The argument proceeds in six steps. Section 2 sets out the structure of foreclosure and the functional displacement of the big Other that makes projection onto alterity structurally necessary rather than contingent. Section 3 develops the libidinal form this displacement takes, which I call necromantic jouissance. Section 4 turns to the scopic threshold at which the other becomes killable. Section 5 traces the same structure back to its most intimate site, the phantasmatic maternal figure of secular modernity. Section 6 examines what happens to identification when

its temporal sequencing collapses, and why the resulting impasse issues in a fantasy of undivided unity. Section 7 shows why negation, far from resolving this return, is the operation that guarantees its recurrence.

2. Foreclosure and the Displacement of the Big Other

Guilt arrives accompanied by the other.

A spectacular entry point into this mechanism can be found in Renata Salecl's analysis of ignorance. Discussing a war crimes trial, Salecl notes how the perpetrator claimed to suffer from a "deceptive memory syndrome" in order to evade responsibility for his actions (Salecl, 2020, p. 49). Crucially, this appeal to ignorance does not function as a lack of knowledge, but as an active strategy for managing unbearable guilt. What is disavowed at the level of conscious acknowledgment does not disappear; it reorganizes itself structurally. Ignorance here does not suspend guilt but displaces it, preparing the ground for its return in altered, externalized forms toward the other.

The other, whether stranger, adversary, or alien system, appears as a projection screen: a repository of unclarified affects and unresolved traumas. This dynamic exceeds what might be described as "Eastern phobia." As Frosh's account of postmemory suggests, traumatic histories do not simply disappear with those who experienced them but persist through their traces, unconscious echoes, and forms of haunting in those who come after (Frosh 2019, 1–56). His later analysis further demonstrates how readily racialized hatred can surface as antisemitism, even where Jewishness itself is attributed to an imagined adversary (Frosh 2025, 81–95). Building on these accounts, I suggest that the other can become a repository for disavowed historical affects: antisemitic fantasies that have become difficult to articulate in their explicit historical form may return through more socially acceptable cultural displacements.

What is deposited on this screen is not only affect but enjoyment. Derek Hook (2018) has argued that racialized dynamics can organize themselves around the fantasy that the other possesses, or has stolen, an enjoyment that was properly ours, a structure Žižek (1993, 200–206) had already located at the core of national identification. Building on this logic, I suggest that the projective surface is therefore never merely a container for what is unwanted; it is the site at which what is most wanted is placed beyond reach and then reclaimed by force.

The projective surface possesses no freedom of choice regarding its positioning in the field of desire, for guilt, in its returning form, forces it to appear alongside itself, for instance, in narratives of "losing control" over illicit globalization that disavow the state's own historical and ongoing

involvement in producing the very illicit economies it condemns (Andreas, 2011). Yet, in the mode of an unconscious mandate, it takes on the attitudes imputed to it in order to satisfy the destructive, libidinal advance of the counterpart's repetition compulsion. In this takeover, dissociation occurs not only within the self but also within self-action, that is, within the very execution of acts no longer experienced as one's own. This understanding of dissociated action resonates with Laub's account of trauma, in which later actions may be organized by an unassimilated traumatic experience whose formative force persists even when the event itself has been repressed (Laub 1992, 85, 87–88).

The notion of an unconscious mandate can be given a more precise derivation. For Laplanche (1989), the subject is constituted by messages it receives before it can decode them, enigmatic signifiers implanted from the side of the other and carried thereafter as an unmetabolized foreign body. What is enacted under mandate is then not a choice made unconsciously, but an inheritance executed on behalf of someone else.

The other, this projective surface, is compelled to posit a further instance of the Big Other in order to prop up the dissociative self. In Lacanian terms, this does not imply a duplication of the Big Other as substance, but a displacement of its function: the Big Other operates as a presupposed locus of symbolic guarantee rather than as a substantial entity. Once positioned as the bearer of projection and symbolic guarantee for the Western subject, otherness cannot sustain this function without referring to a further, supposed instance of symbolic authority. In this sense, symbolic authority is not simply duplicated but displaced and re-established at another level. Without such a containing and organizing function, psychic coherence is threatened, a possibility that can be read through Bion's account of containment and failures of alpha-function and Bromberg's account of dissociation as a defense of self-continuity and coherence (Bion 1962; Bromberg 1998). This can be set out formally:

$$\text{West } (S_1) \rightarrow \text{Otherness (a / projective surface)} \rightarrow \text{supposed Big Other } (A_1)$$
$$\text{Otherness } (S_2), \text{ positioned as bearer of } A_1, \rightarrow \text{refers to a further Big Other } (A_2)^1$$

Taken together, these schemas do not posit a duplication of the Big Other as substance. Rather, they formalize a successive displacement of function: the Big Other exists only insofar as it is supposed to exist for another, as a locus of symbolic guarantee, and this supposition may in turn

1 The indices A_1 and A_2 are used here heuristically to distinguish successive positions of symbolic authority, not distinct substantial Others.

call forth a further locus of symbolic authority.

What follows from the schema is the central claim of this section. Projection onto alterity is not a contingent psychological failing that a more enlightened politics might correct. It is structurally required by an order that has foreclosed the mediators through which its own guilt could have been addressed. This is why appeals to recognition, or to a better management of difference, leave the formation intact: they address the content of the projection and not the position that generates it.

A complex dynamic matrix opens up in which it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish which psychic processes remain accessible to consciousness and which already circulate in the interstices between Western economies of guilt and the affective incorporation of the East. Such an entanglement can be situated within the broader framework of libidinal economy, in which psychic and economic processes cannot be treated as autonomous spheres but become implicated in one another (Gook 2024, 7–40). I suggest that the West's much-celebrated secular modernity intensifies precisely this entanglement, becoming a condition under which traumatic repetition can acquire a structural character.

3. Necromantic Jouissance

Within this matrix, the dichotomy of war transforms guilt into a battlefield of desire: a desire for the smell of death, for decay, for the sight of the body torn apart. War serves as a plunge back into the flesh beyond any ontological anchoring. Guilt itself has long since left the battlefield; in its place a necromantic jouissance has taken over.

The desire to be un-born

Jouissance performs its work beyond any categorical matter, following only the pulsating smell of death. As a libidinal force, it is drawn to death and excites, in the deepest dynamic layers of the psychic apparatus, the primal scene of Genesis, which is now reactivated: that traumatic-creative moment of birth in the sense of Otto Rank (1924).

Whereas Rank (1924) understood birth as a primal trauma whose effects persist throughout later psychic life, linking repetition to an ultimately unfulfillable striving to restore the intrauterine state, I propose that in the secular age the vector is inverted: birth no longer appears primarily as primal anxiety but as the first longing for the object of desire, the prelude to an infinite drift of objects.

Birth is retrospectively remembered not as loss but as the only moment of absolute, prelinguistic

jouissance. It is a jouissance beyond the pleasure principle and beyond the symbolic order: a jouissance prior to the other, prior to language, prior to law, prior to guilt. The intrauterine paradise, the total adhesion of the body to the (m)other, bathed in the smell of blood and amniotic fluid, becomes the sole experience of total plenitude that the secular subject was ever granted. What the unconscious now desires is no longer the escape from this moment, but its eternal recurrence.

Because this recurrence is impossible in life, as there is no confession, no ritual absolution, no symbolic metabolization that could restore it, the only place it can still be staged in is the battlefield. War becomes the necromantic negative of birth: the smell of blood, the warmth of torn flesh, the return to a body no longer separated by skin or law. The soldier does not flee death; he dives into it in order to inhale, for one brief libidinal instant, the same primal odour that once accompanied his entry into the world. Death on the battlefield thus appears as a secular ritual staging the illusion of return to a lost plenitude. In this precise sense, modern war is the compulsive, necromantic enactment of a desire that Rank never foresaw: not the fear of being born, but the unbearable longing (German: *Sehnsucht*) to be un-born.

Drawing on Parkin-Gounelas's account of the "tragedy of desire," in which the original lost object approaches attainment only at the tragic proximity of death (Parkin-Gounelas 2001, 82–102, esp. 101), I understand desire here as structurally tragic because it is oriented toward an impossible Real that both founds and exceeds the symbolic order. Deprived of the theological and ritual mediations that once regulated its relation to this lost plenitude, a symbolic state of undivided bodily attachment prior to lack, the secular subject carries this jouissance not as trauma to escape from, but as an incandescent remainder that demands repetition rather than renunciation. Precisely because this jouissance is structurally forbidden by the symbolic order ("there is no sexual relation"; and, in the terms developed here, there is no return to the womb), it can only reappear in the mode of the Real, as something potentially lethal and destructive. War, then, is what I propose as the contemporary social formation that most radically stages a negative encounter with that lost absolute jouissance.

This interpretation aligns with Žižek's extensions of Lacan, in which contemporary capitalist enjoyment assumes the form of a superegoic command to "enjoy!", an injunction that does not abolish guilt but paradoxically intensifies it (Žižek 2006). Building on this logic, I suggest that guilt can be transformed into an obscene surplus that fuels ideological violence. In the context of war, this command manifests as the libidinal success of repression, where jouissance is not renounced but compulsively enacted in destructive forms.

Three demarcations are necessary here, because the claim is easily assimilated to positions it does

not hold. Against Freud's classical formulation of the death drive as tending toward the restoration of an earlier, inorganic state, what is sought in necromantic jouissance is not the inorganic as such but a determinate remembered plenitude, and it is sought collectively rather than in the economy of a single psyche.

Against Žižek, whose superegoic imperative describes the *form* a command takes under secular conditions, the argument here specifies its *content*: what is enjoined is not enjoyment in general but a particular return, and this specificity is what makes the enactment take the form of war rather than of consumption. And against readings that treat the drive as oriented toward death, the position converges at one point with Zupančič's (2017, 102–103) account of drive and repetition, without adopting it in full: the satisfaction lies in the repetition itself, not in the state it purports to reach, which is why the enactment can never be completed and must be staged again. In the Lacanian terms developed here, this drive aims not at death as a terminal state but at what I conceptualize as the abolition of symbolization itself.

Modern war is therefore not the repetition of Rank's trauma of birth, but the compulsive, socially sanctioned return to the only jouissance the secular subject has ever known, a return that can only be purchased at the price of death or putrefaction. This desire to be un-born cannot be lived, but only staged; and it is first staged not in action, but in the gaze.

4. The Disposal Gaze

Once guilt no longer structures the scene, the libidinal economy of violence can, I suggest, be grasped from the position of the perpetrator, where jouissance becomes operative. This formulation resonates with Moscovitz's account of death by murder as an object situated between victim and killer and of mass murder as a "murderous jouissance" that reproduces itself on the side of the perpetrator (Moscovitz 2019). I extend this logic to what I call the perpetrator's jouissance: an eroticized gaze upon death-flesh, a gaze that knows no differentiation between man, woman, or animal.

I call this the disposal gaze. It does not describe a national character or empirical perpetrators. It names a structural scopic position that became historically legible in its most extreme form during the Shoah, but whose logic persists wherever violence requires a prior suspension of symbolic recognition.[2]

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2 This differs from Žižek's occasional use of "gaze" in a broader ideological and epistemological sense, as in the "American (or German) gaze" in "Da Capo Senza Fine" (2000, 243), where a foreign observer's misrecognition does not merely distort its object but participates retroactively in its constitution. While Žižek's example turns on

Holocaust survivor testimonies repeatedly describe experiences of radical dehumanization in which the victim is no longer encountered as a subject but reduced to a body exposed to disposal and annihilation (Améry 1998; Delbo 1995; Levi 1994). Across these testimonies, I suggest, this de-subjectivization possesses a scopic dimension that is repeatedly staged without being articulated as a stable concept. I call this scopic fixation the gaze: the psychic threshold at which the human other becomes killable, a regime of looking in which de-subjectivization precedes physical annihilation and renders it psychically possible. Crucially, this gaze operates implicitly; its resistance to explicit thematization can be read alongside accounts of Holocaust testimony in which traumatic experience disrupts coherent narration, witnessing, and symbolic integration (Langer 1991; Felman and Laub 1992).

A structurally cognate scene is described by Fanon (1952/2008, 82–85), who recounts being fixed by a look and a phrase in the street and finding himself returned to his own body as an object already assembled by another. What Fanon isolates is not merely insult but a scopic operation: the subject is constituted from outside, in a single moment, as the thing that has been seen. The two scenes are not equivalent in scale or consequence, and Fanon's does not end in annihilation. What they share is the direction of the operation: recognition is not withheld after the fact but pre-empted in advance, at the level of vision.

From a Lacanian perspective, the disposal gaze functions as a signifier without stable signified. It does not represent a determinate object or identity, it marks the collapse of symbolic mediation at the scopic level, reducing the other to flesh exposed to the Real. The gaze does not mean; it performs. Its signified is not really a stable object, but a performative motion. It institutes a position in which the human becomes killable by first being rendered visible as waste.

This can be stated more precisely against Lacan's own account. In Seminar XI, the gaze is not the subject's look but precedes it within the scopic field; the subject does not simply see but finds itself already caught within a field in which it is seen (Lacan 1977, 72–73). The disposal gaze, as I conceptualize it here, is the case in which this asymmetry becomes absolute. The subject is seen, and there is no position from which the look can be returned. What collapses is therefore not vision but the reciprocity that made vision a scene of recognition at all, which is why testimony reports it as a moment rather than as a relation.

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a Hegelian logic of reflexive determination and ideological invention, the term as developed here designates a more specific operation within the Lacanian scopic field as it emerges in trauma testimony, emphasizing implicit performativity over explicit categorization.

Judith Butler (2009) approaches the same threshold from the side of its effects: frames of recognition determine in advance whose destruction will register as a loss, and lives that fall outside them appear as already ungrievable, as lives whose loss does not fully register as loss. The disposal gaze names the operation that produces such a frame at the level of perception, before any discourse of grievability is available.

Reach and limits of the concept

A word on the reach of this concept, since it is easily misused. The disposal gaze is defined by a specific operation, the foreclosure of symbolic recognition at the level of vision, prior to and enabling an act, and not by the severity of what follows. This raises the obvious question of whether the concept then applies wherever recognition is withheld, which would empty it of content.

It does not, for two reasons. First, the operation must be constitutive rather than incidental: the gaze must produce the other's availability, not merely accompany an availability established elsewhere. Second, the concept is analytic and not evaluative. To identify a common scopic operation is to say nothing whatever about the comparability of the scenes in which it occurs, and nothing follows from such identification about their moral or historical equivalence. The extreme case is used here because it is where the operation is documented most fully, in testimony that had no vocabulary for it; it functions as an instrument of description, not as a measure against which other scenes are to be ranked.

5. The Ersatz-(m)other

The plenitude described in section 3 has a figure, and the argument must now return to it. What follows concerns not the gaze of annihilation but its opposite pole: the scene in which a body is first given to be seen at all.

The romanticized first gaze of the mother, holding the newborn in her arms, sediments itself in memory and is mirrored in the child's first sensory encounter with the bloody smell of amniotic fluid, the primal blood. It is precisely this smell that the unconscious, in the mode of war-desire, longs to rediscover: a bloodhound of our libidinal depths. The libidinal stirrings appear on the march in search of return to the intrauterine sanctity of the fetus. That is why we need the other, the unknown (m)other who replaces the real mother to satisfy the war-hunger that the actual mother could not still, because she was too busy, too entangled in her own symbolic obligations.

In Indian mythology, motherhood is not conceived merely as a nurturing role, but frequently appears as an ambivalent, powerful, and mytho-symbolic figure, from the ambivalence

embodied in the Putānā myth to the maternal and feminine divine associated with Devi/Shakti (Kakar 1978; Kurtz 1992). This suggests that culturally mediated perceptions of the maternal body and of motherhood are deeply normativized and invested with profound cultural fantasies.

A caveat is required at this point, and it is not a formality. The recourse of Western psychoanalytic writing to Hindu maternal figures has its own history, one that needs to be situated within the broader problem of psychoanalysis interpreting cultural difference through categories shaped by its own Western and colonial genealogy (Kurtz 1992; Khanna 2003). Within that history, I suggest, such figures can come to serve as a reservoir for what the analysing tradition could not accommodate in itself. This article's own use of them is not exempt from that history. It is retained here because the displacement it describes is precisely the one this article analyses, and because naming the mechanism from inside it is more honest than performing an innocence the argument itself denies is available.

Western maternal subjectivity is increasingly framed through ideals of autonomy, visibility, and reflexive self-realization. This figure of the mother operates less as a concrete relational subject than as a phantasmatic construct, sustained through repetitive performances of care, exposure, and empowerment.

This phantasmatic maternal figure is marked by a structural tension: she is expected to be endlessly nurturing while remaining self-governing, emotionally available yet professionally productive. She who gives birth; who daily struggles to fulfil everything "perfectly"; the revolutionary feminist who freed herself from the fences of the church in order to place children into a secular order; the woman expected to exercise sovereign autonomy even over the reproductive body, including the decision whether to continue a pregnancy; the mother who, in the digital transitional space, transforms her sexuality via Photoshop into a quasi-statutory aesthetic. The man may desire her, but he must not, and cannot, touch her. She is the perfect Western mother, who publicly displays her children and performatively exposes her corporeality without filter or social sanction, even where the boundary to transgression blurs and the erogenous zones become modern secularity itself. In this sense, the "Western" maternal figure emerges within a modern regime that renders bodies transparent, governable, and available to capture, a logic I relate here through da Silva's (2007) account of transparency, self-determination, and the global formation of modern subjectivity.

This performative exposure can be read through Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity (Butler 1990), according to which gender identity is not the expression of a prior essence but is constituted through the repetition of normatively regulated acts. Extending this logic to maternal identity, practices such as sharenting can be understood as repetitive acts that reinforce

secular norms of visibility and empowerment while, I suggest, enacting subtle forms of symbolic violence on the child's body.

A structurally analogous scopic regime can be observed in contemporary practices of maternal digital exposure, where the child's body is rendered visible, and instrumentalized in the name of care, or self-repair. Here too, the gaze precedes symbolic violence: it establishes the child's body as available before any explicit act of appropriation takes place. The gaze is not consciously reflected upon but functions as an implicit dispositive through which unresolved trauma is managed by deciding how, and as what, the other may appear.

Popular fiction is invoked here not as evidence but as condensation: it gives cultural form to what the argument reconstructs theoretically. The utterance "There is something written inside of me" (*Lucifer*, season 4, episode 8) condenses this logic with particular clarity. What is evoked is not simply meaning, confession, or narrative, but an inscription experienced as preceding articulation: something carried within the subject as if it belonged to his very nature, prior to what can be said about it. Such an inscription cannot simply be spoken away; it is carried and, at best, exposed to the gaze. Where pain cannot be symbolized or shared, it requires a carrier and may be delegated to a figure capable of bearing it in silence.

Because the Western mother is occupied with transforming the world of her own mothers so that the archaic father does not rise again in his omnipotent plenitude, she even takes over what I conceptualize here as the tasks of the "brother", a familial position that, as Saville Young and Frosh's analysis of "brothering" suggests, need not coincide with a fixed relational function but can assume parental and caring functions (Saville Young and Frosh 2010, 519, 524–25), in order to expiate the guilt of the man. In the context of war, I extend Žižek's discussion of Weininger's proposition that "woman is the sin of man" and of man's guilt toward woman (Žižek 1994, 141) guilt is not simply expiated but returns libidinally, becoming part of what I describe here as the war-desire. Read through Lacan's later formulation that "a woman is a sinthome for every man" (Lacan 1975–76, Seminar XXIII, session of February 17, 1976), this relation can be understood as one in which woman comes to occupy the symptomatic place of a guilt that man cannot fully symbolize. Preventively, I suggest, she symbolically castrates her own sons so that they will never again rise to the position of the man above the woman. Such an enactment can be read through Abraham's concept of the phantom, which passes "from the parent's unconscious into the child's" and carries into the descendants the effects of narcissistic injury or catastrophe suffered by the parents (Abraham and Torok 1994, 173–74).

The figure of the "Western mother" functions here as a phantasmatic position rather than as an empirical or sociological category, designating a symbolic condensation that organizes

affective economies across contemporary Western cultures. Practices of sharenting and the digital representation of children make aspects of children's lives publicly visible while raising questions of privacy, agency, and the boundaries between parental self-representation and the child's own digital identity (Blum-Ross and Livingstone 2017; Leaver and Highfield 2018; Plunkett 2019). From a psychoanalytic perspective, however, the analytical focus lies not on individual intentions but on the structural use of the child's body as a medium for affect regulation, a dynamic that operates largely implicitly and cannot be reduced to conscious choice or moral failure. I therefore read practices that expose or instrumentalize the child's body as symptomatic condensations of this structure: concrete enactments through which a phantasmatic organization of care, visibility, and self-representation inscribes itself in lived relations.

Of course, many mothers, often among the most politically conscious, refuse this logic altogether and fiercely protect their children's digital bodies. Yet the practice itself is widespread. Evidence syntheses show that many children acquire a parent-generated digital presence early in life, sometimes even before birth, through routine sharing practices that create enduring digital footprints over which the child initially has little or no control (Livingstone, Stoilova, and Nandagiri 2019; Berg et al. 2024). Such images therefore function not only as private memories but also as durable digital traces. Psychoanalytically, I suggest, something further is at stake: in the act of making the child's body publicly available to the gaze, the child, son and daughter alike, is deprived, from infancy, of the possibility of an unexposed sexual body.

The term is used in its psychoanalytic sense: what is at stake is the infantile body as a site of drives and of a sexuality that Freud (1905) showed to precede genital organization; the right in question, however, is the right to determine its exposure, not a right to sexual activity.

Taking Karl Abraham's (1920 [1927]) account of the female castration complex as a point of departure, I extend its logic to the contemporary secular mother: her own felt lack may be unconsciously repaired by turning the child's body into a perfectible phallic substitute, thereby pre-emptively castrating both son and daughter of the possibility of an autonomous sexual body: "my body was never mine." The daughter is aestheticized into availability ("my minime," "my brand"); the son is dispossessed of corporeal sovereignty. What is foreclosed is not sexuality as such, but the right to an unexposed body. His body is no longer his to present, withhold, or risk in adult desire, because it has already been spent in the maternal performance of secular perfection. The rage of the son that follows is not the expression of an innate "toxic masculinity" or of a wounded narcissism in the ordinary sense, but the unmournable loss of the right to one's own flesh. Unable to articulate this theft within a symbolic order that celebrates maternal "empowerment" and "visibility" as the

highest goods, the adult subject, male and female, is left with only one libidinal outlet: to seek the stolen phallus in the destruction of a fantasized substitute maternal body: the Ersatz-(m)other of geopolitical (m)otherness.[3]

Crucially, this substitute maternal body does not emerge in a vacuum. Rather, it draws on culturally available imaginaries through which maternal ambivalence, excess, and threat can be symbolically staged. Where Western maternal discourse forecloses the articulation of loss, aggression, and dependency, these disavowed dimensions are displaced onto mythological and culturally othered maternal figures. Western maternal subjectivity remains structurally ambivalent, burdened by demands that leave little space for acknowledging maternal aggression, exhaustion, or excess.

The structure underlying this foreclosure is itself well documented. Rozsika Parker (1995) showed that maternal ambivalence is not a failure of love but an ordinary condition of mothering, in which love and hate coexist rather than exclude one another. Jacqueline Rose (2018), in turn, has traced how contemporary cultures make mothers carry, in the form of blame, conflicts, failures, and forms of violence that cannot be contained within the idealized image of motherhood. Read together, I suggest, these accounts reveal a further displacement: what cannot be acknowledged within the cultural ideal is returned to the mother as accusation.

Lisa Baraitser (2009) describes the maternal subject as one constituted through interruption rather than through the mastery the discourse of empowerment demands. Building on this account, I suggest that the space unavailable for maternal aggression is culturally produced rather than psychically given, which is precisely the condition under which displacement onto another figure becomes necessary.

In this context, mythological and culturally othered maternal figures, such as those found in Hindu traditions, may function as symbolic substitutes through which maternal ambivalence can be narratively and ritually contained. These figures absorb the disavowed dimensions of motherhood, allowing the Western maternal imaginary to preserve its normative coherence while displacing its contradictions onto an "Eastern" maternal other.

The son experiences the theft as a pre-emptive castration ("my body was never mine") and can only recover an illusory wholeness through necromantic violence against a fantasized substitute maternal body, the geopolitical Ersatz-(m)other whose destruction promises, for one brief libidinal instant, the return of the stolen phallus.

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3 The Ersatz-(m)other is not a mythological substitute or Hindu foster-mother endowed with symbolic density and ritual containment, but a phantasmatic projection surface generated within Western libidinal economies, lacking symbolic autonomy and functioning solely as a bearer of disavowed guilt and desire.

The daughter's path is not symmetrical to the son's; it inverts in the opposite direction and ends up in a murderous identification with the primordial (pre-symbolic, pre-Law) father. This form of identification can be read through what Kristeva (1982) describes as the abjection of the maternal: a precarious separation from the maternal entity and the threat of engulfment, in which a paternal position may facilitate the subject's movement away from the maternal (Kristeva 1982, 1987). I extend this dynamic here into a compensatory alignment with an archaic paternal position. In this identification she develops a burning *Sehnsucht* to avenge the "theft" the mother committed against her: the mother who "robbed" her of the penis and then compensated with a perfectible doll-body.

The daughter-turned-woman therefore becomes the merciless guardian of purity, order, and moral superiority: she demands collective punishment, pre-emptive cleansing, and the annihilation of everything that reminds her of the original injury. Where this identification becomes socially organised, this *Sehnsucht* expresses itself less as a demand for repair than as a demand for purification: not forgiveness, not reparation, but the fantasy of finally executing the father's original sentence on the "thieving" mother, now projected onto any figure that threatens the purified secular order. Such formations are not confined to any single political tendency, and have historically appeared across the entire political spectrum, most often, and most murderously, on its right.

This dynamic resonates with recent psychoanalytic work on maternal abjection and paternity, which links separation from the maternal to the formation of the self and to identification with the Imaginary Father (Yaseen 2025). I extend this dynamic here to a compensatory alignment with an archaic paternal position, through which the threatened loss of differentiation is answered by identification with mastery rather than by relational desire. The claim is structural and does not entail that any particular contemporary movement instantiates it; identifying the form of a demand is not the same as adjudicating its content.

Thus, both trajectories, the son's necromantic war and the daughter's vengeful identification with the primordial father, are two sides of the same secular castration complex: the endless, compulsive attempt to recover what was confiscated in the first Instagram bathtime photograph.

6. Identification after War: Temporal Collapse and the Retreat to the One

Wilhelm Fliess (1925) conceptualized life in terms of periodic rhythms and cyclical returns, proposing a temporal logic in which recurrent processes unfold according to discernible biological intervals. I take from Fliess not the biological determination of these intervals, but the more general intuition that recurrence may possess a temporal structure.

His periodicity theory has no standing today and is not invoked here as a biological claim. What survives it is the question it posed: whether psychic repetition has a temporal form at all. That question is better addressed through *Nachträglichkeit*, the deferred action by which an event acquires its significance only retroactively (Laplanche, 1999), and through Baraitser's (2017) account of a contemporary temporality that no longer defers but suspends.

While Freud's theory of identification remains structurally valid, its temporal articulation appears increasingly destabilized: what Fliess once conceptualized as periodic rhythms of psychic organization now unfolds under conditions of continuous media exposure, producing premature, cross-generational identifications whose long-term configuration remains opaque.

Rather than following a deferred sequence of identificatory phases, these formations emerge diffusely and synchronically, often thereby bypassing symbolic mediation altogether. A comparable destabilization of psychic temporality is described by Salecl (2020, p. 49), where unconscious repetitions resurface not as symbolically mediated memories but as compulsive acts and misrecognitions that intervene directly in social and legal reality. In her discussion of cases in which unacknowledged knowledge returns belatedly yet decisively, Salecl shows how unresolved psychic material re-emerges outside any rhythmic or developmental sequence, exerting real effects precisely because it was never temporally integrated.

When psychic repetition loses its temporal sequencing, it also loses its mechanisms of distribution. Without deferred phases or rhythmic containment, identificatory burdens are no longer metabolized across time but accumulate synchronically within the subject. This temporal collapse does not affect all subject positions equally; it reorganizes the economy of identification along gendered lines.

In this way, a Western, male subject emerges whose containers overflow: love, hatred, resentment, and no preventive intervention of the mother can hold it any longer. This Western subject corresponds to the Homeric *anḗr* of the *Iliad* (ἀνήρ), or, in Roman virtue ethics, to the *vir* of *virtus*: a figure that frequently serves as a metaphor for the ideal moral subject, grounded in a conception of human excellence prior to the modern gender differentiation of women as a distinct moral category, that is, before femininity became the privileged site of ethical responsibility and affect regulation. This subject seeks a substitute mother onto whom love, hatred, and resentment can be externalized, because the desire directed toward the unattainable mother requires a discharge in order to relieve itself. His containers are overfilled; the vicissitudes (German: *Triebschicksale*) of its drives escape all prediction and overwhelm every preventive intervention of the biological mother. The longing for return, regression to the origin, re-emerges and demands realization.

It is at this point that Lacanian theory becomes decisive. Through the function of the *Nom-du-Père*, the phallus is no longer tied to the maternal body or to biological possession, but is instituted as a symbolic signifier that enables identification beyond the maternal dyad (Lacan, 2006). In this operation, figures historically associated with action and virtue, such as the Homeric *anḗr* or the Roman *vir*, are retrospectively readable as cultural formations of symbolic mediation, rather than as expressions of natural or organ-based authority. Otherness emerges as an ideal surface of projection for every repressed fantasy that could have remained contained within the symbolic order, but now forcefully presses toward the Real. Desire here transgresses all limits of reason (*Verstand*), and rationality (*Vernunft*) is effectively exiled.

Where *Vernunft* withdraws, meaning does not simply vanish; it often reappears in symbolic forms that precede modern distinctions between reason and belief. From this angle, the loss of rational mediation invites a return to older visual regimes of authority.

A scene from a Byzantine-Greek sacred image in Chania thus imposes itself: a mounted saint enacts a scene of violent killing below, while from above a disembodied and faceless divine hand enters the pictorial field. Sacred transcendence and corporeal violence thus occupy the same symbolic space. The gaze staged here does not simply signify transcendence; it harbours an irreducible uncanniness already embedded within the Christian symbolic itself (Freud 1919; Royle 2003). In Dolar's (1991) Lacanian formulation, the uncanny does not simply arrive from outside but emerges where what appears foreign reveals an intimate exteriority within the symbolic itself. What later appears as foreign or Eastern otherness can thus be read as the return of symbolic strata that the Christian image has incorporated rather than entirely left behind.

In this scene, Foucault's concept of *le souci de soi* (Foucault, 1986) marks not an alternative ethical horizon, but its structural impossibility: where moral orientation is no longer mediated through reflective self-relation but imposed through a faceless gaze, ethical practice collapses into projection.

Projection onto the other is necessary to guarantee the continuity of the subject; yet here it occurs under the condition of the other's potential annihilation. In Hegelian terms, the longing for war leads to a dialectical impasse: the other cannot be negated, for it is necessary for projection. At the same time, it cannot be allowed to persist, because it disturbs the function of the return of the repressed. The movement from Negation to the Return to the Sublation leads back to the mother, the creative figure of one's own existence. This extends Hegel's master-slave dialectic in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807 [1977, §§ 178–196]), where self-consciousness is constituted through recognition by the other and recognition tends toward reciprocity, but in the geopolitical context here, this movement devolves into a projective impasse that perpetuates disavowal rather

than resolution. The mother must not be killed, for with her one's own existence would be negated and the imaginary self-origination erased. If, however, the substitute mother is destroyed, the real mother can be symbolically saved and raised to a higher level (in Hegel's terms: *negare – conservare – elevare*).

Otherness, the substitute mother, performs her role in naïve, archaic femininity, caught in projective identification, and fulfils the Symbolic as if she did not know what the Western man ascribes to her. This apparent non-knowledge is not denial, but a specific form of latency: a knowing containment that suspends response without relinquishing agency. In psychoanalytic terms, such latency functions as a mode of containment rather than ignorance, where what is known cannot yet be articulated without collapsing the structure that depends on it. From a postcolonial perspective, this suspension of response resonates with forms of strategic silence, in which otherness absorbs projection under conditions of structural violence while retaining agency in deferred form.

The attribution itself requires comment. "Naïve, archaic femininity" is not a description of anyone; it is the content of a Western projection, and the analytic task is to show that it is one.

That this projection has a long and consequential history is the argument of Said (1978), while Spivak's (1988) question exposes the discursive constitution of the position assigned to the Other. Such a position can be occupied without being inhabited. What is described here as latency should be read in that register: not as a property of the East, but as the shape a projection takes when it is received rather than refused.[4]

The Western subject must now encounter the "transformed" otherness, not in an empirical, but in a symbolic and metaphysical sense, in order to discover that "the woman does not exist", that is, that she resists totalization and cannot be sublated, neither in the Real nor in the Symbolic. She has been elevated, within the Western secular imaginary, to the level of Plotinian monism, as a metaphysical solution to an otherwise insoluble dependency.

After the dominant metaphysical grammars of Western dualism and Eastern pluralism alike have revealed their limits, the only remaining horizon appears as a return to monistic "the One" (*to hen*). When neither dualistic opposition nor pluralistic differentiation can stabilize meaning or responsibility, the fantasy of undivided unity emerges as a final refuge. Monistic "oneness" promises relief from guilt, conflict, and dependence by dissolving relation itself. As Salecl has argued, when the burden of choice and responsibility becomes overwhelming, subjects may seek relief in fantasies of a consistent symbolic authority that relieve them of the anxiety of choosing, what she describes as the paradoxical option of "not choosing" (Salecl 2010, 59). Such fantasies can, I suggest, extend politically into promises of inevitability, coherence, or undivided unity. In Plotinus

and the Neoplatonic tradition, the One is the highest principle, beyond being and prior even to Intellect, from which multiplicity ultimately proceeds (Plotinus, *Enneads* V.1–2). One might say: beyond the divine stands the One. I suggest that this is where the secular fantasy tends: beyond the divine and toward a desire to access what was always presumed to lie behind it. Read through the critique of capitalist enjoyment developed by Vighi (2015) and Tomšič (2019), this desire for unity can be understood not as the overcoming of enjoyment but as one of its contemporary ideological forms.

7. From Beyond to Negation

Yet the very movement "beyond" is already the first fatal negation, and with it the return of the repressed becomes structurally inevitable. Hegel showed that negation is never mere denial. It is determinate negation: the "no" that secretly preserves and elevates what it rejects.

The secular Western subject does not escape guilt. What is negated is the metaphysical category of guilt, and with it, God, but guilt itself is internalized as a purely negative magnitude: guilt without a creditor, a stain without the possibility of discharge. This guilt cannot be worked through, because the symbolic mediators that would allow its articulation have been foreclosed; it can only be acted out. It persists as a pure, unresolved remainder, one that neither memory nor confession can reach. In Lacanian terms, such a remainder does not remain inert but takes the form of jouissance. Drawing on Leader's (2021) account of jouissance as a form of satisfaction that persists through symptoms and repetition even where it produces suffering, I suggest that jouissance persists precisely where it cannot be symbolized, insisting instead through repetition and action rather than remembrance.

This remainder is not "sin minus God," but an undead jouissance that persists where symbolization fails, binding enjoyment to destruction across historical, corporeal, and political registers. What remains as the only socially acceptable theatre for this acting out today is war, border panic, and moral purification. These are rituals that, in inverted form, repeat precisely the sacrifice that modernity believed it had abolished. As critical criminologists have shown, contemporary border regimes do not simply operate through exclusion, but through the production of an illegalized and persistently vulnerable population whose exposure to detention and deportation becomes structurally embedded within neoliberal and racialized regimes of governance (De Giorgi, 2010; De Genova, 2018). This normalization, however, is not merely a political or administrative effect; I suggest that it follows a deeper dialectical logic.

Yet in Hegelian logic, every negation is a determinate negation: it carries within itself the positive content of what it rejects. The more radically secular reason declares, "There is no transcendence, no original guilt, no final reconciliation," the more forcefully the negated content returns, not

as theology, but as that undead enjoyment that had always been concealed within theological form. Read through Lacan, Hegel's lesson is ruthless: when secular reason negates God, transcendence, and ritual mediation, it does not eliminate guilt or enjoyment. Instead, it internalizes them in an unregulated form. The secular "No" to God becomes the most powerful "Yes" to the Real of jouissance that God once held in check.

The secular subject is therefore constituted around a double repression: (1) the repression of an unpayable historical guilt (imperial, totalitarian, fratricidal), and (2) the repression of an impossible, pre-symbolic jouissance that is simultaneously promised and forbidden by the symbolic order of modernity. This double repression does not return first as articulated meaning or conscious memory. It returns at the level of perception and affect, as a disturbance of familiarity itself, where what should remain absent nevertheless insists on appearing. It is precisely at this point that the repressed announces itself as the uncanny.

Freud (1919) described the uncanny as the return of something intimately familiar (*heimlich*) that has undergone repression and now reappears in an estranged form; what returns is recognizable as one's own and yet experienced as unbearably alien. The secular age is the age of the uncanny par excellence, because everything the West once declared overcome, sacrificial violence, bloody jouissance, the fantasy of absolute fusion with the (m)other, the archaic father who devours his sons, returns precisely at those sites that were meant to embody the highest degree of civilization. As Gallant (1999, 25–26, 50–51) demonstrates in his analysis of banditry and piracy, figures of extreme violence are not remnants of a pre-modern past but integral to the formation and consolidation of modern states.

Violence oscillates between illegality and legitimacy, between outlaw and guardian, revealing that the civilizing process does not eliminate bloody jouissance but redistributes and manages it. In this sense, the drone livestream, the abandoned migrant boat, and the hyper-visible child's body on Instagram, do not mark a regression into barbarism, but the contemporary sites where disavowed violence reappears in administratively normalized form. These scenes are not uncanny because they are foreign, but because they are too close. What returns is not an external threat but the West's own disavowed enjoyment, now encountered under the sign of the enemy.

This dynamic can be analytically condensed into a triadic sequence: the uncanny marks the moment of return, otherness provides the site of displacement, and negation supplies the discursive operation that sustains repetition. In this sense, the uncanny operates less as an affect than as a structural indicator of failed symbolization. Negation then intervenes not to resolve this return, but to misrecognize it, thereby guaranteeing its recurrence. Negation is the desperate discursive

operation that insists, "This is not us," thereby guaranteeing the next, even more violent surge of return.

The return of the repressed in the secular age is therefore not a contingent psychological event. It is the libidinal motor of an entire civilization that has negated its own conditions of possibility and now survives only by compulsively staging their undead return. The return of the repressed is the moment at which both repressed elements merge and break through the thin crust of secular rationality in the mode of the uncanny. It is the return, in inverted form, of the violence and jouissance that the West believed it had civilized and left behind. The uncanny consists in the sudden recognition: "This is me; this has always been me, and I have no name for it."

At this point, otherness becomes the obligatory carrier of the repressed. Otherness is not chosen arbitrarily; it is the only remaining location onto which the secular subject can deposit what it cannot acknowledge as its own: historical guilt and forbidden jouissance. The other must therefore be both radically foreign, so that projection can remain disavowed, and secretly intimate, so that what is deposited there can once again feel "at home." For this reason, the figure of today's enemy is never simply external. It is the return of undead Western jouissance in the guise of the monstrous East, the primitive South, the archaic father, the devouring mother, figures supposedly overcome, yet returning with the persistence of a nightmare from which one cannot awaken.

This is our necromantic sleep: a condition in which reason does not disappear, but turns against itself, continuing to function while producing the very figures it claims to exclude. Few images render this logic with greater clarity than Goya's *El sueño de la razón produce monstruos* (1799), where the suspension of reason gives rise to a proliferation of monsters. Read through the argument developed here, however, these monsters do not arrive as chaos from without; they arise from within reason's own suspended vigilance.

The scene stages neither a simple opposition between enlightenment and superstition nor a regression into premodern darkness. Instead, it depicts a moment of internal reversal, in which reason, having withdrawn its symbolic responsibility, leaves the field open for figures that are neither fully foreign nor fully familiar. It is precisely this ambiguity that allows the monsters to appear as if they belonged elsewhere, while remaining inseparable from the very rational order that disavows them.

What Goya stages visually is not a single collapse of reason, but a bifurcation in the economy of negation. This turning point does not generate a single explanatory line, but two symmetrical analytic movements: (1) a necromantic-maternal-Plotinian ascent that seeks unity through dissolution, and (2) a cold return of the repressed through the triad of the uncanny, otherness, and negation. The remainder of this section traces how these two movements operate simultaneously within contemporary

secular orders.

Drawing on Dolar's account of the uncanny remainder (1991) and his later theorization of the voice as object (2006), I conceive of this remainder as the voice of the Other that never found a place within the symbolic order and therefore returns as an obscene, adhesive object-binding: precisely the kind of attachment we recognize in the secular fascination with torn bodies and the smell of death. McQuire (1997), in turn, describes a "technological uncanny" in which technologies intended to reorganize and overcome the limits of space and presence generate uncanny effects of their own. Extending this logic, the more perfectly we believe we control the world through algorithms and borders, the more violently the repressed returns precisely through the medium of control itself. Consider the viral image of a drowning child that does not produce mourning, but the next border wall. Rawson's (2010) reading of *The Great Gatsby* develops what he calls a "telephonic logic," in which the telephone collapses real time and virtual space, erasing personal distance while allowing an absent voice to act within the present. Extended beyond its literary object, this logic acquires a more uncanny structure: something arrives from an impossible distance and yet is already inside the house. Today, the smartphone constitutes the perfect uncanny object. It brings the battlefield into the living room and exposes the child's body to a form of endless visibility, collapsing every boundary the secular subject believed it could secure.

According to Weber (2017), the EU-Turkey statement and the closure of the Balkan route did not fully halt migration flows but substantially reduced and redirected them, while efforts to seal the route intensified border controls and resulted in systematic, often violent push-backs and serious human rights concerns along the route.

Europe negates its colonial guilt and its Christian obligation of hospitality ("we are not responsible for the consequences of our historical exploitation"). Europe also negates the refugee as a subject ("they are economic migrants, not rights-bearing persons"), and negates the sanctity of the human body itself ("pushbacks and externalization are technical solutions"). This triple negation, Petrine in form, a threefold denial of what one belongs to, is celebrated as realistic, post-metaphysical politics. Yet, as Hegel would have anticipated, the negated content returns with doubled force. The drowned bodies washed ashore become obscene, spectral proof that the very sacrifice Europe believed it had abolished is now being performed daily, only displaced and disavowed. De Genova's (2018) analysis of Europe's racial denial and the disposability of racialized migrant lives points to a structure of disavowal that, in psychoanalytic terms, can be pushed further: the more insistently Europe declares, "this has nothing to do with us," the more, I suggest, the death drive is fed. Determinate negation has thus transformed the Mediterranean into the largest ritual altar

of secular modernity.[5]

This geopolitical scene exposes a structure whose conceptual necessity reappears in its general form, resonating with work in psychoanalytic geography that brings Freudian and Lacanian concepts to bear on environmental crisis, political economy, and the fantasies organizing human relations to the environment (Kingsbury and Pile 2014). Extending this framework, I suggest that environmental and geopolitical crises can be read as manifestations of repressed violence returning through modernity's disavowal of human-nature interdependence and its unarticulated ecological guilt. At the political limit of this structure lies what Mbembe (2019) conceptualizes as necropolitics: forms of sovereignty in which life becomes subjected to the power of death.

And yet, in a final, almost unbearable twist, the very Other onto whom we project the repressed is also, when read through Levinas, the face whose ethical command is "thou shalt not kill" (Levinas 1969, 197–201). Secular modernity negates this command at the same moment it stages its obscene return. The drowned body on the beach is therefore not only the uncanny proof of our guilt, it is instead the ethical demand we murder a second time by building higher walls. The return of the repressed in the secular age is not only psychic and political, it is the murder of the only instance that could have released us from the compulsion to repeat. The return of the repressed in the secular age is therefore not a psychological curiosity; it is the central mechanism that holds the entire geopolitical order together while simultaneously driving it toward disintegration. Guilt, otherness, and the drive to negation are not accidental side-effects of secularization, they are its very libidinal motor. And it is only when we understand this motor in its full uncanny force that the possibility of a different social bond appears: not the fantasy of a final reconciliation with the One, but the difficult, spoken admission that the repressed was always ours, and that only its articulation, never its acting out, can release us from the compulsion to repeat.

Where guilt is articulated rather than projected, the compulsion to repeat it as violence may, for the first time, lose its structural necessity.

8. Conclusion: Articulation without Absolution

This article has not sought to offer an explanatory synthesis of war, borders, or Western power. Rather, it has traced a psychic matrix in which fear, desire, and responsibility become entangled with contemporary forms of violence. By approaching geopolitical conflict through the economy of secular guilt and foreclosure, the analysis shifts attention from causal accounts to the affective infrastructures that sustain repetition even where explanation appears exhausted.

What emerges is not only fear of loss, of disorder, of exposure, but also a concealed wish: the wish to hand over responsibility, control, and guilt to an instance imagined as both omniscient and impersonal. In this sense, the figure of "the One beyond God" remains deliberately ambiguous. It names at once a metaphysical remainder and a secular substitute: an anonymous authority that promises relief through total capture, whether conceived as divine unity or as the fantasy of complete data aggregation. Where symbolic mediation falters, such fantasies offer not meaning, but delegation, the hope that accountability might be absorbed elsewhere. A similar suspicion toward monistic resolution runs through Adorno's *Negative Dialectics* (1973, 5–6), where the demand for unity and totality suppresses what remains nonidentical rather than genuinely reconciling it. Read through the argument developed here, such unity can therefore function defensively: contradiction is abolished, and responsibility displaced rather than assumed.

From a psychosocial perspective, this longing for relief is inseparable from contemporary anxieties around control, surveillance, and misuse. As Salecl suggests in *The Tyranny of Choice* (2010), modern subjects often seek escape from the burden of choice not through reflection, but through fantasies that suspend agency itself. The desire for an all-knowing instance, whether theological, technological, or geopolitical, thus signals not mastery, but the wish to relinquish responsibility.

This is also why the analysis has insisted on naming the West as the speaking subject, while leaving the East deliberately underdetermined. The East figures less as an empirical agent than as an Ersatz-(m)other, a site where unresolved guilt, desire, and control are staged often through wars whose consequences unfold there, even as their conditions are governed elsewhere.

Articulation, as proposed here, does not promise reconciliation or redemption. It names a fragile alternative to repetition: the risk of acknowledging what has been delegated to gods, data, or enemies, without converting it into destiny. Whether such articulation can be sustained remains an open question. Yet without it, violence persists not as the failure of reason, but as the silent fulfilment of a wish to be relieved of it.

As Glover suggested in 1934, peace cannot be conceived merely as the negation of war but must be linked to the very drives that make war possible. The task of the peace movement would not only be to prevent war, but to trace both war and the efforts directed against it back to their underlying instinctual sources. As Glover puts it, "Human initiative to prevent the next war is clouded by the memory of the last great war, which was supposed to 'put an end to all wars,' and as a result it loses both energy and consistency" (Glover 1934, 86–87; my translation).

What cannot be articulated in its own name does not simply disappear; it may become the object of another's jouissance.

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The West as the Other: History and the Politics of Desire

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Abstract: Historicism has never seriously considered the question of desire in the constitution of the subject. It also has been comfortable in its linear analysis of the supposedly distant 'Other'. On the other hand, if anything, psychoanalysis has begged us to consider the foreignness that is inherent in the constitution of the self– Freud, in Moses and Monotheism, draws himself away from a history that conceals this alterity and preoccupies itself with comfortable narratives devoid of the complications of desire. Thus, psychoanalysis tells us that in order to confront the dangers of the West, we must first attack its claim to know itself. The claim that speaks of a certain us/we, also speaks of desire. This claim is the result of the discourse that refuses to let go of its own superiority. In other words, any inquiry about the "western" subject must confront western exceptionalism or the civilisational rhetoric that the West refuses to abandon. We must question what discourse shields this exceptionalism? The superiority of the West is well maintained within the contours of the pluralist discourse which emerged from the historicism that refused to account for the constitutive failure of the subject. I will argue that psychoanalysis destabilises the "Western" subject by confronting its claim to know itself. The questions of desire and the fantasy of the self, interrupts the comfort of the logic of historicism that has given language to Western exceptionalism— an invocation that claims to only be answerable to itself.

Introduction

> *"Who, if not us, will call back into question the objective status of this "I," which a historical evolution peculiar to our culture tends to confuse with the subject?" (Lacan 2006)*

> *"Nothing is more dry and boring than the fantasies of a locus communis." (Marx 1973)*

What can a history that accounts for desire do for our time? Desire for psychoanalysis is always already displaced in space and time. The subject of psychoanalysis is divided. It is radically separated from the self and there is an alterity that is central to its construction. Historicism forecloses any question of indeterminacy that can account for such alterity. It resists any engagement with a subject that cannot be naturalized in time. The subject of historicism is a trans-historic entity, assumed given across time and space. By grounding the subject within a continuous, intelligible historical trajectory, it renders the subject fully legible to itself. What is excluded here is the constitutive gap, the immanent split through which desire emerges.

Psychoanalysis presents itself as a rupture here by granting the subject the sight of its alterity. It accounts for a displacement that is historical. Rather than conceiving history only as a field of competing representations, a history that can account for desire can attend to the excess that resists symbolisation. From this perspective, the subject of history is not a stable "I" that can fully account for itself, but a divided entity, constituted within language and marked by a fundamental lack. The subject of psychoanalysis is a symptom of history in such a way that it cannot be understood outside of its time. The content of the subject remains empty outside any reference to history. Thus, there emerges a subject that always at the disposal of historical meanings and narratives.

In this context, I want to situate the discourse surrounding the position of the West (or the First World) which is saturated with the question of power in a way that power becomes the defining ontological category for it. What emerges then is a historical imagination unable to account for the rupture in the apparent coherence of the West– the sight of the split in its call for violence or in its affirmation of itself. There is an affective insecurity that can be accounted for when we take desire seriously. This not only destabilises the West but opens up the gap itself where new possibilities can emerge. Multiculturalism, which positioned itself as a response to the hegemonic authority of the West, failed to expose the split, the rupture within power. Multiculturalism, rather than confronting the coordinates of power, retreat into the ethical register of a global consciousness that concerns itself with recognition of identities and denies their constitutive failure. Identities are not brought into conflict but are held at a distance from one another– morality, truth, and even violence is thus

relativized, distributed across a plurality of incommensurable worlds. This supposedly ethical position flattens the possibility of antagonism in discourse that can critique the position of power. This relativist discourse insists upon recognition over conflict, where the West situates itself comfortably. The result is a frozen discourse that refuses to move. Catastrophes do not rupture this order in any way rather it is absorbed within these frozen meanings. We are forced to think within an order that centres itself on the inevitability of the West.

The fundamental incoherence that constitutes an identity– it is here that psychoanalysis offers a crucial intervention. In its conception of the subject as fundamentally divided– split within language and displaced across shifting historical meaning– it reveals that even the relativist subject position cannot sustain the illusion of coherence. To take this seriously is to recognize that even power is structured around a constitutive gap. What appears as totality is sustained through the repression of its own inconsistencies. Psychoanalysis, by insisting on division and lack, makes it possible to think of this fracture within power.

It is at this juncture that history must take psychoanalysis seriously– as a way of reorganising discourse that no longer looks for mere descriptive unfolding of events but within these description account for the marks of displacement, contradiction, and the persistence of what cannot be fully integrated into meaning.

The Secret of the Subject

In this context, I turn to the 1994 book *Read My Desire*, by Joan Copjec who argues for a history that is literate in desire. In her analysis of French psychiatrist G. G.de Clérambault's infamous work around oriental fabrics and drapery, which was so far understood and explained in terms of either his orientalist fetish or his "idiosyncratic passion for cloth" (Copjec 1996, 71) – Copjec moved beyond these popular narratives to understand Clérambault's enigma, and what emerges from this was a critique of historicism. Through her analysis, Copjec reconstitutes the terms of historical inquiry by dislodging a certain historical fantasy that rests on the assumption of the subject position.

A historicist construction of Clérambault's work merely concerned itself with description that oscillated between orientalism and mystery of the French psychiatrist. The analysis of Clérambault's work was largely shaped in the historical backdrop of French colonialism. Between 1914-18, Clérambault began his study of Arab dress, part of which includes a series of photographs he took in Morocco. The popular critique of Clérambault's projects, especially his photographs, only gives us a vague idea of the orientalist desire that shaped his work. However, a closer analysis makes it difficult to understand his work from the lens of orientalism alone especially when compared to the colonial

project of his time marked by the 'will to unwrap' the Arab body. Clérambault's work, far from such desire, was an exhibition of the excess of clothing itself (Copjec 1996, 69). His presentation of the garment rather than stripping the colonial body bare was a peculiar aspect of his work. He took around 40,000 pictures of the natives, especially Arab women, covered from head to toe in overwhelming garments hiding their face and even the contours of their bodies. The above distinction fails to provide an adequate explanation of the intentions of the photographs. Clearly, the excess of the cloth wrapped around the body of the colonial subject and the excessive photographs that he took, only built further the mystery around Clérambault.

The enigma rather than being peculiar to Clérambault is a symptom of historicism. The popular historical inquiry with all the evidence combining essay materials, lectures, clinical case studies, obituaries, and photographs– instead of creating a determinate archival ground around the construction of Clérambault, expressed the failure of any and all evidence. The authority of facts only expressed themselves in terms of their own inability to capture something concrete. Copjec states that the popular works on Clérambault have raised more questions than they have resolved by repeatedly posing contradictions and ultimately giving the historical inquiry an empty suspense of a secret that will not be grasped– marking the limits of knowledge. It was this specific portrayal of Clérambault based on an undecidability of all evidence and the impossibility of resolving the deadlock of his secrets that Copjec called the 'psychological construction' (Copjec, 66).

In her chapter titled, The Sartorial Superego (Copjec 1996), Copjec points us to the fantasy that sustains the popular historical analysis or *historicism*— the subject who knows. Historicism evades the question of subjectivity and its constitutive otherness by grounding the subject in a causal relationship of action and intention—in the case of Clérambault, the mystery surrounding his work is further strengthened with each attempt to establish such intention. The fantasy is the fantasy of a coherent narrative of the subject. The historicist construction flattens all contradiction into a seamless linear story, instead of thinking with these contradictions. Against the charges of being ahistorical, for psychoanalysis history is crucial because the subject is at the disposal of historical meanings. The constitutive otherness of the subject arranges itself around the influx of historical symbols and meanings. In this way, psychoanalysis gives history a much more intimate place— rather than a distant discipline that only concerns itself with materials, the materiality of the world itself becomes an existential inquiry. The subject, by this logic, has no innate knowledge of the self,

Psychoanalysis challenges the assumption that there exists a stable subject behind historical facts who possesses direct knowledge of their own intentions. The subject is born into a field of signifiers whose meanings are dispersed and equivocal, "it is therefore "subject to the equivocation

of the signifier." (Copjec, 68) Because meaning emerges only within the signifying chain, the subject like its historical milieu, keeps referring itself to the past in order to establish itself— towards an origin, that remains out of sight. In this sense, the subject can be understood as a symptom of its history. Far from rendering the subject ahistorical, psychoanalysis situates it firmly within history. Psychoanalytic investigation thus begins at the point of disjunction where the subject's origin is retroactively fictionalized within discourse. It is for this reason that Copjec begins her analysis by destabilizing what appears to be given: the position of the subject as the supposed bearer of knowledge.

The Utility of it All

Much has been written about Clérambault's ethnographic work contributing to the colonial project as it wanted to trace everything back to Europe. For instance, he was able to show that a North African method of fastening cloth was also used by classical Greeks and Romans, further he believed that the flowing folds of clothing could serve as a cultural marker, drapery as the "signature" of a particular race or tribe (Copjec, 71-72). This meant tracing the 'European' markers around the world or centring Europe as the driving force of civilization around the world. This trope has been used in furthering the civilizing mission. However, the enigma around Clérambault's work concerns his interest in capturing not the uncovering of the veil of the native but his interest in the excess cloth wrapped around the colonial body. He had no interest to pierce through it and from a distance he took 40,000 pictures as if each time they revealed something new. We can situate Clérambault's desire under a particular historical condition but only when we consider the subject as the effect of its history as opposed to a naturalised thing in time.

For Copjec, a more fundamental starting point for understanding Clérambault's photographs, is located in his assertion that "a draped costume must be defined by the scheme of its construction." This definition of clothing limits itself to descriptive analysis of the thing in itself and evades urgent questions like the one of *genesis*. Clérambault's analysis of clothing was limited to the structural logic of the cloth, its technical construction and functional elements that distanced itself from all symbolic meanings even though Clérambault's photographs were marked by an excess—the garment wrapped around to a point of overwhelming concealment of the contours of the body. The strictly descriptive analysis of clothing understood on the basis of its technical elements and linked to the description of identity only reinforced what was already known. This analysis cannot accommodate the questions of symbolism and origin since such descriptive philosophy has no language for it. (Copjec 1996, 71-74)

Clérambault's method, like his passion, was not idiosyncratic. His approach aligned with the modernist epistemic structures. The emphasis on the 'scheme of construction' was a byproduct of

modernity that was shaped by the industrial revolution– a period structured by the logics of utility, and the ethics of utilitarianism. Copjec notes that this utilitarian historical period was responsible for defining not just architectural and technological definitions but also the idea of human being itself. The questions of object form, construction, even style were expected to be derived from and be justified by utility. In the wake of these circumstances, man was defined by his vocation. The will to know itself was externalised in the sphere of work and the questions of affect were omitted in order to fit this new-age human in the definitions of empiricism. (Copjec, 74-77) For the utilitarians, it was easy to apprehend the human being whose identity was grounded in usefulness and measurable function. Thus, it was assumed that this human was led by the motivations of pleasure that were inherently useful. This approach concretised and flattened the human experience– an individual who was earlier still an ambiguous being, now solely defined as someone directed towards maximization of pleasure.

The utilitarian redefinition of the human subject produced a fundamental instability. This definition opened within itself a gap through which the subject slipped through. In other words, 'use-value' as definition collapsed the distinction between man and machine. Technology symbolized the impossibility of a complete or coherent human identity, marking the limits of the subject. (Copjec, 88-91) More than the suffocating and flattening definition of the subject, the failure of symbolization shaped the anxieties of these times. The efforts to tackle these anxieties were unfortunately, as if a rule, remained within the boundaries of empirical investigations. Utilitarian definitions were to gloss over the failure that is embedded within the very definition of a subject. Even today, what is the universal abstract individual but someone who is denied the very sight of its own lack?

Utilitarianism describes the individual as a subject guided by the pursuit of pleasure and constructs its ethical framework and moral commands on the assumption of such a pleasure-seeking subject. Copjec argues that utilitarianism does not derive *ought* from *is* rather, it derives an *ought* from another *ought* by transforming this supposedly descriptive foundation into a normative principle. (Copjec, 85) Thus, it thinks of a subject whose behaviour can be regulated by establishing pleasure as the primary motive. Within this framework, the idea of common good ensures pleasure for all and maximisation of happiness becomes the guiding principle of its moral command. Further, common-good in a society is ensured not at the cost of someone else's happiness but by ensuring that everyone enjoys. Thus, this maximisation of happiness, insisting on a common-good which benefits everyone, has egalitarian undertone. However, the theory takes the form of a technique, presupposing a determinate goal and reducing the subject to something that can be engineered through the motivation of such ends. By grounding itself in a purportedly descriptive account of how things are, what human desire and the way they must desire it, this discourse is able to claim neutrality as its foundation.

Utilitarianism becomes an important point of inquiry here as it was on this foundation that the colonial project found its justification–

The ambitious imperialism of functionalism does not expect to encounter resistance. Since it arrives bearing what man wants—happiness—it expects its subjects to submit to its embrace. For this reason, French colonialism adopted a policy of "assimilation". (Copjec, 87)

The ethics of utility, with its teleological approach, was able to justify imperialist aggressions because there was always a noble total form towards which we were meant to move. In the guise of an altruistic gesture that promotes the 'happiness of all' the violent colonial assimilation was justified. That is why the usefulness of any action is premised on the benefit of all, implying the subject can only find pleasure in utility. Consequently, anything that goes against the common-good cannot be useful so it is prohibited.

The determination of the subject and its relation to pleasure is where psychoanalysis intervenes, to deconstruct the subject along with the moral project that centres around the use of pleasure. In *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* (Lacan 1992), Lacan with his critique of Jeremy Bentham argued that any discourse that centres primarily on pleasure remains fundamentally inadequate for understanding morality. This morality is not grounded in utility or the pursuit of pleasure rather, it is structured around an excess, the frustration of jouissance, imposed by a law that appears excessive or demanding. The neglect of this dimension of pleasure has significant consequences. Unlike the utilitarians, the psychoanalytic subject remains a subject to a principle beyond pleasure. This subject is not driven by motivations where pleasure is the index of his morality. It is by destabilising the utility principle that psychoanalytical ethics are established–

The difference between the utilitarian and the Lacanian subject is the difference between zero and minus one, between a subject who is driven to seek the maximization of his pleasure in his own greater good, and a subject for whom pleasure cannot function as an index of the good, since the latter is lost to him. (Copjec, 87)

In order to make sense of this we need to understand the subject's relationship to his own desire and how this desire emerges as a rather retroactive effect of stepping into the symbolic universe. The subject, who always exceeds the symbolic structures, enters into a relationship with desire where the good thing is *always already* lost to him. This *excess* of life that is beyond the margins of the symbolic structure is the driving force of desire itself—a thing that always slips through in our repeated attempts to symbolise it. There is nothing available to us outside of the symbolic structure that is itself already flowing with the excess or the *too-muchness* of life. (Santner 2007) There is no external understanding of what it means *to be,* apart from the available symbolic co-ordinates. The

signifier is always pointing towards something else– another signifier, because something is always slipping from us and we keep moving towards it– with no total form or a linear path in sight. In this case, it cannot be said that the subject has a solely positive will that moves towards pleasure because of the impossibility embedded within such a gesture– there is no linear path in sight when it comes to the subject's movement towards his own desire because there is no complete articulation of that desire as it is already a lost object to him. In other words, the subject's desire remains indeterminate, a retroactive effect of lack that constantly slips through symbolic articulation. Thus, there is no way we can speak of what the subject wants without pointing towards what does not exist. The subject's relationship with desire is structured negatively.

The subject is of the belief that what is lost to him is available to the Other. The subject's desire is to know what the Other desires. However, the secret itself is empty. This alterity that psychoanalysis brings to the forefront, shapes the politics of otherness. It is because of the otherness within us, that we move towards the others– *desire is always the desire of the Other*.

The alterity embedded within the subject and their desire has important implications on how the framework of ethics is constructed. Utilitarianism takes desire as something that is to be fulfilled and for that society to be structured in a way where everyone reaches that fulfilment. Utilitarian ethics, therefore, becomes a project of reconciling individual freedom for social equilibrium. Within this framework, reciprocity is posited as the primary mechanism for resolving this ethical tension between individuals in a society pursuing pleasure. The ethics of utilitarianism rests on the foundation of reciprocity of goodness which secures the peaceful organisation of society. It insists on the command to *love thy neighbour* so the same love is reciprocated. On this premise, there is a deadlock where prohibition is any action that tramples the freedom of someone else but it is required for the grater-good where everyone is satisfied. The theory imagines an altruistic subject alongside a neighbour who is capable of violating such ethical conduct. It becomes clear in this regard that the fantasy of utilitarianism includes the suspicion of a transgressive, disobeying Other. Historically this suspicion has resulted in violent aggression towards the supposed Other because of the fear that the neighbour is capable of violating this law– colonial assimilation is one such instance. In this regard psychoanalysis turns towards what in utilitarian theory remains a void—whether the Other would reciprocate our love?

Copjec draws on Freud's analysis on this ethical uncertainty surrounding the neighbour. Freud is of the belief that we are altruistic but does not ground this in some obscure religious reasons of suffering and reward. For Freud, the altruism is a result of the fear of our own boundless and aggressive enjoyment that is incited by the superego. It is our superego's incitement that threatens

us and the barrier against it is the source of our moral law. The image of an all-enjoying, obscene and violent neighbour, the Other who enjoys at the expense of cruelty towards us—it is our own superego's command to enjoy. This fear is externalised by utilitarians in the form of the Other or the neighbour. Freud's construction of the super-ego disrupts the idea of moral law as a utilitarian quantifiable system of reciprocity by establishing that we all behave altruistically out of the fear of our own capacity to enjoy obscenely. For psychoanalysis moral law is structured around our own fear of the violent and excessive demands of our superego's incitement of an excess or jouissance. In response we erect a barrier against such excessive demands and prolong the immanent conflict in order to survive–

The recoil before the commandment to love thy superego as thyself does not open up the floodgates of our aggression or our enjoyment; on the contrary, it erects a barrier against them, and places out of reach the object of our desire. In resisting the superego, then, we insist on separating ourselves from, rather than surrendering to, this incomprehensible part of our being; we insist, in other words, on prolonging the conflict with ourselves. (Copjec 1996, 92)

This way psychoanalysis completely changes the coordinates of the discourse around prohibition and freedom that rests on a fear of an all-enjoying Other, who will disrupt the commitment to common-good. By making prohibition an internally structured necessity that distances us from our own death-drive, our excess, we are able to think of enjoyment as an internal disruptive force that we fear. Copjec states that the moral maxim of psychoanalysis becomes the prolongation of our internal division, refusing to surrender to it because it is excessive, violent in its demands and more importantly empty in its intentions. In this case prohibition is not pre-emptive actions against the outsider who is going to transgress the moral code and disrupt our freedom but the barrier against our own excessive incitement at the call of our superego. In this case, by establishing that the individual is not at the disposal of its pleasure, the utilitarian fear of the Other trampling our freedom is dismissed. Utilitarians fear the instability and disharmony produced by an unrestrained individual will. This anxiety is the assumption that unchecked personal freedom would disrupt social order. Consequently, utilitarian ethics seeks to reconcile individual freedom with social equilibrium through the principle of reciprocity– a forced reciprocity that materialises itself in the form of something like colonial assimilation– and shifts its attention to ensure that the Other will not transgress.

Psychoanalysis shifts the focus of ethics from the reciprocal relations between individuals, emphasized in utilitarianism, to the nonreciprocal relation between the subject and the inaccessible object—our repressed desire. (Copjec, 94) Moral law, for psychoanalysis, thus concerns an impossible object, an excess that must remain unattainable. The law forbids not because desire exists, but because

the desired object is always already lost—exist only negatively. Desire becomes the cause rather than the consequence of prohibition. Unlike utilitarianism, which motivates ethical behaviour through rewards of common-good, psychoanalytic ethics offers no such benefit and instead emphasizes the importance of separating oneself from the object of desire. Against this alterity there is a law that is immanent, a barrier against our own will. Thus, our internal conflict translates into a moral conflict turning against our own self which in turns saves us from the vagaries of our drive. True freedom is to refuse the call of our superego and resist it. We are altruistic because of this and not for the love of our neighbour whom we in fact, fear. (Copjec, 96)

From here it becomes clear that the Utilitarian fantasy rests on the suspicion of an all enjoying neighbour– the Other as a possessor of surplus pleasure. The ethical framework is a defence against such suspicions. The theory flees from the idea that it fears the neighbour– but it is against the surplus pleasure against which utility of pleasure becomes a defence. There emerged the colonial fantasy centred on the veiled figure of the Other based on the suspicion of excess or *useless* enjoyment—the colonial anxiety of an all enjoying Other was manifested in the desire to strip the veil. The utilitarian avoidance of the superego's incitement is projected on the neighbour who must be tamed.

Clérambault's fascination with the veiled neighbour also rests on a similar fantasy of the surplus enjoyment of the neighbour. This fantasy provides the historical backdrop for the photographs, but apart from being a mere reproduction, Copjec states that the photographs are further perversion of it, "For these 40,000 photographs focused on one rigidly adhered-to object choice—cloth—betray not simply a fantasy of cloth but a fetishization of it." (Copjec, 109)

The subject constitutes itself around the fantasy of the object cause of desire. This fantasy works as a resolution for the deadlock caused by a desire that is always already lost. The subject relates to *object a*– the object cause of desire because it externalizes its internal lack and this misrecognition constitutes the subject. The veiled colonial subject was the manifestation of that *object a,* in the colonial fantasy. The neurotic subject with the colonial fantasy projects his loss on the veil of the colonial subject—the excess cloth—and its fantasy surrounds the unveiling. However, in the case of Clérambault, he is interested in that excess itself, and refuses to unveil the veiled colonial body. Copjec argues that in his photographs, Clérambault desired to occupy the position of the gaze of the Moroccan Other itself. (Copjec, 111) In other words, instead of the suspicion of the surplus jouissance behind the veil of the Other, Clérambault obsession with this excess was his rationalisation of this surplus. This should not be understood as empathy but as a structural positioning grounded in the disavowal of lack. The neurotic subject's relation to his desire is of suspicion, by this way the Other remains a question to him. The pervert, on the other hand, evades this division by making

himself the agent of that division– by positioning himself as the one who is certain about the Other. Clérambault flees his own lack by blocking the question of surplus jouissance itself and sticking to what is immediately was in front of him—the materiality of the cloth and this way he evaded all other complexities of his own work. The position that the pervert takes is of *"never being deprived with regard to knowledge"*. (Copjec, 109) The 40,000 photographs explain this failure which was an attempt to fill the lack that emerges at the limits of knowledge– the excessive evidence at end failed to concretize the intentions of Clérambault.

The utilitarian fantasy manifests itself as the division between the usefulness of cloth and the position that insist on its radical uselessness. The justification for useful pleasure survives on the prohibition of the Other's excessive pleasure. By juxtaposing these two registers without reconciling them, Clérambault's photographs expose what utilitarianism conceals its reliance on an obscene, non-utilizable enjoyment that lies beyond the bounds of utility.

Conclusion

Copjec through her analysis raises an important question– *Why does psychoanalysis insist on exposing the cruel enunciator, the sadistic superego, who speaks the moral law?* (Copjec, 98). This 'untrammelled will' that is our superego, threatens the utilitarian principle and ethics. There is an ethical necessity to address the disavowal that utilitarians engage in to deny otherness embedded within the subject. Desire for psychoanalysis is not at the disposal of positive motivations of pleasure, rather it is tied to something that exists as an impossibility– the lack. The always already lost object of desire cannot be symbolised in any way, especially not within an epistemological structure that insists on a teleological cause/effect relationship. For this particular reason, the utilitarians have to resort to a fiction of a pleasure seeking, pain avoiding abstract individual. In such a context, psychoanalysis disrupts the utilitarian ethics of reciprocity and assimilation that continues to shape our times where the content of such gestures is already fixed— the vision of politics is shaped around enjoyment for all, consequently insistence on individual freedom that translates to market consumption under capitalism. By centring the otherness within the self, psychoanalysis brings into question the very basis of such gestures that manifests itself in a certain anxiety and fear of otherness. The Western philanthropy and violence are two sides of the same coin—a gesture of the same disavowal that is rooted in the fear of the neighbour.

The West that establishes itself through violence against the Other must be read symptomatically as an attempt to cover over a constitutive insecurity that it can never master. Power then, is perceived as a symptom of the anxiety that fears its own alterity—Clérambault's 40,000 photographs were a

proof of this fear. Instead of thinking with the otherness, he wanted to concretize it within the existing colonial epistemic structures, partly out of his position as a colonizer and partly because the failure to symbolize threatens to expose the fiction of the existing structures and consequently threatens to expose our own alterity.

Psychoanalysis provides a radical position because it emphasises on a dimension of truth that exists not in the relativist position of the pluralist or the crude imposition of some total form, like utilitarians. Truth exists within the alterity– in our shared opening that constitutes us. The gap that exceeds the symbolic structures binds us to failure. This failure is not a limit but a possibility. It is this recognition of failure—and consequently repetition that is a response to our limit—that moves us. This displaces the force of fixed festered meanings and positions that are violent in their exposition.

If we refuse to accept this alterity, we refuse to move. Until then we live in what Gramsci called "the times of monsters".

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