

Empty Spaces: The Concept Album and the Neoliberal Turn

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## ABSTRACT

Empty Spaces:

The Concept Album and the Neoliberal Turn

Clara Gibson

The concept album, a musical form in which the songs on an album are narratively or thematically linked to tell a story, achieved its preeminence at a time of great social, political, and economic change. This project examines the relationship three concept albums bear to the political and economic doctrine of neoliberalism, and traces the ways these works respond to the trickle-down effects of neoliberal ideology within the social sphere. The first album, *The Wall*, was released in 1979, and engages with the doctrine of Thatcherism, widely regarded as one of the powerful originators of neoliberal governance, as well as its causes and social consequences. The analysis next moves to more contemporary examples, examining the Titus Andronicus's 2010 album *The Monitor* and Marillion's 2016 release *Fuck Everyone and Run* to map the ways in which neoliberalism, and the discourses it engenders, have shifted and mutated in response to historical and economic stimuli.

*For Ollie. You will never know how much you were and are loved.*

*We will meet again in the place with no darkness.*

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## Introduction

This project is, in essence, an attempt to historicize a cultural form. The definition of a concept album is a bit of a moving target, one applied just as often by audiences as by artists themselves, but for our purposes, we can define the form as a set of songs, released together, relating to a cohesive theme or story. This includes albums that tell a tight, chronological story that progresses from beginning to end (Dream Theater's 2016 album *The Astonishing*, for example, or Styx's *Kilroy Was Here*) or works whose components are joined together more loosely through a shared theme or subject matter (like Jethro Tull's *Aqualung*). As it is understood within the context of modern rock, the concept album first achieved pre-eminence in the seventies with British prog rock. Albums like Genesis's *The Lamb Lies Down on Broadway*, King Crimson's *In the Court of the Crimson King*, and Pink Floyd's *Dark Side of the Moon* and *Animals* eschewed stand-alone, radio-friendly songs in favor of more complex melodies, stories, and elaborate live productions. Despite a marked ambivalence towards the form from record labels and many critics, the form attained significant commercial success throughout the seventies and eighties, and became a hallmark of the prog-rock genre.

The rise of the form of the concept album in 1970s Britain may not have been a specific response to the advent of Thatcherism and the birth of the neoliberal order, but all of the artistic and formal elements employed by bands like Genesis and Pink Floyd were stewing in the same political morass as the rest of British culture. *The Wall*, the first album examined in this analysis, occupies a liminal space between, in the immortal words of Matthew Arnold, "two worlds, one dead / The other powerless to be born."<sup>1</sup> Waters' incisive portrayal of a Britain both clinging

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew Arnold, "Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse," Poetry Foundation. Accessed March 22, 2023. <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43605/stanzas-from-the-grande-chartreuse>

desperately to and reeling from the aftereffects of World War Two, while carving a path forwards through privatization, the annihilation of a social commons, and austerity, . At about the same time as Stuart Hall was establishing the discipline of Cultural Studies with his writings in *The New Left Review* and *Marxism Today* on Thatcherism, racism, and policing in Britain, Pink Floyd's double album *The Wall* was diagnosing these same social maladies in a different medium.

As time wore on and radio airtime became more and more important in disseminating music to a larger audience, the form of the concept album became more esoteric. At the same time, neoliberal policy prescriptions were becoming more and more normalized. As the era of Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Lyndon Johnson passed out of memory, right-wing and corporate interests succeeded in pushing the Overton window further and further rightward. Discourse on the necessity of labor unions, public spending and entitlements, and the regulation of financial and business interest had become ossified around a Hayekian privileging of "freedom" that equated the interest of the populace with the interest of the market. The swelling power of banks and corporations and the withering of state oversight would eventually culminate in the financial crisis of 2008, in which the recklessness of large banks combined with the corruption and ineffectiveness of regulators led to a housing crisis and a cascade of financial devastation. Also in 2008, then-Senator Barack Obama was elected President with a broad public mandate for change. Some voices on the left declared the death of the neoliberal order, and heralded a return to the social democracy of the forties, fifties, and sixties.

Reports of neoliberalism's death were, however, premature. The promise of hope and change embodied by the Obama administration were dashed by stiff resistance from conservative legislators and courts, as well as a series of tactical blunders, misguided attempts at compromise,

and ill-fated cross-aisle allegiances. Titus Andronicus's album *The Monitor* was released in 2010, two years into President Obama's first term, as promises of hope and change had been overshadowed by the birth of powerful right-wing groups like the Tea Party and the Freedom Caucus. With liberals in control of the executive branch and both houses of Congress, the lives of the people who voted for them remained fixed in the strangleholds of debt, poverty, racism, and violence. In the wake of the financial crisis, even as markets recovered, American citizens were forced to confront the reality that the levers of power were firmly out of their reach. This disillusionment would curdle into resignation, nihilism, and resentment, especially among the white middle and working classes. This moment—of resentment of the neoliberal order, channeled into reactionary sentiment—is the moment of *The Monitor* and *Fuck Everyone And Run*.

*Fuck Everyone And Run*, released in 2016 by British neo-prog band Marillion, was created in many ways as a direct response to Brexit, but can be read in the broader context of the resurgence of right-wing populism across the globe. In its examination of the weaponization of xenophobia by the Leave campaign, *Fuck Everyone And Run* locates the inhuman body of the migrant as a nexus of anxiety and displaced rage over decades of austerity. This boiling resentment forms an eerie bookend with the skinhead violence dramatized in *The Wall*, marking the importance of xenophobic nationalism in British neoliberal discourse across time, and provides an excellent opportunity to analyze the mutations in neoliberal thought and policy across the past fifty years.

In his 1851 pamphlet *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Marx outlines the process by which a conservative peasantry, in cahoots with a liberal bourgeoisie wishing to shed



the burden of preserving their own political rule, voluntarily sacrifice their own class interests in the pursuit of past imperial glory:

No Circe, by means of black magic, has distorted that work of art, the bourgeois republic, into a monstrous shape. That republic has lost nothing but the semblance of respectability. Present-day France was contained in a finished state within the parliamentary republic. It only required a bayonet thrust for the bubble to burst and the monster to spring forth before our eyes.<sup>2</sup>

The crisis points produced by capitalism and empire—World War Two, the 2008 financial crisis, Brexit, and the elections of Donald Trump, Giorgia Meloni, Jair Bolsonaro, and other right-wing populists—have thus far been disappointing in producing the political results that will shake off the chains of neoliberal dogma and restore some level of accountability to the state. The artistic responses to these crises, however, richly reward the attentive analyst. These three albums, all of which respond directly to their own historical moment and the political forces that shape their cultural vocabularies, demonstrate the deformations that capitalist society and political ossification inflict upon the psyches of human beings, as well as dramatizing the struggle to find something, anything to cling on to as we crawl through the morass of late capitalism towards the last pale light in the West.

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<sup>2</sup> Karl Marx, “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte,” *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, ed. David McLellan (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1977), 314-315.

## **PART ONE: *The Wall* and the Birth of the Neoliberal Order**

It would be difficult to enter a discussion on the content and reception of the modern rock concept album without reckoning with the influence of Pink Floyd. While under the creative aegis of songwriter and frontman Roger Waters, the band released a series of albums that set the stage for both the production and reception of future works. While an examination of the band's full catalog falls beyond the scope of this project, multiple entries in Pink Floyd's discography fall under the category of the concept album. From the enduring impression *Dark Side of the Moon* left on the genre of psychedelic music, to the caustic, literary tone of *Animals*, Waters' pean to George Orwell, the band's mid-career efforts provide fertile ground for an examination of the relationship between the concept album's form and its political and historical context. For the purpose of this project, however, I have elected to single out Pink Floyd's 1979 album *The Wall*.

Though *The Wall* is frequently labeled as juvenile in its messaging, or boxed into a specific, adolescent context, *The Wall* passed, for a time, out of the spotlight. This relegation to the past was not to last, however. In the wake of Bush's War on Terror and the 2008 financial collapse, Roger Waters emerged once more as a strident anti-war and anti-imperialist activist, and *The Wall* was the vehicle of his return to the spotlight. Roger Waters's 2010 tour was not only the highest-grossing tour by a solo musician of all time, but also the source of a significant amount of controversy. After canceling a 2006 concert in Tel Aviv and moving the show to Neve Shalom, Waters became one of the West's most visible critics of Israel's occupation of Gaza and the West Bank. His criticism of Israeli imperialism has drawn significant backlash. However, as can be seen in the imagery used in his *The Wall* tour, 2017's *Us + Them*, and 2022's *This is Not A Drill*, these critiques stem from a broad anti-imperial sentiment and an abiding concern for placing the political crises of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in their historical contexts.

It is in this spirit that I approach *The Wall*—and seek to intercede in its critical reception—as not a work of personal angst or individual pathology, but as a work deeply tied to the historical and political moment that occasioned it.

There was a resurgence of interest in the political and social messaging of *The Wall*, especially during the escalating reactionary fervor during the approach to the 2020 Presidential election. Depressingly, the album’s iconic cover art had even been appropriated by Trump and his supporters. Despite the dismissiveness with which online fan critique is usually treated, however, I believe that engaging with these new, digital reactions to *The Wall* in the form of a revision or reworking of a “shallow” reading has the potential to be a generative method of engaging with the cultural history of a piece of art. By producing a “new” reading of *The Wall* that situates the work in its political and historical contexts, while also engaging with contemporary “mis-readings,” cultural theorists have an opportunity to expose the gulf between the source material and the way popular works of art become broken down and metabolized through hegemonic ideological narratives.

### **Form and Content**

It is impossible to discuss the artistic vision of *The Wall* without addressing the album’s form. While the form of the concept album may seem self-explanatory, there is considerable room for variation on a theme. *The Wall* begins with the song “In the Flesh?” The track begins abruptly with a fragment a recording—a man’s voice speaking the phrase “...we came in?” over quiet instrumental music. The true significance of this will not be known until the end of the final track on the album, “Outside the Wall,” which concludes with the same instrumental, and the first half of the man’s question (“Isn’t this where...”).

The choice to suture the beginning and the end of the album together is partially born out of practical concerns—a double album with a loose narrative structure can easily lose cohesion without significant formal markers to remind listeners of the relation of parts to the whole—but also serves to drive against the reading of the album as a linear narrative. By repeating itself endlessly, *The Wall* denies listeners closure or catharsis. The album refuses to be understood as a finite series of events that happens to one protagonist, instead insisting on being read as a constant, rhythmic enactment of a set of historical circumstances. In this sense, Pink’s re-entry into society is almost incidental to the message of the album. Whether or not the protagonist personally manages to overcome his own alienation and forge more authentic human connections, the material circumstances that produced him remain, and they will continue to feed more human beings into the meat grinder.

Though the pairing of “In the Flesh?” and “Outside the Wall” is highly significant in informing our reading of *The Wall*, “In the Flesh?” contains other formal attributes that bear mentioning. Though the rest of the album follows in a roughly chronological order, narrating Pink’s birth, childhood, rise to stardom, and eventual alienation, “In the Flesh?” presents something of a framing narrative. Waters begins by addressing the audience:

“So ya  
Thought ya  
Might like to  
Go to the show  
To feel the warm thrill of confusion,  
That space cadet glow.  
Tell me, is something eluding you, sunshine?”

Is this not what you expected to see?  
 If you wanna find out what's behind these cold eyes  
 You'll just have to claw your way through this disguise!"<sup>3</sup>

The delivery of "In the Flesh?" is icy and sardonic. The lyrics, however, communicate two important messages. First, the setting is established within the context of performance. We, the audience, are at "the show:" even if we are at home listening to a record or walking to the subway fifty years later—we are expected to understand this experience as a communion between artist and audience in shared time and space. Second, the lyrics, despite Waters' cold delivery, betray an earnest desire for connection. Just as the brittle, caustic vocals seem to invite a break, "In the Flesh?" closes with a plea that the listener "claw [their] way through this disguise," which, in this context, means engaging with the formal and symbolic difficulty of the album, which would allow the promise of connection inherent in "the show" to be fulfilled. "In the Flesh?" clearly establishes the stakes of *The Wall*, as well as elucidating the demands the album will make of the listener.

### **The Historical and the Universal in "Another Brick in the Wall, Pt. 2"**

A four-side album is an unlikely candidate to produce many hit singles. However, the most enduring legacy of any single song from *The Wall* belongs to "Another Brick in the Wall, Pt. 2." Released as one of three singles, "Another Brick in the Wall, Pt. 2" reached number 57 on the U.S. disco charts and sold more than four million copies worldwide. In Britain, the single was the final charting song of 1979. Released twelve months after Margaret Thatcher became prime minister, in the midst of a resurgence of skinhead violence in the U.K., the song was

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<sup>3</sup> Pink Floyd, "In the Flesh?" 1979, Harvest Records, track number one on *The Wall*, 1979.

poised to take advantage of a groundswell of anti-authoritarian sentiment. Despite the longevity of the song's impact on popular culture, the political ramifications and imagery of "Another Brick in the Wall Pt. 2" are not often fully explored, and in popular culture, the song's message has been flattened into an adolescent protest against school and teachers.

However, it may have been the authorities themselves who were best poised to understand the scope of Waters' critique. According to Alun Renshaw, the director of the children's choir featured in the song, Margaret Thatcher herself hated the song, and "The Inner London Education Authority...was equally appalled, calling it 'scandalous.'"<sup>4</sup> Similarly, both the single and the album were banned by the South African government in 1980 after the song was adopted by anti-apartheid activists. While the song can—and has—been adopted in service of any number of causes, a closer look at the original context and presentation of "Another Brick in the Wall, Pt. 2" can better elucidate the mechanics of Waters' engagement with systems of discipline.

Perhaps the most famous adaptation of "Another Brick in the Wall, Pt. 2" comes from the 1982 film adaptation of *The Wall*. While there are occasional points of divergence from the narrative of the album, Roger Waters' extensive involvement with the project produces an adaptation whose artistic sensibilities are remarkably in line with those of the original album. In the film, the songs "The Happiest Days of Our Lives" and "Another Brick in the Wall, Pt. 2" portray Pink's experience of the postwar British education system. In the movie, Pink is singled out and mocked by his schoolmaster for writing poems. In his psychoanalytic reading of *The Wall*, Phil Rose notes that "According to Waters, this part of the work is very much drawn from

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<sup>4</sup> "Kick Against the Bricks," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, December 20, 2004.  
<https://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/music/kick-against-the-bricks-20041230-gdkeem.html>

his own experiences...many of his teachers just tried to keep the children quiet and still and crush them into the proper shape for going on to university and doing well.”<sup>5</sup> Waters’ critique of the groupthink engendered by the education system is one that has been thoroughly metabolized into popular culture, but the imagery of “The Happiest Days of Our Lives” and “Another Brick in the Wall, Pt. 2” reveals a deeper grounding in British history.

The English postwar education system was famously harsh and repressive. Corporal punishment, while common in both the United States and the United Kingdom until the late eighties, was far more institutionalized in Britain than it was in America. Children could be beaten in front of their peers for relatively minor behavioral infractions, as well as for academic mistakes. The focus on school as a site of repression and violence is not merely an adolescent rebellion against strict teachers and homework. Rather, it is an examination of one of the institutions that serves to inscribe desired behaviors into the minds and bodies of children—a site of Foucauldian discipline meant to build a new national identity in the wake of the devastation of World War Two. As Sarah Cole writes in her reading of a young Stephen Deadalus’s beating at the hands of the prefect of studies:

Equally salient to the personalized quality of the pandying episode is the way it reads as a parable of power. On one hand, Joyce gives us a description of subjective, individual pain, in the form of Stephen’s experience of victimization and physical hurt; on the other hand, it is all but impossible to read the sequence outside of a structure like allegory. The

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<sup>5</sup> Phil Rose, “The Wall.” In *Roger Waters and Pink Floyd: The Concept Albums* (Vancouver: Dickson UP, 2015): 106.

hierarchical configuration is decisive: priest and student, adult and child, punisher and victim, oppressor and oppressed, even colonizer and colonized.<sup>6</sup>

In “The Happiest Days of Our Lives,” however, Waters introduces a new wrinkle to this formulation. Schoolchildren, whose agency is curtailed both by the adults around them and the aims of the institutions through which they must pass to enter society, are victimized within the authoritarian structure of the boarding school. However, as the song progresses, we learn that the teachers that we just saw humiliating their young children are also entangled in a complex web of violence. “In the town, it was well known, when they got home at night / Their fat and psychopathic wives / Would thrash them within inches of their lives!”<sup>7</sup> In the movie, the schoolmaster who mocks Pink is seen choking down a tough steak under the watchful eye of his wife, beneath a photograph of the Queen. The Scottish schoolmaster, caught up under the imperial yoke of the Queen and the economic bootheel of Margaret Thatcher, externalizes his rage and humiliation onto the children he torments. It is these motifs that have earned *The Wall* criticism for misogyny, but Pink’s—and the schoolmaster’s—fixation on women as the source of their humiliation acts as another displacement of the trauma inflicted by the broader capitalist system. The state, gendered female, becomes the recipient of male resentment, but instead of channeling that rage upwards, the state displaces that anger onto other groups—women, immigrants, sexual and ethnic minorities, even striking workers. Because of the sexism engrained within our cultural narratives, male victims of alienation and oppression gender the state female—the archetypal devouring mother, that destroys her children instead of nurturing

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<sup>6</sup> Sarah Cole. *At The Violet Hour: Modernism and Violence in England and Ireland*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012.

<sup>7</sup> Pink Floyd, “The Happiest Days of our Lives,” 1979, Harvest Records, track number four on *The Wall*, 1979.



them—and displaces that rage onto surrogates. This activity serves a dual purpose. By channeling the frustration of citizens into targeting the enemies of the state (striking worker, the poor, and the socially disenfranchised), the state effectively turns those whose interests would best be served by collective action into enforcers for their own interests, as well as foreclosing the possibility of class, racial, and gender solidarity. As Simone Weil writes in her discussion of violence and power, “Such is the character of force. Its power to transform human beings into things is twofold and operates on two fronts; in equal but different ways, it petrifies the souls of those who undergo it and those who ply it.”<sup>8</sup> While Weil’s conception of force is that of a philosopher, not of a postcolonial critic, the idea that different groups are interpellated in a web of victimization and suffering is extremely important to both postcolonial and Marxist analysis. The image of the schoolmaster, riven by the forces of class, empire, and masculinity, externalizing those feelings of impotence onto his wife and the children in his care, is “[w]hat Paul Fussell...describes as ‘a metaphor caught in the act of turning literal.’ The stakes for literature spike in this conflagration...it is in that scenario of dire severity, faced with the worst, that texts remind us of why we read.”<sup>9</sup>

In the film version of “Another Brick in the Wall, Pt. 2,” we see what Waters describes in a draft of the film’s screenplay as ‘the factory farm techniques employed in schools to produce a docile and unquestioning workforce.’ The children are marched mechanically through a maze and on to a conveyer belt where they disappear behind a brick wall. They reappear on the other side of the wall sitting at their desks and are now wearing the pink masks that rob them of their identities. Along with the cogs and wheels that run children into a mincer from which they

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<sup>8</sup> Simone Weil, “The *Iliad*, or the Poem of Force.” In *On Violence: A Reader*, edited by Bruce B. Lawrence and Aisha Karim (Durham: Duke UP, 2007): 388

<sup>9</sup> Cole, 16-17

emerge in a ground-down state.<sup>10</sup> The authoritarian economic and social measures implemented in sixties and seventies Britain are disturbingly reminiscent of the fascist governments that Pink's father died fighting. While Britain sought to cement its national identity upon the corpse of Hitler's war machine, *The Wall* suggests that this may be a case of the lady protesting too much. When Pink retreats into catatonia in the second half of the album, he imagines himself as a fascist leader inciting a riot. In the movie version of *The Wall*, Pink is dressed not as an SS officer, but in a more formal version of the garb worn by the Blackshirts of the '40s. Britain's victory over fascism, won by the blood of millions, is hollow. We have met the enemy, and he is us. This anxiety was not invented by Waters, of course—*The Wall* exists within an established line of British leftist thought. As George Orwell expressed in *1984*, “[A]lways there will be the intoxication of power, constantly increasing and constantly growing subtler. Always, at every moment, there will be the thrill of victory, the sensation of trampling on an enemy who is helpless. If you want a picture of the future, imagine a boot stamping on a human face—for ever.”<sup>11</sup> The adulation of state power and the scapegoating of the poor and sexual and ethnic minorities remains constant, as does Robert Paxton's one-sentence description of fascism: the suppression of the left amidst popular enthusiasm.<sup>12</sup>

Particularly relevant in Waters' comments is the way he connects the authoritarian nature of the school system to the state's desire for a docile pool of potential workers. As Charles Dellheim notes in his history of Thatcherism, in the mid-seventies, “Rising inflation, mounting unemployment, continuous labor unrest, and low productivity had undermined the world's faith

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<sup>10</sup> Rose, 108

<sup>11</sup> George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2021): 280

<sup>12</sup> John Broisch, “There is Nothing Liberal About Fascism,” *The Washington Post* (Washington, D.C.), August 1, 2018.

in Britain.”<sup>13</sup> Like the refractory miners Thatcher would declare “the enemy within” for picketing, stubborn, self-possessed citizens—or even daydreamers and poets—would not be the antidote to Britain’s economic woes. Children, then, were not viewed as individuals, but as future exploitable labor.

The introduction of the symbol of the hammer—a visual motif that recurs throughout the film version of *The Wall* and remains integral to staged productions of the album—is particularly significant in this context. Shadows of hammers are seen as part of the machine that grinds the schoolchildren into meat, and these same hammers will later be adopted by Pink as the legend of his fascist rallies.

### **The Shadow of the Second World War**

Though Roger Waters and his protagonist cannot and should not be treated as synonymous, there are important similarities that must be acknowledged. The first brick in Pink’s wall—the initial trauma—is the death of his father during the Battle of Anzio in 1944. This event is lifted directly from Waters’ own life. The damage this loss wreaks on Pink’s psyche is illustrated by his brooding fixation on World War Two. In the film, Pink is seen watching war footage in a near-comatose state, and the war returns in “Vera,” “Goodbye Blue Sky,” and “Bring the Boys Back Home.” Pink’s father’s death is described directly in “When the Tigers Broke Free,” which was written for the album and included in the film, but was not included due to vinyl restraints and later released in the subsequent album *The Final Cut*. The album takes as one of its central concerns issues of trauma and memory. Pink does not remember

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<sup>13</sup> Charles Dellheim. *The Disenchanted Isle: Mrs. Thatcher’s Capitalist Revolution* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1995): 78.

his father, who died in the war when he was just a baby. Moreover, though the war has shaped every aspect of Pink's existence—left him fatherless, traumatized his mother, shaped the harsh austerity and reactionary sentiment of the society in which he finds himself—he can access the reality of it only through artifacts and films. However, because British society has gone through so much trouble to repress the trauma of the war, Pink's fixation is taken as evidence of his pathology. As Sarah Cole writes in her discussion of *Wide Sargasso Sea*:

The violent deeds that define [the past] (of which there are an almost infinite number) are erased and unavailable, even as they are compulsively reconfigured. They exist somewhere between remembering and forgetting, like the zombie itself, which epitomizes many thresholds—living and dead, past and present, real and imagined...the foundational actions of the past have been obscured, but they have enough presence to unsettle the present, creating an aura of threat and incipience.<sup>14</sup>

Though Pink himself was not a soldier, the extent to which he, along with others of his generation, has been damaged and shaped by the war is a central concern of *The Wall*. Though Britain had been thrust into modernity before World War Two, the Blitz brought the reality of war to the United Kingdom. In the cities, nobody was safe. A whole generation of children was shipped out to the countryside, taken away from their families and given to strangers who were often negligent or even abusive. Even when the German Valkyries departed from the sky, the anxiety they engendered remained. Under the Blitz, there were no civilians, and even non-combatants could not expect safety. For example, Elizabeth Bowen, who worked in London during the Blitz for the Ministry of Information as an air-raid warden, describes the effect of the

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<sup>14</sup> Cole, 33

Blitz in her brilliant short story *Mysterious Kor*. “Full moonlight drenched the city and searched it; there was not a niche left to stand in. The effect was remorseless: Longon looked like the moon’s capital—shallow, cratered, extinct.”<sup>15</sup> The description of London as a blasted landscape, evacuated of all human life, is a compelling description of the sheer waste and destruction engendered by the war. The few civilians who remain “all disappeared quickly, in an abashed way, or as though dissolved in the street by some white acid.”<sup>16</sup> To be out in public space is to have to scurry like a rat, or worse, to risk total bodily disintegration. Bowen’s reference to being dissolved by acid in the street conjures up the repressed reality of bombing—the total annihilation of places and bodies. As one of her characters, Pepita, remarks later, “If you can blow whole places out of existence, you can blow whole places into it. I don’t see why not. They say we can’t say what’s come out since the bombing started. By the time we’ve come to the end, Kor may be the one city left: the abiding city. I should laugh.”<sup>17</sup> By turning the destruction of war into an imaginative project of renewal, Pepita seeks to find a way to rationalize the trauma of living under the Blitz, of the destruction of London. However, her observation carries the ring of truth. The Blitz, and the violence of World War Two, did help to create an entirely new Britain. Postwar Britain was blown into existence by the same bombs that killed thousands and changed the lives of those that survived forever. This is a phenomenon perhaps best described by Herbert Marcuse’s work, which “explains growing accommodation or acquiescence to social and political violence—a ‘degree of normalization where...individuals are getting used to the risk of their own dissolution and disintegration.’”<sup>18</sup> The psychological impact of the violence of the

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<sup>15</sup> Elizabeth Bowen, “Mysterious Kor,” in *The Longman Anthology of British Literature*, ed. Kevin J. H. Dettmar, (Montreal: Longman, 2010): 2540

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 2541

<sup>18</sup> Wendy Brown, “No Future for White Men: Nihilism, Fatalism, and *Ressentiment*.” In *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism: The Rise of Antidemocratic Policies in the West*, 168. New York: Columbia UP, 2019.

state's constitutive enemy can be folded into postwar life and used to emphasize the state's monopoly on violence. Like Pepita, Pink seeks to find meaning and value in growing up in the wake of the war that took his father from him, but empty nationalist proclamations of victory over fascism are unable to assuage his profound sense of loss. Like for a shell-shocked soldier, the past continues its relentless incursion into his present.

Shell shock—what we would now refer to as post-traumatic stress—became a shared national experience after the Second World War. As Sarah Cole notes,

The image of contemporary consciousness suggested by shell shock is characterized by a severe rupturing in time, space, and personal memory...A threshold figure, [the shell-shocked soldier] suggests many antinomies...To name just a few of the many prominent literary examples, Woolf's Septimus Warren Smith in *Mrs. Dalloway* exemplifies the shell-shock victim, a 'last relic straying on the edge of the world, this outcast, who gazed back at the inhabited regions, who lay, like a drowned sailor, on the shore of he world,' as does Captain Herbertson in Lawrence's *Aaron's Rod*, a former officer whose obsessive, panicked urge to relive the war [unleashes] 'a hot, blind, mesmerized voice, going on and on, mesmerized by a vision that the soul cannot bear.'"<sup>19</sup>

The figure of the shell-shocked soldier as a cipher for modernist discourse can be broadened to examine the traumatic effects of war and its aftermath on the psyches of all those who have been left damaged in the wake of social, economic, and physical violence. This loss of innocence can be traced back to the First World War, when wartime poets like Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owens took the gulf between nationalist rhetoric and the physical reality of modern warfare as

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<sup>19</sup> Cole, 27

their subject, but the broader cultural context is best described by Marx himself. “There followed on the birth of mechanization and modern industry...a violent encroachment like that of an avalanche in its intensity and its extent. All bounds of morals and nature, of age and sex, of day and night, were broken down. Capital celebrated its orgies.”<sup>20</sup> The nature of Marx’s description of capitalism is, as Marshall Berman argues, one in which “[o]ur lives are controlled by a ruling class with vested interests not merely in charge but in crisis, and chaos.”<sup>21</sup> Everyday life under capitalism (and, as Berman argues, modernity) is to exist in a state of constant catastrophe and destruction. As Marx famously described:

All fixed, fast-frozen relationships, with heir train of venerable ideas and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become obsolete before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and men are at last forced to face with sober senses the real conditions of their lives and their relations with their fellow men.<sup>22</sup>

Trauma is the connective tissue that binds Pink to the memory of his father, but it is also a condition of modernity itself—a modernity that was shaped and ushered in by global conflict. The horror of the war cannot be confronted—the sheer degree of waste is far too much to contemplate. In Gerald Scarfe’s animated accompaniment to “Goodbye Blue Sky,” the Union Jack splinters into a cross marking a soldier’s grave, while the red stripes melt down into blood that trickles down into the gutter. Because the trauma of the war cannot be addressed, it is repressed, and the pain of loss is soothed through the Potemkin village of economic possibilities that cropped up in the wake of the war. In the film version of “What Shall We Do Now?” Gerald

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<sup>20</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume One* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1995): 184

<sup>21</sup> Marshall Berman, *All That is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Penguin Books, 1982): 95.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 95

Scarfe provides a stunning visual rendition of postwar goods pouring in to fill the empty spaces of Pink's wall.

What shall we do to fill  
 The empty spaces where waves of hunger roar?  
 Shall we set out across the sea of faces  
 In search of more, and more, and more?  
 Shall we buy a new guitar?  
 Shall we drive a more powerful car?  
 [...]  
 We're no more relaxed at all  
 With our backs to the wall.<sup>23</sup>

Commonly read as a critique of materialism, Waters' treatment of British consumer culture is actually building a deeper understanding of the relationship between the economy and people's interior lives. The flood of postwar goods into Britain is one mechanism through which the state creates the illusion of freedom and prosperity. Under capitalist neoliberal economies, however, people's lives are not truly free. The state can use consumer choice as a synecdoche to distract people from the horizons that truly constrain their lives. As Marshall Berman observes:

The masses have no egos, no ids, their souls are devoid of inner tension or dynamism: their ideas, their needs, even their dreams, are 'not their own': their inner lives are 'totally administered,' programmed to produce exactly those desires that the social system can

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<sup>23</sup> Pink Floyd, "What Shall We Do Now?" 1979, Harvest Records, track number eight on *The Wall*, 1979.



satisfy, and no more. ‘The people recognize themselves in their commodities: they find their soul in their automobiles, hi-fi sets, split-level homes, kitchen equipment.’<sup>24</sup>

Proponents of laissez-faire capitalism, or even of the eviscerated welfare states of the U.S. or U.K., describe the present economic system as one that privileges freedom over security, preserving the sovereignty of the individual’s autonomous economic decisions. However, the choices made by the poor, the working class, and even the petty bourgeois in neoliberal economies—working a miserable job to feed oneself, staying in an abusive relationship because of a lack of a social safety net, or enlisting in the military to be able to afford higher education—are choices in name only. While these are all ostensibly choices made by individuals, but the hand of economic coercion is visible beneath all of these decisions. *Do this or starve*. Or, as Waters puts it, “we’re no more relaxed at all—with our backs to the wall.”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Berman, 28-29

<sup>25</sup> Pink Floyd, “What Shall We Do Now?”

## **PART 2: *F E A R* and the Nationalist Impulse**

After lead singer Fish's acrimonious departure in 1986, the future of British neo-prog band Marillion was uncertain. After luring singer-songwriter Steve Hogarth away from The The, however, the band hit their stride after a shaky start with the concept album *Brave*, which charted in the top ten on the UK albums chart. Marillion is perhaps most famous for being an early adopter of online crowdfunding. After severing ties with record label EMI, the band began funding their albums and live tours through online crowdfunding and pre-orders, which allowed them to continue to produce music without studio interference. Despite a loyal cult following, however, the band would not reach the top ten again until the release of *Fuck Everyone And Run* in 2016.

Despite the fact that Marillion does not have a reputation as a political band, their forays into progressive politics pose an interesting counterpoint to their British forerunners and American contemporaries. The first time the band courted public controversy was with their 2012 album *Sounds That Can't Be Made*, with the 20-minute suite "Gaza,"<sup>26</sup> written from the point of view of a Palestinian youth living in the Gaza strip. Hogarth stated that

This is a song for the people—especially the children—of Gaza...nothing here is intended to show empathy for acts of violence, but simply to ponder upon where desperation inevitably leads...Gaza is today, effectively, a city imprisoned without trial."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Marillion, "Gaza," 2013, Ear Music, track number one on *Sounds That Can't Be Made*

<sup>27</sup> "Happiness From the Road," from *marillion.com*, November 13, 2008. Accessed February 15, 2023.

The band also elected to promote (alongside Roger Waters himself) the HOPING Foundation, an NGO aimed at improving the lives of Palestinian young people, during the *Sounds That Can't Be Made* tour, leading to a customary smattering of accusations of anti-Semitism.

Three years later, in September of 2016, the band released *Fuck Everyone and Run*. The album came out three months to the day after the Brexit referendum and emerged out of the increasing nationalist ferment of Tory-led England. In explaining the album's title, Hogarth stated:

This title is adopted not in anger or with any intention to shock. It is adopted and sung (in the song 'New Kings') tenderly, in sadness and resignation inspired by an England, and a world, which increasingly functions on an 'Every man for himself' philosophy. I won't bore you with examples, they're all over the newspapers every day. There's a sense of foreboding that permeates much of this record. I have a feeling that we're approaching some kind of sea-change in the world—an irreversible political, financial, humanitarian and environmental storm.<sup>28</sup>

Because the political vision of this album is ultimately a liberal one, *Fuck Everyone and Run* does not directly locate the accelerated deterioration of capitalism as the source of this sea-change. However, the album does offer incisive critiques of isolationism, imperialism, and that capital plays in these issues.

### **Fleeing to “El Dorado:” Liberalism, Immigration, and Xenophobia**

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<sup>28</sup> “Marillion to Release Brand New Studio Album ‘F E A R’ On September 9,” from *I'm Music Magazine*, September 27, 2016. Accessed February 15, 2023.

The first song on the album, “El Dorado,” examines the psychological effect of living in one of the imperial cores of the world, as well as the political future of the developed world. The song begins with the lines:

I remember...

The enchanted English walled garden

Days of summer air and honey-suckled nights

The capricious dance of lavenders and cabbage-whites

Made more than 3D, glowing in the evening long-shadowed sun

Nowhere better. But in England, although nothing really changes, the weather always does.<sup>29</sup>

The comparison of the state to a garden has a long history in British literature. Famously, in *Richard II*, England is described as “our sea-walled garden.”<sup>30</sup> Both of these descriptions figure England as a fertile and beautiful place that must be preserved by keeping the rest of the world out. The walled garden attains its perfection from the fact that some—some plant species, some visitors—are kept out. The idyllic childhood past that Hogarth describes is “enchanted” because it is built on the exclusion of others. In the next part of “El Dorado,” Hogarth makes it clear what this exclusivity is based on.

The gold stops us.

The gold always did

[...]

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<sup>29</sup> Marillion, “El Dorado: Long-Shadowed Sun,” 2016, EARMusic, track number one on *Fuck Everyone And Run*

<sup>30</sup> William Shakespeare, *Richard II*, (Washington, D.C.: The Shakespeare Folger Library, 2023), Act 3, Scene 4, Line 46

I see them waiting, smiling  
 On the borders in dawn's mist  
 Or lost to the world in their upturned boats  
 I'll be free or I'll die trying to be  
 Trying to BE.<sup>31</sup>

Hogarth refers here to the anti-refugee and anti-migrant rhetoric that has grown in Britain due to conflicts in Syria and Libya. “Three in five British adults surveyed said accepting refugees from countries such as Syria and Libya puts Britain’s security at risk.”<sup>32</sup> In the article from the BBC, a spokesman for the anti-immigration group Migration Watch is quoted as saying “The poll results come as no surprise and underline the public’s concern both with levels of migration and the seemingly endless flow of asylum seekers, many of whom turn out to be economic migrants simply looking for a better life.”<sup>33</sup> To be allowed into the walled garden of Britain is a privilege reserved for those who can either support themselves financially, or who are so destitute and dispossessed that they pose no threat to the political status quo. Those who are admitted are expected to remain in a servile position of eternal gratitude.

According to most post-Brexit analyses, ‘immigration’ was the single strongest issue driving Brits to vote Leave[...]The UK’s referendum to leave the EU was an unequivocal demonstration of the anti-establishment sentiments, xenophobia, populism, and Euroscepticism that had already emerged elsewhere across Europe at the time[...]By erroneously lumping [EU citizens, asylum seekers, and refugees] together and recasting them in the minds of potential voters as a homogenous ‘immigrant’ population, the Leave

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<sup>31</sup> Marillion, “El Dorado: The Gold,” 2015, EARMusic, track number two on *Fuck Everyone and Run*

<sup>32</sup> “Attitudes Harden Towards Refugees from Syria and Libya, BBC Poll Suggests,” from *BBC*, February 4<sup>th</sup>, 2016. Accessed March 1, 2023.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*

campaign could more easily tap into a broader spectrum of fears concerning economics, security, race, culture, and sovereignty than a focus on any one of those categories alone would permit.<sup>34</sup>

The reference to “upturned boats” in the song calls to mind the famous photographs of two-year-old Alan Kurdi, a Syrian refugee who drowned along with his mother off the coast of Turkey while trying to reach safety. The imagery of migrants waiting on the borders is an echo of right-wing, anti-immigrant rhetoric, which tends to conjure up images of foreigners massing on the homeland’s borders like an invading army.<sup>35</sup> However, instead of invading, Hogarth’s migrants are merely “waiting,” not just to be allowed in, but to achieve personhood through the immigration process. The final lines—“I’ll be free or die trying / Trying to BE”<sup>36</sup> are emblematic of the ways in which refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers are dependent upon the whims of international and national bureaucracy to grant them basic human rights. Stateless, impoverished asylum seekers are expected to move through a complex bureaucratic process that intends to make them into subjects of their adopted country.

In her ethnography *The Spirit Catches You And You Fall Down*, Anne Fadiman recounts a story of immigrant students in a state-sponsored English class “[walking] through the door into the pot, wearing traditional costumes from their countries of origin and singing songs in their native languages. A few minutes later, the door in the pot opened, and the students walked out again, wearing suits and ties, waving American flags, and singing ‘The Star Spangled

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<sup>34</sup> Amanda Garrett, “The Refugee Crisis, Brexit, and the Reframing of Immigration in Britain,” from *EuropeNow*, August 1, 2019. Accessed March 1, 2023.

<sup>35</sup> The American media hysteria, especially on Fox News and Sinclair syndicated local television channels, surrounding so-called “migrant caravans” in 2018 and 2022 are especially instructive.

<sup>36</sup> Marillion, “El Dorado: The Gold,” 2015, EARmusic, track two on *Fuck Everyone and Run*

Banner.”<sup>37</sup> This pliant amenability to being molded into the type of citizen the state desires is the price exacted upon the asylee by the state. Anything less—any discontent or attempt to agitate for change—is characterized by the state as ingratitude. In the precarious figure of the refugee, the political and social predicament every subject finds themselves in is made manifest. Quite adeptly, Hogarth perceives the political (and public) obsession with immigration as a symptom of the avarice and cruelty gripping our body politic. The determination of the First World—in this case, Britain, the ancient sea-walled imperial garden—to uphold their standard of living by keeping their boot firmly on the neck of those whose lives have been demolished by the aftereffects of colonialism and imperial exploitation. Those who attempt to escape may be absorbed by developed nations for their workforce or crowded into squalid refugee camps to serve as a warning to the disenfranchised locals: *things can always be worse*. In Part III, “Demolished Lives,” Hogarth returns to the topic:

I see myself in them  
 The people at the borders  
 Waiting to exist again  
 Brothers, sisters, sons and daughters  
 Denied our so-called golden streets  
 Running from demolished lives  
 Into walls  
 The ‘haves’ and the ‘have nothings’  
 The accepted and rejected  
 We can’t keep letting them in

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<sup>37</sup> Anne Fadiman, *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down: A Hmong Child, Her American Doctors, and the Collision of Two Cultures* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 2012), 183.

We can't keep letting them in?<sup>38</sup>

The political vision of *Fuck Everyone and Run* is ultimately a liberal one—that our political woes come from the fact that we have the wrong people in charge. Our leaders are piggish and cruel, but if we were to be kinder, and elect kinder people, our problems would be solved. I would argue that this view is ultimately short-sighted, but the imagery of this song (and the song Steve Hogarth described as the “antidote to the album,” “Living in FEAR”<sup>39</sup>) is undeniably powerful. The figure of the refugee, forced to wait in a misty, liminal space to have the honor of assimilating is a powerful synecdoche for the helplessness that has infested the lives of all but the wealthiest and most privileged. Hogarth broadens his critique by describing “our so-called golden streets.”<sup>40</sup> Even in the countries that have not been eviscerated by empire, most citizens live coerced lives of quiet desperation, comforted only by the knowledge that there are some whose lives are even more precarious. As Paul Gilroy notes:

[I]t is the infrahuman political body of the immigrant...that comes to represent all the discomfiting ambiguities of the empire's painful and shameful but apparently nonetheless exhilarating history...today's unwanted settlers carry all the ambivalence of empire with them. They project it into the unhappy consciousness of their fearful and anxious hosts and neighbors. Indeed, the incomers may be unwanted and feared precisely because they are the unwitting bearers of the imperial and colonial past.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Marillion, “El Dorado: Demolished Lives,” 2015, EARmusic, track three on *Fuck Everyone and Run*

<sup>39</sup> Marillion, “Living in FEAR,” 2015, EARmusic, track six on *Fuck Everyone and Run*

<sup>40</sup> Marillion, “El Dorado: Demolished Lives.”

<sup>41</sup> Paul Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia* (New York: Columbia UP, 2005), 100-101.



However, the migrant is not merely useful to governments as a way to demonstrate their largesse or as a source of exploitable labor. They also serve as a convenient target for the misdirected anger of the poor, the working-class, and even the middle-class. Faced with a shrinking social safety net, grinding economic austerity, and limited prospects for change, immigrants are a common recipient of the blame for the misery of the lives of those native to their adopted countries. In *The Big Short*, Mark Baum (Steve Carrell) remarks that, despite the grotesque misconduct of big banks and government regulators, the 2008 financial recession would inevitably be blamed on “poor people and immigrants.”<sup>42</sup> In *The Independent*, Chloe Farand notes that “one of the main arguments used by the Leave campaign was the false promise of an additional 350 million pounds a week for the NHS, which has since been proven not to be true. In May, Jeremy Hunt admitted the government could not deliver on the Brexiteers’ pledge.”<sup>43</sup> It is highly telling that in a divisive campaign saturated with issues of race and immigration, the Leave campaign chose draw attention to the eviscerated welfare state of Britain and stoke xenophobic fear in the same breath. In “Demolished Lives,” Hogarth adopts the voice of a Leave voter with the repeated statement “We can’t keep letting them in.”<sup>44</sup> Perhaps the most reverberating line is the description of migrants “running from demolished lives / Into walls.”<sup>45</sup> By incorporating the most enduring symbol of Donald Trump’s 2016 campaign into a song ostensibly about Brexit and British xenophobia and nationalism, Hogarth situated the song within an international context. The rise of right-wing, nationalist populism in the U.S. and Europe has been much discussed and encompasses figures from France’s Marine LePen to

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<sup>42</sup> *The Big Short*, directed by Adam McKay (2015; Los Angeles, CA: Paramount Pictures).

<sup>43</sup> Chloe Farand, “Quarter of Brexit Voters Say They Were Misled, Poll Finds,” from *The Independent*, August 22, 2017. Accessed May 2, 2023.

<sup>44</sup> Marillion, “El Dorado: Demolished Lives.”

<sup>45</sup> Ibid

Italy's Giorgia Meloni.<sup>46</sup> Op-ed writers have ascribed this spate of far-right candidacies to people being “fed up” with everything from economic disenfranchisement to political correctness,<sup>47</sup> while left-wing commenters have blamed the flaccidity of liberal messaging for failing to combat the inflammatory tactics of conservative demagogues.<sup>48</sup> Whatever the case, racism is a key lever that can be used to induce the white working-class to vote against their interests. The profound national anxiety—what Wendy Brown refers to as “conservative melancholy for a phantasmic past”<sup>49</sup>—at the root of this xenophobia may be difficult to reconcile with the strident nationalism present in this nascent form of semi-fascism, but, as Hogarth notes, “the FEAR looks like bravado / It always did.”<sup>50</sup> In the fourth part of “El Dorado,” aptly titled “F E A R,” Hogarth continues to develop his exploration of the rule of fear in contemporary politics:

FEAR is everywhere here

Under the patio

Under the hard-earned, bought and paid-for home

Cushions, scented candles, and the lawn

Mowing to the beat and the rumble of the coming storm

We all know about the wars that are raging

All the millions who just cannot see

There's so much more that binds us than divides us

But our fear denies it

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<sup>46</sup> Meloni, jokingly referred to as “Girlboss Mussolini” by online leftists, was both Italy's first female Prime Minister and the first Italian politician in eighty years to openly revive the Mussolini-era motto “God, Homeland, Family.”

<sup>47</sup> Thomas Chatterton Williams, “The French Are in a Panic Over *le Wokisme*,” from *The Atlantic*, February 4, 2023. Accessed March 2, 2023.

<sup>48</sup> Chapo Trap House, “America, You Sexy Bigfoot!” Recorded July 30, 2018. Spotify.

<sup>49</sup> Wendy Brown, 171.

<sup>50</sup> Marillion, “El Dorado: The Gold.”

While the papers stir it  
The colors of the flag we wave  
Were and will become blood red again  
And the madmen all say they hear voices  
God tells them what to do  
The wars are all about money  
They always were  
And the money's dressed up in religion  
And when it's not showing off, the money's hiding.  
Something is cooking inside me...  
It ain't ready, but already...  
I'm becoming harder to live with  
You say I'm becoming harder to live with  
But you can't see into my head (x3)  
And the roads are full of weapons  
That slide by in the night  
Tanks all covered in yellow mud  
Pass you on the motorway  
As you drive by with the kids and the buckets and spades...<sup>51</sup>

The song begins with the invocation of the creature comforts of the middle-class—a house, a lawn, scented candles—under threat from a “coming storm.” The language of the storm likens the wave of anti-immigrant and right-wing sentiment to a natural force that must be weathered,

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<sup>51</sup> Marillion, “El Dorado: F E A R,” 2015, EARMusic, track four on *Fuck Everyone and Run*

as opposed to a historical phenomenon with causes and effects. However, the acknowledgement that “the papers stir it”<sup>52</sup> pushes towards a more systematic critique of a society that manufactures divisions to nullify solidarity. As Marx writes in the *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*:

[The peasantry] are consequently incapable of enforcing their class interests in their own name, whether through a parliament or through a convention. They cannot represent themselves, they must be represented... The Bonaparte dynasty represents not the revolutionary, but the conservative peasant; not the peasant that strikes out beyond the condition of his social existence, the small holding, but rather the peasant who wants to consolidate his holding, not the country folk who, linked up with the towns, want to overthrow the old order through their own energies, but on the contrary those who, in stupefied seclusion within this old order, want to see themselves and their small holdings saved and favored by the ghosts of empire.<sup>53</sup>

The white working class is encouraged by the political establishment to focus their resentment on immigrants, while the political interests of both groups go unaddressed. The creature comforts Hogarth mentions at the beginning of the song reflect this preoccupation with holding onto one’s own small parcel of land and financial security. Despite the characteristic liberal concern for the virtue of political and religious leaders, the song reflects a concern similar to that of Bonaparte’s peasant base. The culmination of the song references the intrusion of politics and empire into the bourgeois family unit, introducing interpersonal strife (“you say I’m becoming harder to live

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<sup>52</sup> Marillion, “El Dorado: F E A R.”

<sup>53</sup> Karl Marx, “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte,” in *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, ed. David McLellan (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1977), 317-318.

with”<sup>54</sup>) and thrusting the physical evidence of imperial violence (“tanks covered in yellow mud / pass you on the motorway / as you drive by with the kids and their buckets and spades”<sup>55</sup>) into the domestic sphere. This is a quintessentially liberal resentment—or, as Marx put it in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, “It proved that the struggle to maintain [the bourgeoisie’s] public interests, its political power, only troubled and upset it, as it was a disturbance of private business.”<sup>56</sup> Liberalism chooses to trade the possibility of political change for security, and resents the incursion of the unpleasantness of empire, racism, homophobia and war into private life. Despite this privileging of the private, of bourgeois family life, the predicament of liberalism is that capitalism is the ultimate annihilator of the personal and private. As Marshall Berman writes:

The truth of the matter, as Marx sees, is that everything that bourgeois society builds is built to be torn down...The pathos of all bourgeois monuments is that their material strength and solidity actually count for nothing and carry no weight at all, that they are blown away like frail reeds by the very forces of capitalist development they celebrate.<sup>57</sup>

There are times, however, the liberal sentiment of “El Dorado” reaches towards a broader historical critique. Hogarth situates the present resurgence of right-wing nationalist sentiment in the ongoing context of Britain’s colonial history: “The colors of the flag we wave / Were and will become blood red again.”<sup>58</sup> Paul Gilroy notes that though “[l]ater groups of immigrants may not, of course, be connected with the history of empire and colony in any way whatsoever. However, they experience the misfortune of being caught up in a pattern of hostility and conflict

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<sup>54</sup> Marillion, “El Dorado: F E A R.”

<sup>55</sup> Ibid

<sup>56</sup> Karl Marx, “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte,” 305.

<sup>57</sup> Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air*, 99.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid

that belongs emphatically to its lingering aftermath.”<sup>59</sup> Instead of forming connections with the other victims of the neoliberal order, the bloc that Marx refers to as “conservative peasantry,” the core supporters of reactionary, right-wing populists, have chosen instead to grasp at past glories, slouching towards an imagined past that can never be made present. One elegant demonstration of this tendency is Paul Gilroy’s examination of the British soccer slogan “Two world wars and one World Cup, doo dah, doo dah.”<sup>60</sup> Gilroy writes:

The intellectual commitment to taking these sentiments seriously, to making them worth understanding and unpacking, involves recognizing the dignity and value of the worthy lives that motto has helped to lead astray or divert into the arid lands of Brit nationalist fantasy. For anyone willing to dig a little past the bright surface of its red, white, and blue crust, that phrase will supply a wealth of valuable insights into the morbid culture of a once-imperial nation that has not been able to accept its inevitable loss of prestige in a determinedly post-colonial world...All the latent violence, all the embittered machismo, all the introjected class warfare articulated by defeated victors (mostly men and boys who were baffled and bewildered by a new postwar world that refused to recognize their historic manly qualities) is coded here in a dynamic and still explosive form.<sup>61</sup>

The fear and bravado that Hogarth describes is rooted this loss of the potency of the imperial heyday. Like the Leave campaign, which seized the opportunity to blame the European Union for Britain’s loss of potency, or the 2016 Trump campaign, which harnessed white working- and middle-class xenophobia and racial resentment in the name of “Making America Great Again,”

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<sup>59</sup> Paul Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia* (New York: Columbia UP, 2005), 101.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, 107

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*

the chanting soccer hooligans do violence and shape political discourse in the pursuit of a perfect past that never really existed.

### **PART THREE: *The Monitor*: Punk Rock, New Jersey, and the End of the World as We Know It**

The first track on Titus Andronicus's 2010 album "The Monitor" opens with a voiceover rendition of Abraham Lincoln's 1838 Lyceum Address.

From whence shall we expect the approach of danger? Shall some transatlantic giant step the earth and crush us at a blow? Never! All the armies of Europe and Asia could not, by force, take a drink from the Ohio River or set a track on the Blue Ridge in the trial of a thousand years. If destruction be our lot, we ourselves must be its author and finisher. As a nation of free men, we will live forever, or die by suicide.<sup>62</sup>

The august invocation of high political rhetoric, delivered in a crackly recording by frontman and songwriter Patrick Stickles's high school theater teacher Okey Canfield Chenoweth III, is generally at odds with the rest of the album's mordant and gritty observations about working class life in deindustrialized New Jersey. Concerned with the economic and social pressures affecting the American underclass, Stickles examines the corrosive effects of capitalism and deindustrialization on the psyche of America's urban and suburban precariat. The first stanza of the song expresses the album's concern with its geographical rooting.

There'll be no more counting the cars on the Garden State Parkway

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<sup>62</sup> Titus Andronicus, "A More Perfect Union," recorded August 2009, track 1 on *The Monitor*, XL, Spotify.

Nor waiting for the Fung-Wah bus to carry me to who-knows-where  
 And when I stand tonight, 'neath the lights of the Fenway  
 Will I not yell like hell for the glory of the Newark Bears?  
 Because where I'm going to now, no one can ever hurt me  
 Where the well of human hatred is shallow and dry  
 No, I never wanted to change the world, but I'm looking for a new New Jersey  
 Because tramps like us, baby, we were born to die!<sup>63</sup>

Patrick Stickles' home state of New Jersey has always figured prominently in Titus Andronicus's albums. The first track on their debut album, entitled *The Airing of Grievances*, contains the track "Fear and Loathing in Mawah, NJ."<sup>64</sup> *The Monitor*, their next release, includes similar geographical locators. The Garden State Parkway is a major commercial and transit artery running from the North to the South of New Jersey. The Fung Wah bus line ran from New York City to Boston until being shut down by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration for failure to comply with federal safety standards. Both the Parkway and the Fung Wah bus line are emblematic of departure, of a precarious, transient lifestyle adopted by people with few social connections and even less social and economic capital. Stickles uses these markers to describe his move from his home state to Boston, Massachusetts. "Fenway" refers to the home stadium of the Boston Red Sox, but the Newark Bears are a minor league baseball team based out of New Jersey. The juxtaposition of major-league and minor-league sports reflects the dichotomy between Boston, the higher-education and cultural center, and Newark, an economically depressed city plagued by persistent underemployment and poverty. According to

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<sup>63</sup> Titus Andronicus, "A More Perfect Union."

<sup>64</sup> Titus Andronicus, "Fear and Loathing in Mawah, NJ," recorded November 2007, track 1 on *The Airing of Grievances*, Troubleman Unlimited, Spotify.



a report by the Associated Press, “Half of Newark’s 277,000 residents live below the poverty level, according to a 2013 report from Legal Services of New Jersey...Per-capita income for Newark residents is \$17,617, according to the U.S. Census. The high school dropout rate is just under 40 percent.”<sup>65</sup> In “A More Perfect Union,” as in *The Monitor* as a whole, Newark stands in for the industrial urban proletariat, and Boston for their frustrated aspirations of class mobility. Marshall Berman writes specifically on Marx’s interest in industrial workers as potential generators of revolutionary sentiment. In Marx’s analysis, “Industrial workers gradually awaken to some sort of class consciousness and activate themselves against the acute misery and chronic oppression in which they live.”<sup>66</sup> Acute misery and chronic oppression are appropriate terms to describe the situation in Newark for many. Stickles quotes one of Abraham Lincoln’s letters in the opening to “No Future Part Three: Escape from No Future:” “I am now the most miserable man living. If what I feel were equally distributed to the whole human race, there would not be one cheerful face on Earth.”<sup>67</sup> The escape referred to in the title is both geographical, connoting the flight from economically blighted areas into major urban centers, but also to Stickles’ own addiction—a reaction shared by many in the Rust Belt and Appalachia. Addiction is a mental illness, certainly, but it is also a response to economic stimulus. “‘There’s no jobs here,’ said Taurean Fleming, 27, who said he has been job hunting for more than two years...He said he also pounds the pavement and goes to employment offices. He said his girlfriend is also waiting

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<sup>65</sup> Associated Press. “Bound for DC, Booker Leaves Mixed Legacy in Newark,” *The Trentonian*. October 18, 2013, <https://www.trentonian.com/2013/10/18/bound-for-dc-booker-leaves-mixed-legacy-in-newark/>

<sup>66</sup> Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air*, 91.

<sup>67</sup> Titus Andronicus, “No Future Three: Escape From No Future,” recorded August 2009, track 3 on *The Monitor*, XL. Spotify.

for a job after passing a civil service examination, but there have been no opportunities.”<sup>68</sup>

According to Thomas Owusu:

[The decline of Jersey’s industrial cities] are attributable to a combination of local, national, and global economic factors including periods of depression, labor discord, product substitution, decentralization of economic activities, and deindustrialization.

Economic decline resulted in a high rate of unemployment, poverty, and urban decay.<sup>69</sup>

Due to the precipitous decline of manufacturing between 1975 and 1997, as well as the loss of retail trade jobs, non-college-educated workers in New Jersey’s urban centers were left with few opportunities. Camden, for example, a distressed industrial city in southern New Jersey:

moved aggressively in the early 1990s to facilitate private acquisition and remediation of its five hundred abandoned factory sites, covering more than 25 percent of its total land area. As of 2010, a staggering 485 remained fallow...government incentives made little difference in areas that suffered from crumbling infrastructure, a poorly educated labor force, and a discouraging real estate environment. Disappointingly, the few successful cases [of revitalization] failed to trigger ancillary spillover effects, leaving scattered islands of vitality stranded in a vast ocean of decay.<sup>70</sup>

The emigration Stickles describes in “A More Perfect Union” is the only option many have left.

Because people under this stage of capitalism have been reduced to rootless nomads, forced to scurry all over the country in search of work, community and even familial bonds have become a

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<sup>68</sup> Associated Press. “Bound for DC, Booker Leaves Mixed Legacy in Newark.”

<sup>69</sup> Thomas Y. Owusu, “Economic Transition in the City of Paterson, New Jersey (America’s First Planned Industrial City): Causes, Impacts, and Urban Policy Implications,” *Urban Studies Research* 2014. Web. Accessed March 5, 2023.

<sup>70</sup> Andrew Hurley. “From Factory Town to Metropolitan Junkyard: Postindustrial Transitions on the Urban Periphery,” *Environmental History* 21, no. 1 (2016): 7-8

luxury unavailable to the proletariat. Those who leave must confront the precarity of a rootless, marginal existence, forced to be relentlessly entrepreneurial in their efforts to market themselves.

Those who stay, as Wendy Brown writes:

[Those who remain] cling to the soil, even if it is planted in a suburban lawn devastated by droughts and floods from global warming, littered with the paraphernalia of addictive painkillers, and adjacent to crumbling schools, abandoned factories, terminal futures. Families become shells, ownership and savings vanish, marriages teeter and break, depression, anxiety, and other forms of mental illness are ubiquitous, religion is commercialized and weaponized, and patriotism is reduced to xenophobic support for troops in aimless, endless wars and useless, but spectacular border barricades. Nation, family, property, and the traditions reproducing racial and gender privilege, mortally wounded by deindustrialization, neoliberal reason, globalization, digital technologies, and nihilism, are reduced to affective remains.<sup>71</sup>

Stickles, throughout *The Monitor*, both leaves and returns to the de-industrial wasteland of New Jersey, unable to find agency or meaning in either his blighted, desolate hometown or in a marginal, isolated existence in Boston. Neither choice provides a way out of the “liberalization, privatization, marketization, securitization, and austerity”<sup>72</sup> of neoliberalism. Though “neoliberal discursive, governmental, and structural changes have reconfigured social and economic life in the name of enhanced entrepreneurial ‘freedom,’”<sup>73</sup> the average American has become more and more alienated from democratic control over their institutions, as well as the ability to improve

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<sup>71</sup> Wendy Brown, “No Future for White Men,” 187-188.

<sup>72</sup> William Callison and Zachary Manfredi, “Theorizing Mutant Neoliberalism,” in *Mutant Neoliberalism* (New York: Fordham UP, 2019): 1.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*, 19.

their own life. Through one man's story, *The Monitor* dramatizes the illusory nature of choice—and individual agency—under the present economic and political system.

### ***The Monitor and the End of History***

The corrosive effects of late capitalism on family life and social cohesion are often weaponized and wielded by the state or corporations to undermine labor solidarity, as well as foreclosing the potential for collective action by transforming workers into interchangeable, “unskilled” units that must be circulated and pitted against each other in a cutthroat gig economy. As Berman remarks:

[S]olidarity, however impressive at any given moment, may turn out to be as transient as the machines they operate or the products they turn out. The workers may sustain each other today on the assembly line or the picket line, only to find themselves scattered tomorrow among different collectivities with different conditions, different processes and products, different needs and interests. Once again the abstract forms of capitalism seems to subsist—capital, wage labor, commodities, exploitation, surplus value—while their human contents are thrown into perpetual flux. How can any lasting human bonds grow in such loose and shifting soil?<sup>74</sup>

*The Monitor* bears a more vexed relation to the concept of solidarity than *The Wall* or *Fuck Everyone and Run*. In the final track of the album, entitled “The Battle of Hampton Roads,” Stickles declines to provide an antidote to his bleak analysis of post-industrial American life. “Solidarity’s gonna give a lot less than it’ll take / Is there a girl at this college who hasn’t been

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<sup>74</sup> Marshall Berman, *All That is Solid Melts Into Air*, 104

raped? / Is there a boy in this town who's not exploding with hate?"<sup>75</sup> The divisions between various social groups have been inflamed by years of inequality and oppression, and the ossified apparatus of neoliberalism have been working overtime for the past thirty years to foreclose the possibility of political advancement. The foundational text of America's political stagnation is Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man*, which was published in 1992 and was quickly metabolized into the broad political consciousness of Western liberal democracy.<sup>76</sup> Despite the increasing gap between the praise lavished upon Western liberalism and the grim ecological, economic, and humanitarian circumstances faced by the vast majority of the populace, the party line of the ruling class and media is that we have limitless opportunities, that all of our economic failures are our own, and must be atoned for through the purgation of poverty. Or, in terms more specific to the post-industrial aesthetic of *The Monitor*, that the massive offshoring of manufacturing jobs will be made up for in the increased availability of cheap consumer goods, regardless of whether or not those left behind will have any capital with which to pay for them.<sup>77</sup> In *Specters of Marx*, Jacques Derrida writes:

[L]iberal democracy...has finally realized itself as the ideal of human history: never have violence, inequality, exclusion, famine, and thus economic oppression affected as many

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<sup>75</sup> Titus Andronicus, "The Battle of Hampton Roads," recorded August 2009, track 10 on *The Monitor*, XL. Spotify.

<sup>76</sup> Francis Fukuyama's framing of human development can be seen in popular depictions of the American government like *The West Wing*, and in the actual workings of government during the Obama administration. Amidst the suppression of the Left by conservative, centrist, and liberal interests in America, the impossibility of improving past liberal democracy has been accepted by the political class and commentariat as a *fait accompli*. For more on the end of history and contemporary American political culture, see Chapo Trap House, "Post Hoc, Ergo Propter Hoc," April 19, 2017. Web.

<sup>77</sup> Chapo Trap House, "Soy New World," February 16, 2023. As Felix Biederman notes, this is also the thesis of *Brave New World*: "that a deluge of information and pleasure is a superior means to control the populace rather than a boot-on-the neck, 1984 style thing...Everything sucks, but people are just convinced that it's good. They're like, 'oh, it's awesome to have sex through a USBC. It's great to eat pill meals.'"

human beings in the history of the earth and of humanity. Instead of singing the advent of [...] the end of history, instead of celebrating the ‘end of ideologies’ and the end of the great emancipatory discourses, let us never neglect this obvious, macroscopic fact, made up of innumerable, singular sites of suffering: no degree of progress allows one to ignore that never before, in absolute figures, have so many men, women, and children been subjugated, starved, or exterminated on the earth.<sup>78</sup>

The tightening noose of economic inequality, the destruction of the social safety net, and the systematic elimination of all political possibilities for remediating these problems generates the tightly coiled angst, frustration, and panicked helplessness expressed in *The Monitor*. In “Four Score and Seven,”<sup>79</sup> Stickles sings: “This is a war we can’t win / After 10,000 years, it’s still us against them / And my heroes have always died at the end.”<sup>80</sup> The first line of the song acknowledges the hopelessness that comes from struggling against a hegemonic state that controls the levers of power, culture, and discourse—a hopelessness and resignation that are generated, by design, by the state to suppress effective dissent. The second line, which refers to 8000 BCE, or the birth of organized agriculture, acts as the end of primitive communalism and the beginning of a system of divided labor and exploitation. The “heroes” referred to in the next line are likely the historical figures whose words Stickles uses to bracket his songs—Abraham Lincoln, Walt Whitman, William Lloyd Garrison—but can be interpreted more broadly to reflect the thousands of rebellious or insurrectionary pockmarks in the fabric of American history, led by those whose attempts at asserting their own humanity ended beneath the iron boot of the

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<sup>78</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International* (New York: Routledge): 1994.

<sup>79</sup> Titus Andronicus, “Four Score and Seven,” recorded August 2009, track 6 on *The Monitor*, XL. Spotify.

<sup>80</sup> Titus Andronicus, “Four Score and Seven.”

state.<sup>81</sup> Since violent resistance is futile and the American political apparatus has become so alienated from democratic control that most citizens do not consider voting to be a reliable method of getting their concerns addressed,<sup>82</sup> culture is the only field of criticism left. Culture provides a medium through which artists can advance critiques of their historical moment that would otherwise prove unpalatable, and allows for the transmission of ideas and sentiments in a way that has the potential to provide grounds for solidarity. It is this field to which many liberals and leftists have decamped, often using texts or aesthetics as a way to signal their beliefs and find a like-minded community.<sup>83</sup> Stickles, however, declines to seize onto the idea that culture is the avenue through which social conditions may be changed. In “Four Score and Seven,” Stickles sings:

Fuck, I’m frustrated, freaking out something fierce  
 Would you help me, I’m hungry, I suffer and I starve  
 Oh, I struggle and I stammer ’till I’m up to my ears  
 In miserable quote unquote “art.”<sup>84</sup>

The physical and psychological circumstances of the work of art’s creation are elaborated here—the struggle to survive in an impoverished and mentally deprived state create both lyrics and vocal delivery that are rough around the edges, frenzied, and full of raw emotion. The message

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<sup>81</sup> John Brown, the radical abolitionist whose raid on Harper’s Ferry resulted in his execution, is referenced specifically in “A More Perfect Union.”

<sup>82</sup> As a result, most Americans do not bother to vote, except for in Presidential elections (and even then, turnout generally hovers around fifty percent). Gerrymandering, the Electoral College, and draconian laws designed to suppress Black, Hispanic, and working-class turnout all contribute to the sense of learned helplessness Stickles performs in *The Monitor*.

<sup>83</sup> For example, a generation of liberals—including prominent Obama staffers and commentators like Matt Yglesias and Ezra Klein—found in *The West Wing* a model of the kind of government they would like to create. In a surreal turn of events, Aaron Sorkin’s technocratic, liberal ideology wound up helping to shape the aesthetics of an eight-year administration.

<sup>84</sup> Titus Andronicus, “Four Score and Seven.”

of the song is not seamlessly imparted, either. By struggling and stammering, Stickles is able to roughly suture together history, geography, and the subjective experience of living under late-stage capitalism into a whole that, while riven by indelible contradictions and divisions, communicates starkly the torment of living in the margins of neoliberal society.

Unconvinced of the effectiveness of the work of art to attack the broader social structures that generate the misery and desperation he narrates, Stickles locates the grinding, quotidian acts of basic existence as another site of potential rebellion. In “The Battle of Hampton Roads,” he writes:

I have a hand and a napkin when I’m looking for sex  
 And that’s no one to talk to when feeling depressed  
 And so now when I drink, I’m going to drink to excess  
 And when I smoke, I will smoke gaping holes in my chest  
 And when I scream, I will scream until I’m gasping for breath  
 And when I get sick, I will stay sick for the rest  
 Of my days peddling hate at the back of a Chevy Express  
 Each one a fart in the face of your idea of success  
 And if this be thy will, then fuckin’ pass me the cup...<sup>85</sup>

By returning to New Jersey and refusing to give up the marginal and hardscrabble existence of Newark’s orphaned, post-industrial proletariat, Stickles is able to exert a limited and self-destructive form of rebellion. By choosing to remain “a loser,”<sup>86</sup> or, in economic parlance, unskilled, unemployed, and unemployable, Stickles becomes the proverbial bee in

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<sup>85</sup> Titus Andronicus, “The Battle of Hampton Roads.”

<sup>86</sup> Titus Andronicus, “No Future Part 3: Escape From No Future.”



neoliberalism's bonnet. Wendy Brown writes in her discussion of white male nihilism and resentment under neoliberalism that "[a]s we become human capital all the way down and all the way in, neoliberalism makes selling one's soul quotidian, rather than scandalous."<sup>87</sup> As he remarks in "Theme from 'Cheers,'" "Down in North Carolina, I could have been a productive member of society / But these New Jersey cigarettes and all they require have made a fucking junkie out of me."<sup>88</sup> By drinking and smoking, Stickles is able to sabotage the only asset of the state that he has complete control over—his own body. The imagery of the abused and destroyed body is everywhere in *The Monitor*, from "these humans [who] treat humans like humans treat hogs / They get used up, coughed up, and fried in a pan"<sup>89</sup> to Stickles drunkenly stopping "to throw up / in the warm glow of the traffic light / But I'm gonna put the devil inside me to sleep if it takes all night."<sup>90</sup> Addiction, alcoholism, and eating disorders all constitute attempts to alleviate internal pain and despair by exerting the will upon the body and brain. Despite all this abuse, the body, however battered and scarred, refuses to be disciplined into a tool of the state, and refuses to die.

I've been called out, cuckolded, castrated, but I survived

I am covered in urine and excrement but I'm alive

And there's a white flag in my pocked never to be unfurled

Though with their hands 'round my ankles, they bring me down for another swirl

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<sup>87</sup> Wendy Brown, "No Future for White Men: Nihilism, Fatalism, and *Ressentiment*." In *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism: The Rise of Antidemocratic Policies in the West*, 161-188. New York: Columbia UP, 2019.

<sup>88</sup> Titus Andronicus, "Theme from 'Cheers,'" recorded August 2009, track 7 on *The Monitor*, XL. Spotify.

<sup>89</sup> Titus Andronicus, "Four Score and Seven."

<sup>90</sup> Titus Andronicus, "Theme from 'Cheers.'"

And they tell me, “Take it easy, buddy, it’s not the end of the world!”<sup>91</sup>

Perhaps ironically for an artist, the triumph of *The Monitor*—if there is one—is not one of the human brain, but one of the human body. The body that refuses to be disciplined into a subject of the economy, that takes its psychological state into its own hands through violence or substance abuse, that shuns extrinsic motivators of health and productivity, is an indissoluble waste product of the capitalist economy. It is a grim approach, one that does not allow for daydreams of heroism or escape, but, Stickle suggests, deprived of any tools whatsoever to dismantle the master’s house, we have been reduced to scratching at the walls with bloodied fingernails.

## **Conclusion**

In the wake of the 2016 election, a cottage industry of white working-class whisperers emerged, seizing the opportunity to explain the actions of Trump voters to their bewildered liberal cousins. Venture capitalist J. D. Vance’s book *Hillbilly Elegy* became “required reading” for many, and David Brooks, the conservative and cosmopolitan New York Times Opinion columnist, published endless anthropological observations on desperate, entranced Middle Americans. What Brooks and his ilk failed to realize was that these dynamics had already been mapped by Marx himself.

During the period of the parliamentary republic, the peasants of different localities rose against their own offspring, the army. The bourgeoisie punished them with states of siege

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<sup>91</sup> Titus Andronicus, “A Pot in Which to Piss,” recorded August 2009, track 5 on *The Monitor*, XL. Spotify.

and punitive expedition. And this same bourgeoisie now cries out about the stupidity of the masses, the vile multitude, that has betrayed it to Bonaparte. It has itself forcibly strengthened the empire sentiments of the peasant class, it conserved the conditions that form the birthplace of this peasant religion. The bourgeoisie, to be sure, is bound to fear the stupidity of the masses as long as they remain conservative, and the insight of the masses as soon as they become revolutionary.<sup>92</sup>

Crushed between an impotent liberalism that has abandoned the possibility of political innovation and right-wing austerity and religious fundamentalism, citizens have begun to misbehave. To cudgel the loudest members of this restive populace into respectability is to treat the symptoms rather than the underlying cause. Each of the albums discussed in this analysis makes an appraisal of the neoliberal world order based on the cultural and historical context that produced them, and offer either a path forwards, either towards producing an insightful and revolutionary populace, or a stubborn, fatalistic refusal to be reduced to human capital. While the war for the future of humanity cannot be won by culture alone, it is art that crystallizes the hopes and fears of a moment in history and allows us to chart a path forwards. William Faulkner's drunken Nobel Banquet speech has become famous for setting out the task of the author, and it is with his words that I would like to end.

I decline to accept the end of man. It is easy enough to say that man is immortal simply because he will endure: that when the last dingdong of doom has clanged and faded from the last worthless rock hanging tideless in the last red and dying evening, that even then there will still be one more sound: that of his puny inexhaustible voice, still talking. I refuse to accept this. I believe that man will not merely endure: he will prevail. He is

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<sup>92</sup> Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte," 319.

immortal, not because he alone among creatures has an inexhaustible voice, but because he has a soul, a spirit capable of compassion and sacrifice and endurance.<sup>93</sup>

It is not the part of the artist or the Marxist to surrender. “The revolution is thoroughgoing,” Marx writes. “It is still journeying through purgatory. It does its work methodically.”<sup>94</sup> As the artist must find a way to present the historical moment that occasions their work in a new light, the Marxist critic must parse these representations, historicize them, and locate the work of art within the ongoing genealogy of class struggle—to keep an eye on the artwork’s part in the play, as well as the play itself.

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<sup>93</sup> William Faulkner, “Nobel Banquet Speech,” December 10, 1950.  
<https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1949/faulkner/speech/>

<sup>94</sup> Karl Marx, “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte,” 316.

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