

THE AGE OF UNREASON?

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It is on the basis of a distinction between reason and unreason (passion, fantasy) that late-modern criticism has been able to articulate a certain idea of the political, the community, the subject—or, more fundamentally, of what the good life is all about, how to achieve it, and, in the process, to become a fully moral agent. Within this paradigm, reason is the truth of the subject and politics is the exercise of reason in the public sphere. The exercise of reason is tantamount to the exercise of freedom, a key element for individual autonomy. The romance of sovereignty, in this case, rests on the belief that the subject is the master and the controlling author of his or her own meaning.¹

Since Donald Trump and Jair Bolsonaro were elected, liberals have tried to put a name to what they are defending from these illiberal leaders. Reason is the value academic circles often settle for, while calling the present political crisis a “crisis of reason.” But, as John Roberts put it, in *The Reasoning of Unreason*, here, reason is something “given, held onto, and then lost, through the forces of reaction,”² not a concept whose meaning ought to be derived from its position in a constantly shifting symbolic matrix. It could be considered a provocation to say the term “reason” is somewhat equivalent to the “rules-based international order” popular with foreign policy actors, insofar as it seeks to recenter an increasingly unstable liberal order qua moral order, but it would not be unwarranted: “Universalist” moral principles “have fallen into disfavour” because “too often they have been pretexts for unilateral impositions upon others.”³ To borrow from Roberts, I would also resist the attempt to talk about a “loss of reason.” Rather than lost, reason “is being given a very different job.” This different job involves rendering weird white and cis pathologies as comprehensible politics, which it manages via appeals to the rational interests of a particular group, while recasting these particular interests as universal commitments.⁴ Unlike Roberts, I do not see these “radical particularisms” as easy to identify. On the contrary, it is difficult to draw a line between imperialism and universalism, because these projects, though formally antithetical, are materially entangled, not only because universalism is contiguous with imperialism, but because large-scale subjugation is not an aberrant form of “bourgeois reason,” but its

“functional expression:”⁵ Imperialism is the immanent horizon of universalist aspirations, and liberalism tends to rationalize concrete oppression for the sake of universal freedom. From this perspective, what we find rational, and by contradistinction irrational, has little to do with reason and a lot to do with how the conflict between universal rights and their fraught implementation is rationalized. Thus, I would not describe the present crisis as the work of unreason, but as the work of a type of political conservatism that cuts across the political spectrum, engulfing both left and right.

THE MEANING OF MGT

On April 2, 2023, a televised interview sparked passionate discussions about the “fascist irrationalism and ‘post-truth’ mythmaking” that define our era, to quote this journal’s editors call for papers. On *60 Minutes*, Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene told her stunned host, CBS journalist Leslie Stahl, that all Democrats are pedophiles. In the media frenzy that ensued, everyone rushed to deny the veracity of Greene’s statement—the literal content of the sentence—to argue that this is not factually true, that the Democrats are not pedophiles. But it is not important whether the statement is factual—politicians’ statements seldom are—what matters is that the statement articulates a political program.

“Won’t somebody please think of the children!” is a statement that evolved into a rhetorical tactic. When commenting on Bill Clinton’s 1997 appearance in a series of print ads and video spots in support of a group that identified itself as the Coalition for America’s Children, Lee Edelman argues that the appeal of “fighting for the children” is impossible to refuse:

Such “self-evident” one-sidedness—the affirmation of a value so unquestioned, because so obviously unquestionable, as that of the Child whose innocence solicits our defense—is precisely, of course, what distinguishes public service announcements from the partisan discourse of political argumentation. But it is also, I suggest, what makes such announcements so oppressively political [...] political insofar as the fantasy subtending the image of the Child invariably shapes the logic within which the political itself must be thought.⁶

I would suggest that the same logic is at work in Greene’s recent polemic. If futurity cannot be articulated in other terms, then the children are the future. This sentence establishes an identity, so that

one cannot be thought of without presuming the other: If you fail the children, you extinguish the future. No children, no future. The political message of “all Democrats are pedophiles” is not, in fact, that all Democrats are pedophiles, but that Democrats are stealing, stalling, or otherwise foreclosing the future. Greene’s statement may be read simply as “the Democrats are stealing our future,” but may also be more accurately qualified as “the Democrats are stealing the white future.” The Democrats are stealing the white future by being pro-immigration, or the Democrats are stealing the white future by putting the interests global finance (personified as the “International Jew”⁷) before the interests of American industry. All these elements may be incorporated into the metapolitical plot that tells us that all Democrats are pedophiles. When prompted to explain her statement, Greene went on to say, “The Democrats are pedophiles because they are sexualizing children.” What Greene means is that the Democrats are sexualizing children the wrong way, in a nonheteronormative manner. Greene has no problem with the “girling” of girls or the “boying” of boys: What she objects to is the modalities of sexual identity that would lead to nonreproductive futurity. In its coercive universalization—and I am paraphrasing Edelman here—the image of the Child,⁸ which is not to be confused with the lived experience of real children, namely queer or trans children, whose well-being is sacrificed at the altar of that image, expresses a perfectly coherent political program, even when said discourse is expressed in ways that are not readily legible as political. No wonder the other targets of the current cultural wars are female reproductive autonomy, gender nonconformity, migrant rights, and critical race theory.

PARANOID IDEATION

It is easy to sneer at MTG, but she is simply embellishing long-established truisms with an element of drama that, in turn, instills a sense of paranoid urgency to prompt involvement in public decision-making. Now, though it seems counterintuitive, there is a special affinity between probability and psychosis.⁹ Paranoia is not the opposite of reason, but an exacerbated version of it.¹⁰ As George E. Marcus notes, Paranoid ideation has an ambiguous relationship to rationality and logic, and is often “mistaken for or identified with the latter.”¹¹ From this perspective, the most influential fields of strategic thought, from classical economics to game theory, could be said to have “paranoid potential.” As a mode of social thought, paranoia is a pervasive cold-war legacy, not only mainstream, but wholly commonsensical. In her book, *Ugly Feelings*, literary theorist Sianne Ngai asks whether paranoia is a masculine prerogative, or a

distinctively male form of knowledge production. According to Ngai, whom I am paraphrasing, this is not to say that female paranoia does not exist, just that some forms of paranoia tend to be elevated to the status of theory, whereas others are dismissed as nothing but jealousy. Although going through your partner's email may be considered unhinged—an “ignoble emotionalism” as Ngai puts it—the elaborate ideation and excessive intellection that characterize the paranoid whose conjectures reach beyond the domestic setting tend to be associated with, and valorized as, a form of cognition. This “disposition to theorize” is nonetheless “aligned with paranoia,” albeit a paranoia that is defined not as “mental illness but as a species of fear based on the dysphoric apprehension of a holistic and all-encompassing system (...) anthropomorphized into a subject capable of understanding its enemies and dealing with them accordingly.”¹² As sociologist Colin Campbell notes, in the same way that paranoid ideation is not incompatible with a belief in strong evidence, scientific and religious outlooks are not behaviorally incongruous. Campbell argues that cults and cultic phenomena provide us with examples of groups whose participants “have adopted a problem-solving perspective while defining conventional religious institutions and beliefs as inadequate.”¹³ One of the most important ingredients of cultic culture is “deviant science and technology,” but those who “are impressed by the demonstrable superiority of science and as a consequence desire to hold a scientific outlook” are seldom “in a position to distinguish between what are orthodox and what are heterodox scientific views. They may, much the same as MTG, end up believing in ‘Jewish space lasers’ because of the convincing scientific ‘evidence.’”¹⁴

FASCISM, UNREASON, AND POLITICAL MODERNITY

We are often told that fascism appeals to unreason. Umberto Eco argued in his often-quoted essay, “Eternal Fascism,” that Fascism does not have a political philosophy, only rhetoric. Its features cannot be organized into a system. In *The Authoritarian Personality*, a widely read study published in 1950, a team of researchers—Theodor Adorno, Else Frenkel-Brunswik, Daniel Levinson, and Nevitt Sanford—developed and popularized the “F scale” (*F* for fascist). Created to gauge the psychological predisposition to fascism among the democratic citizenry, the F scale charted the potential for the devolution of individual and autonomous liberal subjects into an irrational, frenzied mob. Equipped with a set of criteria with which to identify fascist characteristics, the postwar era individualized and pathologized fascist violence, thereby

depoliticizing it. By the late 1950s, fascism became another generic term that denoted an undifferentiated evil, and left the postwar consensus to settle on the idea that fascism was a negation or distortion of politics, not one of its constitutive features. The current resurgence of fascism under figures such as Jair Bolsonaro, Rodrigo Duterte, and Donald Trump has been narrated along these lines, as a descent into lunacy or an outburst of unfocused anger, spilling into the public sphere, running rampant over middle-class civility. But events such as Biden's nomination of Elliot Abrams, who oversaw mass murders and torture in Central America, to the US Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy, undermine all attempts to narrate Trump's presidency as an aberration divorced from American norms.

Fascism is not a form of lunacy or a descent into mass psychosis. It is not a political anomaly, nor is it irrational. As Achille Mbembe argues, however genocidal, "such figures of sovereignty are far from a piece of prodigious insanity."¹⁵ The epoch we call the Age of Enlightenment devised a system of justice for the few, while erecting a system of *justified* discrimination for the many. The alleged "lack of reason" of colonized people defined their status as subhuman who may *justly* be oppressed. This is the paradox of modernity: Whereas the modern revolutions claim that they fought to eliminate distinctions of class, caste, rank, and status, modernity is also the epoch that instituted the concept of racial difference. The Enlightenment's set of inconsistent claims—all human beings are equal; some human beings may legally be owned as property—is usually brushed aside as the last gasp of a premodern order, a residue or vestige of medieval savagery that bled into modernity. But race and racism, unlike xenophobia or sectarianism, are "distinctly modern ideas,"¹⁶ and white supremacy, as philosopher Charles Mills contends, is the system that "has made the modern world what it is today."¹⁷ The history of modernity is thus "not so much about the progress of reason as it is about *the history of reason's unreason*"¹⁸ From this perspective the question I would like to ask is: what must remain unspeakable for Western representations of reason, rationality, and civility to "sustain their power of universal reiteration in contemporary political theory?"¹⁹

THE MEANING OF GAZA

Orson Welles famously quipped that whether a story has a happy ending depends on where you decide to stop telling it. As researcher Emily Dische-Becker states, Israel represents the "happy ending"²⁰ Germany conjured for the tragic story the country engendered.

Israel represents the undoing of the holocaust. The history of the country's founding becomes thus a story about the righting of wrongs: No wonder Germans find it hard to divest from it.

There is an element of sincerity to collective culpability. One can commiserate with a generation who grew tormented by the question of "what would I have done had I lived under Nazism?" now seizing the moment to prove they would stand with the Jews. Because empathy is predicated on identification, the loss of Jewish life in Israel feels like a moral failure to Germany. Palestine becomes an unutterable word because it puts pressure on the established narrative. To acknowledge the plight of Palestinians opens up the terrifying possibility that a different story may hide behind the official one, a story in which Israel does not represent the righting of wrongs but the wronging of wrongs. This unsettles the atoning work the country believes it deserves congratulations for. The term genocide, though politically fraught, carries a sense of moral urgency: A genocide demands a response. German authorities want to make those who use the term to describe the current events in Gaza liable to criminal charges, because its usage sheds an unflattering light on Germany's moral bankruptcy and its complicity in heinous crimes. This is where the story changes: It is no longer a story about the Israel-Hamas conflict, though it intersects with it. This is a story about the ongoing efforts to re-narrate the struggle *against* anti-semitism as a struggle *for* imperialism.

One should also note that in Germany, Jewish people are not afforded political identities. Although the Jewish community holds widely differing views on Israel, Germany only welcomes Jewish voices that speak for the country's foreign policy. Otherwise they are out of line. As Emily Dische-Becker points out, 30% of canceled events in Germany involved Jewish authors and artists.²¹ This is the case because the conflation of Zionism (or support for Israel) and Jewish identity makes room for non-Jewish Zionist Germans to pose as its primary victims while pushing Jews aside. Concerns for Jewish safety are often feigned and insincere, but may appeal to the well-meaning. As Donald Kinder and Tali Mendelberg argue, principles are best understood in terms of how they are "put to use," how they are employed, and for what ends. Prejudice is always expressed in a language that majority populations find familiar and compelling; that is, racial animosity is always expressed in the language of principle.²² In a country laden with a harrowing history, anti-anti-semitism became a convenient way to indulge in sadism and

sociopathy. This is also why, from the outset, the rhetorical function of accusations of antisemitism in Germany could be best understood through the way they were being put to use: to disguise racism as anti-racism.

Outside of Germany, we find a similar mindset. Writing for *The Guardian*, novelist Howard Jacobsen argues that “charging Jews with genocide is to declare them guilty of precisely what was done to them.” Suggesting war crimes are being committed represents the “sadistic triumphalism” of antisemites who “feel they have their man at last.” To argue that Israel’s actions engendered the antagonism that resulted in the October 7 attacks constitutes, in Jacobsen’s view, a breach of the “decorum” that “in the past has marked us out as civilized.”²³ But the geopolitical rivalries between the West and its adversaries do not map easily onto the moral boundaries between civilization and barbarism. In his *Guardian* article, Jacobsen goes on to quote John Gray’s *Straw Dogs* “those who suffer irreparable wrongs are rarely, if ever, forgiven.” But John Gray is in fact describing a lynching in 19th century Georgia. To Jacobsen’s question “when will Jews be forgiven the Holocaust?” one could thus retort: “when will Palestinians be forgiven the Nakba?” Consciousness, Gray concludes, “blesses cruelty and injustice—as long as their victims can be quietly buried.” This is the reason why, as Judith Butler argued in the article “The Compass of Mourning” for LRB, that which would warrant discussion cannot be discussed: The very idea that a discussion ought to take place renders you a “moral failure complicitous in hideous crimes.”²⁴ Is *Gaza*, what must remain unspeakable for Western representations of reason, rationality, and civility to “sustain their power of universal reiteration in contemporary political theory?”²⁵

The meaning of Gaza, today, and whether the victims may be quietly buried, hinges on whether the holocaust was an anomaly, a distortion or negation of modernity, or one of its constitutive features. If the holocaust was a singularity, Israel and the post-war order represent the restoration of the moral project of modernity. If the holocaust was informed and influenced by colonial violence, and the genocidal practices it unleashed over vast territories, it becomes impossible to deny that behind the moral order of modernity a *racial order* remains hidden. From this perspective, the holocaust was not a *Zivilisationsbruch*, but the very essence of Western civilization. Delinking National Socialism from other modalities of nationalism and their legacies of extrajudicial bloodshed, deportation,

differential allocation of resources, racialized citizenship, or the activation of murderous mobs, just gives the victors a pass.

The word “genocide” was coined by the Polish-Jewish jurist Raphael Lemkin, who used the neologism to pursue a convention outlawing it. The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (CPPCG), or Genocide Convention, was the first human rights treaty ratified by the General Assembly of the United Nations, on December 9, 1948. African-Americans and left-leaning political activists, as Anson Rabinbach details, “saw the Genocide Convention as an opportunity to address the issue of lynching in the American South.” The Civil Rights Congress published a petition titled, *We Charge Genocide; The Crime of Government against the Negro People*.²⁶ This petition was presented to the United Nations in December 1951, only to be immediately derided as Soviet propaganda by the US State Department, which, under Eisenhower, went on to derail civil rights efforts and abort the discussion by deeming it “anti-American.” Even Lemkin, Rabinbach argues, “viewed the looming controversy over race as a potentially destructive force, dooming support for his Convention”²⁷ and he went on to recommend severing any ties between the framing of genocide and the struggle for civil rights. The result was to minimize the broader question of white supremacy, which, as Charles W. Mills argues, remained unseen as a “political system,” and is still portrayed as just the cultural backdrop against which “other systems, which we are to see as political,” such as social democracy or fascism, play out.²⁸ This is the reason that the defining ideological question, in Germany in particular, and in the Global North in general, is whether you see “Enlightenment values,” traditionally known as “Western values,” as a bulwark against fascism, or working in tandem with it. Tied to this question is the subsidiary question of the meaning of political modernity.

NAPOLEON IN JERUSALEM

In 1779, during his campaign in Egypt and Ottoman Palestine, which marked the start of modern European colonialism in the Middle East, Napoleon Bonaparte published an edit urging all the “Jews of Asia and Africa to gather under his flag in order to re-establish the ancient Jerusalem.” Napoleon’s troops were defeated in Acre (modern Akko), thus the promise of a Jewish state in the Middle East never materialized. A “Letter to the Jewish Nation from the French Commander-in-Chief Buonaparte,” probably a forgery, emerged in 1940, leading historians such as Zeev Sternhell to dismiss the episode as “an

oddity.” Napoleon was later credited with Jewish emancipation in the territories conquered during the Napoleonic wars, the abolishment of religious persecution, and granting the Jewish population equal rights as citizens and equality before the law. But his edit also manifests the desire to establish a French presence in the Middle East, hence pointing to the entangled history of Liberalism and Imperialism, joined at the hip as both were born. This, again, is the paradox of modernity: Emancipation and colonization are not antithetical projects, politically speaking. And, Israel represents both simultaneously: an emancipatory project for the Israeli citizenry and its diasporic supporters, and a colonial project for the besieged Palestinians, living under occupation.

The current efforts to re-narrate the struggle *against* anti-semitism as a struggle *for* imperialism also have historic precedents. In an article for LRB which details how postwar Germany found it easy to reconcile its unreconstructed and virulent antisemitism with its enthusiastic support for Israel, Pankaj Mishra examines the 1960 meeting between Konrad Adenauer, then chancellor of West Germany, and David Ben-Gurion. While pledging to invest in the country, Adenauer describes Israel as a “*fortress of the West.*” As the cold war intensified, Adenauer, Mishra sustains, became “the most important supplier of military hardware to Israel in addition to being the main enabler of its economic modernization.”²⁹ The “exchange structure specific to German-Israeli relations” would thereafter involve “moral absolution of an insufficiently de-Nazified and still profoundly antisemitic Germany in return for cash and weapons.”³⁰

This exchange structure was reiterated recently when, in her address to the Knesset, in 2008, Angela Merkel said that Israel’s right to exist “is and remains” a “raison d’état,” for Germany.³¹ “Raison d’état” may be somewhat unfamiliar to English speakers, and is a seventeenth century term that sits comfortably beside *realpolitik*: It simply means that national interests may override all other considerations of a legal or moral kind. In 2015, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s 2015, suggested in no uncertain terms that the holocaust was the brainchild of the Mufti of Jerusalem, Amin al-Husseini, instead of being Hitler’s idea.³² This could be considered his symbolic gift to Germany. After the October 7 attacks, Israeli minister Nir Barkat, Andrew Roberts, and Douglas Murray publicly stated that the Hamas fighters are worse than the SS, because, allegedly, the SS felt guilt about the crimes they committed, whereas Hamas fighters rejoiced.³³ Karl Lauterbach, the current health

minister, retweeted Murray, who was also praised by Karin Prien, Minister of Education, Science and Culture of Schleswig-Holstein. Perhaps unsurprisingly, those who contend that comparing the holocaust to colonial genocides minimises the enormity of the crimes committed, routinely *compare it* to the Hamas attack, and insist on using the term *Zivilisationsbruch* to refer to October 7. To put the carnage Hamas unleashed, however abhorrent, on a par with the Holocaust is just one step away from saying the SS were good lads who, led astray, committed some bad deeds. But they fought the Bolsheviks, who were the real enemy. Free of guilt, at long last, the German right can indulge its worst racist instincts. Wallowing in guilt, sections of the left do exactly the same. And, in this implausible place, they meet. There are also those who accept war crimes are being committed but find it untactful to mention them. They believe that focusing on Israel's infractions, be they real or imagined, yields hatred against Jews, and can only be motivated by hatred of Jews. Palestinian lives do not matter - those who advocate for Palestinian rights must be feigning their concern—and are just a convenient ploy to sow hatred and antisemitism. In this paranoid vision, it is hatred of Jews, and not the accessibility of streaming, that draws youth protests and student encampments. From this perspective, the thematisation of the war on Gaza is always “excessive” and all forms of empathy immensely “suspicious.”

In his essay, “The War on Education—in Gaza and at Home,” Alberto Toscano describes how “right-wing anti-diversity activist Christopher Rufo” created a playbook for “peeling mainstream liberalism away from an anti-colonial and socialist Left.”³⁴ Rufo posted this plan on X (formerly Twitter): “Conservatives need to create a strong association between Hamas, BLM (Black Lives Matter), DSA (Democrats Socialists of America), and academic “decolonization” in the public mind. Connect the dots, then attack, delegitimize, and discredit. Make the center-left disavow them. Make them political untouchables.” Weaponizing surreal claims, lawfare, and state-sanctioned abuse, these ideologically incoherent and grievance-besotted attempts to “associate diversity with antisemitism” could be described as an anti-intellectual effort to build reactionary alliances by identifying theory itself as the “breeding grounds of seditious conduct.”³⁵

Apologetic depictions, revisionist history, the humanization of SS leadership, and ultimately, the rehabilitation of Nazism, are not just a rhetorical operation, but a political project to recruit the rhetoric

of liberal values, in order to implement an illiberal agenda. With Russia standing tall as the greatest existential threat to Western democracy, the public was already primed to side with Israel. For both Joe Biden and Ursula von der Leyen, the meaning of Hamas and the meaning of Putin are the same: Both are waging a war on Western values. Thus, the response must be the same: to fight yet another existential war for Western Civilization in The Middle East. This makes the oppression of racialized minorities appear as the desirable outcome of a struggle, which claims to represent a progressive cause (anti-antisemitism), but is ultimately a struggle against democracy and pluralism, fought on behalf of the bitter and insular anti-universalism of mainstream opinion-makers. From this perspective, one way to understand the unbridled support for Israel is to see it as the expression of a wounded narcissism, unable to divest itself from a pleasurable investment in its (increasingly besieged) claim to universality.

EVIL AND UNREASON

In her response to the Holocaust and attendant Nazi atrocities, Hannah Arendt set the stage for postwar debates by stating that that “the problem of evil would be the fundamental problem of postwar intellectual life in Europe.”³⁶ In his seminal work, *After Evil: A Politics of Human Rights*, Robert Meister argues that “political transitions are not just new beginnings” but also “survivor stories.” As Meister contends, “Pauline Christianity gave universal meaning to the experience of Jewish suffering without assuming responsibility for it.” Instead, the survivors get to enjoy a new beginning: Today’s dominant view of humanism is not addressed to “victims who would become revolutionaries but, rather, to beneficiaries who do not identify with perpetrators” and can, as a result, conceive of themselves as “would-be rescuers.”³⁷

As John Roberts details, Post-World War II reconstruction was predicated on the idea that the defeat of Nazism meant the defeat of evil, the victory of humanism, and the renewal of a universalist legacy.³⁸ After 1945, Western democracies “embark on a massive re-assimilation of the debate on “evil” with post-World War II reconstruction predicated on the idea that the defeat of Nazism meant the victory of humanism and the renewal of a universalist legacy. But the Allied fight against fascism was in fact a “fight to restore a set of older imperialist global arrangements,” which only later “*became* the struggle against fascism.”³⁹ The concept of “evil” and its attendant irrationality relieved the pressure on bourgeois complicity with “pre-war

race ideologies and reactionary forms of social order.”⁴⁰ The alleged “incomprehensibility” of the holocaust marks it out as a singularity: To this day, the discussion in Germany is predicated on a differential logic that contrasts Nazi crimes, deemed irrational by virtue of their uneconomical nature, and colonial crimes, deemed rational because they are driven by economic interests. But to fight “evil” is also a way to rationalize the limits of politics, and clearly delineates its outside.

To return to Marjorie Taylor Greene by way of conclusion, I would like to suggest that sentences such as “the democrats are pedophiles” and “the Arabs are antisemitic” share more than a rhetorical similarity, in that both give reason the same task. That task is to renegotiate the social contract by calling for the disenfranchisement of gender non-conforming parties in the case of MTG, or by calling for the disenfranchisement of racialized minorities in the case of the German punditry. Rather than focusing on the distinction of reason/unreason I suggest seeing both as examples of conservative politics, insofar as both “work to affirm a structure,” to establish a moral order, from which a social order may be derived. To fight “evil” is to fight the good war. But to fight “evil” is also a way of disciplining inconvenient or destabilizing facts: “Evil” cannot be reasoned with, it must be exorcised. In each of these cases, the discourse is driven by the threat of the loss of identity (sexual, national, moral), and in each of these cases, the discourse functions as a form of ideological containment that designates its outside. We could conclude, together with affect theorist Lauren Berlant, that the attachments that help reproduce what is most damaging in the world are at the same time those that hold the world together as a coherent representation. Giving up one’s attachments, however cruel or toxic, would mean giving up the world and one’s position in it. Here, the political is best understood as the space within which we experience social reality, in the form of a fantasy: “The fantasy, precisely, of form as such, of an order, an organization, that assures the stability of our identities as subjects and the coherence of the Imaginary totalizations through which those identities appear to us in recognizable form.”⁴¹ Alternatively we could say that it is not unreason that haunts contemporary politics, but—and here I am extrapolating from Cathy Caruth’s description of trauma—our public sphere is haunted by the symptoms of a history that we could not entirely process. Instead we become possessed by it.⁴²

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- 3 Kenneth R. Westphal, "Enlightenment, Reason and Universalism: Kant's Critical Insights," *Studies in East European Thought* 68, no. 2–3 (2016): 127–148.
- 4 Roberts, *The Reasoning of Unreason*, 5.
- 5 Roberts, *The Reasoning of Unreason*, 5.
- 6 Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 2.
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- 8 Edelman, *No Future*, 2.
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- 10 Evelyn Fox Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), 121–22.
- 11 George E. Marcus, *Paranoia Within Reason* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), 2.
- 12 Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2005), 299.
- 13 Colin Campbell, *The Cult, the Cultic Milieu and Secularization* (Lanham: AltaMira Press, 2002), 19.
- 14 Campbell, *The Cult, the Cultic Milieu and Secularization*, 19.
- 15 Mbembe, "Necropolitics," 14.
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