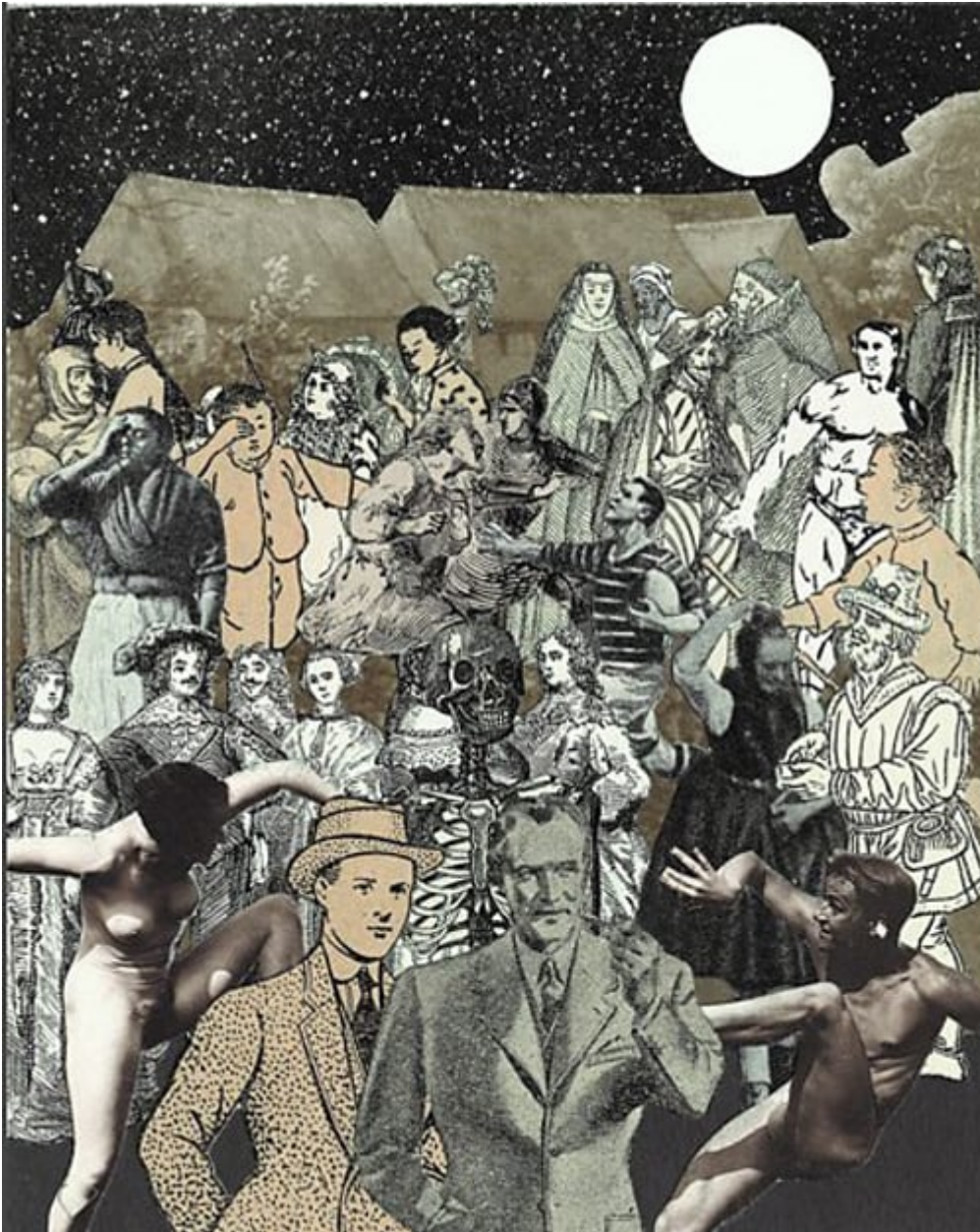


Gramsci's Tentacles

by Robert Gear (October 2017)



The Dead Come out in Their Sunday Best, Peter Blake, 2013

The deliberations of the Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci, have proved a durable and fruitful serpent of destruction. His central notion of cultural hegemony was originally crafted as part of his explanation for the failure of the proletariat rising up in revolt as propounded by the Marxist prophecy of

increasing worker immiseration. Gramsci argued that the cultural beliefs, values and mores of the ruling class had become adopted by the “workers” and that this was not in the workers’ true class interests. So Gramsci’s proposal, to simplify somewhat, was to counter the ruling cultural values by theorizing their replacement with ‘proletarian’ values which would attain eventual supremacy over and through state institutions. Later followers, including the wretched moles of the Frankfurt School, refined this notion to argue for a soft, insidious revolution of radical ideas replacing the ‘bourgeois cultural hegemony’ through a gradual conquest of the educational, religious, legal, media and family structures; in short, an annexation of all the private associations of civil society that are independent of the state.

Come to think of it, perhaps I could have titled this article pertinently, but less delicately, ‘Gramsci’s Testicles.’ The two slight orthographic substitutions necessary neatly connote the fact that this man’s ideas have spread like the broadcast spawning of certain bony fish. But I digress.

That the Gramscian tentacles have dug fissures into the refuge of the traditional family is a logical extension of his reigning idea. As Jonah Goldberg so perceptively put it, “the traditional family is the enemy of all political totalitarianisms because it is a bastion of loyalties separate from and prior to the state, which is why progressives are constantly trying to crack its outer shell.”

The family can be attacked from outside by external enemies, but isn’t it also true that the family can be undermined from within by politically engaged adults encouraging their children to adopt a ‘progressive’ attitude, to turn their offspring into embryonic *gauchistes*? But at what age do

children start to form political opinions? Young children do have notions of justice and fairness, knowing when to hurl the accusation "That's not fair" by about age 5 or thereabouts. According to Jean Piaget, children develop their own moral notions which emerge through their play and often, perhaps surprisingly, in *contradiction* to adult teaching. They certainly sense at some innocent level, feelings of oppression, bullying and the subtleties of power and control by the time they are in school and even within their own family arrangement. No doubt this is purely at an unreasoned level—it is all about feelings, not deliberated, and certainly not infused with the relatively sophisticated thoughts necessary to understand the abstractions of political give-and-take as it is played out in the larger arena of society.

What started me thinking about this question was a political cartoon competition held by a weekly magazine of local news and culture in a mid-size Southwestern American town. The Grand Prize Winner, Honorable Mentions and the Under 18 Entries were published to the no doubt smug satisfaction of much of the readership. Have you guessed yet the range of topics illustrated by the entries? I say 'range' but the word is hardly applicable. No more applicable than 'diversity' is germane to the range of thought displayed by the professoriat of departments of humanities at most Anglosphere and European universities.

The Grand Prize in the cartoon competition depicts Putin and a sidekick, Kislyak, maneuvering a giant wooden head of President Trump past the barricades and walls surrounding the White House. An open door in the Trump head allows Russian agents to slip in under cover. Kislyak's bubble says "Putie, are you sure they'll take this thing in! (*sic*)" Putie's bubble says, "Sergey, who cares (*sic*) it's already paid for!"

Geddit? The reader is supposed to concur with the view that somehow Russian money and ‘collusion’ was involved in Trump’s election. Trump is linked to the hypothetical Russian attempt to engineer the outcome of the 2016 election. But like a lot of leftwing ‘humor’ such fumbling attempts at jocularitry only provokes a laugh if one has a very low threshold for laughter. So, basically the submissions were a predictable trickle feeding into the rising ocean of Trump Derangement Syndrome. But was wit here demonstrated? I need hardly point out that the question is rhetorical. Not, of course, that sitting presidents or political leaders *of any stripe* should be immune from the assaults of cartoonists. Such, for example, is the great tradition of satirical and often scatological caricatures flourishing splendidly in 18th century Britain. These were often propagandistic and aimed at political leaders of the day.

The magazine in question provides for our delectation more cartoons in similar vein, but there is no need to catalog the predictable specimens of this churlishness. But now we come to the point; in addition to these humorless adult anti-Trump efforts, the magazine encouraged *children* to send in their ‘political cartoons’.

The under-18 category of budding Gillrays comprises four different political cartoons. The ages of the four successful entrants are given as 10, 10, 11 and 12. Ten! Can you guess the subject matter? Three of the four illustrated in the magazine were a direct attack on Trump (you don’t say!), jejune in their insinuations; but then the adult cartoons were also somewhat childish, and so indistinguishable from those of their younger peers—leaving aside the relative naivety of the artwork of the preteens. The remaining cartoon took aim at a Republican Governor who has apparently cut the state budget but lives like a monarch. At least that is what I make it out

to insinuate.

I don't wish to denigrate the creative talents of these young caricaturists. With application and perseverance they could become productive humorists with excellent graphic skills. But where did these youngsters obtain such oppositional ideas? Do they really know or care who Trump is? Really, what's Hecuba to *them*? Naturally, most people in their early teens probably have a vague idea and start forming opinions more or less identical to their parents, but the *leperous distilment* poured into the ears of a sleeping child does not always posset; there may be a lot of filial ingratitude stalking abroad. Adolescents often rage against parents; the teen assault on parental values is a truism.

Some of these parents, then, could be in for a nasty shock. And in fact, some evidence points to the contrariness of the offspring of over-politicized parents. This strikes me as a curious echo of Piaget's evidence from young children. A study published in the *British Journal of Political Science* (Oct, 2014), using data from both the USA and the UK, found that parents who try too hard to indoctrinate their progeny actually cultivate opposing ideas. Apparently, when such children leave home and engage in frequent political discussions, they are exposed to a range of *new* viewpoints, which they then adopt with surprising frequency.

Parenthetically, cases of political metanoia (those who in popular parlance have swallowed the red pill), in individuals of more advanced age are not so uncommon. Perhaps most famously, Whittaker Chambers underwent an epiphany regarding the moral turpitude of the Soviet system and its infiltration into US government agencies and civil society. David Horowitz is another with a radical past who rejected the moral degeneracy of the radical left, and more recently, the

playwright, David Mamet, entered the ranks of 'traitors' to his erstwhile 'liberal' comrades. Even Scruton himself claims that he was raised in a 'socialist household.'

Does this herald a great turnaround in civilizational entropy? Can the 'dread empire, CHAOS!', be postponed? We can only hope; but perhaps, just perhaps, we should at least cheer on Gramsci's 'children' to encourage the political indoctrination of their own children. Some solace is to be had when the Marxist/postmodernist indoctrination cult sometimes flounders in its own net. The youthful cartoonists and their kind will soon be shoehorned into tertiary education and even into the realm of dullness currently known as 'Postmodernist, Gender (or should it be Genders?), Critical Theory and Women's Studies.' My own imagined pictorial caricature would involve the expression on the face of a humorless mid-utterance-Marxist/Postmodernist lecturer over whom an exasperated student has thrown a bucket of soapy water. The caption might read "ALTERNATIVE USE FOR HOMEMADE INSECTICIDE." Now, that *would* be funny, sophomoric or not (and richly deserved).

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