



THE NEW INQUIRY

Let Them Drink Blood

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December 27, 2016

Silicon Valley's elites are a revolutionary vanguard party developing the not-too-distant future of cybernetic capitalist reconstruction. Despite cultish personas and massive social influence, however, they tend to keep their politics on the low. That changed this year when Peter Thiel, PayPal founder and Facebook board member, who also has investments in SpaceX and data analysis firm Palantir, revealed himself as mastermind of the litigious assassination of Gawker, a fellow-traveler of right-libertarian White Nationalists, and a prominent supporter of President-elect Donald J. Trump.

Thiel's "Don't Be Evil" competitors now look like saints in comparison. Some colleagues distanced themselves, while others wrote off the endorsement as part of his "disruptive instinct" to break down regulations preventing his Founders Fund investments from expanding. Then, in August, it was rumored that Thiel bragged to friends that Trump promised to nominate him to the Supreme Court, which would make him one of the most powerful men in America for a lifetime term. And Peter Thiel plans to live for a long time. He has a personal and financial stake in life extension technologies, including "parabiosis"—the (theoretically) rejuvenating transfer of young blood to an older person.

For those outside the valley, Thiel's vampiric ambitions appeared to vindicate populist imagery dating back to Voltaire, who wrote in his *Philosophical Dictionary* that the real vampires were "stock-jobbers, brokers, and men of business, who sucked the blood of the people in broad daylight." A century of trite political cartoons have depicted moguls or aristocrats growing fat on the blood of innocents. Most recently, Matt Taibbi's popular description of Goldman Sachs as a "vampire squid wrapped around the face of humanity," revived this discourse as a conceptual rallying point of Occupy Wall Street. It was a sentiment that even played out in the campaigns of Sanders, and to a far worse extent, Trump, who towards the end of his campaign regularly parroted Infowars radio host Alex Jones's discourse about a world-dominating conspiracy of shadowy globalists.

"Elites around the world have been obsessed with blood for thousands of years," Jones said in an Infowars video this summer concerning Thiel. He goes on to argue that elites throughout history, including the British Royal Family, have undergone similar parabiotic treatments for decades. "Where the story really gets weird," Jones opined, "is that Prince Charles came out in the last decade and said I am a direct descendent of Vlad the Impaler... the people running things aren't physical, immortal vampires, but they have the spirit of what you describe as a vampire, and they believe their god, Lucifer, if they establish a world government, is going to give them eternal

life. And now they're mainlining the idea of baby parts and blood from the young to make the rich live longer."

Dropping in Dracula's relation to the British Monarchy would be irrelevant for a journalist, but for a conspiracist like Jones, the detail is delicious enough to aid both his legitimate thesis—that the rich and powerful treat the world's populations as nothing but commodities—and the farfetched one: Thiel, despite being a fellow traveler of Jones' paleoconservatism, is an early adopter of technology that would free him from the eternal hellfire he would otherwise be due through his deals with the devil. Jones warns that Thiel's fellow globalists will continue to push wars, cancer-causing vaccines, and abortions in a eugenic blood-ritual to depopulate the world by 80% and install a one-world government.

Thiel's visionary investments suggest a similar blurring of science fiction, paranoia, and plausible dystopian scenarios. In a 2009 essay for *Cato Unbound*, he stated his anti-national principles: "I stand against confiscatory taxes, totalitarian collectives, and the ideology of the inevitability of the death of every individual."

So what's standing in the way of a "death and taxes"-optional world? The same thing that fellow frontier industrialist Daniel Plainview lamented in 2007's *There Will Be Blood*: People. Poor and female ones, specifically. "Since 1920," Thiel continued, "the vast increase in welfare beneficiaries and the extension of the franchise to women—two constituencies that are notoriously tough for libertarians—have rendered the notion of 'capitalist democracy' into an oxymoron."

"Because there are no truly free places left in our world, I suspect that the mode for escape must involve some sort of new and hitherto untried process that leads us to some undiscovered country; and for this reason I have focused my efforts on new technologies that may create a new space for freedom." He outlines three such spaces: artificial island micronations, the Internet, and space colonies. He's invested heavily in all three, including SpaceX, which plans to colonize Mars. Now, he's a member of Trump's transition team. In a potential sign of Thiel's influence in the new administration, the President-elect's senior adviser on NASA recently announced that funds for studying climate change will be diverted to deep space exploration.

Thiel's plan to locate and conquer space to build a libertarian utopia closely follows the *deus ex machina* of Atlas Shrugged—a perpetual motion machine that allowed the libertopia Galt's Gulch to become a fully-automated bourgeois paradise without need for whiney workers. But even if the pretense of these microstates were egalitarian (and not the aristocratic Reichlets described by Thiel's mentor and lead thinker of the Property and Freedom Society, right-libertarian economist Hans-Hermann Hoppe), the Communist Manifesto's critique of utopian ambition in literature is fitting:

They still dream of experimental realization of their social Utopias, of founding isolated "phalansteries," of establishing "Home Colonies," or setting up a "Little Icaria," duodecimo editions of the New Jerusalem. By degrees, they sink into the category of the reactionary [or] conservative Socialists depicted above, differing from these only by more systematic pedantry, and by their fanatical and superstitious belief in the miraculous effects of their social science.

They, therefore, violently oppose all political action on part of the working class; such action, according to them, can only result from blind unbelief in the new Gospel.

Before Thiel and the broader space-race-boosterism science fiction canon, futurology was a misguided socialist enterprise as described by Marx. Some of Thiel's aspirations were even disastrously attempted in the 20s and 30s by two Bolshevik factions calling themselves the God-Builders and Biocosmist-Immortalists. The writers Gorky, Lunacharsky, Malevich, and Bogdanov were amongst their ranks, and all inspired by Russian Orthodox philosopher and mystic Nikolai Fyodorov, who advocated life extension and space colonization in technological culmination of the Book of Revelation. When Lenin died, Vladimir Mayakovsky's declaration of "Lenin lived, Lenin lives, Lenin will live forever!" represented the sentiments of his peers, who preserved his body, organs, and brain, in hopes they could revive him.

Alexander Bogdanov, a cofounder of the Bolshevik party and Lenin's one-time rival, was a particularly Thielian figure in the group. In 1905, Bogdanov wrote the science fiction novel *Red Star*, depicting a communist society on Mars where parabiosis was practiced as a form of mutual aid. Two decades after writing *Red Star*, Bogdanov founded the State Institute for Haematology and Blood Transfusions. He subjected himself to these transfusions, and died from a botched trial—a fitting metaphor for a revolutionary killed by his own "fanatical and superstitious belief in the miraculous power of their social sciences."

By the 1930's, some remaining Immortalists were making the case for Stalinist terror. Writing for *Pravda*, Gorky described peasants resisting collectivization and their starving orphaned children as "masses of parasites... rats, mice, gophers," who must be wiped out because they "do the economy of the country a great deal of harm." In his book *The Immortalization Commission*, contemporary philosopher John Gray argues that extermination fit well with the transhumanist foundation of God-Building. Following Lenin's promise that the peasants will "worship electricity," God-Builders believed once industrialized, the Soviet Union would advance its technological capabilities to fulfill the Christian eschatology by liberating the New Soviet man from the constraints of mortality, terrestriality, and embodiment. Similar to Kurzweil's "singularity," Gray calls it a "materialist rapture" in which:

The dead will be resurrected by the power of science. Severing their links with the flesh, humans will enter a deathless realm. Lower life forms—plants, animals and unregenerate humans—will be left behind, or else eradicated. All that will remain will be the "pure thought" Gorky envisioned in his conversation with Blok—infinite, immortal energy.

In a way, Gorky was right. During the years of the New Economic Policy (1921-1928), state power centralized to a point that its revolutionary goals only existed in the "pure thought" of elevated apparatchiks. Outside the party, political obstacles were easily dealt with by the secret police, and the theory of Socialism in One Country turned the Soviet Union into a *SimCity* terrain to be built and destroyed as Stalin pleased. Although the Bolsheviks formed their party in a reaction to the horrors of industrial capital and World War I, it's no surprise that the cruelty and terror used to consolidate their power resulted in a totalitarian society.

Thiel views the world much like the early Soviet futurists. Their utopian dreams ran far ahead of the chaos of revolutionary Russia, where Civil War and social upheaval posed a significant impediment to the development of the Soviet Union's productive forces. Our own era of bicameral stagnation, social unrest, and organized labor similarly threaten the reactionary

acceleration envisioned by Silicon Valley futurists, who are developing technology to eliminate rebellion through expansion of the carceral state, scientific breakthroughs to protect the wealthiest from irreversible environmental depletion, and a new relationship between life and death mediated by the dead labor of capitalism.

Organs, blood, or stem cells may soon be freely traded like an Uber for Sein-zum-Tode (although, with scant evidence that life extension is anything other than pseudoscience, it's more likely to be a Theranos for Thanatos). For the middle class, extra years of life will be purchasable in mortgage-like installments. Life extension will be distributed just like the resiliency plans of major population areas under the menace of natural disasters amplified by global warming. The wealthiest areas will fortify structures, raise sea-walls, and afford for evacuations, while places like Haiti and Bangladesh are doomed to drown. Dying will increasingly be viewed as a manageable epidemic, like AIDS, violent crime, or homelessness.

Mars is even more open to the whims of venture capitalists who talk about it as if it's a cold red stress-ball for the worst mistakes of humanity. The most commonly discussed technique for making the planet habitable involves exporting global warming to Mars by building robotic factories that produce nothing but greenhouse gases, thus melting the ice caps and making the atmosphere more like that of Earth. Elon Musk had one other idea: nuking it.

margin-ad-leftIf all of Silicon Valley were revealed to be drinking plasma instead of pinot, so what? Historically, it has not only been the elite that drink blood. Medieval historian Richard Sugg recently told Smithsonian Magazine that villagers would gather around the recently executed with bowls to drink their blood fresh, or congeal it into a pudding for later. "The executioner was seen as a big healer," Sugg said. The 2016 election was such a ritual, meant to unite the people and reify the power of the Sovereign. A Clintonian decapitation of Trumpism would have reassured America that "Trump is not who we are," even as Obama's immigrant detention camps remain full past capacity and Kissingerian quagmires continue to burn across the globe. Instead, it is Clinton, utterly exposed in all her hypocrisy, who will face the new regime's pillory alongside the entirety of the Muslim and undocumented population.

But it wasn't Trump's "they all must go" eliminationism that lured Thiel, nor the unlikely Supreme Court nod. According to colleagues interviewed by Bloomberg, it was his Silicon Valley disruptor instincts—speculating that Trump will return the favor for Thiel's endorsement by helping Palantir with a government contract and giving SpaceX a leg-up against Boeing. With control over big data, the economics of life and death, and his own sandbox planet to build as he sees fit, Thiel is positioning himself beyond critique or recall from the masses.

Nonetheless, like the rest of his class, Thiel will always serve a higher power. For Marx, it is not the capitalists who are vampires, but "the thing they represent," the non-human force, a "dead labor" which "lives only by sucking living labor, and lives the more, the more labor it sucks." Painting Thiel as a vampire may be comforting, because then it would only take some sunlight and a pointy piece of wood to take him down. Instead, consider what Thiel really fears: us, and our historical tendency to commit deicide.