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Holding Out for a Hero: Celebrity Politics in the Neoliberal Age

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Abstract

This article argues that the advent of the celebrity politician can be understood as a consequence of the rise of neoliberalism, a political and economic project that foregrounds the importance of individual autonomy as a means of enhancing one's position in the competitive marketplace. At the same time, the displacements and upheavals occasioned by macroeconomic forces outside the control of any individual undermine autonomy and thus lead to a sense of powerlessness. Celebrity politicians, by contrast, leverage their origins outside the political sphere in support of claims to independence foreclosed to neoliberal subjects. By enabling a sense of vicariously restored power, the celebrity politician achieves credibility among followers through processes of psychic identification. That credibility, however, is secured at the expense of a rejection of the feminine, the state, and the commons, each of which is construed as a form of dependence that vitiates the neoliberal dream of autonomy. The article situates these rejections within the conditions required for democratic politics as a means of suggesting both the attraction and the danger of celebrity politics in the neoliberal age.

Key Words: neoliberalism, celebrity, politicians, politics, autonomy, psychic identification, democratic politics

At the 2016 Republican National Convention, then candidate and later president Donald Trump did what many presidential candidates do at such events by ticking off a list of problems confronting the country, including terrorism, domestic disorder, and wars abroad. Soon, however, his speech took a turn for the unusual when he claimed that "I am your voice. I alone can fix it. I will restore law and order."¹ This was a significant departure from the norms of US presidential politics. Major party presidential candidates typically seek to portray themselves as in partnership with others, be it their party, the American people, or even the opposition. They offer cooperation, acknowledge their need for assistance, and often call on God or their fellow citizens to join in the effort. Of course part of the reason for this is to secure votes. But it is also about creating and

sustaining a sense of community by emphasizing our reliance on others, something that is often strained during the partisan bickering of the nomination process. By offering himself as the sole person able to fix these problems, Trump took a page from a playbook often associated with extremist candidates from fringe parties in countries with a history of ethno-nationalism, anti-Semitism, and authoritarian rule.

Part of what enabled Trump's departure from custom was his origins in the celebrity realm where assertions of autonomy and singularity are a requirement for securing the affective attachments of fans. Adherence to established expectations, to be just like everyone else, is a mortal threat to the celebrity, especially in an age when consumer tastes change with bewildering frequency. From this point of view, Trump's willingness to cast aside traditional appeals to community and cooperation was not all that surprising and was in keeping with his scorched-Earth approach to campaigning that featured routine abrogations of political protocol and decorum. Yet the story of Trump's emergence as a major-party presidential candidate, and how he was able to leverage his celebrity into enough votes to secure the nomination and eventually the presidency, is complex and involves an array of forces that have transformed the American political landscape over the last several decades. In particular, the forces of neoliberalism have contributed significantly to the advent of the celebrity politician. By neoliberalism, what is meant is a constellation of political and economic forces that replace exchange relations with hyper-competition between individuals construed as human capital, the insistence that the individual is solely responsible for his or her fate, and a portrayal of the state—especially the welfare state—as inimical to this project because of the dependency it fosters. Neoliberalism valorizes the individual to an unprecedented degree, though not as an essential component of a healthy polis but as a radically solipsistic subject dedicated exclusively to the project of economic maximization.²

Trump's claim therefore rested on the peculiarly neoliberal belief in the value of autonomy and the conviction that independent action is the solution to nearly every problem. Although rugged individualism has long been a pre-eminent American value, a conspicuous feature of neoliberal autonomy is the degree to which it inspires animosity toward others and toward the forms of cooperation characteristic of the liberal social contract. Conceived as a means to mitigate the worst excesses of the pursuit of individual interests, the social contract is from the neoliberal point of view something of a Trojan horse given that it requires individuals to think in cooperative terms as a means to the achievement of their ends. Reliance on others is seen as impeding the functioning of the free market by imposing limits on the pursuit of economic success. In this context, Trump's claim to be the only one capable of solving the nation's problems made sense because it echoed the neoliberal commitment to going it alone and repudiating relations of dependence on others.

Still, neoliberal autonomy is beset by a paradox that often causes it to fail on its own terms. On the one hand, neoliberal subjects are figured as solely responsible for their own projects of economic maximization, yet on the other those projects are situated within a macro-economic environment over which the subject has no control. This not only subverts the claim to autonomy but leaves the neoliberal subject with nowhere to turn when those projects come to naught. Making matters worse, autonomy then doubles back on itself when "Experiences of powerlessness and vulnerability are not seen to be a product of human relations or political conditions or gender norms

or economic power or social atomization but instead arise only from one's own ineffectiveness as an autonomous agent."³ Neoliberal autonomy thus becomes a site of both praise and blame, invoked as the reason for one's success in the competitive marketplace and the thing whose incomplete realization justifies the marginalization of those who fail.

The neoliberal emphasis on autonomy also forestalls the creation of a political community that might counter the worst excesses of the economic projects it seeks to promote. As the imperatives of competition become ascendant and economic conduct becomes normative, the legitimacy of human interdependence is called into question. Indeed, "Interdependence of any sort is considered unfreedom, so that freedom is sustained through an aggressive stance toward other individuals, nations, and even nature."⁴ Whatever virtues the social contract allegedly confers upon those seeking to maximize their interests, it also implies a degree of mutuality that threatens that very ability. Provision of public goods and services for the benefit of all, collective deliberation and decision-making, and democratic norms of equality and inclusiveness are all jeopardized when the individual is solely responsible for his or her fate. The result is fragmentation of the community, an increasing sense of isolation, and the sequestering of individuals into silos and echo chambers of like-minded partisans.

Three circumstances thus collide to create the conditions for the celebrity politician: the neoliberal emphasis on autonomy, its loss as a paradoxical consequence of that same emphasis, and the fragmentation of the *polis* as a result of neoliberal policy and practice. To explore this claim in more detail, the essay first turns to Hanna Pitkin's canonical account of autonomy in the thought of Machiavelli.⁵ Though independence is the *sine qua non* of political activity and should be the goal of every prince, "the idea of autonomy is itself problematic, implying both a connection and a separation: a separation that challenges, denies, or overcomes a connection."⁶ By far the most significant connection is to Fortune, that force which Machiavelli infamously personifies as a woman best countered by the man of *virtù* who can bring her under his control. To be an autonomous man is therefore to be someone who can break free of the feminine and the forms of dependence that femininity implies. Neoliberal autonomy depends on a similar disavowal of connection to others, with its gendered dimension revealed in the persistent moralizing of the free market as a domain of action and the promotion of an ethos of competition that separates the winners from the losers, the independent from the dependent.

The argument then explores certain features of the neoliberal commitment to autonomy that bear on the advent of the celebrity politician. The claim is that neoliberalism's norms of rugged individualism and hyper-competition echo the Machiavellian quest for autonomy, but that those norms are simultaneously vitiated by neoliberal reconfigurations of power that elude the control autonomy is alleged to secure. As indicated, the paradoxical result is the *loss* of a sense of autonomy, but that this loss leads people into relations of dependence with those who can parlay fame and celebrity into credible claims of independence from the business-as-usual of party politics and from the state apparatus alleged to hinder free-market activity. Vicarious though it may be, psychic identification with the celebrity politician restores the sense of sovereign mastery over the centrifugal forces of post-industrial capitalism. Because of its origins in a non-political sphere, celebrity power is alleged to be absolved of responsibility for neoliberalization and thus uniquely positioned to combat it.

Elisabeth Anker's analysis of melodramatic political discourse in the aftermath of 9/11 helps refine and develop this theme. The hallmark of melodrama is the portrayal of innocent sufferers victimized by forces beyond their control but who are motivated by that injury to seek redemption. In the case of 9/11, the suffering of that day licensed state violence in response to the attack, with the corollary effect of restoring the sense of both national and individual sovereignty. As she puts it, "The allure of melodramatic political discourse is the promise of emancipation that it offers those who unjustly suffer,"⁷ an emancipation that occurs through individual identification with the state. The claim here is that the celebrity politician performs similar work on behalf of neoliberal subjects displaced by economic imperatives beyond the reach of collective action and thus deprived of a sense of autonomy. This deprivation is akin to the loss of sovereignty experienced on 9/11 and becomes eligible for redemption via the celebrity politician who solicits the affective identification of partisans by virtue of an alleged capacity to act alone. Identification is achieved when the celebrity politician responds to the grievances of micro-communities animated by a sense of victimization at the hands of immigrants, big government, or globalization, to name but a few. The celebrity politician's promise of unilateral action vicariously restores a measure of autonomy among the partisan faithful when their sense of injury is spoken to or acted upon.

The final section takes up some implications of these developments, particularly with respect to communities already in positions of precarity. As is well known, women, minorities, and immigrants have recently found themselves on the receiving end of bullying, harassment, and executive action by a president whose faith in the virtues of unilateral action has further contributed to the undoing of the demos he claims to lead. But because the independence of the celebrity politician depends on the cultivation and exploitation of parochialism, it does not appear as though things could be otherwise. Celebrity is not designed to build bridges between people who may have interests in common, just as neoliberalism is not designed to foster communities of interdependence upon which democratic politics depends.

Of States and Men

Central to understanding the attractive power of the celebrity politician is what it means to be a political actor, as well as the nature of the commitments and disavowals that inform its development. The classic resource here is Machiavelli, for whom one especially important characteristic of a political leader is autonomy, a trait he virtually always structures through an opposition between masculinity and femininity. As Hanna Pitkin writes, autonomy for Machiavelli "means having or making one's own laws or principles: independence, self-control, self-government, freedom."⁸ Because autonomy is made rather than found, its realization depends on a successful struggle against forces which might impugn it. As is well-known, much of that struggle for Machiavelli is haunted by the persistent presence of the feminine, the solution to which is found in the development of *virtù*, a word which "derives from the Latin *virtus*, and thus from *vir*, which means 'man.'"⁹ For Machiavelli, "*virtù* is thus manliness, those qualities found in a 'real man.' Furthermore, if *virtù* is Machiavelli's favorite quality, *effeminato* (effeminate) is one of his most frequent and scathing epithets. Nothing is more contemptible or more dangerous for a man than to be like a woman or, for that matter, a baby or an animal—that is, passive and

dependent.”¹⁰ The importance of *virtù* is thus derived from its ability to secure the sort of autonomy that would otherwise be imperiled by the forms of dependence characteristic of effeminacy. By extension, then, the man of *virtù* is very much a man, and the pursuit of autonomy, both for states and individuals, a resolutely manly endeavor. Indeed, “What matters for both security and glory, for both individuals and states, is autonomy,”¹¹ wherein autonomy is understood not simply as political or geostrategic independence but as a contouring of the republic in ways that insulate it from the threat of effeminate weakness.

The need to protect the republic from the enervating tendencies of femininity reveals a dimension of Machiavelli’s thought that is often overlooked when *virtù* is construed merely as the ability of men to assert sovereign mastery. While Machiavelli occasionally links manliness with sexual conquest, the situation is more complex. Given that “women signify the soft, delicate, and dependent things, it seems that association with them threatens to infect a man with these qualities. Though love may be conquest, it turns the womanizer into a weak and unmanly man unable to control his passions and thus distracted from other, ‘higher’ concerns.”¹² It is for this reason that “women are a danger not merely to tyrants, princes, and conquerors, but also to the healthy political life of a republic. They weaken the manly self-control of citizens as they do that of princes, and they tend to privatize the republican citizen, drawing him out of the public square into the bedroom.”¹³ Pitkin adds that for Machiavelli “Older women constitute an even greater political danger than seductive girls . . . [as] these women can be as ambitious as men, particularly for their families or for their marriageable daughters, thus in ways that privatize and tend to fragment the community.”¹⁴ The feminine is a danger, in other words, not just because of the threat it poses to the autonomy of the prince but because of the fragmentation it engenders *within* republics, meaning that political communities tend toward dependence and disintegration when the feminine is not effectively corralled and disciplined.

Little surprise, then, that Machiavelli personifies Fortune as a woman who is most effectively subdued by force. As “the arbiter of half the things we do,”¹⁵ Fortune epitomizes dependence on powers external to the subject who, if he lacks the requisite *virtù*, falls prey to her unpredictable and capricious nature. Fortune, therefore, favors the young, the bold, and the impetuous, those whose autonomy is not sullied by unmasculine timidity. As Machiavelli writes, “because Fortune is a woman and if she is to be submissive it is necessary to beat and coerce her.”¹⁶ It is for these reasons that Machiavelli valorizes the heroic exploits of men engaged in the pursuit of glory. As Pitkin observes, “In the traditionally masculine view, the summons to heroism is a call to leave behind lower for higher things; to give one’s life meaning and purpose by the willingness to sacrifice physical comfort and even life itself for some noble ideal; to leave the household for the public realm, there to express one’s unique individuality in connection with something larger and more valuable than self. Without such opportunity to pursue heroism, human life would be impoverished. And so the men march out to war in pursuit of glory.”¹⁷

The importance of warfare as a means to the achievement of glory is a point to which Machiavelli returns time and again. Its predicate, of course, is the citizen soldier. Perhaps *the* paradigmatic expression of masculinity, citizen soldiering solves the problem of dependency in two important ways. First, it avoids the risk posed by reliance upon auxiliaries and mercenaries, two groups whose primary allegiances are to other princes and to money, respectively. Second, it

sustains the autonomy of the republic via the creation of a fighting force capable of warding off the ambitions of other princes. Yet the citizen soldier is itself a dependent creature, conditioned as it is by the disavowal of the feminine upon which its intelligibility depends. As Susan Jeffords argues, “the female must by necessity be excluded from the enactment and maintenance of this masculine community. Representing the body, the appetitive, necessity, the domestic, and the mundane, the female stands in direct contradistinction to that which the masculine represents itself as being: the abstract, the immortal, the unchanging, the public.”¹⁸ At the same time, this exclusion demands an ever-more precise delineation of the feminine so as to avoid contaminating those who simultaneously wish to avoid it and yet are charged with the task of protecting it. The result is an ongoing process of “remasculinization,” or “a regeneration of the concepts, constructions, and definitions of masculinity . . . and a restabilization of the gender system within and for which it is formulated.”¹⁹ Tasked with constantly sustaining the terms of his martial masculinity, the citizen soldier is confronted with the paradox of mastering an ever-shifting set of identity configurations the origins and nature of which he ultimately cannot control.

The difficulties of sustaining the gendered forms of autonomy so prized by Machiavelli are rendered even more acute once the state assumes responsibility for the wellbeing of citizens in ways typically associated with the domestic sphere. Nurturing, caregiving, and the satisfaction of any number of material and emotional needs have long been considered the exclusive province of the domestic sphere and the women confined to it. Though the state under modern capitalism has had little choice but to take on some of these roles given the economic immiseration occasioned by the relentless pursuit of capital accumulation, the blending of public and private this represents has provoked anguish among those who wish to insulate the public realm from any state apparatus that hews too closely to its domestic counterpart. The reasons emerge clearly when set against the gender roles that prop up separate-spheres ideology. Positioned as clients, welfare recipients are subtly gendered feminine. As “the ‘negatives of possessive individuals’: they are largely excluded from the market both as workers and as consumers and are familialized, that is, made to claim benefits not as individuals but as members of ‘defective’ households.”²⁰ Welfare programs themselves are gendered feminine given that they provide the sorts of things typically associated with the household. Masculine identity is thus further jeopardized since welfare distorts “the internal relation between being a man and being a provider.”²¹

In this context, neoliberal assaults on the welfare state make perverse sense given the insistence that welfare is a form of dependence that saps the manly strength of citizens who might otherwise be able to jumpstart their own lives unaided.²² As Nancy Fraser observes, although welfare helps mitigate the worst excesses of capitalism, “the means employed to realize these new social rights tend perversely to endanger freedom. These means are bureaucratic procedure and the money form. They structure the entitlements, benefits and social services of the welfare system. And in so doing, they disempower clients, rendering them dependent on bureaucracies and therapeutocracies, and preempting their capacities to interpret their own needs, experiences, and life problems.”²³ The point refines Machiavelli’s era-specific concerns by calling attention to the gendered anxieties occasioned by the welfare state’s blurring of the distinction between public and private. Because the public/private divide relies on gender exclusions at both conceptual and practical levels, the welfare state represents the intrusion of the feminine into the sphere wherein

men express and sustain their masculinity. The presence of actual women, so threatening to Machiavelli's conception of masculine autonomy, is no longer the point given that the state gets figured *as* woman when it intervenes to help those whose lives have been obliterated by the machinery of late-modern capitalism. The neoliberal dream is therefore not limited to the restoration of individual freedom or the promotion of capital accumulation but includes the rehabilitation of the conditions under which expressions of autonomous masculinity can be defended against intrusions of the feminine into the public sphere.

Neoliberalism might thus be said to be a recognizably Machiavellian project, with many of the same gender exclusions and anxieties. In lieu of marching off to war (itself a problem given the interruption of capital flows it entails), neoliberal men march out of the household and into the free marketplace where their *virtù* as economic actors can be most fully realized. Their unique problem, however, is that this does not result in a departure from the state apparatus as occurs when Machiavelli's warriors leave behind the dependence-inducing republic. Rather, it entails entry into an environment in which the state's regulatory power acts as a check on the autonomy of economic actors, or worse yet facilitates dependence when it intervenes on behalf of the dispossessed. The significance of the neoliberal solution cannot be overstated: in lieu of abandoning the state, neoliberalism seeks to domesticate it by transforming it into a market actor imagined as autonomous but nevertheless subject to the same market pressures as everyone else. Thus positioned, the state becomes one more enemy to be vanquished when it interferes with the project of economic maximization. Much like Machiavelli's man of *virtù*, the neoliberal hero's return from the economic battlefield demonstrates once and for all that he is his own man, capable of surviving and thriving outside the caring embraces of home, woman, and the state.

Neoliberal Autonomy?

To grasp the nature of the neoliberal commitment to autonomy and its implications for the attractive power of the celebrity politician, certain features of neoliberalism are especially relevant. Neoliberalism gets its start as a theoretical project in the late 1940s in response to the belief that the sanctity of the individual had been eroded as the result of fascism, communism, and New Deal regulatory policies. Economists such as Friedrich Hayek, Ludwig von Mises, and Milton Friedman argued that state interventions in the market such as those proposed by John Maynard Keynes as a means of minimizing the social impacts of market downturns had stifled freedom of thought and expression and thereby sapped the free market of the energy necessary to sustain competition, innovation, and capital accumulation.²⁴ The resulting loss of economic vitality was accompanied by a shift away from personal responsibility and rugged individualism in favor of reliance on publicly-financed social safety nets that eliminated the incentive to work that would otherwise be provided by the free market. This framing of the problem as an essentially ontological issue received explicit articulation from British prime minister Margaret Thatcher, who remarked "Economics are the method, but the object is to change the soul."²⁵

Still, neoliberal dreams failed to gain much policy traction in the three decades following WWII, stymied as they were by Keynesian regulatory practices that succeeded in preventing large-scale economic crises but at the expense of profit generation. Not until the stagflation and general economic slowdown of the 1970s did neoliberalism find a receptive audience at the highest levels

of government. Deregulation and trickle-down economic policies became the new norm, especially in Great Britain and the United States. Keynesianism was largely abandoned in favor of fiscal austerity and a sustained effort to curb the power of labor. The social safety net saw dramatic reductions in funding, leading to corresponding increases in wealth and income inequality. The aims of the early neoliberal thinkers were well on their way to being realized, and with them came significant changes in the political lives of states and the personal lives of citizens.²⁶

Among the most important was the extension of market metrics to areas of life formerly regarded as outside the economic sphere, or at the very least only tangentially related to questions of the economy. Neoliberalism does not merely embrace the market in the name of efficiency and productivity, as if a rejuvenation of *laissez-faire* economics were the goal. More insidiously, neoliberalism recodes the social as a domain of individuals, and only individuals. These individuals, furthermore, are “everywhere *homo oeconomicus* and only *homo oeconomicus*,”²⁷ meaning that economic conduct is prioritized to the point of becoming normative. The result is that the individual “has been significantly reshaped as financialized human capital: its project is to self-invest in ways that enhance its value or to attract investors through constant attention to its actual or figurative credit rating, and to do this across every sphere of its existence.”²⁸ Newly interpellated as a self-investor, the neoliberal subject is then released into the competitive marketplace to pursue her projects in an environment unhindered (at least ideally), by government regulation, progressive taxation schemes, or concern with the welfare of others. The neoliberal subject, in other words, is imagined as a fully free agent, both able and expected to provide for herself in accordance with her assessment of the investment opportunities provided by the free market.

Neoliberalism also presents a new variation on the theme of responsibility, or what Wendy Brown terms “responsibilization.”²⁹ Responsibilization “tasks the worker, student, consumer, or indigent person with discerning and undertaking the correct strategies of self-investment and entrepreneurship for thriving and surviving; it is in this regard a manifestation of human capitalization. As it discursively denigrates dependency and practically negates collective provisioning for existence, responsibilization solicits the individual as the only relevant wholly accountable actor.”³⁰ The responsibilized agent is thus not only free from the sorts of external coercion that might otherwise limit the options available for economic maximization but obligated to pursue those options. By virtue of this artifice, she is expected via responsibilization to assert mastery over her circumstances in a manner akin to the masculine *virtù* prized by Machiavelli. Freed from the dependence on Fortune that besets the weak and the effeminate, the neoliberal subject is now master of its domain. Indeed, responsibilization entails the denial of all forms of dependence, in particular the interdependence enshrined in the liberal ideal of production and exchange among formally equal individuals.³¹ As a self-made self, the neoliberal subject instead “succeeds by destroying or cannibalizing other capitals.”³²

Via these mechanisms, neoliberalism offers the promise of autonomy by institutionalizing norms of freedom, self-reliance, and unconstrained agency quite unlike those of classical economic liberalism in which the human propensity to truck, barter, and exchange *with others* was the presumed basis of economic activity. Yet within these mechanisms resides a problem that threatens to undo the very autonomy in whose name they operate. In other words, to secure the value of

independence, neoliberalism “has spurred the deregulation of labor, the loss of institutional protections from the market, the decline of risk-pooling, and the relentless pursuit of profit.”³³ In the name of freedom, it has dismantled the welfare state, that pre-eminent form of cooperation (but also dependence), thereby leaving behind millions of people who might need it in times of economic crisis. The result is not really autonomy but isolation, an inability to rely on others even when needed, and a deepening sense that neoliberal freedom might not be a vehicle for human flourishing after all. As Jennifer Silva has shown in her study of working-class young adults, many of the traditional markers on the path from adolescence to adulthood—education, getting a job, getting married—have disappeared as opportunities have dried up and risks have increased. These developments “teach young working-class men and women that they are completely alone, responsible for their own fates and dependent on outside help only at their peril.”³⁴ Caught between the Scylla of rugged individualism and the Charybdis of economic marginalization that induces dependence, young working-class adults feel trapped. Though they “see their struggles to survive on their own as morally right, making a virtue out of not asking for help,”³⁵ their lived realities reveal the loss of the very autonomy so prized within the neoliberal imaginary.

Despite this, the men and women in Silva’s study “embrace the logic of individualism and self-reliance, gambling hard-earned money, stability, and self-worth in their quests to make it on their own. Most argued that economic stability and success could be theirs if they could only take the right risks, but their coming of age stories reveal that the odds are stacked against them.”³⁶ This, in Silva’s analysis, is what it means to become “acquiescing neoliberal subjects.”³⁷ Her interviewees “realize that they are denied the tools to succeed by the very institutions that they believe will help them. But this awareness becomes subsumed under dominant definitions of reality in such a way that the hegemonic logic of neoliberalism is reaffirmed rather than fundamentally challenged. That is, their deep distrust leads them to embrace widely available neoliberal ideas and policies, believing that it is in their own best interest to live in a society that privatizes risk and privileges the individual over the collective.”³⁸

As this brief vignette suggests, neoliberal autonomy emerges in practice as a tale of *unfreedom*, one that generates forms of dependency that are simultaneously disavowed by neoliberal individualist discourse yet reveal isolation as autonomy’s evil twin. As Silva observes, “the more we are required to construct ourselves as individuals, to write our own biographies, the more we realize our utter inability to control the trajectories of our lives.”³⁹ And yet this loss of control and autonomy does not thereby lead people into association with others, again because the commitment to self-reliance and rugged individualism has rendered interdependence conceptually illegible and functionally illegitimate. While it may seem as though neoliberal unfreedom might justify renewed forms of democratic solidarity and coalition building, these are simply not credible options within the neoliberal universe given that “Reliance on others is . . . equated with social conformity, a chosen condition that signals a weak and effectual character.”⁴⁰ Consequently, for members of the working class making the transition to adulthood, “coming of age does not entail entry *into* social groups and institutions but rather the explicit rejection *of* them.”⁴¹ It is this circumstance to which the celebrity politician responds.

Neoliberal Melodrama

So far, this inquiry has examined the role of autonomy within neoliberal discourse and the paradoxical reduction or even elimination of autonomy as a result of neoliberal policy and practice. An accompanying suggestion is that the attractive power of the celebrity politician stems from his/her ability to embody this longed-for autonomy, and that this in turn enables members of the electorate to identify with the celebrity politician as a means of restoring a felt sense of their own autonomy. In this context, Elisabeth Anker's analysis of melodramatic political discourse in the aftermath of 9/11 is instructive. Anker argues that the terrorist attacks of that day revealed in dramatic fashion the extreme susceptibility of both the state and the individual to forces beyond their control and exposed as fraudulent the belief "that America was invulnerable to serious attack by foreigners and that geopolitical boundaries could demarcate state sovereignty."⁴² In addition, "The attacks created a loss for individuals in their presumed capacity under reigning norms of liberal individualism to be self-reliant and sovereign over their own bodies."⁴³ The response was articulated in the idiom of melodrama, a genre convention that functioned politically to legitimate state violence and psychologically to redress the sense of impotence and victimization occasioned by the violence, death, and destruction of that day.

Anker argues that "*melodramatic political discourse* casts politics, policies, and practices of citizenship within a moral economy that identifies the nation-state as a virtuous and innocent victim of villainous action."⁴⁴ Much like the neoliberal subject unmoored by market pressures over which she has no control, victims in these narratives bear no responsibility for the evil that has befallen them.⁴⁵ This in turn sets up a unique relationship between the victim and the wounding event in question. Specifically, "melodramatic discourse solicits affective states of astonishment, sorrow, and pathos through the scenes it shows of persecuted citizens. It suggests that the redemption of virtue obligates state power to exercise heroic retribution on the forces responsible for national injury."⁴⁶ The work performed by melodramatic discourse in this context is thus twofold: it justifies the use of state violence, but also interpellates the state as the heroic victim responding to unprovoked injury. In consequence, melodramatic discourse heralds the possibility of restoring the loss of both individual and collective sovereignty. Thus, when the state marches off to war, as in the 2003 invasion of Iraq, not only the wounded citizen body but wounded citizens themselves experience the restoration of a felt sense of individual autonomy. This latter step occurs through processes of psychic identification whereby "the expression of state action may seem to be an extension of one's very own action. Their legitimation of state power is thus a consequence of identification with it, in which the power symbolized by the state becomes an internalized ideal of sovereign agency."⁴⁷ The state, as it were, heroically rides to the rescue and compensates for injury and loss through dramatic displays of violence and power. Through melodrama, "The wounded victim-hero is a self-rescuing sufferer who moves from wounding to triumph, impotence to power, and vulnerability to self-mastery."⁴⁸

Though situated within the American response to 9/11, Anker's analysis is instructive for understanding the nature of the injury caused by neoliberal economic dislocation as well as the role played by the celebrity politician in response to it. As indicated, the wound in question is the loss of a sense of control over the conditions of one's life as a consequence of both non-agentic market mechanisms as well as specific practices (e.g., labor "flexibility," debt financing, exorbitant

health care costs), that enforce relations of dependence. In this case, loss can be countered via identification with the heroic outsider deemed capable of redressing the various social and cultural ills besetting the republic, with outsidership in the case of the celebrity politician being the key consideration. The celebrity politician, in other words, is the ultimate “self-made” person, someone whose fame signifies autonomy and sovereign control by virtue of its origins in non-political and non-economic realms. As both the Republican and Democratic parties, as well as their individual candidates, are increasingly considered part of the problem (i.e., as dependent on, and responsible for, the neoliberal universe in which individual responsibility is simultaneously normative and yet vitiated by forces beyond popular control), the celebrity politician can leverage his or her independence as a means of asserting heroic mastery over this state of affairs. Touting one’s outsider status is, of course, a common feature of electoral politics. But in the current environment, celebrity marks a unique sort of difference because it offers the possibility of heroic independence foreclosed to both neoliberal subjects as well as to members of the sclerotic political class. The celebrity hero portends direct action in response to identifiable “problems” (e.g., immigration), and solicits affective identifications that confer upon the electorate a renewed sense of individual autonomy and power.

Extending Anker’s study of melodramatic political discourses to an analysis of the celebrity politician also encompasses the loss of community occasioned by neoliberal norms of hyper-individualism and market competition. Perhaps obviously, the very idea of the social contract—in its classical liberal sense of a set of rules and institutions within which people pursue collectively that which is impossible to achieve individually—has lost legitimacy in recent decades as a direct consequence of neoliberal rationalities. So too has the welfare state come under sustained neoliberal attack as perhaps the ultimate form of dependence (though its dismantling has only increased an already troubling dependence disparity between the rich and the poor, and between men and women).⁴⁹ And finally, as with the respondents in Jennifer Silva’s study, the desire to forge common bonds across economic, social, and cultural divides is perceived by many as simply too risky. Consequently, the attractive power of the celebrity politician is due not simply to the vicarious recuperation of autonomy and sovereign agency but also because of a capacity to unify people around parochial grievances that then become the basis for an oppositional politics that restores at least a partial sense of community. The “go it alone” mentality of neoliberalism morphs into an “us versus them” approach that names the origin of injury (e.g., “big government,” immigration), and in the process calls forth a community of shared sufferers energized in search of a cure. So, while promises to “drain the swamp” may not sound especially heroic, they work because they unify an imagined community around an identifiable enemy and pave the way for the heroic figure who promises solutions through the assertion of sovereign control.

This, then, is what distinguishes the celebrity politician from its mainstream counterpart: the ability, indeed the requirement, to fashion micro-communities out of a welter of competing grievances whose affective salience depends on *not* being part of the larger whole. Celebrity politics is a particular sort of coalition building, one not predicated on restoring the social contract or the social safety net but focused instead, and paradoxically, on identifying and capitalizing on divisions as a means of re-establishing unity among a select group of followers. Because the predicate of vicariously recuperated loss is the embodiment of its response in someone, the person

best able to embody the solution will be the one best able to dramatize the threat to autonomy and community posed by the threat(s) in question. And that person, in turn, will be hard-pressed to succeed in this endeavor by appealing to norms of inclusivity and tolerance, as mainstream politicians are forced to do. “Melting pot” references do not soothe those for whom immigration is a threat to the white majority, the virtues of globalization do not help those whose jobs have been shipped overseas, and diplomacy-as-usual does not impress those who regard a pot-bellied Asian dictator as an existential threat to the nation.

These phenomena have been witnessed in dramatic fashion in recent electoral cycles, with the 2016 election of Donald Trump to the US presidency being the most visible example. Trump had no background in electoral politics prior to his election and was known mainly for his role on the reality TV show *Celebrity Apprentice* and as perhaps the only human ever to have found a way to lose money owning a casino. Not surprisingly, Trump’s election generated bipartisan bewilderment that someone with such a background could win. Yet the reasons for Trump’s appeal are readily discernible when set against the anxieties occasioned by neoliberal economic displacements and the fragmentation of community those displacements entail. His campaign slogan, “Make America Great Again!,” though a rallying cry as all political slogans are, hinted at a darker (in some cases literally) array of forces against which Trump has aligned himself. As one observer put it, “Mr. Trump is against the political establishment (the media, the Republican Party, political grandees like the Bushes and the Clintons), and change (which encompasses everything you had but fear you are losing), and he’s against the world (which has taken jobs and sent immigrants to take over America).”⁵⁰ While this may not sound like the stuff of which a political community is made, as indicated above the celebrity politician depends on cultivation and exploitation of difference for its very existence. Aspirations to “big tent” inclusiveness may be fine for mainstream party politicians whose existence, at least at the national level, depends on broadening the electoral base. But celebrity culture is by its very nature contoured in ways that enable identification with the celebrity politician as the bearer of collective aspirations articulated in tribal, rather than national, terms.

Scholars of celebrity politics have studied this phenomenon from a range of perspectives, though few have sufficiently emphasized the importance of cultivating provincial resentments in the service of micro-communities defined in opposition to the very idea of the commons.⁵¹ That this is a constitutive feature of celebrity politics is implied, however, by the recognition that “The citizen becomes reconfigured in political campaigns as a political consumer who, like any consumer, must make purchase choices among several different commodities.”⁵² This commodification of the politician, but especially the celebrity politician, helps clarify why the cultivation of difference is so essential in the context of celebrity politics, and goes some distance toward explaining the paradox of community-building through fragmentation. The main reason is that every commodity must be distinguished from all other commodities in order to attract buyers. If there were no difference between this commodity and that one, there would be no obvious reason to buy the one over the other. Translated into celebrity terms, this means that all celebrities must fragment the consuming public *in order to be celebrities at all*. If there were no difference between Childish Gambino and Kendrick Lamar, the forms of identification that enable their celebrity would be lost. In short, unifying the celebrity universe is not the goal. Instead, it comes down to

establishing an autonomous realm of fandom that excludes many in the act of including some.⁵³ What Donald Trump has accomplished is therefore a remarkable adaptation of these strategies. Quite unlike the vast majority of American politicians before him, he has actively tried to fracture the *demos* by abjuring the language of inclusivity and harnessing provincial disaffections that only he, acting alone, can redress.⁵⁴

This latter point concerning the capacity of the celebrity politician to effect unilateral change recalls the earlier discussion of autonomy, a discussion that can now be revisited as a means of further understanding the attractive power of the celebrity politician. As indicated above, celebrity politicians thrive best when they are able to leverage their independence in ways that position them as singularly capable of combating the dependence incurred by non-agentic macroeconomic forces and thus restoring the promise of sovereign mastery. But like Machiavelli's man of *virtù*, this capacity depends on a specific set of gender configurations that significantly shape the meaning of autonomy within celebrity political discourse. Celebrity, in other words, is not available to women in the same way as it is to men "because public visibility is not evenly distributed among women and men, and because they do not carry the same meanings."⁵⁵ In part this is due to the public/private divide, as a result of which "a specific 'feminine style' of speech developed which was consistent with women's role in the family and traditional notions of femininity"⁵⁶ and which is not easily transposed onto the public sphere. The consequence is that "female celebrity is articulated primarily within the codes and conventions of media representations of women," meaning that "the only feminine model of celebrity available to women in politics would be that of the mother, tying into myths of femininity as nurturing and caring."⁵⁷ As with Machiavelli, so too here: to be autonomous means to be a man, even in an age of vastly increased women's participation in politics. Femininity thus emerges as the constitutive outside to the autonomous hero who, in the act of asserting mastery, renders nurturing and caring illegible. Masculine autonomy thus rings true in the ears of neoliberal subjects when they reject the welfare state that might otherwise function as a resource for those who need it. Such care is delegitimized as the very source of the dependency autonomy is alleged to alleviate.

The overlap here with melodramatic genre conventions is revealed in the comments of Trump's supporters concerning what he has done but also what he has not been able to do. As seen, melodrama features a victim wounded by forces for which he bears no responsibility but who uses that injury as the basis for heroic responses aimed at the perpetrator.⁵⁸ As the heroic responder, Trump is lauded by his partisans for "rolling back what they regarded as damaging regulations, withdrawing from the Paris climate accord, acting on the promise to bring jobs back to America,"⁵⁹ and nixing the Obama-era nuclear agreement with Iran. And yet he remains the innocent victim, stymied by forces for which he bears no responsibility. As opposed to those who blame Trump's failures on his dissolute personality, a 2017 survey revealed that "those who voted for him . . . overwhelmingly believed the blame lay elsewhere: principally, at the other end of Pennsylvania Avenue, and especially with the Congressional Republicans. He 'rubs them the wrong way' . . . so 'they're never going to allow him to focus on any kind of agenda whatever . . . There's going to be a roadblock at every intersection.'"⁶⁰ Small wonder then that "fake news" and talk of "witch hunts" (especially by the president himself) have been such prominent features of the Trump campaign and administration. In the celebrity iteration of melodrama, the hero must forever be the

sufferer, beset on all sides by forces that would undo him. These claims also ensure the continued attractive power of Trump among his supporters and explain why there appears to be nothing he could do to lose it. Continually faced with obstacles that injure his autonomy and heroism, Trump is forever positioned to reassert that same autonomy and heroism as a means of overcoming them and which in turn reinforces the affective commitments of the micro-communities he has so successfully cultivated. Having said that, we should note the curious form of dependence this reveals. Absent injury in the form of shackled autonomy, Trump cannot be the hero, and thus he must embody the very wounds he claims his autonomy is able to heal. His “independence” therefore emerges as dependent on a succession of thwarted initiatives. But what if some of those initiatives should fail to fail? What then? He cannot know, because that depends on Fortune. And Fortune is a woman.

Conclusion

When inquiring into the workings of celebrity politics, it is important to avoid placing blame on those who see in the celebrity politician a solution to the problems of agency they confront when presented with economic, political, and cultural changes over which they have no control. This is because the problem of agency is a real one for neoliberal subjects, especially those on the receiving end of the multiple displacements and upheavals that have come to characterize post-industrial capitalism. Instead, the more important concern is with the implications of celebrity politicians and the means by which they solicit the affective commitments of those same subjects. Promises of both autonomy and community are prominent among those means, but their dependence on dividing rather than uniting the electorate, if not an existential threat to the predicates of “we the people,” accentuates the problems such promises are alleged to solve. In addition, by stoking the resentments of groups formerly relegated to the fringes of American society, celebrity politicking has tended of late to legitimate beliefs and behaviors whose repression was for decades regarded as a marker of the democratic capacity to fashion an inclusive public sphere. This is also a consequence of the “divide and unite” strategy fundamental to the existence of celebrity, but with an assist from the social mediaverse in which such resentments so easily metastasize. In what remains, these implications are addressed in more detail, with an eye toward the sinister dimensions of celebrity and the forms of power it engenders.

A starting point is provided by situating the theme of autonomy within the principles typically associated with democratic politics. Autonomy, in other words, is a key component of democratic life, signifying in its most basic form “the aspiration that the people, and not something else, order and regulate their common life through ruling themselves together.”⁶¹ The advantage of defining democratic autonomy in this way is that it invites us to bear in mind the conditions that must be met in order to sustain it. These conditions include “limited extremes of concentrated wealth and poverty, orientation toward citizenship as a practice of considering the public good, and citizens modestly discerning about the ways of power, history, representation, and justice.”⁶² Institutionally speaking, certain norms must be in place as well, for instance “mutual toleration, or the understanding that competing parties accept one another as legitimate rivals, and forbearance, or the idea the politicians should exercise restraint in deploying their institutional prerogatives.”⁶³

Neoliberalism poses a clear challenge to these conditions. Income inequality is normalized as an inescapable feature of competitive markets, citizenship becomes mere membership (one's duty as a citizen amounts to no more than paying taxes and obeying the law), and concerns about power and justice are neutered by neoliberal discourses of individual responsibility that "make hierarchies of power and identity irrelevant to the experience"⁶⁴ of democratic subjects. As for toleration and forbearance, they become casualties of the extreme polarization that results when political life is reconfigured as a zero-sum game of winners and losers in constant competition to demonstrate their partisan bona fides. All this and more leads to the splintering of the demos as citizens are now bereft of a democratically articulated collective that might house more than merely tribal sentiments.

This balkanization of the commons not only eviscerates the autonomy promised by self-rule, it sets the stage for the advent of the celebrity politician. As indicated, celebrity of any sort depends on the cultivation and exploitation of difference as a means of securing the ardent support of partisans. Yet the celebrity politician takes this requirement a step further by playing up narrow resentments in service of securing the affective allegiance of some segment of the electorate. Resentment combined with allegiance then permits the celebrity politician to position him or herself as an autonomous force capable of asserting mastery over the source of those grievances. Put simply, as long as there is neoliberalism the attractive power of the celebrity politician will remain. Appeals to forms of interdependence, but especially the state, will fall on deaf ears as the state in the neoliberal universe is regarded as the ultimate form of dependence. Justifications for heroic sacrifice on behalf of the whole become quaint, starved as they are of the affective nutrients required to survive.

Among the ironies here is the degree of dependence upon the micro-communities cultivated by the celebrity politician in the act of claiming independence and autonomy, a dependence vividly revealed in the social mediaverse where likes, follows, tweets, and subscriptions are the coin of the realm. While autonomy in the Machiavellian sense was secured by abjuring interdependence, the celebrity politician relies heavily on the silos and echo chambers where partisans are found. With the demise of a viable sense that others not only share our fate but might be resources for transforming it, the celebrity politician must seek refuge among like-minded followers where the claim that he alone can fix it will find a receptive audience.

Unfortunately, the story does not end there. The concentration of resentment in social media echo chambers, combined with the actions of a celebrity president dependent on the ardor such resentment creates, has led in recent years to shocking acts of hatred and violence. The 2017 Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, North Carolina, featuring Nazi flags and other emblems of white nationalism, the slaughter of nine parishioners at Emanuel Baptist Church in Charleston, South Carolina, and the sharp uptick in anti-minority sentiment in the United States, all reveal with dismaying clarity what can happen when democratic norms of tolerance, mutuality, and forbearance are replaced by sectarian identities divorced from a sense of the common good. As if to prove the point, President Trump claimed that there were "some very fine people"⁶⁵ among the alt-right demonstrators in Charlottesville that day, revealing again the dependence of the celebrity politician on ramping up the fervor, rather than tamping down the anxieties, of disaffected minorities.

The normalization of the sexual harassment of women is an additional consequence of a celebrity environment in which belief in the equality of all people is replaced by the conviction that autonomy confers an unlimited right of mastery over them. During the 2016 US presidential campaign, the transcript of a 2005 *Access Hollywood* interview with Donald Trump included several alarming comments about women that spoke volumes about what happens when the dignity of others is subordinated to power. After mentioning his “automatic attraction” to beautiful women, Trump boasted “I just start kissing them. It’s like a magnet. Just kiss. I don’t even wait. And when you’re a star, they let you do it.” Moments later, he upped the ante, saying “Grab ‘em by the pussy. You can do anything.”⁶⁶ In a different era, statements such as these would have instantly destroyed a candidate’s campaign. Yet this overtly misogynistic depiction of the prerogatives of star power perversely assisted Trump’s campaign by generating the headlines so coveted by the celebrity. He went on to win the presidency, a result that confirmed the allure of manly displays of autonomous power to those seeking a renewed sense of their own capacity for sovereign mastery.

The argument is that these developments are internal to the workings of celebrity politics in a neoliberal age, riven as it is by a specific set of anxieties around autonomy and control and the forces that undermine them. Because of the fleeting nature of fame, these anxieties are present in the celebrity politician too, giving rise to styles of governing and claims to power that may well have fateful implications for the legitimacy of democratic politics. Given the constant need to shore up their own sense of autonomy through displays of unilateral action, celebrity politicians inhabit “a zero-sum world in which the only possible conception of public life is of domination; they will be either fragmented and thus vulnerable to the domination of others or unified and dominated by a single commander for the purpose of dominating others.”⁶⁷ Empowered to act alone in the name of conquering the putative sources of neoliberal disquiet, the celebrity politician cannot redress the fracturing of the demos that generates identification among partisan followers. Instead, much like the man of *virtù* dependent on the Fortune he claims to abjure, the celebrity politician depends on the neoliberal displacements he claims to oppose, as well as the side-effects of those displacements as registered in the animosities and resentments of his supporters.

Endnotes

¹ Yoni Applebaum, “I Alone Can Fix It,” *The Atlantic*, July 21, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/07/trump-rnc-speech-alone-fix-it/492557/>.

(Date Accessed: December 15, 2018).

² Margaret Thatcher infamously encapsulated this point of view when she asked “Who is society? There is no such thing! There are individual men and women and there are families and no government can do anything except through people and people look to themselves first.” In Jennifer Silva, *Coming Up Short: Working-Class Adulthood in an Age of Uncertainty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 14.

³ Elisabeth Anker, *Orgies of Feeling: Melodrama and the Politics of Freedom* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 173.

⁴ Anker, *Orgies of Feeling*, 191.

⁵ Hanna Pitkin, *Fortune is a Woman: Gender and Politics in the Thought of Niccolò Machiavelli* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

⁶ Pitkin, *Fortune is a Woman*, 8.

⁷ Anker, *Orgies of Feeling*, 8.

⁸ Pitkin, *Fortune is a Woman*, 7.

⁹ Pitkin, 25.

¹⁰ Pitkin, 25.

¹¹ Pitkin, 25.

¹² Pitkin, 116.

¹³ Pitkin, 118.

¹⁴ Pitkin, 119.

¹⁵ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince* (London: Penguin Books, 1999), 79.

¹⁶ Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 81.

¹⁷ Pitkin, *Fortune is a Woman*, 326.

¹⁸ Susan Jeffords, *The Remasculinization of America: Gender and the Vietnam War* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1989), 61.

¹⁹ Jeffords, *The Remasculinization of America*, 51.

²⁰ Nancy Fraser, “What’s Critical About Critical Theory? The Case of Habermas and Gender,” *New German Critique* 35, Spring-Summer (1985: pp.97-131), 123.

²¹ Fraser, “What’s Critical About Critical Theory?” 113.

²² Loïc Wacquant, borrowing from Bourdieu, employs the metaphor of the Left hand and the Right hand of the state to capture the feminine dimension of the state Machiavelli so wishes to control. As he writes, “The Left hand, the feminine side of Leviathan, is materialized by the ‘spendthrift’ ministries in charge of ‘social functions’—public education, health, housing, welfare, and labor law—which offer protection and succor to the social categories short of economic and cultural capital. The Right hand, the masculine side, is charged with enforcing the new economic discipline via budget cuts, fiscal incentives, and economic deregulation.” Loïc Wacquant, “Crafting the Neoliberal State,” *Sociological Forum* 25, no. 2 (June 2010: pp.197-220), 201; Pierre Bourdieu,

“Rethinking the State: On the Genesis and Structure of the Bureaucratic Field,” *Sociological Theory* 12, no. 1 (1994), 1-19.

²³ Fraser, “What’s Critical About Critical Theory?” 120.

²⁴ David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 19-23.

²⁵ Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 23.

²⁶ Harvey, 22-26.

²⁷ Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism’s Stealth Revolution* (New York: Zone Books, 2015), 33.

²⁸ Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 33.

²⁹ Brown, 131-34.

³⁰ Brown, 132-33.

³¹ Brown, 64.

³² Brown, 64.

³³ Jennifer Silva, *Coming Up Short: Working Class Adulthood in an Age of Uncertainty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 14.

³⁴ Silva, *Coming Up Short*, 9.

³⁵ Silva, 17.

³⁶ Silva, 38.

³⁷ Silva, 109.

³⁸ Silva, 110.

³⁹ Silva, 74.

⁴⁰ Anker, *Orgies of Feeling*, 171.

⁴¹ Silva, *Coming Up Short*, 84.

⁴² Anker, *Orgies of Feeling*, 12.

⁴³ Anker, 12.

⁴⁴ Anker, 2.

⁴⁵ This strategy contrasts with the jeremiad, a heuristic device that, on the left, “depicted the attacks as a direct consequence of American imperialism and domination in the Middle East, as punishment for the pursuit of freedom through geopolitical mastery,” and, on the right, “as punishment for American secularism, immorality, and liberal politics.” Anker, 21.

⁴⁶ Anker, 2.

⁴⁷ Anker, 181.

⁴⁸ Anker, 163.

⁴⁹ As Wendy Brown points out, state deprovisioning of public goods is a gendered phenomenon in that “When these public provisions are eliminated or privatized, the work and/or the cost of supplying them is returned to individuals, disproportionately to women. Put another way, ‘responsibilization’ in the context of privatizing public goods uniquely penalizes women to the extent that they remain disproportionately responsible for those who cannot be responsible for themselves.” Brown, 105.

⁵⁰ Katty Kay, “Why Trump’s Supporters Will Never Abandon Him,” *BBC*, August 23, 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-41028733> (Date Accessed: May 7, 2018).

⁵¹ In fairness, it should be pointed out that the members of virtually all of these micro-communities are not necessarily wrong about the nature and source of their grievances (neo-Nazis and white supremacists being a prominent exception). It's the implications of the solution that concern us here, of which more below.

⁵² P. David Marshall, *Celebrity and Power: Fame in Contemporary Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 205.

⁵³ People can, of course, be fans of more than one celebrity at a time. The point is that the meaning of fandom is parasitic upon the meaning of membership and exclusivity, and of celebrating that exclusivity in service of the affective power of identification it entails.

⁵⁴ Of course there have been exceptions, with Joseph McCarthy, Huey Long, and George Wallace prominent among them.

⁵⁵ Liesbet van Zoonen, "The Personal, the Political, and the Popular: A Woman's Guide to Celebrity Politics," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 9, no. 3 (2006: pp.287-301), 290.

⁵⁶ van Zoonen, "The Personal, the Political, and the Popular," 290-91.

⁵⁷ van Zoonen, 291-92.

⁵⁸ Any perpetrator will do, of course, as revealed by the United States' decision to invade Iraq despite its having nothing to do with the attacks of September 11th.

⁵⁹ Michael Ashcroft, "One Year After Trump's Election, Voters Still See Him as a Hero," *Time*, November 7, 2017, <http://time.com/5013542/donald-trump-one-year-later/>. (Date Accessed: May 7, 2018).

⁶⁰ Ashcroft, "One Year After Trump's Election."

⁶¹ Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 202.

⁶² Brown, 179.

⁶³ Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die* (New York: Crown Publishing, 2018), 8-9.

⁶⁴ Anker, *Orgies of Feeling*, 5.

⁶⁵ Rosie Gray, "Trump Defends White Nationalist Protestors: 'Some Very Fine People on Both Sides,'" *The Atlantic*, August 15, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/08/trump-defends-white-nationalist-protesters-some-very-fine-people-on-both-sides/537012/>. (Date Accessed: May 7, 2018).

⁶⁶ "Transcript: Donald Trump's Taped Comments About Women," *New York Times*, October 8, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/08/us/donald-trump-tape-transcript.html> (Date Accessed: May 8, 2018).

⁶⁷ Pitkin, *Fortune is a Woman*, 305.

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