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Trickster's Triumph: Donald Trump and the New Spirit of Capitalism

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Donald Trump's election has provoked widespread debate, particularly amongst those for whom his victory was an unimaginable horror right up until the moment of its arrival. Trump's victory seems particularly strange to many given the remarkable lack of consistency of his public statements and the extent to which he openly contradicted himself and his previous declared beliefs throughout the course of his campaign. Yet in many respects, it is Trump's ability to hold contradictory and mutually exclusive positions together that is at the very heart of his appeal.

New York. My city. Where the wheels of the global economy never stop turning. A concrete metropolis of unparalleled strength and purpose that drives the business world. Manhattan is a tough place. This Island is the real jungle. If you are not careful it can chew you up and spit you out. If you work hard, you can really hit it big, and I mean real big...My name is

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B. Moeran, T. de Waal Malefyt (eds.), *Magical Capitalism*,

https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-74397-4_4

Donald Trump, and I am the largest real estate developer in New York [...] About 13 years ago I was seriously in trouble. I was billions of dollars in debt. But I fought back and I won. Big league. I used my brain. I used my negotiating skills, and I worked it all out [...]. I have mastered the art of the deal, and I have turned the name Trump into the highest quality brand...

This is how Donald Trump presents himself in the introduction to his reality show *The Apprentice*. The show picked up on his reputation as an entrepreneurial guru gained decades earlier through his business best-seller *The Art of the Deal* (Trump and Schwartz 1987). Pitched as “the Ultimate job interview,” over each season candidates vie to become managers in one of Trump’s business organizations. Every episode ends with one of the contestants being eliminated by Trump, the boss, who points his finger at them and says: “You’re fired!” But why did so many people from the rust-belt and elsewhere, who have lost their jobs and seen the base of their livelihoods dwindle during the past decades vote for a man who embodies a ruthless, “winner-takes-it-all” capitalism? How does a tycoon become a “working-class hero?”

Trump is “the entrepreneur” par excellence, but his vexing triumph is at odds with existing analyses of “enterprise culture,” and the paradoxical position of Trump is a challenge to classical theories of capitalist development and ideology. We argue that his strong person-centred, anti-establishment politics can be conceptualized through Weber’s notion of charismatic authority with its curious invocation of “das ewig Neue”—and that his political rise demonstrates a growing connection between contemporary finance capitalism and charismatic forms of authority. We also argue that Trump embodies Polanyi’s double movement, and as such he may be fruitfully analysed as a late modern version of the North American trickster.

Enterprise Culture

The election of business man Donald Trump as president of the United States came as a surprise to most observers. He is not a product of the political establishment. Trump was the least politically experienced candidate

in US history, and he was running against Hillary Clinton, who was the most politically experienced candidate ever to have run for president. He is a celebrity “business guru” whose political success depends on having turned himself into an entrepreneurial brand name. It is tempting, therefore, to see the election of Donald Trump as a grotesque but also somehow “logical” consummation of neoliberalism and a concomitant “enterprise culture” as it has been analysed by sociologists for the past three decades.

From a Marxist point of view, David Harvey and others have explored how over the past 50 years global capitalism has evolved from Fordist to flexible forms of accumulation helped by political and technological change. It became possible to communicate and move things across the globe faster and at decreasing costs. Combined with policies of financial deregulation, these technological possibilities have facilitated outsourcing and subcontracting—moving labour-intensive production to low-wage areas—which has allowed employers to exert stronger control over labour. At the same time, capital has looked for ways to accelerate capital turnover through changing fashions and ever shorter product lifespans (think of the difference between a Ford motorcar and a piece of software) and through a rapid increase in ways of generating profit, which are increasingly not based on production of goods but on “paper entrepreneurialism” (Harvey 1990: 156–157 and 169).

Meanwhile from a Foucauldian perspective, sociologists have analysed the rise of “enterprise culture.” They have looked at the “production of enterprising subjects” by identifying the discourses and “technologies” through which people are encouraged to subscribe to deregulation and support the demolition of the welfare or “nanny” state and engage in the free-market economy by viewing themselves and acting as “enterprising individuals” (Dugay 1996; Heelas and Morris 1992; Rose 1990, 1999). From this theoretical vantage point, it is important to analyse the “pragmatics” and the way words like “freedom,” “flexibility,” “enterprise,” and “citizen” worked in conjunction and thereby achieved particular meanings, and how associated forms of expertise and knowledge (scientific, psychological) were used to “govern” people, in order to refashion “entrepreneurial work as a *responsibility*, not just as a privilege for a select few” (McWilliam et al. 1999: 58).¹ However, we want to argue that the

phenomenon of the business guru in general and the rise to power of Donald Trump in particular suggest that it is much “too early to cut off the head of the sovereign” (Sørhaug 2004: 86).

The analysis of the structural changes underlying global capitalism and the investigation into the “enterprise culture” and the scrutiny of the subtleties of government technologies are crucial—but it seems to us that the surge of populist politics in general and Trump in particular are also reminders that the person-centred and symbolic dimensions of power have not evaporated. The “theatre state” (Geertz 1980) is not limited to eighteenth-century Bali but is a contemporary reality made possible by modern communication technology—public spectacle and performance is as much a part of contemporary capitalism as the kinds of disciplinary power that “covers for itself.” As we point out later, there is a growing connection between charismatic leadership and authority and finance capitalism. It is in this context in which the spectacular performance of entrepreneurialism as a form of heroic and stereotypically masculine energy that reveals the underlying truth behind the surface appearance of bureaucratic facts that the “business guru” emerges. The business guru is a particular kind of expert who often proclaims his disdain for the kind of numerical verifiable data produced by professional experts. The “uber-guru” Tom Peters built his career upon attacking the “bean-counting” number-obsessed experts of previous generations of management thinkers such as Frederick Taylor and Robert McNamara. He instead emphasized the underlying and unquantifiable intuitive truths of “culture” and individual energy that lay hidden beneath their distorting veneer. The rise of Trump takes this disdain for scientific evidence and even “facts” themselves into the very heart of global power, replacing them with an intuitive “smartness” that likewise speaks to a desire to access deeper non-evidence based truths.

The Business Guru and the Spirit of Capitalism

Attempts to scientifically analyse and improve business and management go back at least as far as Frederick Taylor. His book *The Principles of Scientific Management* (1967 [1911]) with its measurement and stopwatch

ideas of management promised to uncover the “one best way” of organizing production. His ideas inspired politicians and industrialists far beyond US and Henry Ford’s assembly line, and his followers counted Lenin and Mussolini. However, most observers use the term “management guru” in a more restricted sense and point to the beginning of the 1980s, when organizations started to become interested in “things cultural” (Jackson 2001). In particular, the book *In Search of Excellence. Lessons from America’s Best Run Companies* (1982) by Peters and Waterman (the “best-selling business bestseller of all times”) is often mentioned (see McKenna 2006: 192; Guest 1992) as the neo-classic that set off this development by claiming that “culture” was the “essential quality” of excellent companies (Peters and Waterman 1982: 75). As *Publisher’s Weekly* put it, “Dieting, sex, whimsy, food and gossip are no longer first in the heart of bibliophiles. With no near competitors, business was the strongest selling subject in the United States in 1983” (Huczynski 2006: 62). What was behind the emergence of the “gurus” and what significance can we attach to their rise to prominence?

The term “guru” is a Sanskrit term that means “dispeller of ignorance” and, in Hindu tradition, it is used to describe a “personal teacher of spirituality” whose teachings are “based on experiential and not only intellectual knowledge” (Mlecko 1982: 34). To connect the term “guru” with the “profane” world of business and management resonates with an old trope of anthropological cultural critique—that of making the familiar “strange.” The term “management guru,” however, is not the brainchild of anthropologists. It is coined and used by the business press. In his book *Management Gurus* (2006), organization researcher Andrzej Huczynski writes that the word describes “the active search by business people for hidden knowledge or secrets, and [...] the preparedness of individuals to carry out, sometimes uncritically, the recommendations or direction of the guru” (ibid. 69). He also calls attention to the fact that the “management guru” is an almost exclusively Anglo-Saxon phenomenon and lists a dozen best-selling authors ranging from Harvard business school academics such as Rosabeth Moss-Kanter, consultants like Peters and Waterman—and “hero-managers” like Donald Trump. What ties the gurus together across all their differences is a belief that “the only object of business is to compete

with others for the favor of the customer as King,” and the underlying claims that “innovation can’t be planned” and that an organization should be managed through values and culture rather than rules and command (Huczynski 2006: 63). As McWilliam et al. (1999: 59) argue, “The effectiveness of Peters... and similar ‘gurus’ in setting current trends in management fashion is undeniable,” before going on to also observe the ways in which, “they resonate with the wider political programmes, such as those which have been associated with the Thatcher and Reagan administrations.” Indeed, this points to the gurus as being amongst the most high-profile proponents of “the new spirit of capitalism” that emerged in the 1980s.²

In their book *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, French sociologists Eve Chiapello and Luc Boltanski attempt to analyse the ideology that justifies engagement in capitalism. They take suggestions from Max Weber who described the spirit of capitalism as a “set of ethical motivations which, although their purpose is foreign to capitalist logic, inspire entrepreneurs in activity conducive to capital accumulation.” What they get from Weber is the idea that “people need powerful moral reasons for rallying to capitalism” (Boltanski and Chiapello 2007: 8). Their work is based on a careful reading of management literature like the best-sellers authored by the “gurus.” They identify the same historical juncture as the sociologists mentioned above and point out that from the middle of the 1970s onwards, some businesses appeared to, at least partially, abandon hierarchical Fordist work structures and develop new network-based forms of organization. The success of this “new spirit of capitalism” rested on the capitalist system’s remarkable ability to absorb what Boltanski and Chiapello call the “artistic critique” which, after May 1968, attacked the way capitalism and bureaucracy worked on the grounds that they alienated everyday life. This critique of establishment is reflected, for instance, in the consistent appeal to “corporate culture” mentioned above, which is an implicit claim that organizations should cater to their members’ need for meaning. Simultaneously, “social critique” was disarmed by the appearance of the flexible modes of employment (outsourcing, short-term contracting, etc.) and the weakening of the unions and their bargaining power.

The Business Guru as Revolutionary Defender of Status Quo

In light of Boltanski and Chiapello's characterization of management thinking, however, Trump's *The Art of the Deal* (1987) is a curious "guru" book: There is no organization to be managed, no advice packaged in acronyms, no edifying allegory, no models to be applied, and no moralistic fable. It is all about Donald Trump as an individual dealmaker: He calls people, hangs out with them, praises them and condemns them—not according to some higher moral principles, but according to how effective they are in "getting the deal done." At one level, then, Trump represents hard-nosed pragmatism and, at another level, he does share in the performative extravaganza that is the hallmark of many other prominent "gurus": The attraction of management gurus like Tom Peters and Donald Trump often seems to rest on shocking the establishment by breaching moral conduct and upsetting conventional codes.

The title of Peters' best-selling follow-up to *In Search of Excellence* sums up the new orthodoxy that emerged in the 1980s. *Thriving on Chaos: A Handbook for Managerial Revolution* was, appropriately enough, published on the day of the great stock market crash of 1987, and honed further Peters' attack on the allegedly innovation-stifling number-crunching bureaucracies that had dominated the US economy of the postwar boom (see Martin 2010). Revolution had been in the air in the aftermath of 1968 and Peters and his guru colleagues harnessed its anti-structural energy, not in the direction of the destruction of capital but to help its accumulation—a process that was now seen as being hindered by formal rational bureaucratic structures rather than enabled by them. For Peters and Waterman (1982: 54), a key task was to "stop overdoing things on the rational side," a claim described by McWilliam et al. (1999: 65) as an "incitement to disorder."³ Although the similarities may not have been at the forefront of every cultural commentator's mind at the time, they have not passed entirely unnoticed in academic circles, with some scholars observing the similarities between Peters' desire to unleash the creative energy of the masses through the destruction of conservative bureaucracy and the cultural revolution launched by Chairman Mao Zedong in the

1960s (e.g. Clegg 2012: 65; Carter et al. 2008: 92). Mao's public animosity towards bureaucracy is notorious and articulated in his pronouncement, "Twenty manifestations of bureaucracy" made in 1967 at the height of the "Cultural Revolution." Twenty years later, Peters headed the "culture revolution" in the management of US corporations, seeking to replace bureaucratic structures with an attention to cultural values that would enable individual talent to flourish.⁴ Chapter 1 of *Thriving on Chaos* is simply entitled "Pursue 'Horizontal' Management by Bashing Bureaucracy," a pronouncement that in its structure and style is strikingly reminiscent of key slogans of the "Cultural Revolution" such as "Smash the Four Olds." Mao's "Cultural Revolution" is predominantly understood as an attack on bureaucracy, motivated by a desire to avoid the Chinese Revolution developing in the same direction as the Soviet Union, and Mao's willingness to embrace the forces that would dissolve the stifling power of bureaucracy marked him out from other Communist leaders and Chinese political figures. According to Solomon (1971), most Chinese Communist leaders shared a terror that had deeper roots in Chinese political culture, of *luan* or "chaos" and the damage it might inflict if strict bureaucratic rule was not imposed on the people. What distinguished Mao, in this reading, was his very non-traditional view of the potential positive virtues of unleashing "chaos." No wonder that he, like his counterparts in the business guru community 20 years later, attracted a cult of personality around his own charismatic appearances, and that he seemed to do so by embodying within his very person contradictory tendencies, such as the ability to evoke the mass excitement of revolutionary fervour at public events, whilst constructing such total authoritarian control that his portrait appeared in almost every school, office, factory, and even private home in the nation.

The Guru as Agent Provocateur

Vague as it may be, then, the notion of "guru" points to frames of understanding contemporary capitalism and its politics that take into account its paradoxical, symbolic, and performative aspects often overlooked in studies of capitalist ideology and enterprise culture. The term "guru" does

resonate with the idea of “magic” and points to the central assumption of this volume and of this chapter that capitalism cannot be understood only as a Kafkaesque process of rationalization—a system of still more subtle forms of disciplinary power—but that enchantment, spectacle, and performance are simultaneously integral parts of the system’s mode of operation.

As mentioned above, “Guru” is not an analytical term but an “emic” one coined by the business press. But let us for a moment explore the notion of “the guru” as it has been developed in the anthropological literature. Norwegian anthropologist Fredrik Barth once made a conceptual distinction between “the guru” and “the conjurer.” Barth developed a conceptual “model of the guru” by contrasting this “tradition of knowledge” from Central Asia with the tradition of knowledge of Melanesia (the conjurer). One central difference between the “guru” and the “conjurer” is that whereas the conjurer’s knowledge is tied to specific contexts and particular performances, the guru: “influence the acts of others by means of abstracted, verbalized, capsuled and transportable injunctions...His characteristic product is composed of words—a highly decontextualized form of knowledge” (Barth 1990: 649–650). The guru thus: “transmits a message” and “[his] cultural reproduction [happens] through systematic and perpetual activity as an educator” (ibid.: 642). So, according to Barth, the guru is an educator who guards and transmits a “knowledge tradition.”

This model of the guru, however, seems to be much too intellectual and rationalistic to fit the contemporary “business guru.” As pointed out above, the business guru’s influence crucially depends not only on a careful transmission of a textual message but on bravura stage acts. The attraction of Tom Peters and Donald Trump rests on their provocative performance. It is through an anxiety-inducing unpredictability in their public appearances that they mesmerize their audience. Such spectacular person-centred performances and disregard for fact seem to run counter to current Foucauldian analyses of neoliberal discourse and the careful and subtle control through governmental technologies that they describe. The registers of power of the likes of Donald Trump and Tom Peters do not appear to depend on the “power-knowledge” nexus and discrete use of scientific expertise to “optimize” the population. On the contrary, it is

precisely the questioning of “expertise” that is their trademark. It is notable that despite its record book sales and wide influence, the “management knowledge tradition” does not have a very high public or academic esteem: It is seen to be superficial and faddish, and it is famous for making dubious claims. And this is even admitted by management thinkers themselves. As leading guru Peter Drucker once remarked, “people use the word ‘guru’ only because they do not want to say ‘charlatan’” (quoted in Micklethwait and Woolgar 1996: 11).

Tom Peters who has earned himself a reputation as “the business guru” par excellence (Thrift 2005), the “uber-guru” of management (*The Economist* 2002), or the “ur-guru” of management (*Fortune Magazine* cited in Collins 2008: 317), and whose best-seller *In Search of Excellence* is described as “a ground-breaking guru text,” is known for his “powerful” and “passionate” performances full of “demonic energy” (Clark and Salaman 1996: 87), for being a “master of rhetorical strategy” (McWilliam et al. 1999: 58), and for his provocative denouncement and outrageous “confessions.” For instance, Peters who as earlier mentioned built his reputation on the claim that “culture” was the “essential quality” (1982: 75) of excellent companies, a decade later, said that “We didn’t know what culture was then, and sure as hell we don’t know what it is now,” adding for the benefit of those who like it in hard figures: “About 90 percent of the training and consulting money that has been spent on culture change... has been thrown down the drain” (BBC video, 1995) (Bate 1997: 1149). And his confessions continued: “This is pretty small beer, but for what it’s worth. Okay, I confess: We faked the data” (Greatbatch and Clark 2003: 397). None of which seems to matter, much as Trump’s much-observed disdain for verifiable facts and his seemingly open embrace of the practice of changing the facts to suit the message does not seem to matter to those supporters who have a deeper belief in a charismatic authority whose power is enhanced rather than diminished by the ability of its holder to shrug off the mere inconvenience of being proved to be factually wrong or deliberately misleading. What matters is the self-cultivation of the kind of person who can convince others that he has the power to magically hold these contradictions within himself. For Peters this is the cultivation of an entrepreneurial, “new subject” who “is *self-centered*, flexible, adaptable, associated with winners, active and in need of intrinsic

rewards.” The parallels with Trump’s vision of himself could hardly be clearer. For Peters and Waterman (1982:11), the embrace of the irrational side of human nature, encapsulated in “soft” skills, in the service of economic rationality led them to proudly proclaim that “soft is hard,” a slogan whose resonances with the Orwellian proclamations “War is Peace, Freedom is Slavery, Ignorance is War” are clear.

It is the same disregard for consistency and fact that Donald Trump has repeatedly demonstrated in his political career, but that goes back a long time. In *The Art of the Deal* (1987), Trump lists 11 criteria of his success as an entrepreneur. Under the headline “maximise your options,” one of his criteria reads: “I also protect myself by being flexible. I never get too attached to one deal or one approach” (ibid. 50), and under another headline—“Get the Word Out”—he emphasizes how important it is to be “sensational”: “The point is that if you are a little different, or a little outrageous, or if you do things that are bold or controversial, the press is going to write about you” (ibid.: 56). Trump’s attachment to flexibility may appear to be in striking contrast to his rejection of the prevailing orthodoxies of flexible capitalism based on global free trade, the reduction of tariffs, and the flexibilization of labour to be replaced with rigid borders and controls on the movement of goods and people. But when viewed from another perspective, the ability to force through any seeming contradiction by force of will can appear to be another sign of his charismatic power. For those who wish to buy into it, every contradiction that he ignores can just as easily bolster this power as it might diminish it.

Make America Great Again: Trump’s Populism

In his book *The World Is Flat* (2007), New York Times columnist and pundit of investor capitalist globalization, Thomas Friedman, ventured that the date people would remember a hundred years from now was not 9.11, but 11.9—Not the attack on Twin Towers but the day in November 1989 in Berlin which inaugurated “The New Age of Creativity, When the Walls Came Down, and the [Microsoft] Windows Went Up” (Friedman 2005: 51). It is ironic that 27 years later, on the same date in November, people woke up to the news that Donald Trump was the new US

president—partly due to his promise to build a wall. The wall is a suggestive symbol and a strong reminder that globalization is not the result of irreversible market forces but the consequence of politicians signing free trade agreements and endorsing neoliberal policies of economic deregulation that worked to the disadvantage of the majority of Americans (Stiglitz 2011). Trump's promise to build a wall plays together with his protectionist policies to give hope to white workers. It reinstates a long-lost sense of agency in a "globalized knowledge economy," which had long been presented by the neoliberal establishment as destiny pure and simple.

As revealed above in his self-presentation and introductory framing of "The Apprentice," Trump endorses and epitomizes on the one hand a law-of-the-jungle Capitalism and on the other a contradictory position in which certain members of society who are victims of that logic are protected from its antisocial effects. Far from being a position that Trump simply adopted for his successful presidential campaign, this has long been a central component of his public persona. In the opening pages of *The Art of the Deal*, Trump boasts of the way in which he uses his fame and influence in order to bully a regional bank manager into not foreclosing the mortgage of "Mrs Hill," a recently widowed small farm owner. Trump held the banker responsible for the suicide of the husband and reports: "It was a very sad situation and I was moved. Here were people who had worked very hard and honestly all their lives, only to see it all crumble before them. To me it just seemed wrong" (Trump and Schwartz 1987: 4).

Trump's empathy stands in stark contrast to his response on the campaign trail nearly 30 years on when attacked by Hilary Clinton for saying in 2006 that he hoped that the housing market would collapse as it would be an opportunity for people like him to buy cheap and make money. Clinton's observation that this led to five million people losing their homes, left Trump strangely unmoved by comparison to the one widow on whose behalf he had threatened to launch a private prosecution for murder. "That's called business, by the way," was all that he could be bothered to offer in response. For defenders of a shrinking liberal political centre ground, such inconsistencies are fuel for attack, and it is often possible to sense the palpable frustration and amazement that such glaring contradictions do not render Trump unelectable. But what if the ability to

sustain and contain contradictions that other more conventional politicians are forced to negotiate is precisely the core of Trump's appeal?

Today the American Working Class Is Going to Strike Back, Finally⁵

With his tendency to push market logic to its limit whilst ferociously defending some of its victims against its effects, Trump personally embodies what the great mid-twentieth-century economic historian and anthropologist, Karl Polanyi, referred to as “the double movement” (1944: 136ff) of capitalist societies that simultaneously moved to deepen the rule of the market whilst also producing counter trends that sought to protect some of society's members from its most antisocial effects. According to Polanyi, before the current era of capitalist modernity, economies were largely based on values of redistribution and reciprocity in which the market logic that today dominates economic theory and practice took a secondary role. But in the course of the so-called Great Transformation that ushered in the modern age, market values came to be increasingly “disembedded” from other kinds of economic value and were allowed to play an increasingly predominant role in all aspects of social life, turning everything, including land and labour, into goods and calling upon individuals to become utility-seeking maximizers in a winner-takes-all competition with others on the market. Polanyi argued that this process would lead to massive social dislocation and inequalities that would inevitably cause public discontent and popular resistance. Movements such as trade unions and agitation to limit the length of the working day in the nineteenth century or environmental activism and debt cancellation campaigns today are examples of the kind of activities by which sections of society seek to push back against the damage that can be caused by unbridled competition. In Polanyi's account, this ongoing double movement tends to pit sections of society against each other, with pro-market forces including businesses and governments often being lined up against opponents such as unions or other activist groups (ibid.: 138).

This is a process of enduring social conflict over the relative importance that market values or movements resistant to their worst effects should

have in any context. What Trump offers is the fantasy that by virtue of his own charisma and personal strength one man can embody and contain that contradiction on behalf of those who suffer. The logic of competition, championed by Trump, that has led many middle-class Americans to fear that they are about to be cast into the ranks of the losers does not need to be fundamentally challenged at a social level for them to be protected. Trump can contain the contradiction of the double movement within himself. His ability to make contradictory statements that both celebrate and reject the intensification of a winner-take-all competition does not lessen his credibility among those who want to believe. Far from it. It is the implicit promise that his lack of coherence communicates underneath its overt message that is the heart of his appeal.— Others are limited to one side of the contradiction or another, but I alone can rise above and contain it within myself. I alone can intensify the brutal competitive game of winners and losers that leads to greater wealth whilst protecting those who believe in me from its effects. I alone can save you.

Trump the Tycoon Trickster

It is this ability to convince a section of the population that he is able to contain this contradiction within himself that is the source of Trump's charismatic appeal. In this regard, Trump operates as a kind of "trickster figure," a mythical figure whose attraction and fascination lies in their ability to embody two structurally opposed principles within their single person (Martin and Krause-Jensen 2017). Evans-Pritchard (1967) wrote about the Zande trickster "Ture" who was represented as a "spider" (incidentally also a favoured image of the capitalist Tycoon) who is seen as clever, but also as someone who is adulterous, who steals, and who does the opposite of what Zande morals prescribe—that he represents the Azande's unconscious desires. In every society, the trickster figure incarnates an oxymoronic mood or a "fooling around" that plays at the "unthinkable" and thereby *suggests* new (im)possible logics. The classic "trickster" figures best known in anthropology are those of North American native groups, most famously analysed by Claude Lévi-Strauss. For Lévi-Strauss (1963), trickster animals, immortalized in these groups' myths, gained their power from their embodiment of contradictory tendencies

whose incompatibility proved to be a source of discomfort in human life. For example, Lévi-Strauss analyses the power of archetypal trickster animals, such as the coyote or raven, to lie in the ways in which their habit of eating carrion means that they do not kill (like herbivores) but do eat flesh (like carnivores), thus embodying within themselves the opposition between practices such as horticulture that sustain life without killing and practices such as hunting that sustain life through the taking of other life. Hence, the trickster animal embodies within its very being the irreconcilable opposition of Life and Death fundamental to our very existence. Even many of those who have questioned the details of Lévi-Strauss' analysis have accepted the basic underlying premise that tricksters mediate and contain structurally opposed principles within themselves (e.g. Carroll 1981). The importance of Lévi-Strauss' intervention does not lie in the particular structural oppositions that he sees tricksters as mediating, but in the underlying principle that the trickster contains such difficult oppositions within his person in a manner that appeals to those struggling with those oppositions. The opposing tendencies encapsulated in Polanyi's double movement form a structural opposition as difficult to contain, and as much in need of a mythical figure to contain them, as any of the oppositions described by Lévi-Strauss for North American tricksters. Trump is a North American trickster of a very different and contemporary type but one whose fundamental character is not too far removed from Carroll's (1981: 310) description of the traditional North American trickster as "a selfish buffoon" who is also a transformer of the social relations that make society possible.

Trump's Charisma

Trump never held office and claims not to be part of the political establishment, although he admits that his initial breaks into the Manhattan real estate business were enabled by shady relations with local Democratic politicians, and as recently as 2005, the Clintons were guests at Trump's wedding and he had previously donated to their election campaigns. Nonetheless, he presents himself as coming from another world and as drawing on a different kind of charismatic power and authority.

According to the German social theorist, Max Weber, such charismatic authority often occurs in periods of social transformation. It promises change and distinguishes itself from bureaucratic and traditional forms of authority by being “inimical to rules,” renouncing establishment and “repudiating involvement in the everyday routine world” (Weber 1947: 362). Again, this has been central to Trump’s public persona from the early days. Echoing Tom Peters’ paean to “chaos” published in the same year, Trump announces: “Most people are surprised by how I work. I play it very loose... You can’t be imaginative or entrepreneurial if you’ve got too much structure. I prefer to come to work each day and just see what develops” (Trump and Schwartz 1987: 1).

Charismatic authority does not obey Aristotelian principles of logic, and it is foreign not only to rules but to everything that smacks of method, systematics, and calculative rationality. It doesn’t need to attend daily intelligence briefings because it is “smart enough already.” Such charismatic authority plays on being “extraordinary,” or, as Weber put it, the charismatic leader is “das ewig Neue” (Weber 1988: 481) (the eternal new), implying a double movement that at once appeals to some unchanging, essential, and often nativist understanding of “the people,” whilst at the same time promising to preserve that essential nature through the performance of permanent radical rupture. One curious feature of revolutionary movements is that in order to move forward, they must go back. Re-revolution means a deep, radical, qualitative change, but revolution also means turning around, moving back to a starting point (Krause-Jensen 2010: 128). It is characteristic of revolutionary rhetoric, then, that its argument is centred on reclaiming a healthy essence, assumed to be lost—*Make America Great Again*.

Bubbles

Weber emphasized that charismatic authority rejects economy and economic gain (1947: 362), and this seems to be at odds with Trump whose exploits as a business entrepreneur is the most obvious source of his charisma. The market economy, however, has changed since Polanyi and Weber wrote. In the first place, with the rise of consumer capitalism’s fetishizing

of the “brand,” the economic world has seen a “re-enchantment” that Weber did not anticipate. Secondly, the economy has been disembedded in a sense and to an extent that might have surprised even Polanyi. The financialization of the economy has meant a process where “paper entrepreneurialism” (rent-seeking) has supplanted goods production as the preferred mode of accumulation (Harvey 2005: 168). Indeed, rather than seeing economy and charismatic authority as antithetical, there seems to be a connection between the economic volatilities of “casino capitalism” and charismatic authority.

The term “casino capitalism”—Trump did earn much of his fortune from casinos—is originally attributed to Keynes, who also made a relevant distinction between “investment” and “speculation.” Investment is driven by an expectation in the rise of a company’s profit over an extended period, whereas speculation is motivated by an expectation in the rise of the company’s value within a limited period. Keynes famously captured the difference between the two in his “beauty-contest allegory”—also strangely appropriate in the case of Trump who has been the owner of the Miss Universe competition:

professional investment [speculation] may be likened to those newspaper competitions in which the competitors have to pick out the six prettiest faces from a hundred photographs, the prize being awarded to the competitor whose choice most nearly corresponds to the average preferences of the competitors as a whole; so that each competitor has to pick, not those faces which he himself finds prettiest, but those which he thinks likeliest to catch the fancy of the other competitors, all of whom are looking at the problem from the same point of view. It is not a case of choosing those which, to the best of one’s judgment, are really the prettiest, nor even those which average opinion genuinely thinks the prettiest. We have reached the third degree where we devote our intelligences to anticipating what average opinion expects the average opinion to be. (Keynes 1964 [1936]: 156)

Norwegian anthropologist Tian Sørhaug (2004) has pointed out the affinity between speculative economic “bubbles” and charismatic “authority bubbles.” Both rest on attribution: In speculative or bubble economies, the distinction between value attribution and value creation is blurred. Bubbles are built on speculation rather than investment. Trump

is the embodiment of “the name economy”—his name is a brand. And in branding the name’s value is the result of pure attribution: The brand is the good’s “charisma,” and charisma depends on continuously renewing itself. It depends on spectacular performance.

In an article about Trump’s rhetoric and performance before he was elected president, Karen Hall et al. point out how Trump’s performances and branding tactics should be seen in light of his close involvement with two forms of public entertainment. Apart from the Miss Universe competition mentioned above, Trump also has a long-term connection with World Wrestling Entertainment, and during presidential debates he was inspired from this particular performative genre: “Trump’s reduction of competitors to nicknames like ‘Low Energy Jeb,’ ‘Little Marco,’ ‘Lyn’ Ted,’ ‘Pocahontas,’ and ‘Crooked Hillary’ is a comparable branding tactic used for decades in this industry” (2016: 81).⁶

In his classic cultural critique *Mythologies* from 1957, French semiotician Roland Barthes analysed examples of modern myths, and the first essay in his book is about “professional wrestling.” Barthes starts by establishing that wrestling is not a sport but a spectacle which resembles theatrical forms like Commedia dell’arte with stock exaggerated characters, and he elaborates on the difference by comparing wrestling to boxing:

The public is completely uninterested in knowing whether the contest is rigged or not...it abandons itself to the virtue of the spectacle, which is to abolish all motives and all consequences: what matters is not what it thinks but what it sees. This public knows very well the distinction between wrestling and boxing; it knows that boxing is a Jansenist sport, based on a demonstration of excellence. One can bet on the outcome of a boxing-match: with wrestling, it would make no sense. A boxing-match is a story which is constructed before the eyes of the spectator; in wrestling, on the contrary, it is each moment which is intelligible, not the passage of time... The logical conclusion of the contest does not interest the wrestling-fan... wrestling is a sum of spectacles, of which no single one is a function: each moment imposes the total knowledge of a passion which rises erect and alone. (Barthes 1972 [1957]: 15–16)

Wrestling is based on “grandiloquence” and “excessive gestures,” and Barthes adds: “Each sign in Wrestling is endowed with absolute clarity,

since one must always understand everything on the spot" (ibid.: 16–17). In his analysis of Trump's performance during the presidential debate, political commentator Judd Legum draws on Barthes to explain his performative effectiveness: "In the current campaign, Trump is behaving like a professional wrestler while Trump's opponents are conducting the race like a boxing match. As the rest of the field measures up their next jab, Trump decks them over the head with a metal chair" (Legum 2015). For his base of supporters, revealing the "facts" behind his performance is as potentially irrelevant as pointing out the "truth" that shamanic performance is "faked," famously discussed by both Boas and Lévi-Strauss (1963). As long as the performance is intended to have an emotional effect that mobilizes its audience, then its effectiveness is its own truth for those who participate.

The Full Magic Circle

Anthropologists today sometimes use their material and comparative analysis to upset common oppositions between "the West" and "the Rest." For instance, they might disrupt the distinction between magic and modernity (in this case read "capitalism") by pointing out, on the one hand, how occult and magical practices are products of modernity and, on the other, how magic is an integral part of capitalism rather than its antithesis—as is also a central theme in this volume. In an exemplary analysis of this kind, anthropologist and Africanist Peter Geschiere (2003) compared the roles of African witch doctors and US spin doctors. He first pointed out how common descriptions of the way witchdoctors and the "occult" are integral parts of African politics carried the implication that Africa was "the heart of Darkness" and consequently that "Western" politics were "transparent, scientific and rational" (Geschiere 2003: 162). He then used his comparative analysis of spin doctors in the US and witch doctors in Nigeria to sabotage such simplistic West/Rest::rational/irrational dichotomies. The necessity of making such an argument already seems a bit dated, however, as the triumph of Trump has effectively put a stop to any comforting illusions of rationality and factuality anyone might still have about politics in the Western world.

As pointed out in the introduction to this volume, the phenomenon of magic plays on a skilful interplay of revelation and concealment. In many ways it would seem misplaced to attribute the sophisticated dialectics of secrecy and revelation and the complex game of truth and falsehood to Donald Trump. Donald Trump presents himself rather like a postmodern version of Martin Luther. He comes forward as a politician who doesn't preach Latin from the podium but uses the street language of the common man. It is all surface. It is all "vulgarity" and, as in the semiotics of the wrestling match, there seems to be nothing behind or underneath it. But if we see Trump as a trickster and accept the idea that magic is concerned with concealment, it is pertinent to ask what sort of concealment can be found in Trump's permanent exposure and *ob-scenities*? As pointed out above the "fact" that "he tells it as it is" counts for more than "factual truth." However, his performance itself can equally be seen as one big diversion. While we focus on Trump—watch and describe him, satirize and analyse him—his administration proceeds with less scrutiny, and laws and policies are passed that endanger the climate and bring more power to the elite.⁷

Look Closer at the Audience, Not the Performer

The election of Trump is an eerie development into a post-factual world of show politics. How, so many people ask, could people vote for a racist, mysoginist, megalomaniac? Many commentators have pointed out how his buffoonish behaviour appealed to a working-class habitus. To some, his unpredictable TV appearances and his *faux pas* were like a breath of fresh air in a spin-doctored, tele-prompted, and opinion-poll political establishment, much as Nigel Farage's beer-swilling man of the people persona in the UK was on occasion enhanced by such confessions as his lack of knowledge of or interest in the contents of his own party's election manifesto. The fact that Trump "says what he thinks" came to represent a truthfulness, which to many counted more than consistency and factual truth. Trump's victory can be explained through his performative

charisma and his masterful deployment of showman tactics learned through his long-term celebrity and engagement in beauty contests, wrestling leagues, and reality shows (see Hall et al. 2016). But such insights bring us only halfway: focusing exclusively on spectacle and performance might prevent us from drawing the most important lessons. Putting our focus there would be comfortable, because we might then explain Trump's victory as sleight-of-hand—as deceit. Such an explanation might again lead us to embrace the view that “we” know better than “they” (Trump's voters) why they voted the way they did and that “we” can see the inconsistencies that “they” are incapable of grasping. But perhaps, as Norwegian commentator Terje Tvedt (2016) has remarked, it is not the world that is out of joint but our perspectives. Simply dismissing “the Trumpenproletariat” and their thoughts and actions as being those of people too backward, racist, or stupid to see that they are being conned only reinforces the message that those of us who are opposed to Trump do it from a position of elite snobbery and lack of concern for the all too real problems of those such as Mrs. Hill who Trump claims to protect and champion. Anthropologists and liberal academics have found it all too easy over the years to sympathize with Others whose difference to ourselves is refreshingly exotic and whose distance from who we imagine ourselves to be is reassuringly great. The real test of our ability to respect difference will be to take seriously those Others disturbingly close to home even while we try to advance a very different set of solutions to the political and economic crises of our times.

Notes

1. Foucault made a distinction between different modalities of power. One was “sovereignty.” Another was “discipline,” the continuous exercise of power through supervision, individualization and normalization—and the third was “governmentality,” a particular disciplinary modality playing on the desires and wants of the subjects to make them “want to do what they should” (Rose 1999: 23).
2. There is a wide body of academic literature analysing the so-called business guru. See, for example, Hilmer and Donaldson (1996), Micklethwait

- and Wooldridge (1996), Kieser (1997), Jackson and Carter (1998), Collins (2000), Jackson (2001), Huczynski (2006), McKenna (2006), Collins (2008), Canato and Giangreco (2011).
3. Peters' strong attachment to the idea of the liberating and productive power of disruption or the idea of a revolution against the established order, consciously drawing on tropes from counter-cultural social movements of earlier decades can be seen in the titles of many of his subsequent books such as *Liberation Management* (1992), *The Tom Peters Seminar: Crazy Times Call for Crazy Organizations* (1993), and *Re-Imagine: Business Excellence in a Disruptive Age* (2003).
 4. And the tongue-in-cheek flirt with left-wing rhetoric was not confined to Peter's bravado performances. For instance, the Danish producer of high-end electronics defined their seven Company Identity Components in a small booklet called "the little red" distributed to all new employees (Krause-Jensen 2010: 96–97).
 5. Donald Trump; final campaign rally. Grand Rapids, Michigan, 07.11.2016.
 6. It is common among professional wrestlers to patent particular signature body movements. In line with this Donald Trump has tried to attain copyrights to his notorious pointing-finger-"you're fired"-gesture that ended each episode of *The Apprentice* (Mogensen 2016: 77).
 7. Examples are legion, but here are a few from the last two weeks of October 2017—attempts to pass a law deregulating banks by giving them the right to demand of costumers that they sign non-litigation agreements before they issue loans; and eliminating environmental controls (fishing industry along the coast); efforts to prohibit scientists to talk at conferences, and so on.

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