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Recapturing the Inverted Systems of Our Civilization

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The financial crisis precipitating in 2008-9 led many of us to a number of stark observations about the “too big to fail” institutions fulfilling supposed crucial roles in our global civilization:

One, should our societies really be at the mercy of massive “pyramid” structured systems where a small pool of insular, delusional or relatively psychopathic executives and managers sit atop a bizarre, ballooning triangle of technicians and careerists? Two, are there points on the pyramid structure where responsibility is being abdicated, or where relatively psychopathic people are operating? Are relatively psychopathic people being placed in fundamental roles? Are these qualities of systemic organizational dysfunction endemic to these pyramid style structures?

Finding the terms to describe groups of people can be fraught with unintended connotations. Dr. Katherine Horton, ex-Research Fellow at St John's College, Oxford uses the term “psychopath” in her formulations; however the term “psychopath” could better be replaced with “relatively psychopathic people” to describe people lacking conscience and empathy. Skeem, Polaschek, Patrick and Lilienfeld argue that classical psychopathy, whether measured by the well-validated *Psychopathy Checklist-Revised (PCL-R; Hare, 1991; 2003)* or other measures is not monolithic. Instead, it represents a constellation of

multiple traits that may include in varying degrees, the phenotypic domains of boldness, meanness, and lack of inhibition. Skeem, Polaschek, Patrick and Lilienfeld use the terms “the corporate psychopath” or “workplace psychopath” in their article quoting from Heywood (2005) that one in ten managers are psychopaths. They state that a “workplace psychopath” may be a boss who is manipulative, intimidating and totally lacking in remorse.¹

What is concerning is that it is ever more apparent that many of our civilization’s structural systems, many of which resemble the pyramid archetype, seem more and more dysfunctional or “captured”. We see pipelines being laid to transport dirty tar sands oil for the profits of a small number of investors and executives while the perils this behavior represents for the local communities and environments along with our entire climate system are dismissed as being nonexistent.

Dr. Horton terms this corruption of human organizations “systems capture”. Systems capture is when a hierarchical human organization finds people in crucial roles in the system being replaced or corrupted by relatively psychopathic people. When this process of institutional corrosion is advanced the system becomes “inverted”. System inversion precipitates the ultimate collapse of the system. The failure of the Enron Corporation in 2001, which was caused by massive fraud and incompetence within the company, is a fine example.

So what are we to do as a society when we face so many captured systems causing so much peril, injustice and violence? We need to move towards “system re-capture”. Dr. Horton offers a [list](#)² of methods of standing up to relatively psychopathic people as well as communication and political ideas. The first method suggested is irreverence towards relatively psychopathic people. Withholding admiration or awe for these high-powered people deprives them of the self-centered sense of grandeur these types of individuals lust for. In this way, the shallow facades of power that they prop up can be torn down. Director Michael Moore enacted this method when upon the ascendancy of Donald Trump to the US presidency he called for the formation of “an army of comedy”³.

The second method relies on transparent and open exchanges of communication and information. When there are no halls of secrecy, the relatively psychopathic people

¹ Jennifer L. Skeem, Devon L. L. Polaschek, Christopher J. Patrick, and Scott O. Lilienfeld, “Psychopathic Personality: Bridging the Gap Between Scientific Evidence and Public Policy”, *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, Sage Publishing, 12(3) 95–162, pp. 95-96. ISSN: 1529-1006

² Horton, Dr. Katherine: Combat Methods for the NAZI Hunt: Fighting Psychopathic Systems: Stop 007; Feb. 14, 2017: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MgeBePzJF3g>

³ Romano, Aja: Michael Moore: Fight Donald Trump with “an army of comedy”; Vox; Jan 20, 2017: <http://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2017/1/20/14331072/michael-moore-alec-baldwin-we-stand-united-rally-comedy>

cannot make their atavistic plans. Journalist Chris Hedges has said that our [transparency will be a strength](#).⁴ We are already able to share unprecedented amounts of information with each other but our strengths in this manner may grow further as we look to network with groups that before seemed disparate but no longer are so in the light of our shared suffering under system capture.

In addition to open communication, we can apply a dimension of empathy. The majority of us who have empathy will be able to find and communicate with each other in a mode of emotional intelligence that relatively psychopathic people, by definition, cannot understand. This can enable us to put the forces of low empathy under siege.

Finally, we need to form citizen coalitions that cross as many of our divergences as possible. If we are finally able to see past our racial, religious, aesthetic or you-name-it differences we can unite in common cause against systemic capture and need not focus on all the political details underpinning the damage caused by any given system's capture. However idealistic this sounds it's already happening as more and more divergent groups are uniting in common cause against issues such as climate change inaction or President Trump's oppression of immigrants. Yet there is still room for these groups to unite against system capture—as un-catchy as that sounds.

There needs to be a rapidly evolving public conversation on techniques for system re-capture as there are likely more tools that can be added to the arsenal. It may even be that the eventual abandonment of systems vulnerable to capture—such as the primitive pyramid model—for more modular, flexible or independent systems will be the ultimate positive outcome.

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⁴ Hedges, Chris: Occupy Draws Strength from the Powerless; Truthdig; Feb. 13, 2012: p. 1 : http://www.truthdig.com/report/item/occupy_draws_strength_from_the_powerless_20120213

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