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WAR ON DRUGS IN RUSSIA / FEMINISM ON NEOLIBERALISM / ANTI-SEMITISM IN POLAND / EXILE COMMUNITIES

- Lars Hillersberg and Ulf Rahmberg. Eje Höggestätt et al. (eds.), *Lena Svedberg 1946–1972: Minnesutställning* (Malmö: Malmö Konsthall, 1975). Ulf Linde, Lena Svedberg, Ulf Rahmberg, Lars Hillersberg, (Stockholm: Konstakademien, 1975). Lotta Svedberg wrote a two-page essay on her older sister, “Lena Svedberg”, which was published in Håkan Wettre (ed.), *Siri Derkert, Vera Nilsson, Lena Cronqvist, Lena Svedberg*, (Göteborg: Göteborgs Konstmuseum and Konsthallen, 1975); reprinted in Höggestätt. Besides these, Svedbergs work is found in surveys of the Swedish 1960s (e.g. Per Bjurström, *Tre decennier svensk grafik*, (Stockholm: Sveriges Allmänna Konstförening, 1976), 148; Olvång, Våga se!. In the late 1990s, there was renewed interest in satirical realist art of the 1960s. See e.g.: Bo A. Karlsson, Ulf Kihlander and Ola Åstrand, (eds.) *Hjärtat sitter till vänster*, exhibition catalogue, (Stockholm: Ordfront, 1998); Susanne Carbin, *Klass, kön och konsumtion: En analys av Lena Svedbergs bildserie Konsumentkvinnan*, (Stockholm: Stockholms universitet, 2004); Carl Johan De Geer, *Lena Svedberg*, (Stockholm: Orosdi-Back, 2011). When the curator Fredrik Liew showed *Aldman* to the public at Stockholm’s Moderna Museet in 2014, it was the first time the *Aldman* suite had been shown since 1976. Liew, *Lena Svedberg*, 5.
- 26 See Walter Benjamin, “Baudelaire, or the Streets of Paris” (1935), in: The Arcades Project, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, 1999), 10, to see how this happens: But precisely modernity is always citing primal history. Here, this occurs through the ambiguity peculiar to the social relations and products of this epoch. Ambiguity is the appearance of dialectic in images, the law of dialectics at a standstill. This standstill is utopia and the dialectical image, therefore, a dream image. Such an image is afforded by the commodity per se: as fetish. [...] Such an image is the prostitute – seller and sold in one.”
- 27 Liew, Lena Svedberg, 69: “[caption:] Suddenly all their troubles seem to be over / [the woman:] my beloved country there it is I recognize it / [Aldman:] congratulations”; Liew, Lena Svedberg, 70: [as Aldman and the woman hit the ground:] ...splash! / [signpost:] Welcome to Democratic Republic of North Ireland / [caption:] They land happily but there has been some changes made in the Lady’s old country. She tries a professional restart”; Liew, Lena Svedberg, 71: “[the Lady, showing her genitals:] Psst! Psst! Psst! Psst! I’ll make special price for you, monsieu [sic], OK? / [Frank Zappa:] socialism and the pill has [sic] killed your business, ma’am”.
- 28 Liew, Lena Svedberg, 8.
- 29 I follow Liew’s identification here (Lena Svedberg, 9–10), since Noam Chomsky would make sense in the Swedish leftist political activist context. See also Chomsky’s widely disseminated anti-Vietnam-war essay, The Responsibility of Intellectuals, *New York Review of Books*, February 23, 1967.
- 30 “Journaux: *Puss* [featuring Ulf Rahmberg’s cover with Superman as a penis], *Lenragé, Ramparts, Le Monde, tricontinental, I.F. Stone’s Weekly*. Liew, Lena Svedberg, 29.
- 31 Mailer’s article was published in *Dissent* (Fall 1957).
- 32 They also appear in T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* (1922) as pointed out by Liew (Lena Svedberg, note 9 p. 4 [Swedish] p. 15 [English])
- 33 Benjamin, “Baudelaire, or the Streets of Paris”, 10–11.
- 34 Peter Wanger in e-mail to Charlotte Bydler, May 10, 2016.
- 35 Lena Svedberg graduated in French before entering Idun Lovén’s art school in Stockholm (1964–1966). In the autumn of 1967 she was admitted to the Royal Academy of Fine Arts. As Lena Svedberg’s career started in Stockholm, her father remained in Haile Selassie’s service until 1973, when the Emperor was overthrown. Lotta Svedberg, “Lena Svedberg”, *Liew, Lena Svedberg*, 6–7.
- 36 Cf. the situationist slogans quoted in Christina Zetterlund, “Att göra politik: Om hantverk och konst vid tiden kring 1970”, in *Tillsammans*:

Politik, filosofi och estetik på 1960- och 1970-talen, ed. Anders Burman and Lena Lennerhed, 371-388 (Stockholm: Atlas, 2014).

- 37 Our translation. “Majrevolten i Paris 1968 hade en av sina kärnceller i École des Beaux-Arts och under några hektiska vårveckor producerade där en *Atelier populaire* inte mindre än 350 affischer, oftast tillverkade som serigrafier och linoleumsnitt primitiva i tekniken, elementära i budskapet. De Gaulle var naturligtvis den som i första hand karikerades och kritiserades. Bilderna var av växlande kvalitet men skärpan i angreppen och upprördheten gick inte att ta miste på. I Sverige uppstod en motsvarande aktivitet.” Bjurström 1976, 145.
- 38 Liew, Lena Svedberg, 2; 16–17.
- 39 The five detailed faces that flank the Lady suggest modelling on historical persons. One may be Nina Simone, another Mick Jagger. But who are the others: more performers?
- 40 If Angela Davis and Stokely Carmichael are correctly identified, are the others also militant revolutionaries or Black Panther Party members?
- 41 Olle Granath, *Olle Kåks*, trans. Gillian Sjö Dahl (Malmö, 2001), 20.
- 42 Mereth Lindgren et al., *Svensk konsthistoria*, (Lund: Bokförlaget Signum, 1986), 465.
- 43 We are perfectly aware that this use of “the social” conforms to a myth, which falsely divides reality into a non social realm where social facts are distinguished as operative. Cf. Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*, (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2005).
- 44 Our translation. “Hur han upplevde sitt eget inträde i de arbetandes skara beskrivs i ‘Stenhuggaren’ där en man sitter och hugger in sin mejsel i ett tunt granitiskal som skiljer honom från en svart avgrund.” Olle Granath, *Olle Kåks: Ett konstnärporträtt* (Stockholm: Wahlström & Widstrand, 1980), 37.
- 45 The painting is in the Moderna Museet collection, Stockholm.
- 46 Kemp 1985, 110.
- 47 Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot*, (Chicago & London: The Univ. of Chicago Press, 1980).
- 48 E.g. Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan, (New York & London: Norton, 1981).
- 49 Kemp, “Death at Work”, 115.
- 50 Liew, Lena Svedberg, 62.
- 51 Bertolt Brecht went out of his way to entertain his audience while also educating them. In a similar effort, Peter Wanger collaborated with *Puss* artists: not only with Lena Svedberg, but also Lars Hillersberg, e.g. on the cartoon *Storfamiljen (Extended family, Bokomotiv, 1979)* – a deconstruction of the nuclear family norm.

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The image has been manipulated.

THE HYPERREALITIES OF PUTIN AND TRUMP

Why it is worth paying attention to the public personas of political leaders

by **Maria Brock**

Barely a month after the news that Donald John Trump had been elected the next president of the United States, some commentators were hailing the end of Western democracy:

Political scientists who normally study American democracy in splendid isolation are starting to turn their attention to Africa and Latin America. They want to know what happens when authoritarians win elections and democracy morphs into something else.¹

In some Russian circles, the response to the election result was less the anticipated celebration, and more an exasperated sense of “welcome to our world” as the American electorate seemed to have chosen a candidate that combines Vladimir Putin’s powerful authority and authoritarianism with the buffoonery of the

long-standing Duma member Vladimir Zhirinovskiy. In fact, the way Trump’s persona relies on a combination of unbridled masculinity, celebration of authority, populist rhetoric, and mastery of the media spectacle displays many common features with Vladimir Putin, currently in his 3rd presidential term.

THEREFORE, RATHER THAN nominating 2016 as the year democracy succumbed to right-wing authoritarianism, examining why such figures might hold appeal across vastly different political and social landscapes is ultimately a more productive endeavor. This does not imply ignoring the specifics of the US in the 21st century, but complimenting existing accounts with additional factors that are less specific to the American political system, revealing more universal tendencies. Indeed, a number of complex reasons led to Trump’s becoming president-elect. These range from fear and racism among those who



Buffy is a caramel and white Bulgarian shepherd Karakachan Dog. Buffy was ten-weeks old when he was given to Putin.

feel threatened by the increasing diversity of the US, to the hopelessness and anger of the white working-class “losers of globalization”, to the lack of appeal Hillary Clinton might have held among key demographics – despite having won the popular vote by a significant margin. Not only is an intersectional examination of the causes of Trump’s election important to understanding how he managed to appeal to multiple sections of the populace, but the low voter turnout also suggests that analyses should turn to those who merely *enabled* a President Trump through their ambivalence or indifference.² However, while it may not necessarily have been a messianic belief in Donald Trump that led to his election, there is much skirting around the issue of what makes him appealing. In fact, paying attention to the forces that prepared the arena for political figures like Trump should not mean a critical turning away from their personalities.

ARGUMENTS AGAINST SUCH discussions insist either that dwelling on character is not productive in furthering a more sociological understanding, or that a psychological, let alone psychoanalytical reading is bound to succumb to cliché or even misinterpretation.³ Notwithstanding, there was clearly an “irrational” element in Trump’s victory, as the list of factors such as those mentioned above do not invariably add up to Trump-as-president. There is, however, another perspective that translates this “irrational” element into evidence of less conscious forces at work, and which attempts a more “subterranean” explanation of what made his presidential campaign so successful.⁴

Trump’s popularity ratings of 46% in November 2016 are of course no match for those of Putin, whose Russian approval

rates were at 86% that same month – more than 15 years into his time in office. As a matter of fact, Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin’s approval figures are made all the more remarkable by the fact that the country is experiencing a palpable and lengthy economic downturn and increasing isolation from the West. Despite all their differences, the two men have frequently been linked this year,⁵ not least because each seems to have hopeful (and divergent) notions of what a closer cooperation with the other will bring. More importantly, both derive some of their power from an age of “post-truth” politics, in which they were able to rely on, and manipulate a public sphere that is characterized by increasing cynicism towards politics and disenchantment with established elites.

IN THIS ESSAY, I argue that while one cannot discount the real inequalities, as well as the real and imagined grievances that opened up the space for less established political figures to gain support, it is nevertheless worthwhile to examine why these particular *kinds* of candidates hold such appeal. Their reliance on spectacle and well-orchestrated exploits which combine the hypermasculine with the hyperreal enabled them to set in motion processes of identification that transcend the need for a coherent, well articulated political agenda. Instead, while seeming unsubtle to the point of being crass, they managed to operate on a more subliminal level, remaining oblique enough to become conduits for the electorate’s personal hopes and grievances. While this piece centers on the representational mechanisms employed by Vladimir Putin and his team of PR advisers, it is possible to identify a number of parallels with other contemporary leader figures – chief among them Donald Trump – each of

whom appears to rely on a kind of hypermasculine charisma to unite a political field that is otherwise increasingly polarized.

The president as spectacle

As mentioned above, it is in part Putinism’s ability to orchestrate PR events that has secured him so firm a position in the national and international imaginary. From a more technocratic public persona in his early days to the ubiquitous star of numerous “pseudo-events”, a typology of events featuring the president would demonstrate that all of them aim to highlight a certain skill or positive facet of his character, often one that falls into the broad category of traditional masculinity. They usually involve the accomplished handling of a prop, or, perhaps more curiously, interaction with animals. Their political or strategic necessity is not always immediately apparent, while their staged nature is either transparently obvious or revealed later. Past “scripted events” – that is, events that did not occur spontaneously and were planned with the media in mind – include the President singing and playing the piano at a charity gala, flying a plane to help extinguish devastating forest fires in the summer of 2010, driving a Russian-made Lada across Siberia, shooting grey whales with a crossbow, finding a pair of ancient amphorae on a diving trip in the Black Sea, and catching a pike weighing 21 kilograms.

In fact, a blurring of boundaries between reality and entertainment in what one could broadly delineate as the arena of political communication, and in many cases a replacement of reality by entertainment, is characteristic of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. This has led to the creation of numerous “pseudo-events”, some of which the public may no longer discern as such. As is the case with any type of ‘pseudo-event’, its success is “measured by how widely it is reported. The question, ‘Is it real?’ is less important than ‘Is it newsworthy?’ Its

relation to the underlying reality of the situation is ambiguous. Its interest arises largely from this very ambiguity.”⁷ Notably, Richard Waterman’s statement quoted here refers to strategies employed by US politicians. The case of Donald Trump is in many ways an even starker illustration of the power of spectacle, as his forays into television and film preceded his entry into politics. Indeed, through his appearances in films and TV shows – always as “himself”, until finally cementing his brand in “The Apprentice”, Donald Trump the character was already a household name. While the Trump brand’s biggest supporter seems to be Donald Trump himself, closely followed by his immediate family, Putin assumes a somewhat more modest public persona, letting his deeds speak for themselves. At the same time, the amount of Putiniana, or cultural output and commodities featuring the Russian president – from toothpicks to songs and calendars – is not too far from the manner in which the Trump name is used as a trademark, lent to products such as steaks and cologne, and turning a profit at the same time.

“IT IS IN PART PUTINISM’S ABILITY TO ORCHESTRATE PR-EVENTS THAT HAVE SECURED HIM SO FIRM A POSITION.”

However, the transformation of politics into entertainment products can also generate a greater cynical distance from politics in general, creating the impression that “in the entertainment industry when there is a sign it seems there isn’t one, and when there isn’t one we believe that there is”, as Umberto Eco observes.⁸ Symptomatic of this disorientation is the media speculation that surrounded a walk the president took in 2013 in St. Petersburg after the funeral of his first judo coach. He ostensibly wished to spend time alone – without bodyguards or the press – in his old neighborhood, but pictures of Putin on his solitary walk soon flooded the Internet, often accompanied by the question whether this was actually staged, perhaps to imbue Putin with greater emotional depth, which would link it to several later occasions during which he was seen shedding tears in public. However, it is usually the newsworthiness of an event that trumps any such speculations. The fact that Donald Trump’s campaign often seemed to be less reliant on a coherent action plan than on his ability to tap into American voters’ ids, also points to the fact that spectacles do not need to rely on terribly intricate strategies, their crudeness instead lending them further appeal.

Populist rhetoric and identification

It has also been observed that Putinism lacks a series of coherent signifiers that could enable the production of a more rigorous set of tenets to form or produce its ideology. It relies on the figure of Putin – a figure that is itself “empty” consisting of a series of attributes that are modified to adapt to changing times. Elements of Putinism have ranged from imperial notions of all-Russian greatness which hark back both to pre-revolutionary Russia and to Cold War rhetoric, to authoritarianism as well as to elements of Western-style democracy, linking

regret and nostalgia for the Soviet Union to an endorsement of neoliberal forms of capitalism. Similarly, during the election campaign, Trump’s eclectic agenda ranged from virulent anti-immigration legislation to drug legalization, and from defunding Planned Parenthood to decreasing taxes for low-income families. In the eyes of some commenters, a strong leader such as Putin is, in his very idiosyncrasy, seen as the only potential figure capable of uniting this incoherent ideological field. Indeed, his larger-than-life public persona resonates strongly with the figure of the “charismatic leader” and his ability to mobilize mechanisms of identification as described by Sigmund Freud in his *Group Psychology*.⁹

HOWEVER, PUTIN HAS also been described as a populist leader – another feature, along with “retrosexual masculinity” he is seen to share with figures like Silvio Berlusconi.¹⁰ Examples of his forays into vulgar language include the promise to “finish (Chechen) terrorists in the crapper” in his days as prime minis-

ter, to a more recent instance, again evoking unorthodox ways of punishing Chechen rebel fighters:

When, a couple of years ago, a Western journalist asked him an awkward question about Chechnya, Putin snapped back that, if the man wasn't yet circumcised, he was cordially invited to Moscow, where they have excellent surgeons who would cut a little more radically than usual.¹¹

These outbursts – recruiting the Russian “national other” of the Muslim separatist, and combining it with sadistic and darkly sexual imagery – occur very sporadically, but always attract media attention like incidents of Putin publicly telling risqué jokes.¹² While the presence of such rhetoric may be partially related to past violence that has remained unexorcised from contemporary Russian discourses, it sometimes appears to be employed with strategic intent. But why would the Russian president need this “obscene supplement” to his speech? And again extending the obvious comparison, why have Trump's forays into the crass and the obscene had such positive resonance among many Americans? The president-elect is notoriously thin-skinned, but even his public obsession with the perceived size of his hands and what this might imply has receives less negative attention among his supporters than expected. Similarly, when footage appeared of him boasting how his fame enabled him to “grab them [women] by the pussy”,¹³ this proved to be less detrimental than his critics hoped.

ONE EXPLANATION SEES the deployment of populist rhetoric as a way of strengthening bonds with the community, tailored to appeal specifically to society's “ordinary” members. In the case of Putinism, however, and in contrast with Ernesto Laclau's more optimistic take on the phenomenon of populism as serving to create new political identities,¹⁴ the president's tightly choreographed publicity stunts and verbal “mishaps” in fact serve to encourage a move away from politics, as a way of continuing and maintaining the depoliticization which commenced in the late Soviet period.¹⁵ Populism can attach itself to any number of demands – in fact its reliance on “empty signifiers” is one of Laclau's core assumptions, but in Putinism, this demand emanates from the presidential administration itself, and represents an attempt to discourage political participation and potential dissent. Thought of in this vein, the potpourri of values drawn upon by Putin and his administration is not intended to represent a coherent set of tenets, but chiefly aims to create an emotional effect, discouraging further analysis, which is easily achieved in a rhetorical move such as that of enunciating what cannot be said, in a manner that is normally taboo in political discourse. This again has interesting echoes in how the Trump campaign instrumentalized the disappointments of what is often portrayed as the white working-class and middle-class losers of globalization, even though some would argue that “their grievances were more theoretical than actual, more media-induced than experience-related”,¹⁶ an argument later proven to be cor-

rect when it turned out that low-income voters tended to favor Hillary Clinton.

According to Slavoj Žižek, “the popular movement *needs* the identificatory figure of a charismatic leader”.¹⁷ However, if all of a “popular movement's” coherence and content are provided by its leader figure, then this also proves to be its weakest point. Putin may be the “master signifier” that brings together the disparate, at times haphazard elements of Russianness and fuses them into the (non)ideology of Putinism, but a potential public rejection of Putin then also leads to the disintegration of this vision. Similarly, the distancing by many Republicans from Trump's candidacy show the lack of support “Trumpism” experienced from established political figures even within his own party. Besides the construction of the infamous wall between the US and Mexico and his demand to have Hillary Clinton imprisoned, his populist melange of ideas and slogans was given only a semblance of coherence by Trump's persona. However, the centrality of his supposed integrity and prowess also made his campaign singularly lopsided. With everything intentionally having hinged on the figure of the president, a turn to theories of identification therefore seems apt.

“A composite of King-Kong and the suburban barber”

The leader needs to find ways of appealing to the group that will put him both in charge and in the midst of its members, so as to be both of and above them. How might one understand this dual identity? In Laclau's words “his identity is split: he is the father, but also one of the brothers”.¹⁸ One easy manifestation of this is the (usually) red baseball cap Donald Trump wore at his rallies:

With his red cap on, the glossy billionaire living in a gilt Manhattan apartment appears to have something in common with the rest of the country, who wear caps when they're actually at baseball games, when they're driving tractors through wheat fields, when they're barbecuing in their backyards. And maybe because he looks so ridiculous in it, Trump's hat is something of an equalizer.¹⁹

In Laclau's view, group membership makes the leader accountable to the community, so that identification in facts suppresses authoritarian impulses and creates “a far more democratic leadership than the one involved in the notion of the narcissistic despot”.²⁰ Theodor W. Adorno, too, argues that the bond underlying group identification center around the figure of the leader, but rather than seeking to exonerate the populist leader from the accusation of despotism, his focus is on the fascist leader. In his analysis, the primary identification with a powerful, authoritarian father figure that takes place in fascist regimes is linked to a kind of regression or return to more archaic or “primitive” state. The paternal leader figure here resembles the primal father for whose murder the “primal horde” is then forever trying to make amends. The group members' similarities with the leader then do not serve to quell the dictatorial tendencies in him – they

are merely evidence of the narcissistic aspects of group identification: “While appearing as a superman, the leader must at the same time work the miracle of appearing as an average person, just as Hitler posed as a composite of King-Kong and the suburban barber”.²¹ Nevertheless the leader figure, in Adorno's analysis, is not impervious to historical contingency: while the authoritarian element may be more pronounced under fascism, it decreases in importance in a less repressive society. What remains is the need to convey an “impression of greater force and of more freedom of libido”²² than the rest of the community.

In the case of Russia, it appears that a classical panacea to this dilemma has been found. To achieve this, the government relies less on the President as sole master signifier, and more on ways of turning Russia's inherent tensions outward. Indeed, the surge of patriotism that followed the annexation of Crimea and subsequent armed conflict in Ukraine may have secured Putin's reign for another term. The newly drafted social contract no longer merely agrees to provide relative economic stability to enable consumption for obedient, apolitical subjects. Lev Gudkov, together with colleagues from *Levada-Center*,²³ illustrates how the antagonisms of Russian society have been effectively channelled in a process of ‘negative mobilization’, whereby dissenters of that vision are branded as traitors, and members of the opposition press designated as belonging to the ‘5th column’.

THE WAYS IN WHICH the Trump campaign had similarly relied on nationalistic ideas – chiefly through a vilification of immigrants and the prelapsarian idea of “making America great again” – as well as the schizophrenic relationship it maintained with the media, simultaneously accusing it of lying while also relying on it to gain as much publicity as possible, demonstrates that the primer on how to win followers and influence people relies on certain perennial and transnational principles, such as the ones discussed here. These include a presence both above and among one's electorate, by combining superiority – be it physical or psychological – with the right amount of populist rhetoric or folksy demeanor. Internal tensions are best channelled outward, or in the direction of select minority groups. Originality is no strong requirement. In fact, relying on existing symbols and narratives is a plus as they enhance recognizability and serve to produce comfortable and comforting nostalgia. A coherent political agenda is similarly optional – personal charisma will most likely outshine sensible policies. Most importantly, the power of spectacle and especially of the well-managed photo opportunity are to assume a central place in one's political toolbox. Indeed, first steps Trump made as president-elect do not bode well for the future, both nationally and internationally. The real danger ahead, however, lies in the creeping normalization of Trumpism – a normalization towards which all of the mechanisms described in this essay will have contributed. ❌

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