

“New phenomena call for new narratives” Contagion, Capture, and “Evolutionary Corruption” in 2020

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Artists for Democracy Talks
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Readings available at scottbenzel.net/syllabi

“When the norms of the legal system are violated in a liberal democracy, mechanisms of institutional control and the division of powers will— more or less—correct such deviations. In their case these deviations do not achieve a critical mass, and do not thereby pose a threat to the system. However, if the deviations undermining the legal standards of liberal democracies are not only present in great numbers, but form the mainstream goals and values of government, thereon the dominant characteristics can be said to constitute a new system. New phenomena call for new narratives, which are usually offered by metaphors or analogies, based on previously experienced patterns...”

The systemic corruption of the mafia state on a national level is therefore no longer an ordinary or underworld instance of corruption, for at this “stage of evolution” corruption has suddenly been elevated from a deviancy to be kept hidden, to the rank of state politics, of a general practice overseen centrally.”

Bálint Magyar, *Post-Communist Mafia State*

“New phenomena call for new narratives” Contagion, Capture, and “Evolutionary Corruption” is part of the Artists for Democracy series of talks leading up to the 2020 Presidential Election. The talk will explore lesser known phenomena informing and altering the contemporary political and social landscape in the U.S. including lawfare, capture, contagion, memetics, and evolutionary epistemology, as well as possibilities for critical intervention and response. The lecture will explore Balint Magyar’s concepts “Evolutionary Corruption” and the “Mafia State”, lawfare, regulatory and institutional capture, and the capture of media and memetic networks

Responses and critical methodologies will be examined including the Yippie’s *Levitation of the Pentagon* and *Wall Street Action*, the Yes Men’s *Unpresided*, and Judith Butler’s formulation after Michel Foucault that: *“Critique will be dependent on its objects, but its objects will in turn define the very meaning of critique”.*

“New phenomena call for new narratives” *Balint Magyar’s Evolutionary Corruotion, Masha Gessen, Freedom House index “Even for a Minute, Watching Hulk Hogan Have Sex in a Canopy Bed is Not Safe for Work but watch it anyway” Lawfare and the Destruction of Gawker, Peter Thiel, Hulk Hogan, Charles Harder **Zombie Ants, Toxo, and Thought Contagion** Susan Blackmore, Aaron Lynch, Cornell and the ‘Infodemic’*

Reading

Bálint Magyar, excerpt from *Post-Communist Mafia State*

Additional Reading/Primary Documents

Sarah Evanega, Mark Lynas , et al. *Coronavirus misinformation: quantifying sources and themes in the COVID-19 ‘infodemic’*

Aaron Lynch, *Units, Events and Dynamics in Memetic Evolution*

“...the massive disruption of the news media has contributed to the fractured state of our politics. Middle America has been a victim of a colony collapse in journalism...” Anne Nelson, *capture, political technology, and the Council for National Policy, Case study: Frontline Doctors of America* **Two Audiences** Masha Gessen’s two audiences **Tactics and Tropes** Adrian Chen, *New Knowledge, The Tactics and Tropes of the Internet Research Agency*

Reading

Anne Nelson, excerpt from *The Shadow Network*

Adrian Chen for the New York Times, *The Agency*

Additional Reading/Primary Documents

Renee DiResta, et al. for *New Knowledge, The Tactics and Tropes of the Internet Research Agency*

Anne Nelson for the Washington Spectator, *Anatomy of Deceit/ Team Trump Deploys Doctors with Dubious Qualifications to Push Fake Cure for Covid-19*

Levitation *The Yuppies Levitation of the Pentagon and Wall Street Action and Memetics, Yes Men* **Response** Timothy Snyder’s *On Tyranny*, Masha Gessen’s *Surviving Autocracy*

Reading

Masha Gessen, *excerpt from Surviving Autocracy*