

## THE CAUSAL CONNECTION BETWEEN RATIONALIZATION, MCDONALDIZATION, AND INCREASING STUPIDITY OF HUMAN BEINGS

Outlines of a *kritische Gesellschaftstheorie* unifying the perspectives of George Ritzer, Ortega y Gasset, Jürgen Habermas, critics of the Internet, and the current critical theorists

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### 1. Why resist global capitalism: left vs right, and the status of the current study

I am antagonistic toward the current global digital free-market world in which we live for two reasons: (1) it is unsustainable in the long run (leading us to a resource and energy crisis, and perhaps climate change as well, which threaten our civilization with collapse); (2) it is making people increasingly stupid. These two problems are not entirely unconnected with each other. The increasing stupidity of human beings is deplorable in its own right. On the other hand, our increasing stupidity also leads to the problem of unsustainability by blinding us to what the problem *truly* is and what the solution might *truly* be.

In this essay, my focus is on how the increasing stupidity of human beings is deplorable in its own right: the increasingly stunted development of our human potential, and the erosion of communicative actions, making the life of intelligent people in our society who are oriented toward *understanding* and *communicative action* increasingly pointless.

As the triumph of neoliberalism on the global scale since the end of the Cold War has increasingly trapped us in a world where money-making and consumption are the only things we care about, resistance has arisen on both the political left and the political right. There is however in general a difference between the left and the right in their otherwise common opposition to our neoliberal globalized commercial world:<sup>1</sup> the critics on the left are more concerned with the problems of

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1 While developing my insight, I discovered that Rahel Jaeggi has already developed, and critiqued, the same spectrum of *Kapitalismuskritik*, although she didn't link it to political orientations in terms of left and right. See her "Was (wenn überhaupt etwas) ist falsch am Kapitalismus? Drei Wege der Kapitalismuskritik", Working Paper 01/2013 der DFG-KollegforscherInnengruppe Postwachstumsgesellschaften, Friedrich-Schiller Universität, Jena. (She has also developed the theme in a course at Humboldt University.) She distinguishes between functional, moral, and ethical orientations in the criticism of capitalism. The leftist tendency in my schema of course corresponds to the moral, and the rightist to the ethical. Meanwhile, as Jaeggi herself has noted, the discontent with the capitalist system on the ground that it destroys our environment counts as a "functional" critique of capitalism. "1. *Eine funktional argumentierende Strategie*: Der Kapitalismus kann als Gesellschafts- und Wirtschaftssystem nicht funktionieren; er ist intrinsisch dysfunktional und notwendig krisenhaft. 2. *Eine moralische oder gerechtigkeitsorientierte Argumentation*: Kapitalismus beruht auf Ausbeutung. Er enthält den Menschen auf unfaire und ungerechte Weise die Früchte der eigenen Arbeit vor und zwingt sie in die Knechtschaft eines Systems, das sie auf vielfältige Weise um das betrügt, was ihnen zusteht. Kurz (und weniger dramatisch) gesagt: Der Kapitalismus beruht auf einer ungerechten Gesellschaftsstruktur oder produziert diese. 3. *Die ethische Kritik*: Das durch den Kapitalismus geprägte Leben ist ein schlechtes – zum Beispiel ein entfremdetes – Leben. Es ist verarmt, sinnlos oder leer und zerstört wesentliche Bestandteile dessen, was zu einem erfüllten,

oppression and exploitation whereas those on the right are more focused on the erosion of our humanity. While those on the left – say, Alain Badiou or Nancy Fraser<sup>2</sup> or Noam Chomsky – condemn the money-making and consumerist *Lebensführung* because it contributes to a system of exploitation and oppression of the poor and disenfranchised, those on the right – say, Alexander Dugin or Marine Le Pen<sup>3</sup> – despise shallow consumerist *Lebensführung* for, well, its shallowness, i.e., for the erosion of humanity or the “human spirit” under the climate of an exclusive focus on money-making and consumption of products and services.<sup>4</sup> This difference is however not absolute. While speaking of emancipation from the capitalist order or of the creation of a solidary society through emancipation, both Badiou and Fraser also hint at the degeneration of the “human spirit” under the capitalist *Lebensführung* and its restoration through emancipation.<sup>5</sup> While speaking of the destruction of French identity (“humanity” *à la française*) under neoliberal globalization or of the disintegration of the “human spirit” under free-market liberal democracy, both Le Pen and Dugin also refer to the impoverishment of French commoners in one case or Western domination of Russophone peoples in

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glücklichen, vor allem aber auch 'wahrhaft freien' menschlichen Leben gehört.” In the end, she concludes that the ethical critique is the most promising. The tremendous import of her analytic for my essay here lies in the fact that I am also developing a sort of ethical *Kapitalismuskritik* in that I argue that our global digitalized free-market world is deplorable for its promotion of a shallow and dummed life. Her concern with the metaphysical grounding of the values in terms of which capitalism can be critiqued – e.g., why should capitalism be expected to not deplete our environment? Or why should it be expected to not be detrimental to our human potential? – is, while presupposed, not part of the objectives of the current essay.

- 2 As for Alain Badiou, see his *L'hypothèse communiste*, Paris: Lignes, 2009; and *La vraie vie*, Paris: Fayard, 2016. As for Nancy Fraser, see especially her debate with Axel Honneth in *Redistribution or Recognition? A Political-Philosophical Exchange*, trans. Joel Golb, James Ingram, and Christiane Wilke, London: Verso, 2003.
- 3 Alexander Dugin, “Eurasien über Alles: das Manifest der eurasischen Bewegung”, available online on The Fourth Political Theory website: <http://www.4pt.su/de/content/eurasion-uber-alles-das-manifest-der-eurasischen-bewegung>. Marine Le Pen, *Pour que vive la France*, Jacques Grancher, 2012.
- 4 The most famous Allan Bloom from the older generation, before the global triumph of neoliberalism, also belongs here: his *The Closing of the American Mind* is essentially about how the political correctness perpetuated by the political left has led to relaxation, consumerism, and the erosion of the human potential of the younger generation. Obviously, many more critics from the left as well as from the right fit easily into the classificatory schema which I'm proposing here, but space does not permit me to name them all here.
- 5 For example, Badiou, *L'hypothèse communiste*, p. 56: “Et c'est bien ce que le monde d'aujourd'hui exige de nous: consentir à la corruption généralisée des esprits, sous le joug de la marchandise et de l'argent... Disons-le en un mot: il nous faut le courage d'avoir une idée. Une grande idée. Soyons convaincus qu'avoir une grande idée n'est ni ridicule ni criminel. Le monde du capitalisme généralisé et arrogant où nous vivons nous ramène aux années 1840, au capitalisme naissant, dont l'impératif, formulé par Guizot, est: 'Enrichissez-vous!' Ce que nous traduirons par: 'Vivez sans idée'. Nous devons dire qu'on ne vit pas sans idée. Nous devons dire: 'Ayez le courage de soutenir l'idée, qui ne peut être que l'idée communiste, en son sens générique.' Voilà pourquoi nous restons contemporains de Mai 68. À sa manière, il a déclaré que la vie sans idée était insupportable...” In *La vraie vie*, Badiou also bemoans the contemporary youth's degeneration, under the pressure of global free-market, to either hedonism or careerism because they are blinded to the real meaning of life. As for Fraser, see her “How feminism became capitalism's handmaiden – and how to reclaim it”, *The Guardian*, 14 October 2013: “In a cruel twist of fate, I fear that the movement for women's liberation has become entangled in a dangerous liaison with neoliberal efforts to build a free-market society. That would explain how it came to pass that feminist ideas that once formed part of a radical worldview are increasingly expressed in individualist terms. Where feminists once criticised a society that promoted careerism, they now advise women to 'lean in'. A movement that once prioritised social solidarity now celebrates female entrepreneurs. A perspective that once valorised 'care' and interdependence now encourages individual advancement and meritocracy....” Presumably while Sheryl Sandberg or Marissa Mayer represent for her women who have successfully “liberated” themselves from bondage, their life is no more meaningful since they don't embody the feminine “care” perspective (interconnection and solidarity) characteristic of women's Way.

the other.<sup>6</sup> However, it is approximately true that, in their common opposition to America-centered global capitalism, the political left is *more* concerned with the question of emancipation while the political right is *more* focused on the problem of underdevelopment, or skewed development, of our human potential.

I share my concern with the critics on the political right. When I speak against capitalism, consumerism, and globalization, I'm worried about the increasing underdevelopment of our human potential under the dominance of such system. I do not believe the fight against capitalism should be motivated by emancipatory concerns insofar as, in my previous works, I have demonstrated that a large portion of leftists' "capitalist oppression" is pure illusion and that emancipation of the oppressed is a mechanism to *reinforce* capitalism rather than resistance against it. This should not necessarily make me into an anti-leftist: certain leftists like Slavoj Žižek and Nancy Fraser have noticed similar irony about the leftist position (that the leftist activists never seem to have accomplished anything other than reinforce and diversify the free-market system in order to further entrench us within it).<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, the Frankfurt school – when they concern themselves with alienation (Rahel Jaeggi) or social pathologies (Axel Honneth) or reification (Habermas) – is essentially also on the right side. Herbert Marcuse's *One Dimensional Man* can be read as a warning about the erosion of human potential under consumerism. (All this also includes social critics who can be associated with the Frankfurt School, such as Peter Berger.<sup>8</sup>) So are also the famous American sociologist George Ritzer and his predecessor, the masterful Max Weber, such as when they lament the "irrationality of rationality". Alienation, social pathologies, and "irrationality of rationality" essentially signify derailment of the unfolding of our human potential rather than any oppression or exploitation of the disenfranchised or disadvantaged groups. This, despite the fact that, with Marx or Lukács, "alienation" is first diagnosed among exploited workers. None of the four examples which Jaeggi has produced in her classic on "alienation", for instance, belong to "oppressed workers".<sup>9</sup> Alienation (*Entfremdung*), reification (*Verdinglichung*), and "irrationality of rationality" affect equally those who have profited from the capitalist system and those who have suffered from it. And there are still other seemingly leftist thinkers who would appear to be aligned with the right when properly seen against the spectrum proposed here. For example, Hannah Arendt (although too conservative for the leftist of her time), such as when she criticizes consumerism for its disinteresting the population for political engagement. ("Dumbing down", which is my issue here.) In summary, I'm not as anti-leftist as I might appear at first sight when I give up "fighting oppression and exploitation" as the proper goal in the resistance movement against global capitalism; or, what amounts to the same thing, some of the critics on the left (like the Frankfurt

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6 Le Pen, *ibid.* and Dugin, *ibid.*

7 As for Žižek, see Jodi Dean's summary of his position in *Žižek's Politics*, New York: Routledge, 2006. As for Fraser, see especially her re-appropriation of Karl Polanyi to save critical theorizing: her "Triple Movement" (marketization, social protection, and emancipation) instead of Polanyi's "Double Movement" (marketization and social protection) and how "emancipation" has too often aligned with "marketization" while dismantling the domination structure inherent in the social tradition that is to be protected in the movement for social protection. See also her "How feminism became capitalism's handmaiden – and how to reclaim it" and her criticism of Cheryl Sandberg's idea of "Lean In" in her various lectures.

8 For example, his (together with Brigitte Berger and Hansfried Kellner) *The Homeless Mind*, New York: Vintage Books, 1974.

9 Rahel Jaeggi, *Entfremdung*, Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2004. English translation, *Alienation*, by Frederick Neuhouser and Alan E. Smith, ed. Frederick Neuhouser, New York: Columbia University Press, 2014.

School) might not actually be so leftist after all.<sup>10</sup>

In accordance with my critique of global capitalism, I must also be antagonistic toward liberal democracy. This is because, as shall be seen below, liberal democracy is intimately connected with free market enterprise in spoiling the modern human being. The Frankfurt School since Habermas, it is true, has been a big fan of liberal democracy *à l'américaine*. Most often, the leftist critics of capitalism do not despise liberal democracy per se. Fraser, for example, thinks that resistance against neoliberalism will reinforce democracy into participatory democracy. A minority of leftists *are* however quite critical of liberal democracy – for example Badiou, who, like me, also sees an intimate connection between liberal democracy and capitalism.<sup>11</sup> The critics on the right are more often split on the subject of democracy. A populist like Marine Le Pen is not against it, or speaks favorably of it. Alexander Dugin in Russia and the British Nick Land who, with his “Dark Enlightenment”, has become part of the Alt-Right movement in the United States, see democracy as “decadence”. However, whereas Dugin sees liberal democracy as “decadence” together with the associated free-market system, Land and many in his camp endorse free-market system while condemning liberal democracy. These are the possibilities. Meanwhile, in another instance where the political left seems to align with the political right, Badiou's anti-democratic pronouncement could also be construed as a critique of “decadence” – even though it is thoroughly Marxist.<sup>12</sup> (Later I will mention how similar Badiou's criticism of democracy is to Marine Le Pen's criticism of the political correctness which the neoliberal elites have imposed throughout Europe.) As for me, I am fundamentally “Ortegan” (Ortega y Gasset) in that, while I am skeptical of liberal democracy, I believe it can function as a good system if the dummed masses somehow do not “rebel” such as they have been doing since the inception of modernity.

Note that I have not included in this classificatory schema (what is in my thinking) the ultimate criterion of all: environmental destruction and shortage of energy supplies and natural resources. Critics on both the political left and the political right could be quite concerned with the negative consequences of global capitalism for our environment and our energy and natural resources, and yet it is more often a concern on the left than on the right (especially the topic of climate change). Some examples: Nancy Fraser and Naomi Klein on the left<sup>13</sup> and Marine Le Pen on the right. (The National Front is known for consciousness of issues regarding the environment and animal welfare.) Nevertheless, because the more vocal political left has created such deadly confusion in this regard – by persistently correlating oppression and exploitation with environmental destruction when, clearly, as has been an important subject in my previous works, the reverse is the case – the question regarding the

10 Scholars who have commented on the similarity between Marcus' *One Dimensional Man* and Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind* are in fact attesting to a certain commonality between the political left and the political right. Both books are about the deterioration of our human potential as a result of the easy and comfortable life we lead in the postmodern era; it's just that, while Marcus describes this postmodern life as “consumerist”, Bloom focuses on its other aspect, “political correctness”.

11 For example, in both his *L'hypothèse communiste* and his “L'emblème démocratique”, in *Démocratie, dans quel état*, Les Éditions Écosociété, 2009.

12 For example Badiou writes in “L'emblème démocratique”, p. 11 -12.: “Le pouvoir de nuisance de l'emblème démocratique est concentré dans le type subjectif qu'il façonne, et dont, pour le dire en un mot, l'égoïsme, le désir de la petite jouissance, est le trait crucial...”

13 As regards Naomi Klein, see her *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs the Climate*, New York, Simon and Schuster, 2014. In the end she concludes – after documenting the failures of some of the big capitalists to carry out their pledge to save the climate – that grass-root social movements (i.e. leftist) are the only possible agents to save our planet.

connection between capitalism and the earth must be postponed to the end of any discussion on upcoming revolutions. I shall here merely point out the obvious: a severely impoverished nation like Bolivia and a severely oppressive society like North Korea both contribute virtually nothing to global warming. And yet it is virtually impossible to convince any critic on the left that poverty and oppression are in general good for the environment while prosperity and equality tend to lay a heavy burden on our mother earth. Like the Chinese emperor who ingests poisonous chemical believing that it's the immortality potion which will extend his life and then always dying far sooner, the political left has been reinforcing global capitalism and accelerating environmental destruction while believing they are fighting against them. Hence I do not belong to the political right while writing the below. In the following I'm essentially defending a position that is roughly called *linkskonservativ*, of which the most prominent examples in recent intellectual history are Ortega y Gasset, Hannah Arendt, and Peter Sloterdijk. This, for me, is the most reasonable political position, especially when the development of human potential, especially human intelligence, rather than liberty or equality or order, is held to be the highest political ideal. My enduring concern which underlies this essay and which is the natural consequence of *Linkskonservatismus* is with the reformation of the political left so that, when they claim to be fighting A, they would really be fighting A.

Finally, I must note that, in the following, I in fact concentrate very little on the harmful effect of free-market and consumerism on human brain development. I have extensively expressed my opinions on this subject elsewhere. Instead, my focus here is on such harmful effect perpetrated by a phenomenon associated with the global free-market, “McDonaldization”, and by the digital communication revolution which I assert to be the culmination of a McDonaldized existence and an intimate associate of consumerism. This essay fits into the literary genre of critical theory (critique of our free-market world) in the sense that the global free-market is the kernel of our postmodern era and that this postmodernity, according to my conception, is characterized by a series of phenomena all intimately linked together: consumerism, mass democracy, McDonaldization, political correctness, and the Internet and the smartphone culture.

## 2.

### The “problem without a name”

I have thus defined what my “revolutionary goal” is – resistance against forces which undermine the development of our human potential, specifically our human intelligence – and indicated where it fits in on the overall spectrum of political orientations. Now I must precisely define what the social ill is against which I intend to fight: for it is neither “decadence” (for the rightwing thinker) nor “reification” (for the leftwing thinker) although it is something similar.

Amidst the hype over the new freedom and power offered by the digital revolution to the common people (what shall be referred to below as the “cyber-libertarian ideal”), a few more sensible individuals have dissented and voiced a contrary opinion, that, in the past three decades, there has occurred an overall decline of the quality of work in many domains of American society. I have personally observed such decline in all institutions which I, as an ordinary citizen, must confront: the school systems, the university system, the health care system, the mental health system, the law enforcement system, the criminal justice system, and even the “Homeland Security system” (the

nation's security apparatus). I will define, in the course of my analysis, what the “quality” which is said to be in decline refers to exactly. For now, suffice it to say that, compared with the situation forty years ago, people in America nowadays seem more frequently confused, less able to remember things correctly, and less mentally alert in general; that students, psychotherapists, psychiatrists, detectives, and national security personnel seem less versed with the subject matters in their specialty; and that the newer generations seem less emotional, less able to pay attention, less thinking, and less interested in understanding the world around them. Thus I, along with many other commentators, have intuitively attributed the said decline to a general deterioration of people's brain power.

Some will certainly dispute the claim that any sort of decline in human brain power has indeed, and *especially*, occurred at all in recent times. I am cognizant of the fact – of which the skeptics will surely remind me – that the intellectual elites have, in every major epoch of human civilization, complained about the decline of intelligence and morals among the general population – which reveals more the privileged position of the intellectual elites, namely their growing intellectual and moral superiority, than the declining intellect and morals of the ordinary people. For a philosopher, the ordinary people inevitably appear sort of “dumb”. Throughout history, the majority of the human population are dumb because they aren't educated. Without an education, they don't know very much, reason badly, and live in fantasies, i.e. are unable to interact with the external reality itself but are only able to comprehend and interact with the simple concepts and prejudices in their own mind. Unable to understand very much and uncultivated in sentiments, they are intolerant of each other and spend their life hurting each other. The critics of the contemporary situation would however argue that the dumbness of the current human population shows a strikingly different character than does the ignorance of the common people in the past – a difference which indicates that a decline is *especially* in progress in contemporary times. Today, while the majority of the population remains uneducated, they also increasingly show signs of brain damage. They are increasingly unable to even pay attention and perceive and remember details as well as think critically. As my professor friend has once distinguished the matter for me: while people in the past reason badly, people today can't reason at all. Meanwhile, just as in the past, the majority of people today are still unable to free themselves from prejudices – from a new set of prejudices – despite becoming increasingly politically correct. In general, human beings seem to have become *simpler*, both in experience and in brain functioning. I'm also cognizant of the fact that my very favorite philosopher Ortega y Gasset has, almost a hundred years ago, said the exact same thing about the general masses of his time. Spoiled by democracy and prosperity, the ordinary human being was becoming *simpler*, more self-centered, and “bestial” – exactly what the older generation often says about the younger generation nowadays.

And so the alarm which the intellectual elites or the old-fashioned older folks nowadays raise about the declining intelligence and morals of the newer generation has all been heard many times before, and one cannot claim such perception of decline to be more than simply subjective impression unless one has objectively established its reality through large-scale empirical and statistical studies. There have been studies done here and there which seem to justify such perception of decline, but the justification is not systematic. I would like here to explore, within the framework of critical theory, the possible causes for the current decline of human brain capacity, while remaining cognizant of the need to first of all establish the objective reality of such decline by citing the necessary longitudinal and latitudinal studies. The following reflections, while remaining thusly tentative on this account, should not be

entirely devoid of value. Neither Ortega y Gasset's classic on the revolt of the masses nor the countless studies on alienation or emancipation are backed up by large-scale empirical studies demonstrating the objective existence of the phenomena they are complaining about. And yet they remain sociologically insightful and probably represent the first necessary step in documenting and explaining the phenomena in question.

In the following I am proposing a phenomenological study of a serious problem which seems to be plaguing the contemporary (postmodern) American society. According to this phenomenological study, there is indeed a difference between the dumb masses of contemporary time and those from time past. Throughout the course of this study this difference will be described as a change-over in human cognitive style from “thinking” (although “bad thinking” among the dumb masses in the past) to “information-processing” (hence “not thinking”). This change-over seems to have manifested itself in a multifaceted decline of human brain power, which I shall coin the term “dummification” to designate.<sup>14</sup> Although I will, at the end of this essay, cover over the common objection as to whether the dumb masses today are really dumber than the dumb masses in the past even given the reality of a change-over in cognitive style, I take it to be obvious, and unobjectionable, that “dummification” has, in the past three decades, indeed occurred throughout the various expert domains in American society which have just been named. That is, if you question whether a pedestrian you find protesting on the street today is really dumber than one of those mobs who stormed the Bastille more than two hundred years ago – they might quite well be equally dumb, although one is non-thinking while the other a bad thinker – you cannot possibly question the obvious fact that a clinical psychologist you see for therapy right now is dumber than a cognitive psychologist doing therapy in the 1970s.

The first part of this essay deals with the general causes responsible for the current dummification process or the change-over in human cognitive style. I shall argue that this “dummification” is the direct consequence of the increasing rationalization of our society, which, in accordance with George Ritzer's “McDonaldization thesis”, has taken on in contemporary times the new form of “McDonaldization”.<sup>15</sup> The second part of this essay then deals with the effect of McDonaldization in the various expert domains which have just been named, namely, the dummification of the experts and the lowering of the quality of their work. In this preliminary section, I must first comment on the place of “dummification” in a critical social theory and name the initial germ present in the founding of American society which would later on blossom into the McDonaldization problem.

When Max Weber first describes the ills resulting from rationalization in Western societies, these societies at the time have just entered the modernization phase. Today American society – along with the rest of the developed world – has entered the postmodern phase.<sup>16</sup> It is McDonaldized, and

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14 The terminology “dummification of America” has already been used by numerous bloggers on the Internet. I'm of course not talking exactly about the same thing.

15 George Ritzer, *The McDonaldization of Society*. The latest edition is the eighth edition: Los Angeles: Sage Publication, 2015. I am here however using the 6<sup>th</sup> edition, 2011.

16 For a brief but most succinct definition of “modernity” and “postmodernity” see Simon Malpas' discussion in his *Jean-François Lyotard*, London and New York: Routledge, 2003, p. 7 -11. There he distinguishes between “modernism” and “postmodernism” as they are used to describe art and literature and “modernity” and “postmodernity” as they are used to describe historical epochs and social organization. I employ the designations “modern age” (“modernity”) and “postmodern age” (“postmodernity”) in the latter sense, and use the former to describe the historical period from

“dummification” is a feature of it. In the parlance of critical theory, “dummification” can be considered one of the new social pathologies – I shall say, the most significant new social pathology – which have accompanied the rationalization process as our society continues to rationalize into the postmodern era. Although new, “dummification” is in many respects intimately related to, and the correlate of, the older social pathologies accompanying rationalization which have been analyzed in many different quarters – notably alienation, reification, and dehumanization. It is also intimately related to that phenomenon of “decadence” which those on the right are complaining about. It is however not reducible to any of these older forms. In keeping with the leftist tradition of social criticism, Ritzer has faulted McDonaldization for its irrationality and dehumanization. I however wish to fault it for its “dummification” – a far more important harmful effect, I think, than irrationality or dehumanization.

As can be gathered from the opening lines, my geographical focus in this essay is the United States, the origin, and currently the world-center, of “dummification” due to McDonaldization. This essay is fundamentally a critique of the corruption of the American system as the most relevant of all critiques insofar as our world is increasingly Americanized – not in the least through the triumph of neoliberalism – and therefore “dummified”. There is something distinctive about American society which makes “dummification” closer to its essence than in the case of other societies. Namely, the dummification which proceeds from McDonaldization has a deeper root, deep within the foundation of the American republic itself. Because American society has evolved from slightly different initial conditions, the rationalization of society has here proceeded on a slightly different path than it has on the European continent. That is, McDonaldization is the particularly American form of rationalization, even if it is now being adopted by the world over. America's slightly different initial conditions were first comprehensively described by Alexis de Tocqueville in his celebrated classic. America is different because it is the first example in world history of a *mass society*, a society ruled according to “mass tyranny”, a society characterized and ruled by the tastes and prejudices of the mass public, where for the first time in human history the opinions of the masses constitute a dominant force to be reckoned with. Although Tocqueville did not explicitly point this out, it would seem that “dummification” is the inevitable consequence of the domination of society by its greatest number insofar as the discourse of the public sphere has to continually simplify in order to become intelligible to the lowest common denominators of society – who rule by their sheer number. Anyone new to American society is struck by the constant imperative to always appeal to the lowest common denominator: “You must make your message simpler and easier to understand so that you can get *everybody!*” Namely, the desire, in both politics and the market, to include and attract *everybody*. Because intelligent people can always understand what dumb people can understand but not vice versa, the imperative to include as many people as possible inevitably leads to a general coarsening (simplification, i.e. “dummification”) of public discourse. Every enterprise, every political candidate, is always seeking to draw in an ever larger segment of society as its audience – until *everybody* is reached – in order to extract the greatest amount of profits or mobilize the greater number of votes. The tendency then results to invert the traditional order, so that it is now the experts who have to strain themselves to make themselves understandable to

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Enlightenment to 1960 – the period during which Western consciousness is concerned with progress toward a better future and Western society is characterized by the production phase of capitalism with its manufacturing factories and so on – and the latter to describe the period after 1960 – during which Western consciousness is gripped with political correctness and Western society has entered into the consumption phase of capitalism: the age of globalization when manufacturing factories are moved out of the Western world to developing countries.



non-experts, rather than the non-experts who have to strain themselves to understand the experts: a tendency which is present although not yet carried to its logical conclusion in the very beginning of the American republic. In such a mass, democratic and consumer society where *quantity* is the determining factor, the appeal to the lowest common denominator requiring the increasing simplification and dumbing-down of discourses is the natural evolutionary goal. “Dummification” inevitably results when the mind adapts to an environment (the public sphere) which is always under pressure to continually simplify itself.

This is all common sense. I shall however name this the “original condition” of American society and see it as the guiding thread in the evolution of American society toward increasing rationalization as it continues to modernize. That is to say, this “original condition” not only leads to dummification by itself, but also guides society toward McDonaldization as it rationalizes. In the following I shall argue for three theses: (1) the common sense thesis that a society which is organized around appealing to the lowest common denominator will cause its members to become dumber and dumber; (2) a critique of rationalization such that rationalization is inherently dummifying; and (3) a modified McDonaldization thesis such that McDonaldization results from increasing rationalization to accommodate, and incorporate, the lowest common denominator, i.e. is a combination of the peculiarly American “original condition” and the general Western tendency toward rationalization. All three theses result in the same thing: people's getting dumber and dumber.

Underlying my three theses is the observation that the “American Way” consists essentially of two drivers, the desire to accommodate the lowest common denominator (the “original condition”) and the love affair with rationalization. That is, Americans love to put the dumbest among them on the pedestal for worship and love to regulate every details of their life with rules, procedures, and laws. The evolution of American society can be seen as progressively actualizing these two primordial tendencies to their fullest possible extent, with the result that people become increasingly dumb while ruling the day.

### 3.

#### The paramount importance of the Internet for the current phase of dummification

Given my theses, one should expect that, as America becomes increasingly “democratic” – as the imperative to appeal to the greater masses colonizes one domain after another of American society – and increasingly rationalized, people should be dumber in 1976 than in 1776. Then, just at this juncture, another major technological revolution happens which seems to have significantly accelerated the dummification process beyond the normal pace guaranteed by the constant gravitational pull in the public sphere toward the lowest common denominator. I am of course referring to the digital revolution, the digitalization of our communications – from the early phase of the Internet to the current wave of smartphones, social media, and Wikipedia. There is now a growing awareness in academia that our Internet and smartphone culture is eroding away our new generation's ability to concentrate and think critically. In the following I shall concentrate on the most influential representative in the United States, Nicholas Carr with his *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to*

*Our Brains*.<sup>17</sup> But keep in mind that I am also influenced by the most influential voice on the matter in Germany, Manfred Spitzer with his *Digitale Demenz: Wie wir uns und unsere Kinder um den Verstand bringen*.<sup>18</sup> Then, in the following, I shall also cite, here and there as supplements, other researches into the erosion of our cognitive capacity by our Internet and smartphone culture. Along with these critics, I have previously also believed that the contemporary “dummification” is largely the result of digitalization. It is largely digitalization which has given rise to the signs of brain damage which increasingly distinguish contemporary dummification from dummification of the previous ages. Namely, “digital dementia”. Today, however, I have become convinced that it is the larger, more general, context of increasing democratization (the “original principle”) and increasing rationalization of our society which constitutes the best explanatory framework within which contemporary dummification finds its origin. My reason is not just that the traditional conceptions of rationalization, democratization, and rampant consumerism can produce their own dummification effects independent of the digitalization of our communications, but also that the digital revolution – or the way in which our use of digital communication has evolved – can itself be seen as part of the process of the increasing democratization of society – and specifically as the latest expression of the American imperative to appeal to the lowest common denominator of society.

#### 4.

#### A simplified McDonaldization thesis commensurate with the Internet

I shall presently demonstrate my first thesis, that increasing democratization is dummifying. I shall demonstrate this in regard to the advent of the Internet insofar as the Internet represents the latest phase of this democratization. It is in this way that I wish to tackle the issue of how digital mass communication, and electronic media in general, have been making us dumber. Then, as I proceed, I will have to modify George Ritzer's famous McDonaldization thesis.

Here I take George Ritzer to be correct in seeing McDonaldization as the latest, and particular, paradigm for the rationalization of American society. When Ritzer speaks of the “irrationalities of rationality” he is often referring to the same social pathologies accompanying the rationalization process of which Marx, Weber, and the critical theorists of later generations have spoken. Thus, the most common social pathology, “reification” (*Verdinglichung*) or “alienation” (*Entfremdung*), is roughly meant when Ritzer mentions “dehumanization” (of both the workers and the consumers) as a consequence of McDonaldization. To be sure, “dummification”, as a social pathology, is already implicit in “dehumanization”. Whereas the worker at McDonald's – or even at the earliest rationalized production process such as Henry Ford's assembly line – feels dehumanized because only a tiny portion of his or her human potential is utilized on the job, we can easily imagine that long term adaptation to such minimum use of one's talents can result in atrophy of one's human intelligence, so that simplification of one's mind – “dummification” – results. And yet none of the grand thinkers in the tradition of critical social theory has comprehensively described the devastating effect of “dehumanization” on human brain capacity.

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17 Nicolas Carr, *The Shallow*, New York: Norton, 2010.

18 Manfred Spitzer, *Digitale Demenz: Wie wir uns und unsere Kinder um den Verstand bringen*, Droemer, 2012.

For my purpose in this essay, I would like to employ the term “McDonaldization” only in a vague way, just as I have done in my previous writings. In Ritzer's original conception, “McDonaldization” is a precise, differentiated paradigm of rationalization consisting of the principal characteristics of predictability, calculability, efficiency, and control. When I speak of “McDonaldization”, I shall mean no more than “efficiency” in the sense of *processing an ever larger volume at an ever shorter interval of time*. I shall speak of anything as “McDonaldized” when it exhibits “efficiency” in this sense seen in McDonald's machinery. A business McDonaldizes because it wants to increase profits. Forced to perpetually drive up its profit margin, the business does this by drawing in an ever larger number of customers and processing them at an ever faster pace – thus continually increasing the volume of transactions in a given time interval. This is the sense in which a system needs to embody ever greater efficiency. One can see that, in this sense, McDonaldization is driven by America's “original condition”, the imperative to attract an ever larger number of people until *everybody* is reached: the rule of the lowest common denominator. McDonaldization is thus the natural consequence of the evolution of American society from its “original condition”. At issue in this drive for efficiency is the need to constantly simplify procedures of production or interaction with customers (including reducing the time of interaction) in order to become capable of processing an ever larger volume of transactions. It seems to me that only by considerably simplifying the concept of McDonaldization in this way can we use it consistently as *the* paradigm of rationalization for our postmodern age – that only then can we retain McDonaldization thesis' status as (in Ritzer's words) a “grand narrative”, which can consistently predict that, as time goes on and our society evolves further, it *always* McDonaldizes more.

Only a concept of McDonaldization that is simplified in this way can, for example, serve as a consistent descriptor of the Internet – or digital communication in general – as McDonaldized. While many scholars have successfully discovered the principal components of McDonaldization “predictability”, “calculability”, “efficiency”, and “control” at work in medicine, psychiatry, policing, and the criminal justice system and analyzed the decline of the quality of work in these domains as due to the over-application of these principles – more on this below – this cannot be done when one approaches the Internet. There seems to be a fundamental difference between the material world and the digital world. Ritzer has tried to analyze the development of the Internet as both further McDonaldized and partially “deMcDonaldized” because he has to rely on the four principal characteristics in defining the degree of McDonaldization with the Internet. The problem becomes especially acute when the Internet evolves from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0. Web 1.0, lasting until the dot com bubble burst, is a more or less “top-down system”: the provider provides fixed contents to the consumers (usually in the form of static text or streamed videos) and the consumers consume them. In other words, it functions exactly like traditional book-publishing, radio-broadcasting, or television, except that it is offered on the Internet. “Examples of Web 1.0 include Switchboard.com and YellowPage.com, which centrally conceive how users find people and businesses through the framework of the sites; the Apple store and other shopping sites that dictate the content and users' browsing (i.e. shopping); and Fodors.com, which uses its own tastemakers to point tourists to various hotels, restaurants, activities, and so forth”.<sup>19</sup> Web 2.0, on the other hand, is a “bottom-up system controlled to a large extent by its users”.<sup>20</sup> The provider here often does no more than provide a platform on which consumers themselves offer contents, products, and services to each other. While

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<sup>19</sup> Ritzer, *ibid.*, p. 232

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

Web 1.0 can be more or less analyzed in terms of Ritzer's original McDonaldization thesis since the principles “predictability”, “efficiency”, “calculability” and “control” can more or less be found in its operations, Web 2.0 no longer seems to fit the description of McDonaldization because it operates on the principle of “prosumption”, i.e. where consumers produce for each other the contents, the products, and the services which they will consumer. The two paradigmatic instances of Web 2.0 are eBay and Facebook, one where the users themselves come up with the products to be sold to each other (they are producers and consumers to each other), and the other where the consumers themselves create the contents (profiles, messages, and shared videos) to be consumed through the platform. Youtube, Twitter, and Wikipedia are three other paradigmatic instances of “prosumption” like Facebook. Because this principle of “prosumption” has created an astonishing degree of variety and unpredictability in the products or contents to be consumed – the objects and contents of consumption are now tailored to individual consumers, resulting in a fragmentation of tastes – it seems to be the opposite of McDonaldization where a central authority imposes an uniform product on all consumers and thus homogenizes tastes. Clearly, then, the major characteristics of the differentiated descriptive of McDonaldization, like predictability, calculability, and control, no longer apply to the production-consumption process seen in Web 2.0. It is Ritzer's student, Nathan Jurgenson, who first pointed this out and suggested the “de-McDonaldization of the Internet”.<sup>21</sup> This challenge to the McDonaldization thesis is then amplified by Elif Izberk-Bilgin and Aaron Ahuvia when they advance the concept “eBayization”.<sup>22</sup> Jurgenson has especially focused on the resistance of “prosumption” which constitutes the kernel of Web 2.0 against the four principal characteristics of McDonaldization as the principal driver for the de-McDonaldization of the Internet. He goes so far as to reject McDonaldization as a “grand narrative” paradigm for our age. This seems to be what has happened: a minor technique which McDonald's has employed to increase efficiency – getting the customers to share in the production process, such as when the customers themselves are expected to clean up their mess after they have eaten – has been carried to the extreme in the development of Internet businesses – these paradigmatic Internet companies have shifted the burden of production entirely onto the consumers themselves and offered no more than a platform on which the consumers can trade products, services, and contents with each other – such that the three other characteristics of McDonaldization have become obsolete. This seems to make the McDonaldization thesis obsolete as a “grand narrative” – as a paradigm of contemporary rationalization process – insofar as the Internet has today become the largest component of our private and work life. Our life seems to have been “de-McDonaldized” by the Internet. Ritzer deals with this difficulty by pointing out that “de-McDonaldization” is only the surface (applicable only to the products and the contents) while the underlying structures of eBay and Facebook – i.e. the platforms themselves – remain McDonaldized, i.e. embodying the characteristics of predictability, efficiency, calculability, and control. That is, while the content is de-McDonaldized, the structure enabling the production of content is still McDonaldized. This has enabled Ritzer to assert the “McDonaldization of socialization” when it comes to, for example, Facebook. Nevertheless, Ritzer is forced to admit that the progress from modernity toward postmodernity is not marked by a linear process of rationalization toward an ever greater degree of McDonaldization. Specifically, because Web 2.0 is clearly less McDonaldized than Web 1.0, Ritzer must admit that McDonaldization cannot function

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21 See his “The De-McDonaldization of the Internet”, in *McDonaldization: The Reader*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, Los Angeles: Sage Publication, 2009.

22 Ritzer, *ibid.*, p. 228.

as a perfect “grand narrative”.<sup>23</sup>

My dissatisfaction with this whole debate about whether the Internet is de-McDonaldized lies in the fact that, upon generalization, one can indeed see an unbroken continuity between the McDonald's in the material world and eBay, Facebook, Youtube, and Twitter in the digital world. First of all, while predictability, calculability, and control have been thrown out of the window when an enterprise enters the digital domain, it has retained the *modus operandi* of *efficiency*. These online platforms are more McDonaldized in the sense of being “more efficient”, not from the point of view of consumers, but from the point of view of producers. The enterprise no longer burdens itself with the production of the products which they shall sell and from which they shall derive their profits. They let the consumers do all that themselves. The efficiency here lies in the maximal reduction of production cost and procedures. It is the ultimate form of the “exploitation of consumers” pioneered by McDonald's. The celebration of the cyber-libertarian ideal – what seems to be the ordinary consumer's sharing in the means of production – really serves the function of masking a new exploitation.

Secondly – and this is the far more important aspect on which I shall concentrate – Web 2.0 is more McDonaldized in the sense that the new Internet platform has made it ever easier for an ever larger number of people to reach and communicate with one another. The social media universe which constitutes the kernel of Web 2.0 is characterized by a vast number of short and simple messages and expressions pronounced at the spur of the moment just as in any fast food place. The development of the Internet has clearly furthered the trend of McDonaldization when McDonaldization is meant only in the vague, more generalized sense which I have just specified. By making the market stand available to everybody (e.g. eBay) the Internet companies have considerably enlarged the volume of trade. By making the means of publication available to everybody (blogs or Amazon Kindle or any other self-publishing means instead of the old printing press) the Internet companies have considerably enlarged the volume of public discourse. By making it ever easier for ordinary people to connect with an ever larger number of their kind from around the globe (e.g. Facebook) the Internet companies have considerably enlarged the volume of transactions between human beings.

What McDonald's and Facebook have in common is therefore the enabling of an ever larger volume of transactions and interactions rather than any calculability, predictability, or control. In the former, the business processes an ever larger number of customers and delivers an ever larger number of burgers – at an ever shorter interval of time. In the latter, the consumer can connect with an ever larger number of people from around the world. Although this is not a requirement, the consumer's goal tends to be to connect with an ever larger number of people and to send them an ever larger number of messages while devoting less time to each person and each message, i.e. *favoring quantity over quality*. This is especially evident when one considers the evolution from the older Facebook to the newer Twitter: messages on Twitter are even shorter, even less thought out, than on Facebook. Thus, the Internet has led to greater McDonaldization of our life in the sense of processing an ever larger number of

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23 Ritzer, *ibid.*, p. 239: “This leads us to a more nuanced conclusion to this book and to this discussion of McDonaldization and deMcDonaldization. That is, the McDonaldization process continues apace in the infrastructure of Web 2.0, and it is that which, paradoxically, has allowed for the deMcDonaldization of the surface-level content to be found there. This is a more complex conclusion than one which simply depicts a grand narrative of ever-escalating and -expanding McDonaldization.”

relationships during an ever shorter interval of time. This is the true meaning of the “McDonaldization of socialization” of which Ritzer has made mention but which he has failed to understand.

It is in this way that the McDonaldization thesis can fit in with the critics of the digital revolution such as Nicholas Carr. The Internet has increased the volume and range of socialization while sacrificing its quality. Dummification occurs due to both the consequent lack of complexity in communications and their increasing shallow nature. “Making it easier” means first of all the possibility of instant gratification of desires. As soon as an emailer or a Facebooker or a Twitterer or a text-messenger experiences an impulse to say something to his or her “friends”, s/he can produce the message to them immediately. The result is a vast and constant flow of monosyllabic, badly thought-out utterances full of grammatical mistakes and devoid of meaning which increasingly characterizes online communication. In the past, on the other hand, because communication is difficult such as in writing letters, writers are forced to concentrate for a longer period of time on a single message, which results in better thought-out and longer letters that are grammatically developed and full of meanings. Compare simply the personal letters of renowned writers of the past that are collected together as a piece of literature (“Collected Letters”) to the instant messages of the digital world today. This is how digital communication represents McDonaldization of communication and socialization: just as a customer enters McDonald's to quickly devour a low-quality, *simple*, meal so that s/he can leave immediately, an emailer or a Facebooker or a Twitterer or a text-messenger instantaneously expresses his or her thoughts – and *in a very simple form* – so that s/he can forget about it and move on to something else. McDonaldization is about being “fast”, “simple”, “on the go”, “more in a shorter time”, at the expense of quality and complexity, which, because both require time and concentration, can only be “less in a longer time”. A significant indicator of “dummification” resulting from the McDonaldization of communication and socialization is the decline of verbal and reading scores on standardized tests for youngsters (e.g. PSAT and SAT) since the time of the dramatic expansion of Internet use in homes and schools.<sup>24</sup> Another is the increasingly shorter attention span of contemporary audience, a fact to which all media companies struggle to adapt.<sup>25</sup> And yet another is the increasing inability of the Internet generation to think deeply and critically since one is increasingly given to (allowed to indulge in) instincts and reflexes. More on this later.

“Making it easier” means secondly overcoming the geographic distance which has traditionally been a barrier to communication. Because it's so easy, a Facebooker forms more relationships with more people from ever far away places, but these relationships are much shallower than the traditional, short range relationships. These relationships also tend to be more vague since, online, people do not meet face to face. Because a Facebooker's relationships with other human beings are shallower, s/he has less opportunities to understand and explore any human being in-depth. His or her understanding of human psychology thus also suffers. This is another aspect of “dummification” with which we are concerned: people are far less able to understand each other nowadays. The result is the opposite of the “humanization of the Internet” of which Jurgenson has spoken: when human beings interact with each other on the Internet, they dehumanize each other.<sup>26</sup>

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24 Carr, *ibid.*, p. 145 – 146.

25 *Ibid.*, p. 94.

26 Robert D. Putnam, in the classic to be frequently cited in the following, *Bowling Alone*, is probably the first scholar to criticize the Internet for being like a McDonald's in the way in which I have described it, even though he is never really

I thus conclude that the Internet is in fact a most extreme expression of McDonaldization. Thus my thesis: if the Internet has contributed to the massive brain deterioration among the human population today, *it is because McDonaldization, rather than the Internet and smartphone culture per se, which dummifies*. By virtue of the extraordinary way in which it has facilitated communication and operated through the principle of “prosumption”, it is encouraging everybody to communicate more and enabling more business transactions to take place resulting in an increase of the volume of consumption – eBayization really signifies that more products can be produced when *everybody* is called upon to join the production line, i.e. when the consumers themselves are asked to come up with the products they shall consume. Amazon Kindle and other self-publishing venues can be assimilated to eBayization: by enabling *everybody* (i.e. every reader) to publish, these self-publishing platforms have tremendously increased the volume of books being published and consumed each year. Again, because every user, every “prosumer”, has, as always, only a fixed (never-increasing) amount of time to consume products and absorb information and messages, the continual increase of variety and volume of products, information, and messages – the current condition of information-overload and over-supply of products – can only mean that s/he will have to devour each of the new varieties in an ever shorter time period and therefore in an increasingly *cavalier* and *perfunctory* manner. Just like dining at McDonald's: quickly get hold of the object of consumption, quickly devour it, and quickly leave and move onto the next thing. Shallow, perfunctory, and cavalier.

“Prosumption” also resembles McDonaldization in that it tends to result in the decline of the quality of the products or contents to be consumed – just as the instant gratification of desires and extraordinary facility in communication made possible by the Internet have resulted in a general decline of the quality and substance of communication and superficialization of human relationships and interactions. I have mentioned the decline of the quality of contents that necessarily results when the contents are conceived and produced only at the spur of the moment. Such decline is however also a necessary consequence of the principle of enabling *everybody* to do it. Under “prosumption”, the quality of the information consumed declines also because the responsibility for production has shifted from a centralized, *expert* agent to the masses of *unexpert* consumers themselves. The traditional sources of contents, the news and media companies and the governments, are experts. The traditional fear has been that these experts, when producing contents for mass consumption, might have nefarious purposes or value their self-interests more than the interests of their consumers. The fear that they might be intentionally distorting the truth in order to manipulate consumers does not however relate to any doubt whether these centralized agents might lack the *competence* to produce accurate and substantive information. With “prosumption”, this fear has been minimized but replaced by a new concern, i.e. that the mass of consumers are untrained and unexpert in the production of information to be consumed. The information they produce is of vastly inferior quality, in terms of grammar, depth, and authenticity. “Dummification” – where consumers *dumb down each other* – is the inevitable consequence.

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concerned with Ritzer's McDonaldization thesis. He emphasizes that online chat is a deficient form of socialization in that non-verbal communications (visual cues, body language) are absent – thus less conducive to the development of one's understanding of human psychology – and that “anonymity and fluidity in the virtual world”, i.e. the very privacy and freedom which the cyber-libertarians would like to champion, “encourage 'easy-in, easy-out', 'drive-by' relationships” (p. 177). That is, just like in McDonald's, with all the intensities lacking. The shallow online socialization is characterized by “depersonalization”, “psychological distance”, and “weak social cues” (ibid.).

The same can be said of the publishing industry. Before, only established authors who are experts can publish. Nowadays, thanks to Amazon Kindle, anybody can publish, and it is necessarily the case that the vast majority of the authors nowadays are amateurs and wholly unexpert in their subject matter and in the use of language. The decline of the quality of contents is thus the necessary consequence of the cyber-libertarian ideal.<sup>27</sup>

It should be fairly obvious that, insofar as the development of the Internet from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 is the progressive realization of the cyber-libertarian ideal – namely, the web is evolving from a centralized, top-down world to a decentralized, flattened, peer-to-peer democratic jungle – the whole Web 2.0 is nothing more than the latest manifestation of the American “original condition”, i.e. recruiting *everybody*, attracting *everybody*, making it possible for *everybody*. Insofar as it is about *empowering* the common people – making everybody a co-owner of the means of communication – it is also the latest, and perhaps the final, phase of the dummification process which the “original condition” necessarily entails. It's no longer the case that the experts have to dumb down their messages in order to appeal to the lowest common denominator of society; it's nowadays the case that the lowest common denominator themselves have taken on the experts' job to appeal to each other.<sup>28</sup>

I have thus been arguing not only that the Internet is perfectly congruent with the McDonaldization thesis – it is the McDonaldization of communication in both the private and the public sphere – but also that it is precisely this aspect of McDonaldization which has enabled the Internet to be so effective in dumbing down the population. You thus see my thesis emerging: Insofar as getting *everybody* to participate (*empowering* everyone to easily do what is formerly difficult to do or to do what is formerly

27 Thus Carr has also commented on the decline of quality following digitalization of the publishing mechanism, *ibid.*, p. 107: “A printed book is a finished object. Once inked onto the page, its words become indelible. The finality of the act of publishing has long instilled in the best and most conscientious writers and editors a desire, even an anxiety, to perfect the works they produce – to write with an eye and an ear toward eternity. Electronic text is impermanent. In the digital marketplace, publication becomes an ongoing process rather than a discrete event, and revision can go on indefinitely. Even after an e-book is downloaded onto a network device, it can be easily and automatically updated... It seems likely that removing the sense of closure from book writing will, in time, alter writers' attitudes toward their work. The pressure to achieve perfection will diminish, along with the artistic rigor that the pressure imposed. To see how small changes in writers' assumptions and attitudes can eventually have large effects on what they write, one need only glance at the history of correspondence. A personal letter written in, say, the nineteenth century bears little resemblance to a personal e-mail or text message written today. Our indulgence in the pleasures of informality and immediacy has led to a narrowing of expressiveness and a loss of eloquence.”

28 As you can see, the disdain I have shown here for the cyber-libertarian peer-to-peer ideal concerns the production and communication of new knowledge. I have no objection to peer-to-peer ideal when it is merely about sharing contents that are already established. Such as the sharing of movies and other large files through Torrents, etc. Only weeks after I have finished this essay did my professor friend bring to my attention Andrew Keen's *The Cult of the Amateur* (Doubleday, 2007) – the exact same complaint is heard there as in my essay here. Keen complains that, by giving the common people, the unexperts, the means to express themselves, Web 2.0 (Youtube and Wikipedia and so on) has ostracized the original experts from the game of cultural production, creating a situation where the blind are leading the blind, where the masses are absorbed in the nonsense they have themselves created rather than in the traditional high culture and good news reporting which could have increased their awareness of reality. “The monkeys take over. Say good-bye to today's experts and cultural gatekeepers – our reporters, news anchors, editors, music companies, and Hollywood movie studios. In today's cult of the amateurs, the monkeys are running the show” (p. 9). Truth is thus sacrificed. This is however only a criticism relating to the harmful way in which the dumb masses use the Internet; it says nothing about whether the very structure of Internet might be harmful to our cognitive ability.



reserved for a minority of experts) is the essence of the democratic spirit – the final fruition of the “original American condition” – the Internet (especially Web 2.0) is thus the final manifestation of McDonaldization, McDonaldization a final consequence of democratization, and dummification part of the large context of continual democratization. You thus also see me gradually offering an answer to the question I have posed in the very beginning: the decline of quality in many domains of American life is the result of McDonaldization, which has made people increasingly perfunctory and cavalier while working in these domains and caused their cognitive capacity to continually deteriorate. This will be fully propounded in the second half of this essay.

## 5. The Internet and dummification

At this juncture I would like to return to those critics of the Internet who have been continually warning us about the dummification effect of our newest technology. Again, I shall single out Nicholas Carr as the most representative voice. How does the Internet make us dumber?

I have, as you have seen, recast the issue by arguing that it is not the Internet per se which is making us dumber, but the way in which we use it. So far the simplest complaint – as Manfred Spitzer has voiced – is that technology, by making our life easier, has caused our brain to atrophy (e.g. Google has caused our memory capacity to deteriorate when we no longer have to remember anything out of our own effort but can always Google for the information we need). I have so far voiced the complaint that the Internet has an inherent appeal to our laziness and greed by which we are prompted to sacrifice quality in favor of quantity and to replace experts with non-experts in leadership positions in our world. Nicholas Carr has in his classic echoed in one way or another the disadvantages of Web 2.0 which I have briefly summarized above. However, Carr is there quite focused on the dummification effect inherent in the very structure of the Internet. He sees the Internet's dummification effect essentially in the fact that the Internet, by virtue of both its very structure (e.g. hyperlinks, multimedia) and convenience (multitasking), is an extremely distracting environment offering constant interruptions.<sup>29</sup> “Our use of the Internet involves many paradoxes, but the one that promises to have the greatest long-term influence over how we think is this one: the Net seizes our attention only to scatter it. We focus intensely on the medium itself, on the flickering screen, but we are distracted by the medium's rapid-fire delivery of competing messages and stimuli”.<sup>30</sup> The human brain's adaptation to this new medium has therefore resulted in the erosion of the human brain's capacity for concentration and deep thinking. Carr's thesis basically consists in a change-over in human brain structure as the most important consequence of the digital revolution and which contrasts sharply with the previous change-over which

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29 Ibid., p. 91.

30 Ibid., p. 118. Miriam Meckel has called the new culture that grows out of the combination of digital communication with the increasing fast-paced and multitasking work environment “interruption un-culture”. C.f. her interview with *Stern*, 28 September 2007, in regard to her new book, *Das Glück der Unerreichbarkeit*: “In Durchschnitt kann sich ein Büromensch zweieinhalb Minuten auf eine Sache konzentrieren, bevor er von außen unterbrochen wird, durch einen Anruf, durch einen Kollegen, durch eine E-mail. Wir leben inzwischen so stark in dieser Unterbrechungs-Unkultur, daß nicht mehr die Arbeit durch Mails unterbrochen wird, sondern umgekehrt das Mailen durch die Arbeit. Wir können uns gar nicht mehr richtig konzentrieren.” In addition, studies have shown that urban setting – with its fast-paced environment, constant noises, and incessant interruptions – also erodes the human brain's ability to concentrate and think deeply. A walk through nature will instantly raise the mind's awareness. This is however not covered in this essay.

followed upon the invention of the printing press. The expansion of a literary culture following upon the invention of the printing press has caused an expansion of our language ability and thereby a deepening of our consciousness, experience, and understanding of both ourselves and the external reality,<sup>31</sup> and the experience of following a linear stream of narrative and argumentation trains our mind to reason critically. All this achievement is now being undone by the digital revolution. Internet use promotes the habit of skimming and scanning and browsing superficially and quickly without understanding anything, which thus trains the brain in the exact opposite fashion than book-reading. While, on the neurological level, book-reading tends to under-stimulate the brain, enabling it to develop the capacity to focus and think deeply, online reading tends to overstimulate the brain, resulting in the opposite effect. As experiments have demonstrated, the brain too adapted to the automated and efficient online world has difficulty in forming “schemas”, complex concepts which organize the scattered bits of information into patterns of knowledge, the most important step in acquiring a comprehensive and complex understanding of reality.<sup>32</sup> Google neatly sums up the essence of our online experience: it is about the “efficiency of information exchange”:<sup>33</sup> “For Google, with its faith in efficiency as the ultimate good and its attendant desire ‘to get users in and out really quickly’”,<sup>34</sup> namely, to get the user to find the information s/he needs and move on, just as in McDonald's. Google also epitomizes the McDonaldization of the information world represented by the Internet by favoring, in turning up search results, the latest chatter at the expense of established, old wisdom.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, Netizens who have adapted to the Internet are ever more able to keep up with the latest trivial events and then quickly forget them while losing interests in the old wisdom which has served in the past as the foundation of our civilization. Meanwhile, Carr notes the important role which a good memory (long term memory) plays in the enhancement of our thinking capacity. He cites Eric Kandel, “For a memory to persist, the incoming information must be thoroughly and deeply processed. This is accomplished by attending to the information and associating it meaningfully and systematically with knowledge already well established in memory”.<sup>36</sup> The McDonaldized processing of information which Internet encourages also erodes our memory capacity and, through that, further damages our ability to think. “And, thanks once again to the plasticity of our neuronal pathways, the more we use the Web, the more we train our brain to be distracted – to process information very quickly and very efficiently but without sustained

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31 Allan Bloom, in his *The Closing of the American Mind* (p. 63 - 64), has at one point described so well how reading great books both enhances one's ability to describe psychology and complexifies one's own psychology that it deserves to be cited here to reinforce Carr's point: “In a less grandiose vein, students today [who grew up with rock music and for whom reading is foreign] have nothing like the Dickens who gave so many of us the unforgettable Pecksniffs, Micawbers, Pips, with which we sharpened our vision, allowing us some subtlety in our distinction of human types. It is a complex set of experiences that enables one to say so simply, 'He is a Scrooge.' Without literature, no such observations are possible and the fine art of comparison is lost. The psychological obtuseness of our students is appalling, because they have only pop psychology to tell them what people are like, and the range of their motives. As the awareness that we owed almost exclusively to literary geniuses falters, people become more alike, for want of knowing they can be otherwise. What poor substitutes for real diversity are the wild rainbows of dyed hair and other external differences that tell the observer nothing about what is inside.”

32 Carr, *ibid.*, p. 124.

33 *Ibid.*, p. 167.

34 *Ibid.*, p. 165.

35 *Ibid.*, p. 159.

36 *Ibid.*, p. 193. Namely, fitting the new information into the existing “paradigm” or “Grand Narrative”. Later in this essay I shall worry about the inherent problem in this most ordinary *modus operandi* of the human brain.

attention... Our brains become adept at forgetting, inept at remembering”.<sup>37</sup> The erosion of attentiveness and deep thinking leaves ends-means thinking (what Horkheimer and Adorno have termed “instrumental reasoning”) to be the dominant form of cognition. “These scripts” – namely the algorithms which run Google, Amazon, and Netflix – “can be ingenious and extraordinarily useful, as they were in the Taylorist factories, but they also mechanize the messy processes of intellectual exploration and even social attachment. As the computer programmer Thomas Lord has argued, software can end up turning the most intimate and personal of human activities into mindless 'rituals' whose steps are 'encoded in the logic of the web pages.' Rather than acting according to our own knowledge and intuition, we go through the motions”<sup>38</sup>. This shall be the main theme of this essay: how information-processing is congruent with rationalization and McDonaldization by favoring literalism without understanding of meaning. Last but not least, Carr argues that the fast-pace world of constant distractions which Internet provides also erodes our ability for experiencing deep and complex emotions, which has a negative influence on our moral sense since our ability for empathy and so on will be impacted. “The experiment, say the scholars, indicates that the more distracted we become, the less able we are to experience the subtlest, most distinctively human form of empathy, compassion, and other emotions... It would not be rash to suggest that as the Net reroutes our vital paths and diminishes our capacity for contemplation, it is altering the depth of our emotions as well as our thoughts”.<sup>39</sup> Now Carr notes that, while online activity has not decreased the time we spend with television, it has crowded out the time we spend reading. The result is that there are no longer any forces working counter to the development of a brain that skims through information and sensory impressions quickly without the ability to think about them and understand them or even to remember them. The picture we obtain of a postmodern human being who spends the majority of his or her waking hours sitting in front of the computer is therefore: with minimum verbal and writing skill to describe human psychology and the surrounding complex world, with shallow and simple experience and understanding of everything, unable to form complex schemas which could adequately represent the complex reality outside the mind, unable to think about much, unable to remember anything (certainly not anything too complicated), merely processing the latest trivialities and then forgetting them (as if the mind were merely an intestine), having little feelings for oneself and others, having little empathy and understanding of people's feelings, seeing ends-means instrumentality (“going through the motions”) as the only purpose of life, merely drifting mindlessly through the material world and the universe of information, i.e. “digital dementia”, as if suffering brain damage. In sum, the *simplification of human being*:

'I see within us all... the replacement of complex inner density with a new kind of self – evolving under the pressure of information overload and the technology of the 'instantly available.' As we are drained of our 'inner repertory of dense cultural inheritance,' Foreman concluded, we risk turning into 'pancake people – spread wide and thin as we connect with that vast network of information accessed by the mere touch of a button'.<sup>40</sup>

In sum, there has occurred a *simplification* of the human mind and human experience – and the Internet

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37 Ibid., p. 194.

38 Ibid., p. 218 – 9.

39 Ibid., p. 221.

40 Ibid., p. 196.

has accomplished this not only through the convenience, and hence the volume, it has made possible but also through its very structure. That is to say, while the Internet, with the democratization and convenience it has made possible, encourages bad quality, incompetence, McDonaldization, and thus shallow use of our brain, its very structure is built to train a mind to McDonaldize: “simple”, “fast”, “fleeting”, “intestinal”, “on the go”. The worst part of all this is that the Internet culture has placed this sort of simplified human being (the “pancake people”) in the dominant positions in our world. They now rule our world. The most important aspect about this simplified human being with his or her simplified mind concerns the formation (or rather de-formation) of “schemas”. The human mind understands, in the words of developmental psychologist Birgit Elsner, by “recognizing in its environment regularities and constructing an order from it. The brain organizes according to categories.”<sup>41</sup> To understand, the mind, in other words, develops a “grand narrative” (or “paradigm”) into which all sensory impressions are assimilated and find their place. A deep-thinking mind can recognize *more* regularities and construct a *more complex* order or “grand narrative” to ever approximate the complex reality.<sup>42</sup> On the other hand, the “pancake mind” – the mind of the human beings who rule the day nowadays – constructs a very simple order or “grand narrative” and uses a very simple set of categories to understand the world, other minds, and itself. (More on this in the final section of this essay.)

Nicholas Carr has written his classic before the smartphone culture has completely taken over our lives. The smartphone has considerably exacerbated all the above-mentioned damages to our cognitive ability by making the Internet portable and constantly accessible. The “interruption culture” is now a permanent state of affairs – and so, whenever you attend a speaking-event or presentation, you see the audience constantly staring into their phones to check the latest messages and to text-message. While constant access to the Internet on your phone damages your memory, attention-span, and emotional development by providing constant interruptions and short and fleeting distractions, researches have warned that this causes the greatest damages to your ability to think about things – your critical thinking ability or your ability to formulate complex schemas, categories, and grand narratives to represent, and explain, the complex reality outside your mind – by crowding out “downtime” for your brain:

... those small breaks, like waiting in line at the grocery store, when we all used to daydream instead of staring at our phones.

When your brain has the opportunities to wander, it fires up a group of overlapping networks known as its “default mode,” shows research from Mary Helen Immordino-Yang, a neuroscientist at the University of Southern California. “When the brain has space to roam freely, its default mode is engaged in reliving recent experiences, connecting emotionally relevant information, and constructing narratives that make sense out of life,”

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41 “... in der Umwelt bestimmte Regelmäßigkeiten zu erkennen und eine Ordnung zu schaffen. Das Gehirn ordnet in Kategorien ein”. In Eva Raisig, “Zwischen Mars und Venus ist noch Platz”, Deutschland Funk, 13 November 2016, [http://www.deutschlandfunk.de/geschlechtergrenzen-zwischen-mars-und-venus-ist-noch-platz.740.de.html?dram:article\\_id=370482](http://www.deutschlandfunk.de/geschlechtergrenzen-zwischen-mars-und-venus-ist-noch-platz.740.de.html?dram:article_id=370482).

42 What is presupposed here is, of course, the concept of truth as *adequatio intellectus et rei*, that truth occurs when the mind creates a correct representation of reality. This, as you shall see, underlies my conception of “intelligence” in this essay.

Immordino-Yang explains. “This is why people often have big insights in the shower or doing the dishes.”

But as our increasingly portable and powerful devices insert themselves into more and more of our lives' empty spaces, our brains may have fewer opportunities to make those connections and conjure those “a-ha!” insights. “Potentially, we're sort of reshaping our brains' networks so that they're more inclined to look for stuff in our environment to entertain us, instead of thinking about the longer-term and broader and ethical and deeper considerations we would otherwise be having,” Immordino-Yang says.<sup>43</sup>

In other words, the latest smartphone culture is the culmination of the Internet – and therefore the culmination of McDonaldization. The Internet as embodied in the smartphone is changing our brain for the worse by effecting, quite simply, a change-over in *Lebensform*. While both the facility in communication which the Internet has made possible and its very mode as a distracting environment lead to McDonaldization and so dummification, we see that the cyber-libertarian ideal which underlies the digital revolution – empowering ordinary people by providing them with the control over means which have hitherto been monopolized by corporations and then with constant access to knowledge, information, and communication – has caused changes in our life-style itself which also lead to dummification. There are still other ways in which the cyber-libertarian ideal, by empowering ordinary people, has caused them to change their habits to the detriment of their brain development. For example, the Internet has also caused them to overload themselves with work and in the process to dummify themselves. The empowerment afforded by the Internet has caused ordinary people to become more independent, and has as a result prompted them to envisage more things to do. It is quite noticeable that, in our postmodern era, people are getting busier and busier. People are thus forced to McDonaldize their own life: as they fit too many things and projects into their limited schedule, they no longer have the time to study any particular thing in-depth. Life becomes a matter of processing as many details as quickly as possible – just as in a McDonald's. Everybody has this experience nowadays: you read your emails very fast because you don't have time. You barely pay attention to what your friend has said and consequently mis-remember or misconstrue his or her words – and you look like you are suffering brain-damage. “I don't have time...” has become the most frequently heard expression nowadays.<sup>44</sup> Again, an increasingly busy schedule results in our perception and experience of reality becoming increasingly shallow and cavalier. Thus the convenience of the Internet, the environment it has created (interruptions, distractions, and information overload), and the new independent life-style it has encouraged all conspire toward the same result: a shallow, McDonaldized

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43 Markham Heid, “You asked: Is My Smartphone Making Me Dumber?”, *Time*, 8 February 2017: <http://time.com/4663458/smartphone-brain-dumb/>.

44 The German “Degrowth” movement (<https://www.degrowth.de/de/>) has proposed the concept “Zeitwohlstand”. One of the most important differences between people in the past and people of today is that people in the past have a lot more free time on their hand and feel a lot less pressured for time than people of today. While people's wellbeing has increased in the sense of having access to more material objects and services, it has decreased in the sense of “having less time” and feeling more pressured for time. The idea behind the concept “Zeitwohlstand” is that a society's prosperity should also be measured in terms of the amount of time available to its members, rather than simply in terms of the amount of products and services consumed. As you shall see, the present critique will lead to many conclusions about alternatives which are exactly what the Degrowth movement and its French relative the “Convivialist” movement are about, and yet will in the end prefer a more “traditional” approach.

life where quantity is increased at the expense of quality. This has often the paradoxical result that we actually feel increasingly isolated due to the shallowness of all our interactions. A conclusion which it is proper to draw from the above reflections is that, because the masses are usually incompetent, when they are empowered, they will only end up destroying their own mind and decreasing the quality of their life. (We will make this observation at different junctures throughout this essay.) This conclusion will receive more force when I later attempt to incorporate Ortega y Gasset's insights into the current framework of a *kritische Gesellschaftstheorie*.

In sum, the Internet has made us dumber because it is a McDonaldized environment which trains our mind to McDonaldize – just as, as I shall explore below, the McDonaldization of our institutions make us dumber by McDonaldizing our mind – and the situation is made worse when the virtual world becomes portable on our phones. We shall, however, not forget that the Internet and smartphone culture are only the second stage of a more general electronic mass media revolution which has begun in earnest with the invention and spread of televisions in the 1950s. Much of Nicholas Carr's criticism of the Internet is echoed in the criticism of television which the most distinguished Robert Putnam has proposed in 1995 and 2000.<sup>45</sup> Putnam's focus is not on “intelligence” but on our social connectedness, or “social capital” – how often we gather together, whether informally or formally in organizations, whether for fun or for specific causes – and his famous thesis is that television has tremendously eroded our social capital and made us “loners”: specifically, the generations which have grown up with television (the baby-boomers and the X-generation) have much less interests than their parents or grandparents in participating in groups or meetings for social causes or visiting friends, preferring to spend their free time in front of television (“couch potato”). Although Putnam is not precisely interested in the detrimental effects which prolonged time-passing in front of television may have on our cognitive ability, when he describes how television-viewing encourages civic disengagement not only by taking away our free time (“competing for scarce time”) but also by training us to be adverse toward social participation,<sup>46</sup> the cognitive and emotional damages he has listed as predisposing us toward anti-social tendencies are eerily similar to those which Carr has enumerated for the Internet. Television, with its rapid montage, is indeed the first McDonaldized environment, and, as such, conditions us to become intolerant “for daily moments that are not similarly chocked full of sight and sound”,<sup>47</sup> i.e. it decreases our patience and our willingness and ability to slow down, concentrate, and think deeply. Through prolonged TV-watching we become excessively relaxed, drowsy, and passive, and the mind addicted to television is characterized by lethargy, laziness, and low level of concentration, alertness, challenge, and skill.<sup>48</sup> (Becoming lethargic and lazy and, in the process, increasingly unwilling to use one's brain, is a consequence of heavy Internet use which I will discuss in more details at the end of this essay.) The TV-viewer is desensitized and has shorter attention span, requiring television editing to be even faster-paced and to present ever more exciting visual material.<sup>49</sup> Television-viewing provides pseudopersonal connection to other human beings<sup>50</sup> and makes us more

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45 First with his “Tuning In, Tuning Out: The Strange Disappearance of Social Capital in America”, *Political Science & Politics*, December 1995, p. 664 – 683, then with his *Bowling Alone*, Simon & Schuster: New York, 2000.

46 “Television has psychological effects that inhibit social participation”; “specific programmatic content on television undermines civic participation”, *Bowling Alone*, p. 237.

47 *Ibid.*, p. 239.

48 *Ibid.* p. 240.

49 *Ibid.*

50 *Ibid.*, p. 241.

anti-social (more aggressive toward others and less trustful of them)<sup>51</sup>. Television with its content geared toward the lowest common denominator furthermore encourages materialistic values while diminishing one's sense of obligation and discipline: “heavy-viewing adolescents 'were more likely to want high status jobs that would give them a chance to earn a lot of money but also wanted to have their job be relatively easy with long vacations and time to do other things’”.<sup>52</sup> That Putnam and Carr sound similar is a hint that dummification or low-intelligence, laziness, lack of interest in substantive relationships with fellow human beings, and inability to communicate with them are all inter-related problems. In other words, dummification and decreasing solidarity with other people (or the decline of the quality of such solidarity) are related to each other. (How television increases the diversity of our viewpoints and therefore makes us less able to communicate with, and more isolated from, our fellow human beings will be mentioned when, at the end of this essay, it is time to mention the same effect from the Internet.) Putnam bemoans how television has “rendered our leisure more private and passive. More and more of our time and money are spent on goods and services consumed individually, rather than those consumed collectively. Americans' leisure time can increasingly be measured – as do strategic marketers – in terms of 'eyeballs', since watching things (especially electronic screens) occupies more and more of our time, while doing things (especially with other people) occupies less and less...”<sup>53</sup> In this sense – i.e. making us dumb and lazy spectators: our mind as an intestine for fast-paced meaningless images and trivial information – the Internet has merely carried on the task which the television has started but not fully accomplished.

Note that, even with Putnam, television is harmful because of the way we use it, not because of its inherent property. All the above-listed symptoms which eventually lead to anti-social tendencies apply to people who use television principally for entertainment purposes. It is in entertainment programs that viewers are subjected to the “spectacular”, “sensational”, “fast-paced”, and “simple” and become anti-social in addition to being dummified. People who use television mainly to obtain information (viewers of news programs and so on) are more likely to participate socially in addition to reading more newspapers – they have not, in general, become more aggressive, more lethargic, less concentrating, and less attention-paying. Theoretically, both the television and the Internet can be designed to not be so McDonaldized an environment – with substantive, slow-programming which encourages concentration, deep thinking, and long-term memory; both instruments have in practice become McDonaldized only because the content-provider needs to cater to the habits and desires of the lowest common denominator.

In this connection, it's not clear how best to make of Carr's claim that the Internet's very structure is bad for a well-functioning and deep-thinking brain. Even when the Internet is redesigned to offer primarily slow-moving educational content without any social networking and instant messaging, the flickering screen itself might still prove harmful to our cognitive capacity. (Holding the book in your hand might simply prove healthier than reading it on Google Books.) The same can be said of television: reading newspapers might be an inherently healthier practice than watching network news. Whether television, Internet, and our favorite digital devices are harmful by their contents or by their structure, because of the way we use it or because of the way they are, it should be obvious – given Putnam's statement cited

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51 Ibid., p. 234.

52 Ibid., p. 245.

53 Ibid.

above concerning the pervasiveness of electronic media in our life – that a critical study of the Internet and our smartphone culture should be the single most important component of any up-to-date critical theory of our society. Our increasing dependence on, and engrossment in, a virtual reality is the single most conspicuous addition to our life in the past few decades. Critical theorists must not remain silent on an entity we more and more spend our entire waking life staring at. It is for this reason that, even though this essay is about how McDonaldization of our life has made us dumber, the discussion of McDonaldization associated with the Internet comes first, before any discussion of the McDonaldization and rationalization processes that are going on in the various institutions of our society. The electronic and digital media are the biggest culprit for our dummification. Since the assessment of Internet, computers, and smartphones has been overwhelmingly positive in public discourse, it's the task of a critical theorist to penetrate the hysteria and discover what harm these strange entities in fact clandestinely embody. In the parlance of critical theory, the Internet, as the culmination of the electronic media revolution, has brought about a certain “impoverishment” of our life (*Verarmung unseren Lebensverhältnissen*) which, not in the physical (e.g. monetary) sense but in the “spiritual” (so to speak) sense, has been here characterized as “dummification”. The above criticism of the Internet thus fits into the *ethical* critique of postmodern conditions (in Jaeggi's sense) or the right-wing critique in terms of human potentials. My position remains that, by inventing the digital media culture for the whole world, the United States is doing to the world exactly what Britain was doing to China in the 1800s (the opium trade): introducing an addictive poison to dumb down the world's populations.<sup>54</sup>

## 6.

### McDonaldization and digitalization in a *kritische Gesellschaftstheorie* in terms of dummification

I'm thus proposing a subordination of digitalization to McDonaldization in the schema for explaining the dummification of human beings – even though, echoing the critics of Internet and smartphones, I do assert that, of all the components of postmodernity, digital communication bears the greatest share of the blame for making us dumb. Digitalization is really just a subcomponent of McDonaldization which is engulfing the entire postmodern society. The digital revolution means the McDonaldization of communication, where speed and quantity of communication – and its triviality – have taken priority over the quality and substance of communication. Just as in all forms of McDonaldization, the ease, and therefore the increasing volume, of communication are purchased by sacrificing the substance of communication. Nevertheless, the McDonaldization associated with the digital communication revolution is distinguished from McDonaldization of other institutions by the fact that it is literally changing the structure of our brain.

The nature of digitalization and McDonaldization – and their role in the dummification of human beings – cannot be gauged unless they are conceptualized within the total structure of our postmodern

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54 “Addiction” may explain the strange finding of a latest study (Adrian F. Ward, Kristen Duke, Ayelet Gneezy, and Maarten Bos, “Brain Drain: The Mere Presence of One's Own Smartphone Reduces Available Cognitive Capacity”, in *Journal of the Association for Consumer Research*, 2017; 2 (2): 140) that mere sight of one's own smartphone reduces one's cognitive capacity. See Christopher Bergland's report in *Psychology Today*, 25 June 2017: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-athletes-way/201706/are-smartphones-making-us-stupid>.

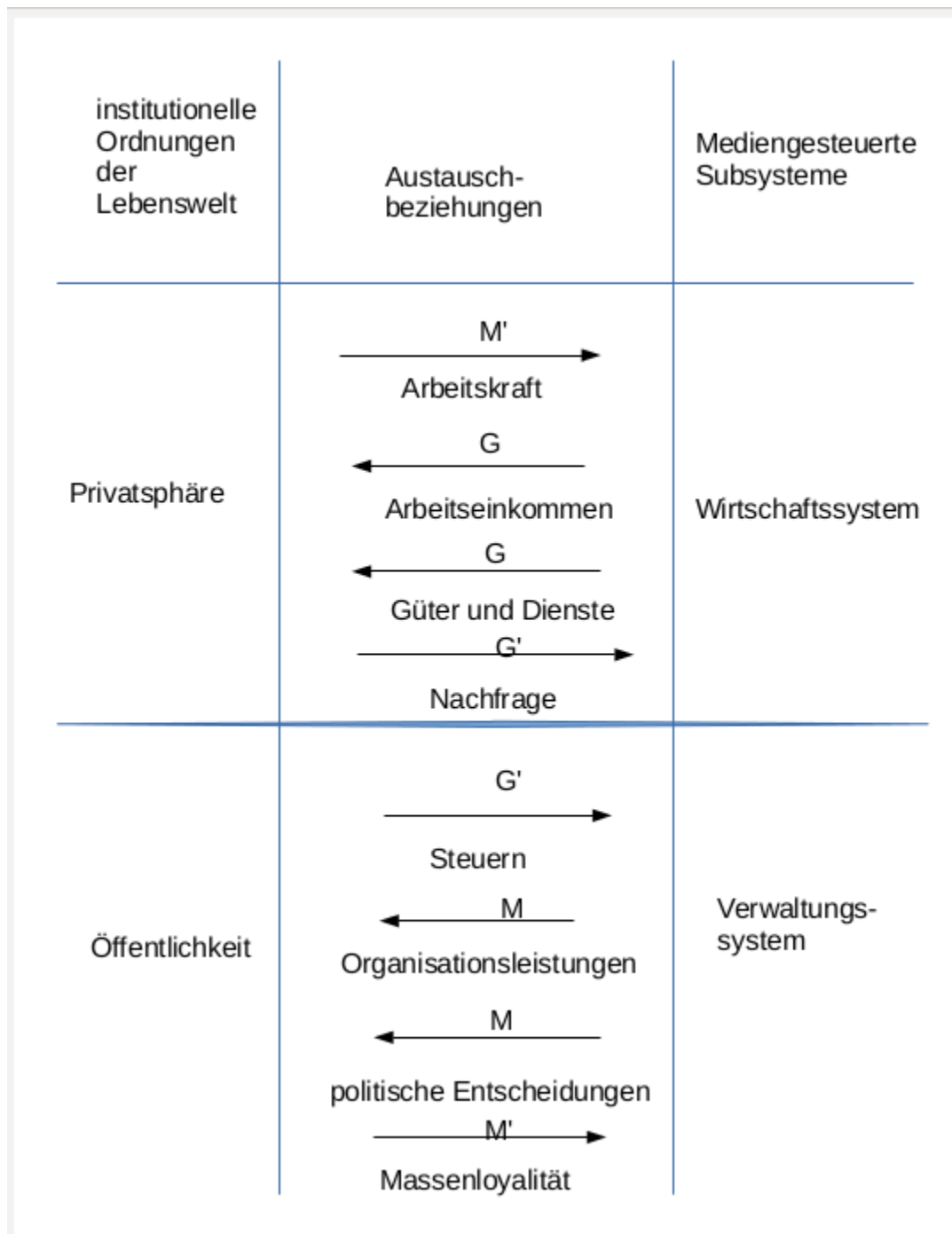


society. Now the best, and most comprehensive, schema which has been so far worked out to conceptualize the structure of our society since Enlightenment is that which Jürgen Habermas has proposed in his *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*. Habermas has described the new structure of our society which has emerged in consequence of modernization or rationalization in terms of the rationalization of the life-world (*Lebenswelt*) and the differentiation from the life-world of the subcomponents “economy” or “market” (*Wirtschaftssystem*) and “political administration” (*Verwaltungssystem*) as “systems”. Meanwhile, the life-world has itself differentiated into a private sphere and a public sphere. While the “system” integrates itself according to the *mechanical mechanism* of money and power (*Steuerungsmedien*) and operates according to *strategic actions*, the life-world integrates itself and operates according to the non-mechanical *communicative actions*.<sup>55</sup> This has resulted in the structure of modern society as an exchange processes between the private and the public sphere on the one hand and the market system and the political and administrative apparatus of the nation-state on the other.<sup>56</sup>

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55 The distinction between communicative actions (actions aimed at making others understand something and so on) and strategic actions (actions aimed at manipulating something or somebody in order to bring about a desired state of affairs in the world) is fundamental to Habermas' theoretical framework. I shall however not explain the distinction in details here.

56 It should be mentioned that, in the past few years, Nancy Fraser has developed a general description of the capitalist society as characterized by a division, and relation, between a production sphere geared toward accumulation of profits and social reproduction geared toward reproducing the social bonding on which the system of accumulation depends; or as a specific order characterized by a triple division, and relation, between, production and social reproduction, the human (artificial) world and non-human ecological world, and the economic and the political. The model is quite sophisticated, is especially useful for conceptualizing exploitation and oppression, and rivals that of Habermas' earlier model.



(*Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*, II, p. 473)

This schema is the most comprehensive description which Habermas has devised by improving upon and integrating the theories of his predecessors: Marx, Weber, Lukács, Durkheim, Mead, Parson, and Luhmann – all of whom could only have offered a description of modernized societies that is narrow, partial, or one-sided. Theories of such kind – i.e. a description of the new, different structure of

modernized societies in order to diagnose the new and particular social pathologies which have accompanied the emergence of the new structure – are “critical theory of society” (*kritische Gesellschaftstheorie*). If the description is too narrow or partial or one-sided, then the diagnosis of the accompanying social pathologies (*Zeitdiagnose*) will also be inaccurate. Since Habermas' schema is the most comprehensive, correct diagnoses of contemporary social pathologies – whether alienation, dehumanization, or dummification – can only be made by reference to Habermas rather than to Weber or Marx or Parson. The only contemporary theorist who has come close to Habermas in comprehensiveness is Peter Berger. The aforementioned classic which he has written along with Brigitte Berger and Hansfried Kellner contains a diagnosis of the social pathologies of alienation and dehumanization roughly according to the three components of modernization: “technological production” (roughly, *Wirtschaftssystem*), “bureaucratization” (roughly, *Verwaltungssystem*), and the excessively “pluralization of the life-world” (*Lebenswelt*). He thus has a conception of the structure of modern society that is roughly equivalent to Habermas'.

Insofar as communicative action is the principal mechanism by which the life-world operates and integrates itself, the problem with digitalization therefore signifies the McDonaldization of the life-world, the McDonaldization of both the private sphere and the public sphere, or the McDonaldization of communicative actions. In the case of the public sphere, it can be said that the process of *Meinungsbildung* (or *Konsensbildung* or *Willensbildung*: to generate loyalty of the masses, *Massenloyalität*) which is its principal function has been McDonaldized.

In this schema, Ritzer's original McDonaldization thesis basically says that both subcomponents the “market” (*Wirtschaftssystem*) and the state's administrative apparatus (*Verwaltungssystem*) have been McDonaldized. Our new McDonaldization thesis therefore amounts to saying that, as society continues to rationalize into its postmodern phase, all its components – both the public sphere and the private sphere as well as the market and the public administrative apparatus – have been McDonaldized, and that the principal effect of such McDonaldization on the human beings who are caught up in the process is dummification. Consider Nicholas Carr's principal conclusion about the Internet in *The Shallows*:

Dozens of studies by psychologists, neurobiologists, educators, and Web designers point to the same conclusion: when we go online, we enter an environment that promotes cursory reading, hurried and distracted thinking, and superficial learning.<sup>57</sup>

Not only do I argue that this is a precise description of McDonald's (“when we enter McDonald's, we enter an environment that promotes cursory choice of food, hurried and distracted eating, and superficial tasting”) but I also hold this to be an increasingly accurate description of the institutions and market of the American society as a whole: when we enter the world of American bureaucracies and market place, we are entering an environment that promotes cursory work, hurried and distracted consumption and performance, and superficial judgment and understanding about our situations and the people around us. (Thus, in the following, I will continually employ the adjectives “perfunctory”, “cavalier”, and “shallow”.) This shall largely explain the overall decline of the quality of work throughout the contemporary American society. Carr's “The Shallows” is not simply a description of

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57 Carr, *ibid.*, p. 115 – 6.

the Internet and the mind which adapts to it, but also an increasingly accurate characterization of American society as a whole and the mind which adapts to this environment. It's not that American society looks increasingly like a McDonald's while the Internet looks less and less like a McDonald's (Ritzer and Jurgenson), but that the Internet is just like McDonald's and that our society looks increasingly like the Internet (my new "McDonaldization thesis"). The Internet thus occupies a privileged position in our critical social theory focused on dummification not only because it is the most dummifying but also because everything else in our world looks increasingly like it.

This aspect of the new McDonaldization thesis is hinted at whenever we look up job descriptions on Craigslist or Indeed: "fast-paced environment" or "requires multitasking" have become the most common descriptors. Our work place is becoming just like the Internet. At this point consider once again the change-over in brain-structure which Carr has emphasized as the neurological consequence of digitalization. Citing Ziming Liu, Carr summarizes, "the digital environment tends to encourage people to explore many topics extensively, but at a more superficial level"; "hyperlinks distract people from reading and thinking deeply";<sup>58</sup> and "A 'screen-based reading behavior is emerging'... which is characterized by 'browsing and scanning, keyword spotting, one-time reading, and non-linear reading'".<sup>59</sup> The Internet compensates the loss in attention-span, memory, and deep thinking and feeling by strengthening "the low-level, or more primitive, mental functions such as hand-eye coordination, reflex response, and the processing of visual cues".<sup>60</sup> The change-over in brain structure thus consists in:

... the neural circuits devoted to scanning, skimming, and multitasking are expanding and strengthening, while those used for reading and thinking deeply, with sustained concentration, are weakening or eroding.<sup>61</sup>

Most importantly, as Carr cites Jordan Grafman,

... the constant shifting of our attention when we're online may make our brain more nimble when it comes to multitasking, but improving our ability to multitask actually hampers our ability to think deeply and creatively... 'The more you multitask, the less deliberative you become; the less able to think and reason out a problem.' *You become... more likely to rely on conventional ideas and solutions rather than challenging them with original lines of thought.*<sup>62</sup>

This deficiency in creative thinking and dependence on conventions and slogans is another aspect of the difficulty in forming complex schemas and narratives to adequately represent the complex reality. (Again, one should remember that the Internet is here merely carrying onto a new level what television has already brought about – that this skimming and browsing and scanning is also the modus operandi of a habitual TV-viewer, such as in "channel-surfing".) My new McDonaldization thesis basically

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58 Ibid., p. 137 – 8.

59 Ibid., p. 138.

60 Ibid., p. 139.

61 Ibid., p. 141.

62 Ibid., p. 140, emphasis added.

amounts to saying – as I shall argue below – that our increasingly McDonaldized work place and bureaucracies are also enforcing the same bad habit of skimming and browsing and scanning and multitasking and thus reinforcing the dummification caused by digitalization, such that there is increasing reliance, in both the market and administrations, on literalist or fundamentalist application of procedures and categories as society further rationalizes and adopts instrumental reason.

## 7.

### Dummification, the erosion of communicative action, and the coarsening of the public sphere

I shall also argue that the increasing deficiency in forming schemas and grand narratives and the greater reliance on conventions and slogans as a result of adapting to a McDonaldized environment have contributed to the coarsening and polarization of the public discourse (of *Meinungsbildung* in the public sphere) about which many politicians, professors, and commentators have lately complained. A representative example is German Federal Minister (of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth) Manuela Schwesig's recent comment in an interview,

Die Zahlen zeigen, dass wir es mit einer Verrohung in unserem Land zu tun haben. Viele von uns erleben das selbst, ich auch, alleine im Netz. Man hat das Gefühl, wir können gar nicht mehr unterschiedliche Positionen sachlich austauschen, sondern in allem, was einigen Leuten nicht passt, liegt eine Art Feindseligkeit.<sup>63</sup>

The complaints about a “Post-Truth Era” (*postfaktische Zeitalter*) and “fake news” all fit in here. It's happening everywhere in the world, in China as well as in Europe and America. Although the older generations tend to complain about this especially in regard to the online world, live debate between candidates during political campaigns also seem less civil than before.<sup>64</sup> (Compare Donald Trump's campaign in 2016 or George W. Bush's campaign in 2004.) Again, it's not clear whether things are really getting worse or whether the same deteriorations have occurred in every age. If things are indeed getting worse, it is reasonable to propose that the decline of our ability to think deeply and creatively and, correlatively, our increasing reliance on conventional ideas as a result of increasing McDonaldization in both the “systems” and the life-world – not simply in the virtual world – are the causes for the hardening and fossilization of positions into fundamentalist doctrines on both the political left and the political right – which is partly the cause of increasing polarization and less civilized debates. While most politicians and commentators sound such alarm in response to the surge of rightwing populism in Europe and North America, I propose that the dummification which those on

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63 The Interview is with Deutschland Funk, “Mehr Prävention gegen Extremismus”, 8 November 2016: [http://www.deutschlandfunk.de/familienministerin-schwesig-mehr-praevention-gegen.694.de.html?dram:article\\_id=370750](http://www.deutschlandfunk.de/familienministerin-schwesig-mehr-praevention-gegen.694.de.html?dram:article_id=370750). See also Deutschland Funk's series, “Verunsicherte Gesellschaft”, December 2016 to January 2017: “Islamistisch motivierter Terror, Flüchtlingskrise, der Aufstieg populistischer Parteien, die Erosion des Vertrauens in die Politik und in die Medien. Eine Vielfalt von Faktoren sorgt für Verunsicherung oder Irritation. Parallel dazu verroht das Diskussionsklima. Wut und Beschimpfungen prägen die sozialen Netzwerke.”

64 Putnam, in *Bowling Alone*, attributes the bad manner (including excessive frankness) characteristic of socialization on the Internet to the anonymity which online communication affords. While this is certainly true, it's not a sufficient explanation for me since manners have also deteriorated outside the Internet. I instead argue for “dummification” as the cause.

the left have attributed to the right is equally occurring to those on the left themselves. On the left the dummification effect is in fact more prominent than on the right. I have elsewhere described the situation as the degeneration of social justice activism to mindless repetition and enforcement of politically correct prescriptions and descriptions without understanding of the experiences of the social reality and the reasoning which have prompted the previous generations of activists to arrive at these prescriptions and descriptions. I'm writing this in late 2016 and early 2017, during which time, because of Donald Trump's election, those on the left are fired up more than ever before to actions, protests, and critique, and yet there seems to be a tremendous shallowness running through their thinking and voice. Gone from the left is the sophisticated argumentation such as is found among earlier generations of progressivists – consider the life of John Stuart Mill: how much more intellectually advanced he was than his fellow countrymen!<sup>65</sup> The frequent stereotyping of Donald Trump and his “Alt-Right” supporters as “racist” and “misogynist” and “fascist” and “antisemite” illustrates my point about the dummification on the left. When one reads the revolutionary texts from the 1960s and the 1970s (such as the Radical Feminists'), one can see that these revolutionaries were inventing a new way of seeing and categorizing social reality in order to point out the oppressive nature of the existing system.<sup>66</sup> The current generation of progressivists, because they are dummified and less creative and more relying on conventions and clichés, simply cannot do this any longer. The fact is that the “Alt-Right”, Donald Trump, or Marine Le Pen are new breeds which the leftist critics are mis-describing when they label them with terminologies inherited from the previous generations of progressive politics like “fascist”, “racist”, or “misogynist”. Their racialist thinking, for example, is different from the simple racism from the previous era. And yet, because the current leftist mind is ossified and uncreative, it can only conjure up familiar concepts and terminologies with vague resemblance to the new breeds to describe them rather than creatively inventing new concepts and terminologies to accurately and precisely represent them. The situation is best illustrated with an analogy I have abundantly used elsewhere. The color spectrum consists of yellow, orange, red, purple, and blue, but someone who is color-deficient (or “color-simplistic”) and cannot see, and has no words for, the intermediary colors like orange and purple, when s/he sees purple, does not really understand what it is and so is wont to call it “red” or “blue”, i.e. use the concepts and terminologies that have some vague resemblance to the object to describe it, in the end giving a vague, but wrong, description. If the progressivist mind is not dummified but is as intelligent, alive, and creative as it used to be, it would have invented new terminologies for the new breeds like “Alt-Right” or Donald Trump or Marine Le Pen. But no.<sup>67</sup> The

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65 Michael St John Packe's biography, *John Stuart Mill* (Secker & Warburg, 1954), is a testament of the struggle of somebody who is ahead of his society – the ancestor of the progressive movement *par excellence*. Alain Badiou has defined philosophy as the critique of opinions that are mindlessly assumed to be true by the masses. The point is that contemporary leftists are increasingly losing the ability to understand, and *critique*, their own positions to which they merely mindlessly adhere. They belong as much to the “monosyllabic generation” as the rest of their peers: such as in “Twitter social activism”. I'm often reminded of the episode in George Orwell's *Animal Farm* where the Seven Commandments have to be reduced to a single maxim, “FOUR LEGS GOOD, TWO LEGS BAD” so that the lower ranking “revolutionaries” can process and digest. “Lower ranking” are the contemporary Antifas and so on in comparison to their glorious ancestors. Again, this is not an anti-leftist statement. Zizek, a leftist, frequently critiques the politically correct “mass opinions” on the left for he is a “philosopher”.

66 Although I have criticized the Radical Feminists' conception of social reality as being *erroneous*, there is no denying that it was *original*.

67 My complaint even applies to intellectuals. Alain Badiou and Naomi Klein, for example, have each published a book on Donald Trump shortly after he was elected. Both seem to have committed the same fault of using traditional descriptors of right wing figures to describe this new phenomenon “Trump”.

result is that the left is nowadays as well as the right ever more susceptible of using simple stereotypes to categorize and conceptualize people and events: just as the demagogues on the political right stereotype their targets in order to demonize them (“illegal Mexican immigrants are rapists and gangsters” or “Muslim refugees are terrorists”), the activists on the political left are also fond of stereotyping their opponents on the political right as “racists”, “misogynists”, or “fascists” whenever the latter deviate from established political correctness. These stereotypes like “racist”, “misogynist”, and “fascist” are not simply given, ready-made (because inherited from the previous generations), and so quick to conjure up, but also simple, easy to process and understand and requiring no thinking. Activists on the political left are no longer capable of understanding the nuances and reasoning of their opponents.<sup>68</sup> Stereotyping without attempts to understand is not so severe a problem on the political right since stereotyping and demonizing have always been the standard *modus operandi* of rightwing populists and extremists. At issue is the simplification of the human mind such that it can neither construct complex order and use complex categories and schemas to describe and understand the world, nor invent new concepts, new terminologies, and new classification systems to describe and understand a world which is always changing and updating itself. Whereas the voters on the right have always been known to be human beings with simpler minds, what has in the past distinguished the constituents on the left has always been complex order, complex categorization, and complex explanation of the world's problems and the human beings causing them – unconventional in the sense of not being ready-made and readily available stereotypes – which so annoy the uneducated, simpler minds on the political right – and yet this is no longer the case. The simplification of the leftist mind has altered the traditional dynamic between the left and the right where the left is supposed to represent the vanguard of the historical movement toward rationalization (leading the human mind and human society toward their natural destiny of greater differentiation in the words of Eric Voegelin or unleashing the rationalization potential inherent in communicative action in the words of Jürgen Habermas) and where the right, the force of inertia.<sup>69</sup> The left has now increasingly fallen to the same level as the right by becoming unreasoned guardians of what is mere convention (political correctness) and degenerating to unthinking practitioners of simple and ready-made stereotypes. Namely, gone from the left is their former ability to think deeply and creatively, with the result that they increasingly rely, without reflections, on simplifications and on the conclusions which the previous generations of social justice activists have passed down to them. Surely, the fact that the counter-culture revolution started by the left half a century ago has now gained wide currency among the general population and become mainstream in the liberal geographic regions (“blue states”) has contributed to this vulgarization of the left. Just as in education or in any expert domain, participation of the masses inevitably results in the

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68 And so Jodi Dean summarizes and quotes Zizek's criticism of the leftist darling “multiculturalism” (ibid., p. 117): “On the other hand, tolerance toward the other ‘passes imperceptibly into a destructive hatred of all (“fundamentalist”) Others who do not fit into our idea of tolerance – in short, against all *actual* Others.’ The idea is that the liberal democrat, or multiculturalist, is against hatred and harassment. Tolerance is tolerance for another who also does not hate or harass, that is, tolerance for an other who is not really so other at all... To this extent, the multiculturalist position blurs into a kind of racism such that respect is premised on agreement and identity.” Thus Zizek, just like myself here, is a leftist who has noticed that the typical leftist position has today crystalized into a sort of fundamentalism and is in this sense not very different from the “hate” and “intolerance” they fight against. Zizek also names “democratic fundamentalism”: the belief in democracy so typical of the political left has now crystalized into a sort of fundamentalism – just the kind of disease which democracy is supposed to fix. (Dean, ibid.)

69 This explains the general impression on the political left that those on the left are more intelligent than those on the right. See for example Teresa Brennan's Foreword to Richard Feldstein's *Political Correctness: A Response from the Cultural Left*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997.

decline of quality. Nevertheless, another factor for the decline of the quality of the leftist discourse (or its fossilization into fundamentalist doctrines without the support of reasoning) must be the simplification of the human mind and human experience – or “dummification” – under the postmodern condition of digitalization and McDonaldization.<sup>70</sup>

The era of digitalization and McDonaldization is thus characterized by stereotypes, “post-truth”, fake news, and polarization. It is the era where people, because their mind is used to skimming and browsing and scanning and repeating established slogans and can no longer formulate complex schemas to adequately represent other minds and the external reality, are increasingly unable to understand, and reason with, each other. (More below on their increasing unwillingness to understand each other.) It is the era where the mind is required to jump to conclusion and label something so fast and without thinking, where the mind is so simplified and uncreative as to be unable to think, think of something complex, and think of something new in any case, where the mind – as shall be elaborated upon in the conclusion – is too lazy to think in any case. Hence greater resort to simple stereotypes. Hence “post-truth”: for it's not that we are more motivated today by emotions than by reason, but that we are simply unable and unmotivated to reason at all. Hence “fake news”: for fake news is precisely simple-to-understand demonic stories which one has not the ability, the time, and the patience to reason about and investigate but which one simply accepts on face-value. And hence polarization: since one does not have the ability, the time, and the patience to dig into the opponents' way of thinking to understand why the other thinks differently. Hence name-calling, shouting match, pointless arguments, and coarsening and polarization of public discourse.

I have yet to touch upon another phenomenon which the Quebecker comedian Louis T has once mentioned. The Internet has indeed also contributed to the polarization of society by making it easier

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70 It should be noted that Allan Bloom, in *Closing*, has characterized the revolutionary students from the 1960s in much the same way as I have just done – repeating slogans without reasoning and understanding. If you read him, it is as if he was also saying the student movements of the 60s were merely about “FOUR LEGS GOOD, TWO LEGS BAD”. This is again the problem I am struggling with while decrying decline and dummification: if my complaints about “decline” have already been voiced by previous generations of philosophers, then things aren't really declining at all but have always been like this. Bloom's description of the dummification of the young Left is worth citing in length (p. 326): “The content of this morality was derived simply from the leading notions of modern democratic thought, absolutized and radicalized. Equality, freedom, peace, cosmopolitanism were the goods, the only goods, without conflict among one another, available to us here and now. Not to be considered were natural differences in gifts or in habitual practice of the virtues, the restraints liberty must impose on itself, wars for the defense of democracy (other than wars of liberation). Devotion to family or country as a form of morality was the last refuge of reaction. There were two poles, supposed to be in perfect harmony, the self- development of the absolute individual and the brotherhood of all mankind. These goods or, rather, values, came on the winds. *They were not the product of students' reasoning or study.* They were inherent in our regime, they constituted its horizon. There was nothing new in it. *The newness was in the thoughtlessness, the utter lack of need to argue or prove.* Alternative views had no existence except as scarecrows.” The deterioration of the progressivist mind has thus presumably already started during America's Cultural Revolution (to use David Gelernter's terminology). Presumably, back in the 60s, the students were simply uneducated. What can a 20-something youngster who hasn't yet read any of the classics possibly understand about social justice? Hence, even on the left side, neither Habermas nor Adorno endorsed the same student movement in Germany. What is peculiar about the contemporary youngsters in Antifa and so on might be that, while still uneducated, they are further hampered by their stunted brain development due to growing up with the Internet and excessive use of social media and smartphones. In other words, my impression is that the young Leftists nowadays are even *dumber* than they were during Bloom's time.



for us to connect to other people who have common interests with ourselves. The result is that we spend all our time listening to those who agree with us and completely lose sight of people who have different opinions.<sup>71</sup> Altogether, a distracting environment, information overload, and an increasingly busy schedule – and the consequent shorter attention-span, inattention to details, inability to reflect on things: all this makes us ever more susceptible to lies, propaganda, and stereotyping. We have neither the time, nor the interest, nor the patience, nor the intelligence to investigate false pronouncements. Thus, of all aspects of McDonaldization in this postmodern age, it is especially the Internet which has ushered in “the age of polarization” as well as the age of ideology, fake news, slanders, and propaganda. Again, because the masses are inherently incompetent, their empowerment by the Internet seems to lead to the paradoxical result that their original limitations have been reinforced rather than transcended.

One thus sees my concern that the mind of the newer generations conditioned by digital media is less prepared to deal with the environmental crisis facing human civilization by understanding what it is all about. In this connection I would however like to concentrate on the deplorable consequences of dummification in their own right and refine the thesis concerning the McDonaldization of communicative action. I shall suggest that there has occurred in our postmodern society a general erosion of communicative action in domains where it can for structural reasons never be replaced (such as in socialization in the private sphere or in *Meinungsbildung* in the public sphere) and its replacement by strategic action in domains where it used to be essential but where it is for structural reasons not irreplaceable (such as in universities). The erosion of communicative actions does not simply mean the decline of one's ability to think deeply and to engage oneself in reasoned arguments. It means also the decline of one's ability to describe, and therefore understand, oneself, others, and the external world. The correlate is – as has been repeatedly asserted in the foregoing – that people nowadays are increasingly having difficulty in understanding each other, i.e. there has occurred a decline in people's ability to understand human psychology, so that society is increasingly polarized between the left and the right which we have witnessed in recent elections in both Europe and the United States. Thus, altogether, “the age of polarization, fake news, and propaganda” signifies an *overall erosion of communicative actions and increasing prominence of strategic actions*. More and more we are only interested in manipulating other people to achieve our own goals and have no desire to make other people understand anything. This decline or erosion of communicative action is only slightly and negatively compensated by the fact that these dimensions of cognitive decline due to the erosion of communicative action also entail a general simplification of human psychology, so that there is nowadays not much left in a human being which stands in need of understanding in any case. This, however, can only have made the polarization of society further unbridgeable. While those on the left are through the simplification of their mind entrenched into the leftist fundamentalist doctrines and those on the right into the rightwing fundamentalist doctrines, they increasingly lack the means to understand what the other side is about.

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71 Putnam has, in his classic cited above, described this by naming online communities as communities of *shared interests* instead of *shared space*, and referred to the consequence as “cyberbalkanization”. He means to point out that the necessity, ever present in face-to-face interactions in the real world, to confront people with different view-points and interests is easily eliminated in online communities (*Bowling Alone*, p. 177).

Incorporating “revolt of the masses”  
in a *kritische Gesellschaftstheorie*:  
An Ortegian critical theory

Thus far my new McDonaldization thesis consists in the observation that our digital culture represents the latest embodiment, or the fullest actualization, of the “original American condition”, that McDonaldization occurs under the imperative of such condition (to bring in *everybody*), and that the digital media, both by its power and by its very structure, “dummifies” in the sense of decreasing our cognitive ability. I have not yet described how the particular personality type which the newly embodied “original condition” brings into being further entrenches and reinforces the dummification effects already achieved. The psychological dimension of the McDonaldization of society (according to my new McDonaldization thesis) which can be derived from the original American principle of mass mobilization, mass recruitment, and mass tyranny and which is very much a part of the dummification phenomenon is the consequence of “the revolt of the masses” which Ortega y Gasset has first named in his classic.<sup>72</sup> The “revolt of the masses” is, really, just a descriptor of the “original American condition”. We have not only demonstrated how the need to appeal to the lowest common denominator for the sake of profit maximization has naturally led to the development of Web 2.0 and resulted in the McDonaldization of communication; we have also mentioned how such appeal to the masses tends to invert the natural hierarchy such as between experts and non-experts and between political authority and the governed masses. This means that a natural correlate of McDonaldization should be the continual breakdown of all authority status as time goes by and society further rationalizes. Under McDonaldization, the very expertise of the authority is already in decline insofar as the education system has begun losing its rigor and the older generations of experts are being replaced by a newer generation of mediocre minds. (More on this later.) Gradually, the very concept of authority begins to break down – even in the very domain where authority is needed to maintain the cultivation of quality and human intelligence, e.g. in higher education.

The “revolt of the masses” of course means that the masses of people who couldn't even be expected to successfully manage their own life are somehow taught to believe that they are capable of managing the whole society – and behave accordingly. They thus want no authority above them, and respect no authority. It is the deadly child of progressivist politics. This phenomenon which Ortega has described in his classic is originally limited to a specific domain. When we consider the matter within Habermas' schema, the “revolt of the masses” basically describes the relationship between the citizen of the state and the client of the state's administrative services on the one hand and these administrative services and the political elites on the other, namely, between the public sphere and the state's administrative apparatus. It however also describes the relationship between the intellectual elite and the ordinary consumer of information and knowledge in the public sphere. A similar revolt is very obvious in the economic system when it comes to the American system of free-market competition (where “the customer is the king”). Ortega has described a very important characteristic of any modern, mass society (or, rather, its variant called “liberal democracy”): citizens and consumers are like “spoiled children”. As American society continues to evolve into the postmodern age, namely, as it continues to bring its “original condition” to actualization, this inversion of the traditional order between the

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<sup>72</sup> *La rebellion de las massas*, Alianza Editorial Sa; 19 edition, 2005. English translation, *The Revolt of the Masses*, New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1993.

authority figures and the common people is spreading over to other institutions where the traditional order still held sway during the initial phases of modernization, e.g. the higher education system. In this context, to illustrate the problem at hand, we can consider the recent complaints about “McDonaldization of higher education” in the United States, e.g., the complaints from many professors about the erosion of their authority vis-à-vis their students (how students are becoming co-equal with them), the ills of the increasingly prevalent student-centered learning, and the consequent decline of the quality of education.

The commentators in this domain typically see the cause for the recent changes in the higher education system to lie in its commercialization or the introduction of the principle of profit-maximization into education administration.<sup>73</sup> The pressure for universities to collect ever more tuition fees from students has not only resulted in the requirement to ever expand the student body – thus the continual “massification of higher education” – but also in the transformation of the role of the student from that of an apprentice to that of a customer. Both the need to accommodate the expansion of the student body – to process an increasing number of students within the existent framework and resources – and the desire to placate the students as “customers” in order to attract them and extract money from them converge into the recent transformation of the higher education system which shall later be described in detail. In general, professors are complaining that students nowadays are becoming so arrogant as to be unteachable, while they are pressured to never give out failing grades no matter how badly the students have performed (what is referred to as “grade inflation”) – both of which result in a serious deterioration of the quality of the next-generation of graduates. This transformation can clearly be seen as the consequence of the extension of the original American principle of mass recruitment into what is originally an elite institution.

While this consideration of the dual components of the McDonaldization of higher education (“massification” and the transformation of the student into a customer) easily shows us how the decline of authority – and the correlative rise of self-confidence among the students – is detrimental to the cultivation of intelligence, the trick is to discover that this is also the case outside the educational institutions. This Ortega y Gasset has taught us in his classic. Indeed, the need to speedily process an ever larger volume of transactions and interactions under the pressure of mass recruitment is only one of the necessary causes why a mass society necessarily begets stupidity in its populous. The other is that a mass society necessarily spoils the incompetent masses (the “revolt of the masses”). Let's reflect on Ortega y Gasset's description of the “mass man” (*hombre-masa*) – the description of a typical ordinary citizen of Western liberal democracy in the 1920s which however still holds true for a typical citizen of our contemporary digitalized mass democracy – and especially for a typical American citizen. The first characteristic is his or her extraordinary self-confidence, or arrogance:

The same thing is happening in other orders, particularly in the intellectual. I may be mistaken, but the present-day writer, when he takes his pen in hand to treat a subject which he has studied deeply, has to bear in mind that the average reader, who has never concerned

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73 See the essays collected in *The McDonaldization of Higher Education*, edited by Dennis Hayes and Robin Wynyard, Bergin and Garvey, 2002. In the following I refer especially to: Claire Fox, “The Massification of Higher Education”; Caroline Hodges Persell, “Digital Technologies and Competing Models of Higher Education”; and James Woudhuysen, “The Online Campus”.

himself with this subject, if he reads does so with the view, not of learning something from the writer, but rather, of pronouncing judgment on him when he is not in agreement with the commonplaces that the said reader carries in his head.<sup>74</sup>

“Unskilled and unaware of it” (see below): ordinary people's bizarre overestimation of their own intelligence, as if they were intelligent enough to be in a position to pass judgments about established experts regarding the issues of the day, such that they have no notion of their “need to learn”. The second characteristic is their simpler constitution:

And in fact, the average type of European at present possesses a soul, healthier and stronger it is true than those of the last century, but much more simple. Hence, at times he leaves the impression of a primitive man suddenly risen in the midst of a very old civilisation....<sup>75</sup>

I have already mentioned “simplification” of the mind as a consequence of adapting to the current digital, and McDonaldized, culture. Ortega is however pointing out that excessive self-confidence also simplifies the mind – awareness of one's own limitations complexifies one's mind. Ortega then characterizes the modern “mass man” as like spoiled children:

This leads us to note down in our psychological chart of the mass-man of today two fundamental traits: the free expansion of his vital desires, and therefore, of his personality; and his radical ingratitude towards that which has made possible the ease of his existence. These traits together make up the well-known psychology of the spoilt child. And in fact it would entail no error to use this psychology as a “sight” through which to observe the soul of the masses of today. Heir to an ample and generous past – generous both in ideals and in activities – the new commonalty has been spoiled by the world around it. To spoil means to put no limit on caprice, to give one the impression that everything is permitted to him and that he has no obligations. The young child exposed to this regime has no experience of its own limits. By reason of the removal of all external restraint, all clashing with other things, he comes actually to believe that he is the only one that exists, and gets used to not considering others, *especially not considering them as superior to himself*. This feeling of another's superiority could only be instilled into him by someone who, being stronger than he is, should force him to give up some desire, to restrict himself, to restrain himself. He would then have learned this fundamental discipline: “Here I end and here begins another more powerful than I am. In the world, apparently, there are two people: I myself and another superior to me.” The ordinary man of past times was daily taught this elemental wisdom by the world about him, because it was a world so rudely organised, that catastrophes were frequent, and there was nothing in it certain, abundant,

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74 *The Revolt of the Masses*, Ch. 1, The Coming of the Masses. “Lo propio acaece en los demás órdenes, muy especialmente en el intelectual. Tal vez padezco un error; pero el escritor, al tomar la pluma para escribir sobre un tema que ha estudiado largamente, debe pensar que el lector medio, que nunca se ha ocupado del asunto, si le lee, no es con el fin de aprender algo de él, sino, al revés, para sentenciar sobre él cuando no coincide con las vulgaridades que este lector tiene en la cabeza.”

75 Ch. 5, A Statistical Fact. “Y, en efecto, el tipo medio del actual hombre europeo posee un alma más sana y más fuerte que la del pasado siglo, pero mucho más simple. De aquí que a veces produzca la impresión de un hombre primitivo surgido inesperadamente en medio de una viejísima civilización....”

stable. But the new masses find themselves in the presence of a prospect full of possibilities, and furthermore, quite secure, with everything ready to their hands, independent of any previous efforts on their part, just as we find the sun in the heavens without our hoisting it up on our shoulders. No human being thanks another for the air he breathes, for no one has produced the air for him; it belongs to the sum-total of what “is there,” of which we say “it is natural,” because it never fails. And these spoiled masses are unintelligent enough to believe that the material and social organisation, placed at their disposition like the air, is of the same origin, since apparently it never fails them, and is almost as perfect as the natural scheme of things.<sup>76</sup>

Here we have immediately the impression that Ortega is describing these typical annoying Americans who have become so used to their comfortable life, and to other people's respecting their “rights”, that they have come to take the comfort and respect they enjoy to be part of nature itself. If their life is slightly disturbed, if their drinking water is slightly dirty, if the government approves the construction of a pipe-line or anything else near their backyard, they jump up and down complaining about injustice and the violation of their “rights” – “rights” has come to mean for them that their comfortable life is as expected as the sun which never fails to rise or the oxygen which never fails to be present.<sup>77</sup> There is of course ambiguity here since, on the other hand, corporations also shouldn't expect drilling where they want to be as unproblematic as seeing the sun rise each morning. Nevertheless, one should recognize here the danger of spoiling citizens when they begin to experience their current comfortable position as part of nature rather than as the reasonable product arrived at through reasonable procedures (such as

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76 Ch. 6, *The Dissection of the Mass-Man Begins*, emphasis added. “Esto nos lleva a apuntar en el diagrama psicológico del hombre-masa actual dos primeros rasgos: la libre expansión de sus deseos vitales – por lo tanto, de su persona y la radical ingratitud hacia cuanto ha hecho posible la facilidad de su existencia. Uno y otro rasgo componen la conocida psicología del niño mimado. Y en efecto, no erraría quien utilice ésta como una cuadrícula para mirar a su través el alma de las masas actuales. Heredero de un pasado larguísimo y genial – genial de inspiraciones y de esfuerzos – el nuevo vulgo ha sido mimado por el mundo en torno. Mimar es no limitar los deseos, dar la impresión a un ser de que todo le está permitido y a nada está obligado. La criatura sometida a este régimen no tiene la experiencia de sus propios confines. A fuerza de evitarle toda presión en derredor, todo choque con otros seres, llega a creer efectivamente que sólo él existe, y se acostumbra a no contar con los demás, *sobre todo a no contar con nadie como superior a él*. Esta sensación de la superioridad ajena sólo podía proporcionársela quien, más fuerte que él, le hubiese obligado a renunciar a un deseo, a reducirse, a contenerse. Así habría aprendido esta esencial disciplina: «Ahí concluyo yo y empieza otro que puede más que yo. En el mundo, por lo visto, hay dos: yo y otro superior a mí.» Al hombre medio de otras épocas le enseñaba cotidianamente su mundo esta elemental sabiduría, porque era un mundo tan toscamente organizado, que las catástrofes eran frecuentes y no había en él nada seguro, abundante ni estable. Pero las nuevas masas se encuentran con un paisaje lleno de posibilidades y, además, seguro, y todo ello presto, a su disposición, sin depender de su previo esfuerzo, como hallamos el sol en lo alto sin que nosotros lo hayamos subido al hombro. Ningún ser humano agradece a otro el aire que respira, porque el aire no ha sido fabricado por nadie: pertenece al conjunto de lo que «está ahí», de lo que decimos «es natural», porque no falta. Estas masas mimadas son lo bastante poco inteligentes para creer que esa organización material y social, puesta a su disposición como el aire, es de su mismo origen, ya que tampoco falla, al parecer, y es casi tan perfecta como la natural.”

77 I have been especially inspired by this group of women who have been, for over five years, gang-stalking me and wanting to exterminate me using the criminal justice system. They take themselves to be so very important, they have the most supreme self-confidence, they have the highest imaginable self-esteem, they don't tolerate other people causing them the slightest discomfort, that would be intolerable violation of their rights, and they will work to the end of time to right the wrong, and will expect the whole nation to mobilize for their quest for justice, while they themselves have no concern for any harm they might have caused to others. This is the most extreme expression of spoiled children, of mistaking the comfort one enjoys to be a very part of nature itself.

John Rawl's "veil of ignorance" procedure). For our purpose ("dummification") it is important to keep in mind that Ortega has pointed out how the experience of one's comfort as part of nature itself leads naturally to the disappearance from one's awareness of another person's, or another being's, possible superiority. The most important disease which these "spoiled children" suffer is the inability to recognize the possibility that somebody might be superior to him or her in intellect and so the necessity of paying attention and listening to other people who might know better. Ortega calls this disease "intellectual hermetism":

I know well that many of my readers do not think as I do. This also is most natural and confirms the theorem. For although my opinion turn out erroneous, there will always remain the fact that many of those dissentient readers have never given five minutes' thought to this complex matter. How are they going to think as I do? But by believing that they have a *right* to an opinion on the matter without previous effort to work one out for themselves, they prove patently that they belong to that absurd type of human being which I have called the "rebel mass." It is precisely what I mean by having one's soul obliterated, hermetically closed. Here it would be the special case of *intellectual hermetism*. The individual finds himself already with a stock of ideas. He decides to content himself with them and to consider himself intellectually complete. As he feels the lack of nothing outside himself, he settles down definitely amid his mental furniture. Such is the mechanism of self-obliteration.<sup>78</sup>

He concludes:

If from the view-point of what concerns public life, the psychological structure of this new type of mass-man be studied, what we find is as follows: (1) An inborn, root-impression that life is easy, plentiful, without any grave limitations; consequently, each average man finds within himself a sensation of power and triumph which (2) invites him *to stand up for himself as he is*, to look upon his moral and intellectual endowment as excellent, complete. *This contentment with himself leads him to shut himself off from any external court of appeal; not to listen, not to submit his opinions to judgment, not to consider others' existence.* His intimate feeling of power urges him always to exercise predominance. He will act then as if he and his like were the only beings existing in the world and consequently, (3) will intervene in all matters, imposing his own vulgar views without respect or regard for others, without limit or reserve, that is to say, in accordance with a system of "direct action."<sup>79</sup>

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78 Ch. 8, The Masses Intervene In Everything. "Ya sé que muchos de los que me leen no piensan lo mismo que yo. También esto es naturalísimo y confirma el teorema. Pues aunque resulte en definitiva errónea mi opinión, siempre quedaría el hecho de que muchos de esos lectores discrepantes no han pensado cinco minutos sobre tan compleja materia. ¿Cómo van a pensar lo mismo que yo? Pero al creerse con derecho a tener una opinión sobre el asunto sin previo esfuerzo para forjársela, manifiestan su ejemplar pertenencia al modo absurdo de ser hombre que he llamado «masa rebelde». Eso es precisamente tener obliterada, hermética, el alma. En este caso se trataría de *hermetismo intelectual*. La persona se encuentra con un repertorio de ideas dentro de sí. Decide contentarse con ellas y considerarse intelectualmente completa. Al no echar de menos nada fuera de sí, se instala definitivamente en aquel repertorio. He ahí el mecanismo de la obliteración."

79 Ch. 11, The Self-Satisfied Age; emphasis added. "Si atendiendo a los efectos de vida pública se estudia la estructura

We are not here concerned with Ortega's worry that liberal democracy tends in this way to degenerate into totalitarianism, but with the dummification effects of the excessive self-confidence in which a typical citizen of Western societies in general, but of American society in particular, finds himself or herself. Arrogant, excessively self-confident, and, like a spoiled child, believing one's comfortable position is naturally given and one has a right to anything one wants; lacking any comprehension of another being's possible superiority, taking oneself to be sufficient and complete without any need to improve oneself, having no awareness of the limitation of one's intellect: "intellectual hermetism" or the closing of one's mind, i.e. without feeling the need to listen to and learn from other people; constantly injecting one's opinions and asserting one's "rights" (standing up for what one wants); simple-minded (with a simpler structure of the mind), and, above all, self-centered without being burdened with feelings of obligation, guilt, and shame – without being troubled by a general feeling of owing something to other people, society, and ancestors – which have characterized the cognitive map of former generations. Instead, like a spoiled child, the citizen of a free-market, liberal democracy where nothing is in shortage and "rights" are always respected, not only believes the whole world owes him or her everything s/he has ever wanted, but also is hopelessly stupid because, excessively self-confident, s/he has never been troubled by a desire to improve himself or herself through learning from others – hopeless, because, excessively self-confident, s/he has no idea how stupid s/he in fact is.

I have elsewhere asserted that this description which Ortega has produced of the typical citizen of a liberal democracy in the 1920s describes even more accurately a typical citizen of contemporary America (an example of the late stage of liberal democracy) – who has become so infantile that s/he on average measures up only to stage two on Lawrence Kohlberg's moral development scale – and that the feminist climate of American liberal (blue) states has produced women who are even more spoiled: with the unwavering conviction that their society owes them everything they have ever wanted which they express with the politically correct notion that their society is "sexist" (has stolen away everything that is rightfully theirs) and which has motivated them to constantly demand their society to immediately hand over what is owed ("fighting for women's rights"). The mentality which the feminists have instilled in liberal women is one step beyond "being spoiled": it's not just self-confidence in the possession of what one is given, but the conviction that what one wants is something the society must pay back after it has stolen it from oneself. In this present context, Ortega's observation that the common people of modern time are spoiled by democracy which confers upon them "inalienable rights" and by the prosperity made possible by economic and technological progress is equivalent to my observation that, in American society, the dumbest have been put on a pedestal. Thus the American "original condition" is, at bottom, just "revolt of the masses". That is, while the shift of the center of gravity in a society from the elites to the masses – what Ortega is complaining about – has been a general trend of Western civilization, it is especially in American society that this

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psicológica de este nuevo tipo de hombre-masa, Se encuentra lo siguiente: 1., una impresión nativa y radical de que la vida es fácil, sobrada, sin limitaciones trágicas; por lo tanto, cada individuo medio encuentra en sí una sensación de dominio y triunfo que, 2., le invita a afirmarse a sí mismo tal cual es, dar por bueno y completo su haber moral e intelectual. *Este contentamiento consigo le lleva a cerrarse para toda instancia exterior, a no escuchar, a no poner en tela de juicio sus opiniones y a no contar con los demás.* Su sensación íntima de dominio le incita constantemente a ejercer predominio. Actuará, pues, como si sólo él y sus congéneres existieran en el mundo; por lo tanto, 3., intervendrá en todo imponiendo su vulgar opinión sin miramientos, contemplaciones, trámites ni reservas, es decir, según un régimen de «acción directa»."

general trend has achieved absolute perfection. In consequence, the stupid masses in American society are the most spoiled of all. In critical theory Axel Honneth has once made the distinction between *rechtliche Anerkennung* and *Wertschätzung*.<sup>80</sup> That the common people have been spoiled by the rights they have and the comfort they enjoy can therefore be reformulated in this way: their “inalienable rights” have deceived them into the (false) impression that they are very important and know it all because they have generally confused the *rechtliche Anerkennung* given them at their birth with the *Wertschätzung* which people generally have to work hard to earn.

Although Ortega has not explicitly brought out this issue, it should be self-evident why intellectual hermetism or “closing of the mind” – the direct consequence of arrogance or being spoiled – leads directly to dummification. Let's review the chain of causation in greater details. Ordinary stupid people, because they have been spoiled by prosperity and democracy (the notion that they are marked with “inalienable rights”), are too proud, and mistakenly think they already know it all. When you can easily have everything you want and are constantly told that you have “rights” which make you inviolable, you begin to believe – mistakenly because being too much catered to – that you are important and the center of the universe and quite “sufficient as you are”. When contemporary ordinary people consequently have no idea that there might be somebody out there who is superior to them, that it might be worth the effort to listen to others from time to time and understand their point of views (rather than simply laughing it off when other peoples' point of views don't concur with their own) – when, furthermore, it has never occurred to them that their conception of reality might not be correct and that it might be worth the effort to look into the external reality from time to time in search of the richness which is not found in their own mind – they become trapped in their own stupid mind and unable to ever get out of it. These “inalienable rights” and economic prosperity thus combine in the worst way possible with McDonaldization and digital culture in the United States. The increasingly shallow and perfunctory mind – a mind diluted under the pressure to constantly skim and scan and never tarry – is also so spoiled as to have lost all ability to become aware of its increasing deficiency and to learn and listen in order to get out of its trap.

While living in America I have personally witnessed so many examples of “dummification through self-confidence”: the ordinary people here are so full of themselves that communication of any new ideas to them has become absolute impossibility. Just as Ortega has noted: they are so confident in themselves that they simply don't see themselves to be in any sort of need to listen to and incorporate other people's points of view. It is the feeling of oneself as insufficient and insecure which drives a person to learn. Low self-esteem and pessimism are better friends of communication, learning, and intelligence. Feeling secure and confident and therefore uninterested in learning anything they don't already know, the common people in America are thus becoming dumber and dumber as they shut themselves off from what the external reality and the experts have to offer. Furthermore, they are not only less interested in listening to each other; they are also less interested in understanding each other. They are only interested in being catered to by other people – especially in having their “rights” respected by their fellow citizens, institutions, society, and the government. *The natural consequence of “revolt of the masses”* – when the American “original condition” is finally actualized in fullness – is *therefore the erosion of communicative actions*, the art of listening to each other, understanding each other, and reaching common understanding with each other. Again, this erosion of communicative

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80 Axel Honneth, *Kampf um Anerkennung*, Suhrkamp, 1992.



actions, while a consequence of arrogance and dummification, can only lead to society's increasing polarization. Dummification, arrogance, deficient communication, and polarization – these are all aspects of a single problem.

Under the climate of declining communicative actions in society, the persistent overestimation of their own intelligence is the most conspicuous, and most dangerous, trait of the common people in America (and more or less so in all Western nations) today. Stupid people don't know they are stupid – otherwise the world would be a wonderful place. That arrogance, undue self-confidence, self-centeredness, and stupidity all “hang together” (*zusammenhang*) is borne out in a classic 1999 study by Cornell University psychologists Justin Kruger and David Dunning, “Unskilled and Unaware of It: How Difficulties in Recognizing One’s Own Incompetence Lead to Inflated Self-Assessments”.<sup>81</sup> Herein the authors discover that incompetent (i.e. dumb) people, because they lack awareness of what competence (i.e. being smart) is like, i.e. precisely because they are incompetent (dumb), always overestimate their own competence or intelligence. Curiously, precisely because they are incompetent (or dumb), they also persistently underestimate the competence or the intelligence of somebody who is an expert (i.e. who is intellectually superior to them). This research result (how dummification leads to excessive self-confidence) is empirical validation of Ortega y Gasset's personal (philosophical) observation of how excessive self-confidence leads, via lack of interest in listening to other people, to “closing of the mind” and therefore dummification. What I have additionally noted is that excessive self-confidence, inflated self-assessment, “intellectual hermetism”, dummification, and underestimation of experts also “hang together” with a general erosion of communicative actions in society. The common “dumb” people's bizarre overestimation of their own intellectual ability – and the correlative underestimation of experts' ability – is nowadays the most conspicuous obstacle to Habermas' ideal of a cooperative society in which people communicate with (rather than simply manipulate) each other in order to reach common understanding (his “democratic ideal”); it is also the most conspicuous obstacle to the actualization of their own human potential (my *ethical* critique of our postmodern, digitalized, liberal democracy and global free-market world). It in fact constitutes the greatest threat to humanity’s future – in that, without following the instructions given by experts, we cannot possibly overcome the resources and environmental catastrophe facing our civilization.<sup>82</sup>

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81 *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 77 (6), Dec 1999, 1121 – 1134.

82 When Hannah Arendt wrote her “Crisis of Education” (“Krise der Erziehung”) in the 1950s, the influence of Rousseau and pragmatism was just coming to an end in American education – this notion that children learn best not by being fed ready-made knowledge by an expert from the position of authority but by doing it themselves: “... einer modernen Theorie über das Lernen... war ganz einfach die konsequente Anwendung der in unserem Zusammenhang dritten Grundüberzeugung, welche die Neuzeit seit Jahrhunderten gehegt und die im Pragmatismus ihren systematisch begrifflichen Ausdruck gefunden hat. Die Grundüberzeugung... lautet, daß man nur wissen und erkennen könne, was man selbst gemacht habe, und ihre Anwendung auf die Erziehung ist ebenso primitiv wie einleuchtend; sie besteht darin, das Lernen durch Tun so weit wie möglich zu ersetzen.” We have seen this in works ranging from the education of Emile with Rousseau to Jacques Rancière's “ignorant teacher”. And so children supposedly best learn a foreign language through plays or immersion in daily contexts rather than through studying it in textbooks. Although this novel view on learning has been discredited in education since the 1950s – Arendt's thesis in her article – it remains a truism in other contexts. If the CIA wants its new recruits or American people to understand something, it will stage a show, manipulate their environment, in order to enable them to learn it themselves. Their principle remains: “The people never learn something unless they have discovered it through their own effort.” The reason for this is that people nowadays are simply too arrogant, and so too close-minded, that it is no longer possible to merely hand over ready-made knowledge to them as a way to make them acquire it.

One should be able to see that the picture we have obtained so far of the spoiled common people – with defining traits like excessive self-confidence, over-estimation of one's competence, self-centeredness, a general fearlessness toward peers and authority figures, incurable ignorance, and, above all, lack of interest in learning from superiors – is indeed also a most accurate description of the “Netizen” in today's Web 2.0 universe. This is reflected in many people's complaints about the increasing disappearance of good manners from the Internet and is that to which the *Verrohung des Gesellschafts* which Manuela Schwesig has mentioned can be reduced. From the very beginning, the virtual world is characterized by anarchy and permissiveness – where people say and do whatever they feel like without any notion of somebody else's possible superiority and without any worries about other people's judgment: from 4chan and the hacker culture to revenge porn websites like myex.com or Dating Psychos: this demonstrates that the stupid and yet arrogant and *tyrannical* “spoiled child” is indeed the typical “Netizen” in addition to being increasingly the typical consumer vis-a-vis businesses and enterprises, the typical client of the states' administrative services, and the typical citizen vis-à-vis the political elite in a mass democracy – those cases from which Ortega originally derived his conception of the “mass man”. Digital culture which McDonaldizes the mind, liberal democracy which makes people believe in their “inalienable rights”, and the most competitive free-market which McDonaldizes people's lives while making them believe they are, as customers, “king” – the worst possible combination which conspires to produce the dumbest possible mind. I want to emphasize here that the Internet does not simply combine a McDonaldized mind with the arrogance cultivated in an economically prosperous mass democracy, but that the Internet, with the anarchy which characterizes its environment and the freedom which it offers, has considerably accelerated the development of *hombre-masa* – considerably reinforced the arrogance and self-enclosure of the average citizen. In this regard I hope to have once again delineated the importance of the Internet – besides liberal democracy and global free-market – for a critical understanding of the destiny of our contemporary society: the Netizen is the “revolting masses” *par excellence* and the final stage in the actualization of the American “original condition”.

Beside the erosion of communicative action, Ortega y Gasset has also insufficiently worked out another conspicuous characteristic of *hombre-masa*: his absolute intolerance of anything unpleasant. When the common people are spoiled by their too comfortable life, another inevitable consequence is their loss of tolerance. Thus American people are less and less able to tolerate anything unpleasant which used to befall human beings on a regular basis: natural disasters, crimes, terrorism. The correlative of all this is that the contemporary citizens – spoiled children – constantly feel themselves to be in danger. Thus the dummified person not only exhibits the personality traits of arrogance, excessive self-confidence, over-estimation of oneself, self-enclosure, under-estimation of experts' ability, and declining capacity for communication, but also perpetually expresses anxiety over security issues. The dummified human beings are obsessed with security. They demand that every accident, every criminal behavior, and every terrorist act be prevented by the authority. When anything happens, there is an uproar against the government which has supposedly failed to “protect the people”. We have been witnessing the growing obsession with security in the United States since the 1990s, and we have been witnessing European society going through the same trend in recent years. This not only expresses a loss of tolerance due to excessive comfort, but is also a correlative of the inflated estimation of one's own importance as a

result of being too much catered to.<sup>83</sup> The dummified and rebelling *hombre-masa* is thus especially susceptible of fear-mongering by demagogues. The massive expression of *Islamfeindlichkeit* in Western societies today – when Islamic terrorists have barely killed more people than lightning did in these societies for the same span of period – is thus a sign of the “revolt of the masses”.<sup>84</sup> I will momentarily discuss how such obsession with security issues leads to a tremendous corruption of the American criminal justice system and security apparatus and contributes significantly to their McDonaldization in the second part of this essay. Here we should merely keep in mind that stupidity, arrogance, overestimation of one's intelligence and importance, underestimation of experts, dwindling communication, and hysteria over security all “hang together” – they are all consequences of a life that is too easy, too fast, and too empowering (thanks to the Internet), too comfortable (thanks to the consumer culture), and too well-respected (thanks to our democratic mass culture, our “rights”).

Too frequently, the leftist tradition of social criticism has focused on oppression and exploitation supposedly going on in advanced capitalist societies. It has not focused much on the negative side-effects when people are *too well taken care of* in these same societies. Incorporating Ortega y Gasset into the critical theory framework is thus essential for any accurate social criticism when we want to be critical not just of exploitation and oppression in advanced Western societies – of which instances, mind you, continue to dwindle – but also of all the things which we take to be good and sacred in these societies: citizens' rights, human rights, equality, comfort and prosperity, and empowerment of the masses through digital technology. Peter Berger may be considered one of the great thinkers in the leftist critical theory tradition who has noticed and spoken about my concern here:

The “gentle revolution” has been conducive to the socialization of individuals used to being treated as uniquely valuable persons, accustomed to having their opinions respected by all significant persons around them, and generally unaccustomed to harshness, suffering, or, for that matter, any kind of intense frustration. Without intending the adjective to be pejorative, we may say that individuals produced by these socialization processes tend to be peculiarly “soft”... What might appear to people socialized under different conditions as perhaps mild irritation is experienced as intolerable oppression by these children of the “gentle revolution”.<sup>85</sup>

He is referring here to those American children born from 1950s onward – specifically the white-middle class kids who started the counter-culture revolution of the 1960s (although not the African Americans who initiated the civil rights movement) which is in large measure the origin of the political correctness under which we currently live.<sup>86</sup> As progressive activism continues ferociously today in

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83 Again, in making this comment, I have been inspired by this group of women who have been gang-stalking me and wanting to exterminate me for over five years.

84 The hype over terrorism since 911 is thus an expression of lowered tolerance rather than a response to rampant terrorism itself. Terrorism is probably more rampant in the 1970s than today; one merely has to recall those leftist extremists like the Symbionese Liberation Army in the US, the Rote Armee Fraktion in Germany, the Palestinian hijackers, etc. Yet neither the government nor the people were so hysterical about the matter in the 1970s as they are today.

85 Peter Bergeer, Brigitte Berger, and Hansfried Kellner, *ibid.*, p. 194.

86 Eugene H. Methvin, in *The Rise of Radicalism* (New Rochelle: Arlington House, 1973), provides a profile of a typical “New Left” who started the “Cultural Revolution” in America. Although he analyzes the radicals from a conservative

America and other advanced Western societies, the critical question that must be raised in this connection is whether any of the oppressions and exploitations against which we are still fighting really exist or whether they are merely *illusions* born from our decreasing tolerance level and increasing hysteria over minor irritations – just as many “conspiracy theorists” are always skeptical whether all these terrorist threats which characterize our current age are real and not fantasies made up by the government for other, unspoken, purposes.<sup>87</sup>

Significantly, Ortega y Gasset, when brought into the context of critical theory, will create a counter current to Honneth's conception, now established in the Frankfurt tradition, that a society conferring rights and equality fosters to the greatest extent a healthy psychological constitution: self-confidence (*Selbstvertrauen*), self-respect (*Selbstachtung*), and self-esteem (*Selbstschätzung*).<sup>88</sup> The German critical theory tradition since Habermas onward tends to see liberal democracy as the best kind of system (although with problems of imbalance such as alienation and reification) in the sense that the human potential is most fully developed under such an arrangement, whereas an “Ortegan critical theory” (something which I propose here) will see liberal democracy – especially when it is combined with free-market and digital culture – as a worst kind of system in that the unfolding of the human potential (especially our intelligence) will here be severely curtailed as the democratic citizens become increasingly spoiled, dummed, and hysterical. The problem with the German critical theorists from Habermas onward is that they assume that all citizens of a liberal democracy have reached stage 6 of Lawrence Kohlberg's moral development scale and are capable of understanding John Rawl's theory of justice. I assert here instead that the Ortegan view is warranted because, in reality, the democratic citizens, adapting to a McDonaldized existence and being thoroughly spoiled, operate more likely on stage 2 of Lawrence Kohlberg's moral development scale. Habermas and his students are simply too optimistic about the actual abilities of ordinary human beings – which is really the cause for their love of America. The overestimation of ordinary people's intelligence and morals is a flaw shared by all progressivist activists – the most critical flaw in the cyber-libertarian ideal. Hence empowerment of the ordinary masses has only reinforced their stupidity, decreased their human capacity, and cultivated their arrogance – to the point that their human potential cannot properly develop. One should see clearly by now what the problem is: democracy can be a best form of system only if people know how to use it. It is *not* a best form of system because the masses are largely incompetent (e.g. unable to understand the true significance of their “inalienable rights” and their “empowerment”).<sup>89</sup> In the same way, the Internet is not by its nature a bad thing. It is doing harm because the masses are largely incompetent and don't know how to use it to their advantage. My conclusion is that, given that a pessimistic assessment of

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perspective, it is mostly accurate.

87 There is a reason why the feminists and feminist-minded women are singled out as the “most spoiled” of all the “spoiled children” in Ortega's sense. I have asserted elsewhere that it is the victim feminists, and the many liberal and progressive women who have been inflicted with victim feminism, who epitomize the *hysterical* revolting masses. They are hysterical over the slightest discomfort they suffer from others' actions, which, because of their conviction in the victim feminist grand narrative, they see as manifestation of the hostile sexist environment against them. A slight glance at them is “sexual harassment” and “violence against women”. Meanwhile, they are completely insensitive to the greater harms they cause to others or which others have suffered. C.f. the women who have inspired me.

88 This is indeed the point of view which Honneth has expressed in his *Kampf um Anerkennung*.

89 This is in line with the conclusions I have repeatedly expressed elsewhere: liberal democracy functions to everyone's advantage (enable the expression of our human potential to the maximal degree) only when the common people are highly intelligent and yet have low self-esteem. You should keep this principle in mind when you read the “leftist conservatism manifesto” at the end of this essay.

people's capabilities is more realistic, we need an “Ortega critical theory” and will do better by being critical toward all the foundations of our liberal democracy, digital culture, and free-market world: all the rights which has been conferred upon us, all the tools which have empowered us, and the high living standard with which our global free-market has blessed us.

Keep in mind that I have not here sufficiently explored the connection between my new McDonaldization thesis and the Ortega theme of spoiling the masses with comfort and respect. Suffice it to note that McDonaldization is partly conditioned by the drive for comfort as well as by the need to process a larger volume in a shorter time. It's more comforting to immediately satisfy one's desire to babble during instant messaging than to wait while writing out a long, well thought-out letter. The McDonaldized environment is more comforting since concentration and deep-thought require more effort than skimming and browsing and scanning. On the other hand, this sort of short-term comfort might lead to tremendous discontent in the long run. Robert Putnam, focusing on our social connectedness in his aforementioned classic rather than on our brain development, has commented on the damages which our electronic media revolution and suburbanization (with the consequence that we buy more cars and drive longer distances) have inflicted on our long-term happiness: we are spending ever more time in consuming information alone and in driving alone in the suburban sprawl. Although this seems to be a more comfortable life-style, the increased social isolation this entails has increased rates of depression and unhappiness among the TV and suburban generations. The McDonaldized life, more comfortable because it involves less effort, is also a lonelier life, not only in the sense that we are spending more time alone but also in the sense that our connections to each other are increasingly superficial and devoid of substance. Again, it's part of the story about the erosion of communicative action in the post-modern era.

## 9.

### Dummification of America does not affect American world-hegemony

In summary, what we have witnessed in McDonaldization, the Internet phenomenon, and “revolt of the masses” is therefore that the original American principle – of which the cyber-libertarian ideal is the latest incarnation – is running completely wild and being carried to its logical conclusion in this post-modern era. We have then a society in which the masses are increasingly “stupid” – both in the sense of suffering brain-damage (unable to pay attention, to remember things, to think critically, to feel deeply, and to do more than repeat ready-made slogans) and in the sense of “simple-” and “closed-mindedness”: not simply in the sense of being uneducated as ordinary people have always been throughout history, but also in the sense of being increasingly arrogant, self-centered, self-important, aggressive, and hysterical about the tiniest things. This development can be summed up as a kind of “beastialization”. At the bottom of the “irrationality of rationality” in my new McDonaldization thesis is therefore the over-extension of the ideals of equality and human rights beyond their proper boundaries, which then results in an overall decline of the quality of work throughout society. Applying Ortega's insights, we say that, while the establishment of equality between those who are in reality equal or who *could* be equal (e.g. the socially disadvantaged minorities *could* be equal in performance to the dominant whites if they grow up in the same conditions) increases the competence of the population in general, the attempt to establish equality between those who are in reality not equal and

*couldn't* be equal (such as between professors and students or between the intellectual elite and the uneducated masses) decreases the competence of the population in general. (The “revolt of the masses” is, as Ortega sees it, an instance of seeking equality between people who are not equal and couldn't be equal.) In more general terms, the new McDonaldization thesis is meant to be critical of the cyber-libertarian or progressivist ideal running wild today – the notion that the masses need to be brought out of their disadvantaged position and empowered and respected, so that, in the process, they can not only actualize their human potential individually but also work collectively to improve our world. The new McDonaldization thesis is meant to dispute both claims. Extending Ortega's insights, we say that, not being made aware of their incompetence, the masses will use the tools given them to empower them (whether digital media or their “inalienable rights”) to their own disadvantages – to reinforce their own incompetence – which then results in the overall decline of the quality of work throughout society. That is, not only is their individual human potential further suppressed but the overall performance of the society at large also suffers. (Not to mention my more remote concern, that the empowerment of the masses increases exploitation of earth's natural resources and accelerates environmental destruction.) The tragedy is that, in contemporary times, the overall decline of performance throughout society does not necessarily lead to the decline of the nation-state's power. The power and dominant position of the United States in the world today is maintained by its military hardware and its dominance of world's financial markets, i.e. by its control, in Habermas' words, of the world's *Steuerungsmedien* “Macht” and “Geld”, or of the world's “systems”. It does not depend on the superiority of its *Lebenswelt*. The thesis which I want to demonstrate, either here or elsewhere, is that the overall decline of performance throughout American society due to dummification has only negatively impacted its life-world – resulting in its further erosion, in Habermas' words – but has done nothing to reduce the functioning of the United States' military hardware or financial might. (A complicated issue here concerns the continual superiority of America's “soft-power”, which I will discuss elsewhere.) As you might have been able to discern already, the decline in performance has all occurred in institutions which have to do with understanding or developing human beings: America's high tech industry and military industrial complex have suffered no reduction in performance and continue to produce ever more amazing and ever more powerful hardware. (This, however, regards only the overall performance of the industry and says nothing about the quality of work performed by individual engineers.) In fact, we must wonder whether the dummification which has occurred in regard to understanding human beings and developing their intelligence might simply be the natural consequence when American society over-develops its technical side (STEM) while neglecting its human side (the humanities and social sciences). To put it simply, the fact that the United States has less capacity today to understand and develop human beings has no negative effect on its power base. In fact, when the whole planet becomes dumber together with Americans, it only makes it easier for the power elites in the United States to manipulate everybody (through its soft-power) as a way to maintain its super-power position in the world. (The increasing preponderance of strategic action while communicative action rapidly disappears.) This is a tragedy in the sense that the power elites in the United States are therefore unlikely to be motivated to do something to remedy the McDonaldization, and dummification, of their society.

## 10.

### A word on American neoconservative cultural critics

In the beginning I have remarked that the critics on the right are critical of rampant commercialization of our everyday existence under globalization – and often also of liberal democracy – because (for the most part) it erodes our human potential, but that the critics on the left are critical of it because (for the most part) it promotes oppression and exploitation. While, as noted in the beginning, I have aligned my concern with the critics on the right, I hope to have provided here a more precise rendering of the matter about which many of the critics with whom I have aligned have been rather vague. Alexander Dugin and Marine Le Pen – and even the leftist Alain Badiou who has most vocally joined those on the right in this regard – have never quite precisely named what the “humanity” is which has so eroded under neoliberalism. A life entirely devoted to profit-making and consumption of products and services – the new form, according to Le Pen's terminology, of this *homo oeconomicus* is *homo mondialisus* – Dugin considers obviously “decadent” without explanation, whereas Le Pen deplors the evaporation of ethnic and national identity which makes human life meaningful. But what exactly is the objective grounding for the lamentation over the lack of meaning? I have, hopefully, here named the problem with *homo mondialisus* by adopting Ortega's stance: this dumb, arrogant, and hysterical “spoiled child”. Here I would also like to bring onto my side the American neoconservative cultural critics, for example Allan Bloom from the previous generation and David Gelernter of the contemporary generation. Both Allan Bloom's classic *The Closing of the American Mind* and David Gelernter's more recent *America-Lite* can be seen as explicitly bemoaning the passing of human intelligence or intelligent culture among the new generations. The neoconservatives have thus identified the eroding “humanity” more or less in the same way as I have. The differences lie in the specific characterization of “intelligence” and the identification of the cause of erosion: (1) Bloom speaks of “intelligence” in a more holistic fashion, inclusive of “character” – he calls it “state of the soul”<sup>90</sup> – and Gelernter refers by the “erosion of intelligence” mostly to “ignorance” (that the newer generation is no longer familiar with the classics of Western civilization) whereas I specifically refer to “cognitive capacity” and describe its erosion according to its most contemporaneous manifestation (“brain damage”); (2) both attribute the erosion to the “left-turning” of academia and culture – both Bloom's *Closing* and Gelernter's *America-Lite* are specifically about “dummification” through the replacement of WASP ethnocentrism and classical Western culture by the relativism and nihilism brought about by political correctness and pop culture.<sup>91</sup> I agree that political correctness – one of the many components of the postmodernity, along

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90 The first half of *Closing* is devoted to a description of the current state of college students' character. Since it is basically lamentation about the decline of such character especially in regard to education and intelligence, this book is, for me, one of the first classics bemoaning “dummification” under the assault of postmodernity.

91 I shall not summarize here Bloom's arguments in his classic. Gelernter explains his position in his *America-Lite: How Imperial Academia Dismantled Our Culture (And Ushered In the Obamacrats)*, New York: Encounter Books, 2013. His objective there is to explore the causes for America's leftward shift since the 1960s (the shift toward political correctness, what he calls a “cultural revolution”) and attribute to this leftward shift the evaporation of intelligence and high culture from the American mind. He explains the “shift” as having been caused by universities' becoming a prominent force in American culture (what he calls “imperial academia”) just when the conservative Anglo-Saxon Protestants at the helm of the university system were replaced by leftist “intellectuals” (what he calls the “Great Reform”) – with the result that what was formerly “society college” (whose mission was to mold a student's character in order to prepare him for leadership position in American society) then became a bastion to enforce political correctness. The hollowing-out of American culture then occurred as the “intellectuals”, in accordance with their ideology, must denounce the classics of Western civilization and remove them from general curriculum. This is Gelernter's version of the story about “dummification of America”. He and I couldn't have been more different. Whereas I have, in accordance with my adherence to historical materialism, regarded America's “cultural revolution” as a consequence of consumerization and globalization, Gelernter explains the “Great Reform” with incidental historical events, such as the

with digitalization, consumerization, and so on – is a major, and an earlier, cause of dummification of the newer generations, but, because I see dummification through political correctness as an extremely complicated issue, I have decided not to analyze the matter in detail here.<sup>92</sup> How the leftist cultural revolution has caused the erosion of brain power among the newer generation has been noted in a preliminary fashion in this essay: the cultural revolution is about the empowerment of the masses and the promotion of laxation (do what one pleases in defiance against all authorities' admonishment) under the pretext of liberation from oppressive authorities and conventions – “freedom” and “equality”, namely, “revolt of the masses”. (Bloom has explicitly complained, in *Closing*, about how the sixties are the inauguration of the “era of laxation”.) Laxation evidently brings about laziness about using ones' brain and arrogance which closes off one's mind. Both Bloom and Gelernter quite reflect this observation. The “left-turning” of American, and Western, culture is thus quite intimately part and parcel of “revolt of the masses” and culminates in McDonaldization. I have, hopefully, gone deeper than the neoconservatives when trying to identify the root cause of dummification within progressivist politics: the desire to liberate the masses from oppression and empower them, i.e., to make it obligatory to take good care of them and put them on the pedestal for worship (the “original American condition”). The specific character of this progressivist politics is that, even when the goal has been achieved, it runs on continually forgetting about reality and still emphasizing that the masses aren't well taken care of enough (are still exploited, disenfranchised, disadvantaged). That's how they are spoiled. Like Kim Jong-Il, who somehow believes he is a victim when he lives like a modern version of the Emperor of China.<sup>93</sup> Such is the outline – as yet incomplete – of my *ethical* critique (within the framework of a new critical social theory) of liberal democracy, capitalism (turned into consumerism and global free-market system), and digital culture.

## 11. Dummification and globalization

As noted in the beginning, I have, in this essay, chosen not to explore how the consumerist life-style itself – a life devoted to money-making and consuming products and services – is doomed to lower

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GI Bill, increasing specialization and professionalization, and white Anglos' loss of will. Note also that Gelernter has specifically characterized the leftist intellectuals as favoring *theory* (fantasies about the evil white male America) at the expense of *facts* (which would suggest that white men might have good aspects to them after all). He is referring to the same phenomenon as I do when I assert that the political left has allowed their worldview to degenerate to fundamentalist doctrines which *no longer* reflect social reality. Namely, Gelernter differs from me in that he asserts that the political left has simply invented their worldview, whereas I assert that their worldview used to be accurate but has since then become outdated. Gelernter has also complained about America's loss of intelligence and culture amidst all the hype over Internet and smartphones in his interview with Deutschland Radio Kultur: “Technik mit 'weniger Gier' benutzen”, 6 January 2017, [http://www.deutschlandradiokultur.de/informatiker-warnt-vor-smartphone-manie-technik-mit-weniger.1008.de.html?dram:article\\_id=375658](http://www.deutschlandradiokultur.de/informatiker-warnt-vor-smartphone-manie-technik-mit-weniger.1008.de.html?dram:article_id=375658). Here he concurs with me.

- 92 Political correctness (or the “left-turning”) is defined here according to its inherent, true, nature: the fight for racial and gender equality and the acceptance of deviants (LGBT), or to weaken, under the pretext of “equality”, the dominant position of WASP males in society in favor of minorities and, especially, white women.
- 93 Refer, for example, to Diane Ducret's narrative in *Femmes de dictateurs* II (Perrin, 2011). And so Kim Jong-Il tries to recruit a beauty as his new concubine, but she is resistant because she already has a lover. Kim is angry over the “injustice” he has suffered (p. 296): “Révulsé par cette insubordination, il lance à cette amante rebelle les raisons de son attachement: 'Je me suis sacrifié pour la patrie et le peuple... J'aurais voulu retrouver ma jeunesse et mes émotions, avoir une consolation à travers toi, en te regardant. Je n'ai pas voulu grand-chose de toi. Seulement les choses futiles de la vie; ton sourire, tes larmes et ton bonheur'...”



one's intelligence – because I'd rather explore the less prevalent recognition that, when our society looks increasingly like a McDonald's, we are becoming dumber and doing less quality work.

I do want to briefly explore, however, as part of my new McDonaldization thesis, the relationship between globalization and McDonaldization – that globalization is also an important driver behind McDonaldization. George Ritzer has not sufficiently explored this connection in his classic. My thesis is that globalization – the global division of labor – increases market competition, which then pressures individual enterprises to McDonaldize (to expand volume per each unit of time). Just as information technology is driven forward through commercial interests, McDonaldization is driven forward as globalization creates an increasingly competitive business environment. This should be obvious enough: globalization means that each nation should specialize in, or concentrate on, what it (its economy) does best, and that each enterprise must compete (for lower prices and/or higher quality of products) with all enterprises, not only within the national boundaries of the nation of its origin, but also on the entire planet. To survive in this increasingly competitive environment, enterprises must increase their efficiency and transaction volume by McDonaldizing. In the process they create an environment which is increasingly dummifying.

Globalization has probably also contributed to people's getting ever busier, which is another most dummifying factor. Think: the most usual measure for a nation's economic strength or its economic competitiveness in the global environment, Gross Domestic Product, is based on the amount of money which all parties participant in the nation's economy (consumers, investors, government) spend – how fast money circulates within its boundaries. What we regard as positive – when the economy grows, i.e. when GDP increases – can only be bad news for our brain development – for it means that we are spending more of our time buying stupid products or investing our saving in funds. When an economy grows, i.e. when a nation becomes more competitive in the global economy, it means that people are getting busier and busier. In consequence, people are spending less and less time reflecting on and investigating and understanding the details of their life or the information and knowledge that flow through their environment. They are under pressure to process information and sensory impressions *fast*. Thus it's not just the Internet, but also the global economy itself, which “promotes cursory reading, hurried and distracted thinking, and superficial learning”. This – our increasing hurriedness – probably more than anything else accounts for the fact that the majority of contemporary people, although taught to read and write since early childhood, are, as the aforementioned Quebecker comedian Louis T has called them, *analphabète fonctionnel*. Namely, while they are *theoretically* capable of reading, they are *practically* illiterate, since, when they read, they barely understand anything in any case – although it is due to their inability to pay attention rather than due to their inability to recognize the alphabets. Thus, it's not just the Internet, but globalization itself, which has made our mind, and our life, increasingly shallow. We are too often focused on the positive aspect of globalization – as human beings from different parts of the world interact with each other more and more, they become more and more familiar with and tolerant of each other: gone are the old days of racism and ethnocentrism – but have completely neglected its negative aspect, i.e. that the process is driven by economic and business opportunities and is highly destructive of our brain development. Together with old-fashioned racism, gone is, sadly, also our ability to experience life and reality – to use our brain – *en profondeur*. We are thus necessarily led to the conclusion that, to save our brain, we must re-localize production and consumption within our national boundaries and reduce market competition. If, then, you complain

about the higher prices of your shoes or the lower quality of your smartphones as a consequence of localization, just keep in mind that this is the price you must pay for keeping your intelligence.

## 12.

### The different forms of alienation which the dumb and the intelligent experience under postmodernity

For the discussion which follows I want to emphasize a fundamental distinction in the dummification phenomenon which I have hitherto attempted to describe: (1) people's increasing mental confusion due to sloppiness of their mind (inability to pay attention and to remember things, or to understand anything big and complex) and (2) increasing degeneration of thinking to literalism or fundamentalist way of thinking (incapable of understanding or creative thinking but only able to repeat ready-made slogans). This distinction is handy because, when I shall explore in the second half of this essay how dummification has increasingly converged with the process of rationalization and systematization and may even be inherent in them, we will see that rationalization and systematization may specifically encourage the mind to degenerate to literalism or fundamentalism. At issue will be whether the rationalized structure and procedures of the “system” will, during the process of rationalization or systematization of human experience and wisdom derived from the life-world, inevitably destroy them so that, when the “system” transmits them to posterity (both in education and public administration), the later generations, adapting to their environment (the “system”), necessarily internalize the “corrupt version” and thereby become “dumber” (“dummified”). The “system” is, in other words, by its very structure too *dumb* for the human being who has to live with it.

The detrimental effects of rationalization, however, do not consist solely in such sort of dummification. They can go in the opposite direction as well: the “system” could have encoded human experience and wisdom in such a way that the later generations of human beings, adapting to their environment, simply find it incomprehensible. In this case, the “system” is too intelligent for the human being who has to live with it. Given this, we might have to conclude that the “system”, constituted through the rationalization of the life-world since Enlightenment (as Habermas has laid out in *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*), can be too severe in its intellectual abstraction for the simple-minded, but too dumb for the more intelligent souls. The result in both directions is however the same: alienation, or the feeling of not being at home. The matter gets more complicated than this: in the polarization process which the contemporary Western society is going through, we are often witnessing the “system” dummifying while remaining too intelligent *at the same time*, i.e. dummifying those on the political left while remaining too intelligent for the uneducated lower-class who are voting for the political right. This then explains both political correctness and the increasing polarization between the blue states and the red states in the United States, or between the politically correct leftwing voters and the immigrant-fearing rightwing voters in Europe.

Before all this can be explained, a definition of alienation (*Entfremdung*) is in order. I will, in this section, first turn to the alienation experienced by the intelligent souls under the dummified, McDonaldized world and then to that experienced by the dumber people under rationalization (when the “system” is too intelligent for them). Then, in the next section, I will expound the dummification inherent in any process of rationalization (how the “system” can be too dumb for the human beings

who have to live with it).

We may turn to critical theory for an understanding of what makes human beings happy, or what makes them feel like they are living a fulfilling life. According to critical theory, human beings feel happy or fulfilled when they feel “at home” within this world of their creation (Peter Berger, Axel Honneth, and Rahel Jaeggi). They feel “at home” (and “free”) when they can fit their actions into the cooperative scheme of social activity, into society's complex scheme of division of labor (Honneth's “social freedom”). “For Hegel and for Honneth, persons are free only when they can be 'at home' in their social world: when their own unique motives and intentions can be meaningfully realized in a context of accommodating social roles and obligations.”<sup>94</sup> When a person is able to realize his or her motives and intentions by articulating himself or herself in society's roles and obligations – in this way appropriating for himself or herself the social world in which s/he finds himself or herself – s/he will have been able to achieve self-realization (Jaeggi).<sup>95</sup> In such “at-homeness”, in such self-articulation through the world or appropriation of the world for himself or herself, the person is able to obtain from others the recognition (*Anerkennung*) that is appropriate to the conception s/he has developed of himself or herself through the articulation in, or appropriation of, society's roles (Honneth).<sup>96</sup> In such case, s/he feels happy and fulfilled. If the appropriation process goes awry – when the person doesn't feel able to identify himself or herself with, or articulating himself or herself through, the social world in which s/he finds himself or herself or the social roles in which s/he has chosen to articulate himself or herself – then s/he feels “alienated” (*entfremdt*) and becomes unhappy. (This is not the end of the story: later on a fuller description of human happiness will be given by combining this critical theory conception with Robert Putnam's conception of social capital and Hannah Arendt's explication of “freedom” and “public happiness”.) Now what effects does dummification – what effects do the McDonaldization of communicative actions, the simplification of society's routines, the simplification of the human mind and human experience, and the erosion of people's attention-span and ability to concentrate and think deeply – have on this process? What is the relationship between dummification and alienation? Is dummification a form of social pathology?

When it comes to increasing McDonaldization which has occurred in society's subsystems, those human beings who have suffered this rationalization process (who have been dummified or simplified in the process) might not see it as a problem at all. Whereas alienation or reification is indisputable as a social pathology because the human beings caught up in the process are discomforted by it, human beings who are dummified or simplified usually do not feel any discomfort at all in regard to their condition. Stupid people aren't usually bothered by their stupidity. In fact, after being simplified in thinking, understanding, and emotions, they probably feel *more* comfortable with participating in the society's subsystems and with the continual McDonaldization of their life-world. Simple people will find themselves more able to identify themselves with, and articulate themselves through, this world

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94 Christopher Zurn, *Axel Honneth: A Critical Theory of the Social* (Polity Press, Cambridge, 2015), p. 10.

95 Jaeggi, *Alienation*, p. 206: “My analysis thus far suggests an idea of self-realization as the individual's realization *in the world* or mediated by the world. In this sense, self-realization does not consist only in the development of one's capacities. Rather, mediated by these capacities and potentials, self-realization is a process of actively appropriating the world. Hence, self-realization is to be understood not as a realization of *something* nor as a kind of inner growth or development (as, for example, in humanist psychology) but as a way of being active. One does not realize *oneself*; one realizes oneself *in what one does*.”

96 This conception is one's “self-concept”, or, in Zizek's words, the “story which one tells oneself about oneself”.

that is increasingly superficial, simple, and perfunctory. Dummification, that is, actually helps human beings better cope with the postmodern condition. This fact could marshal against any consideration of dummification as a form of social pathology.

“Dummification” – and its objective correlate, McDonaldization – seems to be experienced as a social pathology only by those people who are complaining about it (e.g. those commentators, authors, and professors who are complaining about how shallow our life has become, or how dumb people in general have become, thanks to digitalization and McDonaldization). These people are often alarmed by the deterioration of their own intelligence (their own humanness) under digitalization or McDonaldization. What they find more alarming is however the deterioration of the people around them and the social world in which they find themselves. This is the most deadly to their happiness. I myself have been the most unhappy person when I find myself trapped in this American McDonaldized world, i.e. in this social world where human intelligence, and consequently the quality of work in all institutions dealing with human beings, continue to decline – where everything becomes increasingly shallow and cavalier. As society's routines and roles continue to simplify in order to process a greater volume in a shorter time, I find it increasingly impossible to articulate myself in any of these roles and routines. As communicative actions continue to be McDonaldized and when people become increasingly dumb and simple, I find it increasingly impossible to obtain from my fellow citizens the sort of recognition that is adequate to my complex personality and understanding of myself. For – make no mistake about it – we confer to each other the recognition due to each of us through linguistic formulation as to what kind of being we are and then through its communication in speech. As human beings become increasingly simplified, as their understanding of human psychology continually simplifies and deteriorates, and as the concept of what a human being is such as is embodied in the routines and procedures of society's subsystems continually McDonaldizes and simplifies – my fellow human beings and the institutions of the society in which I find myself can no longer confer upon me the recognition that is due to me when I, unlike them, have never been simplified under the pressure of digitalization, systematization, and McDonaldization: when I, that is, am far more complex than the stereotypes through which institutions and my fellow citizens conceive of me. What is the point of your life when nobody can understand what you say and what you are about – how can you then obtain from the human beings around you the recognition due to you? This relates to all three forms of recognition which Honneth has named: in interpersonal relationships, in group solidarity, and in society's legal relations – but especially in regard to the first two. I consequently feel as if I were trapped in a “Planet of the Apes”. That's alienation. (More on this at the end of this essay when “happiness” is examined once again in connection with Putnam's conception of social capital and Arendt's explication of “public happiness”.)

Professor Jaeggi has best defined “alienation” as the inability to appropriate oneself or the world as one's own – while avoiding the essentialist position that there is an objective human nature which predetermines the conditions under which human beings may feel alienated from the world and from themselves.<sup>97</sup> I don't adopt such a position here. It is an objective fact that dummified human beings, with their shallow mind, have failed to adequately develop their human potentials. A person from the intellectual elite feels alienated in this apish McDonaldized world because his greater complexity has prevented him from (1) identifying himself with this world or appropriating it for himself and (2)

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<sup>97</sup> Jaeggi, *ibid.*

obtaining recognition from the people in it. The world and the people in it are simply too simple for him. This is part of the critique as to how the “system” might be too simple, too dummifying, for some people, i.e. for the intellectual elite.

The conclusion arrived at so far is that the *McDonaldized* world is fine for dumb (simple-minded) people (people who have not survived dummification) but alienating – “too dumb” – for the intelligent (complex-minded) people (people who *have* survived dummification). For the sake of my subsequent discussion, I want to here introduce another factor, “systematization” (or rationalization per se), and reflect on the difference in reaction against it between the uneducated and the educated segment of the population. While the more educated and more intellectual segment of the population might be complaining that their world is getting too simple for them (because of McDonaldization), the less educated and less intellectual segment are complaining about just the opposite, that their world is becoming too complex and too abstract – too smart – for them (because of systematization). It would seem that the recent resurgence of rightwing populism in the Western world indicates that the less educated segment of the Western population has begun experiencing a form of alienation of their own, namely, feeling alienated in their own land due to mass immigration.<sup>98</sup> This form of alienation seems to have resulted from maladjustment to the abstract notion of citizenship which, although inherent in the concept of nation-state when the nation-state first originated as a new form of human organization during the Enlightenment, is only lately carried to its logical conclusion (only lately completely manifested in empirical form): the *Rationalitätspotential* is not fully actualized until today. Recall what Angela Merkel has admonished Donald Trump about *demokratische Grundwerte*:

... den Respekt vor dem Recht und der Würde des Menschen unabhängig von Herkunft, Hautfarbe, Religion, Geschlecht, sexueller Orientierung oder politischer Einstellung...

This is a highly abstract notion of human being – what all human beings have in common, i.e. the “humanity” within, which has been abstracted out as the only thing that really matters about them. The rest – national origin, skin color, religious affiliation, gender, sexual orientation, political orientation – are disregarded as irrelevant. These *demokratische Grundwerte* are nothing other than the enshrinement of the most differentiated and abstracted understanding possible of human beings.<sup>99</sup> The abstraction first started with Descartes' *cogito*, crystalized into the doctrine of “Rights of Man” during Enlightenment, and finally becomes the indisputable foundation of any nation-state in the current (postmodern) age of political correctness. The less educated people's experience of alienation in face of immigrants may be explicated as a reaction toward this abstract notion of human being which the state demands that they accept as valid when we consider: (1) that this abstract notion is a long distance

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98 This is the simpler characterization of matter. It is found in Bertelsmann Stiftung's famous study from November 2016: Catherine de Vries and Isabell Hoffmann, “Globalisierungsangst oder Wertekonflikt? Wer in Europa populistische Parteien wählt und warum”, [https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/fileadmin/files/user\\_upload/EZ\\_eupinions\\_Fear\\_Studie\\_2016\\_DT.pdf](https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/fileadmin/files/user_upload/EZ_eupinions_Fear_Studie_2016_DT.pdf). Christiane Kaess in the Netherlands has developed a more complex picture of the constituencies of rightwing populist parties. See his interview with Deutschland Funk, “Wilders ist radikaler als Marine Le Pen”, 10 March 2017, [http://www.deutschlandfunk.de/vor-den-wahlen-in-den-niederlanden-wilders-ist-radikaler.694.de.html?dram:article\\_id=380892](http://www.deutschlandfunk.de/vor-den-wahlen-in-den-niederlanden-wilders-ist-radikaler.694.de.html?dram:article_id=380892).

99 Another way to derive these “democratic values” is of course through the concept of negative freedom. As long as one doesn't hurt others, s/he's free to be black or gay or a believer of eccentric religions, etc.

away from the original experience, within our life-world, of what a human being is and what a human community is and (2) that uneducated people are not equipped to travel such a long distance. The primordial human experience (the “short distance”) is to judge other human beings according to their appearance (i.e., according to all the elements which have been abstracted out in the official definition of a “citizen”). Consider the complaint of a “racist” (here an adherent of the National Front):

Un français a du sang français de par ses parents et ses ancêtres. Tous les autres, ces 'soi-disant français', ne le sont que par papier.<sup>100</sup>

The primordial experience which a human being has of his or her community is a group of human beings who are typologically similar in looks and behavior (who has the same skin color and texture, who speak the same language, who adhere to the same customs, etc.). This more “synthetic”, or compact, conception of the citizens of a national community stands in sharp contrast to the state's more abstract, more differentiated, or *more rational* notion which ignores these typological similarities and counts as relevant only the human essence common to all human beings. It is only through prolonged education and prolonged exposure to human beings from different races and cultures that a human being learns to count, like the state does, the common essence as the only thing that matters. Namely, it is only under such prolonged exposure that one's primordial experience within the life-world itself has changed. Hence the conclusions which the Bertelsmann study has drawn from its surveys.<sup>101</sup> In this sense, the refusal by the uneducated segment of the population to subscribe to the state's abstract definition of citizenship might be construed as a reaction against the systematization (“rationalization”) of the life-world which has lent the components of the life-world an increasingly abstract, and consequently impoverished (*verarmte*) character. In this sense, this kind of alienation is “traditional”, i.e. not much different from the *Verdinglichung* which the working class experienced during the initial periods of industrialization. There was *then* the denial of the use-value inherent in the life-world in favor of systematization (the more abstract, purely quantitative, exchange value), here is *now* the denial of the tribal instinct inherent in the life-world in favor of a systemization which lends a more rational

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100 A confession taken from an online discussion forum for National Front's followers, [www.partisansmarine.com](http://www.partisansmarine.com).

101 “Kurz zusammengefasst: Je niedriger das Bildungsniveau, je geringer das Einkommen und je älter die Menschen sind, desto wahrscheinlicher ist es, dass sie Globalisierung als Bedrohung wahrnehmen.... In einem letzten Schritt haben wir untersucht, was Menschen genau an der Globalisierung fürchten. Wir haben sie gefragt, was ihrer Meinung nach die größten globalen Herausforderungen der kommenden Jahre sein werden. Bei Wirtschaftskrise, Armut, Terror, Krieg und Kriminalität sind die Unterschiede zwischen denen, die Angst vor der Globalisierung haben, und denen, die keine Angst davor haben, geringfügig. Lediglich beim Thema Migration können wir einen deutlichen Unterschied zwischen den beiden Gruppen feststellen: 53 Prozent der Personen, die Angst vor der Globalisierung haben, vertreten die Auffassung, dass die Migration eine große globale Herausforderung ist, 55 Prozent haben in ihrem Alltag keinen Kontakt zu Ausländern und 54 Prozent sagen, dass sie finden, dass sie sich wegen der Ausländer im eigenen Land, manchmal selbst fremd fühlen. Hingegen vertreten nur 42 Prozent der Befragten die die Globalisierung als Chance sehen, die Auffassung, dass die Migration eine große globale Herausforderung ist, nur 43 Prozent haben in ihrem Alltag keinen Kontakt zu Ausländern und sogar noch weniger, nämlich nur 36 Prozent, fühlen sich manchmal entfremdet. Diese Muster, die wir für die EU als Ganzes festgestellt haben, treffen auch auf die neun Länder zu, die wir eingehender untersucht haben.” The older people have not suffered prolonged exposure to immigrants and therefore have less chance in differentiating their consciousness about human essence. Similarly, people who have fewer contacts with immigrants are more intolerant toward them because they also have less chance to engage themselves in such differentiation of consciousness. Implicit in my phenomenological discussion of “intolerance” is my application of Eric Voegelin's guiding thread for understanding world history (in his *Order and History*), i.e. the succession of human civilizations throughout the ages is characterized by the progress of consciousness from compactness toward differentiation.

view of human beings.<sup>102</sup>

This form of alienation is less prominent in the United States than in Europe. While a majority of (mostly uneducated) whites have elected Donald Trump also because they feel threatened by immigrants, the fear is based more on territorial considerations (that the immigrants are taking over resources which have hitherto belonged to them) than on unfamiliarity with “otherness” (different typological features). The more educated segment – those on the political left – has always been more comfortable with this new condition – the full implementation of the abstract notion of citizenship and human beings, or the full actualization of the *Rationalitätspotential* inherent in the concept of nation-state since the Enlightenment because, as noted, prolonged education and prolonged exposure to immigrants have differentiated their consciousness to a greater degree. The Establishment elites' position (at least in Europe) is basically that, if only the dumber people were more educated – if only they were smarter – then they wouldn't feel so alienated living in a framework which operates according to the fully abstract notion of human being – then they would catch up with a *truer* notion of human being. Within this perspective, the question which remains concerns the motivations of the leading figures of rightwing populism such as Marine Le Pen or Frauke Petry: since they are highly educated individuals – since they don't fit into the profile of an uneducated blue-collar worker that can't keep up with a more abstract notion of humanity – it is then a mystery why they remain loyal to a “synthetic” notion of human being that is closer to the primordial, or primitive, experience in the life-world. They must be “racist” for a different reason than that for which their constituents are “racist”. Marine Le Pen has explained herself in her manifesto (*Pour que vive la France*): the abstract, more rational, notion of what a human being is which the Establishment, neoliberal, elites demand everyone accept is simply too “shallow”. Shallow! “A human being without national identity or ethnic tradition but who cares only about money-making and consumption: the neoliberal globalists want to turn us all into this shallow being for the sake of their profit margin!”<sup>103</sup> She feels alienated by such a shallow conception of a human being as simply a *cogito* just as the few of us who are intelligent feel alienated by the increasingly shallow communication among human beings in this increasingly dummified McDonaldized world. As noted, Marine Le Pen counts as a critic of global capitalism on the right.<sup>104</sup>

102 I'm overlooking here the deeper, and more ambiguous, description of the phenomenon of “nation-state.” For example, that by Zizek: “This paradox comes to light in a palpable way apropos of the ambiguous and contradictory nature of the modern *nation*. On the one hand, 'nation' of course designates modern community delivered of the traditional 'organic' ties, a community in which the pre-modern links tying down the individual to a particular estate, family, religious group, and so on, are broken – the traditional corporate community is replaced by the modern nation-state whose constituents are 'citizens': people as abstract individuals, not as members of particular estates, and so forth. On the other hand, 'nation' can never be reduced to a network of purely symbolic ties: there is always a kind of 'surplus of the Real' that sticks to it – to define itself, 'national identity' must appeal to the contingent materiality of the 'common roots', of 'blood and soil', and so on. In short, 'nation' designates at one and the same time the instance by means of reference to which traditional 'organic' links are dissolved *and* the 'remainder of the pre-modern in modernity': the form 'organic inveteracy' acquires within the modern, post-traditional universe; the form organic substance acquires within the universe of the substanceless Cartesian subjectivity.... 'Nation' is a pre-modern leftover which functions as an inner condition of modernity itself, as an inherent impetus of its progress” (*For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment As A Political Factor*, Verso, second edition, 2002, p. 20.)

103 This is a very typical view-point among the right-leaning activists in France.

104 The leading figure of the Alt-Right movement in America, Richard Spencer, has expressed exactly the same sentiment. See for example his speech at Auburn University, Alabama, 18 April 2017. He specifically condemns the big capitalists for attempting to disentangle people of European descent from their connections to Goth, Rome, Athens, and Byzantine in order to turn them into efficient consumers. This “consumer” without ethnic identity, a pure “abstraction”, is too

The further question which still remains then concerns: why do some of the educated class find the shallow *cogito* unbearable while others of this class don't? To refine my question – since leftwing intellectuals like me or Badiou typically are not so concerned with the destruction of racial, national, and ethnic identity under global capitalism: why, although we are all concerned with the shallowing effects of global free-market – although we all feel alienated within this global system in the sense that we are maladjusted to the increasingly rarefied (*verarmte*) existence – some of us (on the left) are concerned with the dummifying (me) or de-moralizing effects (e.g. Badiou) while others (on the right) are concerned with the de-nationalizing effects. I cannot resolve this ultimate question in this essay because it seems to me that it is due to differences in psychological constitution which have usually escaped rational arguments that some educated people find the increasingly shallow, abstract, and reified existence pleasing while others find it completely unbearable, and that, among the latter category, some find the de-nationalizing effect of this new existence disconcerting while others are more bothered by its dummifying or de-moralizing effects. (One may, for example, refer to Zizek's theory that the political right (e.g. the fascists) and the political left (e.g. the communists) disagree because they each embody a different structure of enjoyment (*jouissance*).<sup>105</sup> This is a topic for another essay.

As I have noted, the political left has historically represented the progressive forces to bring to actualization the *Rationalitätspotential* inherent in the original structure of rationalization process (modernity). As such, the political left is credited with rationalizing and modernizing our world, with bringing into being the free-market mass society of the United States, the social democratic systems in Europe, the socialist systems (state-managed economies) in the eastern bloc, and, eventually, the global free-market in which we live today.<sup>106</sup> I have argued elsewhere that the political left often obscures this fact (their avant-garde position in world-history) by mindlessly protesting against the very system which they have brought into being (such as when the feminists protest against capitalism). However, when we operate within Habermas' schema and when we, for example following Peter Berger,<sup>107</sup> abandon the illusory distinction between capitalism and socialism, this fact about the political left will appear obvious and become indisputable. The leftist elements, by pushing for the continual rationalization of our society, have not only created the condition of possibility for “alienation” – not just for the dumber segment of the population who has failed to keep up with progress, but also for the intelligent segment on both the left and the right – but also instituted an environment which increasingly dumbs us down.

### 13.

#### The causal connection between systematization

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shallow for him and he seeks after the intensity and meaning afforded by meditation on the historical story of which one is a part (one's ethnic identity). Shouting “I'm German!” or “I'm white”, he asserts, is a challenge to the Capitalist Establishment which shouting “I'm transsexual” can never be: i.e. he has also noticed the congruence between political correctness on the one hand and global capitalism and consumerism on the other.

105 See, for example, Jodi Dean's summary, *ibid*.

106 Certainly, the recent elections in Europe and America where rightwing populism has elicited tremendous resistance from the political left have amply demonstrated that the left is quite comfortable, and aligned, with the globalization process.

107 Again, in his *The Homeless Mind*.



### and dummification: an overview

The consideration in the previous section has led us to the conclusions: dummified people do not feel alienated by their increasingly *McDonaldized* postmodern world whereas those of us who have remained intelligent (who have survived dummification) do; on the other hand, when it comes to *systematization* (rationalization), the dummified people do feel alienated by our postmodern world whereas some of us who have remained intelligent don't while others of us do, but for a different reason. (Marine Le Pen feels alienated by the de-nationalizing abstraction of humanity; Badiou by the de-moralizing effects of this abstraction; meanwhile the mainstream left has no problems with it at all.) To state these conclusions more analytically: (1) while a *McDonaldized* world is too simple for an intelligent soul, it is just fine for dumb (dummified) people; (2) meanwhile a *systematized* world is too intelligent for the dumb but, while just fine for most intellectuals, is too alienating and too dumb for a minority of the intellectuals; and finally (3) the rightwing and leftwing elements of this minority of intellectuals who don't like systematization are bothered by different aspects of the dummification of the *systematized* world. In these conclusions, the difference between dummification, which is the direct result of McDonaldization, and systematization, which refers to the rationalization of the life-world, thus comes into relief. Can there be a specific relationship among dummification, McDonaldization, and systematization?

The difference between the dummification effects of McDonaldization and the dummification effects of systematization relates, generally, to the fundamental distinction made earlier between two sorts of “dummification”: (1) increasing shallowness and sloppiness of the mind (inability to concentrate, remember details, and think deeply, and frequent mental confusion) and (2) increasing degeneration of thinking to literalism or fundamentalist ways of thinking. The two are not of entirely different domains: as noted, superficial skimming and browsing and scanning on the Internet and in institutional practices, by degrading creative and critical thinking, also promotes mechanical reliance on slogans and established conventions, which is more or less the same as degeneration to literalism or fundamentalism. Furthermore, both kinds of dummification lead to an inability to think critically, to understand things deeply, and to understand other human beings. I have plentifully described the first and have briefly hinted at the structure of the second (increasing “polarization” of society; the dummification of the political left). In the second half of this essay I shall explore how dummification might be inherent in the process of rationalization (or systematization) – apart from the manner in which digitalization and McDonaldization have tremendously sped up the pace of dummification. It is here that degeneration to literalism or fundamentalism is especially relevant: systematization can be inherently dummifying because it encourages degeneration to literalism or fundamentalism. Such degeneration underlies the enormous corruption of the American system which I have personally observed (the decline of the quality of work throughout American society's expert domains) and yet is rarely spoken of in public discourse – and always inadequately spoken of in academia. The cause for the corruption is always incorrectly sought elsewhere. An example is the recent uproar over police brutality: everyone calls it “racism”, and yet nobody has ever noticed that racism – the stereotype that dark skinned people are dangerous and that their life is not as important – is only part of the causes. What are more important as causes are obsession with security or hysteria over danger (already spoken of) and – here is my point – the literalist or fundamentalist application, without any thinking, of rationally derived procedures.

What I am getting at here is the most important theme I wish to advance in this essay: that, in this postmodern era, there has occurred a switch-over in cognitive style from thinking and reasoning to mere information-processing, which results in the reduction of cognitive activities to mechanical reliance on ready-made conclusions (slogans and politically correct conventional statements about social reality), literalist interpretation, and fundamentalist application of procedures; and that this degeneration to mere information-processing could be caused by systematization (or rationalization) as well as by McDonaldization. The switch-over is then inevitable when we live in a society that is not only increasingly rationalized but also increasingly McDonaldized. Moreover, systematization has considerably enhanced the institutions' ability to McDonaldize.

While McDonaldization (“shallowness for the sake of greater quantity in a shorter time”) is necessitated under the pressure to bring the original American principle (“get everybody”) to its final fruition, rationalization in the sense of “systematization” is the mechanism to actualize the original American principle in yet another way: make it possible for any idiot to do expert work. “Systematization” thereby begets dummification in a different way: the dumbness here results not from skimming and skipping but from literalizing and fundamentalist application of previously achieved insights and wisdom. Incidentally, literalist and fundamentalist application then enhances our ability to merely skim and skip and scan. I am not noticing something novel here. Many thinkers have spoken about the same phenomenon. I first read about it in Eric Voegelin's *Order and History* (how the next generation of philosophers always destroys the wisdom of the previous generation by literalizing it), and the following should especially remind you of Horkheimer's critique of “instrumental reason” and would probably seem to you to function as a supplement to Habermas' *Zeitdiagnose* in his theory of communicative action. What I'm doing here is to add “dummification” as a further characterization of the reification process so that my “dummification thesis” may function as a supplement to, or elaboration of, Habermas' *Verdinglichungsthese* (“reification” as colonization of the life-world by the economic and administrative “subsystems”). My final goal is to arrive at a more comprehensive diagnostic of the “McDonaldization” of American social institutions – not in Ritzer's original sense, but in my sense “the shallow”. In the following I shall consider the “shallowing” and “hallowing” of America's health care system, mental health system, criminal justice system, law enforcement system, national security system, and university system. My point is that, to arrive at the fullest possible description of the dummification process that has been going on in these expert domains, a mere reliance on the McDonaldization thesis (making things simpler and running them faster in order to accommodate a greater volume) is not enough, but that, for such purpose, the potential for shallowness and hollowness inherent in the rationalization process must also be taken into account.

To summarize the relationship which I will demonstrate in the following between rationalization on the one hand and dummification and McDonaldization on the other: In the foregoing I have argued that there has occurred an overall decline of the quality of work in the American system as a result of the decline of communicative actions which is characteristic of the digital age, and that this decline of communicative actions comes about when everybody is increasingly cavalier in communicating and understanding in order to process an ever greater volume in an ever shorter time and when everybody is increasingly close-minded having been totally “spoiled”. I have argued that both this increasing emphasis on quantity at the expense of quality and this increasing catering to the dumb masses to the

point of depriving them of any capacity for listening and learning are merely the logical conclusion of the “original American principle” which has already been noticed in its earliest stage by Tocqueville. Here I'm about to argue that rationalization in the form of “systematization” is inherently dummifying because it abstracts portions of the life-world, systematizes it, makes it explicit, but in the process simplifies it and makes it available for idiots and further McDonaldization. McDonaldization of the abstracted, systematized, and simplified version of the wisdom from the life-world to increase efficiency then further dilutes it. We then have the same result: perfunctory skimming and browsing and scanning. While literalism and fundamentalist application stand on their own as dummifying operations of rationalization (“instrumental reason”), they are especially suited for McDonaldization in that the doctor or the bureaucrat, following these systematized procedures, can work much faster in processing patients and clients – because they are spared the troubles of thinking and understanding and judging through communicative action. By describing this process, I hope I will have “demystified” rationalization. American liberal democracy is in essence “mystification” (glorification) not only of McDonaldization – seen in the celebration over bringing the luxury formerly enjoyed by a minority of elite to the masses – but also of rationalization – when American politicians narcissistically tout their country as a “nation of laws”: this cult of *Rechtsstaatlichkeit* which is being increasingly accepted by the entire planet. My “dummification thesis” aims however to show – to enlighten you – that *Rechtsstaatlichkeit* does nothing other than remove from the life-world the precious insights and wisdom which our ancestors have worked hard to achieve so that we will, eventually, forget about them. The result is that, as the life-world shrinks away completely, we grow up only within the “system” not having any insight into social reality and each other. We are dummified, and communicative actions among us can further erode. Meanwhile, the system becomes “corrupt” in the sense that *there is no longer any reality in it*. This corruption then enables the “system” to further McDonaldize. The “system” will then continue on its own accord – and can never be stopped, for there is nobody left to understand it: namely on its suicidal path until everything comes crashing down without anyone understanding how it has all happened.<sup>108</sup>

#### 14.

#### The “rationalization thesis” at a glance

The concept “rationalization” originates with Max Weber and is neatly summarized and critiqued by Habermas in the first volume of his *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*. I shall again simplify this “rationalization thesis” in such a way as to make possible a quick discussion of how “systematization” leads to dummification.

Weber is sensitive to the fact that “rationalization” is an universal process found in all major

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108 Zizke has a passage in *For They Know Not What They Do* which I would like to quote to illustrate the “demystification”

I have in mind here (p. 275 - 6): “In short, the Jacobins were caught in the following paradox: is the King effectively a king or just an imposter? If he is effectively a king, then there is no sense in killing him because he does not cheat – i.e. he is what he claims to be; if, on the contrary, he is an imposter, then there is again no reason to kill him because he does not present any real danger – it is enough to unmask his impotence... The Jacobins' solution is that the King is a deceptive semblance which ontologically does not exist, and *it is precisely for that reason that it is so dangerous* – i.e. it is precisely because of its ontological delusiveness (a nothing claiming to be something, a 'thing of nothing') that it must be fought by every means. In other words, the real mystery of the King's charisma is that of *servitude volontaire*: how was it possible for a pure imposter without any substance to fascinate and dominate people for such a long time?”

civilizations, not simply in the Western. After observing rationalization process at work in all cultures, I want to generalize, i.e. define, “rationalization” in this way:

- (1) Increasing rationalization means that one is getting more methodical when it comes to attaining one's goals. Or even when it comes to defining one's goals. That is to say, more methodical in purposive human actions (strategic actions, as opposed to communicative actions).
- (2) Increasing rationalization means that one is becoming more explicit in representing reality, situations, and goals (formulating them in words).
- (3) Increasing rationalization means that one is becoming more precise in one's perception of reality and in defining one's situation and one's goals.

Let us use our common sense to see how this is the case. Whenever we decide on a goal, in the beginning of pursuing this goal we work unsystematically and inefficiently and in an haphazard manner. Gradually, however, we will learn to work toward our goal in a more systematic and methodical fashion. We will have developed what Weber calls “Technik”. This is (1). We will have become “rationalized” in Weber's sense. We will then also codify our “Technik” in a system of rules and procedures, in an attempt to make it explicit so as to enable outsiders and later generations to quickly adopt it without repeating the same discovery process – eventually without even learning and thinking but simply by following the rules and procedures like a robot. This is (2). When we have developed a system of rules and procedures to pursue our goals, we have also learned to speak about our situations, our means, and our ends in quantitative, more precise, terms, rather than, as we did previously, in qualitative, less precise, terms. (For example, we measure, and we conduct statistical analysis, etc.).<sup>109</sup> This is (3). In summary: after rationalization, we are better able to verbalize about reality, situations, and goals. Before, our notions of reality and so on were rather vague. Now, we are able to speak about it, and describe it, comprehensively. Verbalization (including quantification) enables the formation of an explicit representation of what is formerly only vaguely intuited. It is here that the notion of *Versprachlichung* – which Habermas has adopted from Durkheim and which, for him, serves as the motor of rationalization of society – fits in. All this is a universal trend; it is universally observed that human beings, for the sake of greater efficiency in attaining the goals they have set for themselves, “evolve” from the unsystematic and haphazard manner in the beginning to the methodical manner in the end. It has happened not just in the West, but also in the East. But this evolution in the West is more explicit, more complete, and going in a slightly different direction than elsewhere. Hence Weber can claim that what marks Western civilization apart is precisely its greater degree (and its special kind) of “rationalization”.

You can see that the most frequent product of rationalization, bureaucratization, is the result of increasing methodicalness and explicitness. (This must be noted beforehand because dumification due to systematization is a problem about bureaucratization.) When one first begins to pursue a goal,

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109 When I have, in *Scientific Enlightenment*, characterized the evolution of consciousness as progressing from imprecise, qualitative representation to more precise, quantitative representation, I have merely specified a process of rationalization – consciousness' becoming increasingly rational. Fundamentally, my notion of a transition from the functional to the structural perspective is a process of rationalization.

one proceeds intuitively. As one has developed a *Technik*, one begins to lay down in explicit terms the process, steps, and procedures by which one, or anyone, can attain the goal. This is the origin of rules, regulations, bureaucratic procedures, and laws. These result when one decides to pursue one's goals methodically rather than haphazardly and according to explicit terms rather than vaguely and intuitively.

There is a dispute as to whether all this indicates rationalization at all. Weber's contention is that nothing is really “rational” in itself, that anything is only rational relative to a goal – and every goal is ultimately arbitrarily chosen. I disagree with Weber's relativism when it comes to the measurement of rationalization. Ultimately, there *is* an objective standard for measuring rationalization because there *is* one goal which is not arbitrarily chosen. The ultimate goal for all human beings is happiness, which is thus a rational goal. The question regarding which everyone differs is only the means to this goal: how to be happy? Some people find happiness in bodily pleasures alone (food and sex): these are the hedonists. Some people feel happy when they are recognized or honored by their peers (*Anerkennung*). Some people find happiness in insights and wisdom: the philosophers and mathematicians. (It's roughly like Plato's tripartite division of the soul.) The choice of the right means to happiness depends on which kind of person you are. What would make *you* happy? A lot of money? Power? Recognition? Or Truth? You have to figure yourself out. The better you have figured yourself out to determine what means you should employ to attain happiness, the more rational you are.<sup>110</sup>

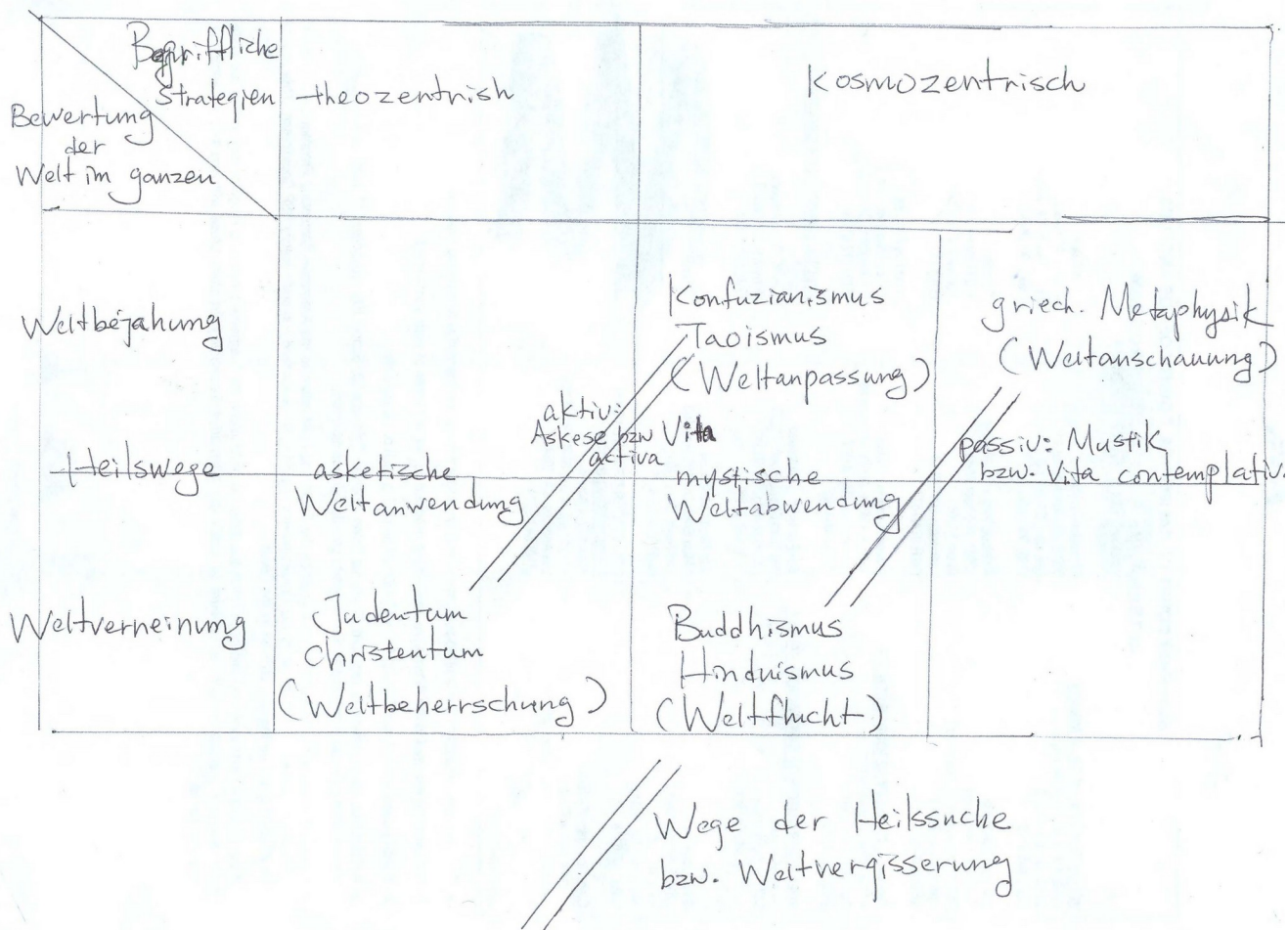
I can use myself as an illustrating example. When I first started my undergraduate studies in philosophy, I was discontent. I thought I wanted to learn philosophy, and yet I noticed that the university system with its specialization and bureaucracy was more a hindrance than a help to acquiring the ability to philosophize. I was all *nous* back then and I was rational in the pursuit of philosophy. And so I began studying philosophy methodically – that is to say, pursuing the study of philosophy in the most efficient manner possible. This means that I simply studied philosophy outside the university system. I was able to learn philosophy much faster and more comprehensively than all the students of philosophy who had chosen to stay in school. For them, my course of action was most irrational; but, for me, since my goal was to understand philosophy and nothing else, my course of action was far more rational than everybody else's. In the end, I regretted, and realized I hadn't figured myself out. For we no longer live in the time of Einstein. If you are not part of the university system, it's virtually impossible to get your works read and recognized. (A few have done it, such as Ken Wilber.) I realized in the end that I had indeed been *irrational*. Other people “put up with the shit” in order to become part of the “system” before they get to do what they would like to do. I realized that I needed recognition after all, like everybody else. I was irrational when I streamlined my studies *because I had set the wrong goal*. I didn't realize that I wasn't the type of soul who would be content with philosophizing all

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110 I take it for granted that increasingly precise and explicit representation through quantification and verbalization ((2) and (3)) serves as an objective measure for greater degree of rationalization. Weber's position on the relativity of rationalization relates really only to (1), i.e. whether increasingly methodical pursuit of a goal really indicates increasing rationalization at all – all because one can always dispute whether the goal being pursued is indeed rational. Furthermore, I do not mean to dilute here the conception of happiness proposed in this essay which combines critical theorists' notions about alienation and recognition with Putnam's notion about social capital and Arendt's explication about freedom and public happiness. Plato's tripartite classification introduces variation on this schema of happiness rather than refuting it altogether: a philosophic person will seek a different sort of recognition and appropriate a different aspect of society than a money-making person.

by myself.

My own case illustrates that, when the goal changes according to a better understanding of one's wants, what was in fact the most rational action at the time now appears as the most irrational.<sup>111</sup> The same differences in wants and goals as well as the differences in the conception as to how the world works explain why, when rationalization process begins to take effect in Judeo-Christian culture, Confucian culture, Buddhist culture, and ancient Greek culture, it leads to such divergent results, from the completely worldly orientation “world-domination” (*Weltbeherrschung*) on one end of the spectrum to caring nothing about the world, or “world-fleeing” (*Weltflucht*) on the other. Habermas completes Weber's classification of world's religions which have resulted from the rationalization process in their respective cultures in this way:



111 Weber's discussion is more complicated. He has distinguished between *Zweckrational* (the rational choice of means and the rational choice of goals) and *Wertrational* (the rational systematization of values which underlie the decision on what goals to pursue) which corresponds to a distinction between *formale Rationalität* and *materielle Rationalität*. See Habermas' discussion in the first volume of *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*, p. 240 – 245.

The defining criteria are: (1) Is the religion theocentric or cosmocentric (applicable to all four traditions)? (2) Is the religion world-affirming (*Weltbejahung*) or world-denying (*Weltverneinung*) (applicable to all four traditions)? (3) Within traditions that are world-denying: is the tradition world-dominating (*Weltbeherrschung*) or world-fleeing (*Weltflucht*) (applicable to only two traditions)? (4) Does the religion advocate activity or passivity? The interplay of all four criteria produces four types: *Weltbeherrschung*, *Weltflucht*, *Weltanpassung*, and *Weltanschauung*.<sup>112</sup>

My focus in this essay is on the rationalization process at work in Western culture – the strand of development which is to lead to the dumified robots with which I'm concerned. According to Weber, the Protestant ethics is the final product of the rationalization process that is at work in the Judeo-Christian tradition. It gave rise to the modernization of Europe and America – caused economy and political administration to differentiate as “systems” from the life-world – before disappearing when the newly emergent nation-state no longer needed it to continue rationalizing.<sup>113</sup> The Protestants, as compared with the Catholics, are clearly more rational: they are more methodical in their *Lebensführung*, more exact and more explicit in their speech and conception. (Hence there is a certain empiricism to their understanding of God and God's creation, to the point of adopting a literal interpretation of the Bible.) Yet Weber would dispute that the Protestants are more rational; he in fact asserts that the Protestant ethics is irrational (like Ritzer's “irrationality of rationality”) by demanding that one make money not for the sake of spending it. Yet the Protestant ethic is *not* irrational: I simply disagree with Weber on this point. The Protestants, when they equate making a good living and living a disciplined life with being favored by God, are really trying to prove to others their superiority over the Catholics. By demonstrating themselves to be more methodical while making a living, they have proven that they are superior: they are infused with God's spirit. Making more money than you can ever spend in order to prove you are favored by God might not sound so rational, but being admired by your fellow human beings certainly *is* a very rational goal. Protestant nations are more admired in the world over than Catholic nations because they are more powerful and more prosperous. Thus, ultimately, it's about power (*Macht*) and recognition (*Anerkennung*).

Not everybody admires Protestant nations. Different people have different tastes – this is why it is difficult to establish absolute standard for measuring rationalization. Some people go to Protestant nations and absolutely admire the punctuality and orderliness with which the society functions. Yet some people go to Catholic nations and are far more impressed by the unpunctual and cavalier manner in which society functions – where people exhibit little discipline while working. These people prefer “free spirit” and “passion” to discipline, order, and the methodical manner. These people don't admire the Protestants: the Protestants, with their methodical and disciplined manners, are too “stiff” and “boring” for them. Again, Weber's objection: the latter sort of people will not regard the Protestants as “rational” – not because the greater rationality of their methodical and disciplined ways is in dispute, but because the greater rationality is wasted on a goal not deemed worthwhile (unnecessary seriousness

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112 Many thinkers have attempted to describe what Weber has described as “Rationalisierung” during Europe's modernization process – but everyone has described it somewhat differently. Foucault's concept of “bio-power”, for example, is just a different characterization of what Weber has described as “rationalization”. Namely, how, after the classic age, the European states decided to take explicit control of their citizens and natural resources in order to extract the maximum degree of power from them. This is precisely what Weber has described in the case of the Protestant ethics: “rationalization” in order to dominate nature and themselves.

113 In Zizek's terminology, it is the “vanishing mediator”.

toward life). But, once again, because the Protestants have chosen to be methodical and disciplined, their nations are more powerful and prosperous, and it's generally recognized that power and prosperity are good things. Now, can this general consensus be used as a standard for objectively measuring degrees of rationality? Can one say that those who claim that the Protestants are irrational because they are unnecessarily serious toward life are wrong? Can one say that the goal which the Protestants have chosen for themselves is indeed more rational? Ultimately, there *is* a way to decide which goal is more rational than others. That Protestant pursuit of “power” and “wealth” *is* a more rational goal than the Catholic “free spirit”, “passion”, and “lack of seriousness”. While the Protestants are happy, or at least satisfied, by being punctual and orderly and methodical and serious, the Catholics are equally happy by being unpunctual and unmethodical and disorganized and cavalier. Clearly one must go beyond such consideration to be able to say that the Protestants *are* more rational. It is a mainstream view that “power” and “wealth” are good things, better things than a lack of interest in them but only a desire to enjoy life as has been given. Those who admire the Catholics are anomalies. The mainstream view is affirmed even by the United Nations development indexes or similar things. Countries that are prosperous and well-organized are ranked higher on these indexes than poorer countries that are in disarray. The correctness of the mainstream view is most borne out during the age of European imperialism in the nineteenth century. Then, the European imperial powers beat up every other nation in the world. Why? The European nations were more “rational”: the average people in Europe were more disciplined in life and methodical in their application to industries, etc. And so all the nations in the world wanted to “rationalize” themselves along the Western lines. Every nation tried to “modernize”.<sup>114</sup> This trend has continued to today, and is the reason why, today, the eccentric ways of the Europeans have, within two hundred years, become the mainstream way for all peoples around the world. And so you see that, when somebody more powerful beats you up, you will not be happy – even if what originally made you happy is not power and wealth, but the care-free enjoyment of the present moment as if there were no yesterday and no tomorrow. But *now* you are forced to concede that you have been wrong. After getting beat up, you realize that power and wealth *should have been* your goals as well. You must *now* learn to value “stiffness” as more “rational”. The Protestants *are* more rational in their choice of goals (power and wealth) and in the pursuit of their chosen goals (methodical and disciplined *Lebensführung*). Hence the origin of the “mainstream” view: it all has to do with domination and recognition. Power and wealth, which enable you to dominate or avoid being dominated, *are* the most rational goals. And it is by being methodical and disciplined that you acquire power and accumulate wealth, so that you will at least never be dominated by others. This is indeed more “rational”. This is why both the Hindu and the Confucian nation, repeating the process which I have gone through (not having figured myself out earlier), have decided to forgo their original paths of rationalization and opt for the Protestant way. The Hindus have abandoned their *Weltflucht* and the Confucians their *Weltanpassung*. In other words, it's because we human beings are by nature social beings that, according to our nature, some goals are intrinsically more rational than others.

This is thus my rationalization thesis in contradistinction to Weber's. There is an objective criterion for what counts as rational and what counts as not rational. Rationalization is objectively defined as the increasingly methodical pursuit of power and wealth in order to achieve domination or resist

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114 In Habermas' schema (*Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*, II, p. 248), every nation was trying to evolve from a politically stratified class society (*politisch stratifizierte Klassengesellschaft*) to an economically constituted class society (*ökonomisch konstituierte Klassengesellschaft*).



domination or live comfortably in general. From this perspective, humanity can indeed be seen as progressing toward ever greater degree of rationalization when it gradually shakes off its traditional religious, moral, and philosophical concerns in order to concentrate all its resources on acquiring power and wealth. In other words, the sad news about the rationalization process is that, as human beings mature and become more rational, they will become increasingly materialistic and consequently less interested in using their brain to think. Dummification is not simply inherent in the rationalization process, but also in its goal. The kind of materialistic civilization we have today – where machines and computers are everywhere and do wondrous things but where people barely think and understand anything about themselves and the world they live in, i.e. the excessive development of our technological side to the neglect of feelings, thinking, and communicative action – is the highest development of the rationalization process.<sup>115</sup>

While we have now established that the Western path of rationalization started by the Protestant ethics is *the* path toward rationalization, the distinction between capitalism and communism is another one which must be collapsed in order to remove hindrance to a proper understanding of the rationalization process. It is Peter Berger who has recognized that rationalization of society (of the Protestant type) is not simply a process that is going on in capitalist societies. Socialist nations have also been going through the same rationalization process. Peter Berger has identified modernity as “technological production”, “bureaucratization”, and “pluralization” – all of which occur in the USSR as well as in the USA.<sup>116</sup> In fact, both capitalist and socialist nations have “modernity”, and finally “rationalization”, in common. They merely represent different variations on this same project. The ills which the Marxists have attributed to capitalism – *Entfremdung* and *Verdinglichung* – are after all not caused by capitalism per se, but by something more fundamental of which capitalism is merely one expression among many, i.e. the rationalization of society. This is why both alienation and reification are social pathologies in communist countries as well.

While it is the case that humanity all over the world, after experiencing European, and then American, imperialism, now recognizes the rationalization of society (of the Protestant type) as the supreme good, it is also generally recognized that there is a price to be paid for the advantages offered by rationalization (principally, power and wealth). Both Peter Berger and Habermas explicitly recognize this. Namely, they regard social pathologies along the line of alienation and reification as the price paid for the power of the nation-state and the prosperity enjoyed by its populous. When I shall speak of “dummification” (increasing brain-damage) engendered by the rationalization process, I'm adding another price paid which has not hitherto been explicitly recognized. For example, we have sacrificed communicative action while developing our technological side.

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115 In the US criminal justice system, if you decide not to pursue the goals which the system has decided it's rational for everyone to pursue, i.e. the avoidance of death penalty and the least possible length of time in confinement, then you are deemed irrational and probably insane and will be sent to mental evaluation. In everyday life, “rational” is called somebody who refrains from emotional outburst but coldly chooses the right means to obtain the desired results. Once again, the decision to pursue not this goal but another is taken to be a sign of “irrationality” – for emotional outburst can also be a goal, but it is a goal which the community has decided it's not “rational” to pursue. This demonstrates that there has always existed a consensus as to what counts as “rational” and what not – i.e. maximal control and domination of one's environment and other people rather than crying to express one's sadness: strategic vs communicative action – which I take here to be the objective measure of rationality.

116 Again, in *The Homeless Mind*. It must be conceded that “pluralization” has occurred to a lesser extent in the USSR.

My modified, and simplified, rationalization thesis thus designates *the methodical pursuit of the proper goals of power and wealth* – and dummification, along with alienation and reification, is the price paid for such methodical pursuit. Of all peoples in the world, Americans are the most devoted to the methodical pursuit of power and wealth. (As I have continually emphasized before, the motto “America is about freedom” is merely a divergence whose true purpose is to mobilize the masses for the sake of amassing power and achieving prosperity.) For this end, America must mobilize everybody in every one of its endeavors – and therefore must McDonaldize. For this end, it must also rationalize in the sense of systematization – completely mechanistic functioning devoid of the slightest human caprice, for the sake of the greatest degree of efficiency in institutions' functioning. In this way the United States has become the most bureaucratized nation in the world and in human history. The United States military also exercises the greatest degree of reliance on machines and computers ever seen in human history. The United States has thus carried to the utmost extreme the principle of rationalizing for the sake of power and prosperity – thus has the United States become the most powerful and prosperous nation in human history. And all nations in the world have today bought into this principle “rationalizing for the sake of power and prosperity”, with every people on earth scrambling to set up a constitution for their governments in order to get away from the capricious whims of a dictator. However, we shall then find it not surprising that the price which a continually rationalizing society must pay for its effort is also most manifest in the United States than in anywhere else. Chiefly, *Dummerwerden der Bevölkerung*. The unfortunate fact is thus that communicative action – human beings coming together to understand each other or reach common understanding about anything – seems especially to be a hindrance to the pursuit of power and wealth that must be eliminated in the process.

## 15.

### How rationalization leads to dummification through elimination of understanding

Let's now examine how dummification might be inherent in the rationalization process. Rationalization, or systematization, can lead to dummification in two ways: (1) by eliminating understanding while one is striving to attain a given goal; (2) by necessarily systematizing only parts of the knowledge and wisdom from the life-world. As noted, “rationalization”, “systematization”, and “bureaucratization” are more or less synonymous in my framework here, and McDonaldization (in my simplified sense) is merely further refinement of the systematization process. By saying this, I also wish to demonstrate how naturally McDonaldization develops out of, and blends into, the systematization process. The principal discussion in the second half of this essay, dummification in rationalization or systematization, is thus meant to be a complete description of the McDonaldization of American institutions.

Here I want to develop a basic principle describing how rationalization – increasing methodical operation in order to more efficiently pursue a set goal – leads to dummification by eliminating understanding. Namely, how inherent in the increasingly methodical pursuit of a goal is the danger that the human being caught up in it will become ever dumber as s/he performs his or her job ever more efficiently but with decreasing understanding. At issue is the downside, the “price paid”, when rules,

procedures, laws, and regulations make the conducting of business more efficient. It works like this. Before the development of a “system” (rules and procedures and so on) for the pursuit of a set goal, only a smart person can conduct business well and achieve the goal. The “expert” then reflects on how s/he has done things well, and creates rules, to codify the process whereby s/he has achieved his or her goal. By developing his or her formerly intuitively guided conduct of business in pursuit of the set goal into a “system” – this is “systematization” – s/he is getting more “methodical” and accomplishing a more explicit and precise representation of the means and situations. S/he has also laid the foundation for dummification because the “system” of rules and procedures can enable the next generation without the same degree of intelligence to conduct the business at hand equally well – simply by robotically following the rules and procedures without thinking. One can see that this “systematization”, while creating the condition for “dumbing-down”, marks also the beginning, or potential, of McDonaldization, which will then further reinforce the dummification process inherent in all this. It's expected that the next generation of bureaucrats will be the less intelligent sort since perceiving, thinking, and reasoning will be less required as long as rules and procedures are followed. Efficiency is thus increased at the expense of human intelligence. Once this initial condition for the deterioration of the human brain has been created, the process which has eliminated intelligence as a prerequisite for reaching the set goal worsens as the institutional process is further McDonaldized and the process of conducting business is running ever faster. This has indeed happened in the United States in the past forty years, in all the domains where communicative actions (actions to *understand*, and make oneself *understood* by, another human being) used to predominate: one gets the feeling that everything – in businesses, in the medical and psychiatric industries, in the criminal justice system, in law enforcement, and in the education system – is running at an ever faster pace while the substance in everything is being drained out – while the technician, the bureaucrat, and the student become dumber and dumber and the quality of their work declines when that quality depends on their exercising their brain to understand people, situations, and the social reality. The lesser intelligence that is sufficient to function well in a rule-governed environment is made even lesser when the technician and the bureaucrat have to devote a greater amount of their energy and attention to running the process at an ever faster pace rather than slowing down to understand, and think and reason about, the situation at hand and the people that are involved. The fast-paced environment simply affords no room for any in-depth understanding and reasoning. Thus McDonaldization has reinforced the dummification process inherent in systematization. As the brain of the technician and the bureaucrat deteriorates further, they have also forgotten all the original insights which their ancestors had achieved when the latter first envisaged, and devised, the rules, procedures, and laws to codify their wisdom. Members of the newer generation perceive only the literal wording of these rules and are capable only of “going through the motions”. The goal is still being achieved, but the attainment of the goal is often only a *semblance*. But nobody notices this anymore, since nobody understands anymore the process leading up to the goal. This is how a situation is arrived at where quantity and volume are increased at the expense of quality – again, when the quality of the work being done depends on better human understanding. Hence, rationalization – increasing methodicalness and the development of an explicit and precise system of means to achieve greater efficiency in the pursuit of set goals – begins, after a certain point, to cause the degeneration of society as a whole as the brain of everybody begins to deteriorate. *After a certain point*, the more efficient a society, the dumber its people.

The increasing mechanization of the functioning of a bureaucracy or institution without the need for

any exertion of the human brain is a factor congruent with increasing *mass participation in expert domain* causing the gradual, and overall, decline of the quality of the work being done. There is such decline throughout American society because the expert professions here are under pressure to recruit *everybody* regardless of his or her talent in order to actualize the original American principle (“get everybody”) to the fullest extent. Since the goal can be achieved by simply mindlessly following the rules and procedures laid down, stupid people can now perform expert task. “Make it easy so that everybody can do it” – this is so American! As more and more stupid people join the expert professions – people of the newer generations who are not even aware that an understanding of people and situations was once required to achieve the goal in question – the tendency toward mechanization is further reinforced – as if rules and procedures were all that is necessary for the functioning of the expert domain.

Weber has criticized the systematization process described above in terms of *Sinnverlust* and *Freiheitsverlust*. I have here, as you can see, focused on *Sinnverlust* – “going through the motion” without thinking in order to get things done entails a loss of meaning. My “dummification” diagnosis is a supplement to Weber here in that Weber has not foreseen how *Sinnverlust* leads to dumber bureaucrats and “experts” and enables the recruitment of idiots to do expert work.

16.  
Habermas' thesis  
about the colonization of the life-world by the “system”

My dummification diagnosis is also a supplement to Habermas' thesis about the colonization of the life-world by the “system” (the “colonization thesis”) and adds an extra dimension to the original *Verdinglichungsthese* (the “reification thesis”) which underlies his “colonization thesis”. Reversely, the “colonization thesis” illuminates my “dummification thesis” and is essential for describing the second, more complex, way in which rationalization dummifies.

The “reification thesis” is most developed by Lukács. In essence it says something like this. Before the emergence of a labor market concomitant with the rise of capitalism, we till the soil or fix our household without any notion of “labor” as a differentiated and quantifiable “thing”. This is production for use-value. Consequently we see each other as living and speaking human beings. When we are then incorporated into the labor market, however, our labor power become quantifiable (e.g. 20 dollar an hour) and therefore “objectified”: it is taken as an “object” which is worth this much money and which can be exchanged for another consumer product or service which is worth the same amount of money. This is production for exchange-value. We consequently see each other as an “object”, as a commodity, manipulable and touchable and with an explicit and precise monetary worth (*Warenform*) – what is called “commodification” as well as “reification” (*Verdinglichung*). There has now occurred a commodification of social relations. The penetration of this capitalist thinking into all areas of life then results in a new form of consciousness which characterizes the modern age and which assumes that anything and anybody can be conceived of as a manipulable object and translated into a monetary worth. The model of a purchasable consumer product (*Warenform*) thus takes on a universal character and becomes the *Gegenständlichkeitsform* (the way in which a culture conceives of objects and people) of a capitalist society. Reality is made up entirely of manipulable and consumable objects and they all

have a price and there are no other forms of existence than this.<sup>117</sup>

One can see that this commodification process is a form of rationalization: the human being is getting methodical with his or her labor power and learns to measure it precisely and explicitly with the yardstick of monetary worth. Lukács therefore sees Weber's "rationalization thesis" as confirming his "reification thesis" (two sides of the same coin). Emerging from this consideration of the rationalization or reification process is the most important concept of the "life-world" (*Lebenswelt*). The labor power as a vague concept is said to have differentiated as a precise and explicit notion from the "lived condition" (in Habermas' words: "... die Herauslösung der Sphäre gesellschaftlicher Arbeit aus *lebensweltlichen* Kontexten...") when the workers coordinate their interaction, instead of according to norms and values which everybody intuitively understands in everyday contexts, now via the concept of quantitative equivalence established for exchange (Habermas: "... wenn die Arbeiter ihre Interaktionen statt über Normen und Werte über das entsprachlichte Medium des Tauschwertes koordinieren..."). The "life-world" is our most primordial world. We are situated in our life-world when we repair our household, interact with our family members at home, or have fun with our friends. Today our life-world consists of the private sphere of life as opposed to the public sphere, whereas in time past, before the rise of capitalism and the rationalization of our society, it encompasses our entire world.

Any society after modernization can therefore be characterized both as a "life-world" and as "system" (or "subsystems") – whereas before it is entirely "life-world". The life-world consists of our shared traditions and common value orientations which we know intuitively but have not explicitly represented anywhere and which regulate our interactions with our family, friends, and strangers. The interactions in the life-world is characterized by communicative actions: the community at the life-world level is integrated when its members communicate to understand, and make themselves understood by, each other. The "system" is characterized by, and integrated through, non-communicative, abstract means: the exchange of money versus products and services in the case of the subsystem "economy" and the operations of power and the rules which govern them in the case of the subsystem "political administration". To return to my simplified version of the rationalization thesis: when the expert pursues his set goal informally and according to his or her intuitive know-how, s/he is operating within the confines of the life-world. When s/he then formulates his or her intuitive know-how into explicit and precise rules and procedures and demands everybody else follow them in the

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117 This is the central theme of Lukács' *Die Verdinglichung und das Bewusstsein des Proletariats*. His *Gegenständlichkeitform* is thus somewhat equivalent to Heidegger's *Seinsverständnis*. Habermas summarizes it in the first volume of his *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*, p. 474 – 488. In my *Thermodynamic Interpretation of History* I have specifically noted that the rise of Protestantism is intimately associated with the universalization of this objectified consciousness (there is nothing else in reality than manipulable and touchable objects) whose clearest expression in that age is the rise of empiricism. We find the similar idea in Peter Berger et al, *The Homeless Mind*. Garret Wilson's summarizes in his review of the book (<http://www.garretwilson.com/books/homelessmind.html>): "The authors, when writing of modernity, are referring to 'the institutional concomitants of technologically induced economic growth.' Put another way, the authors believe that economic growth that is brought about by technological advances brings with it certain institutions, or ways of thinking, which are incorporated into the everyday life of a society's population."

common pursuit of the set goal – in effect creating a bureaucracy on the basis of these rules and procedures – s/he has differentiated his or her activity as a “system” from its original context in the life-world. This is “bureaucratization” or “systematization”. Habermas' elaboration of Weber's rationalization thesis (the rationalization process) can be represented diagrammatically:

zweckrationale Handlungssystem → Institutionalisierung → Bürokratisierung  
(Freiheitverlust/ Sinnverlust) → Systemdifferenzierung (Ausdifferenzierung von Wirtschaft  
und Staat aus Lebenswelt) → selbstgesteuerte System

The way in which Habermas has elaborated on Weber's rationalization thesis is therefore to explain the rationalization process as the differentiation of the economic activity and the political sphere as “systems” (or “subsystems”) from the “life-world”. Habermas can now formulate his “colonization thesis” – when the systems that are differentiated from the life-world then comes back to colonize it:

(p) die Entstehung moderner, d.h. zunächst kapitalistischer Gesellschaften die institutionelle Verkörperung und motivationale Verankerung von Moral- und Rechtsvorstellungen posttraditionaler Art erfordern, daß aber

The differentiation of the political sphere as a “system” from the life-world happens when the rights (and associated duties and obligations) of the citizens are encoded in laws and constitutions during the formation of modern nation-state since the time of Enlightenment. A nation's laws and constitutions which encode its citizens' rights as well as grievance procedures against the state and other citizens are described as institutional embodiment of post-traditional moral conceptions because they express the notion of justice which John Rawls has explicitated in his *Theory of Justice* (or the “veil of ignorance” procedure) and which Lawrence Kohlberg has then discerned as the highest level of moral development on the personal (ontogenic) scale, i.e. stage 5 and 6 or the “post-conventional” level. Habermas is asserting that the differentiation of the political sphere during the rationalization of society is a necessary concomitant of the differentiation of the economic sphere from the life-world and that this differentiation is not inherently a bad thing – it in fact represents the maturation of a society beyond the conventional level of moral understanding (stage 3 and 4 on Kohlberg's ontogenic scale). Now the rationalization process – this maturation process – has become a bad thing because:

(q) die kapitalistische Modernisierung einem Muster folgt, demzufolge die kognitive-instrumentelle Rationalität über die Bereiche von Ökonomie und Staat hinaus in andere, kommunikativ strukturierte Lebensbereiche eindringt und dort auf Kosten moralisch-praktischer und ästhetisch-praktischer Rationalität Vorrang erhält, und daß dadurch

The laws and contracts, although embodying the most mature stage of moral development, govern our activities in the manner of abstract rules – what Horkheimer has called “instrumental reason”. When the operation to regulate with explicit and precise rules intrudes into the life-world which is governed by communicative action with its intuitive know-how, this know-how is eroded. As a consequence:

(r) in der symbolischen Reproduktion der Lebenswelt Störungen hervorgerufen werden.<sup>118</sup>

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118 *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*, II, p. 451.

In Habermas' parlance, “colonization” causes disruptions in the symbolic reproduction of the life-world. When I shall describe the manner in which rationalization dumifies by inadequately explicating the intuitive know-how from the life-world, it will be another dimension to this “disruption in the symbolic reproduction of the life-world”. For now, suffice it to note that, in common parlance, “colonization” is being referred to when we complain about the increasing commercialization of formerly informal or private aspects of life – when a private aspect of life that is not for sale is “objectified” into a quantitative value to enable it to be exchangeable on the public market place – or when the government attempts to bring formerly unregulated aspects of private life into its bureaucracy to regulate them with its rules and procedures. As you can see, while we frequently complain about the former (intrusion of the market into our private life) we often demand the latter (e.g. *want* the government to intrude, and regulate, our domestic life to prevent domestic violence, etc.). Again, there are both positive and negative aspects, both advantages and disadvantages, to the systematization of our life-world into “systems”. Leftist activists, for example, often criticize the process of “colonization” as something negative along the line of Habermas's *Zeitdiagnose* (“... die Übersetzung der naturwüchsigen kommunikativen Beziehung in die universale Sprache des Geldes... schrumpft die Lebenswelt auf die objektive zusammen... die Destruktion der Sittlichkeit einer kommunikativ hergestellten Intersubjektivität, indem sie soziale Beziehungen in rein instrumentelle verwandelt...”) <sup>119</sup> while at the same time working hard to invite the system to intrude into the life-world even further in order to prevent oppression and exploitation (the aforementioned government regulation of family life to prevent domestic violence is one example). In my simplified presentation of the principle of rationalization process, “colonization” refers to explicating more and more instances of the intuitive know-how from the life-world into explicit rules and procedures and confining them within the boundaries of a bureaucratic institution.

The ill-effect of “colonization” is typically described in terms of alienation or dehumanization. Habermas asserts that Weber's view of bureaucratization as the subsumption of the individual acting (*handelnd*) subject as a cog in the bureaucratic machine he has himself created – “die Subsumtion der handelnden Subjekt unter die sachliche Gewalt einer über ihren Köpfen verselbständigten Apparates” <sup>120</sup> – naturally leads to Niklas Luhmann's “system perspective” which analyzes society as a self-organizing and self-running system (*selbstgesteuerte System*). <sup>121</sup> The usual pathology associated with modernization – dehumanization or *Verdinglichung* – then derives straightforwardly since the self-organizing and self-running system sets itself against not only its natural environment but also the acting humans with their *Lebenswelt*: these human beings have to live and interact with each other within this bureaucratic system, and yet this system is no longer run and integrated through its members communicating and reaching common understanding with each other. <sup>122</sup>

Habermas (with Luhmann) asserts that the rationalized bureaucracy, when it becomes self-running and self-organizing, has in effect neutralized the human beings who are recruited to run it: “Wie Personen,

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119 Ibid., I, p. 478 – 480.

120 Ibid., II, p. 454.

121 Ibid.

122 Ibid., p. 455.

als Mitglieder, ihrer Persönlichkeitstruktur entkleidet und zu Leistungsträgern neutralisiert werden...”<sup>123</sup>  
This is the same description according to which the personnel run bureaucracy simply by robotically following the established rules and procedures without the need – or even the requirement – to use their brain (a mere *Leistungsträger*). It has thus become evident that dummification is a further consequence of dehumanization: the bureaucrat, while dehumanized in the sense of being reduced to a robot, also becomes dumber in the process – and this then entails the decline of the qualification of the next generation of recruits and the further degeneration of their brain power in the bureaucratic environment. *Dehumanization has a negative effect on brain development*. Significantly, Habermas (with Luhmann) notes further that the bureaucratic system also becomes independent, or neutral, against the cultural tradition of the society insofar as the norms and customs embodied in the intuitive know-how from the life-world are dispensed with in favor of abstract, context-independent rules and procedures.

What Habermas has done is to lend more structure and differentiations to Weber's, Lukács', and Adorno/ Horkheimer's *Zeitdiagnose*. The ills of bureaucratization (*Freiheitsverlust* and *Sinnverlust*: Weber), the objectification of consciousness (Lukács) – the colonization of every form of human existence and consciousness by the *Gegenständlichkeitsform* derived from relations of exchange to result in *Verdinglichung des Bewußtseins* – and the domination of human consciousness by instrumental reason at the expense of every other kind of consciousness (Adorno/ Horkheimer) – as if strategic actions performed on manipulable and touchable objects of empirical reality were all there is in this world: Habermas now describes all these as the effects of the colonization of the life-world by the “systems” which have originally differentiated from the life-world itself.

Now reification and dehumanization – or “colonization” – happen when the life-world (as the private sphere and the public sphere) has to exchange with the system (the work place/ market and the state's administration system). (Thus the diagram previously cited from Habermas.) Recall that the system is integrated through money (*Geld*) and power (*Macht*). When the life-world exchanges with the two subsystems, it has to do so on the latter's terms (in terms of money and power). This then lays the foundation for the second manner in which the “system” dummifies the human being caught up in it: a *complex* thing originating in the life-world, when entering the system, has to be *simplified* in order to circulate therein – because the system, as the explicitation of aspects of the life-world, always lags behind the life-world in complexity. “Colonization” then means that continual exchange between the life-world and the “system” results in *adaptation of the life-world to the system*, which then leads to the *simplification of human experience and the human mind*. This is my modification or elaboration of Habermas' “colonization thesis” which I have summarized above, and I shall explain it below as the second manner in which rationalization dummifies.

Habermas emphasizes that the differentiation of the (sub)system(s) – the economic and administrative, or “technological production” and “bureaucracies” in Peter Berger's conception<sup>124</sup> – from the life-world does not inevitably lead to these pathologies like dehumanization and reification (grouped under the total phenomenon of *Verdinglichung der Lebenswelt*). Social pathologies result because there has been imbalance in the exchange between the life-world and the system. If balance could be achieved, we

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123 Ibid., p. 457.

124 Again, in *The Homeless Mind*.



would have the ideal of a post-traditional society composed of rational individuals with a sense of civic duty. That is, all the advantages of rationalization and system-formation without their disadvantages. It would be the utopia of our liberal democracy where everybody has reached stage 6 on Kohlberg's moral development scale and is capable of using all the abstract rules, procedures, and laws which govern the system to respect each other's rights and dignities and cooperate with one another. Why has the imbalance occurred? It's the same story with the Internet. The Internet does not inevitably entail dummification. It's because most people are dumb and don't know how to use this powerful instrument to benefit themselves that they end up dumbing themselves down with it. When dumb people use the Internet, they further dumb themselves down. In the same way, the system does not necessarily have to be dummifying. It's quite possible that the bureaucrats, while following rules and procedures to conduct business and reach specified goals, retain the wisdom and intelligence which originally underlie these rules and procedures. It's also possible that, when the system subsumes portions of the life-world by explicating them and regulating them according to rules, procedures, and laws, the explicitation does not lag behind the original portions in complexity. The rationalization process has not happened according to this optimal scenario because most people are dumb and lazy and will not use their brain unless forced to and because American society is always under pressure to McDonaldize – to process more and faster – so that it discourages thinking while we follow rules and encourages maximal simplification when we systematize portions of the life-world. What has happened in American society is that, to increase efficiency, the rules and procedures laid down are also increasingly simplified. McDonaldization becomes the reduction of purposive human action to reach a set goal to an increasingly simple mechanized routine. The mind, when it adapts to such an environment, becomes increasingly restricted in its capability to following simple routines – without any ability to understand anything.

Many commentators have decried that, as machines are running an ever greater portion of our lives, our brain atrophies since we need not use it so often as before. This has been a major factor in dummification through digitalization. But few commentators have voiced the concern that, as we systematize our life by developing rules, procedures, and laws to regulate it, our brain will also atrophy. Because American society is the most systematized society in world history, the complaint I once raised is perfectly justified:

These phenomena are facets of a single tendency of postmodern America: our postmodern life is increasingly shallow, cavalier, and simple – “apish” – under the twin assault of rationalization and digitalization.

17.  
How rationalization leads to dummification  
through partial systematization of the wisdom in the life-world

As noted, the second manner in which dummification results from the systematization of the life-world concerns the impossibility for the system to match up with the life-world in complexity. This form of dummification is most easily demonstrated when it comes to the differentiation of the political sphere from the life-world – such as the differentiation of civil and criminal laws from the social customs and traditions within the life-world. Consider again Habermas' colonization thesis, that *Staatsanwalt*, for

instance, after codifying the understandings achieved in the life-world, becomes independent of it and no longer needs it:

Die Lebenswelt muß so weit rationalisiert sein, daß sittlich neutralisierte Handlungsbereiche mit Hilfe formaler Verfahren der Normsetzung und -begründung legitim geregelt werden können. Die kulturelle Überlieferung muß schon so weit verflüssigt sein, daß legitime Ordnungen traditionsfester dogmatischer Grundlagen entbehren können.<sup>125</sup>

The differentiated system then acts back upon the life-world to colonize it.

Die Rationalisierung der Lebenswelt ermöglicht die Umpolung der gesellschaftlichen Integration auf sprachunabhängige Steuerungsmedien und damit eine Ausgliederung formal organisierter Handlungsbereiche, die nun ihrerseits als versachlichte Realität auf die Zusammenhänge kommunikativen Handelns zurückwirken, der marginalisierten Lebenswelt eigene Imperative entgegensetzen.<sup>126</sup>

We frequently observe this kind of dummification when social justice activists succeed in persuading the government to make laws to enforce social justice. A form of political correctness is then enforced which however lacks reality. The process is in accord with the “colonization thesis”: (1) insights about social justice (achieved in the life-world) become encoded in the system; (2) the system becomes the sole dispenser of social justice and imposes it on all of us (in our life-world context) while the original insights (achieved in the life-world) become lost because the codification fails to match up with what it has attempted to encode in complexity. This dummification process then continues consistent with (r). When the next generation is at least as intelligent as the previous generation, the life-world with its wisdom and insights can be properly reproduced. When the next generation is however dumber due to adaptation to the laws enforcing social justice, the life-world will be imperfectly reproduced.

Let's examine how this works. When the bureaucrats or social justice activists systematize portions of the life-world, they assume that the rules, procedures, and laws which result could comprehensively represent the original life-world reality. And yet they simply do not. The underlying problem is that the life-world is composed of a seemingly inexhaustible fountain of intuitive and implicit knowledge. As Habermas has explained:

Der Modus des Vorverständnisses oder der intuitiven Kenntnis der Lebenswelt, aus der heraus wir zusammen leben, miteinander handeln und reden, kontrastiert... eigentümlich mit der Art des expliziten Wissen von Etwas. Das Horizontwissen, das die kommunikativen Alltagspraxis *unausgesprochen* trägt, ist paradigmatisch für die Gewißheit, mit der der lebensweltliche Hintergrund präsent ist; und doch genügt es nicht dem Kriterium eines *Wissen*, welches in einer internen Beziehung zu Geltungsansprüchen steht und deshalb kritisiert werden kann... Erst unter den Situationsdruck eines auf uns zukommenden Problems werden relevante Bestandteile eines solchen Hintergrundwissens aus dem Modus

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<sup>125</sup> *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*, II, p. 470.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*

der fraglosen Vertrautheit herausgerissen und als etwas der *Vergewisserung* Bedürftiges zu Bewußtsein gebracht. Erst ein Erdbeben macht uns darauf aufmerksam, daß wir den Boden, auf dem wir täglich stehen und gehen, für unerschütterlich gehalten hatten. Auch in solchen Situationen wird uns ein kleiner Ausschnitt des Hintergrundwissens ungewiß, aus seiner Einschließung in komplexe Überlieferungen, solidarische Beziehungen und Kompetenzen herausgelöst. Das Hintergrundwissen wird, wenn ein objektiver Anlaß gegeben ist, uns über eine problematisch gewordene Situation zu verständigen, nur Stück für Stück in explizites Wissen transformiert.<sup>127</sup>

A famous American dictum can serve as an illustration for the problem with rationalization which Habermas is talking about here: “I know it when I see it.” Namely, “I know it is pornography or obscenity when I see it, although I can't define it for you beforehand.” The phrase was famously used in 1964 by United States Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart to describe his threshold test for obscenity in *Jacobellis v. Ohio*.<sup>128</sup> In explaining why the material at issue in the case was not obscene under the Roth test, and therefore was protected speech that could not be censored, Stewart wrote:

I shall not today attempt further to define the kinds of material I understand to be embraced within that shorthand description [“hard-core pornography”], and perhaps I could never succeed in intelligibly doing so. But I know it when I see it, and the motion picture involved in this case is not that.

Judge Stewart, along with everybody else in American society, can identify what is pornography and so on by appealing to the *Horizontwissen* common to all members of society, but which is however never explicitly formulated in words. This intuitive know-how about what constitutes pornography and obscenity is located in our life-world. To explicitly formulate in words the portions of this *Horizontwissen* which regard pornography and art – to rationalize this portion of the life-world, or to differentiate it as part of the “system” – is however an enormous undertaking which judge Stewart was not interested in conducting in this case. He thus appealed to his “gut feeling” or “intuition”, i.e. the *Horizontwissen* or the implicit background knowledge which constitutes the life-world and which everyone possesses in any case. Nevertheless, laws do not function by appeals to subjective “gut feeling” or “intuition” but can only operate according to objectively defined parameters. Namely, this is a case where “the background knowledge must be transformed into explicit knowledge piece by piece.” When we attempt to do so, however, we find the task impossible because the background knowledge is so much more complex than words can describe. Even today, American federal and state courts have never fully explicitated what exactly counts as “obscenity” due to the impossibility of formulating in words what one merely knows as “gut feeling”<sup>129</sup>. Whenever legislators, lawyers, or activists attempt to pass a new crime bill to lend protection to a new group of victims, e.g. the anti-human trafficking bill,

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid., II, p 589.

<sup>128</sup> See, for example, Donald E. Nawi, “I know it when I see it”, *The New York Times*, 8 April 2001.

<sup>129</sup> And so Wex: “Currently, obscenity is evaluated by federal and state courts alike using a tripartite standard established by *Miller v. California* 413 U.S. 15 (1973). The Miller test for obscenity includes the following criteria: (1) whether ‘the average person, applying contemporary community standards’ would find that the work, ‘taken as a whole,’ appeals to ‘prurient interest’; (2) whether the work depicts or describes, in a patently offensive way, sexual conduct specifically defined by the applicable state law; and (3) whether the work, ‘taken as a whole,’ lacks serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value.”

they will have to engage themselves in the laborious work of transforming what they intuitively know about “human trafficking” by virtue of their immersion in the life-world and the background knowledge which governs it, into explicit knowledge which constitutes the legal code. (This is part of the “rationalization process” as has been previously defined: to make an explicit and precise representation of what is formerly only vaguely intuited.) When this is done, however, people will often discover that the explicit knowledge which has been encoded in the law is no more than an inadequate simplification of the original background knowledge. When the inadequate and simplified representation is imposed back upon the life-world (“wenn sittlich neutralisierte Handlungsbereiche mit Hilfe formaler Verfahren der Normsetzung und -begründung legitim geregelt werden”), people will either feel alienated from the law – or from the domain of life-world which has thus been systematized and colonized by, or subsumed within, society's subsystems – or become dummed by it.

We may consider two examples here. A 25 year-old attractive female teacher seduces her 16 year-old student and is prosecuted for sex with minor and therefore has to register herself as a “sex-offender” who is ideally (not necessarily actually) regarded just as dangerous as a serial rapist who has had to register as a sex-offender. This strikes many of us as kind of odd – when we judge the matter from the perspective of the life-world rather than from the perspective of the law. Let us see how the interplay between the systematization of the life-world and the life-world experience itself results in this dilemma. Our experiences with the life-world have taught us that there is a great difference in experience between the female minor who is sexually violated by an adult male and the male minor who is seduced by an adult female. When the legislator formulates the law governing sex with minors, however, s/he has at first translated into explicit codification in the domain of law only a part of this life-world experience, specifically the traumatized experience of the female minor. Traditionally state laws in America only define sex crimes against female minors but not against male minors. Guided by the primordial experience with the life-world, the legislators did not bother to codify seduction by adult females of male minors. When women's movement began to exert effect on American society and people began demanding equality between the sexes, the legislators must respond by codifying the life-world notion of “equality” into explicit formulation in the domain of laws. This caused a change in the law regarding sex with minors. The legislator now cannot simply codify our life-world intuition about the gender difference in sexual experience because it will then conflict with the category “equality” already codified within the system. If the legislator takes into account the experience of the life-world and codify into law differential treatment regarding male and female offenders (where female offenders are less punished), people will express outrage at the inequality. This has in fact frequently happened. Thus, within the last thirty years, all states have eliminated from laws language that solely protected women and replaced this language with gender-neutral phrasing in statutes that allows women to be prosecuted for statutory rape as well. This can be regarded as successful attempts to systematize “equality” together with the life-world experiences of sex-offenses resulting in abstractions that bear little resemblance to the original life-world experiences – an impoverished (*verarmte*) representation, or *distortion*, of the life-world. In practice, judges are still influenced by their life-world experience and usually sentence female offenders in cases of sex with minors to lesser jail time than they do male offenders. Commentators then protest against the inequality of treatment.<sup>130</sup> The judges are then

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130 Examples: Amanda Cairns, “Hot For Teacher: Gender Bias in Sentencing of Teachers That Have Sex with Their Students”, *Campbell Law Observer*, 2 October, 2012: <http://campbelllawobserver.com/hot-for-teacher-gender-bias-in-sentencing-of-teachers-that-have-sex-with-their-students/>; Julia Hislop, “Female Sex Offenders Are Often Overlooked”,

pressured to enforce an impoverished and distortive representation of the life-world where gender differences in sexual experiences which exist in the life-world are completely eradicated within the system. In this case, therefore, it is the category of “equality” which has been driving a uniform systematization of the life-world at the expense of the original richness of the life-world experience. People are complaining about, e.g. sentencing disparities between male and female sex offenders against minors because they have in mind a notion of “equality” which they have inherited from the system of laws but which is merely an impoverished codification of the life-world experiences about what it means to be equal.

This is what I mean when I claim that Habermas' “colonization thesis” explains my “dummification thesis” (dummification due to rationalization). We have a certain intuitive, unspoken, understanding of “equality” according to our *Horizontwissen* in the life-world. This “equality” is a complex matter in the life-world: it is equal treatment for men and women in domains where men and women are equal in capacity but does not deny the existence of other domains where men and women are biologically structured differently and therefore should not be treated equally. When activists have persuaded the legislators to codify “equality” into law in order to enforce it through the system rather than leaving it to our whims in the life-world, the latter could only formulate portions of the life-world understanding of “equality” into explicit representation in the domain of law – because we can never exhaust the richness of this very complex notion of “equality” between two beings which are only in part equal. We have an intuitive understanding of under what circumstances they should be treated equally and under what circumstances they should not – and yet we can't describe it all with our words. A greater part in the understanding common in communicative actions – a greater part of the unspoken and only implicitly known *Horizontwissen* – is simply un-registered in the *Verrechtlichung*. Thus results the blind enforcement of “equality” which is comical from the perspective of the life-world. In other words, as the *Verrechtlichung*, or codification, is an attempt to systematize a portion of the life-world – to codify it in legal description in order to bring it under regulation in the subsystem “political administration” (*Verwaltungssystem*) – the codification or systematization has turned out to be a highly impoverished version of the life-world: the original life-world is much more complex than the legal description of it. When the system then imposes its impoverished version of “equality” on us in the life-world, we feel alienated by it: the equality between men and women cannot be this *simple* because men and women are different kinds of beings!

The problem is worsened when the next generation has completely forgotten the whole codification process and, growing up within the system's administration of “equality”, no longer remembers the original richer version in the life-world experiences. When they witness judges being guided by the original, richer, life-world experiences to sentence female offenders in sex with minor cases to lesser jail time, they complain about the violation of the concept of “equality” which is now enforced by the system. They can no longer understand the original complex notion of “equality” which originated in the life-world but take the impoverished version current in the system to be the whole story about the

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*The New York Times*, 21 February, 2013: <https://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2013/02/20/too-many-restrictions-on-sex-offenders-or-too-few/female-sex-offenders-are-often-overlooked>; and Christopher Simmon, “Sentencing Disparities Between Male and Female Teacher Sexual Offenders: Do Males Offenders Receive Harsher Penalties in Arizona?”, Master Thesis at Arizona State University, 2012: [https://repository.asu.edu/attachments/97779/content/tmp/package-bzXXXU/Simmon\\_asu\\_0010N\\_12405.pdf](https://repository.asu.edu/attachments/97779/content/tmp/package-bzXXXU/Simmon_asu_0010N_12405.pdf).

matter. Their understanding has been simplified: they have been dummed by the system. It is in this sense that, when the system absorbs a further portion from the life-world into its systematization and then reintroduces the portion into the life-world, it runs the risk of dumming people.

The second example is going in the opposite direction than the first example. It is widely known that, in domestic violence cases where it is the wife who has beat up the husband, when the police officers arrive they always arrest the husband. There have been researches which indicate that female victimization of their male partners occurs almost with the same frequency as male victimization of their female partners.<sup>131</sup> Such researches are hotly contested by commentators due to their politically incorrect nature – foremost by feminist activists. Just as in the previous case, the original intent of the feminists – to protect women victims – is enforced blindly. The police always arrests the guy in domestic violence cases because the life-world intuition which has originally motivated feminist activists, “women are victims of domestic violence”, is encoded in the law. In this case, the one-sided life-world experience of women has been codified into the system, but the understanding common in communicative actions among men – that many men, in their life-world, also experience physical abuse from their female partners – is unregistered in the law. Just as in the previous case, such situation has engendered protests from men's rights groups – the intrusion of the “system” (law) into the life-world (domestic situations) is experienced by many men to be alienating because the representation in the “system” is an impoverished version of the real situation in the life-world (it only encompasses half of the situations). The legislator is thus forced by the public to assume equality where there is none in the case of sex offense against minors and by feminist activists to deny equality where there should be equality in the case of domestic violence. Note that equality is denied in the second case precisely because the feminists want to enforce equality (to remove male superiority in physical strength). The problem is therefore again that the “equality” that is codified is too simplistic in its representation of empirical reality: just because males are physically stronger and often more aggressive, this doesn't mean that they are always the aggressors in domestic violence cases. Empirical reality is much more complex: the male minor does not stand to an adult female in the same ratio in which a female minor stands to an adult male, and superiority in physical strength does not necessarily translate into propensity toward violence or guarantee victory in fights with a domestic partner. Again, equality between male and female is more complex than treating them equally or by assuming in a fundamentalist manner that one side is by virtue of physical size always disadvantaged in relation to the other side. (The difference between the two examples is therefore that, in the first case, people *are* aware of the real meaning of “equality” on the basis of their life-world experience whereas, in the

131 See Murray A. Straus, “Process Explaining the Concealment and Distortion of Evidence on Gender Symmetry in Partner Violence”, 14 July, 2007. This is a commentary on Gramham-Kevan's “Domestic Violence: Research and Implications for Batterer Programmes in Europe”. On 10 October, 2016, Deutschland Radio Kultur has broadcast a special Sendung on the plight of male victims of domestic violence in Germany: Catalina Schröder, “Du darfst kein Opfer sein' – Wenn Männer unter häuslicher Gewalt leiden”: <http://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/ms-zeitfragen-20161010-hausliche-gewalt-gegen-manner-pdf.media.1af07ea0ec26b6087827902b660a6c43.pdf>. “Während es in Deutschland in den vergangenen Jahrzehnten diverse Studien über Gewalt gegen Frauen gab, gibt es über Gewalt gegen Männer genau eine einzige. Ihre Situation ist also nicht besonders gut erforscht. Die Studie stammt aus dem Jahr 2004 und wurde damals vom Bundesfamilienministerium in Auftrag gegeben. Weil mit 488 Männern die Zahl der Befragten recht klein und wenig repräsentativ war, wurde die Studie oft kritisiert. Ergebnis der Befragung war, dass Männer in ihrer Freizeit und in der Öffentlichkeit am meisten körperliche Gewalt erfahren – beispielsweise durch Prügeleien. Jeder vierte befragte Mann gab aber auch an, in seiner Partnerschaft schon einmal Gewalt erlebt zu haben. Das entspricht genau der Anzahl Frauen, die in Befragungen angeben, Gewalt zu erleben.”

second case, the feminists *aren't* aware of the real meaning of “equality” on the basis of their life-world experience.) And yet if we attempt to explicitate all the nuances we know from our life-world experience instead of being content with the simple black and white picture that has hitherto been encoded into the “system”, we will never get to the end. *Verrechtlichung* cannot match up to *Lebenswelt* in complexity simply because *Lebenswelt* only exists as unspoken *Hintergrund*.<sup>132</sup>

It can of course be objected that, in the second case, it's because feminist activists have a very partial version of the total life-world experiences (they have only had experiences with domestic violence against women) from which they systematize. The danger of systematization nevertheless remains: the next generation will not remember the original life-world experience where males are just as frequently victims in domestic violence cases as females are. The current generation of feminists and activists who oppose the publication of researches on gender equity in domestic violence cases have already forgotten the original, more complex, experience in the life-world. They have grown up within the system's administration of the life-world and come to believe that the simple, black-and-white picture which the system presents is the whole story. They have been dummified.

This is therefore the problem I have been trying to elucidate: social justice is now enforced on the level of the system and has become divorced from the original process in the life-world through which it was arrived at in the first place: the process of communicating with and understanding each other. Because the system operates on a simplified version of the life-world and does not permit argumentation (as enforcement of law excludes bargaining through communicative actions), the social justice that is enforced often becomes social injustice. The systemic version of social justice is “political correctness” – a blind, inflexible, and simplified version of social justice. It will become impossible to correct the errors inherent in “political correctness” (the system's version of social justice) when everything has been codified in laws and human understanding is no longer involved.<sup>133</sup>

When the newer generation adapts to this simplified version perpetrated by the system – especially the next generation – they will have forgotten all the nuances which make up the original life-world version. They have adapted to a simplified version of reality and their mind has consequently become simplified – dummified. They will find themselves unable to speak of, or even conceptualize, many portions of reality – just as a color-deficient eye can only distinguish blue and red but no longer the

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132 Recall that this analysis underlies Hubert Dreyfus' objection to the feasibility of the sort of artificial intelligence project that is based on codifying human intelligence. C. f. his *Being-in-the-World*.

133 As I am writing this, there is this controversy over Betsy DeVos's decision to dismantle Title IX enforcement which the Obama administration has instituted. One of the issues being debated regards the unfortunate fate of male students who were falsely accused of rape or sexual harassment: the lowering of the evidentiary standard under Title IX has made it much easier for female students to ruin a guy by falsely accusing him of rape or sexual harassment. This is another perfect illustrating example for what I have just described: the feminist activists never bothered to encode into Title IX the male students' common life-world experience according to which females often falsely accuse males of sexual misconduct. DeVos' deputy Candice Jackson's controverted comment “It's mostly this: six months after we broke up, she decided that our last night together just wasn't right...” is the sort of male life-world experience which the feminist activists have worked hard to prevent from entering into codification. (I do believe there is much truth in it – hardly an unrealistic, chauvinistic exaggeration.) I generally oppose social justice activists' attempt to codify conflicts in the life-world into the system because (1) the life-world experiences they codify are usually partial in any case and (2) the codification of even complete experiences will end up doing injustice to them. We will always end up with laws that don't seem to correspond to reality.

more nuanced purple in between. This simplified version perpetuated by the system will have by now intruded into the discursive domain of the life-world and completely colonized it. This explains, again, the crystallization, on the political left, of social justice into fundamentalist doctrines. They will never be able to imagine a world in which, for example, a male might become the victim of a female's aggression.<sup>134</sup>

## 18.

### Rationalization as dummification in American mental health system

What has just been described is the general principle governing the deterioration of the human brain under the rationalization process. Now we can see how this principle holds for the concrete situations in the mental health system, the criminal justice system, the education system, and the Homeland Security system – where the quality of work depends intimately on intelligent human beings trying to understand other people and situations. In all three domains we want to determine whether we are witnessing increasingly inaccurate diagnoses and judgments due to (1) the replacement of understanding and wisdom from the life-world by the mindless performance of mechanized routines which systematization has made possible and (2) the enforcement of a rationalized, and yet impoverished, version of reality to the point of forgetting the original, more complex, life-world experiences.

It is in the domain of psychiatry that the corruption peculiar to the American system, “dummification”, is so pronounced that “reality” is practically non-existent in the diagnoses provided by mental health professionals – those who are supposedly “experts” on what is real and what is not have lost all comprehension of reality itself. I have elsewhere described the “McDonaldization of psychiatry” in terms of fossilization of DSM diagnostic criteria into fundamentalist doctrines and their literalist application.<sup>135</sup> The resemblance of that description to the first form of dummification through systematization is clearly evident. The difference is that, over there, I have described the “mechanization” of the expert domain (“psychiatry” here) as a consequence of “fossilization”. The model I have used there is the Romanticist notion of growth, maturity, and decline. It's necessarily the case that, over time, people will forget the meaning of the words they are using (or the ancestors' *experience* embodied in the words they have invented) and will only be able to repeat the same words without understanding. Here I want to describe the same phenomenon in terms of the negative effects of the rationalization process.

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134 The above observation about the problem inherent in rationalization is also important in regard to the solution of an authoritarian, technocratic state which I shall advocate later. Both the late USSR and contemporary China are instances of authoritarian technocratic state and yet USSR was a terrible place according to my goal and contemporary China is only moderately successful. The problem lies in the virtual impossibility to completely translate wisdom from the lifeworld into rationalized procedures of bureaucracy so that any idiot can get the job done simply by following these procedures. Although I will later praise China as having the best system theoretically speaking, in practice China gets merely a “passing” grade because an authoritarian technocratic state does not function to the best degree unless all bureaucrats are highly intelligent and moral (“philosopher”). We will never reach utopia unless, as Plato has known, “philosopher rules”.

135 In my “Political Correctness as Culture Industry and Revolt of the Masses” (2016).



I want to use here a real case history to illustrate how the replacement of wisdom and understanding by mechanical performance of procedures gives rise to psychiatric “experts” who are so dumb as to have entirely lost touch with reality. In the vast literature on espionage I once discovered the curious case of Susan Lindauer (as she has described it in her 2010 autobiographical *Extreme Prejudice*). In the 1990s, Lindauer was recruited by the CIA and the Defense Intelligence Agency as an asset, specifically as a go-between between the CIA on the one hand and the Libyan and Iraqi government on the other in order to unofficially negotiate deals through back-door channels when these two nations were under sanction and had no official relations with the United States. Her work continued after 9/11 attacks and until the US invasion of Iraq. Just prior to the invasion of Iraq, the Iraqi government informed Lindauer that it fully agreed to cooperate with the international community about letting in weapon inspectors and with the United States about 9/11 investigations. The Bush administration, meanwhile, got on TV to lie that Iraq was uncooperative. When Lindauer requested to testify in Congress about what she knew about Iraq's willingness to cooperate in order to lift sanction and avoid being invaded, the authority decided to remove her. The FBI sent an informant to pretend to be a Libyan agent wanting certain documents from her. (A sting operation.) When she provided them the FBI arrested her under the Patriot Act and the Justice Department charged her with “working as an unregistered Iraqi agent”. Then followed her impossible struggle with the Patriot Act – where the evidences for her “crime” were kept secret from her and her attorney and where her own attorney was required to collude with the prosecutor to work for her destruction – and with the abuse of psychiatry in the name of justice – where a stream of psychiatrists, supposed experts on what is reality and what is not, colluded with the government to declare reality “delusion” and non-reality “reality”. The climax came when Lindauer was at last brought before judge Mukasey in federal court and a psychiatrist was called in to offer an assessment of Lindauer. The charge against Lindauer as an “Iraqi agent” hinged on her contacts with Iraqi diplomats in the United Nations, and, yet, when the psychiatrist read Lindauer's testimony about the contacts, he automatically diagnosed her as suffering from “delusion of grandiosity”: “believing that one is possessed of special talents or is engaged in activities of special significance.” He had simply assumed, without ever investigating the matter, that Lindauer had imagined up the whole episode where she worked as a CIA and Defense Intelligence asset. Judge Mukasey was stunned and asked the doctor: “What's your understanding of Ms Lindauer's case? Are you aware that *she is accused by the Justice Department of engaging in these activities?*”

The psychiatrist made a fool out of himself – denying what is real to be real – because, again, he was practicing a literal interpretation of DSM diagnostic criteria: if the patient's declarations match the literal wording of a diagnostic criterion (here: “believing that one is possessed of special talents or is engaged in activities of special significance”), then the patient is diagnosed as suffering the disorder. The psychiatrist's mistake is, again, that he has become oblivious of the fact that underlying the description of the symptom which constitutes the diagnostic criterion is the subjective experience of the patient which is *not* encoded in the diagnostic criterion. While Lindauer's statements (that she was working as CIA and Defense Intelligence Agency asset) bear *superficial* resemblance to those made by a patient suffering delusions of grandiosity, there is an essential difference between her and the true sufferer of delusions when it comes to the underlying subjective experience: i.e. she was merely describing what happened whereas the sufferer of delusions has imagined it all. It is a case of “convergence” between two different things. If somebody who has had experience with dealing with delusional lunatics interacts with Lindauer over a prolonged period of time, he will eventually develop

an impression of the subjective experience underlying her various pronouncements (he will have known her as a person) and recognize the underlying difference between her and the delusional lunatic. The psychiatrist here didn't have a chance to become acquainted with Lindauer's subjective experience – he was required to make a diagnosis in half an hour on the basis of reading her files – and so it was already impossible for him to make a correct diagnosis. What's more, he was no longer even aware that there was such a thing as “subjective experience”, for he had been *trained* to diagnose “delusion of grandiosity” through the simple procedure of *matching* the literal wording of the patient's speech with the literal wording of the diagnostic criterion – trained to forget that human beings have inner experiences and thought-processes. This is why I asserted that psychiatry as such is already dead in America: the psychiatric establishment has already declared that the patient's outward appearance alone constitutes psychiatry as such – the inner reality of the patient which used to be the proper object of psychology has simply vanished from psychiatric discourse, with the result that a psychiatric expert today is *by training* unable to understand human psychology. Now the question is: how did psychiatry arrive at its current impasse?

You can already sense that the two manners, briefly described above, in which rationalization leads to dummification perfectly explain the current degeneration of psychiatry to a bunch of nonsenses. Originally, the psychiatric expert, after dealing with many delusional patients over a long period of time, begins to notice certain patterns emerging. By describing the patterns, he has mastered certain fundamental patterns or templates underlying all human (sick) behavior. This is the precursor to, and earliest forms of, the DSM diagnostic criteria. This is a rationalization process: before, the expert has developed some intuitive understanding of the sick behaviors according to their type. Right now he is systematizing his intuitive understanding into a classification order and is converting his intuitive understanding of each type into an explicit and precise formulation. In the words of Weber, psychiatry is now a *Technik*: “Das einzige Kriterium, an dem sich die im weitesten Sinne 'technische' Rationalisierung bemißt, ist die Regelhaftigkeit eines reproduzierbaren Verhaltens, auf das sich andere berechnend einstellen können...”<sup>136</sup> His original intuitive understanding counts as “wisdom” from the life-world; and he has arrived at it through *communicative actions* – by trying to understand, and make himself understood by, his patients. It is wisdom because, back in the old days, the doctor has more time to interact with his patients, and therefore has opportunities to know them as persons (to understand their subjective experience as well as observing their outward behavior). *Back then, the doctor has time to engage himself in communicative actions.* When he systematizes his intuitive understanding into diagnostic criteria, he has differentiated psychiatric performance as a “system” from its original life-world context. What should again be noted is that, when he has codified his intuitive understanding of his patient's sick behavior into a diagnostic criterion, he has not codified everything he knows. Much of the patient's subjective experience when s/he is suffering delusions, while accessible to the expert as intuitive “know how”, as a *feel* about another human being, during moments of intersubjective communicative actions, has escaped explicitation into a precise criterion. This then opens up the possibility of “convergence”: someone who has been a target of CIA operations and who is talking about it might be indistinguishable according to the literal wording of a diagnostic criterion from a delusional lunatic who has merely imagined up being a target of CIA operations. Nevertheless, this might not pose a problem for the original expert because, having understood the illness beyond the mere description of its symptoms – all that its explicitation and precise formulation has amounted to –

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136 Habermas, *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*, I, p. 241.

he soon recognizes that this true target of CIA operations, while speaking the same words as the delusional lunatic does, seems “just a little different” (e.g., s/he is rational and non-dramatic in all his or her comportment). He has wisdom and insights – he can distinguish between (1) the description of a bizarre, but true, experience, (2) incorrect judgment, and (3) “true” delusion – because he understands the meaning embodied in the diagnostic criterion he has devised rather than simply being familiar with its literal wording. While operating in the realm of the “system”, he has *not* forgotten about the insights and wisdom from the life-world which have not been completely encoded in the explicit and precise formulations in the system. He has *experience*. This is the psychiatric “tradition”, or “wisdom” which the “ancestors” have accumulated through sheer experience and which it is the duty of the later generations to do more than simply memorize and repeat verbatim.

The first principle by which rationalization or systematization leads to dummification dictates that the later generations precisely cannot do more than simply memorize the literal wording of diagnostic criteria. As noted, by systematizing his intuitive understanding of psychotic illnesses into explicit and precise diagnostic criteria in order to enable the next generation of doctors to have an easier time in diagnosing – *in order to enable them to become more efficient* – the psychiatric ancestor has also laid the foundation for their dummification. The next generation can use the criteria to diagnose without any understanding of the illness itself, simply by robotically (e.g. without thinking) following the diagnostic procedure – by check-listing symptoms or by matching the literal wording of the patient's speech (e.g. “The CIA is going after me”) with the literal wording of the diagnostic criterion. Gradually, the doctors of the later generations will forget the ancestor's *experience* altogether – the intuitive know-how which has enabled him to notice, during intersubjective situations, that there is something wrong with one person and nothing wrong with another no matter what they say on the surface – and come to believe that all that psychiatry is about is to memorize diagnostic criteria so that when the patient says “The US government is going after me” they will know with which diagnostic category they are supposed to match his words. As for a psychiatrist of the new generation, if s/he doesn't know who Julian Assange is, when Julian Assange shows up and says “The US government is going after me”, s/he will certainly diagnose him as suffering from persecutory delusions. Thus you see the cause for the psychiatrist's blunder in the case of Susan Lindauer.

You now see that the cause for such bizarre mis-diagnosis is that the “know-how” wisdom and insights from the life-world, which are only superficially and incompletely encoded (systematized) in the DSM diagnostic criteria, have been completely forgotten in the psychiatric tradition – they are not even known to exist anymore. In ancient time psychiatry was about communicative action; today it is purely strategic action: it's about following procedures, check-listing symptoms, and word-matching rather than about understanding and being understood by another human being. The McDonaldization of psychiatry – the pressure to process more patients in lesser time – is both the cause and the consequence of this. There is no longer enough time for the doctor to know the patient as a person; s/he is forced to check-list and match words without thinking – practice literal interpretation and application of DSM diagnostic criteria – in order to hand out a diagnosis within 5 minutes. It is part of the hallowing-out of American society where the “system” has to process more consumers, more patients, and more prisoners in ever shorter time in order to maximize profit or maximally save cost – in the process sacrificing all substance and quality. As the newer generations of doctors consequently forget that it is by knowing the patient during intersubjective communication that they can render a correct

diagnosis – as they come to believe the business of psychiatry consists simply in “matching words” and “check-listing symptoms” – they become very “dumb” in the sense that, although they are validated by society's institutions as “experts” in human psychology and psychopathology, they actually have *no* understanding of psychology and psychopathology. When they treat patients, they only *look like* they are treating patients. They have become like an unintelligent software following rules but unable to make any real judgments, for example, Edexcel:

How, I wondered, would the Edexcel software discern those rare students who break from the conventions of writing not because they are incompetent but because they have a special spark of brilliance? I knew the answer: it wouldn't. Computers, as Joseph Weizenbaum pointed out, follow rules; they don't make judgments. In place of subjectivity, they give us formula. The story revealed just how prescient Weizenbaum had been when, decades ago, he warned that as we grow more accustomed to and dependent on our computers we will be tempted to entrust to them “tasks that demand wisdom”.<sup>137</sup>

The worst thing is that, when the new generation of doctors becomes teachers themselves to educate the next generation, they teach the next generation to do exactly what they have been doing themselves: simply memorizing the literal wording of DSM diagnostic criteria in order to be able to check-list and match words without comprehension of their meaning (since it has been forgotten that words actually have meaning behind them). Education and license examination thus increasingly emphasize only the memorization of words and categories to the exclusion of understanding what they mean. There has occurred a complete mechanization (“going through the motion” in popular parlance) in the mental health profession – which rationalization always encourages in the end. Again, this has enabled people of mediocre intelligence who never understand anything about human psychology – who have no such talents – to succeed in examination and join this expert field: just memorize words and repeat them on examination.<sup>138</sup> There has occurred a decline of psychiatric education as well. The experience with the subjective experience of the delusional patient is no longer transmitted in psychiatric education. By now, all psychiatrists misunderstand the nature of “delusion” – or have a very shallow understanding of it: they think it means only the expression of certain words, like “People are going after me” or “The authority is spying on me”, which are merely the most superficial aspect of delusional disorder. American psychiatry today is thus completely dead in the sense that all substance – intelligence and wisdom – has been drained out leaving behind an empty set of rationalized procedures.

It can thus be seen not only that rationalization embodies inherently the danger of dummification but also that, in many social domains such as in the mental health profession, McDonaldization is only possible on the basis of rationalization – as a form of dummification through rationalization – so that we cannot arrive at a complete description of McDonaldization without having understood how rationalization can dummify. Meanwhile, it can also be seen that this rationalization and McDonaldization have resulted in the reification (*Verdinglichung*) of the patient in Lukács' sense. Since the judgment as to whether a patient is delusional or not is made purely by reference to his or her audible words and visible behavior without consideration for the subjective experience behind these words and behavior – since the subjective experience is considered to be non-existent – the patient is

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137 Nicholas Carr, *The Shallow*, p. 223 – 224.

138 Recall my earlier comments in “How mass participation has destroyed the mental health system in the US”.

understood on the model of “object” of empirical reality – any object that can be seen, touched, and manipulated and which possesses no inner reality of thoughts and feelings. *Warenform*. The erosion of communicative action and its replacement by strategic action in psychiatry thus entail experience of dehumanization on the part of the patient. In the case of Lindauer, all her experience in working as an intelligence asset (her human experience) was simply ignored by the doctor, who saw her only as a machine which had gone awry due to internal “chemical imbalance”. This is of course the typical *Verdinglichungskritik*. Little has however been said about how *dumb* the doctor would have to become – how little they would have to understand human psychology – in order to believe that this dehumanizing conception of what a human being is actually corresponds to reality.

The reader is asked here to carefully distinguish this critique of American psychiatry from the typical “anti-psychiatry” critique – from the earliest work of Thomas Szasz, David Copper, and R. D. Laing to the recent works of John Mirowsky, Bonnie Burstow, Colin Ross, Irving Kirsch, and Joanna Moncrieff. The critique that is current in the anti-psychiatry movement is either that mental illness is merely a construct imposed on reality and does not exist as a disease (Szasz and Mirowsky)<sup>139</sup> or that the biological model (chemical imbalance) on the basis of which the psychiatric profession treats the disease (medication) is a wrong model (Ross)<sup>140</sup> or that medication's effectiveness is a fabricated myth (Kirsch and Moncrieff)<sup>141</sup>. What I'm arguing here is that, even granted that mental illness exists and that earlier generations of psychiatrists have correctly diagnosed them, the later generations can no longer diagnose them. I'm pointing out the decline – dummification – of American psychiatry by its own standard. What I have in common with the anti-psychiatry movement is the conviction that the whole corruption of the psychiatric profession is encouraged and perpetuated by the pharmaceutical industry for the sake of profits. While the anti-psychiatry psychiatrist like Colin Ross has pointed out that the psychiatric establishment has perpetuated the “biological model” (that mental illnesses are medical diseases caused by imbalances of neurotransmitters in the brain) in order to help pharmaceutical companies sell more drugs, I argue that the ultimate purpose of psychiatry's rationalization, while speeding up practices and making the profession accessible to idiots, is also to sell more drugs. Given the rationalized procedure of diagnosis which excludes communicative action, the literal application of diagnostic criteria, the treatment of the patient like a manipulable object – given all this mechanization, each patient can be diagnosed within 5 minutes and given a prescription to enable him or her to treat himself or herself in the comfort of his or her home. Furthermore, more people who are in reality normal can in this way be mis-diagnosed as delusional lunatics (like Lindauer). This is the ultimate goal of rationalization of psychiatry in the service of its McDonaldization: to *create* more patients and process them in an ever shorter time in order to increase the consumption of anti-psychotic drugs and other forms of medication for “mental illnesses”. It's obvious that the pharmaceutical companies are the biggest winner in all this. I thus, despite my difference, share the conclusion of anti-psychiatry movement that American psychiatry is but a big scam perpetuated by the pharmaceutical companies for

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139 As for John Mirowsky, see his article (co-authored with Catherine E. Ross), “Psychiatric Diagnosis as Reified Measurement”, *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 1989, Vol. 30 (March): 11 – 25.

140 See his (together with Alvin Pam et al) *Pseudoscience in Biological Psychiatry*, John Wiley & Sons: New York, 1995.

141 See the two broadcasts by Deutschland Funk: Julia Friedrichs and Thorsten Padberg, “Ähnlich wirksam wie Placebos”, 02.02.2017: [http://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/antidepressiva-aehnlich-wirksam-wie-placebos.976.de.html?dram:article\\_id=377937](http://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/antidepressiva-aehnlich-wirksam-wie-placebos.976.de.html?dram:article_id=377937) and Martin Hubert, “Die Krise der Psychopharmaka”, 02.04.2017: [http://www.deutschlandfunk.de/teufel-und-beelzebub-die-krise-der-psychopharmaka.740.de.html?dram%3Aarticle\\_id=382585](http://www.deutschlandfunk.de/teufel-und-beelzebub-die-krise-der-psychopharmaka.740.de.html?dram%3Aarticle_id=382585).

money. But I'm also making here the original claim – keeping in mind the guiding thread of my McDonaldization thesis: the American “original condition” – that next to the pharmaceutical companies as winners are those mediocre commoners who have no talents for understanding human psychology and human relationships but who are now able to become “psychiatrist” and “psychologist” and claim expertise on what is real and what is not thanks to the rationalization of psychiatry.<sup>142</sup>

In my other writing on the “McDonaldization of psychiatry”<sup>143</sup> I have cited Ray Dorsey and George Ritzer's “The McDonaldization of Medicine” which has described medical establishment's continual reduction of doctor-patient time in favor of doctor-computer time (to perform bureaucratic procedures) as a way to enlarge hospitals' profit margin. *The same erosion of communicative action in medicine*. While the authors have pointed out the decline of the quality of health care which has resulted from such McDonaldization – in the sense that patients have increasingly the feeling of not being properly cared for – it's not clear whether this has also resulted in increasing cases of mis-diagnosis. Medical diagnoses enjoy the advantage that every human body is a machine which functions more or less in the same way – every human body is more or less interchangeable with every other – so that decreasing interaction with the patient – increasing exclusion of communicative action in medicine – might not necessarily constitute a hindrance to the doctor's making a correct judgment about what is wrong with the patient's body. But this is not the case with psychiatry. Decreasing interaction with the patient in psychiatry necessarily results in increasing instances of mis-diagnosis because the mind is much more

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142 Interestingly, soon after I have finished this essay, I came across A. Donald, “The Wal-Marting of American psychiatry: an ethnography of psychiatric practice in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century”, *Culture, Medicine, and Psychiatry*, 2001 Dec. 25(4): 427 – 39. The abstract is worth citing – speaking of the same *Verdinglichung* going on in American psychiatry, but attributing it to the cost-control measures which have been imposed on the profession: “U.S. psychiatry has been radically reorganized by changes in the way the psychiatric hospital, the asylum, is funded. The imposition and internalization of cost control measures are major elements of this reorganization. This paper traces the ways in which cost control methods associated with managed care have produced new ways of organizing and patterning clinical work and clinical knowledge.... This paper argues that the widespread adoption of Quality Assurance and Utilization Management procedures has created new standards of evaluation and treatment. These standards grow out of a transition from a person-centered to a population-based data base. They are justified by a conviction on the part of managed care proponents that good clinical treatment is equivalent to efficient cost control. This epistemological change results in the development of *a clinical knowledge patterned along algorithmic pathways rather than subjective understanding*. An increased and more rapid rationalization of psychiatry is the result. This rationalization process has produced moral dilemmas for practicing clinicians as they struggle to redefine their professional purposes and identities within a new order” (emphasis added). I have not mentioned anything about the cost-control problem with which American psychiatry is faced. I then also came across the description of the battle to reform Chinese literature in early twentieth century where the reformers' complaint about the classical style bears striking resemblance to my complaint about America's psychiatric profession. This is recorded in Sima Changfeng's *The History of New Chinese Literature* (1976: 司馬長風, 中國新文學史). Hu Shih (胡適) had criticized, back in 1915, the pre-reform Chinese literature which valued imitating the classical style (which was written in classical Chinese rather than in the vernacular) as “language without substance (meaning)” (有文而无质), “having form but without spirit” (徒有形式而无精神), and “an instrument which has fossilized” (工具僵化了). He then emphasized that the new Chinese literature, written in the vernacular, must be composed of “words which refer to reality” (須言之有物). This is precisely the same complaint which I have raised in regard to the rationalization process and the loss of words' meaning when activists merely repeat politically correct slogans without understanding the underlying experiences which have originally motivated the production of these words and without checking reality to make sure the words on their mouth actually correlate to the external reality. Finding parallel in the history of Chinese literature demonstrates my point that America is today entering its dying phase just as China was at the end of nineteenth century.

143 “Political Correctness as Culture Industry and Revolt of the Masses”.

complex and each individual human person is quite unique – even if, in the end, all human personalities can be group into a small number of “types”. Here “convergence” is a real possibility, unlike in medicine. It takes time for a doctor to become sure what “type” his patient is in terms of diagnostic criteria – it takes time for him or her to avoid mistakes through “convergence”.

19.

Rationalization as dummification  
in American criminal justice system

Now let's consider whether the same principles have been operative in America's criminal justice system – whether the McDonaldization of the criminal justice system can be described in the same way. The criminal justice system is comprised of policing (or the law enforcement system), the court system, and the correctional system. That the American criminal justice system is increasingly corrupt since the 1970s in the sense of increasing McDonaldization has already been commented upon by many scholars in the United States who were inspired by George Ritzer. For my study here I have consulted Matthew Robinson's “McDonaldization of America's Police, Courts, and Corrections”;<sup>144</sup> Melissa Hamilton's “McSentencing: Mass Federal Sentencing and the Law of Unintended Consequences”;<sup>145</sup> Robert Bohm's “‘McJustice’: On the McDonaldization of Criminal Justice”;<sup>146</sup> and a small piece by Matthew DeMichele, “The ‘McDonaldization’ of Justice”.<sup>147</sup> Another piece, Richard Heslop's “The British Police Service: Professionalization or McDonaldization”,<sup>148</sup> may also be of relevance for the study of the American situation. The nature of the increasing corruption of the American criminal justice system in *my* sense of McDonaldization is succinctly summarized by DeMichele:

The U.S. incarcerates more people than any Western democracy. Our incarceration rates are roughly seven to ten times larger than other similar countries. In fact, we have an incarceration rate over 700 per 100,000 adults, whereas Australia, Canada, and Germany have rates between 90 and 150 per 100,000 in the population. Strangely, the incarceration rate in the U.S. remained around 120 per 100,000 from 1925 to 1974. Then, something happened to cause a drastic change to how we punish. No longer were law breakers to be rehabilitated or reintegrated into society. No longer were criminal justice officials expected to find ways to alleviate incarceration. Instead, the criminal justice system focused on efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and managerialism. And, to some extent, the justice system adopted the mentality of fast-food restaurants *in which quality goes out the window, and quantity takes over.*

Some years ago I began studying why the U.S. incarcerates so many more people compared to other countries and why we lock-up so many more now than in the past. Ironically, I was surprised to find that crime [rate] had not increased during this time, but

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144 In Ritzer, ed., *McDonaldization: The Reader*, p. 85.

145 *Cordozo Law Review*, Vol. 35:2199.

146 *Justice Quarterly*, Vol. 23, No. 1, March 2006, p. 127 – 146.

147 At *Juvenile in Justice*, 5 November 2012: <http://www.juvenile-in-justice.com/mcdonaldizationofjustice>.

148 *International Journal of Police Science and Management*, Vol. 13 No. 4, 2011, p. 312 – 321.

rather decreased.<sup>149</sup>

A description of the rationalization process and the McDonaldization which it enables is meant to provide an explanation as to *how* the system learns to process the sudden increase of volume within the same amount of time (or even in less amount of time). It does not explain *why* the volume of work is suddenly increased. I have explained the increased volume in the domains of market and political administration by appealing to the “original American principle”: the need to recruit *everyone*, empower *everyone*, in order to maximize profits or garner the greatest number of votes. In the previous section on America's mental health system, I again explained the increased volume by appealing to the desire to increase profits: the pharmaceutical companies want more people to be (mis-)diagnosed as mentally ill in order to derive more profits. This, however, is only part of the reason.

When we move away from the market and political administration and come to an examination of America's mental hospitals and prison system, we see a deeper reason for the increased volume, which is the fact that American society is becoming a “disposal society” – it is under pressure to dispose of an increasing number of people in “trash cans”. Not by exterminating them, but to dispose of them in a way that they may continue as consumers. I have in my previous works commented on the sociological condition which has prompted American society to dispose of an increasing number of its members – which thus explains this most significant development, commented upon by DeMichele, within the American criminal justice system: under continual globalization, as manufacturing capacities moved out of the United States, American society was transforming into a service economy while at the same time having to absorb an astronomical amount of cheap consumer products which foreign (chiefly Asian) enterprises had dumped into it. Uneducated males were the biggest victims of this process since women were especially suited to the service industry (with their orientation toward caring and servicing) and so entered the work force in large numbers while manufacturing jobs to which these poor men were formerly suited had all disappeared. The society has thus come under pressure to dispose of these male laborers who have no more place in the new economy – in the prison system. The sudden increase of America's prison population without a corresponding increase of crime rates is thus interpreted as American society's natural defense mechanism against surplus male labor (by wasting extraneous males away in prison houses). At the same time, American society needs to mobilize everybody to consume the excess consumer products dumped on them. The result is the emergence of a society organized around “wasting”: as the market place becomes increasingly competitive under the pressure of globalization, an increasingly larger number of people are excluded from the resulting high-tech service economy which demands increasing qualification for entry; the growing “disenfranchised” are nevertheless valued as “consumers”, possessed of the important capacity for absorbing the excess consumer products – as people with disability, as (real and mis-diagnosed) mental patients, and as prison inmates. The “disposal society” means a society with a large population which seems to have no particular function – except as “consumers”. The “disposal society” is under pressure to diagnose an increasing number of people as “mentally ill” and label an increasing number of men as “dangerous” and dispose of them in prisons. American society needs to waste them away as excess labor power, while they themselves are still important in being able to waste away the excess consumer products.<sup>150</sup>

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149 DeMichele, *ibid.*, emphasis added.

150 Because wasting people away is America's underlying principle, it is the ultimate goal on both the left and the right of the political spectrum, although the left and the right would like to dispose of (usually) men for different reasons. The



The foundational cause for McDonaldization, according to my thinking in this essay, is thus not simply the American original condition (to recruit everyone in order to maximize profits) but also the American *current* condition: we are too plentiful, too full, that we must dump away a lot. In the one case the increased volume is for the sake of gaining profits; in the other the increased volume is for the sake of greater capacity for trash disposal. But there is more.

While the growth of mental health community (the community of “mental patients”, real or fake) has two reasons – profits and disposal of excess – the growth of prison population might also have a second reason as well. As life becomes increasingly comfortable in the United States due to the flowering of the consumer culture, people's ability to tolerate unpleasant experiences has tremendously declined. I have already mentioned this: the people have been “spoiled”. They think of themselves as so important that they will not tolerate any sort of inconvenience and harm. There is thus more punishment in society not because crime rate has increased, but because more and more formerly tolerated behaviors are now punished as “criminal”. This means that people are growing increasingly intolerant not only toward crimes, but toward any sort of disorders in general. This explains why the mood of the public has shifted increasingly toward punishing criminals and away from rehabilitation (the increasing emphasis on “crime control”) and why a tremendous increase in prison population consists in the incarceration of offenders who have not hurt anybody, such as drug offenders.<sup>151</sup> The price for intolerance is thus an ever increasing volume of criminals to be processed by the criminal justice system. The enlarged criminal justice system then perpetuates its enlargement: as people regard themselves as ever more important, they become increasingly intolerant of the slightest disorders. They are hysterical about potential dangers and any sort of disorders on the street, and constantly demand the enlargement of the law enforcement body. The extra number of police officers on the street, having no real crimes to occupy their time because of the decrease of crime rate, learn to arrest people for the tiniest offenses, thus contributing to the continual growth of the prison population. With excessive resources at their disposal, law enforcement agencies often actively *create* criminals to occupy themselves through unnecessary sting operations on dupes who otherwise will never develop connections with crimes (for example, FBI's controversial entrapment programs to create “terrorists” out of mentally deficient poor people).<sup>152</sup> The system, under such pressure, must McDonaldize to deal with the increased volume. The result is also an increasing concern with quantity and speed at the expense of quality just as in other domains of society. That is to say, a tremendous deterioration of the system's accuracy, which is correlated with the overall erosion of constitutional guarantees and due

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neoconservatives on the right would like to dispose of as many innocent men as possible as terrorists – hence the Guantanamo Bay and the FBI's controversial entrapment program where men who have nothing particular to do with terrorism are made into terrorists and locked up – while the feminists on the political left would like to weaken due process procedures in order to enable innocent men to be easily falsely accused, and convicted, of rape and dumped away in jail as rapists. Although the neocons and the feminists hate each other, what they have in common is this desire to waste away extra male labor power.

151 And so Robinson explains, “Since the early 1970s, there has been approximately a 6 % increase each year in imprisonment, although this has slowed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century...” (ibid., p. 92).

152 Citing Brad Heath, Melissa Hamilton characterizes: “Investigators’ discretion is also evident in the recently adopted and now frequent tactic of sting operations, which constitutes ‘the latest and perhaps clearest reflection of a broad shift by federal law enforcement away from solving crimes in favor of investigating people the government thinks are criminals.’” (Ibid., p. 2242.)

process.

Our nation's justice systems face a continual balancing act attempting to achieve both forms of justice. The pendulum shifts back and forth between an emphasis on catching, convicting, and punishing criminals and an emphasis on assuring that Constitutional rights of suspected offenders are protected. This chapter demonstrates that the US criminal justice system has become McDonaldized; the result is that US police, courts, and corrections favor the former conception of justice (crime control) at the expense of the latter (due process).<sup>153</sup>

The purpose of the due process mechanism can be said to be checking against inaccuracy, making sure that the people who are punished are truly guilty. For the most conspicuous consequence of abuse of power is inaccuracy, namely, punishing innocent people for wrongs they have not done. My complaint about American criminal justice system is thus the same as my complaint about American mental health system: wrongful convictions here just as mis-diagnoses there. I have seen no empirical studies demonstrating that the proportion of wrongful convictions in America's criminal justice system has increased since the 1970s – no such studies exist. However, the sudden increase of prison population speaks for such possibility, and the proliferation of innocence projects since the late 1980s – when the introduction of DNA-checking began exonerating a large number of capital crime convicts and seriously eroding public confidence in the accuracy and reliability of a system which everybody has erroneously believed to be the “best in the world” – is an indication of such conclusion.<sup>154</sup> Whereas, before 1990, professionals and laymen alike believe wrongful convictions to be occasional occurrences, there is now a growing awareness in the law domain that errors in conviction might be systemic to the American criminal justice system. Furthermore, when false pleading as a result of plea-bargain is factored into the problem of inaccuracy, the American criminal justice system can certainly be regarded as inaccurate and unreliable in *most* cases. (More on this below.) The claim which I want to demonstrate below is that the supposed erosion of accuracy in the criminal justice system – just as the erosion of accuracy in the mental health system – is a consequence of the general erosion of communicative actions in American society.<sup>155</sup> The corruption in American criminal justice system thus not only refers to the wasteful disposal, into the abyss of the “system”, of an increasingly larger segment of the population for quite minor offenses, but also to the ever lesser degree of justice that is actually dispensed by the “system”.

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153 Robinson, *ibid.*, p. 86 – 87.

154 Richard A. Leo and Jon B. Gould, in their “Studying Wrongful Convictions: Learning From Social Sciences” (*Ohio State Journal of Criminal Law*, Vol 7:7, p. 7 – 30), provide a brief history of studies on wrongful convictions in the United States from early 1900s to the present era before offering their methodological alternative to the dominant narrative model in scholarly studies on wrongful convictions. The National Registry of Exonerations run by the University of Michigan ([law.umich.edu](http://law.umich.edu)) provides nation-wide statistics on exoneration since 1989.

155 Thus, of all the causes usually cited in the studies on wrongful convictions – eyewitness misidentification, false confessions, informant perjury, junk science, police and prosecutorial error, incompetence of defense lawyers, and racism – my complaint concerns especially the last four. Given that everybody is getting dumber and dumber in postmodern society, however, we can of course also expect eyewitness misidentification to increase in frequency. Since when do ordinary dumb people qualify as reliable witnesses? No wonder that eyewitness misidentification is the leading cause of wrongful convictions. See Jeffrey Mark Deskovic, “Wrongful Convictions: Systemic Causes and Suggested Remedies” (Master Thesis for John Jay College of Criminal Justice of the City University of New York, 2012).

My question is thus whether the increasing inaccuracy of the criminal justice system is inherent in the rationalization process introduced to speed up (to McDonaldize) the system in order to accommodate the increased case load –whether it is the case that rationalization of procedures creates inaccuracy by excluding communicative actions just as has been described in the mental health system. Any commentator, even though not insightful enough to be able to pinpoint the exact problem, is able to notice that something is at work in the criminal justice system which is just like how rationalization principles have been leading to dummification in the domain of psychiatry:

Much like workers in the fast food industry, workers in criminal justice agencies are trained *not to think and question but to simply operate in a preordained way*. Police officers act in ways consistent with the values of their subculture, members of the courtroom workgroup act in ways consistent with the norms of the court, and courtroom personnel, correctional officers, and parole and probation officers are constrained by large numbers of caseloads. This is McDonaldization at its finest.<sup>156</sup>

And:

American law represents, in the lexicon of prominent sociologist and lawyer Max Weber, a bureaucratization of formal rationality in modern society. Legal decisions are driven by reliance upon abstract, universal, and systematized rules and laws. Yet, while Weber contemplated that this type of bureaucratization of formal rationality in the law engendered certain benefits, such as precision, efficiency, consistency, and continuity, it is also deeply depersonalizing. The ideology of the “McDonaldization of society” borrows from Weber’s thesis.<sup>157</sup>

Commentators like Melissa Hamilton and Robert Bohm have noticed that modern criminal justice system is designed on the basis of rationalization – it is part of the rationalization process that characterizes the onset of modernity since Enlightenment. They are concerned with the continual trend of rationalization – that the criminal justice system is now McDonaldizing – mainly because it is “dehumanizing”, i.e. they have at the very least complained about the increasing exclusion of communicative actions from the criminal justice system. In this sense they are “traditional” in the critical theory domain (i.e. as if uttering a version of *Verdinglichungskritik*). They are not cognizant of the more serious problem I’m concerned with, i.e. as the system operates ever faster and becomes ever more cavalier, its personnel is increasingly unable not only to understand the defendant and his situation but also to issue a correct judgment to punish, or exonerate, him. That is to say, the usual commentators could not pinpoint the real harm which rationalization, and McDonaldization, have caused. Secondly, these commentators have completely erred, in my view, in comprehending the *nature* of the McDonaldization of the criminal justice system – which consists, according to my own McDonaldization thesis, simply in the increasing mechanization of the criminal justice process to speed up the processing of defendants. All the usual commentators unnecessarily complicate the matter by trying to discover within the criminal Justice system the four characteristics which George Ritzer has laid down to define McDonaldization: predictability, efficiency, calculability, and control – when, in

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156 Robinson, *ibid.*, p. 99, emphasis added.

157 Hamilton, *ibid.*

my view, only efficiency is the characteristic that matters.

This is how, in my view, continual rationalization, and eventual McDonaldization, have led to dummification in the American criminal justice system. In early 1980s, just when American prison population began sky-rocketing, the criminal justice system was going through a new phase of rationalization under the disguise of “federal sentencing reforms”. Hamilton explains:

The legal subject of this study is federal sentencing reforms. In the federal criminal justice system, district judges are the terminal deciders of the definitive sentences issued in individual cases. As thousands of district judges around the country determine sentences, however, consistency is uncertain. In the 1980s, critics charged that the judiciary retained too much discretion and that the result was unwarranted disparities in sentencing, even potential racial discrimination. Convinced that changes were warranted, Congress enacted certain legal reforms with the intent of achieving *greater uniformity*. These reforms principally operated by limiting judicial discretion in meting out punishments to convicted offenders. Today, in place of discretion is a *systemized process of specific and uniform guidelines* that direct sentencing outcomes through a series of computations based on discrete quantifications of harm. We now have almost thirty years of experience with these sentencing reforms. The principles of McDonaldization and its corollary of the law of unintended consequences appear well suited to examine and explain the reforms’ impact on federal sentencing.

This Article argues the plethora of controls instituted to closely direct sentencing processes and restrain judicial discretion represents a *commodification of punishments* in which the products – i.e., sentences – are meticulously constructed through a sort of assembly-line justice. The products are sequentially created by Congress, a sentencing commission, prosecutors, probation officers, and then handed to judges for the final touches. Hence, I use the rhetorical moniker of “McSentencing” to represent the *mechanized* system that federal sentencing reforms appear designed to achieve. As this Article will outline, McSentencing most assuredly will confront the law of unintended consequences. Founded upon expectations that an *automated* style of sentencing outcomes would lead to an idealized *uniformity*, the reforms have unfortunately led to a sentencing system recently described by a Department of Justice official as “continu[ing] to fragment” and besought with “visible, widespread, and unwarranted sentencing disparities.” The federal sentencing system is in crisis.<sup>158</sup>

The added emphasis is meant to underline the fundamental character of Hamilton's critique, i.e. a typical *Verdinglichungskritik*. Although Hamilton does not say so, the commodification of punishments at which the federal sentencing reform aims, insofar as it is meant to reduce the discretionary power of individual judges, results in the reduction of communicative actions in the court room. The judge is discouraged from trying to understand the defendant and his situation while devising a most suitable punishment. Again, Hamilton makes no mention of the real problem – that accuracy is sacrificed in determining guilt and assigning punishment when communicative action is discouraged in favor of an

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158 Hamilton, *ibid.*, emphasis added.

automated determination process based on check-listing of objective characteristics: exactly like how diagnoses are made in the psychiatric domain today – but goes on trying to interpret various characteristics of the new automated procedure as manifesting “predictability”, “efficiency”, “calculability”, and “control”. Rather senseless.

The real purpose of the new phase of rationalization clearly indicates that efficiency is the name of the game here. It's no accident that the “reform” started in 1980s – when American society had just begun disposing of an extra proportion of its population in the prison system. The main purpose of increased automation (mechanistic functioning) is to streamline the process in order to process an increased volume in shorter time. *That*, again, is the real meaning of “McDonaldization”. Communicative action is discouraged because understanding people costs too much time. Just as in psychiatry, “check-listing” saves time and so is ideally suited to processing a large volume. The American love for rationalization – which, rather than the concern with discrimination, constitutes the true motive for sentencing reform – is ultimately rooted in Americans' perennial need to deal with large quantity. Quantity is the kernel both in the American *original* condition and the American *current* condition. When efficiency is recognized as the key to the new phase of rationalization, we see that automation is but one of the two means employed when the system is faced with the necessity to process an increased quantity. The other means is plea-bargain. (There are other minor means, such as “fast-track sentencing”.) While Hamilton recognizes in her article the increasing prominence of plea-bargaining in the criminal justice procedures,<sup>159</sup> Bohm is more sensitive to this aspect: plea-bargaining is on the ascendancy given the primary importance of efficiency (i.e. processing a larger quantity in shorter time). Both commentators have however failed to describe the quintessential character of American criminal justice system – sacrificing quality in favor of quantity – by being bogged down in trying to make predictability, calculability, and control out of the assembly line process and bargaining scenes which have now dominated the American criminal justice system.

With the exception that both Hamilton and Bohm recognize the decline of accuracy in judgment in relation to increasing use of plea-bargaining. Namely, too many defendants have been encouraged to plead “no-contest” to crimes they have not committed or to a different crime than they have actually committed. This, however, is only too obvious.<sup>160</sup> Resolution through plea-bargaining in the *majority* of cases only indicates all too well how little interest the American criminal justice system has in finding out the truth – whether the defendant really did commit the crime in question and whether the punishment assigned corresponds to the crime committed. Its primary interest lies in *processing* – because its real purpose is to dispose of elements extraneous to society in “trash cans”.

Plea-bargaining aside, has the increasing rationalization of procedures encouraged inaccuracy in the determination of guilt in the past three decades? Again, there are no formal statistics on this matter, although the alarming rate at which death row inmates have been exonerated by private humanitarian initiatives (all the innocence projects) is an indicator in favor of my suspicion. Walking into the court

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159 Hamilton, *ibid.*, p. 2217: “In the federal system, plea bargains have become the focal point of efficiency. Undoubtedly, the system has become increasingly reliant upon avoiding the time and expense of formal trials by incentivizing informal plea arrangements.... The likelihood of a plea is now near perfect. In fiscal year 2013, ninety-seven percent of federal criminal cases were resolved by pleas.”

160 And this is not a problem studied in all the studies on wrongful convictions.

room for too long one inevitably develops the impression that all the lawyers are becoming increasingly cavalier (“lazy”) about their defendants. Adapting to a system which is redesigned to process rather than to understand the defendants, the lawyers have also become both unable to understand and uninterested in understanding the defendant, whether he has really committed the crime in question and how. They just want to get rid of the case as soon as possible while meticulously following rules and procedures. (This is of course more true of public defenders than of private criminal defense lawyers whom the defendant could afford to hire.) The accuracy of judgments rendered can only be expected to decline since the truth about crimes committed can be found out only by human beings' performing communicative actions (talking to the defendant and witnesses and investigating the evidences) rather than by their mindlessly abiding by the system's automated procedures.

Although comprehensive statistics on wrongful convictions are lacking, the decline of accuracy of the criminal justice system is also manifested in what looks like the persistence of racism (and, more problematically, reversed sexism) in the system despite its gradual eradication in the social body. (I'm not simply referring to the frequent complaint that African Americans are tremendously over-represented in the prison population, but also to the less frequently heard complaint that they are also far more likely to be falsely convicted.)<sup>161</sup> That is, just as in my previous work, I argue that the apparent racism in the system is not necessarily caused by racist ideas in the minds of the criminal justice system personnel but is more adequately explained by their increasing laxation – or the erosion of communicative actions among their midst – in combination with what I have originally argued to be the cause, namely the natural human reflex toward neotenous features.

My previous contention – that the more neotenous a person is the more likely s/he is to be judged “not-guilty” as a defendant or “victim” as a victim and that the less neotenous a person is the more likely s/he is to be judged “guilty” as a defendant or not taken seriously as a “victim” when the victim of a crime – basically amounts to the claim that, in American criminal justice system, everything is about “looks” – the system has degenerated to the state of judging people's innocence and guilt solely on the basis of how they look. Thus the most neotenous looking (white females) enjoy the greatest advantage, automatically judged “innocent” and “victim”, punished less for the same crime, and most highly valued (murder of a white female will exact the heaviest penalty), while the least neotenous looking (black males) suffer the greatest disadvantage, automatically judged “guilty” and “victimizer”, punished more for the same crime, and considered the most expendable (murder of a black male will exact the lightest penalty). Muscularity, darkness, and ugliness are the criteria for determining guilt and worth. While normally this is attributed to racism, it is usually overlooked that it's precisely the erosion of communicative action and McDonaldization which underlie the apparent racism in American criminal justice system. Think: given the overwhelming case load and conditioned by a system which has no interest in understanding the defendants, every lawyer (on both the prosecution side and the defense side) and every judge must decide who is guilty and who is innocent within insufficient time, hence everyone judges the defendant (whether he is guilty) and the witness (whether she is telling the truth) solely by how they look. What underlies the apparent racism is the lack of interest and time to understand the human being in question. Within the framework of cumbersome bureaucratic

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<sup>161</sup> See, for example, Scott Martelle's *Los Angeles Times* Opinion, 7 March 2017, “When wrongful convictions affect blacks more than whites, can we call it a justice system?”

procedures and overwhelming case load, people have only time to hear simple stories. Nobody can stomach long, complex stories. Thus, truth suffers. Anyone with experience with both the civil procedures and criminal justice system knows how often judges and lawyers operate only on assumptions – their prejudices – because they have no time to read through the pleadings. Thus what seems to be racism really reflects the McDonaldization of the system – the pressure to process a large quantity within a very short time.

This complaint about America's criminal justice system is about penetrating to the substance of the system rather than being deceived by appearance which can quite impress people. When one examines the due process procedures on paper – e.g. the procedures governing the determination of whether the defendant is competent to stand trial – one is struck by how reasonable and how humane it all is: no one should be put on trial and punished unless s/he is mentally capable of understanding what is going on. And, yet, in practice, under the weight of these reasonable and humane rational procedures, the truth of the matter under consideration and the interior of the person being judged are being increasingly forgotten. I have personally witnessed this many times: if the defendant shows the slightest apathy toward court room procedures, the public defender will send him away to mental evaluation – which then considerably prolongs his confinement time – simply because s/he is too lazy to find out whether he is *really* mentally incapable. All this rationalization has merely resulted in a shallow universe where only looks matter. This is my version of *Verdinglichungskritik* applied to America's criminal justice system. This is what I mean when I say that American criminal justice system and its personnel are increasingly “dummified”.

## 20.

### Rationalization as dummification in American law enforcement and Homeland Security system

I have been arguing that Nicholas Carr's “the shallow” applies not just to our online communications but also to many other domains of American society – to the health care system, the mental health system, and the criminal justice system. When one walks into the police station and compares the work of a typical detective to that from the 1970s, one is inevitably struck by the same “shallowness”. A contemporary detective is cavalier and perfunctory about crime investigation and uninterested in in-depth investigation of anything, has very little understanding of human psychology, and doesn't understand anything about the human beings he or she has to deal with. In fact, one gets the impression that detectives nowadays have been dummified even by reading a typical crime report which a contemporary detective has produced and comparing it to those from the past: contemporary police reports are so full of grammatical mistakes that they seem to be written by people who have never even graduated from high school.<sup>162</sup>

There are many studies on America's law enforcement system because none of this is state secret. I shall however say no more here – anyone familiar with the evolution of America's law enforcement agencies over a long period of time is aware that detectives nowadays are only able to solve crimes via technological advances and are hardly possessed of any sort of human intelligence. My focus here is on

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<sup>162</sup> The last generation of detectives who get a passing grade is described in one of my favorite books, Miles Corwin's *Homicide Special: A Year with the LAPD's Elite Detective Unit*, Holt Paperbacks: New York, 2004.

America's national security apparatus. Because most of this *is* national security secrets, only people who have been “inside” know about the enormous corruption that has occurred there in the past twenty years, and there exists but a paucity of studies on this subject matter in the public domain. I have formed my impression on this subject matter mostly from my personal experiences. Because I lack documentary proofs, I shall only make a few comments here so as to suggest lines along which research may be done in the future. The rise of the Homeland Security system and Homeland Security industry in the United States after 9/11 attacks signals the McDonaldization of the nation's security professions. The Department of Homeland Security and the Homeland Security industry (all the contractors in the homeland security business) – these new comers on the scene who have pushed out the old people in the FBI and the CIA who constituted the nation's traditional security apparatus are mostly amateurs and don't really understand anything about nation's security or human beings or human psychology. Their lack of expertise in human psychology enables them to classify a vast number of nuisances and ordinary people as “threats” and “dangerous individuals” – thus creating volume – while they then invent shallow but rationalized (mechanistic) procedures that are “fool-proof” (any idiots can perform them) in order to process the large volume. Dana Priest's report “Top Secret America” (2011) is one attempt to expose the same problem of McDonaldization plaguing America's Homeland Security world: the sudden increase of volume to process in a shorter time. A persistent problem is “monologue” due to information-overload: the hundreds of thousands of low-level intelligence “analysts” have compiled so much trivial information on suspected dangerous individuals that their supervisors never have the time to look through it. “Profiling” to determine beforehand who might be dangerous is another case in point to illustrate McDonaldization in the Homeland Security business. The old-timers in the CIA and the FBI perform criminal profiling in the old-fashioned way, i.e. through a holistic understanding of the target person's personality. (This old-fashioned way from the 1970s can still be seen in Frederick S. Calhoun and Stephen W. Weston, *Threat Assessment and Management Strategies: Identifying the Howlers and Hunters*, or John H. Campbell and Don DeDevi ed., *Profilers*<sup>163</sup>). The new Homeland Security industry (including all the branches and operational units within the Department of Homeland Security) uses a variety of automated procedures from which communicative action (attempt to understand the human being in question) is excluded but which determine danger by “check-listing” a few isolated, superficial, but stereotypical behavioral traits which the target person seems to display, such as his dietary habits (e.g. “Does he eat pork?”). They then invent a series of new technology to single out people with harmful intent on the basis of the most superficial characteristics: for example, the most sophisticated biometric imaging technology to measure a person's facial expression – something so superficial – to determine whether he intends harm. The principle by which the new Homeland Security industry operates is to come up with rationalized “check-listing procedures” and invent high-tech apparatus to enable people who do not understand anything about human psychology or psychopathology to do the expert work of identifying target persons who might intend harm. The TSA's Behavior Detection and Analysis Program is a case in point. These “Behavior Detection Officers” are in fact complete idiots when it comes to human psychology – they are no different than pedestrians randomly grabbed off the street but who are trained to “check-list” (which any idiot can do): it is in the “check-listing” procedures that the managers have supreme confidence, not in the “officers” themselves.<sup>164</sup> The rationalization and McDonaldization of

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163 *Threat Assessment*, CRC Press: Boca Raton, Florida, 2009, and *Profilers*, Prometheus Books: Amherst, New York, 2004.

164 The TSA provides an official description of its Behavior Detection and Analysis Program on its website in the form of



America's security industry since 911 under Dick Cheney's guidance have tremendously antagonized the old timers in the CIA and the FBI: imagine what these former experienced guardians of the nation's security think when they see that, instead of them, the “Big Boys” now hire minimum wage minorities who would otherwise be working in McDonald's to work as screeners at nation's airports – as if national security is now a matter of “affirmative action” (*discrimination positive*). The new comers in the homeland security industrial complex – who rode on the tide of 911 hysteria to get their contracts from the Bush administration – have also invented strange new “fool-proof” (any idiot can do) surveillance technology to replace the old-fashioned human surveillance which the FBI and the CIA used to perform: minimum wage minorities and white trash wear surveillance earphones while riding Metros and buses and patrolling urban streets *en masse* instead of the old-fashioned way of sending individual agents to follow targets on foot. The operational units within the Department of Homeland Security, throughout the whole Bush administration era, were famous for their bizarre stupidity and incompetence as the administration's blind trust in rationalized procedures had resulted in populating these units with white trashes from trailer parks, uneducated Hispanics, and former housewives and convicts. (This is one of America's most closely guarded secrets.) This is how “dummification” – in the sense of erosion of communicative actions and lessening of the human intelligence necessary to understand other human beings – has occurred in the homeland security business as well. The result, again, is that a vast number of people who are not really dangerous are now blacklisted in various databases as dangerous individuals. The Terrorist Identities Datamart Environment, the nation's centralized database of known terrorists, already contains more than one million names.<sup>165</sup> Are there really that many dangerous terrorists in this world? Just as in the prison system, here the decline of human expertise and the new superficial, automated procedures lead to mis-judgments, which then lead to a larger number of people being disposed of by being labeled “dangerous”. The Homeland Security system also functions as America's “trash can”.

I have here chosen not to comment on the negative changes which have occurred in the past thirty years in the FBI itself, because, here, the cause for the decline of the quality of investigators is ideological rather than rationalization and McDonaldization. Since thirty years ago, the American feminist bullshit that women possess superior relationship skills and intuition has infected the FBI thinking as well, to the point that the Bureau has begun hiring a large number of young female college graduates believing that they will do a better job investigating crimes and terrorism than those old-fashioned, old white men who used to work hand in hand, and compete, with the Ivy Leagues poets and philosophers inside the CIA. The result, instead, is that the young girls, due to lack of experience and over-confidence in themselves conditioned by the American feminist climate, make a lot more mistakes and fumble a lot more often – although, of course, the situation with them is hardly as bad as it is in the various branches within the Department of Homeland Security.

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its administrator John S. Pistole's statement to House Committee on Homeland Security on 14 November, 2013: <https://www.tsa.gov/news/testimony/2013/11/14/tsa-behavior-detection-and-analysis-program>. The Congressional Research Service's report, “Transportation Security: Issues for the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress” (Bart Elias et al), also includes descriptions of TSA's “behavior detection officers” and its Screening Passengers by Observation Techniques (SPOT). At: <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/homesecc/RL33512.pdf>.

165 See Adam Goldman, “More than 1 million people are listed in US terrorism database”, *Washington Post*, 5 August 2014: [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/more-than-1-million-people-are-listed-in-us-terrorism-database/2014/08/05/a66de30c-1ccc-11e4-ab7b-696c295ddfd1\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.1af1246d9a15](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/more-than-1-million-people-are-listed-in-us-terrorism-database/2014/08/05/a66de30c-1ccc-11e4-ab7b-696c295ddfd1_story.html?utm_term=.1af1246d9a15).

21.

Dummification in the American university system

Many commentators working within America's university system have already raised alarm about the decline of the quality of higher education (specifically undergraduate education) and the increasing uneducation of college graduates as a result of the system's changing condition since the 1970s. Allan Bloom's complaint from thirty years ago is becoming increasingly common among the older generation of university professors – and not just among the conservatives:

“His essay on students is bleak indeed. He describes their blankness with respect to literary culture upon arriving at the university (and often on leaving it as well), their compulsive absorption in rock music that deadens their response to a wide range of cultural experiences, and their self-centeredness in relation to others...”

“... entirely negative view of the egalitarianism of students. Bloom describes a shallow reflexive egalitarianism that is only the reverse of the dominant individualism, in which persons are seen shorn of any tradition or cultural specificity, as though they were self-created personalities. These beliefs do not result from principle, a project, an effort...”<sup>166</sup>

Again, we are not here to account for the nihilism and relativism which the leftist cultural revolution has introduced into the university system, but are solely concerned with the student's declining cognitive capacity and increasing uneducation. Unlike in the cases of the mental health system, the criminal justice system, and the national security system, recognition of the decline of the quality of education and students in this sense is widespread within America's university system, and there is considerable consensus on the causes and the description of the symptoms. I base the following account on three sets of classics that are representative of this consensus: *Declining by Degrees: Higher Education At Risk*, edited by Richard H. Hersh and John Merrow (St. Martin's Press Griffin, 2005). This is a convenient, and famous, volume which groups together various representative complaints and comes with a companion PBS documentary, “Declining by Degrees” (also with John Merrow). Then, the two classics of James E. Côté and Anton L. Allahar, *Ivory Tower Blues* (2007) and *Lowering Higher Education* (2011), both published by the University of Toronto Press. It is true that these two scholars are Canadians and that their focus is on the Canadian university system. Nevertheless, they cite plenty of data and studies regarding the American university system as well and, because the university system has followed the same trajectory of decline in all English-speaking countries, their description of the “dummification” of Canadian colleges (the decline of intelligence and learning among Canadian college students) applies equally well to American colleges. Finally there is the classic of Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa, *Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses* (University of Chicago Press, 2011). The following section – on the changing condition of the American university system and the “dummification” of American college graduates – basically synthesizes the accounts given in these classics. All the while I keep in the background the other references that I have cited earlier in this essay, such as the essays on McDonaldization of higher education and David Gelernter's and Allan Bloom's observations about America's university system.

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166 Robert Bellah, “Academic Fundamentalism?”, in *Essays on the Closing of the American Mind*, ed. Robert L. Stone, Chicago Press Review, 1989.

Before World War II, American universities were reserved for the children of society's elites and their purpose was to mold students' character. At that time, only a tiny minority of the American population ever graduated from college. They did not go to colleges in order to “find a job” later: at the time this function was fulfilled by high schools. While students were always more interested in other functions of schooling than learning (such as social networking and fraternity), learning at the time was understood as something done for its own sake – the original form of a “liberal education”. (More on this below.) Universities furthermore played the social role of teaching morals to the next generation. In late 1950s, American universities experienced a first phase of massive expansion in response to the sudden influx of government funding prompted by the Sputnik incident. The student body also went through a first phase of expansion due to the GI Bill. The expansion of the university system did not mean better undergraduate education because, as the universities expanded, they fiercely competed with each other for prestige and, for this purpose, their focus was on expanding graduate programs and promoting research by faculty members. Nevertheless, the quality of undergraduate learning had not yet begun to decline due to increasing unqualification and laxation of the students and increasing accommodation by the teaching party. From late 1960s onward, the “massification” of the university system entered its second phase as a growing number of children from ordinary middle-class families – the baby-boomers – flooded into both good and mediocre colleges and all universities struggled to accommodate the explosion of the student body. From this point onward, the purpose of college education also changed, from cultivation of character and learning for the sake of learning to the acquisition of knowledge and skills needed for the job market. Meanwhile, from 1970s onward, in preparation for the upcoming trend, government funding of public universities began to decline, which forced schools to begin collecting tuition fees and thinking like business enterprises. As the explosion of student body (the third phase) and the transformation of the purpose of college education continued into the 1990s, the university system became increasingly commercialized: education becomes an “investment” and the students' status is transformed from “apprentice” to “customer”. As government funding dries up and schools can only survive in the “market” through their own marketability, universities now think of themselves entirely like businesses do, in terms of competition, supply and demand, and profitability: they are here to respond to the students' needs, which is “to find a job”, in exchange for their tuition fees – in order to survive and prosper in the “market”. This trend of marketization has also encouraged the proliferation of private, for-profit colleges set up to train the growing number of ordinary students for the job market as a way to collect their tuition fees as profit (e.g. the University of Phoenix and Kaplan University). This catering to the shallow desires of students out of financial concerns intensifies as student enrollment begins to decline causing the over-expanded higher education institutions to compete even more fiercely for students' favor – just as private enterprises compete with each other for consumers' attention. They do this in four ways: (1) through lavish spending on entities unrelated to learning like dormitories, sports and recreational facilities, and student unions. Even without going into the classrooms to evaluate students' learning, one can see from the outside that American universities are increasingly about money-spending, comfort, and consumption. (2) Universities continue to emphasize research at the expense of teaching undergraduates since, just as is the case in the 1950s, their prestige in the “market place” is derived from outstanding research results. (3) Universities attempt to excel on superficial indexes of performances (like graduation rates and so on) which the shallow people who constitute the majority of the public mistake for accurate indicators of quality. Universities can then increase their ranking on

these shallow ranking systems like Newsweek's that make use of these superficial indexes as if they accurately indicate quality of learning. (4) Universities no longer passively wait for students but are engaged in active campaign to reach out to potential students who have money or honor students who could help them increase their ranking. Attracted by the glamor of facilities unrelated to learning and deluded by these superficial indexes of prestige, undergraduates enter colleges paying heavy fees only to find themselves immersed in large lecture halls with a hundred other students and ignored by the faculty as far as learning is concerned. But it doesn't matter: they are never there to learn and get wiser in any case. When the school commercializes and ingratiates its students as customers, it does a better job satisfying their bodily desires and responding to their shallow career goals but pays only lip service to their actual learning. This situation is exactly the opposite of what was the case in the 1950s, before the university system began its massive expansion.

Concomitant with this process is the continual deterioration of the quality of the student. The average student today is dumber, has little inclination to work, and graduates from college without learning anything. The average college graduate today is less educated than in the past. Côté and Allahar have brilliantly analyzed the causes for the current decline of learning among college undergraduates: (1) the prevalent idea that one needs a college degree in order to get a job in today's advanced economy; (2) the growing sense of entitlement among today's youngsters, as if they deserve a good grade even without putting in any work; and (3) the universities' growing need to collect tuition fees from students in order to survive.

The prevalent idea that a college degree is necessary for employment in today's advanced market place has driven so many ordinary youngsters who otherwise have neither the talent nor the motivation for learning into college campuses and is now the single greatest cause for the continual expansion of the student body. It's common sense that mass participation in what is originally an expert domain inevitably destroys the expertise. Each time the student body expands, more youngsters of mediocre intelligence enter into institutions of higher learning in order to drag down overall performance and ruin learning for everyone. Côté and Allahar are quite clear about the fact that, as always, only a tiny portion of a society's population is ever fit for learning in higher education in any case. Secondly – as Ortega's observation continues to be ever more relevant in the contemporary age – today's youngsters are more spoiled than ever before by economic prosperity, technology, and the democratic climate of respecting people's rights and taking care to not abuse children. Here is clearly evident the harm which America's “original principle” – of recruiting everyone, of catering to the lowest common denominator in order to recruit them – has done to higher education (or any sort of elitist institution or expert domain): first of all, everyone takes it as justified that everyone should have a chance in higher education. Secondly, the continuous catering to the lowest common denominator has resulted in “... the wider societal trend in which individualism has morphed into 'specialism', where children are raised to believe they are not only individuals, but also special in ways that unfold for them without any particular effort on their part.”<sup>167</sup> Such spoiled youngsters go into college with the expectation that good grades should come to them without their being required to exert themselves in any way whatsoever.

The school's need to attract and retain students in order to collect tuition fees from them then serves as the complement for the decreasing quality and the growing entitlement on the part of the student body.

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167 Côté and Allahar, *ibid.*, p. 72.

Higher learning (especially on the undergraduate level) now becomes characterized by the twin process of “grade inflation” and “academic disengagement”. Namely, because the school sees students as customers, it makes every attempt to cater to them by tolerating their low intelligence and lack of motivation and rewarding their cavalier and perfunctory learning with higher grades. This is part of the increasingly student-centered university culture. This has only helped foster, instead of dampening, the growing arrogance among the students, so that Côté and Allahar, thoroughly Ortega (“revolt of the masses”: the new generations are “spoiled children”), can characterize the current student culture as “entitled disengagement”.<sup>168</sup> “Disengagement” is indexed by the continual decline, since the 1960s, of the amount of time the average student spends on studying and doing homework outside classrooms, from 40 hours in the pre-1960 era to around 25 hours in the post-1960 era.<sup>169</sup> It’s “entitled disengagement” because, although putting in less efforts, the student actually expects a better grade. (The culture of “entitled disengagement” is thus really the extension into higher education of the general culture of “revolt of the masses” in which the newer generations are increasingly spoiled by economic prosperity, technological wonders, and the ideologies of inalienable rights.) All this then enters into the worse combination with the school’s increasing cavalier attitude about knowledge-transmission (at least on the undergraduate level) and the professor’s loss of ability to force knowledge-transmission and loss of interest in teaching in general. The school itself is increasingly perfunctory and cavalier about teaching since its primary goal is to increase its prestige instead of being concerned with student learning. As noted, today’s university is more focused on the research of its prestigious faculty members and on scoring high on these superficial indexes of performance – like graduation rate, for which it is only more motivated to “pass” students in a cavalier fashion by inflating their grades. Faced with the massive number of mediocre students, universities are forced “to either fail a large number of students – and lose significant amounts of funding – or to redefine standards and water down course requirements to handle them.... For combined with disengagement there is also a very strong sense of entitlement and empowerment that is characteristic of recent cohorts. To keep students happy and in the system, higher grades are awarded for lower performances from first through final year, and just as in high schools, very few are ever allowed to fail.”<sup>170</sup>

Correlative with the increasingly perfunctory and cavalier attitude on both the student’s side and the school administration’s is the increasingly perfunctory and cavalier attitude of the teaching party. This has two causes. The first is the focus on research and the second is the increasingly rationalized structure of the university system which has further eroded the teaching party’s interest in teaching. The

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168 Hence, Côté and Allahar have made such characterization of the current student culture in America and Canada by comparing the present undergraduate student culture with the cultures in the past such as are outlined by Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz in her *Campus Life*: “In no previous era did high levels of disengagement coincide with extreme pressure to attain high grades, as is the case in the current era.... This latest historical development is traceable to circumstances unique to the present era of superficial calls for democratization, whereby large numbers of unprepared students from all social classes have been funneled into universities with the expectation that simply paying tuition and putting out a minimal effort will have a maximal payoff in terms of grade attainment and eventual occupational success. Unlike the past, when those seeking upward mobility did not take for granted their chances of success and therefore valued hard work, those with a sense of entitled disengagement apparently feel that the path has been opened for them and they simply have to follow it.” (Ibid., p. 123 – 124.)

169 Côté and Allahar, *ibid.*, p. 116 – 118. This is especially the case in the English-speaking countries, like the United States, Canada, and the UK, but not so much the case in continental Europe, which fact leads the authors to reject “massification” as the reason why students nowadays are less engaged than their counterparts in the past.

170 *Ibid.*, p. 66.

special emphasis which the university, as noted, has placed on research for the sake of ranking, prestige, and marketability has meant that, in order to get ahead, faculty members are also more interested in doing researches than in teaching undergraduates. When faced with students who don't wish to put in any work and have no interests in learning but who somehow feel entitled to a good grade and take themselves to be his or her equal, the faculty professor, pressured by the university administration to graduate these junk heads, naturally gives in and becomes increasingly cavalier about teaching and handing out grades just like the students are. This is not where his or her career path lies in any case. The increasingly rationalized structure of the university system which commercialization has entailed is the second thing which all educators caught up in the university system have most frequently complained about. In accordance with the earlier definition of the rationalization process as streamlining goal-setting to that of power and wealth and the process of attaining power and wealth, American university system can be seen as going through a tremendous rationalization process since the 1960s when it has become increasingly commercialized. The most serious problem from the perspective of fresh doctorates is the university's attempt to streamline the teaching process in order to cut cost – by expanding the hiring of part time lecturers on a contractual basis rather than providing them with tenures. This is merely the equivalent in academia of what has also been going on in the business world in response to the increasingly competitive environment under the impact of globalization. (I want to cite here a most representative complaint in a famous blog post by “Homeless Adjunct”: “How the American university was killed, in five easy steps” (12 August, 2012)).<sup>171</sup> This has also reinforced the increasingly perfunctory and cavalier nature of higher education since, in the face of job insecurity, part time lecturers are even more vulnerable to the new generation of arrogant and domineering students who have no interest in learning – they are even more afraid of students' complaints and more likely to inflate their grades and less motivated to lecture well. Both the imperative of research in the case of faculty members and job insecurity in the case of junior professors and PhD students have resulted in what some commentators have called the “mutual non-aggression pact”, or “mutual disengagement”, between the teaching party and the undergraduate student.

The twin process of grade inflation and academic disengagement ties in with what is said earlier about the McDonaldization of higher education. For financial reasons, university's task has become the processing of an increasingly larger number of customers rather than the cultivation of their intelligence. Just as in other domains of American society, the original American principle of recruiting as many people as possible ends up cultivating a sense of superiority and entitlement among the masses who are really inferior. Their recruitment into the expert domain results in the domain's becoming increasingly shallow, perfunctory, cavalier – where speed and quantity are purchased at the expense of quality – just as, when one enters McDonald's, one eats a low quality and simple meal in order to quickly get it over and done with and get out. As every professor who has complained about this increasingly watered down and worthless “higher education” has pointed out, the root cause of the whole problem is the commercialization of the university system, that America is much more market-driven than it was 50 years ago, that even the university system has had to join the “market”. It is this marketization which has degraded the teaching party's ability to teach and forced the school to allow today's spoiled children to get away with their poor quality.<sup>172</sup>

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171 At: <https://junctrebellion.wordpress.com/2012/08/12/how-the-american-university-was-killed-in-five-easy-steps/>.

172 I have in the above not included the phenomenon of the professionalization of school administrators, which Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa have cited in addition to all the factors which have been enumerated: the school's focus on

The result is my own version of the McDonaldization thesis: the manner of the Internet – the “shallow”, the “perfunctory”, the “cavalier”, the “convenient”, and the “effortless” – has penetrated the university environment just as it has colonized society's other domains. The vast expansion in size of the university system, mass attendance, the schools' new profit orientation with the attendant transformation of the teaching corps, and the resultant “entitled disengagement” and “grade inflation” together paint an atmosphere of increasingly perfunctory and cavalier learning and teaching process. In higher education, unlike what the case is in regard to the mental health system, the criminal justice system, and Homeland Security system, it is still the American *original* condition, rather than the American current condition, which has brought about McDonaldization. When the students get better grades while doing less work, this means that higher education learning is an increasingly perfunctory and cavalier – shallow and effortless – business. When school administrators and professors reward less work with better grades, this means that university education is an increasingly perfunctory and cavalier – shallow and effortless – business. Students who have passed their classes and graduated often have performance level that would have resulted in failure in the past. Comparing higher education of today to what it used to be in the past is precisely like comparing contemporary youngsters' Internet chat with famous writers' letter-writing before the invention of electronic mass-communication: “shallow”, “perfunctory”, “cavalier”, and “quantity” as opposed to “deep”, “intensive”, “serious”, and “quality”.

Côté and Allahar are quite explicit about the counter-productiveness of the current idea that “one needs a college degree in order to get a job in today's advanced economy”. Thanks to grade inflation – thanks to schools' effort in making it ever easier to graduate – the proportion of the population with a college degree has been steadily enlarging. From the employers' perspective, the significance of a college degree consequently steadily shrinks.<sup>173</sup> As a result, a bachelor degree nowadays is worth as much in the job market as a high school diploma was 100 years ago. Higher education has been going through tremendous inflation in the past 100 years just as, in the domain of buying and selling, the value of a dollar has tremendously eroded in the same past 100 years. Correlative with the increasingly mediocre quality of the average student, the continual decline of the education process (where nothing in particular is being learned any more, at least on the undergraduate level), and the decreasing value of a good grade (principally due to “grade inflation”), is therefore an increasing worthlessness of college degrees. It's now thus harder to get a job with a college degree than ever before. Again, the masses have ruined it for themselves – they have thought that they could have an easier time getting a job with a college degree, but, because they have flooded out of schools with their degrees in such large numbers, they have only ended up ruining each other's chance. Thus my point once more: the masses, when they are empowered, tend to ruin themselves due to their own incompetence.

Having commented on how McDonaldization of higher education means its dummification, I want to

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research, the rationalization of hiring procedures (treating teachers as wage-laborers), the need to tolerate low quality students, and the students' declining quality and growing sense of entitlement.

173 All the commentators cited here have missed the fact that employers nowadays more often demand college degrees from their employees not because the tasks in the job really require any college education but simply because, today, there are so many people with college degrees entering the job market that it has become merely customary to regard them as if they were essential.

proceed to rationalization – how, in higher education as well, rationalization goes hand in hand with McDonaldization and is just as much a part of the mechanism of dummification. My point is that the rationalization of learning is precisely the result when learning is increasingly shallow, perfunctory, and cavalier and that rationalized learning characterizes exactly the cognitive style of the new generation of entitled and disengaged students. James E. Côté and Anton L. Allahar have devoted many pages to describing the new type of learning process and the new cognitive style. In the very beginning of their second classic, they write:

The title for this book, *Lowering Higher Education*, was selected to signify a decline of higher learning in which the liberal arts and sciences are being appropriated to legitimize programs that are more appropriately described as *pseudo-vocational* training. These programs have been rebranded to promise that they will give students an edge in the competition for jobs. As this has happened, the pedagogical value of the liberal *education* in stimulating critical thinking abilities, and honing the skills associated with effectively communicating those abilities in writing and speech, is diminishing; thus, as universities adopt teaching practices associated with *training* people to remember formulae, systems of facts, and procedures, rather than *educating* them to develop a critical awareness of the world at large that they can defend epistemologically, we witness a fundamental alteration in the structure and function of the traditional university and its curriculum.<sup>174</sup>

While the increasingly perfunctory and cavalier nature of higher education is concomitant with the switch-over of education's goal from learning, understanding, and cultivation of character to job-preparation and the change-over of schools' mission from liberal education to pseudo-vocational training, it also correlates with a change-over in cognitive style in higher education, from the cognitive transformation traditionally expected of a liberal education to simple “information-processing”. (Again!) In this sense, the decline of higher education is simply part and parcel of the larger postmodern trend where thinking and reasoning are replaced by information-processing.

Think about how rationalized learning is dummifying and inferior. When the student proceeds more rationally in his or her “learning” process, this learning process necessarily suffers. What is decried earlier as degeneration to literalism (mechanically repeating words without understanding) is precisely the manner in which learning has deteriorated – what Côté and Allahar deplore as mere “information processing”. It's a common scene nowadays in undergraduate education: once the student has paid the fees, s/he does all the homework like a robot, and expects the professor to graduate him or her with a good grade even though s/he has never understood the subject matter. The student sees education in an means-end manner and proceeds mostly instrumentally. Before the test, the student expects the professor to provide a sample of test questions, and s/he surveys the textbooks or lecture notes expecting to find the answers to the questions. “Tell me what I need to read and know” – i.e. what words I need to be able to repeat – “in order to pass the test.” If the answers are not clearly printed somewhere, s/he complains about *injustice*: “The answers are not found in the books.” This is the essence of dummification at work in higher education: the brain, after simplification, has become restricted to following a simple procedure: see the question, find the answer to the question in the book, and then repeat the answer on the questionnaire. In other words, learning is no more than a process of

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174 Côté and Allahar, *ibid.*, p. 4.



matching categories – matching a certain piece of information in the book to a question on the test – just like the “check-listing” seen earlier in psychiatric diagnoses, federal sentencing reform, and homeland security operations. When the answer to the test question is not explicitly stated in the book but is merely implicit in its text and the lectures, the student is at a loss – because s/he has been dummed – and decries the test “unfair” – because s/he has become too arrogant (“The customer is the king”). The mind is no longer capable of inferring the answer from the content of the book or the words spoken by the professor because it has not actually *understood* anything. Only when the mind has understood the meaning of a certain description can it perform the magical permutation to express the same meaning with different words. But, of course, only when the mind has comprehended the meaning of the text can it even imagine the possibility of permutation (hence the possibility of *inferring* the answer from the content of the book). Just as in psychiatry, the student has mistaken “mindlessly repeating words” (literal interpretation, information-processing) for all that there is to learning. Writing a term paper is similarly a matter of extracting texts from various sources and recombining them on one's own paper. There is no creativity in the sense that there is no understanding. And, when the student turns in the work, s/he, since s/he has already paid the tuition fees, expects to get a good grade. If not, s/he complains to the dean. Thus: when the student becomes perfunctory and cavalier, s/he becomes purely instrumental and operates entirely in the mode of information-processing; since understanding is deep and information-processing is shallow, this is another perspective on higher education as “increasingly the shallow”. Then, thanks to the increasingly tolerant school structure, the student has never become aware that going to school can be more than processing information and consequently feels ever more entitled. Just as the feeling of entitlement is the result of ignorance – not understanding what real learning is about and therefore not comprehending how limited one's performance is: “unskilled and unaware of it” – it is also the necessary component of an increasingly shallow and perfunctory “higher education”.

The reduction of learning from understanding to information-processing signifies that the student has rationalized the “learning process” – the process has become mechanical and streamlined to that of acquiring the minimum necessary skill and credentials in order to become qualified for a job. It fits in with the more general rationalization process at work in the university system when it functions increasingly like a business. That is to say, the student's going through the learning process in a rationalized manner is correlative with the school's dispensing with tenures in favor of part time lecturers who are paid a specific amount of money to get a specific thing done. Again, such a simplification of the learning process is expected when more people are going to college than ever before – McDonaldization and rationalization are accommodating procedures for increased volume. Less capable of internalizing the insights and wisdom of the previous generations of intellectuals because of their mediocre intelligence and never quite interested in learning – understanding – in any case, the dumb masses who have flooded into college campuses also have a narrow and shallow notion of what life is about – it's all about getting a job and earning a good living – and so believe the purpose of schooling cannot be more than processing certain information as the minimum work required to obtain the qualification for the job market. When such shallow people have become the dominant force in the university system – when they have, with their sheer number, forced the university administration to validate their shallow way as authentic – the transmission of knowledge becomes a matter of memorizing slogans and repeating them in response to the right question – exactly like what has happened in psychiatry. The result is a new generation not able to think creatively and deeply – not

able to think at all – but entirely relying on conventional ideas and slogans that are already current in the public domain.

I have derived my critique partly from long hours of listening to my professor friend describing his teaching experience as an adjunct professor. When he goes to conferences, while all the other professors are complaining about how students can no longer write – this is merely the surface of the problem with the decline of the quality of students – he complains that the problem goes deeper, that students can no longer *think*.<sup>175</sup> The students nowadays absorb words and knowledge and repeat them verbatim on examinations in order to pass the class, but they have no understanding of the meaning of these words, and therefore cannot *think* on their basis. When they join society, they repeat certain words they have seen from books, but can't *think*. They are very dumb in this sense, although, because they can repeat something and have a college diploma to show for, they have acquired the semblance of being educated. The ability to process certain information and repeat certain words without understanding and thinking then further produces the impression of suffering brain-damages. All commentators in the references cited here have complained about the tremendous erosion of critical thinking ability among newer generations of undergraduates. The mystery is why, with all the student-centered learning and all the concentration on creativity rather than on absorbing the classics, students' ability to think creatively actually declines. The answer is that all the emphases on creativity are shallow, that one learns to think creatively only by absorbing and understanding the insights of past generations of creative and deep thinkers and then applying them to the present condition. (You can't effectively critique the present without the assistance of geniuses from the past, as Allan Bloom has emphasized.) In order to become creative, deep, and critical thinkers, the students need to go back to the classics and learn them in more than an instrumental (information-processing) fashion.

As noted, all commentators have uniformly identified the commercialization of the university system as the cause for the decline of critical thinking ability among the current generation of undergraduates. They cite, when they can, empirical evidences for the decline of gains in critical thinking among undergraduates since the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>176</sup> In accordance with my new McDonaldization thesis, the causes are also their growing use of digital technologies and the more general McDonaldized (shallow, cavalier, perfunctory) and rationalized (procedural, means-ends, instrumental) culture. But the commentators are correct when they describe the decline of critical thinking ability as a decline of “liberal education” (or liberal arts education). According to Côté and Allahaar's formulation, what has happened in universities is the replacement of liberal arts education by vocationalism or “training for the job market” (where “liberal education” is appropriated into vocationalism as if one learns about

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175 It is he who has introduced me to his thesis about how, under the impact of technology, the human brain is progressively losing its capabilities: during Homeric times, the poet had to have excellent memory in order to be able to recite the epic poem in entirety without losing words. Once writing was invented, thinkers lost their good memory but were then good at thinking. With Internet and computers at our disposal, we today are increasingly losing the ability to think as well. I have merely added “rationalization” to the arsenal of Internet and computers.

176 Côté and Allahaar have cited the especially interesting work of Derek Bok, *Understanding Colleges*, in order to define “critical thinking” (ibid., p. 94): it consists of the three levels of reflective judgment (p. 96): (1) pre-reflective thinking, where all problems have definite answers, and where these definite answers come from an expert or an authority source. Then, (2) quasi-reflective, where knowledge is understood to be relative and contextual and there is no way to judge the validity of different forms of knowledge. Then, (3) reflective thinking, where there *are* ways to judge the relative merits of complex arguments, namely, on the basis of the persuasiveness of evidence and the strength of reasoning.

humanities and sciences as part of the process of preparing oneself for the job market) in consequence of the universities' becoming part of the "market" and massified.<sup>177</sup> Given my version of the McDonaldization thesis and rationalization thesis – that, thanks to the American principle of "recruiting everybody", society has had to rationalize and McDonaldize in order to accommodate increasingly larger volume, in the process becoming increasingly shallow, cavalier, and perfunctory and resulting in the erosion of communicative actions in favor of strategic actions (or the erosion of understanding in general in favor of blindly following conventions, rules, and procedures) – I naturally want to be able to characterize the connection between critical thinking and liberal education on the one hand and communicative action and the orientation toward understanding on the other so that I may assimilate the decline of critical thinking which all commentators are complaining about to the general decline of communicative actions which I am here specifically complaining about. The key here is "understanding" (especially understanding other human beings on both the personal and the collective level) as opposed to means-ends thinking, instrumentality, and following rules and procedures which characterize bureaucracy and engineering. An liberal education is about cultivating understanding and fostering understanding of the human phenomenon and complex matters in general; it's about reasoning about moral situations with another human being – and this is the domain of communicative action. The decline of the quality of higher education and the erosion of liberal education in particular are therefore part of the general trend of the deterioration of the human mind and the erosion of communicative action in a postmodern, mass, McDonaldized, and rationalized society which is geared toward information-processing.

Here is how the various commentators cited above have characterized liberal education: "... integrative thinking and the ability to transfer skills and knowledge from one setting to another..."<sup>178</sup> "Ability to analyze information and communicate in written and spoken form..."<sup>179</sup> "... liberating education... that helps students comprehend and negotiate their relationship to the wider world";<sup>180</sup> "... to foster critical thinking, analysis, and expression across a range of topics, to contemplate the relation between accumulated knowledge and skills, on the one hand, and the issues facing contemporary society, on the other; to prepare students – in a broad rather than narrow sense – for civic life and productive work..."<sup>181</sup> – namely, to prepare an intelligent citizen with "a sense of responsibility to ends beyond one's own advantage..."<sup>182</sup> And Côté and Allahaar's emphasis on the difference between education and training (between liberal education and vocationalism): "On the one hand, education is more general and envisages as an end product a more cultured, open-minded, and civic-minded citizenry. On the other hand, training is more given to specialization and the acquisition of a narrow range of skills and information associated with a discrete or specific task, challenge, or problem."<sup>183</sup> They cite John Henry

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177 Again, Côté and Allahaar: "The demise of liberal education, replacement by pseudo-vocationalism for the masses, replete with a high-school mentality toward teaching and learning. ...universities will pretend to teach students at a level of higher education, and students will pretend to learn at that level, but the truth will be that universities are simply providing empty degrees..." (*Lowering Higher Education*, p. 191.) They are pointing to the increasingly shallow and cavalier nature of higher education as well as to its increasingly vocationalism.

178 *Declining By Degree*, p. 180.

179 *Ibid.*, p. 86.

180 Carol G. Schneider, "Liberal Education: Slip-Sliding Away?", *ibid.*, p. 64.

181 Howard Gardner, "Beyond Markets and Individuals: A Focus on Educational Goals", *ibid.*, p. 98.

182 Schneider, *ibid.*

183 Côté and Allahaar, *ibid.*, p. 14.

Newman's description as the classic definition of the objective of a liberal education: “A cultivated intellect, a delicate taste, a candid, equitable, dispassionate mind, a noble and courteous bearing in the conduct of life; these are the objects of a university”.<sup>184</sup>

All these characterize the life focused on understanding, creativity, and making oneself understood by others (communicative action) rather than a life dominated by following rules, repeating conventional view-points, instrumental thinking, and deceiving and manipulating other people (strategic action). It's a life which reflects on, and understands, itself – as in the Socratic dictum that has become the motto of liberal education, “An unreflected life is not worth living.” The commentators have emphasized that such life is desirable not only for its own sake but also because it is essential to republicanism. In the same way in which Montesquieu has emphasized that civic virtue is essential to a republic, the commentators are in effect saying that a thinking and understanding citizen – somebody who can do more than simply repeating what is heard, following rules that are laid down, and manipulating causation – is the necessary condition for the formation of such civic virtue (and so for a republic or a democracy itself).<sup>185</sup>

Yet all the current trends seem to have been designed to undermine this life of understanding and communication in favor of the latter robotic existence: digitalization, rationalization, McDonaldization. There is a congruence between the general trend of society's rationalization and masses' entry into the university system to ruin its standards. The rationalization of our society encourages the decline of liberal education in that, as people become more rational, they tend to streamline their goal to money-making or power-grabbing and weed out anything which doesn't contribute to this. History, literature, drama, philosophy, and languages – all go out the window. Understanding why human beings do what they do is extraneous to an existence devoted to acquiring power and accumulating wealth. Communicative actions – understanding other human beings and making oneself understood by them – are simply not important any more. The only important thing is to be able to manipulate other people. This fits perfectly well with dumb people's shallow conception of the purpose of life (making money) and so most people adapt quite well to the changing nature of the university system. In line with their shallow goals, they practice their rationalized version of learning, which also blends smoothly into the general streamlining of university education according to market needs.

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184 Cited in Côté and Allahar, *ibid.*, p. 14. The ultimate formulation of what a liberal education is about is of course Allan Bloom's aforementioned classic, *The Closing of the American Mind*. His description however only makes sense in relation to his Straussian ideal of the university as the refuge from society where the philosophically minded person may devote his or her life to contemplation (as opposed to the pursuit of wealth or honor: a reference to Plato's tripartite division of the soul) in relative safety away from the dangerous dumb masses. (See also Richard Rorty's excellent summary of Bloom's vision in “Straussianism, Democracy, and Allan Bloom I: That Old Time Philosophy”, in *Essays on the Closing of the American Mind*, *ibid.*) This is much loftier than the conception of the commentators cited here, but is, incidentally, also the “leftist conservative” position.

185 The idea that the purpose of university is to train good leaders and good citizens for a well-functioning republic and democracy is of course a very common one, and has been especially championed by America's Founding Fathers. It is, for example, Thomas Jefferson's reason for founding the University of Virginia. It is, as noted, fundamentally different from Allan Bloom's Straussian notion about the purpose of university. But both ideas presuppose that liberal education is the most important. Keep in mind that Ortega y Gasset has expressed a third notion about the purpose of university in his famous lecture, “Mission of the University”, i.e. to prepare citizens to live “according to the height of his time” (*a la altura de sus tiempos*). Here Ortega is also talking about liberal education. Living according to the height of one's time is, as I shall briefly note later, especially conducive to the formation of high quality social capital.

Now, we shall elaborate further the relationship between the sort of intelligence fostered through liberal education and communicative action when we discuss the importance of intelligence for forming better quality “social capital” in famous sociologist Robert Putnam's sense. In the meantime, we can summarize the matter in such fashion. At issue is the contrast between two kinds of “life of the mind” and the problem is the sacrificing of the former while giving prominence to the latter: liberal arts education vs vocationalism; education vs training; the contemplative life vs the life devoted to acquisition and honor; understanding vs formulae, systems, and procedures; understanding and knowledge vs information-processing; critical thinking vs job qualification; creativity and originality vs reliance on clichés and conventions; knowledge for knowledge's sake vs knowledge for its material or exchange value; a more cultured, open-minded, and civic-minded citizen vs a mere employee; living a reflected life vs merely earning a living; communicative vs strategic action; understanding other human beings and making oneself understood by them vs merely manipulating them; and an intelligent vs a dummed human being.

The focus of the foregoing discussion has been on the deterioration of education on the undergraduate level and on rationalization and McDonaldization as the mechanisms for such deterioration – the focus has been on how information-processing has become the dominant cognitive style among undergraduate college students. There has been no discussion on the decline of quality on the graduate level or in academia itself, and no discussion on other mechanisms which might have contributed to the same decline. Other mechanisms which have probably contributed to the decline of academic learning include the increasing specialization of academic disciplines which has resulted in the increasingly technical nature of each academic discipline and the increasing differentiation among academic disciplines, to the point that mediocre academics begin forming “fake” academic disciplines (with a lot of technical jargon but no real wisdom and knowledge about reality) while completely forgetting the classics (the Great Books are the most important vehicles for developing one's critical thinking skills). Many great thinkers have already complained about how increasing specialization of academic disciplines has tremendously narrowed the mind of a supposedly educated person from wisdom and understanding about the whole of reality to that of a “specialist” (namely, an idiot in every domain of life except one).<sup>186</sup> Another important mechanism which has contributed to the decline of learning and thinking in higher education is certainly the colonization of universities by leftist ideologies. This is the focus of the two neoconservative critics cited here, David Gelernter (*America-Lite*) and Allan Bloom (*The Closing of the American Mind*). The requirement for academic thinking and research conclusions to be politically correct in order to reinforce the dominant leftist paradigm (“white men are oppressing minorities and women”, etc.) has dummed academia in the sense that the mind is now required to look away from truth and reality in favor of artificially constructed fantasy. What has happened in American universities in the past forty years is indeed akin to what happened in China between 1949 and 1979 and in Germany between 1933 and 1945. As one commentator has noted in regard to Bloom's classic,<sup>187</sup> the combination of the leftist colonization of academia with the concurrent relaxing of academic standards in universities has meant a change-over of university's goal from teaching students *how* to think to teaching them *what* to think. These trends, not discussed here, have been detrimental to

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186 My favorite remains Ortega y Gasset's in *The Revolt of the Masses*.

187 During the conference on the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Bloom's *Closing*, held in Harvard in January 2013. During the first panel on “Students”, with Arthur Melzer, Kathryn Sensen, James Hankins, and Paul Cantor.

learning and thinking not only on the undergraduate level but also on the graduate level. The fact is that, because the quality of learning even on the graduate level and in academic discipline itself have been on the decline, even supposedly educated people today are increasingly uneducated or dummified. Although I do not explore this matter here, I cannot help but wonder whether there might be a connection between the general switch-over in cognitive style from thinking to information-processing on the one hand and academic over-specialization and leftist politicization on the other.

## 22. Conclusions

### A. “Laziness”

In this essay I have advanced a new McDonaldization thesis as a better descriptor of the current trend of American society (the “grand narrative”): American society is becoming more and more like a McDonald's in the sense that people quickly do their things in order to move on to something else with little attention to, and patience for, depth and details, with the result that everything is reduced to the simplest, that appearance and presentation have come to acquire paramount importance while the content of one's character and the real level of one's intelligence are increasingly overlooked, and that the experience of life is becoming increasingly superficial, shallow, and perfunctory – just as, when customers go into McDonald's, they get a simple meal quickly and eat it quickly in order to move on: a superficial, shallow, and perfunctory “cuisine”. Nobody slows down and tarries to understand things – events, situations, and each other – a little better. In consequence, the human mind has become increasingly unable to comprehend complex matters and is increasingly geared to routines, rules, and clichés with decreasing capacity for flexibility, creativity, critical thinking, understanding, and wisdom. Instead of thinking and reflecting, the mind conducts the simpler task of processing information, matching categories, and repeating slogans. This kind of mind is the quintessential product of growing up with the Internet (specifically Web 2.0) and smartphones. Meanwhile, the increasing rationalization in all domains of society also reinforces, and is reinforced by, this decreasing capacity of the mind. In this essay we have examined how the fundamental modus operandi of conducting business on the Internet is, in the context of increasing rationalization, also colonizing the health care system, the mental health system, the criminal justice system, the law enforcement system, the homeland security system, and the higher education system. Especially marked is people's decreasing ability to understand each other and all human phenomena – even while engineering companies are inventing ever more wondrous technologies to enable us, increasingly brainless, to control nature. Correlative with humans' ability to control nature is their decreasing ability to understand themselves and their own society. In life I have always noticed the necessity of an “equilibrium”, a “total amount” which can never be surpassed: whenever humanity progresses in one domain, they regress in another, so that, in the end, they have achieved no net gain. We are always at the maximum of our progress. Our miraculous achievement in the domain of technology has been compensated by our regression in the domain of understanding and communicating with each other.

In this concluding section, I want to first of all describe some of my personal experiences and personal impressions which have prompted me to conduct this reflection on McDonaldization and the further

rationalization of our society. In the process I will round off my reflections on the various domains of social life which have been examined in the foregoing and – picking up the question mentioned in the very beginning – consider the most important objection which those commentators would raise who do not share the pessimism that we are entering a new Dark Age, the era of brain-death, i.e. that, throughout human history, most people have never been very smart. As a way to emphasize the peculiar nature of the present era, I then want to point up another characterization of this increasing superficiality and shallowness of our existence, i.e. laziness (when it comes to brain-using) and the cognitive style of “lazy brain-users” (“cognitive misers”). In the process I shall also describe the mode of existence that is congruent with lazy brain-users (“I-It”) and the mode that is alienated by them (“I-Thou”), consider the implication of such lazy, unthinking, and information-processing brain for the healthy functioning of a democracy (republicanism, social capital, governmental transparency), and reach a deeper understanding of America's increasing corruption. Finally, in the very end, I would like to sketch out a cure to the dummification (“brain-dying”) engendered by the McDonaldization of our society – a sketch of the sort of “utopia” the realization of which is the proper objective of my “leftist conservatism”.

This essay is, for me, not a mere dispassionate exercise on an abstract academic theme. It's about a phenomenon with which I have been personally struggling since a long time ago. I have been personally struggling with the increasing worthlessness of a college education nowadays. I have personally met so many people with a bachelor or master degree and yet who are as ignorant and stupid as peasants from the Middle-Ages. The new generation of college graduates has caused me so much pain because they have no idea that they have never learned anything in college but, deluded by their possession of a college degree, actually believe they belong to the intelligentsia. Again, the worst combination: arrogance and stupidity. The new generation of college graduates no longer has any idea what *it is like* to be educated and intelligent. This is of course more the case in regard to graduates from the humanities and some social science disciplines (psychology, education) than in regard to graduates from physical sciences and other more rigorous social science disciplines (economics, sociology).

I have personally acquired the impression that the newer generation is also less sensitive to my (and presumably other people's) emotional state. I find it ever easier to deceive people and manipulate them nowadays because it appears ever easier to hide from them whatever feelings I have inside me. The “Millennials” who have grown up with the Internet and smartphones are both emotionally less sensitive and cognitively less active, both less feeling and less questioning.

I have increasingly the impression that people in America nowadays are specifically characterized by mental confusion and faulty memory. Making them understand even simple descriptions of empirical reality has become an extremely difficult task at times. If I say to a youngster, “My women adversaries have recorded our conversation in the garden the other day”, she would respond, “What? *You* have recorded my conversation with you?” When I had two backpacks with me and the social service employees took one of them away, and when I shouted to them, “Where is my backpack?” they would point to my remaining backpack, “It's right there!” “No! I have two backpacks!” And they would not understand what I was saying, unable to overcome their preconception that every person carried only one backpack. This mental confusion extends to educated people as well. Once in an email I tried to bring to my professor friend's attention the works of Paul Rabinow. “What's Rainbow?” he replied. I

have an endless series of such anecdotes.

Because I have had decades of experience with consuming mental health services, I have also personally witnessed the declining expertise of psychotherapists and psychiatrists in America in the past thirty years. Up until the early 1990s, I could still run into psychologists in the therapeutic setting who were wise and disciplined and expert on human psychology such as you would expect from years of studying and psychoanalysis. After 2000, I virtually never met anybody in the mental health profession who had any understanding of what I was thinking and feeling. Evidently, because the educational process is becoming increasingly cavalier and perfunctory and “rational”, anybody could have graduated with a degree in psychology or psychiatry and obtained a license – anybody without any talent for understanding human psychology. As noted, what has so facilitated this is the increasing literalism involved in “rationalized” learning: merely memorizing words from textbooks and repeating them on examination is enough to graduate and get licensed.

What I have noted above – the continual decline of the time which a mental health professional spends with his or her patient – is something which I have also personally experienced. Mental health professionals not only can no longer understand their patient; they no longer have any interest in interacting with him. The kind of intense therapy and intense interest in the patient which we read about in, say, the famous Torey Hayden's novels or in Dr Wilbur's “*Sybil*”<sup>188</sup> has completely disappeared after the 1990s. Meanwhile, I began noticing, concurrently, how these supposed authorities on human sanity and insanity and mental functions are increasingly mentally confused just like the rest of the population. Once in 2012, a psychiatrist of mine called up the mental evaluation team requesting them to come evaluate me. The evaluation team then called me believing they were calling the doctor, mistaking me for the doctor and the doctor for the patient. Again, my anecdotes of such sort are endless.

I have acquired my deepest personal impression about McDonaldization through my negotiation with police officers. Another anecdote: Once I broke a window by throwing a bottle against it. The security guards caught me and the police came. The police officer took me to the station. When he searched my bag and found a rock in it, he uttered, “So you have broken the window with a rock!” It had never occurred to him to ask himself why the rock was still inside my bag if I had supposedly broken the window with it. He then suffered memory defect and wrongly assumed I was the same guy whom he had arrested months ago for breaking a window. All this time, he had never bothered to go to the crime scene to take a look (and discover that it was broken by a bottle) and to check my arrest record to discover that I was not the person he had arrested the last time.

Soon I was arrested again for more broken windows. Based on witnesses' identification, over a dozen police officers came to my home to arrest me. Such a vast mobilization for a vandalism case – yet, when the detectives brought me into the station to interview me, they spent merely three minutes asking me a few questions (Is there stalking? Is this a hate crime?) and quickly brushed me aside. They were clearly not interested in hearing from me. When it came time to meet my public defender, she and her supervisor immediately jumped to the conclusion that I was insane and sent me to mental

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188 Journalist Flora Rheta Schreiber's 1973 best-seller *Sybil*, the story about Dr Cornelia Wilbur and her most special patient Shirley Ardell Mason.



evaluation. They had never bothered to interview me about facts and details, but, on the basis of how I looked, assumed they already knew what it was about. My public defender would get angry and berate me if I attempted to explain that what had happened was different from witnesses' descriptions on the police report. The court-appointed psychiatrist, amazingly, spent 30 minutes asking me questions and evaluating me. He asked me how I planned to defend myself and, when I replied that, in one instance, I had an alibi, that I was somewhere else and had recorded my conversations and activities on that day with a voice-recorder, he got confused and wrote in his report that I told him I had “webcammed” myself that day as my alibi, which he considered to be insufficient (and which therefore spoke against my competency to stand trial).

You should have been able to see the common thread running through all these anecdotes. Beside the fact that everybody is confused and can't understand anything complex and can't reason – what has been abundantly covered in the foregoing – we are now living in a society where doctors are not interested in understanding (or even talking to) their patients, where detectives are not interested in investigating crimes (or even talking to the suspect), where public defenders are not interested in understanding and defending their clients (or even talking to them), where students are not interested in learning and exerting themselves. (“Entitled disengagement” means at bottom the impossibility of demanding that the students exert their brain.) And so on in every domain of our McDonaldized society – to the point that I have simply lost interest in this society altogether. It's bad enough that everyone – from commoners to experts – seems to suffer from brain damage and is constantly confused and can never hear things right. The worst thing is that everyone believes s/he already knows the conclusion before investigating the matter or hearing from the person involved. Too often, people – from acquaintances to doctors – would ask me what had happened to me, and, as soon as I began describing my situation, they would assume they knew what I wanted to say, interrupt me, and produce their preconception as to what I wanted to say – and they would be completely wrong. But, since they would never let me speak for myself, they would never find out they were wrong. Nobody is interested in hearing, understanding, or learning anything from me. It's not just that people are too dumb to understand what I'm saying; communication has become impossible when the very opportunity of speaking has disappeared. This is McDonaldization at its most blatant: people want a ready-made conclusion *here and now* – instantly, before investigating the matter and hearing from the person involved. They refuse to wait the slightest. Hence nobody is interested in hearing, understanding, or learning anything from anybody – nobody has such patience anymore. Hence the polarization of our society as noted earlier. Recall Ortega's “intellectual hermetism”: except that we are not talking about arrogance this time, but about *laziness* – this is yet another cause, another component of McDonaldization. Namely, McDonaldization has made everybody too lazy to pay attention and exert his or her brain. This very important aspect of the dummification process which underlies the increasing superficiality and cavalier nature of our social functioning, i.e. people's increasing laziness – at least when it comes to using their brain<sup>189</sup> – is implicit in the foregoing description of the increasingly cavalier and perfunctory operations in the mental health system, criminal justice system, law enforcement system, homeland security system, and higher education; but it was not specifically named as such. (The police officers are certainly not lazy when they appear in the dozens at your front door to arrest you for a broken window, but they are far too lazy when it comes time for them to

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189 People can be hardworking in one respect but lazy in another. Although Americans are working longer hours than ever before, they are getting ever lazier when it comes to exerting their brain to understand something.

interview you about what has happened.) You may recall Jacques Rancière's most famous book, *Le maître ignorant*. The whole point in the story about Professor Jacotot is that *motivation* is absolutely essential to learning. To be intelligent, one must learn; to learn, one must not only be smart, but also *want* to learn. People nowadays are simply less motivated, less driven, to use their brain to understand anything. The result is that they degrade the quality of work in the institutions in which they work by doing their work only superficially to get by, and that, in the domain of public discourse, they rely, as noted earlier, increasingly on stereotypes, can do no more than call each other names, and easily fall victims to fake news and government propaganda. People nowadays are simply too *lazy* to think beyond stereotypes, to understand each other, and to investigate whether the news pieces and propaganda have any truth in them. Thus, my personal impression is that our postmodern cognitive style, information-processing, is characterized by a tremendous *laziness*. Both the comfort and the convenience offered by digital devices, instant messaging, and 24 hour news and video-streaming and the simplicity and surety offered by rationalized rules and procedures seem to have contributed to people's deteriorating desire to exert their brain for any purpose whatsoever.

In my anecdotes I have operated in much the same way as Montesquieu or Tocqueville have done, trying to infer the character of a people, a society, and a nation by observing their daily habits.<sup>190</sup> (Although my reason for wanting to explain this character is that it makes me miserable: more on this below.) This is how I have expanded my personal impressions into this book-length essay. The author of the first great classic on postmodern dummification which I have so admired, *The Closing of the American Mind*, has, it seems to me, similarly operated. So has Ortega y Gasset in *Revolt of the Masses*. (One can surely name many more famous philosophers along this line.) I am the opposite of the typical citizen of our McDonaldized world. Together with Montesquieu or Tocqueville – and other thinkers like him such as Ortega y Gasset and Allan Bloom – I belong to that minority of the human population who, more sensitive to their environment, refuse to go through the world as if going through a McDonald's – always in a hurry, never bothering to stop and think about what is going on – but take the time to dwell on each experience and reflect on it in order to *understand* the reason behind it.<sup>191</sup> Traversing through American society just as Montesquieu had during his “Grand Tour”,<sup>192</sup> I have thus noticed these three things in particular: (1) the *original* principle, namely, to get everybody involved in everything; (2) the trend to cater to the lowest common denominator, to make their life easier and more comfortable while empowering them with technology and constantly showering them with praises

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190 For an overview of Montesquieu's philosophy, I have used Peter V. Conroy Jr., *Montesquieu Revisited*, Twayne Publishers: New York, 1992. Otherwise, I have used Montesquieu's most representative work, *De l'esprit de lois*.

191 Colin Wilson, in his famous *The Outsider* (1956), has called this kind of human being an “outsider”. The outsider stands for truth and *sees deeper* and is characterized by a feeling of unreality (de-realization in psychiatric parlance). He has difficulty in finding happiness in society because society is marked by insensitivity whereas he is sensitive, and even has problem surviving in society because the majority does not understand him. It seems that the Straussian philosopher is an Outsider – since he sees the truth that there is no God, no after-life, and no justice in this universe and always risks being killed by his fellow citizens – but that not every Outsider is a philosopher (in the Straussian sense). Many Outsiders are artists and novelists and poets and so on. Furthermore, as Wilson himself has noted, many artists and writers are quite mainstream and do not belong to the Outsider group. See also John A. Weigel's *Colin Wilson* (Twayne Publishers: Boston, 1975) and Howard Dossor's retrospective on Wilson given on 2 January, 2014, in Melbourne.

192 Conroy is at pain to point out how Montesquieu formulated most of his reflections in his study on the Roman empire and in his *Laws* during his three-year voyage through Europe (from Italy through Germany to England) where he carefully observed the different customs of various peoples.

telling them how much they deserve all the good things in the world; and (3) the *current* principle, namely, to waste labor, brain power, and natural resources as much as possible because there are too much around. I have thus noticed the need to simplify things in order to process an ever larger volume, with the attendant *necessity* to never tarry to consider details and ponder depth, and in order to enable idiots to do expert work. I have also noticed how much rationalization is part of this whole mechanism – that rationalized procedures are tailor-made for a system which has to quickly process a large volume, reduce the need for thinking, and recruit idiots to do expert work. (In other words, the purpose of rationalization in the contemporary American context is quite beyond Weber's original imagination.) I have also noticed how, to recruit consumers and make money, enterprises continue to invent new technology to make ordinary people's life more comfortable and effortless, to make daily business more convenient for them. The most obvious examples are the smartphones and the perpetual streaming of videos over the Internet. Like the way in which Montesquieu was able to detect how such a simple thing as a cup of tea could have corrupted a whole society,<sup>193</sup> I have noticed how smartphones with the ability to stream any entertainment videos at any time could have so corrupted an entire generation's cognitive ability. (Think about the most common scene nowadays: during a lecture or a presentation or reading or anything else, everybody is constantly looking at his or her smartphone without paying attention and, thanks to the general feeling of “freedom”, without feeling the need to pay attention: what effect does this “interruption culture” have on an entire generation's cognitive ability?)<sup>194</sup> Because life is becoming too comfortable with the smartphone culture – anyone can communicate and receive anything instantaneously without waiting and can stream any video at the very instant that one suddenly thinks of it – the ordinary postmodern consumer is not only conditioned to a life of constant interruptions without a moment of concentration but also becoming used to tremendous laziness. People who sit in front of their streaming videos all day long become used to their passivity and gradually develop an absolute unwillingness to exert any effort to *actively* understand anything. In

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193 “... tea is ruining the Dutch Bourgeoisie. A woman drinks thirty cups of tea in the morning. With that, the whole family gets together; a lot of sugar is consumed; the husband hangs around for two hours and wastes his time. The same thing with the servants. Tea weakens women's muscle tone; as a remedy, a number of them take up strong spirits...” Cited in Conroy, *ibid.*, p. 50.

194 Bloom's negative view on rock music applies here as well (*Closing*, p. 74 – 75, emphasis added): “Picture a thirteen-year-old boy sitting in the living room of his family home doing his math assignment while wearing his Walkman headphones or watching MTV. He enjoys the liberties hard won over centuries by the alliance of philosophic genius and political heroism, consecrated by the blood of martyrs; he is provided with comfort and leisure by the most productive economy ever known to mankind; science has penetrated the secrets of nature in order to provide him with the marvelous, lifelike electronic sound and image reproduction he is enjoying. *And in what does progress culminate?* A pubescent child whose body throbs with orgasmic rhythms; whose feelings are made articulate in hymns to the joys of onanism or the killing of parents; whose ambition is to win fame and wealth in imitating the drag-queen who makes the music. In short, life is made into a nonstop, commercially prepackaged masturbational fantasy.” In sum, Bloom's critique is not made from the perspective of cognitive psychology but consists in the philosophic (Platonic) argument that rock music destroyed the new generation's inclination for classics or liberal education in general by disrupting their pleasure principles (causing excessive release of pleasures without the occasions of lofty achievements to which the pleasure principle was originally attuned). Similarly, Putnam's observation about the corrupting effect of television on cognitive ability and social connectedness fits in here as well. And so we have television since the 1950s, rock music since the 1960s, Walkman since the 1980s, cable TV since the 1990s, Internet since 2000, and smartphone since 2010: drug cartels, parasiting on our democratic freedom and material abundance, continually invent new forms of addictive substances to degrade our human potential as a way of making money off us. All these commentators are making the Ortegan point that our ancestors have fought hard for freedom and toiled hard for material abundance so that we can fry our brain and live like trash.

other words: no longer able to concentrate, people are also becoming lazier than ever before when it comes to using their brain. In all the personal examples I have cited above, what characterizes police officers and detectives and lawyers and therapists and psychiatrists and undergraduate students is a virulent laziness when it comes to using their brain to understand their suspect or their patient or their client or the subject matter at hand. I have here supplemented other commentators' complaints about the shorter attention span and an inability to concentrate such as have been conditioned by a life with digital media and modern urban setting not only with an additional complaint about rationalization in general but also with this complaint about people's deteriorating *motivation* to use their brain under the influence of comfort and convenience provided by their digital devices and the increasingly simple life necessitated by McDonaldization – just as Montesquieu has noted that the northern cold climate has created a disciplined and liberty-loving people while the southern comfortable climate has conditioned a softer, less disciplined people prone to monarchy and despotism. Again, rationalization has tremendously facilitated the new tendency toward laziness: rules and procedures free the mind from exertion while enabling the efficient processing of an ever larger volume. And it can be seen that people's increasing reliance on conventions, slogans, and clichés is also a consequence of their increasing laziness about using their brain. At issue is nothing less than the decline of human civilization itself. Montesquieu, in his study on the decline of the Roman empire, describes how luxury and laxation have corrupted the republican spirit, i.e. have caused the decline of discipline among citizens. In *Laws* he describes how the correlative of comfort, luxury, and laxation, i.e. arrogance, could destroy a democratic republic.<sup>195</sup> In this he is not only echoing many philosophers from Plato onward, but also prefiguring Ortega y Gasset's *Revolt of the Masses* and, to a lesser extent, Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind*. Today our society is increasingly corrupted because increasing simplification (McDonaldization), increasing rationalization, and increasing comfort and convenience have contributed to the increasing atrophy of our mind – which means also a supreme laziness about using it. Simply consider how many of the new trends of our institutions are completely congruent with the phenomenon of laziness. For example, the increasing reliance on pills in the mental health system can be explained not only by the need to process a larger number of patients in a shorter time, not only by pharmaceutical companies' propaganda for the sake of profits, but also by an increasing unwillingness to use our brain to understand what the problem is. Old-fashioned psychoanalysis and cognitive therapy require too much exertion of brain power (for both the therapist and the patient), simply swallowing a pill is far easier, sparing us the trouble to use our head. On top of all this, I have finally noticed how authority figures', and the general culture's, constant catering to the masses has bred a most *dangerous* generation – with a *dangerous* sense of entitlement, as if they should be automatically respected without having to exert themselves in the slightest manner or accomplish anything significant in order to earn it. That is to say, I have finally noticed the detrimental effect of our democratic culture, authorities', enterprises', and political activists' bad habit of constantly encouraging ordinary people to assert themselves and showering them with praises – that they are so well born that, simply given the means, every one of them can accomplish great things. The resulting over-confident

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195 What he calls *égalité extrême* (Livre VIII): “Autant que le ciel est éloigné de la terre, autant le véritable esprit d'égalité l'est-il de l'esprit d'égalité extrême. Le premier ne consiste point à faire en sorte que tout le monde commande, ou que personne ne soit commandé; mais à obéir et à commander à ses égaux. Il ne cherche pas à n'avoir point de maître, mais à n'avoir que ses égaux pour maîtres. ... Telle est la différence entre la démocratie réglée et celle qui ne l'est pas, que, dans la première, on n'est égal que comme citoyen, et que, dans l'autre, on est encore égal comme magistrat, comme sénateur, comme juge, comme père, comme mari, comme maître.”

spoiled children, without any idea how increasingly limited their mental capacity is and without any awareness of the need to learn from people who know better, and comfortably respected without having to demonstrate any special capacity – this kind of people can only be expected to indulge themselves in their laziness even further having been thoroughly convinced that they are quite sufficient as they are.

## B.

### Objection: “It has always been like this”

I have felt it important in this last section to comment on those personal experiences of mine which have motivated me to conduct this reflection because it is inevitable that many commentators will find this essay to be a waste of time and reject the notion that people's brain is in any sort of jeopardy. I have personally heard a few scientists and sociologists expressing the bizarre view that ordinary people are in fact getting smarter because they have been, on average, performing better on IQ tests or because more of them have nowadays graduated with a college degree. Needless to say, I consider this kind of objection to be absolutely devoid of substance because it is itself an instance of McDonaldization: judging matters by superficial indexes – as if a college degree means today the same thing as it did a hundred years ago.<sup>196</sup> We must come to terms with the reason why even educated people will disagree on matters which should have seemed so obvious to everyone: people have had different experiences and their different experiences have caused them to develop different grand narratives about the world. They then go through life cherry-picking their evidences, focusing on those instances in their life which confirm their grand narratives while overlooking others which contradict them, so that, in the end, they become ever more confident that their understanding of how the world works is correct. This is why feminists take it to be obvious that American society is sexist and misogynist and cannot understand why “men's rights” people can honestly (i.e. without the ulterior motive of protecting men's power) believe that American society is biased toward women, and vice versa. Throughout my life I have been a victim of McDonaldization. Because I am ugly and don't look confident, people usually assume I'm stupid (judging me by appearance and presentation), are not interested in hearing from me, and are unmotivated to learn about me. I thus experience far more laziness and close-mindedness from people than those who raise objection to the dummification thesis here: because they look pretty and confident or are propped up by their credentials, they experience less laziness and close-mindedness from their fellow human beings – they have not been victims of McDonaldization. People who have not suffered communication problems or been misdiagnosed or misjudged or falsely convicted simply do not have the impression that there is any serious problem with our institutions and smartphone culture. They will object saying they have seen none of the foregoing. There is no point in arguing with these more fortunate souls: they haven't really investigated the matter. People who are more learned, however, will raise a kind of objection which must be reckoned with here, namely the fact that all my complaints have been heard before in our intellectual history, so that – as noted – there cannot have occurred any sort of decline if the problem has been perennial.

I have myself noticed this problem. Soon after I first formulated my thoughts between 2012 and 2014 about how people's over-confidence in themselves due to growing up in a democracy has rendered communication (and therefore learning) increasingly impossible for them, I noticed, in 2015, that

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<sup>196</sup> Carr himself has discussed (ibid.) where this erroneous notion that people's IQ test scores have been increasing in the past decades come from.

Ortega y Gasset has made the same observation in 1920s. Soon after I have, through my involvement with the progressive elements in the Green Party in 2016, developed the impression that all this fight for social justice is just empty slogans without thinking and reasoning, I came upon the exact same complaint by Allan Bloom in his *Closing*. Then, while exploring Hannah Arendt further as a forerunner of my “leftist conservatism”, I ran into her simple statement about the corruption of American society in late 1950s and early 1960s (“Reflections on Little Rock”):

For unlike other domestic problems which have beset this country since the end of World War II (*a security hysteria, a runaway prosperity, and the concomitant transformation of an economy of abundance into a market where sheer superfluity and nonsense almost wash out the essential and the productive*), and unlike such long-range difficulties as the problem of mass culture and mass education – both of which are typical of modern society in general and not only of America – the country's attitude to its Negro population is rooted in American tradition and nothing else. (Emphasis added.)

This (the italicized portion) is exactly what commentators *today* point to about America as evidences of its decline and corruption.

My point of view is that we are faced with the same problem, but that the problem has gotten worse. That is, it is the same trend which has been developing from the heydays of modernity (Ortega's time) through the beginning of postmodern era (Arendt and then Bloom) to the current postmodern heydays (Nicholas Carr). Carr has also cited, in his aforementioned classic, the same complaints made when the printing press first came into existence – that unthinking and greedy people were using it to print garbage which would corrupt ordinary people's intelligence and morals – and, when the novel (*roman*) first became prevalent in France in the 1730s, it was also severely criticized for corrupting people's mind.<sup>197</sup> But this does not mean that the increase of intelligence thanks to the printing press and its erosion thanks to the Internet is pure fantasy. Printed books and *romans* eventually become respectable because great minds have decided to use them to express their geniuses rather than common people's base sentiments – which confirms my thesis that the harm inherent in the new technology lies in the way in which dumb people use them – and a shallow, pornographic *roman* from the 1700s is in fact better for the mind (at least it develops the reader's sense of grammar and descriptive power) than a contemporary video game which Anita Sarkeesian (Feminist Frequency) is fond of criticizing – which can perhaps only be praised for developing the gamer's spatial perception. A dumb thing from the past is in fact smarter than a dumb thing of the present age. *Dumb and dumber*.

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197 Jean Goulemot's introduction in the Gallimard edition of Rousseau's *La nouvelle Héloïse* discusses the controversy to which the *roman* was subjected when it was first becoming prevalent after the 1730s: it was widely criticized for its corrupting influence on the mind. For example, “Bruzen de la Martinière, pédagogue et géographe, affirme d'un ton tranchant: 'on s'y gâte le goût, on y prend de fausses idées de la vertu; on y rencontre des images obscènes; on s'y apprivoise insensiblement avec elles; et on se laisse amollir par le langage séduisant des passions.’” Since women were thought to be the primary consumers of *romans*, the new literary form was also criticized for corrupting women by distracting them from their domestic duties and installing in their head strange fantasies which motivated them to waste themselves. “Abîmées dans leur lecture, la femme mariée oublie ses devoirs et la jeune fille apprend ce qu'elle ne doit connaître que bien plus tard, devenue épouse et mère.... La gravure galante est à ce égard éloquent: la jeune fille qui cède à son amant ou se livre à des caresses impudiques a toujours un livre, sans nul doute un roman, à son chevet.”

We can consider the parallel phenomenon in the problem – which is, as noted, somewhat related to dummification – of superficialization, even break-down, of human relationships due to urbanization. When Putnam, in his aforementioned classic, complains about the deterioration of social capital among Baby Boomers and Generation X, he takes care to mention that the same phenomenon had in fact occurred during the late nineteenth century, so that America is not characterized by a continuous decline of social capital but rather by the recurring cycles of its increase and decline. In late nineteenth century, it was also technological advances, although different sorts of invention, which had caused a sudden, steep decline of social capital. The invention of railway, telegraph, and electricity for lighting accelerated urbanization and the growth of big cities where people who did not know each other and never grew up with each other came to meet – concomitant with the decline of traditional communities where people grew up with each other and were familiar with each other. The resultant widespread feeling of alienation in the urban settings caused many critics of the time to denounce railway and telegraph – how they had destroyed community life – in a way which very much echoes Putnam's own criticism of how television has caused the decline of civic engagement. The ills of urbanization had at the time also encouraged Oswald Spengler to make the distinction between “culture” and “civilization” and Ferdinand Tönnies to develop the contrast between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*: these famous thinkers at the time were also experiencing a sense of decline just as I do now. If in every era the most representative thinkers are always complaining about “decline”, then nothing could possibly have really declined. As has already been noted, with any sort of progress – whether it is progress from small, isolated communities to urbanization, or the enlargement of capitalism and the free market, or the enlargement of the range of human communication from personal communication to mass media – there is always an equilibrium: whenever something is gained, something else is lost. If technology has made communication easier and longer range, then this advantage must be compensated by its becoming more shallow and less meaningful.

My personal experience clearly suggests to me that a decline has occurred – people simply weren't this dumb and confused when I tried to talk to them thirty years ago, and this is not because I have become so much smarter – despite the fact that many smart people in the past have complained like I do and that many other people (including smart people) in the present don't have the same complaint. Certainly, my point of view remains a mere hunch until, as noted, a longitudinal and latitudinal study on dummification can be conducted. In this last section I want to answer in fullness this question which has been posed in the very beginning: if people have always been dumb throughout history (if society has always been too corrupt for the philosopher), in what way are people dumber today – or in what way is society more corrupt today? The full answer: People were dumb in the past solely because they weren't educated. Today, a whole complex of causes has emerged to make people dumber than ever before and to determine *new manners* in which they can be dumb. It's not just uneducation, but also digitalization, McDonaldization, rationalization, laziness about brain-using, and arrogance. And on top of all this, there are political correctness (which I didn't cover here) and increasing government propaganda (which I shall mention momentarily). I invite you to see phenomenologically that, even though, throughout history, the common people have always been too dumb, and society too corrupt, for the philosopher, there is something strange about the current generation which has never been seen before. When I watched CNN's “The Seventies” or “The Eighties”, or when I compare the documentaries on students' movements in the sixties in USA and Germany with the Antifa movement which I personally witness today, I was struck by how the world used to be a better place forty years

ago. People were surely dumb back then – hence they did stupid things and hurt each other, and racism and sexism were rampant back then unlike it is the case today. But people's brain was more *alive* back then, there was not the dead, robotic, formalism which characterizes the contemporary brain and institutions. Again, the difference is between a *thinking* brain (although it thinks badly) and an *information-processing* brain. However stupid people were in the past, they weren't simply processing information but were feeling negative emotions like jealousy and envy, acting on them, and incapable of understanding the world and unable to reason so as to find common grounds with their fellow human beings. Most importantly, they didn't mistake themselves for geniuses *to the extent to which* dumb people do today, and they weren't deluded *enough* to believe that whatever they wanted was their “right”. My dummification thesis basically asserts that we are in an era of decline – that we are entering a new Dark Age – as our cognitive style has switched to information-processing and the formerly dumb peasants who were at least humble enough to know they should keep their head down when the lord arrived have morphed into dumb consumers and citizens of today's world who constantly assert themselves and refuse to listen to anyone who knows better. My personal experience with American society in the past thirty years has simply been, partly, that digital mass communication technology (smartphones and Internet) has considerably contributed to the current deterioration of brain power from thinking and feeling to information-processing. Reminiscent of Putnam's observation about how television has changed our habit and destroyed our social capital by making us too lazy about connecting with other people, my personal experience with postmodern people has also been that our digital devices and Internet have caused the atrophy of our brain by conditioning it to passivity and comfort on top of shortening its attention span, evaporating its patience, and eroding its ability to concentrate. It is also part of my personal experience with American society that, in the past thirty years, the ideology “We have rights”, along with the ideology of gender and racial equality, has considerably solidified its foothold in ordinary people's conscience emboldening them to demand ever more aggressively what they want and making them ever more confident in themselves – that they are in the right so that they need not entertain doubts about themselves and listen to others for a change. It is finally part of my personal experience that, in the past thirty years, professionals in the domains examined above are increasingly uninterested in their clients and patients and more and more simply going through the motion (by going through the rationalized procedures) so that their expert understanding of their respective subject matter has tremendously atrophied due to apathy and immense laziness about using their head. When I expound my dummification thesis in such details, it seems that this complaint is indeed being raised for the first time in human intellectual history.

C.  
“I-It” vs “I-Thou”  
or the government vs the educator

Another part of my personal experience is that the American government has in the past thirty years considerably stepped up their propagandist campaign and that it has been broadcasting propaganda and brainwashing their citizens more successfully than any other government in any other lands or epochs. The success is due to two factors: the mass media and the sweet illusion which the democratic climate of inalienable rights has created in people's mind (that they are somehow the natural-born masters of their government). People have no idea that the narratives with which their government everyday feeds them through the media are frequently just “war-propaganda” (all the bullshit about Muslim terrorists,



evil Russians, and their own government's respect of their rights and privacy and desire to protect them from harm) which describe the exact opposite of reality. By convincing people of the opposite of reality, propaganda disconnect people from reality. By always giving people a simple, black-and-white picture of the world (the evil “them” vs the good “us”), propaganda make people dumb – simple-minded, unthinking, and thus McDonaldized. Meanwhile, propaganda themselves are successful precisely because people are McDonaldized and so quite dumb: unwilling to tarry to think about, and investigate, things and unable to understand complex, non-black-and-white situations. Hence government propaganda, along with those clichés and slogans current in the social domain and sensational news about mass-murder or tabloid gossips, are an integral part of the McDonaldization of our world. Hence, the so-called “peace-activists” (for example my favorite Daniele Ganser, the best in our time) and gurus of the so-called “alternative media” (for example my favorites like Thierry Meyssan or James Corbett or Sibel Edmond or Eva Bartlett), when they attempt to debunk government war propaganda, are not simply trying to promote peace but, in my view, also trying to make us smarter – in the double sense of liberating us from delusions and introducing us to a more complex vision of the world which is closer to reality.<sup>198</sup>

However, I do not regard this peace-activism and alternative media as entirely positive. I shall explain my reason in more detail later; for now, simply this. The government does not simply tell (simple, black-and-white) lies out of an intent to manipulate people (to do things for elites' own benefits) but also does so out of necessity. When I learned in the beginning about the government's attitude, “People are dumb and so we must lie to them – tell them 'noble lies' – in order to steer them (deceive them) onto the right path...” – this Straussian tendency which I have, elsewhere, characterized as “smart totalitarianism” – I was, like many other intellectuals who have seen through the deception of Western democracies, incensed. What kind of democracy is this? Only gradually did I realize that the government is really correct in its assessment of the “people”. Telling noble lies is really the only possible way for a democratic nation to function – because, here, the “people” are dumb as hell while having been completely spoiled and become arrogant enough as to believe that they can understand what a government does and should do and that their government should therefore heed their opinions and respect their rights. It's simply unrealistic to expect the “people” to understand what the government is doing, needs to do, or should do and to realize how worthless the things are to which they believe they have a right. In other words, democracy is impossible because the “people” are too dumb (and too arrogant and too lazy about using their brain). This is another aspect of my story about how the decline of people's ability, and will, to use their brain is corrupting our civilization. While Montesquieu was worried that a democratic republic will become corrupted and degenerate into monarchy and despotism when luxury is introduced to corrupt civic virtue (in addition to the degeneration of “equality” to *égalité extrême*), we today should worry about whether people's dumbness has corrupted our democratic republic by making it impossible for it to function as such. (This is my own phrasing of the educators' complaint that the corruption of liberal education is detrimental to our democratic republic by eroding citizens' ability to perform their civic responsibility.) Once again, beside McDonaldization and rationalization, I have to single out digital communication as the principal culprit in the current situation. Like what railway and telegraph have done in late

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198 Hence Daniele Ganser has defined the two governing principles of peace-activism as “Liebe” and “Wahrheit” and characterized the essential cognitive activity of a peace-activist as “Achtsamkeit”.

nineteenth century,<sup>199</sup> the Internet, by tremendously facilitating communications between different parts of the same nation, has further integrated the discoursing public into one unity. Any public speaker as well as government official is aware of the fact that, the larger your audience, the dumber (the simpler, the more McDonaldized) your message has to become if you wish to be understood – that people are never dumber than when they congregate together as a single entity. A super-sized mass society itself can never function as a democracy in the way a city-state could (just as Montesquieu has deemed a republic to be only possible with nations no larger than medium size), and modern communication technology has made our society ever more “mass” and ever more super-sized.<sup>200</sup>

Here, however, is the trick. While the politicians and government bureaucrats are forced by dummification to manipulate people instead of making them understand anything, they never complain about it. The politicians and government bureaucrats are never concerned with dummification and never bemoan, in their hearts, the passing of a democratic republic – since their objective is to manipulate people (strategic action) rather than making them understand anything or being understood by them (communicative action). In Buber's terminology, their orientation toward life is I-It rather than I-Thou,<sup>201</sup> and so they find dummification advantageous rather than an obstacle to their happiness. In my case, because I am an educator, an author, and an artist, my *modus operandi* is I-Thou instead of I-It, or communicative action instead of strategic action, so that this increasingly rationalized and McDonaldized world is the most deadly for me. I thrive on understanding other people (why they believe what they believe, etc.) and making myself understood by them – something that's out of fashion in an increasingly rationalized and McDonaldized world.

Just as a dummified and McDonaldized world is advantageous to government propagandists (the shadow-manipulators inside the cave, to use Plato's terminology), so it is a paradise for practitioners of slanders. Again, a slanderer's *modus operandi* is strategic action (manipulating people with lies), while the victim's is communicative action (trying to make people understand what s/he is really about). When people are becoming increasingly simple-minded and lazy about brain-using, it's increasingly impossible to expect them to spend time and effort to investigate slanders and understand the innocence of the victim of slandering. Witness all the anti-Putin propaganda in late 2016 and early 2017. For example, refer to CNN's special episode about Putin,<sup>202</sup> which attributes his hatred toward Hillary Clinton to a dictator's natural fear of people wanting freedom when Hillary spoke for the Russian people in uprising in 2012. Once again, the American people's dumbness has encouraged the US governing elites to use slanders to accomplish national objectives. The elites can't really explain to their people why Putin preferred Trump to Clinton during the 2016 election. If they explain: Putin doesn't like Clinton because she is part of the “Establishment”, they would have to explain the long-standing US policy about “regime change”, the grounding of US policy in the struggle for natural resources and hydrocarbon energy reserves and America's destiny as the “last empire”... Nobody will understand what they are saying. The geopolitical reality has never been part of people's grand narratives. So the elites

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199 Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, p. 369.

200 Robert Putnam must be credited for having brought out other factors which have corrupted our democratic republic: such as the increasing bureaucratization of the state apparatus. I should therefore add that the decline of people's intelligence – while the state's actions are becoming increasingly complex and specialized – is only one of the many factors which are responsible for the decline of the democratic and republican tradition.

201 *Ich-Es* and *Ich-Du*.

202 CNN Special Report with Fareed Zakaria, “The Most Powerful Man in the World, Vladimir Putin”.

say: Putin has a grudge against Clinton because she spoke out against him during the 2012 protests in Russia. Everybody can understand what “personal grudge” is, and so everyone is mobilized to hate Putin and Trump. It is slander because it has falsely portrayed the deeply wise Putin as merely an ordinary shallow dictator who is possessive, jealous, power-hungry, and therefore intolerant of criticism. But people don't really deserve anything better than slanders given their inability to understand reality. When Putin is accused of hacking American election, neither does he bother to explain himself (what really happened) because, again, if he does, nobody will understand what he is saying. He simply denies it all. My point is that, because people are dumb and don't know they are dumb but are confident they are smart and their demands are their rights, the politicians are forced to tell stupid lies to dupe them, which only reinforce their dumbness. Politicians are not particularly bothered by this constraint because they are here to manipulate and mobilize, not to make people understand anything. It's a horror story for somebody like me because I want people to understand what I understand and to act on the basis of a correct understanding of reality. There are simply these two fundamentally different kinds of people. The “I-It people” feel increasingly at home in this dummed and McDonaldized world, whereas the “I-Thou people” feel increasingly alienated. In a moment I shall explain the proper method for getting out of this vicious cycle of people's dumbness and over-confidence and the elites' “noble lies”: namely, the replacement of a democratic culture with an authoritarian culture.

#### D. “Cognitive miser”

After learning that I am I-Thou instead of I-It, you should be able to imagine how, everyday, I am frustrated with the fact that people can no longer understand what I am saying and what I am about. Everyday I am saddened by how people can no longer understand each other and what their world is about. Everyday I am alarmed by how impossible it has become to communicate any idea – when it is slightly more complex than “I want coffee” – to other people. I am determined to understand the cause. Before I attributed it to people's increasing dumbness. Thus I have examined how rationalization, digitalization, and McDonaldization have contributed to people's increasing dumbness (their increasing reliance on clichés and their eroding understanding and critical and creative thinking capacity). The increasingly shallow, perfunctory, cavalier, and effortless existence means that people's brain is less activated and less able to understand anything complex and original. I have also examined how people's excessive confidence in themselves due to growing up under democracy and consumerism has prevented them from opening up their mind to other people's, especially experts', opinions. (Again, nobody has explained this better than Ortega y Gasset.) Then I gradually realized that motivation is also the problem. Both comfort and excessive self-confidence have conditioned people's increasing laziness about using their brain and hearkening onto others, while, in a McDonaldized world where presentation is all there is, those with lousy appearance have ever lesser ability to attract other people's interests. I am now getting much warmer to explaining my predicament: nobody is interested in understanding what I'm saying – and so nobody has ever tried. The increasingly shallow, perfunctory, cavalier, comfortable, and effortless existence has made people far less interested than before in understanding each other and the world before them. By now I have however pinpointed the problem even more precisely – what psychologists have referred to as “cognitive miser”.

I came across the concept “cognitive miser” in Côté and Allahaar's aforementioned classic – this inevitable product of the decline of liberal education: “We all prefer to rely on our memory of what we already know instead of making the mental effort to incorporate new information into our mental representations of the world... We would rather explain things with what we already know than spend the time and effort to learn new things”.<sup>203</sup> They then cite Jeffrey Ricker's characterization: “A mental characteristic in which the least amount of attention and mental effort needed to process information is used. This concept assumes that humans are limited in their capacity to process information and, therefore, make use of automatic processes (mental shortcuts, formally referred to as cognitive heuristics) that simplify complex problems. In other words, all other things being equal, we are motivated to use relatively effortless and simple mental shortcuts that provide rapid but often inaccurate solutions rather than effortful and complex mental processes that provide delayed but often more accurate solutions.”<sup>204</sup>

I have in my life often tested the current dummification of ordinary people and experts alike to the maximal degree by telling them my most unbelievable story about becoming a target of intelligence agencies and eventually being implanted with electronic nanochips. Such a story would be unbelievable to ordinary people even before the era of dummification, let alone for the current dummified generation. Needless to say, whenever I tell it to people, they immediately consider me to suffer from paranoid schizophrenia. “Schizophrenia” is an effortless and simple solution to the enigma (“How can this guy be involved with intelligence agencies and be implanted with electronic devices?”) which everyone immediately prefers to the complex solution (“Convoluting, unusual events do happen; intelligence agencies target people at times and, thanks to technological advances, more and more people are showing up with electronic implants in their body – we must investigate”). “Schizophrenia” is what everyone already knows whereas “becoming targeted by intelligence agencies and implanted” is something new which people will have to learn. It's simpler and requires less effort on the part of the mind to simply dismiss the story as “paranoid schizophrenia” than to modify one's established world-view (“mental representations”) through learning in order to incorporate the new information. A “cognitive miser”! Just as, under dummification, people rely on clichés and conventions more than ever before, so dummification – this increasingly shallow, perfunctory, cavalier, lazy and effortless existence – also means that people are more of a “cognitive miser” than ever before. In the same way, when people hear about a crazy killer on a rampage on public space, they prefer to immediately jump to the conclusion that he's afflicted with mental illness. To simply categorize somebody as “mentally ill” requires less effort on the mind's part than to delve into cause and effect and psychopathology which, when this complex is fully understood, would have explained the killer's actions as rational acts that can be expected of any normal human being with normal human emotions but who is caught up in his unfortunate circumstances. Therefore, the fact that, today, more and more socially intolerated actions are quickly categorized as “mental insanity” without being examined any longer in regard to their cause and effect is a sign that our current age is the era of dummification – that we are getting so perfunctory and cavalier toward life and so lazy about using our brain that we no longer have any inclination to understand anything out of the ordinary. (The public imagination seems to suppose that mentally ill people act on ideas that are randomly generated and which it is therefore senseless to examine.) The fact that the public is seeing “mental illness” at work in more and more of its outcasts – homeless

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203 *Lowering Higher Education*, p. 127.

204 *Ibid.*, p. 218.

people, vagrants and street-wanderers, prison inmates – is a surest indication that this public is becoming increasingly shallow and lazy and unmotivated to understand anything – just like the current generation of college students, criminal justice personnel, police officers, and mental health workers. Labeling anybody eccentric as “insane” saves the ordinary dumb and lazy people the trouble of understanding him or her. The growing proportion of mental illness in American society is in fact an indication of, not any sort of epidemic nor any greater precision of psychiatric judgment, but simply people's increasing laziness as well as their increasing simple-mindedness – that they are more a “cognitive miser” than ever before.

Recall the earlier comments on psychologist Birgit Elsner's “schemas” or “categories” – or our “mental representations of the world”. Here is a more detailed description of how “cognitive miser” works. When people hear new information, they have to be able to integrate it within their current “grand narrative” (about how the world works: the organized totality of your schemas, categories, and mental representations) in order to understand it. When the new information is so unusual (so contradicting their current grand narrative) that they can't do this, there are three options. The first is to throw it into the “trash can” which comes with any grand narrative, the second is to modify the grand narrative in order to make it congruent with the unusual new information, and the third is to hold the unusual new information in suspense until further notice. Needless to say, the first option is the most effortless and the most relied upon by a “cognitive miser”. When somebody tells you he was abducted by UFO and yet “extraterrestrials” are not a component of the grand narrative in your head, you, a “cognitive miser”, dump it in your “trash can” by calling him “crazy”. “Mental insanity” is the dominant form of “trash can” in contemporary American consciousness. (In the past, it might be “possession by evil spirits”.) In this way, you don't have to investigate the new information any further, you don't have to do any hard work to modify your current “grand narrative” nor do you have to live with the anxiety which accompanies holding up something as “unknown” in your mind. Because of the deterioration of people's mental capacity, their increasing laziness about using their brain, and the decline of psychiatric expertise, the trash can “mental insanity” nowadays contains an increasingly large quantity of matters. A more open-minded person, on the other hand, can either modify his or her grand narrative – so that it can now accommodate the existence of extraterrestrials (which requires one to accept a stranger view of universe) or some such grotesque scenario as government's faking of UFO abductions (which requires one to accept the fact that our democratic government does terrible things from time to time). Such modification of the grand narrative is usually called “paradigm shift”. (Thomas Kuhn has brilliantly described the same process in the domain of science in his classic, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.) The open-minded person can also simply hold the narrative about UFO abduction in suspense: “I don't know what to make of it in this moment.”

Dummification means that the first option “trash can” is becoming ever more prevalent. It means that we are more of a cognitive miser than ever before – and moreover a cognitive miser whose existing solutions are increasingly simplistic. You can see how simplification, laziness, and excessive self-confidence are congruent with the habits of a cognitive miser. Living in this perfunctory and cavalier environment, where everybody, out of busy schedule, constant distractions and interruptions, and profound laziness, never reflects on any matter deeply and never bothers to examine any details, people necessarily simplify the grand narrative in their mind. Meanwhile, their increasing arrogance has made them ever more confident in the correctness of their own grand narrative. It's not just that they are too

lazy to revise their grand narrative in order to accommodate new information; but also that they see no need to revise it because they are sure that they have already understood the world correctly. Since they don't doubt that they can be wrong, when they come across information which contradicts their notion about how the world works, it can only be that this information is wrong (“It's crazy”) and never that it is their notion about the world which is wrong or incomplete. Thus, arrogance, busy schedule, constant distractions, and laziness – all the conditions of “revolt of the masses” and McDonaldization – conspire to decrease one's willingness, when confronted with unusual information, to modify one's grand narrative or to hold the information in suspense, and to increase one's desire to pronounce a verdict right away on any unusual matter by throwing it into the “trash can”. Consequently, one's grand narrative – one's belief about the world, peoples, and history – becomes dangerously inflexible, one's view upon reality becomes less likely to evolve as part of humanity's learning process, and one is ever readier to dismiss creativity and originality and dump them into the “trash can”. In other words, one's point of view is becoming more inflexible just when it simplifies so as to capture less of reality and so is ever more in need of modification.

By this time you should have a pretty clear understanding of what is meant by “intelligence” – the erosion of which constitutes “dummification” – in this essay: it refers to the ability to connect with reality, to understand it, hence to *represent* it in one's mind. It's the capacity for truth as defined, in a simplistic fashion, by the logical positivists, *adequaetio intellectus et rei*. When people are dumb, they can't really represent reality in their head, and so are living, in a sense, in “delusions”. People's “dumbness” refers to their inability to understand reality in the simple sense of *representation*. Although, as you must be wondering, “dummification” in the foregoing seems to refer to a less active mind (with less depth) as a result of its switch-over to information-processing as the dominant cognitive style, the activity and depth that are associated with a thinking and feeling, rather than a simple information-processing, mind are really a means to an end, i.e. a means to the goal of correctly representing reality. The more active mind of a tribal people – seeing gods and ghosts in every corner of nature – is not so much an advantage compared to a less active mind of a work-a-day person of industrialized society which sees no spirituality anywhere because gods and ghosts are after all non-existent. The point is that the simple black-and-white pictures (“delusions”) so favored in our McDonaldized world and government propaganda are easy for the brain to process, but are deficient representation of reality. Reality is rarely black-and-white, but is always complex and ambiguous.

## E.

### Dummification and social capital deficit

This study of dummification does have relationship with Robert Putnam's most important study on the decline of social capital at the turn of the new millennium. In two ways: although I have not dealt with social capital itself, I have in effect studied the particular way in which social capital is constructed in contemporary time, i.e. McDonaldization and rationalization. Secondly – this would be my criticism of Putnam's work – I'm concerned with the *quality* of social capital, not simply with its quantity, which is the central object of Putnam's study. In essence, my complaint stems from my increasing inability to communicate and form satisfying relationship with my fellow citizens because everyone is too dumb, can't understand anything complicated, and doesn't have the patience and motivation to exert his and her brain to understand anything. The general tendencies of laziness, McDonaldization (fast-paced),

and rationalization (check-listing) both in the digital realm and in institutional spaces have created dummified human beings who form very superficial communication networks and relationships with each other. Moreover, because they are too dumb, i.e. are too simple-minded and can't therefore really understand reality, the narratives which they have created about the world and social reality to bind themselves with one another during civic engagements and so on are increasingly simplified, and false, representation of reality, which renders their working together a worthless, or even counter-productive, enterprise. Herein lies a deeper understanding of the dummification of the left mentioned earlier: the shallow and unreal rhetoric and agendas of, for instance, the contemporary progressive (“Antifa”) activists. Such is what is meant when it is asserted that dummification has resulted in the decline of the *quality* of social capital.

Intelligence has many functions: it not only helps us understand (represent) the world around us, but also enables us to form quality connections with other human beings through better communicative actions. All these things are connected: recognition (Honneth), social capital (Putnam), unalienated life (Jaeggi), and intelligence (my sense here). Because I am intelligent and complex, only other intelligent human beings can recognize my talents and goodness and give me the recognition due me so that, mutually recognizing each other's capacity, we can form meaningful and substantive connections which make all of us happy. And, because I am more intelligent and can perceive reality more clearly than other people, I find little truth in the narratives by which other people bind themselves in a common cause and so have little interests in most of the things going on around me, consequently feeling alienated and taking life to be meaningless. Recall that Hannah Arendt in her classic, *On Revolution*, has attempted to retrieve the original meaning of Founding Father's “liberty” and “pursuit of happiness”, i.e. they were referring to, not “doing what one pleases without government's interference” or “attaining an life of abundance and comfort” (these contemporary attributions), but “public happiness”: the happiness one experiences when one participates (has the power to participate) in public affairs.<sup>205</sup> When Axel Honneth introduces his notion of “social freedom”, he also seems to be referring to “public happiness”. When he talks about the human urge to be recognized, or when Rachel Jaeggi speaks of “unalienated life” as realizing oneself in appropriating the world around oneself, or when Putnam talks about the normal human urge for social capital – disappearing though it may have been – or when I talk about a human group's having a common narrative about the world and their place in it to bind themselves together – all these are different aspects of the same thing to which “liberty” and “happiness” in their original sense belong. Intelligence thus directly improves the quality of one's “liberty”, “happiness”, “social freedom”, and “social capital”. Other than this benefit for the individual, Putnam makes the point that social capital – when human beings are more connected to each other – also fosters productivity: this is social capital's benefit on the social side. A society where members are connected to each other is more efficient, he says, such a society can get more things done. This is especially the case if members of the society are intelligent in the Ortegian sense – living

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205 As John Adam has explained: “Wherever men, women, or children, are to be found, whether they be old or young, rich or poor, high or low, wise or foolish, ignorant or learned, every individual is seen to be strongly actuated by a desire to be seen, heard, talked of, approved and respected by the people about him, and within his knowledge.” (Cited in Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, p. 110.) You can see that, if Einstein is trapped in a little village where nobody can understand what he is doing and what he is saying, it's simply impossible for him to pursue “public happiness”. Hannah Arendt remarks that those *hommes des lettres* were prompted by the same pursuit of public happiness to desire to bring about the French Revolution: they wanted to create a public space where they could play significant roles in contrast to their former outcast positions under the *Ancien Régime*.

according to the height of their time: a group of people who are versed in the scientific knowledge of the day can do amazing things when they work together. But low quality connections – when the narratives about social reality which bind together a group of citizens into common action are inadequately simple – mean that this society cannot get more complex, more realistic, and more worthwhile things done, but only simple, symbolic, and worthless things. Think about this: women and men are bound together in common cause against a judge over a rape case by the narrative that America is a “rape culture” where rape is epidemic and where authorities do not take women's victimization seriously because society doesn't value women;<sup>206</sup> women and men are bound together in common cause against Trump by the narrative that Trump is racist, misogynist, fascist, antisemitic, or neoliberal;<sup>207</sup> but what if America is not “rape-epidemic”, the judge is not sexist, society doesn't value men more than women,<sup>208</sup> Trump is not antisemitic nor fascist nor neoliberal nor misogynist in the simple sense – what if these narratives are merely stereotypes which are simple enough for the brain to process but which inadequately, even falsely, represent all the complexities of reality? People are then more civically engaged but for the wrong causes – more like witch-hunting or mob action or, as I have kept arguing in the case of the anti-capitalist progressive left, reinforcing the power-structure while believing they are bringing it down – because they are too dumb to understand reality adequately enough in order to devise *real* cure which corresponds to its *real* ills. Instead, they perceive imaginary ills and devise imaginary cures<sup>209</sup> – they are all *deluded* because they are too dumb – rendering the whole society counter-productive. Putnam has addressed the issue of the dark side of social capital – that citizens might gather together for the wrong cause which, although benefitting themselves and providing them with personal fulfillment, are detrimental to other citizens and the society at large, such as Ku Klux Klan or street gangs. Dummification is an additional issue here since it erodes and distorts the causes even when these causes are morally admirable or motivated by sympathy, tolerance, and good will. That is to say, dummification has rendered, for example, the leftist fight for social justice something no better than, and no different from, the struggles of KKK and street gangs. (I have continually argued elsewhere that the fight for social justice, such as the feminist fight for gender equality, usually only ends up replacing one form of social injustice with another form: such is one example.) In the same way, while Putnam, because he has done his classic work before the explosion of Internet use, focuses on television as the principal reason why the newer generation who has grown up

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206 The famous Stanford sex assault case which has mobilized millions against judge Persky's sentencing. See *New York Times*, 12 June, 2016, “Court Papers Give Insight Into Stanford Sex Assault”.

207 All the Anti-Trump protests in 2016 and 2017.

208 I have been demonstrating this elsewhere. Here, I shall simply cite a paragraph From Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Second Edition, Preface, ix): “For example, the manner in which anomalies, or violations of expectation, attract the increasing attention of a scientific community needs detailed study, as does the emergence of the crises that may be induced by repeated failure to make an anomaly conform. Or again, if I am right that each scientific revolution alters the historical perspective of the community that experiences it, then that change of perspective should affect the structure of postrevolutionary textbooks and research publications.” Americans currently have a paradigm saying that women – middle-class white women, even – are suffering disadvantages in their society, especially in comparison to white men. When they discover cases which violate this expectation, it will attract the increasing attention of scholarly community. When the scholars find it impossible to make these cases conform to the prevalent paradigm/ Grand Narrative/ expectation (by labeling them as exceptions), a crisis will emerge. A paradigm shift will eventually result as the mistakes in the former paradigm are properly explained. Americans' historical perspective will then change, and this change will affect the structure of postrevolutionary textbooks and research publications.

209 This is the whole point of my criticism in my “Political Correctness as Culture Industry and Revolt of the Masses”: political correctness as *Massenbetrug*.



with it is not very interested in social connections with their fellow citizens, we must, given all that has been said in the foregoing, focus on the Internet (the social networking media) as another principal reason why the newer generation who has grown up with Facebook and Twitter are united by increasingly shallow (and therefore incorrect) narratives about social reality. The easy connectedness and permissiveness (“anybody is allowed to join”, that is, McDonaldization) which social media have made possible can only serve to dumb down the general narrative about social reality which unites any group of people together. My original concern has always been that the decline of the *quality* of social capital due to dummification – leading to society's getting the wrong things done – can have quite catastrophic consequences affecting human survival itself rather than simply instituting more social injustices. Namely, when citizens share increasingly only a shallow conception of reality, this means that society can never work together to *truly* solve the environmental and energy crisis which faces our human civilization. That is, when we couldn't develop a deeper conception of global warming and our dependence on fossil fuels but are only capable of superficial understanding, the cure we devise together is also only superficially effective. This characterizes much of the leftist environmental movements today. People cannot simply be civically engaged, but must have an intelligent conception of the problem in order for the civic engagement to be fruitful.<sup>210</sup>

At this point, the same objection to my dummification thesis can of course be raised again. Granted that, say, the feminist revolution is no different from the Chinese communist revolution which has replaced feudal, landlord, oppression with communist oppression, or the Russian communist revolution which has replaced Tsar's oppression with Stalin's oppression, or the Iranian revolution which has replaced Shah's oppression with Khomeini's oppression, or the Taiwanese democratic revolution which has replaced Mandarins' oppression with Taiwanese's corruption – all this has merely proved that the present crisis of decline is merely a permanent human condition. There has never been a time when people are not living in delusions, when they are not bound together and motivated by a false narrative about social reality. Think about the Aryan myth which bound the German people together during World War II; think about the hysteria over “communist infiltration” during the McCarthy Era; think about – since we have talked about the dummification of psychiatry – the excitement over Multiple Personality Disorder and the hysteria over child-abuse and Satanic cults subsequent to the success of the “Sybil” in the 1970s.<sup>211</sup> What exactly is so distinctive about the current era of dummification? Once again, one should be reminded that the present era is characterized not simply by uneducation, but also by “brain-death” caused by the switch-over to information-processing as the dominant cognitive style. There has been a decline in the *quality* of social capital also in the sense that social connections are

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210 The decline of the quality of our social capital – when everybody is becoming dangerously stupid – means not only that it's harder for intelligent people to become happy in the currently existing networks of interpersonal relationships, but also that it's harder for society as a whole to make use of their wisdom – that it's in fact harder for society as a whole to become innovative in solving its social justice problems and the environmental crisis facing it. This is in fact related to the degradation of America to the “trash can” of humanity as it consumerizes. Once again, I have my own experience to demonstrate this. I was widely regarded in American society as an insane misogynist serial stalker and a plagiarizing, impersonating, and computer-hacking terrorist because such an entity is easy for the common mind to understand and process. I was never recognized for my philosophic wisdom because only a very educated mind – and only after spending time and effort – can understand this. I consequently can never get anywhere in American society, can never contribute my talent to the general wellbeing, and am always in danger of being exterminated by the dumb people around me.

211 See Debbie Nathan's *Sybil Exposed* (Free Press: New York, 2011).

increasingly established by people who neither think nor feel but merely process information. There is a certain intersubjective death among the present day Antifas which is not found among the student movements of 1968, even if the latter is as dumb as the former.

## F.

### Our increasingly inflexible mind

If I have had such a difficult time communicating with the dumb common people, you might think I would have better luck when communicating with experts. But no. Because the information-processing mind does not in fact think, it is extremely inflexible; it regurgitates and repeats words it has swallowed, but does not actually know how to relate them to the external reality to represent it. And, because this new cognitive style has colonized academics as well as the common people, the so-called educated people nowadays also have tremendous difficulty in being flexible enough in their mind as to be able to incorporate new information. I have elsewhere referred to this problem as the “objectification of the mind” (not in Lukács' sense). I have encountered this phenomenon many times. A certified “educated person”, a skillful bureaucrat, a technician, a lawyer, or a scientist, who can repeat to you the rules, procedures, laws, and the research results which s/he has internalized or “mastered”, who can work within their framework, but who, when encountering something which doesn't fit within the established framework, cannot understand it – even when it is merely a different permutation of the same thing. In other words, the mind can only understand what it has already understood but cannot comprehend what it hasn't yet understood, so that the possibility of learning is closed off. The mind has been closed up and *objectified*. The expert is no longer open to the external reality, but can only understand the particular limited domain of his expertise *and* the particular variation of it. For example, I once met with an immigration lawyer. When I tried to explain to him my problem of being gang-stalked and the fraudulent scheme my gang-stalkers had devised to deceive law enforcement into imprisoning me, he couldn't understand anything I said. He could only understand a discussion when it fit into the framework of immigration and asylum procedures of which he claimed expertise. The example I have used elsewhere is brain-computer interface: the experts I have met can understand, because they have an expertise in, the use of brain-computer interface to help paralyzed patients or cure depression, but cannot understand the use of the same technology to control the target person to suffer pain and disease – as if they could understand using knife to cut fruits during cooking but could not understand using it to stab people during robbery.

This mysterious inflexibility of the mind is an annoying problem with both the common people and the so-called experts. In the case of the experts, the cause seems to have something to do with academic and professional specialization. Namely, the mind, after it has become too adapted to the specialized version of a task, becomes so fixed upon it that it can no longer understand anything else – not even something that is merely a different version of the same thing. In the case of the common people, the cause seems to be related to Putnam's observation about our increasing social isolation – that the generations since Baby-Boomers are spending more and more time alone either consuming information from TV or Internet thanks to the electronic media revolution or commuting in their vehicles thanks to the suburbanization revolution. When we spend the majority of our time consuming information by ourselves, we are building up our “grand narrative” (our narrative about the world) by ourselves rather than during discussion with others (in community with others). We are now too adapted to dialoguing

with ourselves. Since the information we each choose to absorb in our isolation is all different, we have each developed a different grand narrative that is incompatible with every other. The problem is that, because the information-processing mind doesn't really think, it can't really understand that another point of view, another “grand narrative”, might be simply a variation of one's own; instead, nobody can understand another person's point of view if it's slightly different – and difference is inevitable given our consumption of information in isolation. This is the problem which Peter Berger has referred to as the pluralization of our life-worlds.<sup>212</sup>

The point is that a mind that is excessively engrossed in its specialized task or in processing information in isolation might have lost the ability to dialogue with other minds, to understand their points of view, and even to see how the information is supposedly representing an external reality. In consequence, the mind can't learn, it can't incorporate new information, and, while information is originally produced to represent a portion of reality, it can't really relate the information it has swallowed to any reality outside itself. Each mind becomes capable only of interacting with its own contents – not with other minds, nor with the external reality. The mind is closed up, permanently fixed upon its own routines and the structure of the information which it has swallowed. The social manifestation of this is deteriorating communicative actions in the public sphere and increasing polarization of society. And so, while the Antifas condemn the ruling white male privileges, the Alt-Right people bemoan discrimination against white men – and the two sides do not understand how they could have arrived at such radically different versions of reality. Neither side is able to notice the truth, that their “grand narrative” is partial and inaccurate because they have been cherry-picking their evidences and have therefore arrived at different partial views of reality – like those blind men describing the elephant some of whom are holding onto its tail while others are groping its nose. Again, while this has always been a feature of human society – different factions' inability to understand, and communicate with, each other – my impression is that the problem is a lot worse today. The typical mind today is more closed off to other minds in two ways: the information it holds in itself is solidified into fundamentalist doctrines and cannot be permutated and related to the reality outside – this is because it is an information-processing mind, not a thinking and feeling mind; secondly, people are considerably more arrogant, more confident, than before such that they simply see no need to understand other people. The last thought that will ever occur to the postmodern man or woman is the doubt: “Why does he think differently than I do? Perhaps he knows something that I don't... Let me hear him!”

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212 I have again described this phenomenon elsewhere: “Consumerism has caused this presumably because the mind has become more and more absorbed into its relationships with consumer products and media content; the consequence is that each person then has a world view that is different from and incompatible with every other person's world view because his or her world view is formed only from the consumer products and media content he or she has encountered (all “representations”), rather than from conversation with other minds. Since there are more varieties of consumer products and media content than all the people on the planet put together, no two persons will absorb the same products and media content; each person's world view is thus the result of a unique combination of a tiny subset of the total amount of consumer products and media content that exist. Thus, we no longer have a common view upon reality, unlike people in primitive tribes where all the people in the same tribe believe in the same gods and see the world in the same way. The diversity of viewpoints makes it impossible for people to cooperate to achieve a common goal – and it's not as if any of these viewpoints actually describe reality at all. So what's the point of such diversity? 'Wanton diversity.'” (“Conclusion to the Syrian Scandal”).

By now you should have clearly understood that “intelligence” as is meant here – the erosion of which constitutes “dummification” – refers also to a second quality, i.e. the ability to understand what other people are saying when what they are saying is not a verbatim repetition of the slogans and cliches that are turning about in your own head. Namely, the ability to communicate and to *learn new things* – to remain “open-minded”. (We have each seen this many times: when the other person speaks something with which we are unfamiliar, we try to distort it into something else which can fit into the schemas with which we are already familiar.) This requires that you have gone beyond information-processing, are able to use the words and phrases inscribed in your head to represent the external reality, to *understand their meaning*, and to perform permutation on them. It is preferred that you have constructed your world-view in dialogues with other people, and are humble enough to suspect value in other people's points of view.

## G.

### A deeper understanding of America's corruption

My objective in this essay has been to describe American society as going through corruption and decline. While many intellectuals have seen through America's self-deceiving rhetoric about itself as the “best country in the world”, I'm dissatisfied with the typical ways in which they describe America's corruption. This is, for example, how Peter Sloterdijk presents his “Bilanzbetrug” about America:

Es gibt in den USA mehr aussichtslos Arme, als der Irak Einwohner besitzt, es gibt mehr chronische Psychopharmaka-Konsumenten als in jedem anderen Land der Erde, es gibt mehr Menschen mit schwerstem Übergewicht als in allen übrigen Ländern der Welt, es gibt mehr politisch nicht vertretene Gruppen und Nichtwähler als in jedem anderen demokratischen Staat, es gibt proportional Zehnmal mehr Strafgefangene in den USA als in Europa und sechs- bis achtmal mehr als in den meisten übrigen Ländern der Welt. Dennoch bleiben all diese Problemkollektive dem *American way of life* verpflichtet, indem sie sich mit Hilfe eines elaborierten Systems der Depressionsvertuschung und der inneren Bilanzfälschung über Wasser halten.<sup>213</sup>

I must however point out that these kinds of things – the number of people imprisoned or the proportion of population disenfranchised – are merely superficial indexes of corruption – just like those superficial indexes of performances which universities use to enhance their reputation. The number of people caught up in dire situations not generally assumed to exist in a prosperous democratic nation – these are hard numbers, aspects of a society that are easily measurable. Even the decline of social capital which Robert Putnam has studied is more or less easily measurable, although a more profound, and less superficial, index of the health of a democratic society. Then there is another group of commentators who focus on the real nature, or goal, of the American system and, since this is apparently different from America's self-interpretation, use this as indication that the system has been corrupted. For example, they point out that America is really an oligarchy than democracy, since power is always concentrated in any tiny group of elite families and corporate giants.<sup>214</sup> They also argue that there has been a fundamental change in America's ideology, from freedom to free market, from citizens

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213 *Im Weltinnenraum des Kapitals: für eine philosophische Theorie der Globalisierung*, Suhrkamp, 2005, p. 388 – 9.

214 E.g. C. Wright Mills' *The Power Elites*.

with political equality to consumers, from a guarantee of civil liberties and rights to a guarantee to earn and spend. They deplore the fact that we have gone from being a nation emphasizing liberty to a society emphasizing capitalism. This is a somewhat more sophisticated perception of America's corruption – that America has strayed from its very goal rather than, as in the previous case, simply failing to live up to its expectation of itself. Many commentators in this camp have been arguing (just as I have done) that many of the corruptions measured by these previously cited superficial indexes are simply consequences of the increasing marketization of American life. Somebody like Hannah Arendt would then point out that, because, since the very beginning, the vision of America has been formulated by the poorer class for whom the principal achievement of *novus ordo seclorum* consists in the miraculous elimination of poverty, “freedom” in America has always meant “emancipation from poverty” rather than the Founding Fathers' and the contemporary senses cited earlier.<sup>215</sup> This is in fact closer to our position, which is that America's current corruption is simply the straightforward development of America's “original condition” – that “*everybody* gets to be rich, *everybody* gets to have power, *everybody* gets to be the expert”, etc. In the foregoing, while analyzing the contemporary stage of this development, I have been trying to point out something less tangible, less visible, less measurable than disenfranchisement or replacement of freedom with free-market: “dummification”, or the increasing shallowness of our life and experience due to our switching-over to an information-processing model. This observation about the health or corruption of American society is the deepest, and most profound, since it is supposed to penetrate into our very cognitive and subjective experience itself. A complete description of America's corruption and decline must of course incorporate all of the above, from the more superficial, and obvious, indexes through the more general observation about the corrupting marketization to the characterizations of the less tangible aspects and demonstrate, perhaps,

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215 “The hidden wish of poor men is not 'To each according to his needs', but 'To each according to his desires'. And while it is true that freedom can only come to those whose needs have been fulfilled, it is equally true that it will escape those who are bent upon living for their desires. The American dream, as the nineteenth and twentieth centuries under the impact of mass immigration came to understand it, was neither the dream of the American Revolution – the foundation of freedom – nor the dream of the French Revolution – the liberation of man; it was, unhappily, the dream of a 'promised land' where milk and honey flow...” (Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, Penguin Books, p. 130 – 131.) Recall that, in this book, Arendt is comparing the French Revolution (which became the model for all revolutions afterwards) with the American Revolution (which was properly speaking a local phenomenon only), rediscovering the meaning of “freedom” as “public happiness” (the right to participate in the process of public sphere and the power to have an influence there – it is *not* simply “civil liberty”), and analyzing the dialectical process between the original objective of all revolutions, the foundation of “freedom”, and a secondary, originally irrelevant factor, the emancipation of the poor from poverty, which became a prominent factor for the first time during the French Revolution. Partly because poverty was less conspicuous in American colonies than in Continental Europe, the emancipation from poverty was never an issue during the American Revolution, but in the French case it eventually overtook the revolutionary cause altogether so that the French Revolution, and all revolutions which came after, came to be about abundance rather than about freedom. From this Arendtian perspective, we can characterize the second type of critique of America's corruption as consisting in the claim that America, too, has come to be about abundance instead of about freedom. Is America the “land of the free” or is it just the “promised land of the poor”? Arendt notes that the triumph of the “promised land of the poor” is even manifest in the struggle between the United States and the USSR where the competition has come to be about which system creates the greater prosperity or is more technologically advanced (p. 208 -210). The Arendtian perspective is that this degeneration of America's goal is more or less inevitable given the shallowness of ordinary, poor, people in general. For the Founding Fathers, the predicament of the poor was not so much their abject misery (falling short of material resources for subsistence) but the obscurity (lack of opportunity to participate in the public sphere) to which poverty had condemned them. And yet, once the poor are liberated from poverty by becoming rich, they have little interests in public affairs – going to the public to be seen, heard, recognized, and accounted for – but seek only to advertise their conspicuous consumption. (Ibid., p. 60.)

how the causal connections among them work. As I have attempted to show, the hard numbers might be the outward expressions of the less tangible aspects. The increase in the number of people in prison or on prescription drugs might be the consequence not simply of marketization but also of our increasing inability and unwillingness to use our brain (to examine crimes and the accused more carefully in one case and to cognitively understand our distresses more comprehensively in the other).

I have often the impression that contemporary America is just like China in the nineteenth century, a great civilization which however, as it has entered its late phase, becomes increasingly corrupt through the over-extension of its founding principles. America, as noted in the beginning, is founded on mass-recruitment and the catering to the lowest common denominator – disguised in, and justified by, the original vision of America as “liberation from poverty and oppression”.<sup>216</sup> This principle has become so over-extended that the common people have become so arrogant, so close-minded, and so lazy about brain-using that it has become impossible to communicate anything to them or to educate them about anything. America is, as noted throughout, also founded on rationalization and technological advances. Whereas other nations are called “corrupt” (including China and Russia) because their system isn't rationalized enough (so that, for example, it is possible, or necessary, to bribe the police or government administrators), the United States is “corrupt” in the opposite direction – because it is *too* rationalized. Here, it's not that people are not following the rules, but that the rules have become so prominent as to squeeze out any brain-functioning.<sup>217</sup>

There is however a problem which I have pointed out in the very beginning. While contemporary civilization is increasingly corrupted, it never really falls – unlike the case of the Roman empire or the Chinese empire. Again, this is because contemporary civilization is increasingly being run by machines rather than by human beings, and because elected officials and government bureaucracies can actually rely on people's deteriorating intelligence to function ever more efficiently. (Manipulation and the use of “noble lies”.) While our world-views simplify, our critical thinking is eroded, our creativity is stifled, our learning process stops, and communication grinds to a halt among us – while we can't pay attention and can't and don't want to think about anything – technology continues to progress. This disjuncture is due to the fact that most machines are built by other machines nowadays in any case and that engineering is far more susceptible of instrumental thinking. The machine itself is not in danger of being lost because its reproduction depends merely on the institutions and machines that are already in place rather than on human intelligence. What Ortega y Gasset has feared – that the dumified newer generation will lack the intelligence to continue to maintain the technological wonders which they have inherited from their ancestors – is simply not going to happen. Our technological wonders have learned to reproduce themselves while we deteriorate especially because, as Weber has noted, human beings are

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216 Hannah Arendt, in the aforementioned “Crisis of Education”, has emphasized that, when the Founding Fathers spoke of America as “*novus ordo seclorum*”, the “New Order of the World”, they meant to say precisely that America has got rid of poverty and oppression (*Armut und Knechtschaft*) which have hitherto characterized the civilizations of the Old World. The two senses of “liberty” mentioned earlier (emancipation from poverty and the right to participate in the public sphere) are both covered in this formula.

217 My view is in this regard similar to Bloom's. The American founding condition is like the AIDS infection: the American original condition is a poison which begins killing the organism only many years later. For me there is no question of whether it is the working out of America's original condition or whether it's because America has deviated from its original condition – a point of contention between Bloom and his detractors. This is like debating whether old age is the working out of youth or whether it is rather deviation from youth.

becoming too much part of the machines and institutions they have themselves built. We are left with a world where machines are invented to become ever more powerful while we have ever less wisdom to understand why we do what we do, communicate ever less among ourselves, and are ever less able to understand the genius and the great philosopher among us. We are becoming increasingly the one-dimensional mankind: the engineer, the inventor, and the programmer, but complete idiot when it comes to understanding ourselves and our social world and communicating with each other.

H.  
Overthrowing the democratic culture  
for the sake of intelligence and communication:  
A “leftist conservative manifesto”

This essay, as well as all my previous works, is meant to critique the dominant leftist ideology and political correctness which the leftists have persuaded the world to adopt since the 1960s. While in my other works I concentrated on critiquing the leftist fight for the rights of women, minorities, and other marginalized or so-called disadvantaged groups, here I'm concentrating on a more general aspect of the leftist tendency – currently reaching its most extreme, or perfect, expression with the cyber-libertarian ideal: (1) The leftist campaign since the sixties to return us to Nature – to begin what Bloom has called the “age of relaxation”, when the common people are liberated from all restraints, this dangerous pursuit of comfort and freedom which has today resulted in total laziness about using one's brain. And (2) this habitual celebration of the common, ordinary people, which I regard as the most dangerous orientation in regard to the problem of the corruption of human civilization and the destruction of our earthly environment. I'm referring to this bizarre notion that ordinary common people, if just given the means (whether it be liberty, rights, or technology), will do great things to make our world a better place. This is the ultimate expression of America's founding principle: it's the straightforward expression, the final actualization, of the original vision of America as “liberation from poverty and oppression” and its implementation in the form of mass recruitment and catering to the lowest common denominator.<sup>218</sup> I am here to point out the serious negative consequence of this progressivist celebration of the common people: the serious deterioration of the human cognitive capacity and – since the majority of human population has always been stupid, if not in this way then in that way – especially in the expert domains, so that the expertise which our ancestors have developed to understand ourselves and our social world can be completely forgotten. I'm here to point out that this progressivist, leftist, or democratic tendency has erred – things have not worked out so well – due to a gross overestimation of ordinary people's intellectual capacity and willingness. Indeed, the foundational error of all liberation ideologies is the gross overestimation of ordinary people's capacity. What has guided the dummification process resulting from digitalization, McDonaldization, and rationalization is the inevitable, and tragic, fact that ordinary people's most natural tendency – their default state – is laziness. Ordinary people, when given the means to make their life more efficient, will simply use their new found freedom and convenience to allow their human potential to atrophy rather than develop themselves further on the basis of the new resources made available to them. Ordinary people simply cannot be expected to want to learn and become intelligent beings out of their own accord.

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<sup>218</sup> Elsewhere I have characterized the leftist's greatest error as the attempt to increase productivity of the masses across all domains.

In the progressive circle the perception is becoming common that American democracy, with its constant propaganda, surveillance of its citizens, increasing distance from the common people (“oligarchy” or “plutocracy”), and control by the “deep state”,<sup>219</sup> is in name only.<sup>220</sup> (Part of the various types of critique of America's corruption enumerated earlier.) The reform-minded leftists – those who cry out for genuine democracy – however don't see the reality that the fault is on both sides (the government and the people) but desire to reform the system without ever thinking about reforming the people. Yet, when the “people” are *this* dumb, how can you expect the politicians not to lie – not to adopt “noble lies” and manipulation as their only stance toward the people?<sup>221</sup>

Like Montesquieu and many other Enlightenment thinkers, my concern is fundamentally utopian. My objective is the common one of creating a good society in which one can have a good life. Hence the increasing stupidity of my fellow citizens – to the point that communication has become impossible – is deplorable in its own right. The utopia for Montesquieu – a common vision in his time and in the political theory tradition since then – is a well-ordered society characterized by civic virtue and self-rule so that liberty, self-determination, and justice can be maximized. Thinkers in the political theory tradition have always been concerned with either liberty (the libertarians) or justice (Badiou and many other progressives) while conservatives hold order as the highest goal. As I have explained elsewhere, I have veered off from this spectrum. For me the highest value toward which political practice should be oriented is development of our intelligence and, concomitantly, our ability to communicate with one another. Not the intelligence of an engineer, but the intelligence of a philosopher, the intelligence needed to understand social reality, other human beings, and the human phenomenon in general. Putnam has noted that, of the triad of the French Revolution, “liberty” is covered by the libertarians and “equality” by the progressivists concerned with social justice while “fraternity” refers exactly to social capital. When I hold intelligence to be the highest value, I am also holding “fraternity” (social capital)

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219 The fact that most of what the US government does on the world stage is decided by bureaucrats in the Pentagon, the State Department, and the CIA, rather than by the elected persons in White House and Congress. The fact that the US government is mostly controlled by unelected bureaucrats rather than by elected officials is not “stupid conspiracy theory” but also recognized by professors in academia. But the latter tend to have a positive view of the matter. See, for example, Jon D Michaels' “Trump and the 'Deep State'”, *Foreign Affairs*, Sept/ Oct 2017. Here he gives a somewhat accurate, but overly positive, picture of American government agencies: (1) the bureaucracy functions independently of the President. “These agencies function somewhat autonomously from their political masters, drawing on their own sources of legal authority, expertise, and professionalism.” (2) These agencies are transparent in their functioning. (False!) (3) “What's more, unlike in many nations where democracy presented itself as a late-arriving imposition on an already entrenched bureaucracy, in the United States, it is the administrative state that is seen as the intrusion.” Correct! The “Deep State” is unforeseen by the American Constitution.

220 For example, the interview with Edward Snowden by Lawrence Lessig and Birgitta Jónsdóttir in December 2016, broadcast on ARTE (“Meeting Snowden”). At one point, Snowden did hint at the fatal problem that the “people” might be too dumb.

221 Although Hannah Arendt's ideal in *On Revolution* is the foundation of freedom for everybody – i.e. that all citizens get to find the meaning of their life in the participation in the nation's politics instead of simply being concerned with accumulating wealth in their private domain – she does, toward the end, acknowledge that this ideal is impossible in modern mass society and admit that the so-called “democracy” will always be merely “representative” in that only a minority of elites will be able to find the meaning of their life in the participation in the affairs of the body politic while representing the private interests of the majority of citizens who are excluded therefrom. Public happiness and “freedom” in the traditional sense will always be reserved for a minority of elites only. It would seem that the likes of Lessig have difficulty in comprehending this fact. Jónsdóttir's expectation, however, is more realistic since her country, Iceland, is merely the size of a small city by the standard of most nations in the world.



to be the highest value because meaningful fraternity only happens when intelligent, not stupid, people – people who have an adequate understanding of reality and each other – try to connect with each other. Again, the connection between critical thinking (liberal education), communicative action, and social capital – all of which are on the decline in our increasingly McDonaldized world.

Given my goals – intelligence and communication – I have envisaged a distinct version of revolutionary action. The objective of my “leftist conservative” (*linkskonservativ*) revolution is the installation of an authoritarian culture, the dismantling of democratic ideas like “human rights” and “women's rights”, and, if possible, the abandonment of such thing as “democracy” altogether (which is probably not possible). It's the return to traditional (pre-democratic) culture as much as possible and within certain limits. This politically incorrect ideal is the only solution to the problem of deteriorating intelligence and communicative action because (1) genuine, or popular, democracy is not possible when people are too dumb; and because (2) the solution of making democracy function according to the Straussian method (“noble lies”, “duping people onto the right path”, “making them believe they are empowered while secretly disenfranchising them”) is unsatisfactory insofar as it keeps them dumb and so runs counter to my goal. I can drive home my point by illustrating how Straussianism emerges as a superficial solution to the problem of a democratic culture (fixing the symptoms without addressing the disease) and how my ideal is a deep solution to the same problem – it eradicates the disease itself.

My foregoing references to Allan Bloom's *Closing* have represented a superficial, literal, reading of Bloom's classic (as if it were a typical conservative reaction to the leftist cultural revolution with its tolerance, relativism, and nihilism and to the consequent dummification of the newer generation of college students). Several critics in *Essays on the Closing of the American Mind*, like Shadia Drury (“Allan Bloom on the charms of culture”) and Thomas G. West (“Allan Bloom and America”), have however penetrated Bloom's literal wording to uncover the Straussian perception of reality underlying Bloom's complaint. Bloom in fact held Leo Strauss' view that the Enlightenment philosophers have betrayed philosophy by speaking openly about the truth of life (that there is no God, no afterlife, and no justice) which philosophers in time past have been careful to keep away from the public for fear of degrading them and sowing chaos in consequence. The Straussian view is that truth is dangerous. Bloom's real complaint is that, by attempting to bring the naked truth to the masses, the university has succeeded neither in developing the dumb majority with noble lies nor in educating the intelligent few with the naked truth. In fact, nobody has really absorbed the truth while completely missing out on the noble lies. Similarly, the democratic regime has resulted when the Enlightenment philosophers attempt to bring the naked truth to the common people and found a political and social regime on the basis of this naked truth. While I don't quite agree with the Straussians' notion of the naked truth which all philosophers in all times supposedly agree upon, my personal experience has been that their notion that truth is dangerous is indeed correct – simply because people are too dumb and have yet no awareness of it. Since I have here also been dealing with the dummification effect of government propaganda, I shall here produce an example from my association with conspiracy theories folks to illustrate just how true this is. Consider the United States' supplying weapons to Islamic terrorists in Syria in the past few years or Cheney's orchestration of 911 attacks. Those intellectuals who have exposed the reality that it is the US government itself which has been supplying and running these “terrorists” (that all the Al-Qaeda operatives were CIA-NATO operatives and that ISIS and Al-Nusra got their weapons from the

United States) are like the incautious Enlightenment philosophers who have wanted to bring the naked truth to the unqualified dumb masses. The dumb masses can absorb the literal meaning of the descriptions of the event (“Our government has in fact been secretly supplying and running these terrorists whom it then pretends to be battling”), but are too dumb to appreciate the greater significance of the government's actions (the “larger picture”). If you tell them, for example, that part of Cheney's real intention when he wanted to use nuclear bombs in the Middle-East was to exterminate the over-breeding Muslim peoples in a nuclear holocaust,<sup>222</sup> the dumb liberals in the Blue States would understand this to be an horrible genocidal plan, the worst violation of our human rights tradition, even the repetition of Nazi-style racism. Hence Cheney, in the Straussian manner, tried to escalate the situation in the Middle-East so that, in the end, it would look as if the United States were forced by circumstances to employ nuclear weapons and the tremendous loss of life were not its original intention. (Namely, like telling “noble lies”: since people can't understand what is good and necessary to do, you must deceive them into accepting it under other pretexts.) Whether extermination is really a good solution to the problem of human over-breeding in certain regions of the world is debatable, but it's unlikely that the dumb masses can ever appreciate the fact that over-population is indeed a real, serious, problem threatening human civilization, especially among these backward peoples whom it is now forbidden to look down upon by telling them not to breed. In the domain of conspiracy theories, everybody decries government's deception (orchestration of terrorism) in order to increase its power at home and have pretexts for wars abroad, but few people have any comprehension of the larger problem which this “evil government” is trying to fight. A few do mention it – natural resources, energy supplies, and over-population – when they give lectures on government deception, like Daniele Ganser or the late Michael Ruppert, but nobody quite understands the real significance of the problem. The result is that everybody is prompted to oppose the government's solution to the problem – even if the solution is not a good, or humane, one – while leaving the problem unattended to, so that we all go to hell in the end. We have to recall that the majority of people are “functional illiterates”. They can read alphabetical letters and recognize words but rarely understand what they are reading, and yet, because they can do the former, they deceive themselves and onlookers into the impression that they can really read and understand what they read. The majority of human population is meant to be illiterate like they have always been throughout history; the modern attempt to make everybody literate has only resulted in making most people *look like* they are literate but not really be so. The common people are simply not meant by their nature to transcend their sorrowful lot. The truth – even a local truth, like the fact that the so-called terrorists are in fact US and NATO operatives – should therefore never be shared with the dumb masses. The progressivist, cyber-libertarian, ideal – that we must bring the naked truth to everybody indiscriminately so that, in the end, all people will work together to solve all our crises – is based on a gross overestimation of ordinary people's capacities. The fact that the liberal peoples in the Western world are working in a disorganized manner to curb fossil fuel exploitation and consumption and yet paying no attention to over-breeding in the Muslim world and Africa is one example where the dumb masses can superficially deal with the crisis facing them on the basis of a superficial, and politically correct, understanding of the problem but cannot be expected to have the intelligence, resolve, and organizational power necessary to *really* overcome the problem. Telling noble lies to the dumb majority (duping them or manipulating them onto the right path) while reserving the truth for the intelligent few – that's really the best method. Just like the real reason why Bloom

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222 This is merely an example. I'm not certain whether Cheney has in fact intended this. It's safe to say that he has always intended on something similar.

advocates the Great Books education: the Great Books with their apparent messages for the masses and esoteric messages for a selected few. I have encountered the same problem in my experience with my own writings: dumb people would read them and, just because they can discern the alphabetical letters of the English language in which I write, falsely assume that they actually understand what I'm saying. I have thus always hoped that we can go back to Medieval time when scholars wrote in Latin instead of in vernaculars so that the dumb masses, unable to even make out the words they were looking at, could never pretend to have understood what they were reading. When truth and wisdom are written in vernaculars – like bringing the naked truth to everybody – ordinary dumb people can pretend to understand it; they have the *semblance* of understanding it by virtue of being able to pronounce it and repeat it – just like what I have described happening in American psychiatry. When dumb people misunderstand the truth and yet are not aware of it, they act on their misunderstanding, and create a mess. Hence the Straussian worry is in fact quite correct: sharing the naked truth with people is very dangerous, whether the truth is, according to Hannah Arendt's distinction, *Vernunftwahrheit* (atheism and nihilism according to the Straussian conception) or *Tatsachenwahrheit* (that the US government is supplying the terrorists it claims to be fighting).<sup>223</sup> You must hide the truth from them, and, if grave crisis is facing the nation or human civilization and their collective action or consent is required, carefully dupe them with fairy tales about terrorism and so on in order to manipulate them to do, or consent to, the right thing.

Because people are too dumb and yet demand their right to be the master of their government, the American governing elites have all developed the Straussian method of making the dumb masses believe they have power over their government while carefully, without their awareness, disenfranchising them. If you don't like such a situation, then you can understand my desire to launch a revolution to overthrow democracy altogether. Not necessarily democracy in the political sense (voting to elect your leaders) but at the very least in the cultural sense (the culture of respecting people's "rights"). The whole problem is that people have "rights", believe they are entitled to their opinions, mistakenly assume they have the wisdom to understand their situation, run their own life, and defend their own interests, and will demonstrate on the streets to oppose the authority on the ground of their erroneous assumption. Given this, a rational discussion about what the common good is and how to achieve it is practically impossible. Now consider China's case instead. When the government calculated and realized what disaster was facing the nation if the population was allowed to grow unchecked, they ordered "One Child Policy". They succeeded – unopposed by the people – because the people didn't yet have any notion that "they had rights". Because people were dumb and selfish, they often cheated, so that, today, more than 30 million Chinese men have no chance of finding a Chinese wife. However, because the dumb and selfish people had never been taught they have rights, they had no choice but to regard their government's policy as legitimate (their consciousness had never been raised), and so were unable to organize and successfully resist the government. Hopefully you can see that something like the "One Child Policy" can never happen in the US: here the people, because their consciousness *has* been raised, will protest against such outrageous intrusion into their privacy and violation of their rights.<sup>224</sup> Consequently, the US government, when a crisis is facing the nation, must

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223 In Hannah Arendt's seminal article "Wahrheit und Politik" (1964). The distinction seems to correspond to Kant's older distinction between analytic and synthetic truth.

224 Examples from China are endless. When the Chinese government's study group performed computer simulation and concluded climate change would be devastating to China's environment, China gladly joined the Paris climate accord.

practice noble lies – dupe people with fairy tales and fantasies in order to lead them onto the right path without awareness.

The point is that China, with all the examples adduced, is an instance of the technocratic authoritarian state best suited to confronting any crisis facing nations or civilizations. (It is so at least in theory, although not necessarily in practice.) The government studies the problem, and devises solutions, all scientifically. It then implements the solutions through sheer authority and brute force. It does not permit discussions among the populous as is regarded as ideal in America. As Hannah Arendt has noted, even when it comes to *Tatsachenwahrheiten*, it is simply idiotic to ascertain their truth by submitting them to the people for discussion, as if their truthfulness depended on people's opinions about them. China, in other words, conducts business in an entirely rational manner, and can do so because the people, not having been brainwashed by all these democratic values, have never developed the *expectation* that they can argue with the government.<sup>225</sup> You can here see that a *traditional* system is therefore far better suited to confronting the environmental and energy crisis facing humanity. “Traditional culture” means precisely the Chinese situation, the pre-democratic situation, when the dumb masses have not yet been taught any notion about their “rights” by means of which they could dismantle the authority's legitimacy and claim equal footing with the government or any experts. But this is not the focus of this current essay. The focus of this essay is that such a “traditional” system is also a far better environment in which to develop people's intelligence and facilitate communication. (At least to keep the public sphere, or public discourse, intelligent.)

In this regard, it is important to note that the Chinese government does not have to resort to deception and manipulation (noble lies) in order to get things done. (At least not to the same extent to which American government does.) When people's head is not clouded by all these notions about their “rights” and social justice, the government can simply tell them what the problem is and what the solution should be. If people don't understand it, it can afford to simply ignore them. Although it is unrealistic to expect the dumb masses to ever become intelligent under any regime, it is likely that, under an authoritarian regime that is somewhat transparent, they might eventually become *a little* smarter. That is, people will, *over time*, grow more intelligent under a combination of healthy factors. First of all, their government will not try to use lies to mislead them away from a correct view of reality. Furthermore, people are expected to be humbler in traditional society because they have never

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The Chinese government did not submit the matter to the people for a discussion nor did they allow corporations to lobby against it. See Deutschland Funk's interview with Tobias Armbrüster on 3 September, 2016 (at: [http://www.deutschlandfunk.de/usa-und-china-ratifizieren-klimschutzvertrag-ein.694.de.html?dram:article\\_id=364856](http://www.deutschlandfunk.de/usa-und-china-ratifizieren-klimschutzvertrag-ein.694.de.html?dram:article_id=364856)). Another example is China's “social credit” program, which can certainly never materialize in the United States. (“It violates people's privacy.”) See Deutschland Funk's report of 9 September, 2017, “China auf dem Weg in die IT-Diktatur”: [http://www.deutschlandfunk.de/sozialkredit-system-china-auf-dem-weg-in-die-it-diktatur.724.de.html?dram:article\\_id=395440](http://www.deutschlandfunk.de/sozialkredit-system-china-auf-dem-weg-in-die-it-diktatur.724.de.html?dram:article_id=395440).

<sup>225</sup> The most harmful thing about democracy is that everyone has to tolerate disagreement from other people. Whenever a subject matter is under discussion, everyone has a different opinion and, because agreement can never be reached, collective action is impossible. Originally, the enlightened ones advocated for the right to disagree and respect for others' different opinions because they thought dogmatism would hamper the pursuit of truth since, when the authority is wrong, no one can point it out to him. In other words, the original intention (or at least the best original intention) is to facilitate the common pursuit of truth. Today, however, such respect for different opinions only results in dumb people's refusing to listen to experts' right opinion and stubbornly holding onto their own wrong opinion, i.e. the obstruction of the common pursuit of truth, the exact opposite of what was originally intended.

been spoiled by their “rights” and brought up to be arrogant when their teachers and parents have persistently “respected their rights”. Their mind is more likely to be open and they are more likely to listen to people who know better. The most important characteristic of a traditional society is that the common people are constantly told by the authority that they are stupid and worthless, so that they have grown up more likely to pay attention to expert's advices. *Communication is then much easier*. What I cannot comment here is whether traditional culture in combination with modern infrastructure also cultivates people's character. Ortega has remarked that, just as the body grows stronger by running into resistance, character is cultivated in adverse environment (adverse to a certain degree). (We hence wonder whether women in the past, before they had “rights”, actually had more character – compare them with the young girls whom we nowadays see strip-teasing on Youtube.) The return to traditional culture will thus immediately eliminate two causes of dummification, democracy and government propaganda. It remains to be seen how digital communication and rationalization will function in a traditional context and whether McDonaldization will become a trend at all.

This essay is supposed to complete the cycle of my works in which I have wanted to demonstrate that all the good things which we have been taught to celebrate are in fact very bad, and that the best solution is to return to those old-fashioned things which we have been taught are bad. The things which we have been taught to celebrate as good, namely, “democracy”, “human rights”, “women's rights”, and “equality”, have all come out of the leftist culture – the ultimate target of my “leftist conservatism”. In my previous works I have spoken against the leftist culture in general and political correctness in particular and advocated for the return to traditional culture for other reasons. I have been speaking out against the leftist culture because, by reinforcing capitalism and the free market economy, it contributes to the destruction of our planet. I have also been speaking out against the leftist culture because it is clandestinely instituting social injustice while apparently fighting against it (replacing one form of domination and oppression with another form). In this essay I'm speaking out against it because it is about the construction of a system that would make us increasingly dumb and render communication increasingly impossible. In this sense, it would seem as if I were completing Bloom's critique in *Closing* and were talking like a conservative. Bloom has been regarded as hating democracy because he has made the point that democracy, by replacing tradition with reason, paradoxically makes people dumb and unreasonable and enforces conformism rather than independent thinking. Hannah Arendt has also voiced the usual complaint about democracy or any egalitarian system, that it is a system which elevates the dumb masses at the expense of the experts – similar to my observation about the American “original condition”. Finally, conservatives frequently complain that the leftist ideology (e.g. requiring us to *believe* that all races and cultures are equal) makes us dumb by deliberately distorting our perception of reality for political purposes. (As noted, this kind of complaint is also frequently heard among enlightened leftists, such as Zizek.) In this essay, I hope to have made progress along this line by pointing out that leftist ideology – from its earliest manifestation in the form of *Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen* during the French Revolution to its latest, contemporary manifestation as “democratic values” – makes us dumb also by creating a system (values, culture, and institutions) which encourages us to be lazy about brain-using and to shut our mind off from other people and the external reality out of arrogance and overestimation of our own ability. I hope to have gained greater insight into the dummification effect of the leftist tradition by demonstrating that its latest manifestation, the cyber-libertarian ideal that everyone should partake of the means of production and be able to enter expert domains and higher education, is doing nothing other than facilitating our

switch-over from thinking and feeling to mere information-processing. I'm here touching upon the deepest root of the leftist evil. Taken together, my works are supposed to demonstrate that the contemporary democratic culture which the leftist ideology has created is destructive of our planet, creates new form of social injustice, distorts our perception of reality, and finally erodes our ability to think and feel so that we don't ever notice that our perception of reality is incorrect and that, by practicing the things which we believe to be good, we are in fact perpetuating oppression, destroying our planet, and shortening our very life. When we are too lazy to think and overly self-confident, we simply don't see the obvious and easily fall into the trap of ideologies which teach us to believe in the opposite of reality. When I advocate the development of intelligence and communication as the highest political values, I'm not simply envisioning benefits for the human being himself or herself – now that his or her most important human potential can better develop – but also wanting all human beings to develop the capacity to recognize, and correct, their “bad habits” – i.e. these politically correct democratic values which the whole planet is being brainwashed to accept. Only then can we successfully, and consciously, confront the crisis facing our civilization – without the government using noble lies on us. Think about how difficult it is, within the current Western democratic culture where everybody can only process slogans and yet is so confident that s/he is in the right, for an expert to point out to them the obvious disastrous consequences of these “democratic values”. I have always been warning how these so-called “democratic values” which the leftists advocate – tolerance of otherness, welcoming immigrants, respecting other cultures, empowering women, the “revolution of love” (in Madonna's words) – are environmentally costly in the sense of encouraging us to increase our consumption of oil and contribute more to global warming. Because racism is out of fashion and we are increasingly tolerant of, and curious about, each other, we have been flying across oceans to meet each other more often than ever before – and all this costs oil. And, because racism is out of fashion and we are increasingly tolerant of people from foreign cultures, millions of people are flying across oceans every year to immigrate into Western nations<sup>226</sup> – and all this, again, costs oil. Why should immigration be so mindlessly celebrated at all? Any reasonable person should have found it ridiculous that somebody, say in India, should fly across the Pacific Ocean to settle down in America just in order to work in 711. A tremendous expenditure of hydrocarbon energy just to do a simple thing which anybody can do anywhere in the world. Airline companies certainly are happy about our “values”, but our earth cries over it. Tourism is of course even worse – “mass tourism” is another obvious consequence of our increasing tolerance of, and loving, one another.<sup>227</sup> The point is that our *Weltoffenheit* – thanks to the globalization process which has made us increasingly familiar with, and tolerant of, each other – is currently setting in motion the most massive *Völkerwanderung* in the history of humankind – and peoples are not moving on foot like they did before but are transported by fossil-fuel engines. Then imagine the situation in the traditional, pre-modern cultures, where people were frightened and suspicious of foreigners and so were unmotivated to leave their own societies to visit, or immigrate to, other societies. That saves oil, bad news though it might be to transportation companies and tourism

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226 Just in one case: in 2015, 1.38 million foreign-born individuals moved to the United States. To get a sense of the scale of immigration in the one case of United States, see the summary published by Migration Policy Institute on 8 March 2017: <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/frequently-requested-statistics-immigrants-and-immigration-united-states>.

227 To get a sense of the scale of the problem, listen to Deutschlandfunk Kultur's interview with Stefan Gössling on 16 September, 2017: [http://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/tourismusforscher-stefan-goessling-wie-ist-nachhaltiger.970.de.html?dram%3Aarticle\\_id=395955](http://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/tourismusforscher-stefan-goessling-wie-ist-nachhaltiger.970.de.html?dram%3Aarticle_id=395955). The problem is so noticed that the UN has declared 2017 to be the “International Year of Sustainable Tourism”.

industry. The fact that tolerance and love are burdensome on our environment while nationalism and ethnocentrism are wholesome to the earth is so obvious and yet nobody in our democratic culture will be able to comprehend it. Because people nowadays are merely processing information without actually thinking, it is impossible to communicate something even so simple to them in order to teach them how to save themselves. Because they are confident that they are already sufficient in regard to their knowledge about the world, they will never feel the need to listen to a different opinion that is so contrary to what they have been taught. And this is itself the *most* disastrous consequence of our democratic culture! The fact is that only certain rightwing elements – like the rightwing movements in France – are open to, and have comprehended, such obvious connection between leftist, liberal values on the one hand and corporate interests and environmental destruction on the other.

In my previous works I have also been complaining about how it is corporate interests (profit margins) which have prompted the leftists to engage themselves in the struggle for social justice – how this is especially so in the case of feminist struggles (gender equality and the protection of women from harm) and the resultant “victim culture” – which is really about establishing a new system of oppression to replace the old one. I have spent much ink on demonstrating how women activists, and their women victims, are pretending to be victims as a way to gain power and achieve domination. Again, this campaign of deception, and self-deception, only works because everyone merely processes information and is cavalier about thinking and so has fallen out of touch with reality. Because people can't really think, when you tell them they are “victims”, they readily believe it, demand compensation for it, and succeed because the rest of the population also can't think and so believe it's all legitimate. Most victims are in fact idiots and don't really know what they are talking about. My own experience has been that, because people can't really think, they mean by their “rights” simply what they want; that, when they claim their “rights” are violated, they simply mean they are feeling uncomfortable or aren't getting what they want; and that, because people have only a very vague notion about reality, they think what is real is whatever they want to be real. Ordinary people simply cannot be expected to know what it means for something to be real. Whenever they are confronted with indisputable proof that what is real is not what they want to be real, they get angry, believe their “rights” have been violated, and demand the authority to change reality to suit their expectation of it. Inability to think – to know what is real and to calculate what is fair – lies at the foundation of the whole “victim culture”. When one reads about surveys which find that one-third of female college students have experienced sexual misconducts,<sup>228</sup> one wonders whether such a high rate is simply due to the “victims” inability to assess what is real, reasonable, and fair. In my previous works I often talk about my own story about this group of women who constantly file stalking claims with the police against me and so on. What they mean by “stalking” (violation of their privacy) is merely the fact that I have identified their visits to my website and have talked about them on my blog. They then complain about law enforcement's “sexism” because, whenever they file false complaints or forge evidences to pretend to be victims, law enforcement officers would catch them and then ignore their complaints. They are unable to think about whether their claim is reasonable or whether they have done the same, even worse, things to others but are convinced they have suffered “violence against women” because they have been told that, as women, they are victims. If asked in such survey, these women in my story would certainly

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228 For example, Palo Alto Online's 1 October 2015 report, “One third of Stanford women experience sexual misconduct, survey finds”: <https://www.paloaltoonline.com/news/2015/10/01/one-third-of-stanford-women-experience-sexual-misconduct-survey-finds>.



report “having been stalked” and “sexually harassed” or “having suffered discrimination”, thus contributing to this kind of survey culture which paints a horrible picture of “victimization”. The activists, meanwhile, are not aware of how stupid and out of touch with reality most of these so-called “victims” are but work hard to lobby for Title IX enforcement and so on, thus creating a system which increasingly marginalizes men as “aggressors”. As a result of my own experience, I have become extremely skeptical of any system erected to protect victims. My experience has demonstrated to me that people will exploit and abuse such a system, to pretend to be victims in order to gain power and hurt other people. Meanwhile, they will *really* believe in their heart that they are victims because, again, they always believe the good news they are told without bothering to check it against reality.<sup>229</sup> And the spectators will never stop to reflect: perhaps the epidemic situation – all these victims, this precarious world – is due to the deterioration of the meaning of words, the disappearance of people's notion of reality, and the evaporation of people's tolerance: 20 years ago, Bill Clinton was called a “womanizer”, today he is considered by many on the left who used to support him to be a “rapist”. Leaving aside my analysis of how such “oppression of men” serves to reinforce consumerist culture, I wish here only to emphasize that dummification – hence our switching-over from thinking and feeling to information-processing – is at the foundation for all my earlier complaints about the leftist ideology's destruction of our environment in the name of love, tolerance, and saving our environment and instituting a new social injustice in the name of social justice.

It is of course simply unreasonable to expect ordinary people to develop the intelligence required to recognize, correctly, the consequences of their actions or what their rights really are or whether their rights have really been violated. As noted, if people today can't think because they have grown up with digital communication and McDonaldization, they would still think badly had they grown up in a healthier environment such as has existed in the past. Since “victims” are always too dumb and never know what they are talking about and have never any understanding as to what justice looks like; since people can never comprehend the price which the earth will have to pay when they love one another and respect each other's differences; and since they will never understand how the democratic culture which requires the respect of their rights has closed off their mind, it is simply most urgent to rid the world of all these “human rights” and all these concepts about “liberation from oppression”, “sexism”, etc., and to return everybody to a traditional culture where people haven't yet comprehended that they have any “rights” at all. It's most dangerous to tell people they have rights and are victims of oppression, for, since most people don't have a functional brain to understand what is real and what is reasonable, they will keep on demanding compensation even when they are already on the top of the world – until the whole earth is exhausted from catering to their demands and they have their foot on everybody else's face. If you don't care about brain development or social justice, at least care about the survival of our civilization itself! In sum, the ideology that one deserves all the good things in the world simply by virtue of the fact that one is born (or belongs to a pre-determined “victim” group) is unwholesome both to our earth and to the development of our brain – and is unlikely to bring about any social justice. Elsewhere I have advocated the “de-powerment of the masses” rather than their empowerment in order to save the earth. Here I recommend additionally an authoritarian culture with a technocratic authority: to simply tell people what is real, what is fair, and what is reasonable, without permitting discussion. It will save our brain, restore social justice, and save our civilization from

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<sup>229</sup> As I have repeatedly stated, the “victim culture” and the system to protect “victims” make “victims” very dangerous. Victims are dangerous because stupid people are dangerous.



collapse.

At the end of my essay, I'm thus providing a sketch of the “utopia” according to my leftist conservatism. Because the highest political ideal here is brain development, it is not always so rightwing, but has also many progressive aspects. I have elsewhere described, in a preliminary fashion, the combination of liberalism with authoritarianism (authoritarianism when young, liberalism when old) and authoritarianism with transparency as part of my utopian program. Since we leftist conservatives value *merits* more than *rights*, we are rightwing. Namely, we ask: Why take people so seriously? When they have only such a vague notion of what reality is and what is right and what is wrong? It makes no sense to regard them as “victims” as if they were so important that they must be protected from the slightest harm at all cost. (This awful consumerist ideology.) On the other hand, because we believe that we should as much as possible avoid distracting people from developing their brain, we do believe in certain basic rights. “Rights” means that you are guaranteed something as long as you can breathe and eat. But, in our view, if all you can do is breathe and eat, then you shall have rights to food, clean air, and shelter, but nothing more. You shall not have, for example, any right to vote and to voice your opinion in public communication channels. We believe in universal basic income (*Grundeinkommen*) because the need to make money in order to survive is often the major reason why people don't have time to read and pay attention in order to develop their brain. Our principle is the development of merits rather than the respecting of rights – for the sake of brain development. People shall have rights only to the extent that this accords with their respective merits or helps develop their brain. We bemoan the fact that, under prosperity and “democratic values”, this traditional idea is lost, namely, that everyone needs to put in work in order to achieve something and become respected, that one needs to *earn* other people's respect, and we intend to restore this old idea..

In some of my other writings I have persistently speculated on the program which a revolutionary group hiding inside the UN has devised to save human civilization. It is a sustainable civilization program to save human civilization from collapse and a program to save the human brain from disappearing under the impact of digital communication, democracy and its “democratic values”, and McDonaldization and consumerization of culture. I have always believed that my leftist conservatism is precisely this program to save both our civilization and our brain. The revolutionaries in question are precisely concerned that the democratic culture (all this political correctness about human rights and women's rights and respecting other cultures) and the political system it has engendered have so trained people to shut down, and shut off, their mind that it has become impossible to point out to them that, with their political correctness, they are destroying their civilization and their planet in the name of fighting for social justice and saving the planet. The revolutionaries have precisely wanted to advocate the return to (pre-democratic) traditional culture as the best condition for the masses – “best” in the sense that it is good both for their brain development and for the planet. As many scientists dealing with sustainable civilization have noted, when it comes to our energy crisis, the most urgent thing is to change the behavior of individual consumers.<sup>230</sup> I'm merely expanding on this insight when I argue for a

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230 See, for example, Richard Heinberg and Daniel Lerch, ed., *The Post Carbon Reader: Managing the 21<sup>st</sup> Century's Sustainability Crisis*, Watershed Media: Healdsburg, 2010. There is a subsection “Behavior” in the book. See, for example, William E. Rees (University of British Columbia; One Earth Initiative; Post Carbon Institute), “The Human Nature of Unsustainability”: “Improving the prospects for human civilization requires that we organize – globally and consciously – to override those behavioral propensities that have become maladaptive in the modern world. To reduce the human eco-

behavior modification program for the sake of both environmental conservation and brain development. I have elsewhere noted: people in traditional culture are the inverse of “consumers” in the postmodern age, they are guilt-ridden and have low self-esteem – just as people often are under totalitarian regimes. Their brain-structure is of the “saving”, rather than “spending”, mode, and hence compatible with sustainable civilization. The people from traditional culture are, simply by virtue of their habits, wholesome to their environment, and their civilization is sustainable. They are already doing all the right things when it comes to their environment and their future. Even if they aren't, it's simply much easier, given their low self-esteem, lack of self-confidence, and humble personality, for the authority to correct them or instruct them to do the right thing. In a non-democratic, “traditional”, system, “authority” is respected and something valued. And they raise their children right, i.e. they discipline, and *beat*, their children, so that their children may grow up with lower self-esteem – the exact opposite of the contemporary situation which, as seen, many contemporary educators have complained about. I believe that the revolutionaries in question simply agree with those psychologists who, as if traditional, complain about parents' over-indulgence of their children nowadays.<sup>231</sup> I can think back at my own experience. Growing up in Taiwan in the 1970s just a decade before the country adopted democracy, I belonged to the last generation growing up under a pre-democratic traditional culture where nobody had yet any notion of having “rights”. And I went to a private school which was particularly strict, where, when the student said something stupid, the teachers would slap him or her with a stick. When I came to America in the early 1980s, I was struck by how America seemed to be the “opposite world”. Going to middle school for the first time, I was shocked by teachers' saying “Thank you” to students who turned in their homework. Here the traditional order was reversed. At the same time, debate raged on in Taiwan as to whether corporal punishment should be banned in schools altogether. “In America teachers are not allowed to hit students!” Amidst the storm of democratic reform which swept the island, everyone thought “progress” meant imitating America's “opposite world”. Gradually becoming assimilated to American culture, I eventually completely forgot about my childhood experience. Only now do I know that my initial experience was correct – that it is the

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footprint, the fetishistic emphasis in free-market capitalist societies on individualism, competition, greed, and accumulation must be replaced by a reinforced sense of community, generosity, and a sense of sufficiency.... It would be naïve to think that the creation of a radically new cultural narrative would not be met by strenuous resistance. 'Contraction' is not a narrative that resonates with the times. On the contrary, most people are psychologically committed to continuous economic growth, ever-increasing prosperity, and the myth of progress.”

231 In my *Testbuch ÖSD Mittelstufe Deutsch B2* ([www.eotvoskiado.hu](http://www.eotvoskiado.hu), p. 163 - 4), I saw this interesting interview with a certain Dr Wolfgang Blaumann whose complaint about the inversion of the power relationship between parents and children nowadays is thoroughly Ortega and expresses perfectly what I mean to say here: “Das Problem, das wir in Deutschland haben, ist, dass immer mehr Kinder psychisch nicht mehr reifen können. Die Fehler liegen auf der Erwachsenenenseite. Das heißt, immer mehr Erwachsene sehen in Kindern Partner. Es gibt auch immer mehr Erwachsene, die wollen von Kindern geliebt werden. Es kommt dadurch zu einer Macht-Umkehr und das Kind hat keine Chance auf Entwicklung. Ihre Psyche kann sich nicht entwickeln... Diese Psyche, die wir jetzt brauchen, um so leben zu können, wie wir leben, muss aufgebaut werden. Das heißt, sie wird nicht vererbt und sie kommt auch nicht automatisch. Die Psyche sitzt im Gehirn, besteht also aus Nervenzellen. Diese Nerven müssen trainiert werden. Das heißt psychische Funktionen wie Frustrationstoleranz, die Fähigkeit, Frustrationen auszuhalten, soziale Fähigkeiten, die müssen eintrainiert werden. Das ist auf der partnerschaftlichen Ebene nicht möglich. Es herrscht heute die Vorstellung vor, dass man über Reden und Begreiflichmachen erziehen könnte...” He then gives the example of tennis training: simply telling the novice how to play is not enough; he must play it to train his nerves. “Das heißt, es geht, wenn sie Kinder haben, gar nicht um die Frage, Regeln einzubauen, dass diese Kinder sagen wir mal hören und funktionieren. Sie wollen Psyche aufbauen, und das ist ein vollkommen anderer Prozess. Der kann überhaupt nicht gehen über Ratio.” This is what Peter Berger has said about the “soft generation”, and why I advocate bringing back corporal punishment in school.

Americans who should have imitated the Taiwanese rather than the other way round. It's not just that it's easier for the experts and the government to educate the people and correct them when they have not yet learned to overestimate themselves. The humble human being with low self-esteem and without awareness of one's freedom has also retained good habits wholesome to the mind. People are distracted when they constantly look at their smartphone during lectures and so on because they feel no need to pay attention: "I do whatever I feel like". It is the same freedom which has been especially made possible by digital mass media ("I can hear any music and stream any video anytime and anywhere I feel like"), which dummifies the mind, but which the person from traditional, authoritarian culture doesn't experience. While in traditional cultures most people are dumb peasants, my revolutionaries are probably counting on the fact that, as long as we retain the access to knowledge in public libraries, schools for the masses, and mass media, people will presumably not become this dumb, i.e. when their humbleness has opened up their mind, when the government, although authoritarian, is more transparent than before – for it is, like the Chinese government, more or less fearless toward people's opinions and so has less need to lie and hide – the dumb masses will, over time, become more intelligent – "according to the height of their time" (Ortega: *a la altura de sus tiempos*). Finally, since the people are humbler, the government can function more like the sort of technocratic, authoritarian state which China is. This makes it much easier for the government to confront whatever crisis is facing the nation. What is most important is that, if we do have a traditional culture, none of these democratic values will even arise to cause us to overburden our environment, to obstruct our brain development, and to force our government to lie and cheat.

The traditional culture is thus best for every party involved – the masses, the government, and the earth. What is most important – since, even when people's intelligence does increase over time to an appropriate level, it's simply unrealistic to expect them to become "intelligent" in the proper sense – is to restore the competence of the expert domains. The restoration of the experts' intelligence is a far more important task than the restoration of the common people's intelligence. This is where the significance of the elimination of McDonaldization and the abuse of rationalization really lies – and, here too, the return to traditional culture is the ultimate cure. The foundation of this project is saving higher education. What is most important about traditional culture is the elitism inherent in it. When the common people are humbler and have low self-esteem, they will not feel compelled to flock into expert domains, especially higher education, in order to prove that they are somebody. In combination with such measure as guaranteed basic income, lowering common people's self-esteem, and therefore their expectation of themselves, can certainly destroy the prevalent notion among them which educators have so frequently complained about, that they have to go to college in order to get a job. In this way, higher education can return to the good old days when only the very gifted went to colleges, and idiots will be prevented from entering expert domains by graduating from colleges and passing license examinations thanks to lowered standards. Herewith is, of course, another leftist element called for in our "leftist conservatism", i.e. universities must be so well funded by the government that they will not be compelled to compete in the "market" or even require tuition. (Like the German university system: "free for all", even for foreign students.) The return of traditional culture will also restore educational standards by reinvigorating the authority of professors and dismantling the leftist ideology's dominance in academia (this campaign against anything Western and anything white male and to glorify women, minorities, and even the talentless and mentally retarded as sacred "victims") and, along with it, the sort of affirmative action which provides idiots with credentials simply because they belong to a

“victim group”.

Once higher education is again restricted to a tiny minority of intellectual elites, the expert domains will again be populated by experts instead of by idiots, thus raising the quality of work to its traditional standard throughout American society. While the way in which rationalization process is able to accommodate idiots in expert domains will no longer be a question when idiots are prevented from entering them, the task remains to de-McDonaldize the entire society. Here, again, it should be evident that, within the framework of a pre-democratic, traditional culture, society will not be under pressure to McDonaldize, so that, when our postmodern society is forced to return to a traditional framework, it will necessarily de-McDonaldize. A traditional social framework and traditional mindset is the antidote for all these factors which have forced our society to McDonaldize. The kind of *Fremdenfeindlichkeit* (or simply: “xenophobia”) characteristic of traditional culture will certainly encourage “economic nationalism” (for example, Steve Bannon's “brand”) and discourage globalization so that, when the market is once again coinciding with national boundaries, market competition will become less intense. When society is rid of the democratic spirit, when the people are rid of any notions about their “rights” – their expectation that they deserve everything they want and should be catered to because, somehow, they are born so important – when, if possible, universal suffrage itself is canceled, there will be no more of this American “original condition”, this constant catering to the lowest common denominator. It shall once again be the idiots who shall strive to understand the experts and the authorities. Without this harmful democratic ideology that they are entitled to their opinions, have good opinions, should express themselves, and can always make something of themselves if only given the means, the people will talk less, do less, and demand less, so that the transaction volume in public domain will shrink. With less competition, less catering to the dumb masses, and less of their self-expressions, we will no longer have to constantly rush about, but, with lighter case load, will be able to tarry to pay attention to details. Along with the advocacy of “economic nationalism”, we will also have to demand fundamental transformation of people's attitude toward jobs, a thorough de-marketization in many essential domains: not just in education, but also in other domains where profit-margins have destroyed the quality of work, such as the mental health system. De-marketization for the sake of de-McDonaldization: herein is another leftist aspect of our “leftist conservatism”. When it comes to our *bête noire*, the electronic mass media, we shall note that, while Internet and smartphone could be harmful to our brain by their very method of delivering contents, the decrease of people's self-expression due to their lowered self-esteem will certainly lessen their constant attunement to these meaningless, monosyllabic “messages” which, with their interruptions and simplicity, have so dummed their mind. The return to traditional culture will, in sum, seriously curb the continual extension of the American “original condition”. We will then live in a civilization that both is sustainable and provides a framework in which we can be intelligent and communicative. Then follow more, and better quality, social capital and “public happiness” as well. Such is the “leftist conservative” utopian vision.

You can see that I'm describing a fundamentally anti-capitalist program. I am, in a sense, Marxist, and my framework remains that of historical materialism. Our conservative tendencies – hierarchy, authority, authoritarianism, elitism, centralization, and the encouragement of low self-esteem among the dumb masses – are due to our coming to terms with the most unfortunate fact about most human beings: that they are simply not smart enough to be able to profit from freedom, prosperity, and

equality in such a way as to develop their human potential while not overburdening their environment. If this were not so, we will be content with the commune system of those 1960 hippies. Our lack of sympathy for “victims” – more in the case of white women than in the case of African Americans and LGBT – is simply due to our coming to terms with common people's utter stupidity as well as to our understanding of the connection between women and consumption. Our rightwing tendencies – the promotion of ethnocentrism – are due to our coming to terms with the big capitalists' interests in promoting tolerance among common people: “If you refuse to sell to blacks or Indians or Chinese because you don't want inferior races to contaminate your business, your business cannot expand and you are hampering the free-flowing of money. A Chinaman's dollar is worth as much as a white man's dollar!” Or: “If you look down on Chinese, how can you successfully move your factories to China for the sake of greater profits?” Or: “If you are afraid of foreigners, how can we encourage you to buy foreign-made products and visit foreign lands for vacation?” The return to the prejudices of traditional culture is simply in order to reverse the trend of marketization and globalization so that the politically correct, but shallow and unthinking, mind will itself disappear while our environment will be less burdened.

If the promotion of old-fashioned ethnocentrism and abandonment of these “democratic values” for the sake of our environment and our brain development sound utterly bizarre to you, you should understand that we are ultimately promoting a “two-tier” system: reserving the democratic values for the intellectual elites only. It is ultimately unrealistic to expect the common people to become as intelligent as the sort of reasonable people presupposed in Habermas' vision of democracy or John Rawl's vision of a just society even when the traditional cultural framework is restored, digital technology is removed altogether, and society has completely de-McDonaldized. Given the continual existence of modern education and public libraries and so on, they might become slightly smarter than they have been in the past. Their brain might have been saved from non-thinking and information processing, but it's expected that they will remain more or less bad thinkers. As such, they really have no business in being tolerant of, and appreciating, foreign peoples and foreign cultures. Think about those common people who have traveled to foreign lands because they are so tolerant nowadays and so appreciate otherness. They walk through the streets of the exotic city, dine in exotic restaurants, lie on the foreign beach, do all the touristic things, and then come home. Because they are not really thinking beings in the first place, their experience of foreign cultures is completely superficial. This is in utter contrast to Montesquieu's Grand Tour through Europe or Tocqueville's voyage through America. All that the common people have ever done with their tourism is to have wasted a lot of fossil fuel and made the oil, airline, and tourist industries very happy. Enlightenment – that all peoples and cultures have their own beauty and unique importance in world history – and the consequent appreciation and tolerance are worthwhile only in the case of intellectual elites.

Given the inescapable limitation of the common people's intellect, the revolutionaries' most urgent and most important task must be the removal of the culture of respecting people's rights so that the common people will no longer grow up so spoiled as to operate under the illusion – the confidence – that they have already gained access to truth and that their opinions should therefore be respected. Namely, to make the common people understand the *most important truth* – that they are stupid and that their life is of no real importance. To make them appreciate the elites' assessment of their worth: “worthless eaters” (in the famous words of Henry Kissinger). While the common people will always be dumb,

they can now at least know *this* simple truth, and understand the necessity to not trust themselves and esteem themselves too much. This is the only way to dismantle the self-enclosure of the “mass men” and “mass women” – their conviction in self-sufficiency and their consequent lack of interest in listening to other people – which constitutes the greatest threat to humanity because, given the upcoming crisis facing human civilization, people must, after the experts have reached a consensus as to what to do, have the ability to listen to them. You might not see a problem of this kind when it comes to climate change. It will, however, be a problem when the experts say something contradicting ordinary people's long-standing convictions – such as when the experts point out that women's rights and racial equality are actually bad for our environment or that Africans and Muslims must stop breeding. Certainly experts have long been aware that ordinary people are not rational, that they did not formulate their beliefs on the basis of evidences, that you can make them believe anything as long as it fits their belief system, that you don't even need to present evidences in such case, but that, if the new information contradicts their current belief system, they will not believe it despite being presented with overwhelming evidences. The only cure to this natural irrationality of ordinary people – it is the stronger the more confidence they have in themselves – is to treat them like the dumb shit that they are since they are young so that they shall never develop any trust in themselves. In other words, since it is unreasonable to expect the human majority to ever develop a fully functional brain, the best we can hope for is to eliminate their dumbness as an obstacle to our collective survival and progress. In order to know that they are dumb, the common people must be constantly told by the authority since birth that they are dumb and that their life is of no importance – like it is the case in pre-democratic traditional cultures. I believe that, when the common people have learned to not trust themselves and never argue with experts and authorities but simply follow orders, they will, in the long run, paradoxically become more intelligent – given that the contemporary infrastructure of knowledge transmission remains in force.

By now you should notice that the “conservatism” in our “leftist conservatism” does not refer to the actual “conservatism” in America or any other Western societies, i.e. it has not much to do with the American or European conservatives who prefer the older phase of their societies and want to conserve the earlier phase of what is essentially a *leftist* evolution (the Founding Fathers, the ideal of the “Republic” during the French Revolution) against the same evolution's latter phase (the politically correct culture and system after the 1960s). The “pre-democratic traditional culture” actually means the transplantation of my Chinese experience with authoritarian culture (in Taiwan before the advent of democracy and in China currently) in the Western context. We are saying that this Chinese cultural framework combined with America's infrastructure is the best environment under which the mind can optimally develop while conserving the earth's natural resources. Since this sounds utterly bizarre, we are inclined to find the closest thing within the Western tradition itself – and that is Christianity. This is because the essence of Christian ethics lies in teaching people to be humble, and the most important revolutionary goal is, as noted, to lower people's self-esteem and self-confidence.

Another element of Christian ethics that is most important to brain development is honesty. This is not mentioned in the foregoing as a most important means to become intelligent (to connect with reality) because dummification due to dishonesty is the most common occurrence throughout human history – hardly a new invention by postmodernism – and honesty, while one of God's commandments, is not anymore present in traditional culture than in postmodern culture. It is so because people everywhere

and in all times have always believed in anything that makes them feel good. Hence they almost always believe in what is false. Through dishonesty, one refuses to believe what is true – in order to keep intact one's own self-esteem and one's Grand Narrative which one has devised to prop up one's self-esteem. In this way, one keeps oneself dummed in the sense of disconnecting oneself from reality. In the Christian context, humility and honesty are the preludes to seeking repentance, i.e. a change of mind (*μετανοια*). Here, in our secular context, “change of mind” refers to learning what one does not already know and accepting it as true (when it *is* true). This is of course extremely difficult to do unless one has learned to change one's goal, i.e. to place one's satisfaction, one's pleasure, one's pride in oneself, not in one's *being* good but in one's *knowing* better. In this way, even if one learns the truth that one is dumb and one's life has no importance, one easily accepts it because one is happy that one has known better what is in fact the case. Then one will always be honest with oneself. When one is confronted with the truth that one is not worthy, one does not cry, but actually rejoices – over the fact that one has learned something and become smarter. One is therefore on the path of becoming more intelligent in the sense of gaining greater connection with reality.

Like the Founding Fathers during the American Revolution or the *hommes des lettres* during the French Revolution, we want to lead a revolution to create a new system, a new public space, in which *we*, the intelligent elite, will have the chance to express ourselves, participate in society's process, and realize our human potential, rather than remaining marginalized as all intelligent, and complex, personalities must do under the current McDonaldized system. We are in pursuit of “public happiness” in Jefferson's sense or “freedom” in Founding Fathers' sense. We wish to escape the fate of obscurity and being overlooked and forgotten which constituted the essential meaning of “oppression” for the Founding Fathers and the negation of which was properly the revolutionary project. For this end, we want a revolution to first of all re-create a traditional culture in which authorities and experts are respected and in which ordinary people are aware that they are idiots and become humbler, so that *we* the intellectual elites will have an easier time in communicating our ideas – making the whole public domain more complex and more intelligent in the process. We want secondly a revolution to de-McDonaldize society so that intelligence will not be overlooked, fall into obscurity, and become extinct. This issue about my pursuit of “public happiness” (or “freedom” in the original, revolutionary sense) underlies all my incessant complaints about how, under McDonaldization, presentation, whether one *looks like* a nice person or *looks* smart, is increasingly the only thing that matters, at the expense of the real content of one's character and the real level of one's intelligence which it would require too much time and effort to assess and appreciate. This revolution to make the world once more a home for the intellectual elite of humankind has more than personal meanings for the intellectual elite themselves. Given the pace at which the world McDonaldizes, and given, that is, the extent to which we merely process information rather than thinking, human civilization itself is soon to disappear, in three senses: (1) human intelligence is fast becoming extinct; (2) human society is fast becoming a paradise for hypocrites, psychopaths, and charlatans who are good with presentation and hell for the introverted philosophers who are good and smart inside but don't know how to show it on the outside; and (3) as nobody is intelligent enough to understand how our political correctness is destroying our planet, environmental disasters are about to wipe out, physically, half of our civilization. To save the human brain and our planet, we need to put in place a utopia for the intellectual elite while dismantling the current dystopia designed for idiots and charlatans and those leftist Antifas and their behind-the-scene corporate sponsors.

I do not wish to suggest that behavior consistent with environmental conservation is only possible within a pre-democratic, traditional culture with its hierarchy, authoritarianism, and xenophobia. Currently, the Convivialist and Degrowth movements in France and Germany are proposing life-style changes that will lead to a shrinkage of our economy while keeping us happy, and the proponents of both movements are typical leftist progressivists committed to egalitarianism, decentralization, democracy, and tolerance of otherness. It's quite imaginable that their movements will eventually become the norm just as many elements of the hippies' culture has become normalized today as political correctness. My view is that the leftists' struggle for environmental conservation (encouraging people to consume less fossil fuel) is ultimately only about fighting the symptoms of a disease which they themselves have created while blaming environment destruction on people on the right who, with their xenophobia and nationalism and so on, are actually far less likely to create the disease in the first place. This is however not to suggest that fighting the symptoms without addressing the disease can never succeed in suppressing the symptoms altogether (i.e. in drastically reducing oil consumption to the appropriate level). We leftist conservatives remain nevertheless skeptical that egalitarianism and decentralization can constitute a good environment for brain development where expert opinions will gain preeminence in the public domain to make the whole public sphere more intelligent. The American "original principle" will always remain in effect under the egalitarian, decentralized, and democratic structure which the leftist progressivists champion – where the dumb majority will be encouraged to assert themselves and, by their sheer numerical superiority, become the dominant force.

At the end of this essay I would like to make it clear that I am perfectly cognizant of the fact that it is virtually impossible to expect things to change in the direction of the sort of "utopia for the intellectual elite" which I am advocating here. I have always remained convinced of the historical necessity which I have described in my Thermodynamic Interpretation of History: it will always be a hopeless fight when you fight against the whole capitalist system – against the Reason of History itself. The leftists have won over Western civilization because they are the agents of the expansion of the free-market system while the "white supremacists" have lost because they are backward forces working against the expansion of capitalism – it is capitalism which has demanded the dismantling of racism and the elevation of women. My current essay has completed the cycle of this analysis. In this essay I have concentrated on how egalitarian ideologies and practices – whether it is about encouraging everybody to participate in the ownership of means of production or whether it is about enabling everybody to participate in expert domains through the rationalization of procedures or the lowering of standards – lead to dummification. I am here deploring such dummification not only because it has become impossible to teach people to distinguish between good and evil and between what is wholesome and what is harmful, but more generally because it leaves the majority of the human species increasingly under-developed and renders them increasingly uncommunicative, so that, eventually, the life of the intellectual elite like myself becomes increasingly pointless. On the subjective level, the leftist conservative revolution also seems to be a hopeless project. These so-called "democratic values" have acquired such allure because, when you tell the dumb, poor, and hitherto insignificant people that they are in fact quite important, smart, and competent, and should be made the kings in their society, of course they will love it. Now if you tell them they are in fact quite dumb and have overestimated their importance, of course they will kill you. Once you give people "rights", you can never really take them away – not without their resisting to their death. My utopian vision is thus quite an impossible goal –



unless a *scandal* happens which shall fundamentally change people's perception of reality, specifically people's attitude toward “human rights”, “women's rights”, tolerance, and “equality”, just as the neocons have noted in their manifesto, “Project for a New American Century”, that they cannot see themselves persuading the Establishment to adopt their imperial vision for America, “absent a catalytic event, like a new Pearl Harbor”. Namely, something like 911. In other words, only the “Deep State” has the power to “re-traditionalize” our society in the way in which I have described it in this essay. If, that is, those Straussians in the “Deep State” suddenly see the need to make American people smarter rather than dumber.<sup>232</sup> This is of course pure madness: the “Deep State” has built an entire world-empire on the basis of American people's dummification and expecting them to want these people to become smarter is like expecting Microsoft to dismantle itself in favor of Apple. If anything, they would prefer to ban all the ideas in this essay instead.

### **The principle of leftist conservatism:**

We value merits rather than rights. We help the good rather than the victims. If the victim is a bad person, we help him not. If the good is a billionaire, we help *him*.

### **The three options:**

- A. When people are intelligent and have low self-esteem, democracy functions optimally.
- B. When people are dumb and arrogant, democracy must function in the Straussian manner.
- C. When people are dumb and arrogant and yet deception is not desirable, an authoritarian regime is called for.

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232 The leftist conservative might find it instrumental to team up with the white nationalists to fight for “white men's rights” as part of the campaign to re-traditionalize society because a most essential part of the effort to dismantle democratic values is to find white men who are willing to beat down white women. For the leftist conservative, as noted in “Political Correctness as Cultural Industry”, the whole cultural war in America, excepting black people's fight for their civil rights, is nothing other than liberal white women's attempt to achieve domination over their men – by pretending to be victims in order to play on their men's chivalry and sympathy as a way to gain dominion over them. All the other minorities are simply dragged into this war when white women look for allies to beat down their men. This war is of significance to the whole planet because it is these liberal white women in America who have introduced “sacralization of the victim” (the tactic of pretending to be victims as a way to gain power and achieve domination) into the public domain to poison our mind. It is however also of significance for the minorities who have been recruited by white women. While those liberal white women form alliance with minorities in their fight with their men, it's expected that, once they have achieved dominion over their men, they will turn around and exterminate us the minorities. This feminist fight for minorities' rights is all a bunch of hypocrisy – my personal experience has clearly demonstrated this. Our objective in America is to return this country to white men's rule as the first, and most important, part of the leftist conservative revolution. As minority, we have compared white women's rule with white men's rule, and the latter is far more preferable. When the Asian guy was going to middle school and high school in California, white guys would surround him, call him “Chinckers”, and beat him up. That was the days of white men's rule. Now that he lives in Feminist Land, liberal white women would find their government partners to insert chips in his brain in order to remotely control him to harass them, forge evidences to prove his wickedness, and make false reports about him to law enforcement – all in order to pretend to be victims of his misogynist terrorism and persuade law enforcement to exterminate him. Clearly, everyone can see that white men's rule is actually the lesser evil. Deep down, of course, I simply don't believe that, once again under white men's rule, we will see the return of all the racism and sexism that were rampant up until the 1980s. Peoples of all origins have been so mixed up together in the past thirty years that the old-fashioned prejudices born from ignorance are simply no longer possible.