

POSTCULTURE

Richard Appignanesi

The Indian-American sociologist, Arjun Appadurai, argues that we should consider 'the human preoccupations that shape the future as a cultural fact'. By conceiving the future as specific cultural form, 'we will be better able to place within this scheme more particular ideas about prophecy, well-being, emergency, crisis, and regulations'. This begs the question: what is culture?

Do not trust anyone who speaks of culture without first defining it. Pronouncements on culture seldom if ever survive the test of this golden rule. The reason is apparent. Any attempt to define culture at once founders on the reefs of eclectic plurality. Culture is not reserved only for ethnographic designation. There is a pop culture, another of high culture, a New Age culture, a culinary culture, a culture of violence, a culture of rogue bankers, and so forth into endless particularist multitude. It demonstrates taxonomy chiefly by the rival incompatible differences within itself. The word culture attaches itself promiscuously to every sort of manifestation. We might pointlessly object to many of these usages of culture as being superficial, misapplied or invalid. It might indeed be true but fruitless to say that culture has entirely succumbed to nominalism. We will yet have to satisfy the golden rule of trustworthy definition. Where in all this termitary of cultures is the culture which can bear universal sense? Is there some unacknowledged template of culture which answers universally to all its unruly factions?

It would seem there is none. How can there be a single definition of culture when it disintegrates even at micro-level? Nor are we better served at the macro-level. Judeo-Christian, Islamic and other such grand narrative cultures decompose into the bloodiest, irreconcilable schisms routinely witnessed in actuality. Of course, these macro-cultures ought rightly to be called civilisations, a term often paired with culture. Civility once had the

sense we now invest in culture; but there is more at stake in this change than a preferred mode of expression.

Culture emerged from the original twin connotations of the Latin word *cultus*, meaning both to 'till the soil' and 'worship'. Culture and ritual are the obvious conjunct prerequisites – I would say technologies – essential to the material and spiritual foundations of civilisation. Cultivation of nature implies a transcendent dissociation from it in urban culture as a tributary of ever-expanding civilisation. By the time of Roman philosopher and statesman, Cicero, culture had already taken its accepted sense of personal cultivation which sets one's proper civility apart from the plebeian mob and the yonder barbarian. It is a culture of the urbane; the cult of transcendent self-tillage. Roman classical civilisation made evident a distinction between the inner spirit of culture and the vulgate public one, a separation between the moral and material domains of culture; and for the first time specified its opposition to the falseness of civilisation. Civilisation was judged unnatural, degenerate, a fall from the original Golden Age of humanity. Culture has proceeded ever since in this familiar vein of nostalgia for a genuinely restored 'state of nature' while committed technologically to its extirpation. But this is already culture privatised by civilisation and endowed with an aura of utopian antiquity, our unattainable future-past, so to speak.

One thing not normally associated with this immemorial nostalgia for naturally organic culture is the dread foreknowledge that culture stands temporarily as the most fragile human ecology. The anxiety is experienced defensively by migrants who sense their culture will not endure transport to another. One's domestic culture discloses its frailty at the very moment of exposure to wider horizons. It is brought home to those who have left it that their culture destines them to a persecutory burden. Migrants, of which I count myself one by origin, know very well, and often bitterly resent, that their culture of provenance has failed them, and has left them orphaned exiles and refugees. Their place in a host culture is that of guest accommodated in terms of ambivalent sufferance against which it is folly for them to transgress. My Italian forbears in their small Montreal enclave gave me to understand, early and not in so many words, the debt of gratitude we owed our hosts. I had from them the other sense of forbear, the lesson of forbearance. Being 'nearly American' on the soil of America offers best rescue to the immigrant who responds to the gift of allegiance

and is transformed by it, so they felt. I set aside for now the uncertainty: was their identity thereby severely diminished, even lost?

The question remains of culture's singular integrity which can survive distinct and even inimical frontier-line differences. I need not belabour the point that culture is divisive. One can only speak of culture by speaking from an already stationed culture. Culture assumes its identity negatively by not being someone else's. Its meaning can forgo definition because it is presumed obvious by instantiation. Culture thereby gains its fissile nature and its disposition to irredentism. Odd though it might at first seem, multiculturalism could be said an understanding of what culture is – if we are alert to the irony that it cannot be a policy of benign remedy or a politically correct solution to intercultural hostilities, but a mere redundant statement of the very problem itself of culture, its alienable nature.

We are perhaps a little nearer to understanding that a definition of culture resides precisely in its power of indefinability. A definition of culture may well be that which is lost to the desiderata of global civilisation. Such a likelihood, with its explicit threat of homogenisation posed to culture's native reserves of diversity, might help explain why civilisation is now a term in disfavour among theoreticians committed to salvaging culture exactly from that progressive cost of fast-forward adaptation to global civilisation. There is inadmissible certainty in this camp that the end result of a techno-evolutionary civilisational process will leave only a taxidermic simulacrum of culture. Ecumenical credence is therefore invested in culture when it is instead more likely that civilisation alone can provide the stimulant to ecumenical accommodation. Jubilation, if this were absolutely so; but it is not. Civilisation and culture do not make for a comfortable hand-in-glove fit. On the contrary, the erosion of culture's fabric bares through to the visible manipulations of globalised civilisation. Culture does not require civilisation for its initiative but depends on the skills of community patterned on memory. It textures the existential uncertainties of what we call tradition. Culture is that which is left over after civilisation's failure to face the impermanence of human endeavour. The problem can be condensed in a telling equation:

civilisation produces the citizen: culture creates the communal subject.

Both representations are opposed by and to the bare historically irreducible human being (not to be confused with the nominal human individual).

I lean here on Heidegger's naming of *Dasein* (being-there) which is the human entity – 'that Being for which Being is a problem' – who is partly possessed by and yet distinct from the categories of science. This existential being-in-the-world resists captivity in the abstractions of theory. The facts of history turn inwards in actual existing beings and become wayward natures. Jean-Paul Sartre tells us that our needs, our passions, our most abstract thoughts are '*always outside of themselves toward*' (his emphasis), and by toward he intends an 'impulse toward objectification'. Existence does not mean 'a stable substance which rests in itself, but rather a perpetual disequilibrium, a wrenching away from itself with all its body'. What does existence in culture purport, then? 'The world is outside; language and culture are not inside the individual like stamps registered by his nervous system. It is the individual who is inside culture and inside language; that is, inside a special section of the field of instruments.' Culture, in our ability to manifest it at all, restricts our horizon of consciousness. It impedes consciousness of the total life-world.

Sartre does not foreclose pessimistically on culture as only rigidly restrictive. He is saying that culture perforce externalises our own limits on what is deemed culturally permissible and can thereby appear an impediment, a blind-spot obstacle to our fulfilment in the total life-world. But he has also indicated that culture is not 'in' us, not an essentially inhering loop from which we cannot escape: which clearly suggests that it must to some conscious degree also be electively optative. There is always some potential spur to conscious intention which permits us at any moment to opt out of cultural restriction. It will of course require maverick privilege to do so; but even so, we still need to know what sharpness to one's conscious intention must be delivered before that 'inspired' privilege can be brought to manoeuvre. Optative or restrictive – these two opposed and incompatible prospects of culture are in their own way future-orientated. But the future – whereto?

Let us step back for a moment and take a benign view of our current electronic regime. Digital culture appears blessed to its evangelists by its resources of instantaneity which promise an ecumenical utopia. Users embedded in that culture are themselves being evolved by it into multi-

tasking and cognitively enhanced sifters of universal information. The good news is twofold: a potential leap forward in consciousness evolution and a collectivity of networked intelligences far more apt than ever to ameliorate the world. Optimism of this sort is still attempting to run on the depleted fossil fuel of culture.

Matthew Arnold's Victorian idea of liberal education had supposed that knowledge of the best in culture is per se discriminatory of what makes for one's betterment in society. Is it a 'dead white man's' outmoded notion? Today's neoliberal view of cyberculture differs absolutely from the past. It is no longer individual self-cultivation of knowledge which interests the networker who is by definition collaborative. The user is immanent or in the current lingo 'plugged in' to the cybersystem of collective knowledge. There can be no calculable effect of 'self-improvement' on consumers of knowledge but only their absorption in an ever-widening loop of online information. Nor is it sensible to speak of a real 'interface' with a replicant system whose outer reaches are trans-individual and a-temporal. Here the bad news starts.

We are liable to forget that cyberculture happens also to host criminal deceit, the dark net of perversity, the cellular contagion of Salafi-jihadist terrorism. The suicidal Islamist might appear exceptional, disconnected from the normal world, and yet instantly available online to collaborative imitations. Resemblance to communal life by such publicly occult means of conjuration – what else is that but a new form of shamanism. Paul Virilio names this sort of magic, far more pernicious in its digital regalia, hyperterrorism. Hysteria will inevitably preside as the result of audio-visual paralysis. Virilio: 'The saying goes that "hysteria is the enemy of Time". If so, the real time of terror relayed in a loop is most definitely "hysterical" and it is the time of globalisation as a whole, whether economic, political or strategic. The time required for reflection has been outdone; the time of the conditioned reflex is the order of the day of grand terrorism.' Culture is fatally vulnerable to the seduction of digitally hyperrealised community. I am not insensitive to the benefits that cyberculture has conferred upon the world, the advances in science and industry, the blessings that far outweigh the egregious evils – taking the adjective to mean in its archaic duality, as it should, 'shockingly bad or

good', for such is the two-sided case of cyberculture, that it is modernity's *pharmakon*, simultaneously poison and remedy.

Existence can for the first time in history imagine itself immaterially socialised in virtual reality. This is certainly a 'first' in history and is allied to the illusion of an 'end' of history prevailing among an ill-assorted cast of neoconservatives, Christian and Islamist ideologues. It has also induced a global façade of universal culture – which does not mean that culture is everywhere turning the same but is everywhere claiming its 'human rights' to inalienable difference by appeal to the spectre of universal validation. Universality of this kind rests on a paradoxical situation. Cultural diversity can pursue its objective of ecumenical tolerance in apparent quarantine from a universal civilisation of technological levelment. But they are both effectively complicit and twinned in the fashionable code name, hyperreality. I prefer simply to call it postculture. Nor does my postulate spell the 'end' of culture. Rather, it suggests a spectral after-life of culture, a wearisome life-like prolongation gauged by a pervasive sense of terror – a terror, note well, from which the actualisation of terrorism derives and benefits. I stress here, to be clear, that the 'terror' I speak of concerns the invasive undercurrent tinnitus of panic in the everyday – a 'culture of panic', if you will – of which terrorism in its jihadist occasions is but an epiphenomenon. Tele-communication takes priority in what Virilio calls the 'interoperability of weaponry' today: 'Now, with the Information Revolution, calibration of public opinion and politically correct standardisation no longer go far enough. They must be topped up with the emotional synchronisation of the hordes, a process in which terror must be instantaneously felt by all, everywhere at once, here and there, on the scale of a global totalitarianism.'

But I have left out of my account the aboriginality of culture in which presumably its definition is found. Consider this idea proposed by Jean-Paul Sartre: 'What we call freedom is the irreducibility of the cultural order to the natural order.' Sartre introduces us to an infrangible line of maintenance which separates culture from nature. This is our horizon of freedom which has no causal, material or any empirical support of evidence. It is for this very reason an irreducible line of consciousness which situates us in being unnatural. To speak colourfully, I might say that human being is nature's one admission of unnatural perversion.

Sartre has also provided a minimally negative definition of culture. He specifies that culture in consequence does not permit a 'return to nature'. The re-entry of nature into culture can only occur by artifice of ideology. Ideological revisionism of this sort is easily spotted at work, digging below the parapet line of culture to expose the natural foundations of human behaviour. It will claim to have struck a fundamental invariable unconscious, either the psychical one of Freudian doctrine or the genetic other of socio-biology, to which culture is a mere secondary additive. These reductionist ideologies do not consider that our access to nature is granted to us solely by way of what culture has made of it. This is true of the Kalahari Bushman as it is for the Wall Street stockbroker, whatever their differences of adaptation. They have each fabricated a 'nature' which the technologies of their culture strive to render 'suitable to purpose'. Culture is precisely this equipping of nature. We have possession of conscious insight into nature which is unrecognisable to nature itself. There is indeed strictly no nature at all except in its cultivation by ideology. Nature does not know existence as a problem. Human being is alone the entity for whom being is a problem. And we have given to that inexistent problem the consciousness of nature. And our bonus is culture.

So, where do we finally stand with culture? Wittgenstein advised submitting certain words to mental hygiene: 'Sometimes an expression has to be withdrawn from language and sent for cleaning – and then it can be put back into circulation'. 'Culture' has to be withdrawn and put into dry-cleaning for renovation. Meanwhile, I suggest that we mark culture's suspension from use by affixing 'post' to it. Postculture, like a receipt from the cleaners, will serve to question our trust. Who is charged with the cleaning?

Vice and Virtue

Postculture risks being another declamatory term of fashion. To my knowledge I am the first to introduce postculture within a frame of existential analysis. Postculture is an afflicted situation indisposed to admit itself as such. Knowledge of its own irrecoverable condition has ceased to be available to it. Where is the positioning for a secured awareness of culture? Postculture's indefinable nature stems from a withdrawal of

meaning in the psychical substructure of culture. What has caused this withdrawal? Our search for 'causes' has become a habit of existential crisis to which we are all addicted. This mode of forensic frenzy which seems to me characteristic of postmodernity has contrived to bring forth the diagnostic term, hyperreality, the simulacrum of reality 'more real than real' interchangeable with postculture.

How are postculture and terrorism converging towards amalgamation which might initially have appeared tangential? I have abridged these convergences as the Seven Deadly Virtues of postculture, parables of a kind, which I shall detail below.

Seven Deadly Virtues? What do I mean by this odd inversion of Christianity's normatively attributed Seven Deadly Sins? How can a virtue be said to be deadly, and indeed, accounted a sin? A deadly virtue is a species of conduct which acts in duplicitous contradiction to itself, for which persuasion and coercion are one and the same, and all things weigh indifferently on its scales of devaluation. It disguises nihilism by posing as beneficial enterprise and 'for our own good' seeks universally to instrumentalise life. The sense of my upending virtue will become clear as I proceed to exemplify the allegories of deadly virtue.

I should begin with a reminder of the Seven Deadly Sins that stand opposed to virtues in their orthodox sense. I shall identify these sins of vice by their original Latin names ranked in the order that the Catholic Church employs. Next to each Latin designation I give an English translation of the vice, followed in square brackets by its further meaning signified in practice. The contrasting Christian virtues are listed in the right-hand column.

VICE			VIRTUE
<i>superbia</i>	pride	[hubris]	humility
<i>avaritia</i>	avarice	[rapacity]	charity
<i>invidia</i>	envy	[malice]	compassion
<i>ira</i>	wrath	[violence]	patience
<i>luxuria</i>	promiscuity	[disloyalty]	chastity
<i>gula</i>	gluttony	[waste]	temperance
<i>acedia</i>	sloth	[indifference]	diligence

I have transformed these vices into postcultural virtues. I preface my paradoxical assertion of ‘deadly’ virtues, normally ascribed to vices, with a general remark. Christianity in its once vigorous self-confidence reduced the possibilities of good and evil to seven. Its wisdom in so doing – adept in its knowledge of the dark profundities of moral psychology – was to identify and place the state of soul before any of the actions it is capable of. Pride is one state; but its possible actions – its misdeeds, its sins – are many. Christianity focuses on the cure of the soul, its ill condition, not on misdeeds done and too late for treatment, except, as part of the cure, to reserve forgiveness in deferral of sacramental absolution. Redemption is the Christian project, literally, in the sense of projection that ‘casts ahead’ into futurity. Evil in the radical Augustinian view does not exist: it ceases to be the moment one turns away from it. For inexistence is Satan’s condemnation, nothingness is his eternal punishment; while goodness *is*, because the Good is the boundless, limitless nature of God’s eternal isness. Christianity’s conception of the human condition bears resemblance to, and indeed has close affinities with, the existential analysis of Dasein. Modern society may hold the idea of ‘sin’ at arm’s length in distaste, but its enlightened negligence overlooks the finer-grained existential subtleties that have shaped the weft of Christian psychology. I apply this psychology in reverse, in the negative, by deciphering postcultural virtues under the categories of transgression. My conception of a deadly virtue is not individually inflected but refers to the condition of being-in-the-world which redemption fails to reach.

I will illustrate an example of the behavioural complexities condensed in the vice *acedia*, one of the listed Seven Deadly Sins. *Acedia* (Latin variants, *accidie* or *accedie*, from the Greek, *akeoia*, ‘negligence’) is usually but inadequately translated as ‘sloth’. St Thomas Aquinas, in his thirteenth century *Summa Theologica*, traced *acedia* (negligence) back to St Paul’s saying, in 2 Corinthians 7:10, which contrasts Godly sorrow that ‘worketh salvation to repentance’ with ‘the sorrow of the world [that] worketh death’. St Paul means carefulness is at work in the sorrow of repentance; lack of care is instead the worldly sorrow that will abandon one to death. The apostle is an astute existential psychologist: care (*Sorge*, care or concern) is key to the essence of Dasein in Heideggerian analysis. And it is by lacking care, by his sin of negligence, that Dante strays lost in the Dark Wood of despair. *Acedia*

has misled him; and he comes to witness it physically in the slothful who suffer its after-life form of punishment in Canto VII, 118–126, of the *Inferno*, those wretches ‘gurgling unseen in the slime deep beneath the wrathful [ones] churning madly above them’. *Acedia* is revealed for what it is, not sloth merely but mortal torpor, apathy, ‘not caring that one does not care’; St Paul’s ‘sorrow of the world that worketh death’, in flight of despair. It was also identified in the fourth century as the *ennui* to which monks in desert seclusion were liable, a temptation of the demon, a confusion of mind that takes possession ‘like some in foul darkness’.

Acedia assumes modern shape in Walter Benjamin’s musings on melancholy in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (1928). Benjamin observes that the original theological conception of melancholy is found in *acedia*, a ‘darkness of heart’, under the astrological sign of Saturn believed to cause sluggishness in those it ruled which made them apathetic, indecisive, unfaithful. Hamlet is the ideal melancholic character of the Baroque Counter-Reformation. I would say rather an ideal Mannerist type of melancholic. Albrecht Dürer’s famous engraving of 1514 acknowledges a monumental winged woman – a fallen angel perhaps – as the depiction of melancholy: a suitable image to preface Sigmund Freud’s 1917 study, *Mourning and Melancholy*, in which the melancholic is represented ‘sunken in loss’, in utter paralysing dejection; and a fitting emblem blazoning the poet James Thomson’s *City of Dreadful Night* (1874), the atheistic anthem of nightmarish despairing pessimism.

I could extend a similar richness of allusion to *superbia*, the vice normally translated ‘pride’, but entailing an Ariadne’s skein which unravels into strands of vainglory, vanity, self-righteousness, and so on, in a maze of theologico-moral history. And so too would all the other deadly sins respond to moral, allegorical as well as psychological interpretations. But let us proceed with postculture’s ‘upside down radicality’, the eversion of vices into virtues.

The Seven Deadly Virtues of Postculture

1. Identity [*superbia*: hubris]

Identity, the unconscious product of race, milieu and history, mistakes itself as autonomous and naturally entitled to political recognition.

Identity has become virtually, if not to say personally, interchangeable with culture as the conflictual site of authentication and self-authorisation. Identity has come to assume itself the object of cultural politics that surpasses politics.

We have witnessed two extremes of contemporary 'identity politics'. Islam, for one, understands that its identity, not its religion, is under siege from the West. Identity in such a case of threat will resort to populism, the correct name to give to the extreme Salafi faction of Islam which undertook jihadi terrorism, militarised populism which went in territorial pursuit of the ideal Caliphate. A second example, in which cultural politics surpasses politics, deep-rooted in the grievances of disregarded 'silent majority' identities, has given us Trump-style populism in the United States, a revanchist democracy or ochlocracy.

Culture has come to signify the enemy of society. This concludes a prosecution of culture that has endured for thirty years in the twentieth century. The question argued across the political spectrum has been this. What do we need culture for that cannot be better achieved by the practical functions of society?

The celebrity sociologist Daniel Bell has been described as the 'most brilliant of the American neoconservatives'. Bell popularised the notion of 'adversary culture' at war with society. He traced the ills of contemporary Western societies – and of America chiefly – to the 'split between culture and society'. Culture in everyday life has become chronically infected by *modernity* with its excessive demands for authentic 'self-experiencing identity'. We recognise it today as the 'selfie' right of entitlement, unbridled 'me too' culture. A culture of free-floating subjectivism has dissociated itself from the moral basis of rational conduct in social life. Culture in its avant-garde modernist form inflames hatred against the imperatives of conventional social virtues. The hedonistic motives of modernist culture are altogether incompatible with the economic and administrative disciplines of professional life in civil society. What is to be done to re-establish the 'Protestant work ethic' and tame adversary culture? Bell offers a religious revival as a means to renew faith in tradition which alone provides individuals with purposive cultural identities and 'existential security'. Does the prescription sound uncomfortably familiar? Islamist, in fact?

Bell's analysis published in *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (1976), gave neoconservative assurance to the view that modernist culture was at once both dominant and dead. It is a verdict on the zombie menace of contemporary culture. Did it herald what I name postculture? Neoconservatism is itself an accomplice of postculture, and in this sense, a preview of fundamentalist society. Is it by chance that the date, 1976, and Bell's verdict on culture coincide with the escalation of terrorism in Europe, Palestine and Latin America – the 'Red Terror' waging its thirty years' war on Western society?

2. Technology [*invidia*: malice]

Western power is enslaved by its own technological facility. I intend both senses of 'facility', that is, 'ease of doing' and as 'equipment'. Entralment to technology determines a paradoxical mode of foresight by generating scenarios of catastrophes. Solutions to them can only be foreseen in further advances of technological deterrence. Salvation from our impending ecological Armageddon is one example of such 'last instance' deterrence. To what do we turn in our panic? To AI robotics – a word originally from the Czech *robot* meaning 'forced labour'. Which gives a new Cyborg Manifesto sense to Marx's exhortation: 'Workers of the world unite! You have nothing to lose but your chains!' Another impending catastrophe awaits us in the unfinished business of jihadi terrorism. Technological supremacy in control of Western perception has imposed the lens which magnifies an outlaw Islamist minority to virtual equivalence of power. It is foresight duped by what is really on view, namely, postculture. Terrorism in its former suicidal restriction and subsequently in its attempted caliphate investiture is a symbol of postculture. A symbol that I stress has become incomprehensible because it has shut down its time-frame. Islamism assumes a reality fitting to the timeless. Technology 'without attachments to Western *jahiliyya* metaphysics', that is, shorn of history in Sayyid Qutb's Islamist view, is thereby restored as a remedial weapon of terrorism to pious jihadists on the sole basis of Qur'anic literalism which occasions the fusion of culture and religion. But this is a result of the same orientalist distortive lens in obverse occidental view. Neither side in this looking-glass encounter can see what is in place – the neutrality of technology as itself irreducibly fundamentalist.

3. Postculture [*gula*: waste]

Postculture immobilises history's threat of change. It seems a paradox, or call it counter-intuition, but technology requires our dependence on 'traditional values' for its advancement. We progress in unrelenting fast-forward by reversion to technically superseded values. Value-free technology, like a 'selfish gene', thrives on cultural nostalgia while vampirising it to a husk. Technology can have no motive of its own which is not ours by which to historicise the future and at once preclude it by conceiving of its already accomplished end. History dissolves into ever-present mediated instants of anxiety, socially real, but at a vertiginous tempo that outpaces the grasp of experience. Postculture occurs when culture is overtaken by the globally measureless but cannot itself measure the passing away of culture in history. Postculture's end use is to concede the uselessness of culture to the practical dictates of digitally ordained global civilisation. History becomes transmission of the 'virtually credible', that is, news. 'Freedom is the condition of the possibility of history', well says Susan Buck-Morss.

4. Democracy [*acedia*: indifference]

Can we speak meaningfully of democracy in crisis? Sovereignty is always originally illegitimate. Only by absolutist Divine Right solipsism can it claim authority: 'It is *because it is*.' On what does democracy base its right of sovereignty? On consensus, on the inalienable will of the people – so it is said – but otherwise without foundation beyond self-authorisation. The Reign of Virtue begins with the guillotine in the French Revolution's Great Terror which cut short the monarchy's previous legitimacy. Democracy is a promise that must constantly consider itself already ideally in being. This is its peculiarity. Democracy is the anachronistic future-present. Perfectibility is its elusive horizon. Derrida rightly says that democracy is presently in a state of civil war: 'is it still necessary to point out that liberal democracy...has never been so much in the minority and so isolated in the world? That it has never been in such a state of dysfunction in what we call the Western democracies'.

There is a technical undercurrent to domestic civil war in democracies that overlaps into new international Cold War. Democracy invested in technologised society will result in its exact opposite. Islamism appears to us as the scandalous ‘exact opposite’ of democracy. And yet, Islamism’s world-design should be all too familiar to us. Its annulment of historical time by reduction to technologised fundamentalism is also our own in reverse focus. We seem unaware of being equally captives to the ‘freeze-frame’ lens in which terrorism and the West’s technical supremacy converge to antagonistic affinities. 11 September 2001 occupies this frozen frame as the *inconceivable* event of postculture. It could not *be*; and hence it *is* by impossibly literal symbol. Postculture in that moment became for once *glimpsed*. What did it presage? A declension of Islamism and the West converging to nihilist democracy, a devaluation of all values, which leaves only an immobilised state of indifference, *acedia*.

5. Media [*luxuria*: disloyalty]

There are three discourses of cultural power: the political, the media and the scientifico-intellectual. The dominant, or as Marx said, ruling ideas of an age, assume the dominated, the submitted, the overruled. Media hyperreality has succeeded to vacuum-package the other two discourses, although they have never sounded so amplified. Take politicians, reduced to reality TV rhetoricians, mere silhouettes of parliamentary power. No one is really deceived; but everyone is duped. The horns of this dilemma have become the diabolical fork of social media dissemblance. Follow your desires today and you are at once submitting to digital regulation. Iteration (repeating your preferences) feeds into algorithm (hijacked coded information): outsourcing ourselves to anonymous corporate modes of social control. The other prong from which we dangle is distrust of experts (‘Just look at the 2008 debt crisis – did our experts foresee that?’) Now turn to politics. Which? Our politicians have been disenfranchised by their own brazenly transparent corps elitism out of touch with real people.

Much has been said of a contemporary ‘turn to the right’. Identity gets its mediatised welcome there – the ‘white shift’ of American flyover states and pissed-off Europeans patriotically defending their traditions, ethnicity and religion. Turn left and find the alternative social media welcome there.

Identity promotion of the marginalised, blacks, immigrants, women, the LGBTs and refugees. In either case there is a confused clash of minority and majoritarian identity interests. Democracy has to contend with the archaic faults of 'native soil' and inter-ethnic civil warfare which liberal consensus cannot redeem. Nor can we discount the capitalist phantom states of mafias and drug cartels on every continent which cannot be 'clearly dissociated from the process of democratisation', as Derrida exemplifies in Italy's case, citing its historical trajectory in a 'telegraphically simplified' schema: 'the history-of-a-Sicilian-mafia-harassed-by-the-fascism-of-the-Mussolinian-State-thus-intimately-and-symbiotically-allied-to-the-Allies-in-the-democratic-camp-on-both-sides-of-the-Atlantic-as-well-as-in-the-reconstruction-of-the-Italian-Christian-democratic-state-which-has-today-entered-into-a-new-configuration-of-capital, about which the least one can say is that we will understand nothing of what is happening there if we do not take account of its genealogy.'

The criminal phantom state threatens to cross the threshold from vampiric twilight to daylight normality – or *postnormality* as some prefer. Tele-visual predominance serves as conductor of the parapolitical democracies of Donald Trump, Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping, each vying in degree of capitalist authoritarian capitalism, and they, in turn, act as beacons of rightist empowerment.

6. Hyperreality [*ira*: violence]

Everyone at present is a ready-made slice of life for media transmission. Information technology's absorption of illusion by hyperreality cancels our existential sense of time passing normally. We are placed instead in chronic anxiety by the 'Sudden', the overpowering, ever-shifting and discontinuous Urgent. As Søren Kierkegaard puts it in the *Concept of Dread*:

At one moment it is present, at the next one it is gone, and as it is gone, it is again totally and completely present. It can neither be worked into a continuity nor worked through to one.

This annulment of time by the Sudden has co-opted media virtuality to process real 'slice of life' victims in its disruption of illusion. But there is no gain in reality. Violence recedes to a forgotten moment and postculture

over-gains time by way of further disillusionment. The convincing no longer seems sufficiently to convince. All this sacrifice of 'vacuum packaged' life, an overcrowding of reality that makes reality itself a collateral casualty – what more do we need of it to recognise ourselves interchangeable as tools of the social media? Paul Virilio quotes the Viennese writer Hermann Broch: 'A world that blows itself up won't let us paint its portrait anymore.'

Postmodernity and hyperreality have unwittingly theorised terror by playing the end game of history to stalemate. Both have been overheard to say in sinful despair of history: 'The future is over. It has proven a big disappointment.'

Much has been said about postmodernity's 'relativism' and hyperreality's 'nihilism' – terms lost in stillbirth – which simply mean that neither can offer a paradigm of change. But this is critically insufficient in recognising the condition which has brought them to historicise the future itself in the absence of history, in other words, to assign a present that we cannot get over. The present has been rendered a fixed theoretical state of contemporaneity, a petrified aesthetic of replication, whether it is named postmodern or hyperreal. Both have discarded historical change for models of simulation, cloning, bionic extensions of the real. A wheel turning at high speed blurs its spokes to a standstill – this is the notion of change in postmodernity or hyperreality – change which is overtaken at the very instant of apparent change. A narrative of circularity, replacing one of progressive change, identifies the aesthetic of postculture. The ever-present has replaced eternity. Terrorism enters into this script as the terminus of aesthetic idolatry which does not aim at change but to remain contemporaneous, as if in violent parody of, and in global parallel to, postmodern art.

7. America [*avaritia*: rapacity]

Is America to blame for postculture? America's presently fragile world hegemony offers all too sufficient reason for terrorism. We need not hate America to be culturally anti-American. This is not to suppose that postculture is 'made in America'. Nor is it a superficial question of resisting Starbucks, KFC and other junk consumables; or even of denouncing

America's state crimes. Is it then meaningless to speak of being 'culturally anti-American'?

Our understanding of postculture must be guided by a decisive nuance: that America is the first victim of its own entrapment in globalisation, at the epicentre of postculture, whose seismic waves are engulfing us all. America remains stalled in a project that my Québécois separatist confrères ironically name *presqu'Amérique*, 'nearly America', that ever-unreachable, globally invasive completion of 'Being American', the realisation of its Manifest Destiny as the end goal of history. To give it an address in postculture is misleading. Postculture does not give earthquake evidence of itself. It advances in disguise and not by cataclysm. Postculture finds its most opportune disguise in adaptation to democratic optimism. Multiculturalism is a representative instance of postculture in its advancement of democratic benefits for cultures disintegrating under its pluralist tutelage. Multiculturalism exists as a policy enterprise; postculture instead has no being specific to itself but can only symptomise existence. It can be thought of as a screen on which distortive imaginings of perfectibility are played out. We catch a glimpse of this when the extremes of imagined perfectibility meet, as in the Twin Towers collision of Islamist dedication and American democracy. Islamism's combination of technicist education with immaculate Qur'anic credentials permits it to annul poverty as a guiding principle of terrorist rectification. The poor (*al-fuqara'*) and the wretched of the earth (*al-mustad'afin fi-l'ard*) do not carry a leftist weight of 'expectation of radical change' but are blemishes subsumed under the perfect justice of Islam's imminent futurity. A redeemed Islamic world will run perfectly on the automatic pilot of *Sharia* law. In this sense, Islamists share in Fukuyama's end-of-history eschatology, a programme of totally realised justice in the world which is presumed ever-nearing completion.

Sayyid Qutb prophesied a militant Islamist vanguard in 1964. Jihadism has since moved on from al-Qaeda's elite technicist corps to become a common battleground practice of militarised terror in Syria, Iraq and elsewhere. In likewise parallel Fukuyama's intellectual credo of neoconservatism, on the model of Daniel Bell's social theory, has become a bygone platitude of America's state-administered war on terror. Ideas of justice that assume perfection are reduced to inanity by tactical diffusion.

Ongoing conflict between the creeds of Islamism, neoconservative democracy and populism has rendered them empty of any persuasive content. This prolonged, preposterous war has not been fought for ideological or religious values. It has been fought for *position*. What prevails in place of their cultural vacancy is greed, *avaritia*, a predatory rapacity that assumes the mask of socially advantageous virtue.

I end with America nominated among the Seven Deadly Virtues. Does it belong there by self-election, by sinful transgression, or has it fallen to a state of unconscious being and lapsed there in peril of self-destruction? Francis Fukuyama has been much mocked for his (apparently) misfired prophecy. History comes to its end in American-style liberal capitalist democracy. I gamble on 'apparently'. I dare say with deadpan Andy Warhol irony that he was not so off-target. Everyone wants to be American. Disavowal is foregone. The tide of *presqu'Amérique* laps at every shore. 'Nearly America' must be played out – but to what final good or evil consequences I am not enough prophet to say.