

ANTI-DAEDALUS

A Manifesto Against the Cybernetic Hypothesis

$$e(t) = r(t) - y(t)$$

$$u(t) = K_p e(t) + K_i \int_0^t e(\tau) d\tau + K_d \frac{de(t)}{dt} = K_p (e(t) + \frac{1}{T_i} \int_0^t e(\tau) d\tau + T_d \frac{de(t)}{dt})$$

by Lisbeth Salander and Maia Halassar

For our rhizomatic gardener cat, the best kitty who ever was and ever will be. Love love love.

And,

*For Ariadne Navane, who gave me a lifeline and taught me to pull at the threads. All my love,
Maia.*

2025: THE ABSOLUTE FAKE

The old world is dead. The new world is stillborn. And we have forgotten what it is to live without monsters.

Trump, Thiel, Musk...convinced of their invincibility and immortality, the servants of Kapital are as brazen as ever. They salute the Nazis as their heirs and executors. But let us not numb ourselves with the false comfort that these men are in any way an aberration from what America is, what it does and means to do. *The purpose of a system is what it does.* And the history of that evil empire known as the United States of America is written plainly in blood – the blood of the Vietnamese, of the Afghans and Iraqis, of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd, of the Palestinians. *The purpose of America is to make money while reorganizing the world for the benefit of capitalism and white supremacy.* It has never been anything but.

The goal might not have changed, but the methods of achieving that goal certainly have. Quietly, discreetly, the liberal hypothesis of 1789 has been replaced by something much more sinister. The Cybernetic Hypothesis abandons all pretense of faith in human beings (not to mention the divine) to venerate a new idol, The Thinking Machine.

This text will attempt to track the development of this new idolatry, which we name Daedalus. Daedalus – inventor and philosopher, responsible for both the Labyrinth and the Minotaur it held, responsible for the death of his son and for the attempted murder of his nephew, the icon of technical-mechanical genius in the service of the Mad King. Daedalus – the name we give to that persistent myth of modern society which few dare speak aloud, *that we will construct God from the machine, and that this God will once again bless the capitalist world system with Its authority.* Daedalus – it was not due to his incompetence that Icarus fell into the waves, but *Icarus' failure to heed his father's command not to fly too high or too low.* And in this, as we shall see, Daedalus shows us the lines of flight, of escape, of how it shall be overcome.

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1948: THE CYBERNETIC HYPOTHESIS

If I were to choose a patron saint for cybernetics out of the history of science, I should have to choose Leibniz...the same intellectual impulse which has led to the development of mathematical logic has at the same time led to the ideal or actual mechanization of processes of thought.

Norbert Wiener, *Cybernetics*

“All is for the best in the best of all possible worlds.”

Voltaire, *Candide*

The United States won the Second World War through industrial and technological supremacy. That was the intended message of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, after all – that the Soviet Union, whose children had bled and died to turn back the Nazi war machine, had better not get any ideas about continuing to spread its revolution. Uncle Sam had the bomb and he was willing to use it; *go ahead, make my day*.

The story of Robert Oppenheimer and the Manhattan Project is justly famous; so too is the story of Alan Turing and his Bletchley Park research into breaking the Enigma machine. Less famous is the story of Claude Shannon and his Bell Labs reports on information theory. And who today even remembers Norbert Wiener and his cybernetics? Poor Norbert...son of a man determined to be the father of a prodigy, he possessed both sophisticated mathematical ability and a far-ranging knowledge and interest of physics, biology, medicine, and philosophy. This was one of the ways in which he resembled his idol Leibniz.

In 1948, Norbert published his magnum opus, *Cybernetics, or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine*. In it, he generalizes his WWII anti-aircraft research into a grand unifying Theory of Everything which he terms Cybernetics.¹ If nothing else, the work holds up today as the foundational text of control systems theory and an intellectual landmark which first demonstrated the importance of feedback in all sorts of machines and systems – electrical, mechanical, biological, computational. As an example, Norbert holds up a pencil, and asks us to reach for it. He notes that we do not consciously move each muscle of our arm, or even think in terms of muscles at all. Rather, we note that our hand is *not* at the pencil, that it is a certain distance away, and we tell our hand to move towards the pencil. When we reach the pencil, our hand will stop moving; until then, we will continue to reach out, ideally at a constant speed and with a smooth, steady motion. Norbert further points out that in many cases, we do not even need to observe this action directly; it can proceed out of sight and even out of mind, as anyone who has ever absent-mindedly picked something up can attest. Feedback is shown to be the mechanism by which systems maintain a stable equilibrium in the presence of internal imperfections and external disturbances. When the ship veers to the left, steer to the right; when it veers to the right, steer left. *Icarus, don't fly too high or too low...*

So far, so good. And we're not done yet...Norbert has equations, oh so beautiful equations, to describe precisely how these systems work, to demonstrate the essential *sameness* of all of them, and how this stable unity may be designed and controlled. Thermostats and steering wheels, nuclear reactors and anti-aircraft guns, Texas Instrument missiles and Boston Dynamics mechanical hounds...all can be explained by Norbert's cybernetics.

¹ From κυβερνήτης, “kubernetes”, the Greek word for a ship's helmsman or pilot. In 2014, Google released the container management tool Kubernetes as free and open source software.

Norbert, however, was not content to simply find a new way to describe and analyze mechanical systems. As the title of his book suggests, his Cybernetics was not simply the science of feedback loops, but a proposed unifying theory of machine, animal, and human behavior. In his *Cybernetics* and other books, including *The Human Use of Human Beings*, a non-mathematical introduction to Cybernetics intended for a popular audience, he constantly stressed that what he discovered was nothing less than the fundamental process by which sufficiently complex systems process information about the world to make decisions. This is how control systems theory, a falsifiable science underpinning our modern industrial world, was stretched and mutated to produce something else, a non-falsifiable theory of all human behavior which some have called the Cybernetic Hypothesis.²

If the liberal hypothesis is that every human being, regardless of circumstances, should be treated by the state as both a unique individual and a citizen with common rights and responsibilities, a first definition of the Cybernetic Hypothesis is that *human beings can and should be modeled according to the principles of cybernetics – feedback loops adjusting their behavior according to the information they consume about the world*. This, as we shall see, has disastrous consequences.

Norbert was no fascist.³ *The Human Use of Human Beings* is not a triumphant announcement of the theory that will save us all – “that much-heralded theory that finally encompasses everything, that finally totalizes and reassures, the one we are told we ‘need so badly’ in our age of dispersion and specialization where ‘hope’ is lacking”, as Foucault wrote in his preface to 1972’s *Anti-Oedipus*. Cybernetics is just such a theory, and Norbert intended it as such, but he never expected it to win. Norbert, like Deleuze and Guattari, was horrified by what fascism

² “As unbearably oppressive as it is prescient”; this is how Ireland and Kronin introduce another work of Tiqqun’s, *Raw Materials for a Theory of the Young-Girl*, before detailing how it “brings to a near-climax the aptitude of the Marxist Left for peevish stealth misogyny.” (*Cute Accelerationism*, p. 126). We would like to echo that Tiqqun’s *The Cybernetic Hypothesis* is equal parts prescient and unbearably obnoxious. While the text deftly traces first the shape of the initial Cybernetic enemy, and then how Cybernetics has only grown more influential as it has become more obscured, it is utterly silent on the plight of anyone who is not an abled white man. TE Lawrence is described in almost messianic terms while the Palestinian Arabs are only ever mentioned as the people he ‘led’; the introduction to the 2019 edition makes no mention of the War on Terror and instead accuses ‘the Chinese rulers’ of demonstrating the possibilities of digital technologies to maintain control and stifle dissent. These are just two examples of many. Oh, one more – referring to a shadowy elite controlling world affairs as THEY, as Tiqqun does throughout this and other texts, is antisemitic as fuck (though not out of character for the French).

³ “As a participant in a liberal outlook which has its main roots in the Western tradition, but which has extended itself to those Eastern countries which have a strong intellectual-moral tradition, and has indeed borrowed deeply from them, I can only state what I myself and those about me consider necessary for the existence of justice. The best words to express these requirements are those of the French Revolution: *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité*.” (*The Human Use of Human Beings*, p. 105). He proceeds to attempt to derive a complete political philosophy from the first principles of contract law. Note that Tiqqun references this book as *Cybernetics and Society*.

and Nazism implied about his society's capacity for evil, domination, and destruction. However, where these authors invent schizoanalysis in order to destroy the despotic signifier of Oedipus, Norbert summons all of his Faustian lore in order to create the despotic signifier of Daedalus. To contain the rampaging Minotaur that he calls entropy, he invents a Labyrinth which he calls Cybernetics – a self-regulating system capable of resisting the Second Law of Thermodynamics to the maximum extent possible through the precise application of Communication and Control. Leibniz saw the world as composed of monads, vibrating independently of each other since the moment of Creation, carefully organized by an all-knowing all-powerful all-good God so that these independent oscillations combine to form the order of the *Best of All Possible Worlds*. Norbert, however, conceived of the world as composed of feedback loops, haphazardly organized today, but which may be coupled with each other in such a way as to create systems that know *enough*, are powerful *enough*, are good *enough* to create for us the *Best of All Possible Worlds*. As he wrote in *Human Use*,

The education of the average American child of the upper middle class is such as to guard him solicitously against the awareness of death and doom. He is brought up in an atmosphere of Santa Claus; and when he learns that Santa Claus is a myth, he cries bitterly. Indeed, he never fully accept the removal of this deity from his Pantheon, and spends much of his later life in the search for some emotional substitute.

It is one thing to create a cybernetic model of deterministic physical components such as resistors, capacitors, and inductors, which channel electricity according to well-understood differential equations; or of a system such as the human nervous system, which may not behave as nicely as these simple components but is still a collection of deterministic electro-chemical components. It is something else entirely to attempt to construct a cybernetic model of *human society*, for to do so is to assert that the components of society, human beings, can be predicted and understood definitely. And as we shall see, when humans cannot be understood in this way, the forces of Cybernetics will attempt to contain, limit, and flatten them until they do.⁴

Norbert does not go so far as to say that human behavior can be predicted in a rigid deterministic sense; in contrasting his vision with that of the fascists, he compares humans and ants, arguing that humans are capable of learning and changing while the ants remain bound to the instinctual behavior programmed into them through evolutionary pressures. He instead argues that by organizing society along Cybernetic principles, we may account for the essential *uncertainty* of human behavior in the same manner that we account for the

⁴ We speak as trans women, specifically white trans women. Transfeminine people of color, especially Black trans women and transfeminine people, understand this far better than we ever will.

uncertainty of physical measurements or dynamic states – through careful application of feedback loops designed to maximize information available throughout the system, in order to maximize the efficiency of the communication and control mechanisms.

We are not impressed by this distinction. Yes, the Labyrinth trapped the sacrificial children of Athens just as well as it trapped the Minotaur which was to devour them. That was, in fact, the problem.

Norbert paid this no mind. Neither did the participants of the Macy Conferences, regular meetings of many of the most respected and/or powerful academics of the time, including Wiener, Claude Shannon, the anthropologists Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead, the ubiquitous John von Neumann and his partner in game theory Oskar Morgenstern, the visionary Licklider, and most of the next generation of cyberneticians: Ashby, Pitts, McCulloch, Lorente de Nó, and von Foerster, among others. Wiener's close colleague Arturo Rosenblueth, with whom he developed cybernetics and to whom he dedicated *Cybernetics*, represented the Instituto Nacional de Cardiología of Mexico. No doubt others reading the guest list will be both surprised and not surprised that another given intellectual of the period attended these meetings and had their thought profoundly shaped by them. Like the participants of these conferences, or blind men feeling an elephant, we are experts only in our narrow little fields, and often scarcely able to comprehend the wonders which our neighbors are exploring. Norbert knew this, and was simply ecstatic for the possibilities of Cybernetics to bridge all interdisciplinary gaps, answer the unanswerable questions, and carry humanity out of the dark winter of the 1930s and 40s into an unbeatable summer of total transparency and control. The liberal hypothesis conceives of the nation-state as a representative of a "people", and the executive of that nation using their power on the nation's behalf. Norbert's dream was to unify all human knowledge and technique under a Cybernetic banner, to reorganize society's feedback loops so that this executive may stretch out his hand and grasp the object of his desire without so many ataxias and purpose tremors. Being a good liberal of 1789, this was the only way Norbert saw to hold fascism at bay as long as operationally possible.

It was a fine dream. But he dreamed it on behalf of the United States, and an American Dream is the world's nightmare.

1968: THINGS FALL APART

I am convinced that if we are to get on the right side of the world revolution, we as a nation must undergo a radical revolution of values. We must rapidly begin the shift from a 'thing-oriented' society to a 'person-oriented' society. When machines and computers, profit motives and property rights are considered more important than people, the giant triplets of racism, materialism, and militarism are incapable of being conquered.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. "Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence. Riverside Church, April 4, 1967"

Can anyone forgive Robert McNamara?

In retrospect he had to admit,

it was a mistake in going to war..

without first asking all the questions.

Laura Jane Grace, "High Pressure Low"

This text will consider five⁵ men who are Daedalus. The first is Norbert Wiener; next and last will be Daedalus himself. But perhaps the most important Daedalus for our story is Robert McNamara.

In *The Cybernetic Hypothesis*, anonymously published September 2001 in the second issue of the French post-Marxist anarchist journal *Tiqqun*, the authors correctly note that something important happened to Cybernetics in 1968. However, being obnoxious French boys, these authors refer only to the student movement of May 1968 in Paris. Far more important to our history is the Tết Offensive in January 1968, which was planned to occur during the Vietnamese Lunar New Year, or Tết Nguyên Đán, for much the same reason that Washington chose to attack the British forces at Trenton on Christmas Day. Although the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese People's Army were ultimately defeated by the United States and its allies, the series of surprise offensives across South Vietnam was sufficient to convince the American public that despite what its government had been promising, the North Vietnamese forces were not exhausted and on the verge of defeat. Americans would continue to occupy South Vietnam until the 1975 liberation of Saigon; the My Lai massacre would occur in March 1968, and we may never know how many other My Lais occurred. Tết, however, signalled that these atrocities would not break the Vietnamese people; Uncle Sam was doomed to lose Vietnam, just as France had before him. The Viet Cong had scored the first great victory for humanity against the cybernetic war machine of the US military-industrial complex.

No one man illustrates the dark union of cybernetics and Empire better than Robert McNamara. His work reorganizing the Ford Motor Company along cybernetic lines inspired Kennedy to select him as his Secretary of Defense, and Johnson retained him when he ascended the throne. McNamara was a disciple of data, who liked to say that a given operation had perhaps a 20% or 50% chance of success. He was not amused when a wiser colleague asked whether that same operation might not instead have a 19% or 51% chance of success. This anecdote comes from Jill Lepore's *If Then: How the Simulmatics Corporation Invented the Future*,⁶ and it points to something important about capital-c Cyberneticians – to justify their

⁵ The number five is important for our story in several ways. There are 5 levels in Stafford Beer's viable systems model of cybernetics, which was the primary model for project Synco in Chile. Synco is short for 'Sistema de Información y Control' and is unfortunately known in English as Project Cybersyn. Synco was a visionary attempt to organize the Chilean economy around decentralized digital communication flows; it remains the pinnacle of leftist cybernetics. The project was shuttered in 1973 after the democratically elected Salvador Allende was overthrown by the US-backed coup of Pinochet. Fans of a certain Rick Riordan series will notice another connection between Daedalus and the number 5; this connection is appreciated but not intended by the authors, who mostly like and respect Riordan, but do not wish to cite any series where a key plot point is "the gods have confirmed that all human progress comes out of the West".

⁶ Other highlights include: Kennedy only making civil rights an issue in his 1960 campaign after a Simulmatics computer report showed that he would gain more Black Northern voters than he lost white Southern voters; the fact that the first computer most Americans ever saw was a fake (a dummy UNIVAC console in the CBS

continued power, they must project an unearned image of total authority and competence, and do not like it when others who are familiar with a topic (in this case, statistics, and the kinds of statistical predictions that are possible to make) point this fact out.

McNamara worked with Kennedy to reorient US military strategy from the massive retaliation of Eisenhower towards the strategy of flexible response. This was an explicitly Cybernetic strategy in many respects - in its promotion of feedback loops to allow decision makers to judge the extent to which their orders were not becoming reality; in its faith that high technology would provide solutions to problems that had persisted for thousands of years; in its recognition that assuring continual stability required continual manipulation, as exemplified by the new doctrines of counterinsurgency. Lepore notes that the largest contract that Simulmatics ever got was to win hearts and minds in Vietnam; its director Ithiel de Sola Pool boasted he was inventing a new discipline he called 'psychological warfare'.

It did not matter that despite these new doctrines, the US was obviously losing in Vietnam, as demonstrated by the rapid and dramatic escalation of US military presence in the country. As Malcolm Harris writes about SAGE, a 1950s computer system which supposedly allowed NORAD to distinguish between commercial flights and enemy bombers on radar -

*For one thing, SAGE couldn't handle radar countermeasures, which the Soviets were already using. For another, ICBMs replaced bombers as the go-to nuclear delivery device, those went above radar into space. At best SAGE was a glorified air-traffic control system; at worst it connected nuclear missiles to buggy code and unsecured phone lines. **But the Cold War power elite, congealing between the academy, the defense industry, and the military, had every reason to keep flashy scams like SAGE going.***⁷

Harris appears to have arrived at this conclusion based solely on remarks from 'SAGE engineer Lester Earnest', and they are certainly disputed. However, the question of whether or not SAGE was an explicit, intentional scam, or just technology that never did a single useful thing and may well have never worked, does not interest us. As Harris goes on to write, "These high-tech tools projected American lethality across the so-called Third World...Palo Alto was a conduit for the production of an outsourced capitalist planet".⁸ That is, not only were these tools symbolic of the USA's very real capacity for death and destruction, and often accompanied by traditional bullets and bombs, they also generated enormous wealth for

broadcasting studio on election night 1952, while the real UNIVAC processed election returns at the University of Pennsylvania and its operators relayed the results to CBS over the phone); the fact that the Simulmatics corporation claimed to have elected Kennedy in 1960 and became a public sensation not unlike Cambridge Analytica in 2018; and that none of Simulmatics' technology ever actually worked.

⁷ *Palo Alto*, p. 245.

⁸ *Palo Alto*, p. 276.

Silicon Valley. American capitalists were making ludicrous sums of money off the Vietnam War, as capitalists always have. No one was in a hurry to cut the party short by telling the US government it was selling them magic beans. Furthermore, the image of power and victory is just as important in warfare as actual warfighting capability. There is a reason that so much of Sun Tzu is tips for deception.

But perhaps the most important reason that it didn't matter when projects like SAGE or Simulmatics failed, was that it was never the fault of the designers of the system. "Not enough data"; "the dream outpaced the technology"; "the operators were incompetent"; there are no shortage of excuses, and the reader has probably heard many more. Why is it, after all, that the failure of the wings is always blamed on Icarus, and the possibility that Daedalus had given his son the inferior suit *never even considered*?

Thus the aforementioned significance of the Tết Offensive – it convinced *CBS Evening News* anchor Walter Cronkite that the war was unwinnable, and he in turn convinced much of the American people. Johnson is said to have said "if I've lost Cronkite, I've lost Middle America". The May student demonstrations in Paris which prompted Charles de Gaulle to flee to Germany, the street fighting in Chicago outside the Democratic National Convention and the election of Richard Nixon to the US Presidency – these almost seem to have been precipitated by Vietnamese courage alone.

The authors are not French, do not respect the French, and are perfectly happy to hand all credit for May 68 to the North Vietnamese. When it comes to 1968 in the United States, however, we would be deeply remiss if we did not also mention the assassination of the Reverend Doctor Martin Luther King, Jr. Since his death, King has been sanitized, decontextualized, recontextualized and otherwise coopted (it was Ronald Reagan who made MLK Day a federal holiday in the United States). This is particularly insulting given that King's family has always insisted that he was killed with the knowledge and blessing of the highest levels of US government. Whether or not the assassin was paid by J. Edgar Hoover remains unclear; what is crystal clear is that King was an orator and organizer of exceptional ability, and that he was murdered April 4, 1968, exactly one year after he delivered his Riverside Church speech quoted at the opening of this section.

How much higher, how much further, might King have flown? We cannot know. What we do know is that the triple evils of "racism, materialism, and militarism" remain our great enemy today, and that they are indeed distinct and yet inseparable, an unholy trinity, KKKapital. The Kapital of the United States, that wicked fortune amassed over four centuries of toil and exploitation, not least by and of the slaves of the plantation South; which protects and sustains itself through a prison-industrial complex and stochastic racial terror, not to mention the

rhizomatic tendrils of white supremacy; and a military-industrial complex which continually reformulates itself into its deadliest, purest form, so as best to kill everyone it meets.

In 1968, the Cybernetic State was bloodied, and it might have been destroyed. But just as the Parisian students hesitated, and Charles de Gaulle returned from his Flight to Varennes⁹ to win a snap election, the year ended in America with the election of Richard Nixon. His Presidency would end in disgrace, and Watergate has become a byword in the US for political scandals of all kinds. It is this, *and only this*, which prevents modern liberals from remembering him with the same warm and fuzzies with which they remember not only Kennedy, but Eisenhower. After all, Nixon created the EPA and PBS, ended the Vietnam War, opened diplomatic relations with Communist China, and oversaw the fulfillment of Kennedy's dream to put whitey on the Moon.¹⁰ He was, in many ways, the last liberal President.

We should not be surprised that Tricky Dick did all this. These were the demands of the Cybernetic State, the same State which Kennedy and Johnson had served, and which remains today as the idyllic dream of the Democratic Party. But Vietnam had shown that this State would not, could not, triumph over the increasing determination of the wretched of the Earth. To maintain the perpetual stability of the capitalist world-system would require new tools, new ideology, new Cybernetics.

Throughout his life, King worked as a cybernetic regulator of the American system. That is, he represented a critical source of feedback for white America and its Presidents, through his nonviolent actions designed to demonstrate both the appalling injustice which Black America suffered and the capacity of Black America for disciplined self-organization. Malcolm X had

⁹ In 1791, King Louis XVI of France fled Revolutionary Paris with his family in an attempt to reach Royalist troops on the Austrian border; he was captured by revolutionary patriots at the town of Varennes in a midnight ride which puts Paul Revere to shame. Then and now, the attempt was seen as the King repudiating the Revolution and led to his overthrow and execution. Compare this to May 1968, in which student demonstrations in Paris quickly escalated into a general strike which prompted De Gaulle to flee to West Germany, which brought France just to the edge of full-blown revolution. However, the radicals did not press their advantage, pro-Gaullist supporters mobilized, and de Gaulle returned and called snap elections, which the radicals agreed to, as they believed it was of the utmost importance that they come to power through the proper bourgeois liberal channels. De Gaulle's party won the election and the revolutionary moment passed. This, and only this, is cited by Tiqqun as the turning point between first- and second-wave Cybernetics. We hope that we have convinced you, reader, that although these events are indeed critical, they must be understood in a wider global context of surging anti-colonialism which threatened to fatally destabilize the capitalist world-system.

¹⁰ "A rat done bit my sister Nell/With whitey on the moon/Her face and arms began to swell/And whitey's on the moon/I can't pay no doctor bills/But whitey's on the moon/Ten years from now I'll be payin' still/While whitey's on the moon." Gil Scott-Heron, "Whitey on the Moon". In 1970, space exploration was Great Power posturing; today, it's Great Billionaire posturing.

always seen that the USA was an evil empire which must be overcome; King had hoped that the evil empire could *learn*, could actually grow to achieve its stated purpose. But *the purpose of a system is what it does*.¹¹ Malcolm was murdered in 1965, Martin in 1968. The fledgling Cybernetic State did not, could not, distinguish between those who had wanted to help it grow and thrive and those who had always wanted it destroyed. This lesson was not lost on a new generation of Black freedom fighters. To quote Kwame Ture –

Dr. King's policy was, if you are nonviolent, if you suffer, your opponent will see your suffering and will be moved to change his heart. That's very good. He only made one fallacious assumption.

In order for nonviolence to work, your opponent must have a conscience. The United States has none, has none.

¹¹ “According to the cybernetician, the purpose of a system is what it does.” Stafford Beer, October 2001.

1175 BC: SYSTEMS COLLAPSE

'Now Icarus, listen carefully!

Keep to the middle way. If you fly too low, the water

will clog your wings; if you fly too high, they'll be scorched by fire.

Fly between sea and sun. No need to determine your course...

Simply follow my lead.' As he gave his pupil his flying

orders, he fitted the wings on the boy's inexperienced shoulders;

and while he did it the old man's cheeks were wet with his tears

Ovid, Metamorphoses

The world ended once. We like to speculate on why, looking for a simple answer, but no one factor caused that interregnum we call the Bronze Age Collapse. How could such a complex interdependent networked society simply... break?

The conventional narrative of the end of the Bronze Age begins and ends with "Sea Peoples did it".¹² While there is much more to it than that, these Sea Peoples haunted the nightmares of the Bronze Age for a reason. Among the most powerful and dangerous of these peoples were the great thalassocracy of the Minoans. Their decline and fall was the first of the Collapse, and (from no known method of translating linear A) the most difficult to parse.

Minoan artifacts can be found far outside Crete and tell us a great deal about their trade and craft. Most of what we know of the Minoans, however, we know through their possible colony, occasional rival and perpetual demonizer, the Mycenaean Greeks. It is from the Greeks that we inherit most of what we 'know' of Minoan culture and its monarchy – centralized, organized, bureaucratic, and sustained by wealth obtained through the strategy of "trade and raid". 325 years before the Bronze Age Collapse, the Minoans, not the Greeks, were the great power of the Aegean Sea. And in their fall, we can trace clearly the shape of the apocalypse to come.

It began with an explosion unlike any their society had ever seen, an island destroyed by the very chaos at the core of the earth. An unaccountable change, and an unforeseeable disturbance which would ultimately cascade to fatally destabilize the entire system. As Norbert notes in the opening pages of *Cybernetics*, not even a god can count all the clouds in the sky, and these were sufficient to blot out the very sun.¹³

The Minoans were dying. All they could do to delay this inevitable entropic slide was to increase the colonization and exploitation of those who we refer to today as the Greeks. The Minoan bull would become the symbol of this domination, whether it was sewn into the sails of an invading galley or worn on the helm of the leader of the 'barbarians'. The Mycenaeans had every reason to fear the Empire of the Bull as it charged forward in unsustainable bureaucratic industry, and this terrible memory is still with us today in Achaean myth. Have we forgotten how Daedalus first came to the attention of King Minos of Crete? Was it not by building a sufficiently convincing suit for the Queen that would allow her to fuck The Cretan

¹² The Sea Peoples are largely noted archeologically by an inscription on the Mortuary Temple to Rameses III among several other examples, these noted them as being a rough assemblage of peoples from various areas that fell first, noting that it may have simply been each area collapsing in turn when the tin in their bronze became too diluted, along with a period of global cooling, later capped off by the circa 1100BCE explosion of the Hekla volcano in Iceland, ending the era of bronze collapse as it began, with blackened skies. This put the last nail in the era's coffin and began a full interregnum period in the Mediterranean.

¹³ *Cybernetics*, p. 30-31.

Bull? Out of this coupling was born a monster – the Minotaur, man with the head of a bull, combining human intelligence with Nature’s strength to produce the ultimate engine of death and destruction. The creation was no longer confined by the creator’s intent.

And so, our reluctant villain comes to center stage, a pathetic man with a sympathetic cause, *“Keep the monster contained.”* Never mind why the monster exists - the bull will run wild if not contained. Surely, he must be acting for the good of all! Daedalus builds the Labyrinth, the technical genius producing the ultimate trap, the ultimate system of confinement and control. It proves inadequate – there is still a discrepancy between the outcome that is desired, and the outcome currently obtained, *the monster is hungry*. No matter – stability may be ensured perpetually through a small corrective term, namely, an annual sacrifice of children from the imperial periphery to the monster of the imperial core. A stable number of children, even – 14, 7 Athenian boys and 7 Athenian girls. A small price to pay for peace and prosperity in the kingdom.¹⁴

Daedalus can’t seem to solve a problem without creating another. Let us not forget that he first fled Athens for Crete to escape punishment for the attempted murder of his nephew, whose recent inventions had shown that he might own day outshine his already-famous uncle. To prove his worth to Minos, he builds the machine which calls forth the Minotaur. To contain the Minotaur, he builds the Labyrinth, and he and Icarus are imprisoned within it after Theseus slays the Minotaur and brings the sacrificial children home to Athens. To free them both, he achieves a miracle – a means of flight, of escape. Only he survives the journey home – *Icarus, listen carefully! Keep to the middle way...no need to determine your course...simply follow my lead...*

Like Werner von Braun and the other Nazi scientists the US welcomed with open arms at the end of the War, Daedalus was a man of shifting loyalties who served many masters. He found a new king to serve, and built him a temple to Apollo, which is to say, he built a temple to the way he saw himself. But Minos could not forgive this affront to his control, and sought him out.

Unlike these later men of similar ilk, Daedalus was ultimately punished for his crimes – Minos ultimately found him and confined him to a heated bath of his own design (far outside of acceptable parameters!) until the genius’s skin boiled off. In another version of the myth, this end is attributed to the serving women or daughters of the inventor’s final patron, Cocalus, who ended the fates of both Minos and Daedalus, the tyrant and his agent of control both

¹⁴ In an unsettling note this may not be as much of an exaggeration as some evidence is shown of ritual consumption of human flesh at Knossos.

caught in the mechanism they had wrought. There ends the great empire, an end brought on by those that myth gives no names.

So ends that famous story of triumph and tragedy. It is not the entire story; not even close. There are far more interesting threads for us to examine. Let us begin with the thread of Ariadne. Daughter of Minos, keeper of the Labyrinth, she was the one to show Theseus how to reliably navigate the impossible maze. What did it take to overcome this dark feat of engineering, this monstrous coupling of Invention and Empire? A magic map, a special compass, a brilliant guide? No, only a spool of thread that Theseus unwinds as he stalks his prey. The raw material of women's work is sufficient to make the Labyrinth as simple as a cereal box maze. Like Rome, the Labyrinth was not built in a day, but it was defeated in one by a piece of string.¹⁵

And what became of Ariadne, who had thus outsmarted Daedalus? She is said to have fled her father's kingdom aboard the famous ship of Theseus¹⁶, who had quickly proclaimed his love for her and would almost as quickly leave her. On Naxos, she was abandoned by the Athenian hero. Left to weep on the shore at her fate, only for the god Dionysus, to find her in her woes, marry her and bring her home to Olympus, making her a goddess in her own right (if you take Plutarch's word for it).¹⁷ The contrast between the Apollonian Daedalus and the Dionysian Ariadne should not be overlooked, both for what it implies about the possibilities of asymmetric struggle against the cybernetic war machine, and as a reminder that women have been threaded into the history of cybernetics from the very beginning, often weaving their designs in plain sight until the Labyrinth is traversed and the Minotaur slain.

Such were the fates of Daedalus and Icarus, the Minotaur and Theseus, and of Ariadne, daughter of Minos. The myths tell us something true about the collapse of the Minoan culture. Just as Theseus conquered the Minotaur, the Minoan empire continued to decline and ultimately fell to the very Mycenaean Greek city-states it had extracted tribute from. With the fall of the government, there was no reason to stay in the cloud of ash cast by Thera and the Minoan people dispersed. Some fled to other islands, some were absorbed into Mycenaean

¹⁵ It's not usually mentioned in the myth if Daedalus ever learned how Theseus traversed the Labyrinth, but we are of the opinion that the skilled craftsman could not have fathomed his great work being foiled by a woman spinning thread. He was a man with a machine mind, confined by the walls he had built for himself, unable to see the solution because it contradicted all the laws he held to be self-evident. In this way, he is paradigmatic of Royal Science, as described by Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p 369-370.

¹⁶ Or one version of it, at least.

¹⁷ One wonders what the god of wine would see in her to hold so dear, until you look at their early forms: Robert Graves claimed that Ariadne was the great goddess of Crete entwined in snakes, bulls bowing to her, a diadem of poppies crowning her, the deity of the Minoans we have seen held in the greatest regard. The goddess of opium and the god of wine seem a natural pairing. Both also began their existence as Chthonic deities and psychopomps.

culture, and some simply perished. We know that by 1450 BC,¹⁸ the Myceneans ruled Crete, and a few centuries later the celebration of Aphrodite-Ariadne appears in Cyprus.

These were already old myths by the time of the Bronze Age Collapse. The Minoans would not be the last advanced bureaucratic maritime empire to be reduced to irrelevance by independence movements and environmental disaster. These same factors would fatally destabilize the rest of the Mediterranean Bronze Age empires of the 12th century, though the final blow to Europe's first multinational trade regime would not come until 1050 BC, when the sky fell yet again.¹⁹

In the face of failing crops, helpless bureaucrats, and a collapsing military-industrial complex, the peoples of the eastern Mediterranean simply walked away. Great Valley Cities were abandoned for the mountains, along with writing, which was in those days used only for bureaucratic accounting of power and debts. It was, quite literally, the end of history for the empires of the age. Only 500 years later would the written word begin to reappear in the region, when the mathematics and metallurgy of the Gangetic peoples finally made their way to the uncivilized North, and the city engine was restarted. Once again, man started to build walls and dream of controlling forces more powerful than him. The myth of Daedalus took hold of these men, as it does all machine men with machine minds who wish to make the entire world like them.

And what of the myth of Ariadne? The daughter of Minos, tasked with leading the children of Athens to their doom, she spins a fateful thread which is still with us today, though often out of sight. Let us now examine an even older myth than that of Daedalus and the Bull King.

We have only fragments of the story of the "Mistress of the Labyrinth", and it long predates any of the names which we have given here. In these fragments, the Labyrinth is not invented in order contain the forces of death and destruction. It has instead always been here, a

¹⁸ Linear B texts appear on the island of Crete dating back to 1450BC eclipsing the untranslatable Linear A text, including ones mentioning the Daidalaion as an institution meaning the "house of Daedalus" serving the Mycenaean state, as pale imitations of the "innovator".

¹⁹ The point where writing largely disappears, and most states fully collapse coincides with the Hekla 3 eruption spewing into the sky once again blotting societies from the map in a cloud of ash. That was the killing blow, but it was by no means the only factor leading to the Collapse. Another critical factor was a crippling shortage of a vital industrial mineral 'tin', an important precursor to an advanced material called 'bronze' which was vital to the military strategies of the time. The empires of the eastern Mediterranean had long ago exhausted the supplies within their borders and relied upon trade with the distant 'tin isles' north of Iberia for their supply. But with the cascading destabilizing crises of the age, there were no longer reliable sea traders to provide this supply. Only sea raiders remained, the leftovers of dozens of empires. This is attested to by the deteriorating quality of bronze artifacts over the centuries, as bronze was reused, recycled, and reworked, magnifying its flaws and debasing the tin, like a Xerox of a Xerox until it was no longer possible for the smiths of the era to produce bronze of any acceptable quality.

passage between this world and the next, the boundary between life and death, traversed only by those mad enough to comprehend it. It was not a prison, but the Dancing Path of a Chthonic poppy-haired psychopomp to whom bulls bowed.²⁰ When Dionysus learned of Ariadne's actions, he knew he had found nothing less than his other half, split from him by men like Plato and Aristotle in their symposiums. Ariadne danced the Labyrinth, danced it countless times to guide frightened souls from life to death, to the center of the maze which held not wrath and terror but serenity. Daedalus, by contrast, could not see the Dancing Path, and saw only the blueprints for walls of stone, a pale echo of the divine unpredictability which is chaos from which, (like death, and the machines he dreamed of,) there could be no escape. Daedalus clings at the thread of containment within his understanding of the very nature of thought and the machine mind. One must imagine Daedalus terrified and baffled at the Ur-Gordian solution for his impossible knot. This thread would continue to unravel until the present day showing itself for the pale imitation of the inspired that it is. Despite any anxiety we may feel, however, the merciful Ariadne²¹ is beside us as we prepare to snip apart the threads of Daedalus which began to degrade the moment they were woven in pale imitation of the Goddess's steps. One only hopes we are prepared to rise to the task of dancing in the rubble of the works of pale imitators.

²⁰ The Minoan mosaics seem to specifically focus primarily on powerful women figures leading many to believe that like later maritime expansionists, the society at home was largely matriarchal.

²¹ In some myths from the interregnum period beyond the bronze age collapse Aphrodite-Ariadne would be worshipped throughout many Isles as a goddess of love and compassion but also as a goddess of justice, showing she was thought to carry some of the aspects of Aphrodite's earlier syncretic origins in Inanna as well as the mistress of the labyrinth both of whom were demonstrated in their myths walking the path to the underworld and back as was Dionysus in their early chthonic form.

1984: BRAVE NEW WORLD

The congressional hearings [investigating Iran-Contra] focused on who knew what when, in particular President Reagan. This was a distraction; the whole group of men at the top of the Reagan administration fervently believed in a free-market system in which people didn't need to know what was going on for it to all work out. This was the central insight of Friedrich Hayek, the economist who along with Reagan was one of the Hoover Institution's first three honorary fellows.

Malcolm Harris, *Palo Alto*

The real is produced from miniaturized cells, matrices, and memory banks, models of control- and it can be reproduced an indefinite number of times from these. It no longer needs to be rational, because it no longer measures itself against either an ideal or negative instance. It is no longer anything but operational.

Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*

Herbert Hoover was a Stanford man of the first class, both literally and metaphorically. The orphaned son of an Iowan blacksmith, he became first a world-renowned mining engineer, and then a world-famous humanitarian for his work rescuing white people from the Boxer Rebellion in China, where he had been sent for work. From this point, his story is more well known – he would gain further accolades for directing food aid to Europe during WWI and be elected US President in 1928, only to be unseated in 1932 by Roosevelt's New Deal coalition at the height of the Great Depression. He would then return to Stanford to found the Hoover Institution, which was dedicated to eradicating Roosevelt's legacy through a decades long project to promote what today is called neoliberalism.

The major contribution of *Palo Alto* by Malcolm Harris is to demonstrate that the 'Reagan Revolution' of 1980 had nothing to do with chance or Ronald Reagan. Rather, it was the culmination of a careful, deliberate project to create both an ideology capable of challenging both New Deal liberalism and Marxist-Leninist communism, and a network of men, money, and think tanks responsible for communicating this ideology and controlling Republican party politics while obscuring its actions as much as possible. Neoliberalism is the metamorphosis of Cybernetic ideology away from the Cybernetic State of Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon, towards the Cybernetic Market of Reagan, and all Presidents to follow him except Trump. Herbert Hoover is thus our fourth Daedalus, and the most formidable Daedalus yet produced by that infamous Daedalus Factory known as Leland Stanford Junior University.

Cybernetic Market ideology differs from Cybernetic State ideology in three key aspects. First, Cybernetic State ideology, in the tradition of political liberalism, sees the State as an expression of a nation's will and the task of Cybernetics as ensuring that the leader of that nation can most effectively act. Cybernetic Market ideology, however, views the State as a cancerous growth restricting the pure flow of commodities and information throughout the Free Market, which has been given quasi-magical powers of efficient resource allocation. Second, where the high technology of the Cybernetic State was used almost exclusively for State (military and intelligence) purposes, the Cybernetic Market would retool such technology into a wide variety of gadgets aimed at (initially, quite wealthy) consumers. And so Texas Instruments is known by most Americans today, not as a bomb manufacturer, but as a maker of overpriced handheld calculators. If smart bombs weren't going to win Vietnam, at least their integrated circuits could be used to turn a profit.

Third, and most important, Cybernetic Market ideology works very hard to hide the fact that it is Cybernetic. This is of a piece with the broader strategy of the Reagan Administration to

neutralize the radical critique of 1968. Atwater's infamous 'n----r, n----r, n----r' comments,²² while only directly applicable in the context of race and anti-Blackness, do point to the motivation and nature of this strategy. *It was no longer acceptable, socially or politically, to say certain things out loud. Arguments thus had to be made in a way that minimized their actual motivation, while still acting to achieve these motivations and making this fact clear to those who already share those motivations.* That is to say – after 1968, the US would continue to pursue Cybernetic strategies, but it would take great pains to conceal this fact. Cybernetics, after all, was associated with expensive Democratic boondoggles and McNamara's failure in Vietnam. Fundamentally, as expressed by Norbert Wiener, it was and is an ideology concerned with prolonging stable conditions in a world doomed by entropy and decay. Such talk is too depressing when it's Morning in America.

And so Norbert and his feedback loops disappear behind a neon-arcade²³ haze of signs and simulacra. The need for free flow of information to maximize communication and control becomes Hayek's argument that state economic controls are ill-advised because no individual actor can ever possess more than a tiny fraction of the information available to the Market. His recognition that complex systems do not need a central head to act effectively is vindicated by the Hoover Institution's backroom steering of both the Reagan and Bush, Jr. presidencies. But perhaps most destructive of all was the metamorphosis of Norbert's faith in the ability of cybernetic systems to maintain stability to a faith in the ability of *computer systems themselves* to maintain stability.

This distorted Xerox²⁴ can be best understood through the ostensibly anti-Cybernetic 1984 Apple Super Bowl commercial. In it, an ominous Big Brother recites totalitarian propaganda from a giant screen at a crowd of attentive gray workers, until a buxom blonde breasts boobily into the room to throw a hammer into the screen, breaking it and amazing the

²² 'You start out in 1954 by saying, "n----r, n----r, n----r." By 1968 you can't say "n----r"—that hurts you, backfires. So you say stuff like, uh, forced busing, states' rights, and all that stuff, and you're getting so abstract. Now, you're talking about cutting taxes, and all these things you're talking about are totally economic things and a byproduct of them is, blacks get hurt worse than whites.... "We want to cut this," is much more abstract than even the busing thing, uh, and a hell of a lot more abstract than "n----r, n----r." These 1981 comments by Republican strategist Lee Atwater were first published, though not credited to him, in 1984's *The Two-Party South*.

²³ In some cases, literally – the pioneering cabinet arcade game *Galaxy Game* was built with B-52 bomber joysticks picked up at a military surplus store. *Palo Alto*, p. 442.

²⁴ In 1983, Jobs learned that Bill Gates was planning to launch a mouse-based graphical operating system called Windows. When he summoned Gates to Apple HQ to accuse him of stealing Apple's intellectual property, Gates responded, "Well, Steve, I think there's more than one way of looking at it. I think it's more like we both had this rich neighbor named Xerox and I broke into his house to steal the TV set and found out that you had already stolen it." (https://www.folklore.org/A_Rich_Neighbor_Named_Xerox.html). Gates was referring to the fact that Jobs had blatantly ripped off most of the Mac from the Alto system of his previous employer, Xerox PARC. (*Palo Alto*, p. 445)

workers. On January 24th, the narrator announces solemnly, *Apple Computer will introduce the Macintosh. And you'll see why 1984 won't be like "1984"*.

In terms over style over substance, the commercial, directed by Ridley Scott, is surpassed only by George Orwell's *1984*. The totalitarian enemy is vague and ambiguous – it could equally be Nazi Germany or the Soviet Union which had sacrificed so much to defeat it. Similarly vague are any details of how Big Brother controls the workers through the screen, whether the revolutionary blonde's plan goes any further than 'break a screen and be immediately apprehended by armed agents', or how an expensive gadget will help to forestall American fascism. Most importantly for our purposes, however, the commercial seems to imply that choosing a different computer vendor has profound impacts on politics, morality, and hegemony. Norbert would certainly have agreed with this, but only insofar as it was necessary to choose a computing machine capable of properly executing his Cybernetic algorithms. Dijkstra, pioneer of theoretical computer science, famously said that "computer science is no more about computers than astronomy is about telescopes".²⁵ Steve Jobs, by contrast, argued that the best way to resist fascism is to ensure you have purchased the correct telescope.

The fetishization of the computer did not begin in 1984 or 1980.²⁶ As Jill Lepore documents in *If Then*, the computer has been an object of much public fascination and misunderstanding from the moment most Americans first saw one, when CBS borrowed UNIVAC from the University of Pennsylvania for Election Night 1952. However, 1984 marked a critical turning point in our story in two key respects. First, the computer was now a product marketed directly at consumers, who, unlike the grad students who had been the primary computer operators until that point, had little to no knowledge of how the dang thing worked. Second, it occurred in a period when the dominant political ideology of the US was shifting from FDR liberalism to Reaganite Hooverian neoliberalism; that is, from Cybernetic State ideology to Cybernetic Market ideology. To Oliver North and men like him, the aim was not to create a cybernetically-regulated system which would allow the State to act with maximum agency, but to use the military capabilities of the State to cybernetically regulate the market so that it may act with maximum agency. This, of course, meant neutralizing disturbances to the system such as the Sandinistas and Black American radicals. Iran-Contra thus represented a confirmation of that definition of cybernetic systems which states that in such systems,

²⁵ Computer science is the college major of choice for those who want high-paid programming jobs in the 21st century, and it does indeed teach programming, computer organization, practical networking, and so forth. However, computer science as an academic research discipline often strives to abstract away the physical machine as much as possible, to instead explore which questions are possible to answer in a reasonable amount of time given datasets of a certain size and computational resources of a certain capability.

²⁶ The word fetishization is very deliberate here, and is meant to evoke both the commodity fetishism of Marx and ecstatic prostration of Adam Susan to the FATE supercomputer in Alan Moore's *V for Vendetta*.

control functions are not centralized and exterior to the system, but decentralized and immanent throughout the structure of the system.²⁷ Not only did Reagan not need to know what was going on, neither did any one individual or organization. Remove roadblocks from its path, and the Cybernetic Market would regulate itself.

And so, by the 1980s, the emblem of American techno-military supremacy was no longer the Bomb, but the Computer capable of dropping the bombs. Most Americans forgot where the ICs for their new gadgets had come from, and the story is little known today. But the world would not have to wait long to be reminded that the United States is ‘guided by the beauty of our weapons’.²⁸

²⁷ “To connect his intercontinental cabal, Oliver North used a top-of-the-line device, a set of some of the first laptops, produced by the venture-funded Xerox PARC spin-off GRiD Systems Corporation, the first to fit a portable computer into a briefcase.” *Palo Alto*, p. 438

²⁸ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2017/04/07/beautiful-brian-williams-says-of-syria-missile-strike-proceeds-to-quote-leonard-cohen/>

2001: DEUS EX MACHINA

Global controls will have to be imposed

And a world governing body, will be created to enforce them

Crises, precipitate change.

Deltron 3030, "Virus"

Cybernetics is warfare directed against all that lives and all that lasts for a time.

Tiqqun, *The Cybernetic Hypothesis*

On September 11, 2001, terrorists flew two hijacked planes into the World Trade Center and one into the US Pentagon, killing 2,977 people. In response, the United States declared War on Terror, which as of April 2025 has killed over 900,000 people directly and over 4.5 million indirectly.²⁹ The architects of this carnage are likely to all die peacefully in their beds surrounded by loved ones. Meanwhile, the attacks of October 7, 2023, which killed 1,200, were used by Israel as justification to initiate their ongoing genocide in Gaza and Palestine, which as of Sep 30, 2024 had killed over 53,000 directly and 67,000 indirectly.³⁰ Unless something is done, it is likely that this pattern will continue throughout this century and beyond.

We have neither the space nor the expertise to give a full accounting of the War on Terror and the resulting US Terror State; for that, we refer the reader to *Reign of Terror* by Spencer Ackerman. Ackerman's thesis is that post-9/11 US jingoism, at home and abroad, created the conditions which led to the rise of President Trump; Trumpism, it must be understood, is the violence of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq coming home, just as Fanon understood fascism and Nazism as the violence of European imperialism come home to the metropole. Here, we seek to examine the role of the Cybernetic State and the Cybernetic Market during this period, so that we may better understand the distinctions between these and the Cybernetic Fascism which is soon to come.

It is our thesis that the Terror State – the socio-political-techno-military apparatus which sprang up after 9/11 to murder Muslims abroad and spy on Muslim Americans at home, which Ackerman describes so clearly – is a cybernetic system consisting of the Cybernetic State and Market working together against a common enemy. Although it is totalitarian and genocidal, it is not fascist, per se – after all, it was liberals, not fascists, who built the European empires of the 19th and 20th centuries. It is led by people like Dick Cheney, Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, and Kamala Harris. Cybernetic Fascism, led by men like Trump, Musk, and Thiel, represents a specific degeneration of this ideology as it encounters resistance and the prospect of fatal defeat. We shall deal with it in time. First, let us examine the Terror State, which liberals hated so much in 2004 and rallied behind absolutely in 2024.

The Terror State occurs when all US power bases converge to fight a dynamic, poorly understood enemy. During the Cold War, in which the capitalist world-system and the Marxist-Leninist world-system struggled for global supremacy, Moscow was perceived to be the wellspring of all anti-Americanism. The fall of the Soviet Union and the ensuing globalization

²⁹ <https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/figures>

³⁰ We chose to cite a death toll for Gaza that is as conservative/unarguable as possible; Israel's systematic destruction of reporting capabilities and media/aid blockade around Gaza mean the death toll is almost certainly much higher, not to mention injuries both physical and mental.

[https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/files/cow/imce/papers/2023/2024/](https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/files/cow/imce/papers/2023/2024/Costs%20of%20War_Human%20Toll%20Since%20Oct%207.pdf)
[Costs%20of%20War_Human%20Toll%20Since%20Oct%207.pdf](https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/files/cow/imce/papers/2023/2024/Costs%20of%20War_Human%20Toll%20Since%20Oct%207.pdf)

movement may have suggested that society was at the end of history, but the 9/11 attacks quickly turned this careless dream into a nightmare. America still had enemies, but who were they? *Where* were they? Who did they take orders from, who funded them, who supplied them arms and ammunition and targets...these questions, so simple to answer before, suddenly seemed to be an intractable problem. As Galloway and Thacker describe the new theory of 'netwar' developed by Arquilla and Ronfeldt,

*The topologies of netwar [war conducted by enemy networks rather than enemy States] and the 'multitude' throw up a challenge to traditional notions of enmity: they have no face; they are instances of faceless enmity. Or rather, they have defaced enmity, rendered it faceless, but also tarnished or disgraced it, as in the gentleman's lament that asymmetrical guerrilla tactics deface the honor of war.*³¹

Or as Judi Dench's M says in 2012's *Skyfall*, widely considered the best 21st century Bond -

I'm frightened because our enemies are no longer known to us. They do not exist on a map. They're not nations, they're individuals. And look around you. Who do you fear? Can you see a face, a uniform, a flag? No! Our world is not more transparent now, it's more opaque! It's in the shadows. That's where we must do battle. So before you declare us irrelevant, ask yourselves, how safe do you feel?

How safe do you feel? What a fascist thing to say! People are not allowed to demand that they 'feel safe'. Our fears are often irrational, tightly coupled to our prejudices, and potentially infinite; Freedom from Fear is *not* a valid political project, especially when it conflicts with another's Freedom to Live. We may demand that we *are* safe, that no foreign devils bomb our schools and hospitals and weddings, and that any who do face swift and definitive justice. This is the demand of the Palestinians. It is the Israelis, and the Americans, who demand to 'feel safe'.

In order to feel safe again after 9/11, the American people turned to Daedalus, and to Cybernetics. The world's most terrifying domestic surveillance apparatus was built, switched on, and aimed at all Americans. But at first it mostly hurt brown people, so few cared. As Ackerman demonstrates, the initial data collection program, codenamed STELLARWIND and revealed publicly in 2004, was controversial within the Justice Department with men like James Comey and Robert Mueller. Not because they opposed the practice, but because they were worried that the (lack of) legal justification would ruin their careers once the program was disclosed. They had no reason to worry.

³¹ *The Exploit: A Theory of Networks*, p. 66

Of course, the entire War on Terror would ultimately be legalized through the tireless efforts of Barack Obama and the Democratic Party; it was one of the few promises he kept. But this was merely a formality to protect professional careers. The Snowden disclosures would ultimately establish that US tech companies *regularly and willingly* share massive amounts of user data with the NSA; the agency needs only to submit Section 702 requests for all traffic matching certain keywords, such as “terrorism”, “mosque”, “political affairs” or even “oil”. As Ackerman writes,

*NSA received access to Microsoft servers in September 2007; to Google in January 2009; to Facebook that June; to Google’s YouTube the following year; and to Apple in October 2012. While the debate over [Section 702] was focused on terrorism, the NSA’s collection was not. Intelligence reporting emerging from the data collection during a single week in February 2013 concerned Mexican internal security, Egyptian politics, Palestinian finances, Iraqi oil, Israeli cyber-planning, Japanese trade, Venezuelan military procurement, and, for good measure, al-Qaeda.*³²

To facilitate these searches, the intelligence community turned to the CIA-funded startup Palantir, which provided a sleek and powerful graphical user interface to sit atop that firehose of data (codenamed PRISM). And so Peter Thiel first started making connections with and within the Terror State.³³

A word about Thiel, Musk, Gates, Zuckerberg, and the rest. None of these men are Daedalus. We repeat – *none of these men are Daedalus*. Recall that we define Daedalus as technical genius in the service of the military industrial complex and the State. All of these men are swine of the State, but none of them hold anything close to genius (least of all Musk). They are poor imitations, simulacra, Xeroxes of Xeroxes of greater minds. And to prove it, it is time at last to consider our fifth Daedalus, a huckster, a fake, a flim-flam man whom we have already met – Steve Jobs.

Malcolm Harris writes that ‘it reflects Silicon Valley’s short memory that [disgraced Theranos founder Elizabeth] Holmes compared herself to Jobs, not Hewlett or Packard, who ran a testing-instruments company’.³⁴ We disagree. Holmes had chosen the correct idol, because she was not interested in following in the footsteps of the men who actually built computers. She wanted to follow in the footsteps of the man who perfected the art of selling them. Before Jobs, smartphones such as the Blackberry were seen as the tools of overworked businessmen and social discontents. Jobs’ iPhone, by contrast, was a glitzy designer item, obviously an object of conspicuous consumption but also inheriting a marketing tradition that allowed those who

³² *Reign of Terror*, p. 200

³³ *Palo Alto*, p. 596

³⁴ *Palo Alto*, p. 574, footnote

could afford iPhones to still position themselves as rebels, dreamers, trendsetters. And a trend was indeed set – in 2025, it is virtually impossible to live in the United States without owning a smartphone, whether iPhone or Android. And the fact that Google has a location-data telescreen in so many of our pockets and purses really ought to terrify us far more than it does.

In *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, Shoshana Zuboff explains the meteoric rise of Google in the 21st century through a phenomenon she terms ‘the discovery of behavioral surplus’.³⁵ In her definition, behavioral surplus is any data collected throughout the use of a digital (cybernetic) platform which is not used to improve the platform for the end user. This surplus is instead used as the raw material to build predictive models of user behavior, initially for the purpose of more targeted advertising profiles than were possible under a pre-surveillance capitalism. It would be several years yet until Google opted to share this data with the NSA and the Terror State. When they did, under PRISM, the results were nothing short of catastrophic. The raw data and technical wizardry of the Cybernetic Market coupled with the bombs and guns of the Cybernetic State; it should not surprise us that Google’s preferred primary candidate ultimately triumphed in the 2008 US Presidential election.

This is what Google is, and this is what they taught Silicon Valley to be. American KKKapitalism has never acknowledged any god but money, and Google was making ungodly amounts of it. They did it all before Jobs made the smartphone a must-have consumer device. The implications are simply horrifying. Even Orwell, with all his bluster, bothsides-ism, and betrayal,³⁶ never considered that we would carry our telescreens with us at all times, nor that Silicon Valley would hire slot machine designers from Vegas to make the devices as addictive as possible, all the better to maximize behavioral data collection. Have you ever been sitting talking with a friend about something, and when the conversation ends and you open your phones, the topic of your conversation is the first recommended result? *How did the State really find Luigi Mangione?*

Before we proceed, there are three more points we must make. First, do not be fooled by the neoliberal assertion that we wanted these phones, that we chose this cyborg life. Smartphones metastasized from expensive toys to expensive necessities because capitalism saw a way to move organizational and technological expenses from their balance sheets to ours. This had the added bonus of creating new stable revenue streams of monthly service payments and

³⁵ *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, p. 74-82

³⁶ To echo Welles’ comments on Kazan – George Orwell was a rank misogynist who betrayed his friends to British intelligence. And having given names to the corrupt and authoritarian rulers of Britain, he wrote *1984*, which is a celebration of a rank misogynist who gives names to the corrupt and authoritarian rulers of Britain. And so no author who uses him as an example of moral fortitude and courageous truth-telling, as Zuboff does, can be recommended by us. We must add that he was a very fine writer.

frequent hardware updates, even before the ludicrous wealth available through surveillance capitalism. Second, do not be fooled, as Zuboff is, by Apple's claims to offer a privacy-focused alternative to Google's Android ecosystem. It's well understood in undergraduate CS classes that Android phones are so much cheaper than iPhones because the difference is subsidized by selling all of your data. A future where society bifurcates into those subject to Cybernetic surveillance and those wealthy enough to escape it is not a future that humanity can live in, even assuming Apple never succumbs to the forbidden temptation of behavioral surplus.

Third, do not be fooled by those who, in the coming years, will attempt to argue that this system is an invention of Trumpism, or at least a noble system perverted by Trumpism. This lie will most likely come from the Democratic Party, but it could come from anyone who only cries over children in cages when Trump occupies the throne. Never forget just how proud Kamala was to have received Dick Cheney's endorsement in 2024.

And so we have returned to 2025, the Year of the Absolute Fake. Our America is not the same America of a quarter-century ago, which was at its peak, but neither is it a break from that Empire's trajectory. Last year, Cheney Republicans and Trump Republicans duked it out for control of the Empire's future; Trump's victory was thus a victory for the nascent Cybernetic Fascism against the Terror State alliance of the Cybernetic State and Market. It is still too early to trace this fascism clearly, but we believe that we can manage a few key differences between the Cybernetics of Trump and Thiel and the Cybernetics of Cheney and Obama.

First, Cybernetic Fascism is suspicious of and hostile to the traditional forms of Cybernetic power. Trump's war against the "Deep State" includes the FBI and intelligence community; he courts the wealth and prestige of Silicon Valley while denying them the skilled foreign labor and cheap rare earth minerals needed to sustain and grow their power; his supporters are not capable of using (or owning) major social media sites without inducing mass migrations from more well-adjusted people, thus depriving him and his allies of a critical source of behavioral surplus. Time will tell whether these dynamics hold or whether Silicon Valley is ultimately able to adjust to the new normal; the authors are certain that in any case, Big Tech will follow the money as it always has.

Second, Cybernetic State and Market ideology both carry the assumption, usually unspoken but not always, that these systems will help the best nation thrive, and that the best nation is obviously America. Trump has no such faith. Trumpism is an attempt to violently restructure the world order to ensure perpetual US dominance *when the US is no longer capable of dominating the world through its intrinsic wealth, power, or capability*. It is the ideology of white male resentment on the global stage. We shall see whether this change ultimately makes the United States more or less powerful; the authors predict that as China continues to grow in

global stature as it eyes the title of world hegemon, Trumpism will be unable to do much to resist except inflict more violence on those within its borders it deems insufficiently American.

Third, and most importantly, is the relationship between Cybernetic Fascism and stability. Recall that Norbert's original Cybernetic dream was that of a liberal democracy augmented by the latest science and technology to ensure a perpetual stability in the face of Fascism and Communism. When this dream proved unable to keep the Vietnamese people in the perpetual stability that America had chosen for them, the dream morphed and metastasized. The dream of Friedrich Hayek was that of a hyper-capable free market, freed from the fetters of New Deal reforms, able to maintain the Efficient Market Hypothesis through the free exchange of price data and financial transactions. To do otherwise would invariably bring slowdowns and crashes, feared not so much for what they would do to the people but for the terror of non-optimal GDP growth. Today, in the form of Terror State politicians like Obama, Clinton, Biden and Harris, this *will to stability* can no longer promise that things will get better anytime soon, but it is adamant that refusing to listen to it will bring catastrophe. Not that it believes this, of course. Kamala was smiling as she certified Trump's 2024 victory on Jan 6.

Trump has no such will to stability. He might even have the opposite, a genuine *will to chaos*. Destabilization, like stabilization, is not inherently moral or immoral. Trump, however, deliberately cultivates chaos in all levels of society in order to create confusion and opportunity to achieve his goals, which are uniformly authoritarian, white supremacist, patriarchal, and above all self-serving. For him, unlike all of the Cybernetic tyrants we examined before him, *the uncertainty is the point*. It is not an obstacle to his goals; it is, in fact, the source of his power. It is why his supporters love him so much. In the United States prior to 2016, open bigotry was seen as a political liability in a nation that was naturally, inevitably, moving along history's supposed arc of justice. World war and Holocaust were the doing of Nazis, and we all knew America had beaten the Nazis. Then Donald Trump rode down an escalator, and suddenly anything is possible again.

CONCLUSION: THE MYTH OF ICARUS

Cybernetic systems are excited by military technology, security and defence. Still confident of his own indisputable mastery over them, man continues to turn them on. In so doing he merely encourages his own destruction. Every software development is a migration of control, away from man, in whom it has been exercised only as domination, and into the matrix, or cyberspace, 'the broad electronic net in which virtual realities are spun'...The matrix weaves itself in a future which has no place for historical man: he was merely its tool, and his agency was itself always a figment of its loop.

Sadie Plant, "The Future Looms: Weaving Women and Cybernetics"

O Solomon don't leave me here

Cotton balls to choke me

O Solomon don't leave me here

Buckra's arms to yoke me

Solomon done fly, Solomon done gone

Solomon cut across the sky, Solomon gone home.

Toni Morrison, *Song of Solomon*

There is another version of the myth.³⁷ Icarus does not plummet to his death, but neither does he hew to the mean. He vibrates, resonates, ascends...He knows that 'if you surrender to the air, you can *ride* it'.³⁸ He speaks the secret key harmonic of the universe and is rewarded for his boldness a miraculous transformation; rather than melting, his wings harden, become stronger and lighter, and he flies further and farther away, never to be seen by his father again.

What was it to be the son of Daedalus? Was Daedalus a good father? Did he have Icarus reading and writing at three, debating natural philosophy at six? Did he reduce the boy to tears with shouts and curses when he made a mistake in his recitations?³⁹ Were there secrets in his heart he knew he could not share with this man, this man who had attempted to murder his nephew (out of jealousy? rage? no, fear - fear of how high this boy might fly, how far he might go, where even crafty Daedalus could not follow)? As Toni Morrison has written,

The fathers may soar

*And the children may know their names.*⁴⁰

Daedalus – a father's idea. If only the boy had followed his advice, if only he had done as he was told, *if only he had allowed himself to be controlled!* From the perspective of the tyrant-father, there is no distinction between a son in flight and a son falling to his death...did he see the latter or was he blinded by Apollo's brilliance? Does it even matter? Icarus's fate, like Milkman's, is ambiguous, but that only means that we do not know how the story ends. Daedalus and Macon, Sr. looked to escape; Icarus and Macon, Jr. looked to fly. When a young girl takes her estrogen for the first time, she has no way of knowing how her transition will go; there will no shortage of doomsayers, even from trans girls like her, to tell her it's too late; the conditions are not right; she's not realistic about the possible results; she is not strong enough to live in this world as a woman, least of all a trans woman. *Lies, lies, forever and always lies*; but one thing is for certain. Icarus and Milkman have no destination; they know not where they're going or when they shall arrive. How could they possibly? They have surrendered to the air.

And so can you.

We have lost whatever hope we felt in 2008 and replaced it with the resolve we found in 2020. We were among the fools who attempted to 'pull Biden to the left' and we are deeply

³⁷ Like Camus' myth of Sisyphus, this is not a myth of the past, but a myth of a possible future.

³⁸ *Song of Solomon*. In order to retain the dramatic impact of this line, we will not cite its location in the text, but invite you to read it yourself if you have not already.

³⁹ As Leo Wiener raised his son Norbert. *The Prodigy*, p. 56-57.

⁴⁰ *Song of Solomon*, epigraph.

embarrassed that we ever believed such a thing might be possible. There is no redeeming the United States of America; the forces of KKKapital are too powerful, whatever system they exist within will necessarily be corrupted by them. Recall how Daedalus corrupted the Dancing Path of Ariadne into the monstrous prison of the Minotaur's Labyrinth. This is the true danger of the Cybernetic Hypothesis – it is happy to stabilize the system within acceptable parameters, *but it has no will to power beyond that will to stability*. And as we hope to have sketched, and as our Black neighbors have always known, in the long run, all American systems bend towards maximal financial exploitation.

What is to be done?

Daedalus is preparing for war with China. If this should occur, the death and devastation will make the guns of August 1914 look positively quaint. Daedalus knows this, he fears this, but he cannot stop the charge of the Bull King. Once upon a time in Germany, Rosa Luxemburg saw a war coming with the potential to doom the global socialist project. She attempted to organize a general strike to stop that Great War; she failed. After the war and the revolution it brought for Germany, the good patriotic socialists and liberals of the new Weimar Republic sicced the proto-Nazi *freikorps* on her. Luxemburg, who was Jewish, thus died a martyr's death. She was the Communist that the Nazis came for first. For the sake of the people of the United States, and for the world, we must succeed where she failed.

Our task must be to *destabilize the cybernetic war machine* as much as we possibly can; we outline three methods for doing so. Like Camus, we have an obvious preference, but we know all three will play a role in what is to come.⁴¹

There is the path of Ariadne. *This is by far the most dangerous*. Recall that Ariadne was responsible for leading the sacrificial children of Athens to their doom, until one day she said, no more. *To actively sabotage the cybernetic war machine from the inside*; the Nazis fear this so much because it poses such incredible danger to them. But you *must not be caught*. Recall Chelsea Manning, who hoped to serve as a cybernetic regulator of American power; for her courage in exposing a new generation of My Lai massacres to the American public, she was tortured in solitary confinement for almost a year and imprisoned for years longer. This was under Obama, who pardoned Manning at the end of his term to protect his own legacy; nothing of the sort can be expected under the current administration, or indeed from a Democratic Party which blames pro-Palestine protests for its loss in 2024. *Be careful*.

There is the path of Icarus. This is the path of those who wish to walk, no, fly, fly away from Omelas. *Quit your job at Google, at Meta, at Lockheed, at Raytheon, at Boeing, for the feds, for*

⁴¹ Also like Camus, our preference is for the path that presents the greatest opportunity to sleep with many beautiful women, although we think there's a bit more to it for us than that.

the oil companies, for all of the faces of KKKapital which we lack the space here to list...if you work for the cybernetic war machine, you can no longer claim innocence. And if you are not a member of this privileged minority, you must still kill that part of you which believes there was, is, or could be anything redeemable in the genocidal settler-colonial project which is the United States of America. It all must burn, so that the world does not. We cannot promise where you will land. But you will be free. It is not a matter of being careful; when you attempt to defend the moral abyss of American Empire, you will be corrupted, it will gaze back into you and rewire your deepest values to suit its own ends. But you are only trapped in this Labyrinth so long as you choose to comply. At any point, you are free to put down the butcher knife and become, not the Buddha perhaps, but a human being again.

And finally, at last, there is the path of Perdix. The nephew of Daedalus, he has been with us this whole time, hidden from sight. As a pupil of the master craftsman, he had invented the handsaw and mathematical compass at the tender age of twelve, and for this his uncle attempted to kill him by throwing him 'headlong down from the sacred hill of Minerva, pretending he'd slipped'.⁴² However, Pallas Athena

*caught him and turned him,
still in mid-air, to a bird and covered his body in feathers.
Nevertheless, the strength of his quick intelligence filtered
into his wings and his feet, and he stayed with his old name – Perdix.
The bird, however, can't lift its body far from the earth
or build its nest in the branches of trees or on mountainous crags.
It flutters close to the ground and lays its eggs in the hedgerows,
never forgetting that fall long ago and frightened of heights.⁴³*

These are not limitations. The Taoist *Zhuangzi* records various wonders, and it says,

In the bald and barren north, there is a dark sea, the Lake of Heaven. In it is a fish which is several thousand li across, and no one knows how long. His name is K'un. There is also a bird there, named P'eng, with a back like Mount T'ai and wings like clouds filling the sky. He beats the whirlwind, leaps into the air, and rises up ninety thousand li, cutting through the clouds and mist, shouldering the blue sky, and then he turns his eyes south and prepares to journey to the southern darkness. The little quail laughs at him, saying, "Where does he think he's going? I give a great leap and fly up, but I never get more than ten or twelve yards before I come down

⁴² *Metamorphoses*, 8.250-251

⁴³ *Metamorphoses*, 8.252-259

*fluttering among the weeds and brambles. And that's the best kind of flying anyway! Where does he think he's going?" Such is the difference between big and little...*⁴⁴

*...If wind is not piled up deep enough, it won't have the strength to bear up great wings. Therefore, when the P'eng rises ninety thousand li, he must have the wind under him like that. Only then can he mount on the back of the wind, shoulder the blue sky, and nothing can hinder or block him. Only then can he set his eyes to the south.*⁴⁵

The politics of mass action have a role to play in our struggle; but the winds which might power such a revolution blow only rarely – in Haiti in 1791, in France in 1792, in Mexico in 1910, in Russia in 1917. The Marxist-Leninists are the masters of mass action, and as anarchists, we salute our comrades and are ready to fight alongside them against the horrors to come. But their tools will not be our tools. Our way is subtler, our revolution truly permanent, our ambitions easier to realize because they are so much more immediate. *Feed our neighbors. Organize to protect the most vulnerable. Destabilize whatever injustice is within our reach. Grow like a rhizome, not like a tree.*⁴⁶ The winds which topple the Bastille blow oh so rarely; the winds which bind us to our neighbors in mutual obligation are all around us, for those with the eyes to see.

The myth of Perdix has come down to us alongside the myths of Daedalus, Ariadne, and Icarus. Writers interested in recounting the glory of the Mycenaean slave empire simply don't know what to do with him. And that is exactly what is required. *Become illegible to the State.* Tiqqun is correct to note that the Cybernetic Hypothesis demands total transparency and knowledge of the system it regulates. Like nonlinear differential equations, that which poses an unsolvable problem is either flattened into a solvable problem, or simply ignored. *Let them ignore you.* If they cannot see you, if they cannot comprehend you, it is that much harder for them to hurt you. As many have said on Trans Day of Visibility, visibility without justice is a most dangerous trap.

This is not doable for everyone, of course. Some of us will have to remain visible and legible, because sometimes that is the only way to do what must be done. Julian Assange has famously used the hacker handle Mendax; Edward Snowden, who distrusted Assange, called himself Verax.⁴⁷ We have examined five Daedali in this text – the visionary, the executor, the reformer, the pusher, and the father. We conclude with a Perdix with which to mock these men. Manning was a naïve kid attempting to do what she thought her fathers wanted; they could not kill her too publicly, so they hoped prison would do the job. They failed. We came so close

⁴⁴ *Chuang Tzu* [sic], p. 25

⁴⁵ *Chuang Tzu*, p. 24

⁴⁶ *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 5-11, 21

⁴⁷ *Reign of Terror*, p. 203

to losing Manning, but now she is found – *Chelsea Manning*, the prodigal Perdix, a blazing flame who lights the world immensely by her mere presence, a beacon of hope for all those scared children who find themselves within the Minotaur’s Labyrinth. *If you still draw breath upon this earth, then there is still time.* We invite you to fly in the craggy mountains with us and breathe the good air of Zarathustra and Kondiaronk.⁴⁸ Perhaps one day you, too, will cuckold Elon Musk.

⁴⁸ “I have spent six years reflecting on the state of European society and I still can’t think of a single way they act that’s not inhuman, and I genuinely think this can only be the case, as long as you stick to your distinctions of ‘mine’ and ‘thine’. I affirm that what you call money is the devil of devils; the tyrant of the French, the source of all evils; the bane of souls and slaughterhouse of the living. To imagine one can live in the country of money and preserve one’s soul is like imagining one could preserve one’s life at the bottom of a lake. Money is the father of luxury, lasciviousness, intrigues, trickery, lies, betrayal, insincerity, - of all the world’s worst behavior. Fathers sell their children, husbands their wives, wives betray their husbands, brothers kill each other, friends are false, and all because of money. In the light of all this, tell me that we Wendat are not right in refusing to touch, or so much as to look at silver?” Quoted in Graeber and Wengrow’s *The Dawn of Everything*, p. 54-55. These words are attributed to Kondiaronk, a great leader of the Wendat people at Michilimackinac, which is today called Mackinac Island by the settlers. They were published by a French traveler in 1703 and were the talk of Age of Enlightenment coffeehouse Europe; the far inferior words of Montesquieu, Voltaire, and Rousseau were inspired not by some vague ‘Western humanism’ but were instead an attempt to explain to their educated white audiences why, despite being freer, happier, healthier (save the apocalyptic ravages of pandemic after pandemic brought on by the European colonizers), more persuasive, and even taller, the native peoples of Turtle Island, now called North America, were still inferior to whitey. Given the influence of these philosophers on the Great French Revolution, whose energy was indeed “sufficient to sweep away the armies of the old regimes of Europe like straw” (*The Age of Revolution*, p. 72), we assert that all major liberatory movements which trace their history through this revolution are in fact the heirs and followers of the so-called ‘indigenous critique’ which Kondiaronk represented. We have much more to say on this, but we sadly lack the space in these margins in which to do so.

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