Heidegger's Hippies

This essay is about the future of the political sphere in the West based on what we know about its past. I argue that the current state of politics in the West can be characterised as one of selective forgetfulness, a semi-blissful, amnesiacal state of collective dementia that manifests itself in symbolic idealism: informationalism.

The Information Society?

If this is the Information Society, then how come nobody knows what is happening to society? Of course, we all know what is happening *in* society and *to* people at any given time, or at least the 1.5 percent of the earth's people who have access to new and emerging information and communication technologies (ICTs) can generally, with some effort, find out. This is not to say that an information society does not exist; it does. Its access is highly restricted to an informed and privileged elite. Its products are fantasies. It has, as its means of production and exchange, ICTs. It manifests itself in what I call informationalism[1].

Informationalism is the latest form of idealism. It is a lot like religion insofar as it causally relates abstract concepts with reality and, consequently, becomes confused between the two. Historically, this has proven to be a dangerous state of affairs, especially where a ruling elite becomes confused between ideas about how a society *should* work, and the way it actually *does* work.

Just for the moment, I will stay in the realm of ideas. Not because I do not wish to dirty my hands in the muck of reality, but because I want to show you what flimsy material ideas are made of, and where an obsession with them inevitably leads.

It's simple! All we need to make this idea work is …

Seen from two perspectives at once, society is both a concept and a collection of things. Seen from a third perspective, society is neither of these. It is, rather, the totality of relationships among and between the "collection of things" that make up society, and which manifest themselves in processual instantiations of a micro-sociological nature. When seen as such, or indeed as any of the preceding *definitions*, society ceases to be anything in particular: *it just is* - or it *is not*, as some, like Lady Thatcher, would have it.

Of course, this simply won't do. If we are to study the New World Order - the Information Society - as the sociological phenomenon that it is, then we need to put forward a definition of what sociology is and what - if not aspects of society - it studies. But that's beside the point. The point is, how can the essentially technical phenomena of ICTs form the basis of a new set of relationships that constitute a New economy, a New society, and a New Global Social Order? The answer, of course, is simple: they don't.

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[1] This is a term used by Manuel Castells (1996). However, I have a somewhat different understanding of the word's meaning than does Castells.

According to its proponents, the Information Society is organised around fundamentally simple principles and entails certain, seemingly immutable phenomena: increased access to *information*, an unproblematic term for most proponents; time and therefore space collapses; symbolic and digital convergence and/or simultaneous implosion becomes immanent; global organisations of firms and nations become increasingly "complex", now a handy pseudo-scientific term; increasingly "skilled" workforces become necessary; increasing amounts of equality, leisure, choice, competition, efficiency, wealth, and so on, become available; and *especially* increasing amounts of harmony and understanding among the people of the world.

Note that every one of the tenets I name above refer to abstract *concepts*. I will deal with these later. First I want to explore some concepts that have attached themselves to the technologies of the New World Order.

The clockwork universe and the white rabbit

"I'm late!", cried the white rabbit, as he scurried past Alice into Lewis Carroll's laudanum induced dreamscape. Freud would have said that Carroll was having some sort of repressed sexual reaction to industrialised society, but Freud was a notorious cocaine addict and therefore inevitably prone to reducing everything to some aspect of sexuality. Freud notwithstanding, the rabbit might indeed signify the daily horror of millions of middle-class managers over the last few centuries –over-stressed operatives who respond to the demands of Capital for increasing numbers of tasks to be performed in a finite and repetitve temporal space: the working day. Today, we would probably say that the rabbit signifies an advanced form of Taylorism, a socio-cognitive malaise that has taken almost a century to show its true colours. However we view the symbolism of the White Rabbit, his frantic and apparently aimless scurryings have never been so broadly emulated as in the Information Age. The so-called knowledge worker, wired to her or his (ideally portable) ICTs, performs more quickly yet less productively, often in circumstances of extreme stress. What's going on? What's the big rush?

Isaac Newton posited a clockwork universe. Descartes put forward the idea that the mind, a spiritual entity, is somehow separate from the body, a mechanical automaton.

Fashionable scientific and philosophical descriptions of people and the universe(s) they inhabit (actually, as far as we know, they only inhabit the earth and, on rare occasions, the moon; but I'm still dealing with idealism here) have remarkable and lasting effects on society.

The genius of Newton, whose ultimately fashionable scientific and mathematical principles remain, to this day, unrefuted in specific domains, had a lifetime of inspired, prodigious scholarship - understanding - concerning the universe that surrounded him reduced to the metaphor of a giant clock. Descarte's *Meditations*, which he undertook, for some significant part, inside a stove, propounded an objective sophistication that was ultimately fortuitous for the Roman Catholic Church because it anticipated an emergent scientific subjectivity which could, quite obviously, be used objectively, and especially subjectively, in the service and proof of God.

And consider what kinds of intellectual and political milieux surrounded these two influential minds as their understandings of the universe and the human body were reduced to, respectively, a clock and an automaton. Civil war, plague, and religious fundamentalism - a reaction to an emergent

scientific "modernity" - surrounded and shaped their understandings of their universe, and, consequently, the metaphorical language with which they described it.

Machines held a boyhood fascination for Newton. The century in which he lived might well be seen as the opening bars of the industrial revolution; philosophically, scientifically, socially, and economically. Pneumatics were invented, dynamics were conceived of, optics and clocks were improved on, and the workhouse came into being. Using clockwork-like mechanisms, several calculating machines were invented in Europe[2]. Maritime navigation needs drove the imperative for improvements in optical instruments like the telescope. But more importantly, in the the clock: 'The clock became the symbol and central problem of the age'[3] because if an accurate enough clock could be built, Newton's ideas could be operationalised at sea. For Newton, time and space were absolute (i.e. constant and flat) and mutually exclusive "things". Perhaps it was inevitable that Newton would posit a clockwork universe. The clock was the "sexy" technology of the day. The finest clocks of the day were built by fashionable artisans, and increasingly accurate clocks promised wealth to their inventors, ease and accuracy of ocean travel, and the physical keys to the undiscovered secrets of Newton's Universe. Such an explanation for the Newtonian metaphor is, of course, too simple by half. However, Newton's system of the universe, a clockwork universe, reminds us that technologies not only shape knowledge, but shape the metaphors with which people communicate knowledge, or at least by which it is understood.

The White Rabbit and the Clockwork Universe met in the early-18th century. They just happened to be travelling in the same direction. Later on, Frederick Taylor arranged a lifelong partnership between the two, showing how each complemented the other, and how they were both joined, driven, and constrained by absolute time and space. With Taylor's contract in hand, the White Rabbit and the Clockwork Universe sealed the trajectory of the Industrial Revolution: an increasingly intimate meshing of human and non-human machines that went faster and faster and faster.

Please note, I'm still talking about ideas here. I'll get to reality later.

My mind, the computer

The confusion between concepts, technologies (things), and people has rarely been so evident as it is in the so-called information age. Today, as an example, a multi-billion dollar industry called Artificial Intelligence (AI) thrives throughout the West. Underpinning this industry is the idea that the human mind is somehow like a computer, and vice versa. Previous metaphors, of course, likened the mind to a clockwork mechanism. If you listened closely, you could hear the wheels turning; you could hear it ticking. Sometimes, alarm bells would ring, but the clock really wasn't taken all that seriously as a metaphor for the mind, and anyone who had seen any part of a human body below its skin, knew that clocks had nothing to do with it.

But now we have the microprocessor metaphor to work with, and new theories about the mind abound. Surprisingly, people take them seriously.

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[2] This was a function of interaction between Chinese and European scholars. For a short history see: Calculating Machines in China and Europe in the 17th Century: The Western View (Graf, K. D., 1998) http://www.inf.fu-berlin.de/~graf/cm.htm .
[3] Bronowski, J. (1973). *The ascent of man*. London: Science Horizons, p. 243.

This is not to diminish the marvellous technologies of which I am so fond. Nor is it to denigrate the various innovators and technicians who have invented them. Nor do I suggest that, in some respects, the human mind and computers do not share similar characteristics. After all, the logic of minds built the logic of ICTs. Therefore, some similarities are inevitable.

Still, they remain stupid chunks of stuff: plastic, silicon, and metal. Without people to program, maintain, and use them, ICTs are just so much detritus. And despite massive efforts to patent the newly-cracking DNA code, and the attempts of varying success to mesh biological and technological materials, the surgeons remain unconvinced. They have not found any power supply, nor any hard disk data storage area, nor any microprocessors inside humans. Indeed, like everything else we have studied as a species, the mind becomes an increasingly elusive problem the more we "know" about its (lack of) structure. Ironically, explanations of the mind are increasingly simplified to fit technological advances.

Such understandings are, of course, a function of language which, throughout history, has reduced "expert" knowledge of the world to parables, homilies, similes, analogies, allegories, and metaphors: a system of concepts, symbols, and descriptions; language.

I say, I say, I say …

If we accept the view that computers and minds operate similarly, we must also accept that minds and language are separate "things" which have a merely mechanical - even arbitrary - relationship with one another. I say this because, inside computers, so-called symbols or codes are manipulated by hardware and software to produce output of some sort. Most often, the output is some form of language chosen by the programmer, or rather the person who pays the programmer.

Now this is a nice metaphor for how the mind works. Input from a nervous system, which is continually perturbed by environmental factors (note we have just separated internal and external factors of perception as if they were independent of each other), is encoded into some sort of symbolic system that the brain has learned (here, we have unproblematically assumed that these processes are separate, and that some encoding mechanism discreetly encodes packets of sense datum for interpretation and manipulation by "something else"), and then these symbolic resources - which, incidentally, are not considered to be language by AI theorists, but rather "mentalese"[4] - are manipulated, recombined, recoded, and transmitted to other people in language and other communicative behaviours.

The central problem with the mind-as-computer metaphor is probably already obvious to you.

Firstly, when we deal with conceptual "items", like eternity or quality or virtue, we need to separate the concept from the language used to describe it so as they can be separately decoded and encoded. Where, then, do these concepts that we decode and encode exist? In society? In heaven? In a book? Perhaps; perhaps not. Perhaps language and minds are more closely integrated than the AI scientists would have it.

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[4] The internal form of language that the brain manipulates when it thinks. See Pinker, S. (1994). The language instinct. *** p. ***

Similarly for material descriptions, if a person utters the word "tree" and there is no tree to be seen, the mind-as-computer model suggests that, prior to the utterance, the person must first bring forth a concept or memory of a tree from some data storage system in "mentalese", then somehow translate it into language, and then speak the word. All these "subroutines" require mechanical connections of some sort: so where and what are they? What's more, the person must somehow program her or himself to want to bring forth the concept of a tree for translation, and so on *ad infinitum*. Once again, the concept of a tree must be viewed as a separate "thing" from the language that is used to communicate it. What, then, is the relationship between the two? The glaringly obvious hypothesis is that there is no separation between concepts and language: language is intrinsically conceptual. Language is *effective* human consciousness [5]. It is the human mind in action.

Working with the computational model of mind, processes of cognition and recognition, then, must also be viewed as a separate process from that which deals in concepts, unless people can recognise a concept (which, of course, they can, but only if it is "pre-packaged" in language somewhere). If a person sees a new kind of tree and wants to tell another person about it, then they must say they saw a new kind of tree and describe it. To do so, they must conceptually grasp, not only the tree they saw, but also the aspects of the tree that make it new - that is, *not like any other tree* they have seen. If it is not like any other tree, then is it necessarily a tree? Perhaps; perhaps not. Take, for instance, a person disguised as a tree…

I shan't continue, the computer-as-mind argument becomes utterly nonsensical from here on in.

The mind is not a computer, although it can imagine them. If the mind and body are separate and independent "things" - a Cartesian concept that has largely been discarded by all but the AI industry, the IMF, and various other claques of technophiles - then the body must be merely an instrumental appendage of the mind, and *not* vice versa. Regardless, for the mind-as-computer theory to be "true" (of course, a theory cannot be true: it's just a perspective) mind and body must once again be viewed as separate "things". Thus, after imagining a computer, the mind sets the body to work building it: utter nonsense.

I'm still talking about ideas. I'll get to reality later.

Symbol worship

I was brought up worshipping symbols. We all are. Flags and crosses, hammers and sickles, dollars and cents, are all, or have been, the objects of human worship. They are at the heart of what we call a value system. Symbol worship and death are closely related in human societies. The symbols that people worship most usually promise deliverance from evil or hardship or whatever else is said to lead to an untimely or uncomfortable death (as if there were any other kind for the dying), or an unhappy life. As such, symbol worship is an act of fear. Undoubtedly, it is also an act of consumption: people swallow the story attached to the sacred symbols knowing full well that the object of their worship is an abstraction like "security", "everlasting life", "hope", "love", "prestige", "equality for all", "international competitiveness", and so on.

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[5] Marx notes this in *The German Ideology*.

This is not to say that values are not important; they are. In fact, they are an inevitable aspect of life for humans. What I want to say, and what the point of this essay is, is this: Valorised symbols shape society; they become the objects of worship and, as such, the basis of social values. Humans can decide which symbols are worth the sacrifice that every act of worship demands. Which brings me to politics, the symbolic expression of a society's organisation.

Throughout the West, the political sphere has shifted, and its trajectory is ugly and dangerous. It has to do with symbol worship, perceptions of people and society, the information age, and the global economy.

I'm still talking about ideas, but I'll try and stop now.

The end of politics

In 1968, police cracked open students' heads at Berkeley and Chicago. In Paris, 10,000 students fought riot police and lost. Martin Luther King was assassinated. The remaining social revolutionaries completely lost their nerve and scattered into the rarified, finely nuanced realms of postmodernism, poststructuralism, social constructivism, neo-marxism, feminism, and other interest group politics. Today, intellectual and political revolutionaries do not exist, at least not visibly. Instead, the political and intellectual spheres, which, at any given time, are symmetrical around an historically specific axis of shifting social values, are subsumed under an overarching rationality of market logic. Everyone in Western societies is now a client or a producer of one sort or another. Even prisoners in the West are ludicrously described as clients of the prison system [6], as are the recipients of welfare and other government sector services like mental health care. It is as if they had a choice.

The penetration of market logic into every sphere of human life in the West is a combined function of the West's social organisation, which includes technology; the symbols that Western societies worship; and the way these societies, by which I mean the people who constitute them, describe themselves.

Societies rarely describe themselves as such these days. Instead, they are most usually described as economies, and thus as a collection of economic entities or agents. This is because "the economy" has become the main symbol of worship in the West. Its God, "The Market", is an unpredictable, vicious, and moody anthropomorph that was innocently concocted as an explanatory tool some three centuries ago, then personified, deified, and dragged through history, violently kicking and screaming its protests which have so far manifested themselves in serial financial failures; gross economic inequities; periodic and frequent social unrest; and in several infamous and ongoing cases, unprecedented mass murder. People are now subjects of the market and its bipolar demands and dissociative disorders. People are mere appendages of the market and must accede to its terms.

The terms of the market were most recently received and set down in stone by the High Priests of the World Trade Organisation (WTO). They are enforced by the World Bank and its subsidiary, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and constantly reinterpreted, studied, re-rationalised, and

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[6] It was, however, noted by an influential political scientist at a dinner I attended that clients in the prison system had no 'exit voice'. Thus, he argued, they may possibly not be considered as economic agents.

regurgitated by the Free Trade acolytes within the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

I'm not talking about ideas here, this is really happening.

These multilateral entities (in fact, they are not *really* multilateral, they are the blatant appendages of a bullying US economic fundamentalist administration who are, in turn, Wall Street lackeys) dictate policy tenets to developed and developing countries alike. Thus, national boundaries are mere formalities as far as economic policy goes. Underpinning the logical, empirical, and social aberrations of the WTO, the IMF, and the OECD is a technological determinist, economic fundamentalist form of symbol worship: informationalism.

Informationalism is the paradigmatic, overarching rationality of globalisation, another God in the pantheon of informationalism. Informationalism, a religion, has its own Holy Trinity: the Free Market, ICTs, and Globalisation. Its benefits are clear to those who are faithfully devoted. I have dealt with the silly axioms of informationalism elsewhere, so I will not bother with them here.

Let me just clear something up. Societies have economies; not vice versa. Economies are a function of people trading; not the reverse. Economics is supposed to be an explanatory study of how people trade, not the haven for a prognosticating claque of semi-insane mathematicians and social engineers who unashamedly spend their time making predictions that rarely, if ever, come true. I do not wish to tar all economists with the same jaundiced brush. Nor do I wish to denigrate the mathematical talents of brilliant econometricians. I merely wish to point out the limits of what economics is *capable of studying with any confidence and validity*.

Back to politics now.

Politics is dead. This is because there is no philosophical dialectic at work in the Western political terrain. The dialectic has been replaced with interest group compromises, business demands, market logic, and multilateral policy dictates. Thus, the Western citizenry has no real choice about policies, policy formulation, or political trajectories. Consequently, democracy in the West is sick - perhaps terminally so. I do not personally think that this is a terminal malaise. However, it may be terminal for many individuals, perhaps many millions of them.

So what is to be done? How can we, as citizens of a putative democracy, revive an apparently terminally ill patient who is sick with idealism? Language, logic, and healthy public debate are good starting points. After all, that's where democracy first received its promise of a long and healthy life.

Linguistic CPR for a democratic revival

Language, as I pointed out earlier, is effective human consciousness. As such, it mediates human society as it is instantiated in private and public domains, both of which are intrinsically political. Language and logic, by which I mean conscious, systematic thought, are essentially the same thing: language has its own logic, and illogical language is definitive nonsense. This is not to say that people are immune to nonsense. On the contrary, it is most likely that many people have become addicted to it. This is a function of symbol worship.

Statements and arguments contain logical and discursive bases; foundational premisses and assumptions. The ability to think critically is the ability to penetrate the foundational premiss and assumptions of statements and arguments, and empirically weigh their coherence with each other, and with the realities to which they refer.

In the mainstream public sphere, critical thought, if it exists at all, is rendered largely invisible. This is a handy state of affairs for the elite, dynastic and *nouveau-riche* ruling class in Western countries because the logic of the financial system, upon which the power of this class is based, is such a frail "thing" that it easily explodes with the prick of a critical pin. I'll return to this later. But of course, it has become taboo to speak of such things as class. Class-based critique went out of fashion once the intellectual and political revolution lost its nerve. Capitalist muscle, as the revolution found out, has much more substance to it than do idealistic notions of social justice, equality, and so on. Plus, the messy and blatant inequities of the Capitalist system seem so much more logical than do, say, notions of equality.

But language is free for everybody in the West, or so the story goes. Libel, slander, and threats of violence notwithstanding, anyone can say what they like - within reason - to, or about, anyone else – or so you might think. Language is the common wealth of society, the backbone of democracy, the glue of community, the social free-for-all that constitutes healthy public debate. Of course, I have returned to the realm of concepts again. Language is not free; it never has been. In fact, language has become increasingly classified - that is, restricted to particular classes of people - and commodified as informationalism, an intellectual and political paradigm, advances. The everyday language of everyday people, by which I mean the people who are excluded from the operation of effective power in societies, is far removed from the techno-gobbledygook that passes for public debate in Western societies today.

Without getting into a full linguistic characterisation[7] of what this language looks like, it can easily be identified by the way it packages impossible concepts and gives them a concrete appearance: the term "Globalisation" is an excellent example, but there are many others currently *en vogue*. This expensive, exclusive jargon pervades public language. It is the language of experts, expertly packaged, and turned into social theory, sterile public debate, and destructive public policies. You can buy it in newspaper form; you can swallow it whole as it is spoonfed to you buy corporate communicators and government bureacrats alike; you can even sell it back to its inventors, repackaged for use in other, untrammeled domains of society, the more intimate the better. The more rigid the commodified dialects become, the more easily they are transposed from one social domain to the next - each one increasingly more intimate than the last. The language looks conciliatory because of its emotional barrenness; it looks objective because of its "expert" pedigree. It uses words and phrases like "arbitration", "conciliation", "cooperation", "positive development", "strategic presence", "international community", and so on. It is euphemistic and logically nonsensical. It takes concepts and dresses them up as immutable, impenetrable "things". If we, as citizens in a democracy, don't aggressively defend the arena of public debate, opening it up to all citizens, we will descend inexorably towards the bottomless, authoritarian void of informationalism.

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[7] For a full explanation of technocratic discourse see, for instance, Lemke, J. (1995). *Textual politics: Discourse and social dynamics*. Taylor & Francis: London, Chapts. 4, 5; McKenna, B. & Graham, P. (forthcoming). *Technocratic discourse: A primer*; Adorno, T.W. (1964/1973) *The jargon of authenticity* (K. Tarnowski & F. Will, Trans). Routledge & Kegan Paul: London; Marcuse, H. (1964). *One dimensional man*. London: Routledge & Keegan Paul.

This is the problem; this is why society is sick and why informationalism, like other forms of fascism before it, won't work. The potential for democratic engagement in a commonly accessible public language, and consequently, the potential for public thought, is being steadily eroded by a nihilistic religion that has, as its objects of worship and its communal ritual space, a hollow and fragile set of idealistic symbols that refer to nothing real.

Did you say Fascism?!

Yes I did, but please don't get confused between the philosophical pedigree and underpinnings of fascist thought and the regimes of Hitler, Mussolini, and Franco (who wasn't *really* a fascist). While fascism manifested itself in these regimes, their stylistic features remain far more memorable than their philosophical and political underpinnings. Which has been a fortunate thing for fascism because, as a philosophical and political model for governance, fascism has flourished - continually rebadged, reclothed, and with increasing strength - ever since it was putatively wiped off the political map in 1945.

It probably seems a bit cold of me to characterise the most memorable aspects of of Hitler's and Mussolini's regimes as "stylistic features", after all, millions of people were systematically murdered in cold blood by leather-clad, jackbooted people who were "just following orders". But at least the trains ran on time.

They were, at their very heart, *efficient and productive* regimes that functioned with an historically odd mixture of concensus, rationality, and emotion. Their rationality manifested itself in extremely efficient economies based on a consensual partnerships between international and national big business and government; through government initiatives to bring industry and its workers "closer together"; and through random acts of violent repression. Their emotionality manifested itself in the first electronically mass-mediated propaganda programs the world had ever seen.

Hitler invented the airborne hustings trail, using party funds to fly throughout Germany, descending from the sky like Nietzche's superman, completely aware that God had died in Germany, and that his people needed new symbols to worship; he had them in the form of an Aryan folk religion that had all the trademarks of 'societalized chosenness, noble and homey at once'[8].

Mussolini had a head-start on Hitler in terms of developing fascism as a form of the corporate state. In his first cabinet meeting as Premier, he laid down the party line: 'a combination of [social] pacification, the creation of national discipline, and the achievement of budget economies'[9]. He achieved this through a close and conciliatory relationship with business; sytems of community consultation involving 'technical groups' of "experts"; lots of repressive rules backed by the threat of effective violence; and a strong (although often fractious) relationship with the Catholic Church, which eventually provided community services to the state[10] such as youth and sports goups. The thing that Italian and German fascism had in common was their intention to form a Third Way, a reconciliation between the Right and Left in politics, which, in Italy, was realised in the 'Palazzo

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[8] Adorno, T.W. (1964/1973), pp. 5-6.
[9] Eatwell, R. (1997). *Fascism:A history*. London: Verso, p. 48.
[10] Eatwell, R. (1997). Chapt 4.

Chigi Pact', the main purpose of which was to 'simplify industrial relations' thereby ensuring 'industrial peace'[11].

Similarly, after gaining notoriety through violent and polemic action, Hitler's National Socialists finally managed to sell their Third Way policy through a process of Third Way political reconciliation[12]. By January 30, 1933, Hitler had sold his party as 'one which could appeal both to those concerned primarily with economics and those who sought a more affective national community'[13].

While fascism presented extremely different faces in Germany, Italy, Britain, France, and Spain, its underpinning philosophies were similar, just as they are today. Its central tenets - 'the quest for community, the desire to rediscover national identity, and the belief that a new socio-economic order is required'[14] - are in evidence throughout the most influential political and academic literature concerning globalisation, information technology, postmodernism, and neo-liberal economics in the West. The term 'Third Way', the nominal packaging for Mussolini's, Hitler's, Blair's, Clinton's, and Latham's[15] political agendas, has made an unashamed comeback. Why? More importantly: How?

How could a society that has recorded, filmed, and documented the most violent century in history turn to embrace failed policies, failed philosophies, and terminally flawed perceptions of itself?

The answer is, of course, mass amnesia. Mass amnesia is a function of propaganda and the absence of healthy public debate[16]. Its by-product is the numbed consciousness and emotionally charged state of an "informationalised" society. Accompanying this collective insanity is an ethos of professionalism, or managerialism, or something else that has its roots deep in free-market logic. The marionnette-like monologues by those who valorise "change" as a somehow historically unique paradigm for the West at the end of the twentieth century, are driven by a technological determinism that rationalises itself - always in terms of its own choosing and definition - by intellectualising "being" in and of itself. It is an advanced state of Narcissism - a self-reflexive, existential malaise of blissful forgetfulness.

I blame it all on Heidegger's Hippies.

Heidegger's Hippies

There is no more reason to believe that today's fascists would appear in jackboots and leather chanting anti-semitic slogans than there is to believe that the Catholic Church would begin another inquisition, or that its priests would once again don hair shirts and begin ritual self-flagellation.

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[11] Eatwell, R. (1997). p. 58. Readers familiar with Australia's industrial landscape will note that a similar process of accords took place through the mid-eighties through to the early nineties. The unions in Australia were closely aligned with the Labor Party, just as the unions in Italy were aligned to the fascists. Fascist movements often start as ostensibly socialist movements.

[12] Eatwell, R. (1997). p. 109

[13] Eatwell, R. (1997). p. 109

[14] Eatwell, R. (1997). p. 279

[15] Someone who the Australian Labor Party (ALP) has 'instead of a thinker' Ellis, B. (1998). *First abolish the customer: 202 arguments against economic rationalism*. Maryborough, Victoria: Penguin.

[16] Saul, J.R. (1997). *The unconscious civilization*. Maryborough, Victoria: Penguin.

Social movements, which are necessarily united by (largely) common philosophies, change - irreversibly - with time. Change is not new. We should remember at least that much as a society.

Also, in hindsight, it might look as if large sections of the Italian and German society all of a sudden became fascists and began to commit atrocities at home and abroad. Of course, this was not the case, it happened by accretion. As with any society, its socio-historic conditions provided the environment in which particular forms of social relations became possible. The people in pre-fascist Germany who embraced Nazism (as distinct, but not separate from pure fascism) were, no doubt, just ordinary, everyday people who, in the face of mass mediated, ideologically restricted and controlled, mass communication campaigns became convinced that what was happening was either inevitable or desirable. Those who were critical of the ideology either left the country or continued to fight the regime invisibly from behind the lines, as it were. Unfortunately, in a globalised, informationalised world, there is nothing "outside".

Fascist Germany seems an insane proposition to those of us looking back; like an irrational blip in the rational progress of history. Still, the level of its atrocities, statistically speaking, were dwarfed by Stalin's efforts. Stalin's Communism had a lot more in common with fascism than it did with anything to do with any utopia that Marx or Lenin may have inferred or designed[17]. Indeed, like Germany and Italy, Stalin created ideal conditions for industrial Capitalism: centralised control of the economy by a ruling elite, a repressively passified working class, minimal intellectual and political dissent, and an ideology of efficient industrial production based on Frederick Winslow Taylor's philosophy of manufacturing[18].

But stylistically, fascist Germany remains unique in recent history. Its intellectual, political, social, and folk-religious trappings manifested themselves in a powerful and ancient symbolism - drawn in part from Ancient Roman, in part from Norse beliefs - that persists to this day. Fascist symbolism is used most notably in the United States Council for International Business (USCIB), but also by the more blatantly neo-fascist movements throughout the world. Its symbolism and emotion propounded an inevitable destiny for the German people, a destiny that Heidegger embraced, philosophised, and propagated.

Heidegger, for me, is an exemplary anti-humanist philosopher (he would have hated being called a philosopher. Good.). His thought exemplifies the philosophically nihilistic futurism of public amnesia that characterised the social and intellectual milieu of prefascist and fascist Germany.

Heidegger: 'The history of Being is never past but stands ever before'[19]. Of course to propound a continual 'new beginning at an alleged zero point' is the philosophical flexing of a 'strenuous forgetfulness' which is intrinsically sympathetic to 'barbarism'[20].

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[17] Marx's last words were: "I am not a Marxist". He actually spent much of his life campaigning for democracy in Germany. The appalling regimes that Soviet Russia produced had very little to do with what he wrote.
[18] Bullock, A. (1991). *Hitler and Stalin: Parallel lives*. London: Fontana.
[19] Heidegger, M. (1947). Letter on humanism. In L. Cahoone (1997), (Ed.). *From modernism to postmodernism: An anthology*. London: Blackwell, pp. 274-308.
[20] Adorno, T. W. (1973). *The dialectic of enlightenment*. (E.B. Ashton, Trans.). London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, p. 71.

Heidegger joined the Nazi Party in 1933 in exchange for the job of rector at the Freiberg University. He was Hitler's Chancellor, a big fan of Nietzche, and shared the fuhrer's vision for the future of Germany and thus Europe.

One of Heidegger's favourite themes was an appeal to a sort of folk religion based on an ethic of Being and work (or Being *at* work): '"even here," at the stove, in that ordinary place where every thing and every condition, each deed and thought is intimate and commonplace, that is, familiar, "even there" in the sphere of the familiar … it is the case that "the gods are present."[21] Just as today, when we are informed that it is through work that we are fulfilled as individuals, that work and individuation are synonymous, the "guests" of Auschwitz were met by the hopeful legend that graced its unwelcoming gates: "Arbeit macht Frei"; freedom through work.

Hitler and Heidegger understood the importance of community consciousness - *Volksgemeinschaft* - and knew that faith, will, symbol worship, and mass communication could transform people's consciousness, especially the young. Education became training; training became ideologically oriented towards community spirit - *Volksgemeinschaft* - work experience [22] - *Erlebnis* - and the party line. No longer would knowledge for its own sake play a part in German education. Education would mean training for work, and thus for "authentic" citizenship. As Heidegger put it in his inaugural address to Freiberg University: 'No dogmas and ideas will any longer be the laws of your being. The Fuhrer himself, and he alone, is the present and future reality for Germany'[23]. In short, the education system became an instrument of economic, ideological, and political solutions.

Then Leni Reifenstahl and Albert Speer designed the genre and techniques for emotive action films. The first of these had a neat, catchy, Neitzchean theme and title: *The Triumph of the Will*. With such cultural artefacts, Reifenstahl, Speer and Goebbels removed critical language from the public consciousness and replaced it with 'deeply felt' symbol worship; 'myth, ritual, and ceremony'[24]: propaganda. Hitler called it co-ordination.

Then he destroyed the union movement. Not (initially) through violence, but by appropriating May Day, traditionally the day of the international worker's movement, making it a public holiday, and renaming it the Day of National Labour. Hitler used the first of these holidays to 'level outdated class distinctions, end snobbery and the class war, and establish mutual respect between the different groups which made up the nation'[25]; and, of course, he promised a cure for unemployment. The euphemisms gave way to violent recriminations fairly shortly thereafter. The unemployment problem was also eventually solved, temporarily for some, permanently for most.

The rest is history.

Today, the class war has once again been defeated, or rather, redefined on a global scale. The labour movement, where it still exists, is neutered if not essentially outlawed. Labour no longer has the inalienable right to withdraw itself from production without severe legislative recriminations. In academic and political arenas throughout the West, the formerly well-recognised dialectic between

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[21] Heidegger (1947), p. 303.
[22] Bullock (1991), pp. 343-345.
[23] Bullock, p. 345.
[24] Bullock, p. 343.
[25] Bullock, p. 347.

the interests of big business and workers that, for many years, defined the role of government, has been silenced by a babble of Heideggerian *Dasein*; existentialism by any other name. Postmodern neo-liberalism, a sophisticated, obscure, essentially nasty, narcissistic, and selfish worldview, has largely replaced critical thought with the ethic of Heideggerian "authenticity": nihilism. Economic class is thought to be largely anachronistic in this democratised, informationalised, and globalised New World Order.

Today's social and intellectual engineers are remnants from the defeated social revolution of the 1950s and 60s. Many of them were hippies once. Some will tell you they were in Paris or Berkeley or Chicago in '68, just to show you how credible and revolutionary they really are, and to show you, via their sophisticated subtext, how pointless revolution is, how all interests can be reconciled by "conciliatory processes" or "healthy dialogue".

Now they are tenured academics; stockbrokers; Presidents, Premiers, and Prime Ministers; think-tank gurus; business magnates; astrologers; herbalists; vegetarians; feminists of one stripe or another; and so on. They are, without a doubt, "postmodern". They follow orders because they are scared for their well-being. They believe in conciliatory radicalism, an oxymoron. They believe in global citizenship, which is also either an oxymoron or a tautology. They believe in reconciling global, binary opposites. They believe in a Third Way.

They are Heidegger's Hippies.

In reality

Half the world's people have never made a phone call. In reality, the Asian "miracle" wasn't. In reality, the world is worse off now than it was thirty years ago. Before you start screaming "conservative" at me, take a look around, I'm just stating the facts of life. Which brings me to another sticky point: facts. Ethics, morality, and social justice are (separate) concepts that have buckled under the weight of a language-free democracy, they have disppappeared from the public agenda except for those who wish to point out that we really can't afford to have any, economically speaking.

Symbol worship has replaced any sense of what is real. This is a dumb issue of ontology that has been settled innumerable times throughout history. Of course, if we do not look back at history, which gives the clearest view of humanity's progress, then we may not realise this. The various relativisms that plague notions of reality, which has now been subsumed under the ridiculous concept of Baudrillard's simulacrum, have placed the burden of proof on existence itself - a task that Heidegger kick-started in a (seemingly successful) effort to wipe out public thought in 1933.

In reality, less than .01 percent of the world's people own a computer. If this is the constituency of the globalised information society, it is a very small one.

But computers, of course, are just a small part of the informationalism story. Disney, for instance, which has a much greater reach than does the internet, is valued at twice the total price of all companies listed on the South Korean Stock exchange. Multinational companies, especially multinational media companies, are generally much more powerful than nation-states these days – except, perhaps, in the United States. Regardless, business tells government what it should and

should not do, and it pays good money for its favourable decisions. In reality, the 358 richest people in the world own more than the poorest 2.3 billion.

These are not controversial statements, which makes them all the more alarming.

Free market ideology continues to go about its socially and environmentally destructive work, largely unhindered by any coherent opposition, the remnants of which are either being financially assuaged, intellectually confused, or violently silenced. Harmony and understanding are the public order of the day in the information age. Community consciousness in the West is a function of propaganda. Identity is a commodity. The media fix is the public consciousness in action. It is the symbol worship, the ritual, myth, and ceremony of everyday life at the end of the second Christian millenium.

The end

Informationalism, like any other 'ism, is an ideology. It is an old ideolgy, a feature of the kind of societal relationships and self-perceptions from which the earliest pre-fascist philosophers - Nietzsche, Gobineu, Le Bon, Sorel - drew their hopeless and brilliantly irrational conclusions. The human addiction to myth is dangerously incompatible with its technological sophistication – as usual.

Informationalism is the child-like state of an unconscious society prone to epileptic fits.

In one hand the petulant, egocentric child holds a Gameboy, in the other, a nuclear triggering device. Everyone knows the child is prone to violent paroxysms and severe delusions. The inevitable outcome is too hard to face, so denial becomes the order of the day. In the meantime, the child is pacified with more entertaining toys in the hope that, one day, it will put down the trigger, and that all will eventually be well.

The most remarkable aspect of the late 20th century is the widespread celebration of a unified world, especially of a unified Europe (ironically, the argument now is that because Europe has a common currency, it should also have a common language!). This was Nietzsche's main philosophical concern: a truly European vision overseen by elite supermen.

Informationalism, like all previous mythologies - by which I mean an overarching social rationality that has its origins in myth - is a function of hope and death. It signifies a loss of hope in life and the fear of death combined. As always, it is controlled and propagated by a ruling elite that believes in the fundamental inequality of human beings based on the logic of its public symbols. The Third Way, a disastrous political contrivance based on neo-liberal ideals of how society *should* work, is now entrenched in the German (and therefore a "united" Europe), US, and British public consciousness in a revived and cynical attempt to 'reconcile the irreconcilable'.[26]

Politics has historically been about how people can best live together. If we allow public consciousness and, therefore, society itself to be controlled by undemocratic organisations like media behemoths and multilateral organisations, then democracy is doomed to undemocratic manipulation. If democracy is doomed, then the potential for equality is doomed. If this is destroyed, then politics is

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[26] Marx (1976), p. 98. Here Marx refers to the political economy of John Stuart Mill who may also be viewed as trying to theoretically reconcile the interests of labour and Capital.

dead. Healthy politics is a necessarily violent space. But we can choose between certain sorts of violence. We can have violent dialectical debate, or violent war. We can have a violent clash of ideas or a violent clash with weapons.

Humans speak. They speak about the realities they inhabit. They will not remain silent about them. If they are temporarily silenced - whether by violence, threats, or intellectual confusion - they will eventually revolt so as they *can* be heard. History show us that this is so. Somewhere, someone must make a choice about when, whether, and how the political space can be opened up for access to the public.