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**Anger Fast & Slow:  
Mediations of justice and violence in the Age of Populism**

William Davies

We live, it has been said, in an ‘age of anger’ (Mishra, 2017). The rise of populism and cultural conflict in liberal democracies has been widely attributed to a heightened power of affect in public life, with resentment, hostility and rage playing a critical role in the mobilisation of support for the ‘hyper-leaders’ that drive nationalist parties (Davies, 2018; Gerbaudo, 2019). Where liberal government seeks to appeal to individual self-interest (primarily understood as enhanced economic welfare), populist politicians and parties address feelings of injustice and status anxiety, channelling a far wider range of moral emotions. Not unrelatedly, digital media platforms have established new spaces of cultural and political conflict, where trolling, hostility and scapegoating are common, and which are mediated by graphics as much as text (Phillips, 2015; Seymour, 2019).

The important role of emotions within contemporary populism is becoming better understood (Demertzis, 2013; Salmela & von Scheve, 2017; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2018; Cossarini & Vallespín, 2019). In particular, anger has been recognised as a crucial emotion in the current political landscape, seeing as it has the capacity to mobilise people around a sense of injustice. It has long been recognised that anger is an ‘action’ emotion, that propels people in certain ways, whether for good or ill. It is also a *reactive* emotion, in that it is typically linked to some past injury or sleight that it seeks to redress or avenge. It has powerful political properties, if it can be released in a coordinated fashion (Lyman, 1981). Whether anger is focused on the appropriate target, or whether it is diverted towards some substitute, is another question altogether.

Yet when we speak of the political arena being disrupted by 'anger', this can summon up some quite heterogeneous types. Firstly, it often refers to feelings of resentment that have been building for years or even decades, lacking any adequate political release (Magni, 2017). This is associated with a gradual disillusionment with mainstream politics, and a disengagement from democratic participation (Mair, 2013). The concept of 'left behind' people and spaces became something of a cliché in the aftermath of Britain's referendum on EU membership and Donald Trump's Presidential campaign victory. However, ethnographers have shown that feelings of anger amongst economically and culturally marginalised populations were indeed brewing for many years prior to 2016 (Hochschild, 2016; Cramer, 2016). This is anger that is sedimented over a long period of time and held in reserve. It potentially forges whole political and moral identities.

Secondly, there is the anger that is acted out in political argument, media debates and social media 'wars'. The 'anger' that is attributed to Trump or to trolls is not one that derives from the past, at least not in the absence of any psychoanalytic excavation. Rather it is performed in real time, causing disruption via its speed and unpredictability. If anything it makes it *more* difficult to talk about the past (as a set of empirical experiences), seeing as it is constantly provoking more immediate reaction. Whether this anger is authentically felt, or whether it is a type of prank played on the rest of us, is impossible ever to fully establish. Nevertheless, it constantly generates new anger, before any previous grievances or past statements can be properly addressed. In the 'attention economy', angry behaviour is a tactic for drawing attention, while feelings of anger are frequently provoked by the misrepresentations, discriminations and oversights that inevitably occur in this frenetic media landscape.

Lying between these two ideal types, we might also note a third type, that plays an important role in mediating economics and politics. Economic psychologists have noted that we are affected by losses of status and income, far more than we are by gains (Payne, 2017). Put in the context of capitalist development, this means that we can experience years of gradual improvements in welfare, without any commensurate increase in life satisfaction, but experience acute pain and indignation in the immediate aftermath of any losses (as in a recession). It is telling that support for populist parties in Europe correlates

more closely to the *rate at which unemployment has increased* than to aggregate unemployment (Algan et al, 2017). Similarly, the crucial Mid-Western counties that swung from Obama to Trump in 2016 had all experienced a plant closure *during the 2016 presidential campaign season itself* (Davis, 2017). Populist support is more closely associated with feelings of relative deprivation (failing to keep up with others) than with objective deprivation (Pettigrew et al, 2017). Sudden localised downturns of economic prosperity and status might produce a particularly acute form of anger in the medium term, which can convert more easily into political mobilisation.

One way of distinguishing these three different species of anger is via the different chronologies involved. The first is anger that accumulates over the long-term, married to entrenched feelings of injustice and resentment that don't find adequate political expression in the near-term. The second is anger as a form of rhetorical and somatic performance and combat, that exists in real-time, with immediate affective prompts and consequences. The third is an anger that reflects recent changes in the distribution of status and welfare in society. These are all variants of anger, but they offer different ways of relating past and present. Where anger is 'pent-up', it sees the past exerting an over-bearing influence upon the present; where it is sheer performance, it obliterates memory or empirics, focusing all attention upon the present. Undoubtedly, each of these has political implications, and may often be assembled in certain ways to achieve political ends. Successful demagogic leaders will often have the ability to channel all of them, synthesising long-term resentments, current fears and insecurities, and the spectacle of a live event, to produce a moment of mass affective expression. Without some kind of political resolution – justice – the pain of the past continues to haunt the present, but the effect of relentless 'real-time' anger is to make such resolution impossible to carry out. This is a common dynamic effect of populist leadership, which speaks to anger, cultivates it, but never resolves it.

One response to demagoguery is to say that anger – or even emotion in general - has no place in politics, and must be eliminated. This is both empirically and politically naïve. As numerous feminist scholars have argued, anger has positive political attributes (e.g. Lorde, 1981). But how do we distinguish 'good' anger from that of the demagogue? How might we

resist the tendency to lump all anger together, as if everything – Twitter, Trump, #Metoo, Fox News, Brexit – were all just symptoms of a diffuse atmosphere of blame and hostility? One way is to consider that spaces and times need to be defended, in which anger about the past can be articulated, without being either ignored (such that it is sustained for even longer) or expressed via a kind of real-time rage that exists solely in the present.

In this article, I propose disaggregating anger by considering its different chronologies and speeds, and exploring the different political attributes of each. The aim is not to specify what normatively ‘good’ anger consists of, which would be to deny the spontaneous and extra-normative dimensions of anger, let alone to prescribe how or when we *should* be angry. But the rise of populism has generated some simplistic and confused accounts of anger, that fail to recognise its varieties, its benefits and its harms. My hope is that this paper will shed some sociological light on the contemporary political moment by highlighting the divergent ways in which anger can mediate political temporality. It is structured as follows. In the next section, I outline some of the key properties of anger, reviewing recent arguments within political philosophy and affect theory regarding the status (and benefits) of anger. Anger, I argue, has properties in common with both justice and violence, and can pull towards either pole depending on the pace at which it is exercised. I then turn to different ‘speeds’ of anger in turn, starting with the ‘slow’ anger that accumulates over time, then turning to the ‘fast’ anger that briefly seems to abolish the past altogether. In conclusion, I offer some reflections on what moderation might look like, not in the sense of less anger, but in the sense of a thoughtful, purposive anger, which is neither nostalgic nor explosive.

### **What is anger?**

Arguably the most famous definition of anger belongs to Aristotle: “an impulse, accompanied by pain, to a conspicuous revenge for a conspicuous slight directed without justification towards what concerns oneself or towards what concerns one’s friends” (Aristotle, 1968: 1382-83). This definition does not perfectly capture every possible case of (what we describe as) ‘anger’. In particular, it assumes that anger is necessarily felt towards

those who are responsible for some 'slight', whereas it is eminently possible to feel and direct anger towards a blameless substitute, such as traffic or some inanimate object (Miceli & Castelfranchi, 2019). However, Aristotle's definition does draw our attention to a number of key elements of anger, that have been fought over by conflicting traditions of psychology and philosophy. These conflicts are themselves revealing of some of the ambivalences of anger, which hovers between conscious and unconscious action, subjective judgement and physical response, visions of justice and the urge to violence.

Firstly, Aristotle highlights the somatic and affective nature of anger (the 'impulse' and the 'pain'). Anger is something that is embodied to some extent, and which is likely to translate into some kind of action. For positivist sciences of emotion, this embodied dimension represents the full extent of anger, showing itself in facial and other behaviours, as one of a fixed number of 'basic emotions' (Leys, 2017). Angry feelings and behaviour can be studied as objects independently of what *explains* them or what they *intend* towards. William James (1884: 190), in his famous somatic theory of emotion, writes we feel "angry because we strike". Anger is something that comes over us as a distinctive state of physiological and behavioural being.

By itself, the physical and affective state of anger doesn't tell us anything about the world. Reduced wholly to various symptoms (such as facial expression and heart-rate), anger exists wholly independently of the type of 'slight' Aristotle speaks of, or any other type of injustice or harm committed in the past. This allows us to speak of 'angry behaviour' as a form of spontaneous violence, that is wholly disruptive, rather than representative of anything. This strips anger of any evaluative or cognitive capacity. Instead, it opens up philosophical, neurological and evolutionary questions about the autonomic nature of our reactions and their physical correlates (Massumi, 1995). But these are assumed to exist independently of conscious and discursive accounts of *why* we are angry, or what we are angry *about*.

However, Aristotle's definition draws our attention to a second quality of anger, that pulls against this tendency. Anger is typically accompanied by a sense of indignation, that something in the past has produced a wrong that needs to be repaid in some way. It includes a desire for retribution, to create some kind of balance between pain suffered and

pain re-paid. This points to the intentional dimension of anger, which is foregrounded in philosophies which view emotions as ways of acting meaningfully and judgementally towards a goal in the world (Solomon, 2004; Sartre, 2015 [1939]). The risk, of course, is that angry exchanges can continue indefinitely and escalate, if they are not accompanied by a resolution mechanism, in the form of justice and proportionality. It's for this reason that Martha Nussbaum believes societies need transition mechanisms, that move them from moral economies of anger (based around desire to repay harm) to those of justice, where a key property of the latter is precisely that it allows us to leave pain and anger behind (Nussbaum, 2016).

Nussbaum's argument is that, if we are serious about achieving some kind of balance for past wrongs and harms, then anger is not a reasonable means of achieving this. Repaying a wrong does not, in fact, improve the situation of the wronged party. Only if anger is born out of jealousy (and I want to stop you enjoying what you have) does it achieve what it sets out to. Law, on the other hand, provides us with the physical protection we need from harm, without requiring us to inflict suffering upon wrong-doers ourselves (Nussbaum, 2016: 4). The question of balancing out harms needs, therefore, to be divorced from the somatic and impulsive dimensions of anger, which belong to our physiological make-up where "it derives very likely, from its evolutionary role as a "fight-or-flight" mechanism" (Nussbaum, 2016: 39). For Nussbaum, anger is – at best – a type of stunted judicial mechanism, and at worse it is brute violence.

Yet, Nussbaum's negative evaluation of anger rests heavily on a teleological argument, of whether it achieves the outcomes that it purports to seek. Anger does *not* successfully 'settle up' (other than where it is wholly focused on status imbalances), she argues, whereas law does. Against this, Srinivasan has argued that anger can be normatively justified, even when it produces a worse outcome, if it is nevertheless an *appropriate* response to injustice and oppression (Srinivasan, 2018). We can be justified in our anger, even when our anger makes the situation (including our own) worse. Srinivasan's argument echoes a long line of feminist political critique, which treats anger as a potentially positive force in bringing oppression to light and resisting it (Lorde, 1981; Holmes, 2004). Recognised as a "power emotion" and an "action emotion", it becomes an indispensable part of political

engagement and mobilisation, of a sort that will not simply wait for legal and representational means of moral redress (Schieman, 2006; Demertzis, 2019). There is no guarantee that anger will improve the state of the world, but it can nevertheless perform a type of embodied judgement and disruption of oppressive structures.

Anger therefore brings questions of justice into orbit with those of affect, embodiment and violence. As Jean-Paul Sartre's account of emotion, it sees conscious intentions (which have objects in the world) enter a kind of 'magical' alliance with unconscious bodily movements (Sartre, 2015: 47). In its optimal form, anger manages to marry justified indignation to bodily action in the world, potentially including violence. But of course, this optimal state may be the exception rather than the rule. It may be that we feel angry for a set of good reasons that we can articulate but not act upon, and that we behave angrily elsewhere for no apparent reason at all. For various reasons, the moral quality of anger and the physical response of anger can become detached, and angry behaviour then appears irrational and violent, like a *causa sui*. 'Good' anger is not allergic to violence, but it is at least in touch with moral reasons and memories of past harms. As Hannah Arendt (1970: 64) wrote, "rage and violence turn irrational only when they are directed against substitutes".

Part of the problem of anger, as a political phenomenon, is that its value depends on being in the right place at the right time. This is impossible to guarantee, indeed anger that was entirely measured and deliberate would cease to be anger, and become something else (as Nussbaum hopes). There is an intrinsic risk in angry responses, that they might be excessive or harmful to an innocent party, or to the angry person themselves. Angry responses are necessarily extra-judicial and in some sense self-legislating. But there is a converse risk, namely that anger gets 'bottled up' until no type of release or action is possible, and injustice comes to seem permanent.

This points to the chronological dimension of anger that concerns us in this paper, namely that anger varies in the *time that elapses* before a reaction occurs. Frederick Douglass noted that if the expression of rage can be delayed somewhat (though not suppressed or averted), it allows for an "investigation of whatever has caused it" (Sokoloff 2014). The extent to which anger successfully balances and fuses claims to justice with embodied action is a



question of the speed at which the exchange of recognition and harms takes place. The psychologist Daniel Kahneman has famously distinguished ‘thinking fast’ from ‘thinking slow’, where the former “operates automatically and quickly, with little or no effort and no sense of voluntary control”, while the latter “allocates attention to the effortful mental activities that demand it [and is] often associated with the subjective experience of agency, choice and concentration” (Kahneman, 2012: 22). Perhaps, therefore, we can speak also of ‘anger fast and slow’, which points to the two potential poles of anger. The former pulls towards an automatic physical response, which cries or lashes out before thought has had time to intrude or establish any kind of delay. This is anger as physiological affective reaction, of the sort that James describes in ‘What is An Emotion?’, and which Nussbaum appears to have in mind when she speculates that anger has an ‘evolutionary’ function. The latter pulls towards restorative justice, but grants excessive power to memory and mental self-restraint, such that anger is never released. Neither of these is normatively objectionable in and of itself, save for where they become over-bearing and break away from the other pole. A wholly automatic anger is impervious to reasons, while anger that exists solely in the conscious mind becomes melancholic. Borrowing Kahneman’s terms in this way potentially illuminates how anger can and does go wrong: when it becomes too fast and violent on the one hand, and too slow and restrained on the other. The anger currently reshaping politics in liberal democracies is arguably a combination of both.

### **Slow anger**

The institutions of law, finance and the market are interlocking ways of establishing a sense of balance in society, that is, of sustaining the belief that scores have been settled. All of them assume that, with the aid of recording mechanisms (such as witness statements and book-keeping), past, present and future will be woven together in a system of accountability, which levels everything out. It was Nietzsche’s (2013 [1887]) great insight that ideals of market exchange and of moral exchange share a common origin, in the notion of an indebted subject who would be compelled to pay what they owe, either back to society (in the form of a punishment) or to a creditor (in the form of a repayment)..

There is something utopian in the idea that all forms of pain, loss and suffering can be successfully captured via formal systems of accountability and repayment. Nietzsche viewed Christian morality as the most all-encompassing effort to achieve this, encouraging individuals to believe that all forms of suffering were being recorded in a metaphysical balance sheet, to be repaid and settled in the next life. “What really raises one’s indignation against suffering is not suffering itself, but the senselessness of it all”, he wrote (2013: 54). By making *sense* of all suffering, Christianity sought to eradicate indignation, and thereby worldly action. Today, we can point to the surveillance and calculation technologies that subject all of our actions to a constant moral evaluation, on behalf of potential creditors (Lazzarato, 2013). The equally utopian ideal of the ‘spot market’ implies a type of synchronic exchange, in which all forms of mutual obligation are created and then settled in a single instant, without any form of continuing relationship or ‘externality’. These devices purport to place pain in a moral-economic grid of calculation and just desert.

Being always extra-judicial in nature (that is, leaking outside of formal norms and codes) anger points to the inadequacy of such efforts to create an adequate ledger of human suffering over time. In that respect, anger is a vital mode of meta-critique of systems of evaluation and accountability which are themselves critical in nature (Boltanski & Thevenot, 2006; Boltanski, 2011). Precisely because it emanates from the body as much as from reason, anger is potentially a means of subjecting regimes of denunciation and blame to renunciation and blame. Sloterdijk identifies this moment of extra-judicial judgement:

When the public order is accused of malfunctioning or of being a part of the problem (we might think of preferential treatment in court proceedings), individuals can take themselves to represent justice as wild judges.

(Sloterdijk, 2012: 65)

The difficulty, as Nietzsche and Freud both emphasised, is that dominant systems of accounting, accountability, justice and moral responsibility are all predicated on seeking to channel, rationalise and constrain the expression of injustice and blame. In the process, anger becomes trapped, and turns into something that lacks active embodied expression.

For Nietzsche, Christian morality was founded precisely on a renunciation of violent retribution against those it despised, therefore producing a psychology of *ressentiment*, which repressed the anger and thereby made it impossible to release. Freud's notion of 'melancholia' rests on a similar understanding, namely that individuals incapable of recognising the external source of their suffering (which for Freud was a loss of a loved person or object) would cling on to the suffering instead, and attribute its cause to themselves (Freud, 2005). In both cases, a failure to engage intentionally and meaningfully with the source of suffering (external to oneself) creates a turn inwards, towards repetitive self-punishment and a refusal to let go of the pain. Pathologies of *ressentiment* and melancholia are exactly why attempts to eradicate anger, or to rationalise it via mechanisms of law and economics, may ultimately produce a far worse problem that is sustained well beyond the time horizons of the original injury. One lesson of Nietzsche and Freud is that *no* formal normative system of exchange and accountability is fully adequate to capture and make sense of suffering, and there must be space for a form of self-legislating, angry denunciation, or else this will get repressed and do even greater harm over time.

Scholars of political emotions have argued that *ressentiment* needs to be distinguished from ordinary resentment, if we are to understand different types of political mobilisation, especially in the age of populism (Salmela & von Scheve, 2017; Demertzis, 2019).

*Ressentiment* is a type of blockage, an excess of conscience, which gets in the way of political action or expression. Resentment, on the other hand, can be seen as an entirely practical, indeed necessary, political emotion that responds to a perceived wrong of some kind. Resentment is arguably an integral feature of democracy and egalitarianism, inasmuch as it targets the hoarding of privilege and power as bad in and of itself, and not only on utilitarian grounds (Engels, 2015). *Ressentiment*, by contrast, (like melancholia) turns away from the world of action and denunciation, and towards a feeling of isolated helplessness and shame. Lacking an external object to blame and punish, punishment turns inwards.

There are good reasons to suspect that neoliberal ideology and rationality is especially prone to generate these affective states. Neoliberalism seeks to re-activate subjectivity, but in the particular form of a morally endowed, responsible debtor, who is accountable for the full costs and benefits of all their choices, risks and decisions, both inside and outside of the

market (Rose, 1996; Lazzarato, 2012; Cooper, 2017; Feher, 2018). Economic rationality becomes all-engulfing, emptying society of non-calculable forms of voice and critique (Foucault, 2008; Brown, 2014; Davies, 2014). This is a heavily moralised vision of individual agency, which combines with extensive infrastructures of surveillance and evaluation, to ensure that suffering always returns to the individual who has earned it by virtue of their character, effort or lack of foresight. Eventually, neoliberalism becomes a moral framework for the allocation of punishment, regardless of utility (Davies, 2016).

What is potentially psychologically devastating about neoliberalism is the relentlessness of evaluation that it perpetuates. Liberal governmentality historically witnesses multiple spheres of worth, resting on incommensurable instruments of evaluation (such as ‘social’, ‘economic’ and ‘political’) (Boltanski & Thevenot, 2006), operating in tandem with instruments of normative ‘discipline’ that are restricted to specific times and spaces (Foucault, 1991). But neoliberalism is characterised by ‘economic imperialism’, in which all behaviour is judged according to a single measure of monetary cost and benefit, and non-market activity is judged according to its potential impact on market values (Fine, 2002; Foucault, 2008). Combined with pervasive technologies of control, such as those of social media platforms, and there becomes one all-encompassing measure of worth, without any ‘outside’. Responsibility, especially for debt and past mistakes, becomes overbearing and inescapable, raising the likelihood of some kind of depressive collapse.

In this context, populism serves as a potentially healthy re-activation of political subjectivity and of anger, but only because such things have lain dormant for so long. Magni’s empirical analysis of populist voters finds that they express high levels of anger, combined with low levels of political ‘efficacy’: they are indignant about injustice, but have very low confidence that the mechanisms of liberal democracy are adequate to represent or respond to this injustice (Magni, 2017). The anger exists, but not in the form of any action or expression. It is what Hochschild refers to as the “deep story” of perceived endemic injustice, that is experienced but never publicly represented (Hochschild, 2016). Whether or not the populist leader is morally credible in their promise to deliver justice and compensate for past suffering, they are at least willing to denounce the established system (of markets, finance and law) which presently promises to settle things up. Such leaders do not require trust in

order to acquire support; they simply need to call out the existing system through which responsibility and suffering is presently distributed (Hahl, et al, 2018).

The tipping point between liberal hegemony and populist ascendancy is very often some form of establishment corruption, which conveys the sense that norms of punishment and repayment do not apply to those who oversee them. Populism is typically defined as a rhetoric that opposes a morally pure 'people' against a corrupt 'elite' (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017; Mueller, 2017). The 'elite' is exposed as having 'rigged the system' in its own favour, suggesting that dominant moral-economic codes are a sham. The financial crisis was an epic example of this, inasmuch as the handlers of risk and credit were exempted from the austere debtor morality that their instruments applied to everyone else. This seems to be a powerful trigger for activating anger. As Arendt observed, "if we inquire historically into the causes likely to transform *engagés* into *enragés*, it is not injustice that ranks first, but hypocrisy" (Arendt, 1970: 65). What it implies is that the enforcers of responsibility are permitted to behave irresponsibly, which simultaneously de-legitimises formal mechanisms for allocating blame and suffering, and legitimates the informal one of anger.

The populist leader seizes such opportunities to convert *ressentiment* (inner-directed rage) into resentment (outer-directed rage). The passage of time that precedes this reversal slowly adds to the accumulation of anger, in ways that escape formal and public efforts to account for suffering. Sloterdijk refers to the formation of "rage potential" and "rage banks", that build up thanks to the patient deferral of any political action (Sloterdijk, 2012: 60-62). The indebted, depressed subject, who lacks belief in their own efficacy in the world, is manifestly not enraged or even angry. However, we might nevertheless view the sustained suppression of resentment and political anger as a series of deposits in a 'bank', which can later be seized in the form of violent political expression. Reflecting on her five-year ethnography, that concluded in 2016, Hochschild writes "looking back at my previous research, I see that the scene had been set for Trump's rise, like kindling before a match is lit" (Hochschild, 2016: 221). The passage of time was reflected in the quantity of unreleased rage.

## Fast anger

'Slow anger' builds up over time, accumulating thanks to the power of human memory, and the felt injustices of the juridical and economic mechanisms which purport to settle scores. It is deposited as a type of 'externality', every time a bureaucratic, legal or financial penalty is set, which (inevitably) fails to fully account for the contingencies and complexities of the case. It is remembered and thought about to excess, becoming pathological in the form of melancholia and *ressentiment*. 'Fast anger' suffers from the opposite problem. There is a complete circumvention of thought or memory, and a kind of ecstatic revelling in the present, as if past and future do not exist. The somatic and violent dimensions of anger become everything, and there is a brief liberation from conscious intentions, honesty or reasons. If 'slow anger' is a thwarted desire for moral retribution, emanating from the conscious mind and memory, then 'fast anger' is closer to an autonomic and physiological action or reaction, that is prior to conscious thought.

When it reaches its violent extreme, anger loses its indignant quality (which is what makes it a political emotion) and becomes a kind of indecipherable rage. But in the process, there is a loss of subjectivity or intentionality about the anger, which poses questions about its authenticity as anger. Rather as affect theorists and scientists of facial expression would assume, anger becomes purely behavioural and performative – a set of recognisable body movements, which do not possess any signification. It illuminates nothing about the world or subjective intention. This loss of interiority is described by Sloterdijk as follows:

In the case of pure rage there is no complex inner life, no hidden psychic world, no private secret through which the hero would become understandable to other human beings. Rather, the basic principle is that the inner life of the actor should become wholly manifest and wholly public.

(Sloterdijk, 2012: 9)

This type of violent emotion is a limiting case for what can be described as 'anger', seeing as any sense of injustice, past harm or retribution has evaporated, and the body becomes autonomous.

Anger may not escalate to this level of meaningless rage, but may nevertheless come too quickly and too easily, to the point where it fails to find objects to attach itself to. Instead, it is spewed out in various directions, to an extent that raises doubts as to whether it is meaningful or serious. Melanie Klein's theory of the paranoid-schizoid position refers to the tendency to 'split' all negative aspects of the self, and project them outwards onto the world, such that *everything* is deemed bad and oppressive, and the self is beyond reproach. But such a self is very hard to meaningfully engage with at all. Klein describes encountering patients in the paranoid-schizoid position, full of anger and resentment, but lacking any real concern with what it was focused on. In one case she writes of a man for whom:

very strong feelings of frustration, envy and grievance came to the fore. When I interpreted... that these feelings were directed against the analyst and that he wanted to destroy me, his mood changed abruptly. The tone of his voice became flat, he spoke in a slow expressionless way, and he said that he felt detached from the whole situation. He added that my interpretation seemed correct, but it did not matter. In fact, he no longer had any wishes, and nothing was worth bothering with. (Klein, 1946: 19)

Part of his ego had temporarily "gone out of existence", leaving him in a state of "detached hostility" (Klein, 1946). Anger becomes a way of living entirely in the present, as a way of avoiding any reflection or engagement with the past, or one's own inner psychic life. But for the same reason, it is empty of any signification.

This type of hostility banishes memory and, with it, empirical evidence of wrongdoing and harm in the past. It is sheer unaccountability, in the sense that it refuses to take stock of what has happened or to gauge its fairness. Instead, it revels in unfairness and an absence of any measure. Nothing captures this as well as the figure of Donald Trump, whose ecstatic performances exist in a constant state of 'real-time', and are never inhibited by past statements or facts. Trump's refusal to be bound by the record (including records of his own words) makes him the perfect vehicle for an affective politics that seeks to eradicate the past as a set of verifiable empirical experiences. Just as Klein describes, Trump's

performances are a form of “detached hostility”, which veer between the irate and the ‘flat’, making it impossible to tell if he’s *really* angry, or what he’s angry about.

Anger of this nature adds to the amount of violence and pain in the world, initiating new transactions of harm. The enraged person becomes what Sloterdijk calls a “pain donor”, distributing pain to others who currently lack it. Survey evidence on attitudes of nationalist voters indicates a commitment to ‘authoritarian values’, which translate into greater use of violence across society, in relation to criminals, terror suspects and children (Norris & Inglehart, 2019). Use of torture is viewed positively. While we can speculate about how childhood experiences might forge such attitudes, there is no sense in which these preferences relate to any perceived injustice. Instead, there is simply a view that levels of violence in society are too low, and inhibited by liberal norms and laws. The assumption is not that pain needs re-paying, as in a liberal or neoliberal moral economy, just that there should be more of it.

For multiple reasons, the internet seems ideally suited to the cultivation of “detached hostility”, of a sort that is perpetually acted out, but never fully interrogated or explained. First of all, the massive over-abundance of information to which we are subjected in the digital age requires us to adopt ‘post-comprehensive’ techniques of navigation and selection, which side-line semiotic problems of critique, interpretation and representation, in favour of techniques for the grabbing of attention and physiological responses (Andrejvic, 2013). We are constantly subject to techniques of emotional manipulation, which are founded in theories that treat emotion as wholly physiological and behavioural (Davies, 2015; McStay, 2018). Meanwhile, we (wittingly or otherwise) subject others to emotional manipulation in the way we communicate online: it has been shown that tweets with a high level of ‘moral emotion’ travel more virally than those without (Brady et al, 2017). Thus, online interaction becomes a constant cybernetic cycle of stimulus and response, but without pauses in which thought might interrupt autonomic responses. The emotion that is triggered and monitored online is conceived as wholly real-time, a data point in an unceasing flow of behaviour, rather than a judgement or intention that relates to the past (Davies, 2017).



Twitter exchanges are a case in point. First of all, every Twitter user can feel resentful that they do not get as much attention as those with more followers than them, of which there will always be some (hence journalists receive particular hostility in this domain). Unlike the marketplace or legal system, Twitter has no mechanism for establishing that a distribution of value (in this case, attention) is 'fair' and finished. Attention can be gained either through a spontaneous attack on others (trolling) or through some impassioned denunciation of a deep injustice, that is going unrecognised by 'mainstream' institutions. Often the two are combined as a type of 'call-out': an alleged moral bad is shared online, to prompt resentment (and potentially a 'pile-on') against the target. However, attention is never the same thing as recognition, and no matter how much attention might be gained, there is never the satisfaction of being properly understood or heard. Indeed, the more attention there is, the greater the chance of being mis-represented and mis-recognised in the scrum. In this context, misunderstanding and selective quotation are not deviations from the communicative norm, but central to the forms of exchange that take place. The pursuit of attention is fundamentally at odds with the pursuit of mutual understanding (Smith, 2019; Seymour, 2019). Twitter is a machine for increasing the over-all levels of anger in the world.

The problem with this kind of case is its presentism. Where social life is reduced to a cybernetic interplay of attention (the behaviour of brains and eyes) and affective behaviour (emojis, facial movements, expressions of outrage) there is an eradication of self and of memory, meaning that claims of injustice and harm are reduced to their mere appearance. When Christine Blasey Ford testified to the US Senate in 2018, that then Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh had sexually assaulted her in 1982, including acute memories and empirical details of the effect it had had on her, Kavanaugh's response was a demonstration of how 'slow anger' can be smothered with 'fast anger'. He became visibly and physically enraged, wept, lashed out at the Clintons, claimed persecution and declared that he "feared for the future". Reports of the past were rebuffed with pure affective performance in the present. Affect is how the present is first encountered (Berlant, 2011), but for the same reason affective interventions and manipulations can make the present over-bearing, and quash other forms of cognition.

Speed of reactivity is an essential feature of this mode of anger, as it closes down the possibility of a purposeful and empirically-based anger, that takes time to be expressed and heard. Speed and hostility produce a self-reinforcing cycle, which is the essential property of the Hobbesian 'state of nature'. The danger of lawlessness for Hobbes was that it becomes rational to attack others before they attack you: rapid response is everything when it comes to self-defence. The origins of digital computing lie precisely in the need to accelerate calculation and anticipation to super-human speeds, in the paranoid context of aerial warfare and nuclear threats (Galison, 1994; Edwards, 1997). Violent conflict has a tendency to accelerate social exchange, and an acceleration of social exchange comes to feel more like conflict (Virilio, 2006). The 'real-time' nature of the 24/7 media cycle, which removes moments of interruption for critical reflection and recuperation, arguably renders public dialogue closer to a form of combat, in which respondents must rely increasingly on instinct, first impressions and the power of surprise, as is the case in war (Crary, 2013; Author's own, 2018). There is no 'down time'. The 'flame wars' and 'culture wars' of social media escalate partly because they lack interruption.

The anger of Trump, Kavanaugh and Twitter trolls is of a nature that lacks interiority, and belongs rather to a type of cyborg that has learnt 'anger' as a code. Sartre writes that "if emotion is play-acting, the play is one that we believe in", however the 'detached hostility' of anger performances struggles to suspend our disbelief (Sartre, 2015: 41). Anger becomes sheer performance, what Lazzarato terms a "power sign", that executes a change, rather than refers to something (Lazzarato, 2014: 86). What this can certainly do, however, is to damage the possibility of mutual semiotic comprehension, because it has the advantage of moving at speed. If mutual recognition is necessarily slow (potentially, in the case of psychoanalysis, very slow indeed), then diversion through fury and hostility is extremely fast. It renders shared reality and a shared past impossible to attain, since it does violence to the basic semiotic tools through which human beings can understand one another and recognise others' experiences as real and meaningful. Misunderstanding and misrepresentation becomes the normal mode of social exchange, making discourse feel like violence.

Fast anger operates without any consciousness of time, but nevertheless leaves a residue over time. Rather than the type of 'rage bank' described by Sloterdijk (namely a build-up of internal resentment, that can eventually be converted into political action by the right leader), the staged cybernetic anger of trolls and demagogues produces a slowly more conflicted and violent world. Being wholly expressive and embodied, this is an anger that lacks any normative or interpretive capacity, but has the effect of reducing the political possibilities of normative and interpretive discourse. As Arendt (1970: 80) argued, "the practice of violence, like all action, changes the world, but the most probable change is a more violent world". For the vast majority of us, who lack the power of the angry celebrity, we deposit our staged anger in the 'banks' owned by Silicon Valley, where it provides data for the proprietors and their algorithms to learn more about patterns of sentiment and affective behaviour. In the terms of Mark Hansen, this anger should not be understood as 'feedback' on past experiences, so much as 'feed-forward' of behavioural responses to be mined and analysed at some future date for some as-yet unspecified purpose (Hansen, 2015).

### **Conclusion: time for anger**

The analysis presented in this paper seeks to shed light on the ambivalences of anger, as a way to understand the ambivalent promises and dangers of populism. Anger is political and emancipatory to the extent that it fuses well-grounded feelings of injustice and indignation with an embodied capacity and tendency to act and denounce. It brings the thinking mind and the acting body into a type of alliance and rhythm, just as walking and public assembly can do. It also frees politics from the limits of established normativity and established modes of denunciation, bringing both risks and new possibilities. It is possible to imagine a form of populism that seized precisely this mode of anger, speaking simultaneously to the truth of past suffering, and to the impulse to respond and disrupt. Judis (2016) notes that populism can be either 'diadic' or 'triadic'. 'Diadic' populism pits 'the people' against the 'elites' who hold power and privilege, and is typically associated with the Left. This harnessing of anti-elite resentment is in some ways the essence of democracy (D'Eramo, 2013; Engels, 2015; Mouffe, 2018).

'Triadic' populism, associated more with the nationalist right, adds a third party to the moral economy of anger, in the form of the immigrant, refugee, the European Union, Jew or 'welfare scrounger'. The message of the nationalist is that 'the people' have been betrayed by 'the elites', who are guilty of prioritising the third party over the *real* people. Anger and blame therefore descends on *both* the elite, and this foreign minority that has infiltrated society. The power of the demagogic leader is to take *ressentiment* that has accumulated over the long-term, exploit the economic downturn of medium-term, and then unleash anger upon the 'elites' *and* the third party, where the latter may have played no demonstrable role in the harms and wrongs of the past. An excess of memory and moral culpability in the population (manifest as shame) is married to a complete vacuum of interiority on the part of the leader and affective media performances, such that pain can be harnessed and directed against entirely blameless others.

In the terms I'm using here, 'triadic' populism seizes the opportunities presented by the bifurcation of 'slow' and 'fast' anger. The accumulation of unexpressed, melancholic anger goes unrecognised, until it is suddenly lanced by the injection of a type of attention-grabbing violence, that offers it a cathartic release. This is the collision of two different ideas of agency, which are very unlike, but have both been cultivated under neoliberalism. The first is that of the moralised, responsible self, who can only blame themselves for whatever harms they encounter over time. This is the debtor self, who must constantly demonstrate good character in the eyes of credit scorers, workfare contractors and auditors. This aspect of neoliberalism constantly leaks unaccounted-for resentment, every time an individual is blamed for something that is beyond their control. The second vision of agency is of an asemiotic cyborg self, who is reducible to the performance of neural and technical codes. Such a self is not endowed with moral conscience, but is increasingly being mobilised by infrastructures of real-time stimulus and surveillance, which constitute the platform economy. As the history of the philosophy and science of emotions testifies, anger means very different things, depending on whether one factors in memory, intention and meaning (Leys, 2017).

Both are symptoms and causes of prolonged depoliticization and withdrawal from democratic participation, as seen across liberal democracies from the 1980s onwards (Crouch, 2004; Mair, 2013; Streeck, 2016). Psychologically and psycho-analytically, democracy offers what neither law nor economics can, which is to publicly represent forms of suffering and harm that do not breach formal rules. It ensures that, even while rules of exchange are in place and upheld, that anger can nevertheless be voiced, heard and understood, to the effect that the system does not capture human pain in its entirety. The depressed self (which turns anger inwards) and the cyborg self (that performs anger as meaningless behaviour) are twin responses to a politics that has radically downgraded the power of intentions and voice. Resentment towards those who seem to still possess public voice and be listened to, such as commentators, experts and cultural elites, grows commensurately with the decline of mass participation in democracy.

The question this leaves us with is how we can make the right kind of time for anger, which might also be the basis of a 'diadic' populism which names the source of suffering in a more reasoned and empirically-grounded fashion. This might require us to produce new ways of writing, publishing and narrating (or re-purpose old ones), that can represent experience of harm with enough time-lag for it to be thought about and understood, but not so much time-lag that memory has got polluted by melancholia, *ressentiment* and misleading nostalgia. New 'utopias of writing' need imagining (Seymour, 2019). Nixon poses the question in relation to ecological and colonial devastation:

*How do we bring home - and bring emotionally to life - threats that take time to wreak their havoc, threats that never materialize in one spectacular, explosive, cinematic scene? Apprehension is a critical word here, a crossover term that draws together the domains of perception, emotion, and action. To engage slow violence is to confront layered predicaments of apprehension: to apprehend - to arrest, or at least mitigate - often imperceptible threat requires rendering them apprehensible to the senses through the work of scientific and imaginative testimony.*

(Nixon, 2011: 14)

For Nixon, this is a task for writers and artists to take up. There are also questions for our media and democratic infrastructures, of how they can be designed in such a way as to let anger be heard and recognised, rather than just seen as spectacle or detected as behaviour. This is a challenge of pace-setting, that is, allowing for an anger that is neither too fast nor too slow.

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