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The Global Network of Players

Eric Kramer and Taesik Kim

INTRODUCTION

In this paper we discuss the role of the "player" and the globalization of the player ideology and mindset. Globalization is characterized by widespread standardization of beliefs and behaviours. As this occurs, the difference based on temporal and spatial separation is declining; space and time, as philosophers like to say, is "collapsing", while economists argue that a single market is expanding, at the same time that political scientists argue that this involves the internationalization of domestic politics and the inevitable growth of democratization, and critical cultural studies people observe the diffusion of consumerism across the globe. As space and time collapse civilizations are thrust together, clashing, fusing, interpenetrating, sharing an increasingly common space. For the player, his playground is expanding.

All such descriptions are correct in their own ways. The diversity of perspectives points towards a gathering sameness of not merely machine functionality, of "universal pragmatics"¹ of "how to" (even talk), but also and much more important, a reduction to a small repertoire of credible ambitions and dreams linked to a realism and rationality based on positivistic pecuniary ambitions.² From banking to agriculture to manufacturing to pedagogy, even the pragmatics of "how to" involves a convergence on common modes of functionality and

common tasks done in increasingly systematized and routinized "efficient" and "competent" ways. But there is also a convergence on a shrinking repertoire of common fantasy themes.³ One of them is to be a player. According to this ideology every sane, normal, honest, realistic person should want to be a player, a wheeler-dealer who practises the "art of the deal". The profiteer is the new saint.

One of the dominant models of appropriate behaviour and mindset operant in this shrinking repertoire of realisms, we argue herein, is that of the player. Entire fields of applied social scientific methods such as marketing and public relations are now deployed in industrial strength to enhance ("spin") the image of the player. Campaigns of dis- and misinformation are expertly crafted and positioned. This is the age of mass advertising and public relations. This⁴ is the age of the Third Sophistic where lying has been elevated to an art form and professional liars form an entire industry backed by academic units training behavioural and cognitive experts for hire.⁵

THE NATURE OF THE PLAYER

In his short essay, "Crap Shoot", Garret Keizer dichotomizes people in terms of those who deal in information and those who serve their needs.⁶ The former are called "players" and the latter are called "workers". Keizer defines play as something different from ordinary life, and thus this difference is crucial to understand the concept of a player. Consequently, he analyzes what "player" means by looking at the possible antonyms of the concept, such as "spectator". However, Keizer also argues that in order to find the best antonym for "player", one should trace the identification back to its linguistic root, "play". The opposite of play is "work", and thus the opposite of a player is a worker. We argue herein that the old dichotomy of bourgeoisie and proletariat is obsolete. Today the proletariat believes and wants to be a player. He does not have contrary dreams and ambitions. And today the player, unlike the modern capitalist bourgeoisie, is not at all conservative or even patriotic. The player does not desire to be admired, to be a pillar of his community, a leader, a saviour, a hero. The player wants no

such obligations that come with being part of a leader within a community.

For instance, all traditional societies had versions of God/kings such as the emperor of China, the Inca, the king of the Aztec, the Egyptian pharaoh, and so forth. All such social structures were highly structured and hierarchical so that even the emperor had to follow very carefully the dictates of heaven. Royals had profound obligations. Royals in such societies had to follow very strict doctrines of formality and etiquette and then of course their subjects had to obey them just as they obeyed heaven. Even the sex of their offspring had to conform, putting great pressure on female royals as evinced in recent years with the stress Princess Masako in Japan suffered (including a miscarriage and the birth of a girl, Aiko) until she produced a male heir. Royals were identified utterly with their land, their country. The Confucian hierarchy is typical. But the player obeys no one. The post-modern player has no allegiance to any country, creed, religion, or ideology. The player is the ultimate, hypertrophic ego but with a floating identity.

Keizer elaborates upon the concept of the two groups, two "races" of humans, players and workers, so identified by John Ruskin. Ruskin says that workers cultivate and manufacture.⁷ The worker provides the necessities of life while the player is "proudly idle, and continually therefore needing recreation, in which they use the productive and laborious orders partly as their cattle, and partly as their puppets or pieces in the game of death".⁸ The player "has it made". To Ruskin, business and its curriculum is a "bastard science", "the 'science' for getting rich".⁹

Keizer argues, "The first true player as the first person to successfully ride a horse...[in so doing he] entered a zone of being almost instantly faster, higher, and stronger than anyone on foot."¹⁰ In ancient Rome the Plutocratic class was named the "equestrian order". Consequently, a player tries mightily never to be pedestrian. Paris Hilton is a good example of a player. According to Keizer, "There are players and the people who wish to be players", Paris' pathetic fans for instance.¹¹ The player has an insatiable need to be exceptional and transcendent,

and they thrive on exhibitionism and voyeurism. Keizer includes the technocrat as a player. The hacker he calls a subspecies of player as he has your password, invades your computer and points and clicks at your "private parts" while he is out of his body and "out of your league".¹²

Keizer identifies the greatest difference between the player and the worker by analyzing their respective attitudes toward each other. According to him, the definition of the player itself implies "exclusion". "If everyone is a player, then no one is a player, [and] when everybody comes onto 'the field,' it is no longer a field, [but] it is a park."¹³ On the other hand, the worker wants more participation for lessening his or her burden. In this sense, Keizer expects that change in American society will come only "when people who work, who love work, whose conception of the world is of a work in progress, come to realize they have no choice but to fight".¹⁴

This is not the same as Marx's concept of class struggle in nineteenth-century capitalism, because the working class described by Marx was still looking for the liberation from the name "worker". However, Keizer's worker will still be a worker even after losing his or her chain.

This essay borrows the concept of the player and the worker to analyze globalization, and the dominance of the network of global players. Although it is common to regard the nation-state as a unit of analysis of global capitalism in social science as well as in everyday life, this essay posits that the nation-state is less and less significant in the globalized world. Our unit of analysis is the player. Modern players control local and global institutions including mass media and reside in urban centres and remote rural luxury retreats. This essay does not posit the nation-state as a unit competing to be a player in the globalized world, even though we recognize that competition between modern nation-states does generate a pattern whereby some nation-states are players while others are excluded. Instead, the focus is on the background stabilization of the new super-players' playground which is the globalizing network of economy and culture; the emergent player monoculture.¹⁵

The player sees the game, reality, as contingent, the rules

flexible; so flexible as to be practically nonexistent. This claim is important. It is essential to understanding our take on what is happening. The game, its rules and parameters are itself gamed, not merely played by players. If all participants adhere to the rules of a game equally, then it is a much more sporting, a much more equitable competition. But a player is not a predictable participant in a social system in the way a speaker is in a Wittgensteinian language-game. The player is a rapper. A player disregards the rules, the grammar; the received structure. The player is an opportunist. The player is adaptable and innovative. The player often crosses the line of criminality and sees himself as a robust buccaneer. A good recent example is Jack Abramoff, the lobbyist at the centre of much wheeling and dealing during President George H.W. Bush's administration.

Players proclaim the sanctity of laws and rules only when it is advantageous to them. Though they often claim the moniker, they are not conservative. The claim to be conservative is only the first in a long line of lies. Another is the bloodthirsty Christian who supports war, no matter how many innocents are killed. The identity-claim to be conservative does however ingratiate the player to real conservative supporters, those who want and need faith, giving the player a political power-base. But the player plays them just like she plays the rules. They are duped by the confidence game. For instance, during the 2001 parade of inaugural balls held to celebrate Bush and Dick Cheney's victory, a *Washington Post* reporter inquired of two Bush aids whether either Bush or Cheney were likely to show up at a particular party. The aids basically laughed and said it was highly unlikely that either would bother with a ball filled with car dealers, even though that group formed an almost monolithic and very generous bloc of support for their election. Economic and Christian conservatives have also felt duped by Bush, the Neocons, and Carl Rove.¹⁶

The most basic criminal quality of the players is their disregard for rules and laws. They are hypocrites and they are so transcendent, so dissociated from the obligations of games that they don't care. Hypocrisy is not a sin to them. We might

say that they have no shame; a profoundly “thick face”. Be it in the conduct of human or natural physical and psychological behaviours, a law that is not universal is not, by definition, a law. This is a basic fact of set theory. A law that does not apply to the person who proclaims it is not a law. Players presume privilege, and this privilege involves not having to play by the laws, mores, and rules that they expect others to play by. They claim exceptionalism for themselves. The first exception is the power to purvey others, to collect all sorts of information about others but to remain invisible to them. This violates the major tenet of genuine, “authentic” communication, which is reciprocity. Players are not friends. They do not allow reciprocity. They do not communicate but strategically “leak”. Though they claim to function on a quid pro quo basis, they actually try to always maximize their personal profit and to minimize any liability (obligation). A good example is the insurance business. On the face of it, insurance looks like a community service, even a form of Marxism; “from each according to his ability to each according to his need”. But in fact they work day and night to minimize “exposure”, to be invisible to the vagaries of life, to avoid obligation, which to the player is risk. Their actuarial models are astoundingly complex and they endlessly keep their “valued customers” under surveillance, always gathering more data to “crunch” in their computations. Often players desire *not* to be understood for this aid in their effort to have their moves misread, at least until it is too late for the larger community to do anything about them. As authoritarian personalities they are, as John Dean calls them, “conservatives without conscience”, but more accurately they are simply players; not in any meaningful sense conservative.¹⁷

The player is in it for personal profit. He lives by the social exchange modality of constant cost versus benefit analysis.¹⁸ The baseline assumption, the ground of all reckoning is the self. All is reducible to intuitive calculus. Thus this is hardly rational unless one sees absolute egoistic interest as the bases of reason. This is the economic animal, *Homo economicus* par excellence.¹⁹ John Stewart Mill presents this ideology in its first full expression

in 1848, “[Political economy] does not treat the whole of man’s nature as modified by the social state, nor of the whole conduct of man in society. It is concerned with him solely as a being who desires to possess wealth, and who is capable of judging the comparative efficacy of means for obtaining that end.”²⁰ The player takes to heart the point of not taking the “whole of man’s nature...nor the whole conduct of man in society”, for the player dissociates his actions from the actual to the virtual system of accounting. This is what a group of French economics students in their manifesto calls “autistic economics”, a science so abstract that it loses the human element entirely in pure econometrics. This manifesto, this written protest against how economics is perceived and taught, has led to a small but vocal movement among economists such as Edward Fullbrook and Anne Mayhew. In Ivy League economics departments a small movement called “post-autistic economics” (PAE) has begun and its central tenet is the principle of intersubjectivity. PAE argues that economics must begin by recognizing the social quality of economics and the economic actor. They are trying to change the discourse, moving it away from the autistic economic model that sees the economic actor in neoclassical theory as a function within a “dazzling” array of “calculations of utility maximization despite being entirely unable to communicate with this fellow man”.²¹

In pure hypocritical style, the player, maximizing his own subjective wants and needs, embraces the neoclassical autistic version of other people as mere functions – tools to be used for his own personal satisfaction. And this utterly subjective perspective is elevated to the status of pure “rationality”. The player is the embodiment of utilitarian pragmatism. The player sees everything in her life, including other people, as merely base resource. Her mission, her desire is to find a way to exploit everything to its maximum potential. She is an efficiency expert when it comes to achieving personal wants and needs. Life is a grand balance sheet, a competition for who can accumulate the most profit by the time they die. And so time too becomes money. All is competitive gaming, which is the nice way to refer to the complete fruition of Machiavellianism. But even

competition involves some interest, some caring about how the other is doing. It presumes some form of communication and community right. No. Data gathering and surveillance is not communication; it is informatics. And the player despises competition even as he sings the praises of it and other social Darwinian principles. The pure player really does not care about how others are doing unless their fortunes affect his. He has no "bleeding heart" and expects no such sympathy in return, but as an opportunist will exploit such compassion if it comes his way.

To the player nothing is sacred except his own freedom to play at will. That which proves to be more of a cost than a profit is thrown overboard. In this sense the player is truly "objective" but hardly disinterested. The player is intently interested, observing as closely as possible and plotting demographics and psychographics down to the smallest possible variance. He longs for the power of prophecy/prediction. This obsession indicates calculation, intelligence; in a word agency. But to avoid responsibility, the player likes to say all is natural, causally determined by natural law. Yet at the same time the player likes to gloat over his superior decisions, his abilities to manipulate the system and thereby win. He believes in free will and inherent "talent".

This old Spencerian ideology, including its internal contradiction of law governed fatalism coexisting with individual agency, has recently and curiously worked backwards from social behaviour to biology as some economists are now arguing that the very existence of human beings is a consequence of natural economics.²² We are told that economic decisions led to the success of *Homo Sapiens*. Wealth, life, and evolution are thus collapsed into a single process, which is the purest form of economic reductionism. Not unlike the linguistic turn, the economic turn argues that humans did not invent economy but instead that economy led to humans.

For the player, self-interest is identified with rationality. *Homo economicus* bases his choices on a consideration of his own personal "utility function". Economic man is amoral. He ignores all social values unless he gains personally from adhering to

them, but such a coincidence is practically accidental. What is a rational course of action is the course that most enhances the accomplishment of his desires. Thus reason becomes utterly subjective while the player appears completely objective or disinterested in values and the interests of others. This is ego-hypertrophy leading to pure relativism. Perspectives multiply with the number of egos. There are as many realities, as many moralities and truths, as there are individuals.

A Case Study of Playing and Replaying

Consider the accounting practices of Silverado Savings and Loan, Broward Savings and Loan, Enron, Sally Mae, and Long Term Capital. Their accounting practices were created specifically to confuse and misdirect whatever oversight by law enforcement there might be. During Ronald Reagan's charge to eliminate oversight altogether, especially in the financial industry, we saw the results. "Conservatives" demanded lawlessness. The results of the Reagan era are now being repeated with foreclosures soaring to rates not seen since the mid-1980s (according to FBI and U.S. Census Bureau data, not surprisingly homelessness, poverty, and violent crime are also on the rise again). There should be no surprise that this debacle is being repeated because it is the same people, the same players replayed.

For instance, the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) recognized as criminal the "land flipping" that led to the failure of many financial institutions including Empire Savings of Mesquite, Texas in April 1984. A month after Empire Savings failed, the Bank Board and the FDIC, seeing the looming financial disaster, tried to eliminate insurance coverage for speculative, brokered lending, but a federal court blocked the move. The result was that the taxpayer was forced to back the players.²³ Fast-forward to 2001. W. Bush, no longer a failed oil man but now President of the U.S., convinced his first Federal Reserve Chairman (and ardent admirer of Ayn Rand) Alan Greenspan to cut the prime interest rate to historic lows so that Americans would stop saving and start buying and borrowing. Bush also wanted to force all retirement funds including social

security into private markets so that financiers, brokers, and speculators could get access to them. Forget that many older Americans saw their limited livelihoods linked to their certificates of deposit collapse.

The player's psychology, often expressed in fraternity rituals, is classically Freudian as they conflate sex, money, and death in the irresponsible pursuit of thrills and power. Even conservative liberals often admire and envy their chutzpah. What real conservatives consider irresponsible is the essence of the player's attitude and lifestyle. The player, like a child, also has lots of energy. They are movers and shakers, not bookworms or lazy types.

Savings in the U.S. is at an-all time low and it is lower than any other industrial nation. This is not a good sign, as most economists believe that "Economic growth occurs from high personal savings rates and increased labor force participation, and from technological change".²⁴ The imminent wave of baby-boomer retirement population has little to live on. Most experts agree that the "conservative" players' policies are leading to a burgeoning and massive population of elderly poor in America.

As of the summer of 2007, the current and precipitous escalation in foreclosures across the nation is, as Yogi Berra famously said, *déjà vu* all over again, for in the 1980s the entire Bush family was involved in a gigantic savings and loan scandal which, according to the FDIC cost the American taxpayer an estimated \$1.4 trillion (with a "T"). At the time this amounted to nearly one quarter of the U.S. national debt. Each of the three Bush brothers and their father, George Sr. profited hugely by taking out massive loans and also granting huge loans to friends and business associates who then defaulted on them, leaving the U.S. taxpayer to pick up the tab. It is said that if you owe a bank \$500,000 and you cannot pay, you are in big trouble. But if you owe a bank \$500 million and you can't pay, the bank is in big trouble. This is true but it is not the executives of the bank, the players who are caught in the breach but instead the institution and the federal government that backs the financial infrastructure of private loans. It is taxpayers who have to bail themselves out. Meanwhile, the players in the "private sector"

do their profit taking and run.

In the 1980s the Bushes got control of financial institutions. For instance, Neil Bush at the ripe old age of 30 became Director of Silverado Savings and Loans. They then began promoting predatory lending practices through unwise home ownership and real-estate acquisitions. They created a massive bubble that then burst. Today (2008) it is happening again only this time, the borrower has far less recourse to legal protection because the Bush's learned an important trick during the first fiasco, eliminate the ability of borrowers to file for bankruptcy protection. This in effect puts the borrower in the position of indentured servitude, and the government sponsors the entire private affair.

THE END OF BOUNDARIES/OBSTACLES, IDENTITIES

Around the world, poor people are disregarding nation-state boundaries as well as ethnic and racial boundaries. People are moving into societies that are predominantly different from themselves, to subject themselves to being a minority. They are flocking toward perceived relative economic opportunities with profound consequences for major cities everywhere.²⁵ Meanwhile, globalizing systems of exploitation are reaching into more and more remote communities. Development, progress, we are positively promised, is on the march.

The player is not an ethnic or tribal leader/hero. The player displays profound, late-modern, perhaps even post-modern dissociation. The player is an independent operator who can switch allegiances at will. The player's passion is for his own satisfaction. He does not share. The interest of the player is contrary to the interest of those played.

For instance, while 6 of the 10 cities in the United States struggling with the highest rates of real estate foreclosures are in California, at the same time and in the same state, even the same cities, the number of super mansion sales is soaring.²⁶ Each hollowed-out American city now has a suburb or two that is filled with huge single-family homes, tracts of status mimicry that have inspired the apt moniker "Vulgaria". At the same time manufacturing jobs, the backbone of the U.S. middle class, are

vanishing. Players have allegiance to no one and no place and therefore they have allegiance to everyone everywhere. Players are like capital; truly global. They are willing to exploit any opportunity, anywhere, without prejudice. They are, according to some economists, saintly. Capitalism, it is argued, will overcome all forms of bigotry. All labour is equally one-dimensional, equally rolled flat under this transcendent god.²⁷ Thus jobs are fleeing high wage regions for repressed wage regions.

THE GOLDEN MEAN: THE SACRED MIDDLE

From the heights of the player's view, workers have no human dimension. From this perspective they are, as Herbert Marcuse put it, one-dimensional *Homo Laborans*.²⁸ The new form of control is for everyone to want, to long, to strive with all their might to enter *Vulgaria*, while those living it, the players, have always already harnessed that straining effort to their own ends. They are the ones who provide the frame for directing such desire. Either things work or they do not. It is therefore very important to advertise the gap between rich and poor, to "rub their noses in it". It is a calculated risk that players take for this could spark revolt, but the system allows for just enough mobility to defuse such an actuality. That is the function of the middle class.

The middle, between the rich and the poor is a buffer zone. Moving from poverty to middle-income levels is much easier than moving from middle to elite economic status. The limited mobility functions to defuse potentially destabilizing stresses among populations. It is not an illusion that if a person works extremely hard and invests, for instance, in their education, they can better their lot. But it is an illusion to believe that one can move to the top of the heap. This limited mobility "proves" that the system is a meritocracy, that it is fair and just. But that justice is as limited as the mobility enabled by the structural characteristics of the political economy.

Showing off the goods seduces the masses to want, to strive, to work. Providing cheap mimic or knockoff products to take the place of expensive original products proves profitable and

also effective in satisfying "what the customer/worker wants". But in this process what the human being wants, namely equality and dignity, is replaced with commodities which are not only more easily acquired but, and this is vital, also reinforce indignity and inequality. The modern status struggle is one of social status but it has been transformed into one of commodity consumption.²⁹ The social and psychological dimensions of being for the inhabitant of the modern industrial, increasingly global world are rapidly being reduced to and defined by the political economy of consumerism.³⁰ No longer do traditional ritual and ceremony function. The magic and mythic dimensions of life are being exterminated as irrational. Only economic decisions are rational.

The "middle" class is the grand buffer, the modulator that keeps the system running. It is moderate: the moderator that the player class uses to keep the system of structural inequality stable. Allowing for a middle class was the most brilliant move the player class ever conceived. The middle class presents the truest of the true believers because they are supplied with products and services that mimic the world of the players on a smaller scale. They cannot afford a Ferrari but they can, if they work hard and are patient, late in life, perhaps, manage to acquire a Corvette. They cannot afford a yacht but they can take a cruise and be "treated like royalty". They cannot afford a true ranch or estate but they can be proud of their McMansion on half an acre, which itself requires massive debit burden. This burden keeps the ox-like worker moving "forward".

The greatest enemy of the lower classes is not the elite but the middle class who believes and strives. To attack the middle class dream and the Protestant work ethic, which became the core virtue, the sacred ideology and leverage the bourgeois players used not only against the clergy and nobles, but also workers as well — is to take away their motive for striving. The workers are their own worst enemy as they identify falsely with a mobile (progressive—liberal) "middle class" rather than their fixed "working class" reality. The Protestant work ethic and its internalization, is hardly a protest against unfair labour practices. It is the doctrine one small group, the bourgeoisie,

used against other small groups, the clergy and nobles, in their struggle for supremacy. Meanwhile, the workers did not change their power position or status. If they work, they are not flawed or broken and therefore destined for the trash heap. If they do not work, they must be “fixed”; perhaps sent to a “correctional” facility.

The rewards of labour, as Max Weber noted, are said to be supernatural.³¹ The rationalization of Christian-based capitalist asceticism is thus understood. But this is only partially correct. The real genius of the current system is that it gives actual, real, material consolation prizes to those who are most ardent defenders of the faith. This is why the current “prosperity theology” is actually playing with fire, because the faithful may come to realize the myth of the story, as preached, for unlike the traditional theology that stressed supernatural rewards, prosperity theology can be empirically tested. Otherwise, the true believer internalizes the belief that their failure to achieve upward economic mobility is their own private, personal fault; not a consequence of systematic, structural obstacles.

The market is portrayed as a mathematical miracle.³² When markets are good for the player they are bad for those played. No longer do generals lead charges, captains go down with their ships, or CEOs lose when their decisions run a company into the ground. Beginning with the highly corrupt deals cut to build the transcontinental railroad in the United States during the 1860s, a new dissociation of the player from the game was instituted called “limited liability”. The modern player came to hover over, to transcend the game, which he played. With limited liability, a company could be ruined while its management and/or owners took their personal profits and remained financially insulated from the outcome. Unlike the worker, whose work cannot be dissociated from industry, the player can take profits and leave. No longer is the player part of the system but rather the player games the system abandoning it if the chips are down.

OBSOLETE BUT USEFUL MODERNIST HEROISM AND REALISM

The fallacy of the grand ideology is the myth that those who sacrifice most gain the most. If one dies in service to the cause, reward must be had in the afterlife, a widely held belief that motivates millions not from reason but from emotion, indeed repressed instinctual drive from which are born “good” and “evil” as such, a strange motivator which prompted Friedrich Nietzsche to observe the obvious absurdity of the promise of “life after death”.³³ How does a soldier or flyer justify to himself the fact that he destroys scores of innocents in places such as Dresden or Hiroshima or Baghdad? He does so by insisting that he is doing his job and not letting his mates within his clique down (for the ultimate clique is the platoon).³⁴ For young males pumping with testosterone, the more violent the dance, the chant, the communal activity, the “job”: the greater the commitment to the group. Risk is the source of peril and so the greater the risk, the more emotional the bonding process. The menace must be defeated for the sake of all. The threat to “our way of life” equates with civilization itself in the most ethnocentric of narrow definitions. The true believer identifies with his job and those who help him get it done. Preservation of the system, not progress, is the goal. Thus, 17th-century positivism is revealed as an imperialistic apologetic, a myth based on emotion far more than reason. What counts as “progress” is the advancement of techniques and systems that defend and preserve the order; the “bigger bang for the buck” is the essence of efficiency.

As Sigmund Freud noted in his classic *The Future of an Illusion* irrational religious and nationalistic belief systems, and we add, down to the level of street gang membership and identification, is so closely associated with wishful thinking that it is never likely to disappear.³⁵ Wishful thinking, dreaming, is both escapism and also the catalyst for efforts to make reality perfect. Narcissism is at the core of all utopian wishful daydreaming. The hero, the central figure in control achieves eternal life, immortality. But he does so only by doing his job, even if that includes dying and murdering.³⁶ Such is the morality

of ascetic self-contradiction. It is idealistic. The player is no idealist. He is a "realist", which is to say, an opportunist. For the modern hero-idealist, to die heroically becomes the goal of life. It is narcissism as social construct, self-love reflected by the adoration of others who need salvation. To be a hero, one must have a crisis and a weak constituency. Most glorious histories are motivational stories for the sake of this absurd ideal. Such is the dream of having tales and song written about and memorializing one's sacrifice. But the post-modern hypertrophically egoistic player wants his cake and to eat it too. He wants glory, *if it plays to his advantage*, without the need for self-sacrifice. In step the public relations experts. So too comes the proliferation of fake diplomas and fake military service medals to generate images without the need to actually embody it.

This is the age of simulacra, where image and symbolism is more real than obsolete spatial materialism.³⁷ But this world of symbolic force is something essentially different from mere representationalism. It is the "hyperreal", which is an endless, "always already" reproduction without an original or authenticity. The player feeds on the fact that there is no reference behind his reference letters, that there is no truth that could expose his lie, that he cannot be accused of lying at all because one cannot lie if there is no truth. The player is a player; not a liar or cheat. Such old identifiers are obsolete, hopelessly wedded to the notion that there is a reality independent of claim. In this world of pure discourse, hypocrisy and falsehoods are impossible. The will of the player is to be self-made, without referent, a true free radical. Such is the hypertrophy of militant individualism. Everything is available for acquisition and even spouses are contingent trophies, symbols to be displayed on one's arm at parties and galas as "*mine*" for now, the current Mrs. X. But this is a myth. The shepherd, the player is nothing without a flock and his loyal dogs. At some point, the person being most fooled by the slight-of-hand, by the cosmetic surgery of life itself, is the magician himself. As the street philosophy states, aging is not for sissies. Certain truths are inescapable, no matter how hard we wish. Donald Trump's hair becomes a joke.³⁸

The basis of the carnival is the stark contrast between the pompous image and reality. Critical assessment is epistemological (as opposed to political) positivism in the service of justice. The fundamental break from mythological/religious hegemony comes when someone is brave enough to speak, to say publicly that in fact, in reality, the Holy tyrant, the demigod, has no clothes on. The nakedness is not of his well-fed paunch but of his well-fed narcissistic self-delusion. Insofar as this image is sustained as a social construct, when the herd begins to turn, the image evaporates. The hope of justice is that eventually, the magician ends up fooling only himself, and that others are freed from the delusion. For Socrates, the final straw is when the magician realizes this about himself. Saying it is so does not make it so.

The modern capitalist exploits others, giving them "value", in terms of his own agenda. The modern capitalist is often eager to lead the charge, to be the alpha male. By contrast, the player demurely allows others to lead the charges. The modern player prefers to profit from war without risk by, as the Du Pont family did, selling arms to both sides of conflicts while floating above such human, all too human, struggles.³⁹

As a consequence of systematic distortion of communication, the buyer of products and political agendas, including wars, cannot tell what a "fair price" is, as based on costs, and therefore cannot bargain in good faith but only compare among profit takers. What is the true cost of going to war or not going to war? Presuming that people could make a rational choice if they had all the facts ("rational" being increasingly abbreviated by modern Machiavellianism as simply following one's own personal best interests), players, who often have very different interests from the majority such as trying to get as much labour out of workers as cheaply as possible, try mightily to obfuscate and distort facts. Just a few examples of this appear below.

The marketplace of products and ideas is distorted. And insofar as it is, it is antidemocratic, anti-justice. One ubiquitous example is the curious dual class structure within transactions between the wholesale universe and the retail universe.

While it may seem quaint today, many modern capitalists actually believed that their enterprise was spiritually motivated and that they were achieving progressive goals for society at large, elevating civilization, even if their methods were sometimes brutal. The player has no such motivations or delusions. He transcends religious and moral ideology. He is "beyond good and evil". The player is a narcissist and he does not care what others think of it.

THE SUPER-PLAYER

Now we turn to discuss the globalization of playing and gaming, the outreach by means of secret societies and communication between various government leaders and their intelligence, military, and trade agencies as they craft strategies and tactics to assure the success of their personal agendas. Much "international cooperation" is based on personal ties, as for instance the Bush family's intimate relationship with the Saudi royal family. While interlocks among royal families may seem to be a thing of the past, a secular version now reigns.

The super-player manifests an essentially post-modern, Western attitude and identity. He sees himself liberated from all religious and nationalistic associations, all obligations and limitations be they of investors, workers, colleagues, or law. As Karl Marx noted, capital knows no boundaries, no limits; morally, geographically, culturally, or ethnically. The super-player is an equal opportunity exploiter who, for instance, cares little for local traditions taking many wives and trophy women, men, companies, and toys such as mega-yachts, mansions, airplanes, et cetera. Arguably the first wide scale outbreak of the super-player mentality was during the gilded age. But today's super-player egomaniac makes the old guard look positively conservative by comparison.

The super-player, unlike the modern capitalist, cares little for being a national hero, a pillar of any community. The super-player is dissociated not only from place and tradition but from the lives of the vast majority. For instance, from 2001-2004 the jobless rate in the United States rose to over 6 per cent despite the surge in defence spending (which keeps the U.S. rate lower

than most European nations), and the earning power of the working class has steadily declined for the past 30 years. At the same time everything has become "super" and "mega" with new terms emerging such as "superyacht" and "megafortunes" being coined just to try to describe the new post-national, global lifestyle of the super-player.

SUPER-PLAYERS AND THEIR SUPERYACHT ENVY

For instance, while jobless rates rose in the U.S. supersales of super luxury yachts 120 feet or longer jumped by 10 per cent every year from 2001 to 2004. The keels being laid are growing in size dramatically along with their price tags.⁴⁰ Players are fighting for the longest boat. Paul Allen, co-founder of Microsoft, has three superyachts including the 301-foot *Tatoosh* and the 198-foot *Madusa*. Until 2005, the longest was his new 416-foot yacht. Most of the details about *Octopus*, as it is called, and perhaps appropriately as the moniker conjures up images of Allen's vast diversification of business interests, are a tightly held secret. It is known that *Octopus* has state-of-the-art communications capabilities, multiple helipads, is manned by a crew of over 60, including former Navy Seals, and has its own 12-man submarine that deploys from the bottom of the hull.⁴¹

The real story of interest here is the player's mindset. A case in point is super yacht envy, whereby super rich players compete with each other to own the longest yacht in the world. What might have seemed unseemly flaunting of riches by previous capitalists, holds no reservations for today's super-player.

Super rich players become dissociated from money and its value. Money takes on a meaning for them, which is quite different from what money means to the vast majority of human beings. In this case it is expressed as the competition between Allen and Oracle founder Larry Ellison. The magazine *Power & Motor Yacht* now covers the explosion in super yacht construction like a race because the genteel pastime of yachting has been overtaken by the player mentality. The rivalry between Allen and Ellison has become legendary. Ellison's boat was

under construction about the same time as Allen's. Ellison's original design was for a boat a few feet shorter than Allen's, but mysteriously Ellison's yacht ended up being a few dozen feet longer. The result is Ellison's 452-foot *Rising Sun*. *Rising Sun* is actually only one ship in a flotilla. *Rising Sun* is part of a 200+ million dollar fleet which includes the super yacht itself and three smaller boats, known as tenders, each more than 40 feet in length, that accompany it. *Rising Sun* has 5 storeys of 82 rooms. It has 86,000 square feet of living space, which is roughly the size of an average Wal-Mart. It has a gym, a basketball court, a private cinema, and an extensive wine cellar.

This may seem the final word in super yacht envy but Ellison's boat was soon surpassed by a 525-foot super yacht built for the crown prince of Dubai. Others in the global game of who has the biggest super yacht include Russian oilman Roman Abramovich, with his 354-foot *Le Grand Bleu* (in addition to at least two other super yachts), Leslie Wexner, whose 315-foot *Limitless*, which is a play on the clothing company that made him rich, Limited Brands. Others in the game of show me how long it is are Peter Lewis, former CEO of the insurance company Progressive Corp., who has the expedition-style 255-foot *Lone Ranger*. One observer of the super yacht scene has noted that converting deep-sea tugs into a pleasure craft such as the *Lone Ranger* is very expensive and rare. "This is much more than a Hummer. It's as if someone bought themselves an M1 tank and decided to drive through the Jack In The Box with it."⁴²

MODERN CAPITALISTS VERSUS POST-MODERN PLAYERS

The size of personal fortunes started expanding dramatically concurrent with globalization beginning in earnest around 1980. Before this time there were players and the superrich to be sure, but the new breed is far less nationalistic, far less conservative, much more mobile and richer than the old denizens of the Gilded Age could have imagined.

While modern capitalists held family as sacred and patriarchal hierarchy as sacrosanct, the player does not care for any such obsolete notions and their socially imposed

obligations. Today, players see themselves and their work as transcending the parochialism of communities, cultures, nations, languages, religions, and races. They play at the orders of things rather than defend them. They express a highly dissociated attitude which means that the player is "objective", careless, which is another way to say uncaring except for her own "bottom line".

Capitalists were yet associated with community, while players are utterly dissociated. Modern capitalists often thrived on investing other peoples' money and lives, but often their own too. The Kennedy brothers were quick to respond to the chance to fight in World War II. Similarly, Theodore Roosevelt was so eager not to miss participation in his generation's war that he resigned his prestigious position as Assistant Secretary of the Navy to enlist as a lowly Lt. Colonel in the Army forming the First U.S. Volunteer Cavalry Regiment out of a ragtag bunch that ranged from cowboys from the Western territories to Ivy Leaguers. It was a diverse group with little experience and who were poorly equipped. But they shared a common sense of nationalistic obligation and patriotism. Only Roosevelt had a horse in this "cavalry" regiment. But it is a fact that Roosevelt the romantic risk-taker did fight. Modern capitalists like to see themselves as adventurers-leaders. The player, by contrast, often "flies under the radar".

The real risks that capitalists take sometimes pay off, and sometimes end in disaster. In either case, nothing is left alone. Another example, another struggle junky, if not flat out war junky (at least in his youth) was Winston Churchill who, in 1895 secured a commission from the *Daily Graphic* newspaper (the name of which is itself is more than suggestive) to travel to Cuba and observe the fighting between Cuban guerrillas and the Spanish. Later, Churchill, the war correspondent, was disappointed that the Greco-Turkish war ended before he could join the fighting, but he got his chance to fight in India. One might think that his lust for action would abate but as First Lord of the Admiralty, his eagerness to engage the Turks at Gallipoli led to a disaster for the British troops who were slaughtered as they tried to fight up the beaches on the

Dardanelles during World War I. Churchill had personally fought in the Second Boer War and at the Battle of Omdurman, so he knew war, but not enough it seemed to become cautious of it.

Such is the character behind the Western notion of global conquest. Its ambition comes out of Western philosophy's dream of grasping universal understanding and control, first articulated in the person of Alexander the Great. A similar universalizing attitude is seen in the tyranny over mere mortals, anonymous soldiers, mere contingent people (later to be called general issue canon fodder) under the first emperor of China, Qín Shì Huang (Qin Shi Huang). This attitude, which has emerged in many cultures through time, found an efficient confluence with a new scientific and technological prowess in Renaissance Europe, a power that enabled reach across oceans to globalism. This confluence led through the development of the navigational chronometer, steam power, the telegraph, the radio, the airplane, the atomic bomb and up to today's genius for mass destruction and global reach from extraterrestrial orbital platforms. The desire of the player is to rise above the mundane, to ride a horse, to escape the mere pedestrian perspective, to make history, to make history as truly his personal story of exploits and conquests. The new super-player's ego is not interested in being a saviour of his nation. It is now global in scope.

Mobility is the player's goal and the game, reality, is mutable. Players don't play by the rules, they play the rules themselves; they "game" the system. To a player, rules are for dupes and pilgrims; innocent, harmless fools. The player seeks angles. Rules, harmonies are stolen, borrowed, manipulated, and disregarded at will. The player often sees himself as a Nietzschean *ubermensch*, as a person who "transvaluates" his own and the community's values. But this is false for the Nietzschean *ubermensch* famously has the courage not of his convictions but the courage to challenge his own convictions. The confident player never abandons his self-interest. He creates and manipulates the game at will, which, having such enormous power through lobbying and access to capital and armies of

politicians, lawyers, and accountants who distort the intent if not the letter of the rules, makes community practically impossible.

CONCLUSION

Disregarding the Hobbesian warning, the great message of global capital is an assault on the obligations social contract put upon individuals. The mantra is that every person has not only the right but the duty to pursue his/her personal happiness, and in arenas of scarce resources this leads to Machiavellian tactics in the social Darwinian struggle of every man for himself. Under such conditions, to not be a Machiavellian is to be a dupe. Of all the phrases in the United States Constitution, the one that repeatedly is used in product and service advertising is the God-given right to pursue personal happiness.

Gaming the system and being a player are hypertrophic egocentric attitudes. They are not conservative. Conservative societies revere tradition, responsibility, obligation, social status as proper place, which is often regarded as an inherent, unchangeable quality of a person. Conservative societies change little. Late-modern/post-modern society changes rapidly. Fortunes are made and lost. Social and physical mobility are accelerating. Everyone wants to believe they are players, are in the game scrapping as a free agent to make their reality as they wish. But in traditional conservative societies, though equality exist and is even canonized, even the elite, the kings and emperors are forced to abide by sacred ritual and comportment lest the cosmos falter. There are countless examples of this. The ritual bloodletting ceremony of the Inca royals is an example. To maintain the cosmic status quo, the Inca regularly scarified their own genitalia so that their royal blood could be used in rituals to assure the continuance of the world. They had no choice in this and if one tried to rebel and avoid the pain, he was seen as an extremely dangerous disruptor of cosmic harmony and killed. In traditional, conservative cultures, the inherency of blood dictates the social station even for the royals so that privileges and obligations are dictated by sacred law.

Conservative cosmologies tend to be grounded in sacred, eternal beliefs that guide their motivations and behaviours.

The player is the ultimate expression of post-modern ego hypertrophy. He articulates a kind of militant liberality, an extreme fundamentalist expression of individualism. The player is a player precisely because she does not see herself bound by any traditional norms or mores. They do what they want. The law is more problematic but that too is part of the challenge of the game to the player. Now breaking norms and mores and "stretching" the law may be frowned upon by "normal" folk so secrecy is an important aspect of playing. Keeping one's moves hidden and controlling visibility are important powers the player seeks to enhance. Players sometimes crave visibility, to be celebrated, to flaunt their wealth and power. What good is being a player if you can never show off? But at the same time, they want to control the image and so they have public relations experts at their beckon call and lawyers ready to slap down unwanted publicity with threats of libel and slander lawsuits. Beyond this, as Ben Bagdikian has observed, players in utterly unrelated spheres of industry and influence discovered in the 1970s that it is easier and more controlling to buy-up the media than to constantly struggle with it.⁴³ Why threaten an inconvenient investigative reporter with slander when you can just fire her and kill the story altogether? Thus the moves, made by one "holding", say a financial "unit", can either be puffed or ignored by another media holding within a conglomerate. Boards of directors have become notoriously lax in oversight of corporate operations.

The player has no association with the product or service they produce or with community. Nothing has any essential meaning or quality to them. Everything is contingent. The player is totally liberated and mobile. Unlike the old "captains" of industry, who often actually invented their products and processes such as Goodyear, Edison, Ford, Carnegie, and who saw themselves, and were seen by most, as pillars of their communities, benefactors to the neighbourhoods bringing jobs, prosperity, and a free Christmas ham or turkey, the post-modern player has no interest in the community or even the product.

They are scientific. They have no passion, no associative attachment to the product or service. With the rise of management schools on university campuses and increasing emphasis on quantification and computational methods, the player today believes that she can move from business to business with no need to even know what the product or service for sale is and be successful. All that matters is the accounting, the bottom line. Whether it is shirts, automobiles, pest control, arms manufacturing, health care, even running a church, the job is the same, work the books, maximize profit for the shareholders. Manufacturing and selling pharmaceuticals is basically the same as manufacturing and selling bombs or pimping sex slaves. The street drug dealer is not lying when he says, "I'm just a business man. I just offer a service that is in demand. If I didn't service the market someone else would."

Consequences? Like the predatory loan shark who talks a young inexperienced and marginally literate couple into a mortgage they cannot afford, the excuse is the same. Whether it is buying street drugs or an often even more hazardous mortgage from a treacherous money pusher, everyone is free to make their own mistakes and their own fortunes. This mentality achieved global proportions in the 1980s when commercial banks, seeing profits galore in developing nations, bundled loans into "super loans", plunging many of the poorest countries deep into debt. The motto: Let the laws of Machiavellianism work, including exploiting, when convenient, the doctrine of social Darwinism. But while the player espouses risk-taking and decries government welfare for losers, she makes sure that the tax-supported bailouts are codified for her own risky business. Thus, if banking managers make horrible decisions, the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC), founded by the Glass-Seagall Act of 1933, and Federal Reserve are there to guarantee their investors' accounts.⁴⁴ Forgiving foreign debt is even seen as saintly. Hence the player's mantra. Never risk your own money, health, and well-being, always risk someone else's. I don't want my own to go to war, or down into the mines, or my own money to be invested. I'll just take a percentage if it succeeds.

Everything is subsumed under the new science and technology of the market. Its laws are written in the sacred discourse of accounting, which is often purposefully mystified along with associated jurisprudence; part of the secrecy of power. This is the new global religion and the player is the new high priest. But it is not conservative and the player/priest enjoys a power previous clerics could never have imagined. She does not fight to uphold the law but fights to skirt it and to escape the obligation and duty of community norms and mores.

The player is the most hypertrophic late-modern. In fact, the player is the deficient aspect of liberality which is bad faith and cynicism. The player is actually an expression of deficient postmodernism. The player believes in nothing but herself. And she believes that reality is not fixed, certainly not sacred or eternal. Reality is what she can make of it, which means her ability to manipulate reality against other manipulators. Rules, certainly not eternal rules, such as the inalienable rights of humans as Denis Diderot called them, do not exist except as obstacles to self-fulfilment. Transcending law implies equality "under" its purview. Equality is, to the player, the most pernicious of liberal myths. The player sees nothing but opportunity. But the freedom to exploit is limited by other opportunists. This is the game. Rules are made to be broken. Taking risks is the gamer's drug. Thus, players use tools of manipulation to shape their reality such as advertising agents, public relations agents, army-sized legal departments, various managing techniques (some threatening, some appeasing), shrewd accountants that find loopholes and ways to hide income, private detective agents, and lobbyists.

Players "game" the system, which means to cheat or seek a semi-legal way to avoid the intent of policy and law. And when this is pointed out to them, the players' rebuttal is that they did not invent the game, they merely play by its rules. But of course, through lobbying they also help invent the rules. This is bad faith for they are denying their own freedom as a rhetorical move to be free of responsibility as a member of a community. They are willfully ignoring the consequences of both the system and their gaming of it. Hence the argument that "I did not invent

the system, I just play by the rules", is the same as saying it is okay for me to pull the trigger because I did not invent firearms.

NOTES

1. Jurgen Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, trans. T. McCarthy (Boston: Beacon, 1979).
2. Eric Kramer, "Cosmopoly: Occidentalism and the New World Order," in *The Emerging Monoculture: Assimilation and the "Model Minority"*, ed. E. Kramer (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), pp. 232-291.
3. F. Bales, *Personality and Interpersonal Behavior* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1970); R. Bormann, "The Force of Fantasy: Restoring the American Dream," in *Communication Theory* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1980), pp. 184-190.
4. Eric Kramer, *Modern/Postmodern: Off the Beaten Path of Antimodernism* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1997).
5. See Vance Packard's 1958 classic *The Hidden Persuaders*, which chronicles the original marriage of social scientific psychographics with mass rhetoric to formulate messages of mass persuasion and image manipulation.
6. Garret Keizer, "Crap shoot: Everyone Loses When Politics is a Game," *Harper's*, February 2006, pp. 31-39.
7. John Ruskin, *Unto the Last and Other Writings* (New York: Penguin, 1986).
8. *Ibid*, p. 44.
9. These harsh criticisms appeared in two essays published in 1860 in the *Cornhill Magazine*, "Ad Valorem" and "The Veins of Wealth". The outcry by subscribers against the essays was so great that the publisher stopped publishing them after 4 months. Ruskin responded in 1862 by compiling his essays on economics and publishing them as a book titled *Unto the Last*.
10. Ruskin, *Unto the Last and Other Writings*, p. 32.
11. *Ibid*, pp. 32-33.
12. *Ibid*, p. 32.
13. *Ibid*, p. 35.
14. *Ibid*, p. 39.
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16. V. Gold, *Invasion of the Party Snatchers: How the Holyrollers and Neo-cons Destroyed the GOP* (New York: Sourcebooks, 2007); R. Viguerie, "Bush's Base Betrayal," *Washington Post*, May 21, 2006, B01.

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19. The phrase "economic man", first appears in the utilitarian John Stewart Mill's *The Principles of Political Economy: With Some of Their Applications to Social Philosophy* (1848).
20. John Stuart Mill, *The Principles of Political Economy* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2004).
21. G. Bigelow, "Let There Be Markets: The Evangelical Roots of Economics", *Harper's*, May 2005, pp. 33-38.
22. See: R. Horan, E. Bulte, and J. Shogren, "How Trade Saved Humanity From Biological Exclusion: An Economic Theory of Neanderthal Extinction", *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization* 58, no. 1 (2005): 1-29.
23. For a detailed timeline of the great S&L scandal of the 1980s see the FDIC website at <http://www.fdic.gov/bank/historical/s&l/>
24. J. Ritter, "Economic Growth and Equity Returns", *Pacific-Basin Finance Journal* 13, no. 5 (2005): 489-503.
25. Kramer, "Cosmopoly: Occidentalism and the New World Order".
26. CNN, "Report: 8-Figure Home Sales Soar", *CNN Money*, May 7, 2005.
27. W. Greider, *One World, Ready or Not: The Manic Logic of Global Capitalism* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997); T. Frank, *One Market Under God: Extreme Capitalism, Market Populism, and the End of Economic Democracy* (New York: Anchor, 2001).
28. Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man* (Boston: Beacon, 1964).
29. D. Morris, *The Human Zoo* (New York: Kodansha, 1996).
30. The phrase "political economy" was originally the standard nomenclature for economic phenomena until the free market ideology enacted by true believers in the political realm, generated a series of human disasters such as the Irish potato famine. After such debacles, academic apologists sought to inoculate themselves from such realities by dropping the term "political" from "political economy". Thus we have the new science of economics that claims to have no political dimension. Such sophistry attempts to conceal (a typical player move) the fact that government policies effect economies and vice versa.
31. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons and R. Tawney (Meneola, New York: Dover, 2003).
32. H. Cox, *The Secular City* (New York: Viking Adult, 1966).
33. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter

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34. G. Dyer, *War: The Lethal Custom* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 2006).
35. Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, trans. J. Starchey and P. Gay (New York: W. W. Norton, 1989).
36. The totally divergent positions taken by Heidegger and Nietzsche here illustrate Walter Kaufmann's (1992) contention that Heidegger understood Nietzsche very little, though he wrote a three volume work ostensibly about Nietzsche. It was based on very little study of Nietzsche's works and mostly on Elizabeth Nietzsche's ideas more than Friedrich's.
37. B. Baudrillard, *Simulations*, trans. P. Foss, P. Patton, and P. Beitchman (New York: Columbia University Press/Semiotext(e), 1983).
38. While writing this in 2007, a feud between a famous female comedian/troubadour, Rosie O'Donnell and the real estate tycoon, Donald Trump titillated the herd. A good example of the carnivalesque aspect of the feud is an amateurish video O'Donnell posted on her website showing her and her lesbian companion tipping longneck beers while mocking Trump and the fact that he announced to the world that his latest trophy wife would not dare fart in his presence.
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42. Ibid.
43. Ben Bagdikian, *The Media Monopoly* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000).
44. Until February 2006, there were two separate FDIC funds; the Bank Insurance Fund (BIF) and the Saving Association Insurance Fund (SAIF). The latter, not coincidentally, was established after the huge savings and loan crisis of the 1980s, which the Bush family had a major part in. In February 2006, President George W. Bush signed The Federal Deposit Insurance Reform Act of 2005 (the Reform Act) into law. The FDIRA merged the Bank Insurance Fund (BIF) and the Savings Association Insurance Fund (SAIF) into a single new fund, the Deposit Insurance Fund (DIF), thus eliminating one backup system for depositors.

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To *Camilo Jin Suh*
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other future revolutionaries