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Trump and the Phantom of Democracy

By Nozomi Hayase
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After the Electoral College vote, the Trump presidency is now official. While denial and blame games continue, this was not a foreign government coup d'état. The truth is that democracy in America has been rotten to the core for decades. It is meddled with by corporate lobbyists, Big Pharma, Big Oil and Wall Street –those who are addicted to money and power.

American democracy is hollowed out, veiled with a loud media echo chamber, bringing feigned solidity to its emptiness. Out of this vacuum emerges a madness for power. U.S. politics is a contest for those who are driven by insatiable hunger of the most callous, cunning and manipulative members of society.

In this system, only people who lack empathy and have an ability to advance self-serving agendas without concerns for others can rise to the top. The results of this year's presidential election simply means that this person who many saw as 'unfit to be president' was better suited to play this dirty game than his opponent, Hillary Clinton.

Ascent of Trump

Trump, a perceived outsider, seemed to appear out of nowhere. The former producer of the American game show *The Apprentice* sniffed the vulnerability of disfranchised Americans who are continually betrayed by the establishment. He then quickly moved in for the kill, turning the electoral arena into a new Reality TV.

With social media as a hunting ground, this new Republican contender made direct connection with his audience, pouring out his charm and grooming them with fake promises. Deploying words as weapons of control, he managed to garner favorable reactions from his followers. His language cast a magic spell on his supporters where any contradictory remarks and bombastic lies he made bypassed critical examination. Emotions triumphed over reason and under the grip of irrational logic, facts no longer seemed to matter. With a chameleon-like ability to shape-shift and say whatever his voters wanted to hear, he was able to create a mirage and ensnare the populace into his grandiose fantasy.

What was the press, as a supposed watchdog of power doing during this Trump's uncanny rise in popularity? Mainstream media did nothing to prevent it and instead facilitated this process. His bombastic comments hit jackpot high ratings for the corporate media and rhetoric not bound by fact was not only tolerated, but was actively promoted with their shortsighted mentality of profit at any cost.

WikiLeaks and the Democratizing Power of the Internet

There are a few facts that are not fully understood regarding the 2016 U.S. presidential election. Buried by much of corporate media's distortion that deflects the real issues, many seem unable to dig deeper. This year's election was an unprecedented phenomenon. This is not only because the lesser evil game was fought between two of the historically most disliked candidates, but also because of the role played by a new actor from outside of the U.S. electoral arena. Days before the election, a *Forbes* article acknowledged the significance of WikiLeaks' DNC emails, calling them a "Holy Grail of understanding of U.S. electoral politics." It noted how "few understand the importance of WikiLeaks in the eventual writing of the history of presidential politics."

WikiLeaks has shown how elections in the existence of a truly free press will never be the same as before. U.S. politics sponsored by corporate masters creates a milieu of deception, lies and fraud that is fraught with corruption. These power and money driven politicians can only thrive in secrecy. When their actions are exposed, like Hillary's highly paid Goldman Sachs speeches, crafted public images that suck the masses into their illusions of grandeur tend to shatter. Contrary to liberal's hysterical rants of 'Russia hacked the election!', the defeat of the Clinton dynasty was a testimony to the power of transparency.

WikiLeaks, the world's first global 4th estate, which operates outside of any government was birthed on the Internet. It showed the potential for emancipation unleashed by this Net. Much of the force of democratization on the Internet is being subverted to create mass surveillance and censorship. Yet at the same time, its effect of empowering ordinary people cannot be denied.

In fact, Bernie Sander's campaign was built on social media's grassroots organizing. With independent campaign funding, this virtually unknown senator from Vermont successfully sparked the idea of socialism and raised issues of Wall Street corruption, economic injustice and poverty at a national level. Sander's largest support came from millennials. It was these natives of the Internet that galvanized his political revolution.

Fake News and Fake Authority

Democrats appear to be disconnected with this new reality of the Internet's bottom up spontaneous crowd gathering or even worse are acting as an adversary to it. This was shown in their reactions to the corruption revealed in the DNC email database and later to Trump's winning of the election.

On the second day of the Democratic National Convention, hundreds of Sanders delegates who learned from WikiLeaks documents about mainstream media's collusion and the DNC's rigging of the primary walked out in protest. Chanting "This is what Democracy looks like!", they vowed not to go with Hillary. This crisis of the American political system opened up an opportunity for real democracy. But then, Bernie turned away, urging his supporters to nominate Hillary and sided with the deeply corrupt Democratic Party. His failure to seize this historical moment helped throw the election to Trump, who the Clinton campaign had portrayed as a 'pied piper candidate'.

After all this came the Fake News explosion. Some established liberal media, freaked out by the country quickly turning red in this Republican takeover created a new red scare. On November 24, an article in *The Washington Post* made wild accusations that Russia was engaging in propaganda during the election to spread 'fake news' in favor of Trump. The anonymous site that claimed to have identified these fake news sites that the author cited in the article, was shown to be nothing but a black list that labels anyone who challenges the official narrative as untrustworthy.

Despite U.S. Intelligence Chief James Clapper's claim that intelligence agencies lacked strong evidence for WikiLeaks' connection with an alleged Russian cyberattack, it was way easier for progressives to ignore facts and spread paranoia, blaming the loss of Clinton on anyone but themselves.

In the age of the Internet, fake news can easily be manufactured and spread. Yet, at the same time it can be quickly shut down with countering views that surround them. Also, in this new environment, traditional media has lost its monopolizing power to disseminate information. They no longer can claim themselves to be the sole purveyor of truth. In the case of *The Washington Post*'s fake news scandal, *The Intercept* and Matt Taibbi of *Rolling Stone* quickly denounced and challenged its claim, halting the spread of this fake news report. Social media networks also countered the gatekeepers who tried to dictate what is real through filtering any views that challenge the official narrative. In the end, this fake news article was debunked, with Wapo issuing a correction on that story shortly after its publication. What this has shown is the publisher's false authority and the establishment's desperate attempt to reassert their shrinking legitimacy to keep people under their sphere of influence.

From Regime Change to Game Changer

The election is over and liberal's hope to stop the rise of demagoguery is lost. The president elect began recruiting some of his rich buddies into his cabinet. Recently, he convened a group of Silicon Valley tech leaders to invite them into his new 'construction project to rebuild America'. As this void of American democracy is being filled with more blatant patronage networks, new insurgencies of civic power are also arising. The potent and creative power of the Internet is

already here. Those who have experienced it will not easily succumb to the reality being handed down to them from the teetering Trump Tower.

Just as the power of the Internet can be used by the oligarchic class to corral the masses, it can also be used to empower the people, through its open network. When the liberating force of a free net is claimed by citizens to create movements across borders, linking diverse struggles, it can give all a chance to not only change a regime, but to change the game altogether.

One game changer is WikiLeaks. With the creative use of technology, this Internet of the media built a robust network that is resistant to censorship, making it possible for the organization to be free from state and corporate influence, allowing it to truly serve the interests of the people. It has gained its own credibility through a perfect record of authentication of documents and rigorous scientific journalism that publishes full and verifiable archives. Despite mainstream media's smearing of the organization, public opinion polls indicate that Americans strongly approve WikiLeaks' Podesta leaks.

Another democratic tool that is available to people everywhere is cryptocurrency like Bitcoin. With this new invention, ordinary people now have power to create their own money and peer-to-peer networks that are not intermediated by any governments, banks or corporations. Just as WikiLeaks distributes free speech beyond borders and lets truth be discovered through each individual's participation, with Bitcoin, free speech becomes an app that can be downloaded from anywhere by anyone and values are created through people transacting freely, verified by a consensus of equal peers.

In Your Nothingness, We Find the All

On January, 20 2017, Trump will be sworn in with the Oath of Office. The White House will become his new executive boardroom. With United States Incorporated, the Constitution may be slowly shredded off from his business contract. With the president elect's proposal on Twitter to give penalties, including jail time or loss of citizenship for burning the American flag, coupled with his recent call for the expansion of nuclear weapons, many are rightfully fearful of the future.

Yet, wars and destruction of civil society are already happening around the world. Crackdown on cash and schemes of demonetization are taking place in countries like Venezuela and India. When faced with the reality of their national currencies quickly disappearing or losing value, people are waking up to the fact that these claimed values are fake and that they are not backed by real economic activity or anything of true value. More and more people are seeing bubbles pumped up by toxic assets and fraud of financial engineering that rent-seeks earnings of hard working people and creates money out of thin air.

In his speech "Currency Wars and Bitcoin's Neutrality", technologist and author Andreas Antonopoulos spoke of how "cash is being eradicated around the world as a scourge." He then pointed out how governments are waging currency wars against other countries and their own people in order to benefit from a crisis they artificially created. He emphasized how governments and central banks can't win this game, because "cash is something that we can create, electronic

cash, self sovereign cash, digital cash – Bitcoin.” He then noted how this math-based Internet of money offers an exit from this old world of currency wars. He alerted the Bitcoin community that as the battle intensifies, those who create a new infrastructure as an exit from nation-state gated economies, and those who point to this exit will be called traitors, criminals, thug and terrorists.

This war on cash and censorship with Fake News memes are attacks on our fundamental freedoms. It is a battle for truth, involving the question of who will define our human reality. This war is now full on, yet mostly brewing beneath the radar. Just before Christmas, President Obama quietly signed into law the 2017 National Defense Authorization Act. This included the ‘Countering Disinformation and Propaganda Act’, which was presented to help counter foreign enemy propaganda, yet is actually a McCarthy era-style censorship law.

In this war on the people, independent media that publishes voices of dissent are being punished. They are now being called Russian agents, spies or traitors by this increasingly authoritarian state. Those who create an exit from this oligarchic rule by bringing truth from outside national party political lines will likely be branded as terrorists.

We live in a time when traditional authority and leaders have failed us and there is vacuousness in this space where a center used to hold. In the story of Faust, Goethe wrote about a universal man following his thirst for knowledge. In this journey, Dr. Faust meets Mephisto (the devil) who tried to trick and tempt him to come under his control. In the scene *A Dark Gallery*, Faust told Mephisto, “In your Nothingness I hope to find my All”. He then took the key and entered into this mysterious unknown.

Our quest for real democracy invokes this thirst for knowledge. It invites us all to enter into the realm of Nothingness. We no longer want to believe; we want to know. We will no longer blindly accept a world conceived by a few elites. Now, in this chaos and abyss that we are descending into, we may be able to find the real source of our own legitimacy. With a knowledge that springs from deep within, we are able to penetrate the deception of those who seek to control us and recognize their emptiness. In their nothingness, we will find the creative power that has always been there, power that can bring life back to this phantom of democracy.