

Breaking from Research: A Personal Reflection on Syncretic Politics and the 1990's

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This post is different from my usual research-heavy writing. Sometimes, I need a break for self-reflection. The topics I often explore, like the populist right, red-brown politics, and new directions for the Western left, involve not only political analysis but also personal introspection. After all, I am part of this Western left myself. Once the more obvious crossover themes are explored—like responses to COVID or global events such as the Syrian Revolution and the Russian invasion of Ukraine—deeper, more personal layers emerge.

Recently, someone asked me about my past experiences with radical environmentalists and how they might connect to modern reactionary groups like eco-fascists. I was a bit unnerved because I'd never considered myself anything but left-wing, understanding the limitations of such categories. This question made me reflect on how I might have been unknowingly drawn to what would now be seen as reactionary politics in my youth. This self-reflection led me to consider these experiences within the broader political context of the 1990s, examining both the positives and negatives of that era. This post will explore these reflections and their implications.

My experience on the far-left has followed a typical trajectory within the U.S. and Western context. It wasn't until I pursued an education in history and social science that my perspectives began to expand, leading to a profound shift and deeper self-reflection. In retrospect, I see that some of my past views were unexpectedly aligned with populist ideas and conspiracy theories which I now recognize as dangerous. Populist and conspiratorial thinking aren't unique to either the far left or far right. Today, they also appear in mainstream politics, especially on the right.

Reflecting on the period from the mid-1990s to 2000, both personally and politically, it was a formative time. What made the '90s different was the specific ideas and the overlap, or perceived overlap, between opposing political views. For me, it was about being a teenager seeking meaning and authentic experiences through music and activism. For broader political movements, it was a time when both the foundations for contemporary radical activism and some of its problematic aspects were being laid.

Music was a big part of my life and central to the activist scenes I was involved in. Punk rock and hardcore dominated my music interests during that era, and this subculture introduced many to anarchist and leftist politics. Patches of bands like Crass, Discharge, Nausea, or Amebix were ubiquitous at shows, alongside messages about anti-capitalism, environmentalism, anti-racism and anti-authoritarianism to name a few. Later in the decade, other genres, like post-metal bands such as Neurosis, began adding layers of esoterism and multimedia performances to these ideas, as society inched closer to a new millennium. The mixing of music styles and messages reflected a similar mixing of activism and politics.

Many factors contributed to the mixing or rise of political syncretism in the 1990s. One significant factor was an increasing recognition of the authoritarian

nature of the Soviet Union and its eventual collapse, which left many on the Western left disillusioned. The idea of scientific socialism, rooted in Marx and Engels, appeared to have failed to many. Once institutionalized, it often felt elitist and disconnected from the real struggles of the people it was meant to help. In response, the left began searching for new ways to address modern problems. This involved revisiting older ideas and exploring new concepts.

When disillusionment with the Soviet experiment disrupted the keystone of class consciousness, attention shifted to other established protest movements, from environmentalism to feminism. Each of these movements brought its own unique history and identity. Together, they formed a "movement of movements," united in opposing the universal challenge of responding to the new unipolar world.

A growing interdisciplinary approach in the humanities was influencing academic institutions, encouraging collaborations between departments such as history, political science, and literature. In 1989, Kimberlé Crenshaw's paper "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex" introduced the concept of intersectionality, describing how various forms of discrimination, like racism and sexism, intersect and overlap. This interconnected view of identity and oppression also began influencing activist spaces, encouraging greater collaboration between previously separate movements, such as labor rights and environmentalism.

There were also protest views against a unipolar world from the far-right, albeit in very different ways. These perspectives often emerged from Christian evangelical angles, antisemitism, or far-right conspiracies. With their existing literature, networks, organizations, and messaging, they could provide ready made slogans and critiques for those seeking alternatives to the concentration of global power.

Looking back, the music and activist subcultures I was part of opened doors to positive causes, but they also carried more ambiguous, and at times problematic, influences. While bands like Nausea focused on somewhat specific activist topics like animal rights and environmentalism other bands used vaguer language regarding "the people" vs the "elites." At the time I made assumptions about what this meant without considering other contrasting points of view. It was a situation ripe for populist conspiratorialism; the only missing ingredient was to have a malevolent actor.

Populist rhetoric is interesting because it can appear anti-intellectual and anti-establishment even when its coming from those very sources. For example, Noam Chomsky became popular in these circles, even having excerpts of his lectures mashed into samples for songs like Propagandhi's track "State Lottery." I was completely unaware of his genocide denialism at the time, instead being versed in his writings on topics like the Zapatista movement. I also viewed the world through a Western-centric lens, even when critiquing the West. My understanding of how global activist communities perceived contemporary events was limited, shaped largely by what Western voices, albeit alternative ones like Chomsky, told me.

On the broader activist scene, anti-globalization protests emerged as a major focus. They occurred against the backdrop of the Soviet Union's collapse and Francis Fukuyama's notion of "the end of history." The dominance of free-market economics and neoliberal policies appeared inevitable. Free trade agreements like NAFTA were signed, and international organizations such as the World Trade Organization and the International Monetary Fund became targets of criticism from both the political left and the right. Although this criticism came from both ends, it still contained overlaps.

Superficial similarities such as a populist "us vs. them" mentality took shape, even when "them" was often chalked up to various "elites." Conspiratorial mechanisms existed in both perspectives explaining why events that were rapidly changing the world were occurring. These explanations introduced antagonists into their narratives, providing figures to blame. This was largely an appeal to simplicity as opposed to an objective narrative. While I still believe the sentiments were generally accurate, the way I thought and formed my conclusions back then was misguided.

Like many others, I had concerns over underregulated, international entities finding foreign countries to exploit their circumstances while escaping established labor and environmental laws. In this sense anti-globalization was not against globalization per se but was instead an internationalist effort of solidarity against various forms of exploitation. However, that message was not universally accepted, nor did it clearly follow political lines. At times, it was interpreted as anti-globalist, aligning with reactionary politics and concepts like the "New World Order." While leftist critiques of capitalism and environmental concerns could be encompassed under the label, it was also used to address cultural fears, including racism, far-right anti-government beliefs tied to the militia movement, and apocalyptic Christianity, which gained traction as the new millennium approached.

"Hegemony and Socialist Strategy" by Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau had been available long enough for populist efforts to emerge to unite various distinct movements. In a somewhat ironic twist, organizers began to borrow ideas such as those found in the book, like the concept of "hegemony," which refers to unifying various political struggles and social movements under a common political project or discourse, even if these struggles were acting against perceived global hegemony.

Critiques of U.S. hegemony were nothing new. They span back to post-war French New Wave films to 1980s punk bands. For example, Crass's song "Smash the Mac" condemns American capitalism and consumerism, represented by McDonald's, for exploiting global inequalities and promoting superficial Western lifestyles. The song declares, "We've been occupied, culture smashed and betrayed," and concludes with the call, "E.T. go home." Their message centered on resisting oppressive systems and expressing solidarity with those affected by exploitation. However, it's easy to reinterpret such lyrics or protest points as a longing to return to a previ-

ous state or to highlight nationalistic themes, especially when the focus of protests shifts to vague targets like global elites or organizations such as the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, which are framed as representative of those systems.

As I reflect on that time, I find myself reconsidering the intersection of personal experience and broader political trends. Contemporary research on red-brown or syncretic politics often points to the 90s as the moment when these ideas gained traction in the modern era. This includes everything from tankies defending authoritarianism to volkish anarchists borrowing from National Bolsheviks. While I agree that these undercurrents intensified during this period, I also push back against some of the more direct links that have been made.

What I experienced wasn't so much a migration from one end of the political spectrum to the other, nor was it a direct consequence of the anti-globalization protests; rather, it was the adoption of a broad, post Cold War populist analysis that facilitated the normalization of conspiratorial thinking. Still, I feel uneasy when I reflect on my attraction to certain aesthetics that, in hindsight, could be viewed as gateways to crypto-fascism, for lack of a better term.

As noted earlier, music was a central element for me during that period, as it is for many young people. Hardcore, punk, and metal bands were blending styles. Most of the bands and people I encountered were firmly leftist, even though many bristled at such labels. But there was a heavy influence of tribalism or primitivism in the sound and aesthetic that has since spawned conversations about cultural appropriation. Symbols from world cultures were merged with 80s anarcho-punk imagery, including Norse and European iconography. This interest in past culture wasn't just in the underground; it was also present in mainstream culture. Antisemite Mel Gibson's *Braveheart* was huge, and punk shows often looked like gatherings of extras from the film. World music was also being integrated into electronic music, while conspiracy theories, popularized by shows like *The X-Files* and movies like *JFK* began to seep into the popular zeitgeist. Some of this may have stemmed from paranoia and unease about a rapidly changing world, whether due to the geopolitical shifts following the collapse of the Soviet Union, technological advancements like the internet, or the approaching new millennium. It might also have been influenced by the baby boomer generation leaving their mark on culture after gaining control of institutions and media.

Regardless of the reasons behind it, the far-right had been steeped in conspiracy thinking for decades. The 90s saw some of the worst domestic terrorism in U.S. history, from Timothy McVeigh to Eric Rudolph. These figures were tied to the gun show circuit, militia movements, and the Christian Identity movement. This era set the stage for the normalization of right-wing extremism, which would later manifest politically in the Tea Party and, ultimately, MAGA. At the heart of these movements were conspiracies about One World Government, which anti-globalists

see as a threat to national sovereignty and individual freedoms. They fear it could lead to authoritarian control, diminish distinct diversity, and erode local traditions and self-governance. This concept easily folds into ZOG "Zionist Occupied Government" conspiracy, an antisemitic theory that claims Jewish interests secretly control Western governments. Given that antisemitic conspiracies frequently linked banking institutions, concerns about international finance in the 1990s were readily absorbed into this narrative.

I can see how these distinct and different groups could cross-pollinate a decade later when anti-Western imperialism emerged as a core focus of protest. Building on concerns about globalization—or "globalists," depending on political leanings—the rhetoric surrounding U.S. hegemonic power surged. Just as critiques of globalization from the left and right sometimes overlap superficially, the same is true of anti-imperialist rhetoric, which largely depends on its framing and context.

For instance, reactionary conservatives like Alexander Dugin frame Russian expansionism as a rebuttal against Western imperialism. Similarly, many Western leftists ended up defending Assad in Syria after his regime brutally attacked a popular uprising in the name of anti-Western imperialism. Such reactionary anti-imperialism dates back to Weimar Germany, where National Bolsheviks like Karl Otto Paetel framed their revolution as "A front against Versailles, which means a front against the West and its eastern and southeastern satellites, echoing the old slogan of Brockdorff Rantzau: 'Against capitalism and imperialism.'"

Looking back, it's tempting to craft a narrative about the rise of a new syncretic politics that emerged from 90s activism and subcultures. However, I would caution those interested in the topic not to find patterns where none exist or to overemphasize those that do—turning correlation into causation, cherry-picking data, or falling into post hoc fallacies and confirmation bias. In doing so I am also reminded of the need to be self-critical in my own research as to not build narrative bridges that do not exist. Even so, I can't help but wonder how often I unknowingly flirted with populist and reactionary ideas during that time, even if only through aesthetics or casual conversations.

A good example of this is an article by the Southern Poverty Law Center about the 1999 anti-World Trade Organization protest in Seattle. It is an amazingly prophetic article, having been written in 2000. While I find some of the descriptions to be generalizations it provides an overview of how the right, specifically through Third Positionism, had been gaining adherents from the left. The articles focus on specific Third Position groups was somewhat off base, as groups like American Front did not massively increase their membership in the coming years from the left. What the article got correct was a general, directional accuracy regarding overlap of various movements.

The article asks, "What was behind this truly remarkable mix? How was it that members of the far "left" and "right" found themselves facing down police together?"

In the answers to these questions may lie the shape of future American extremism.” It goes on to reference Louis Beam’s infamous quote to describe the protests in Seattle: “The new politics of America is liberty from the NWO [‘New World Order’] Police State and nothing more.” The insinuation was that leftist anarchists and far-right activists were fighting the same battle against “globalism;” which in my experience, is not exactly accurate.

I have never met anyone on the left who sympathized with right-wing figures like Beam, Randy Weaver, Timothy McVeigh, or Eric Rudolph. That’s not to say that some on the right weren’t attempting to court others on the left, but similar to more extreme groups today, they did not mix. While a common enemy could be identified in a superficial analysis, who these groups believed they were fighting and why they were doing so were very different.

Then, where exactly was the overlap? The overlap I experienced during that time centered on non-traditional alliances, such as those between environmentalists and labor, but did not include far-right groups. Does that mean it didn’t happen? No, I’m certain it did. However, it’s essential to place it in the proper context. These groups never really merged, nor were there mass migrations from one to the other. Instead, what took place, in my view, was more about the adoption and cross-pollination of ways of thinking rather than specific ideologies. Populist rhetoric and conspiratorial generalizations weren’t just tolerated, they were preferred over the more academic-sounding critiques that had been common a few years earlier. This was partially based on distrust of media and institutions along with anti-intellectualism if it defended mainstream narratives. This trend intensified as the Democratic Party was increasingly seen as out of touch with much of the left, particularly in the 2000s. The rise of social media injected this process with steroids, and outside events only further accelerated this crossover. Today, Third Positionist groups remain relatively minor in activist circles, but sources of information, messaging, and framing of events are shared across internet spaces, albeit with different styles of delivery.

However, political overlap in the 90’s cannot be denied. I remember zines selling “God, Guts, and Guns” merchandise alongside anarcho-syndicalist pins and Chomsky lecture CDs. And while no one I knew talked about “Jewish cabals,” there were discussions about “bankers” and international elites within the context of global capitalism. Though I didn’t see much overt crossover, there was a certain openness to populism, which created space for new conspiracy theories to take hold. I wonder, for instance, how the modern “Great Reset” conspiracy might have been received or dismissed by groups from that time.

The SPLC article also references the National Revolutionary Faction in Britain and the appearance of neo-Nazi Matt Hale at the Seattle protests. While I think the SPLC exaggerates the political overlap to fit a particular narrative, I can’t deny that the signs were there, both in mainstream culture and in subcultures, hinting at what

was to come. Rather than a physical merging of groups or a migration of supporters, the external divisions largely remained, but the ways of thinking, analyzing, and interpreting the world began to shift. These changes can be tracked and analyzed today by following the flow of specific content throughout social media and media personalities. And I realize now that, to varying degrees, I was part of those initial shifts—whether through music, aesthetics, or vague political affinities.

In the late 90s, I briefly rode freight trains and squatted in Portland, Oregon. In reflection I can see how some of the SPLC's critique of what I'd call leftist populism existed, particularly its description of how the 1960s "back-to-the-land" ideals were repackaged into the leftist rhetoric of the era. This mindset influenced my own travels. I grew up in the Northeast, where these ideals were widespread, with easy access to hubs in areas like Vermont and Massachusetts. However, once I hit the road, politics became vague and secondary. The reality was much less political. Many of the people I met were addicted to drugs or alcohol, or victims of various abuse. This was outside of the urban centers and country co-ops but on the peripheries of society. In that context, ideological consistency, much like my then strict vegan diet, tended to fall by the wayside, often unconsciously.

I quickly understood my place of privilege in how various people treated me. Because of that, I also began to gain clarity on some of my ideals and assumptions. I remember hitchhiking through either eastern Oregon or Idaho, looking like a typical crust punk while my friend was going through heroin withdrawal. We weren't the most appealing to passersby, but eventually, an old pickup truck pulled over, and the driver waved us into the truck bed. We were both thankful and jumped in. He sped down the road, taking sharp turns and blasting 80s metal. My friend, even in the pangs of heroin withdrawal, had to laugh at the situation. When we finally arrived in a small town, the driver stopped to let us out. He came around the back to wish us luck in travels. I shook his hand and noticed swastikas tattooed on his knuckles. Both he and his companion had shaved heads. In that moment, I realized why he had picked us up: we were both white. I've thought about how that might have turned out differently if we weren't cis white men.

Another story from that time stands out. Radical environmental movements, especially groups like Earth First!, were part of the activist landscape. An SPLC article mentions them specifically:

"The radical right has added other ideas into the mix. More and more, its ideologues applaud the actions of terrorist groups like the Animal Liberation Front and sometimes violent "deep ecologists" like those in Earth First! and the Earth Liberation Front, which claimed the \$12 million arson of a Vail, Colo., ski resort in 1998."

Though I never had direct contact with Earth First!, I did visit a group in Eugene, Oregon, called "Red Cloud Thunder." They were a breakaway from the Cascadia Forest Defense, sometimes called the Fall Creek Tree Sit. The group was somewhat

publicized with articles featured in the LA Times and other mainstream outlets. The Seirre Club posted an article with some interviews of those at the camp. I believe that I recognize a few of their pseudonyms.

It was an intense experience. A friend and I were blindfolded and driven 30 to 40 minutes into an old-growth forest, where we were dropped off and escorted to a camp. The people there taught us skills like rappelling down trees and managing tree-sit fears. We sat around campfires, drank alcohol, and listened to music. Black metal, Amebix and Neurosis were staples, along with various local underground bands. There was never any discussion of violence and certainly nothing pointing to rightwing rhetoric. I can't speak for the radical right's applauding of actinons at Fall Creek, but the people there wouldn't have welcomed it from my experience. If anything, the division of any right or left politics was more aligned with loggers and the logging company versus protesters.

Black metal's problematic history with white supremacy is well-known today, though it wasn't explicitly discussed in my experience at the time. Still, people overlooked aspects of the genre like the murders and church burnings associated with some acts like Emperor. I find Neurosis interesting in retrospect because of its esoterism and symbology. These types of bands left a lot open to interpretation and projection by listeners. That's not to compare bands like Emperor and Neurosis. For example, Neurosis took a firm stand against Scott Kelly when he was accused of abuse. This contrasted sharply with black metal bands that overlooked or even shielded criminal members. Regardless, there was something more in-tune with this music and the era, at least in these environments, than overtly political bands like Crass or American punk like the Dead Kennedys. The best way that I can describe it was a general sense of populist authenticity as opposed to tinny political lecturing. It feels like that reflected broader sentiments of these activist movements at the time.

I reflect on how that sentiment influenced my worldview at the time and how it might manifest in 2024. It seems like such "populist authenticity" would have made me vulnerable to red-brown messaging, which is more accessible today through social media. I also think about what drew me to that kind of music and aesthetic, wondering if it's similar to what attracts young people to reactionary media today. It makes me question whether this indicates a certain disconnect within myself in thinking about people who become drawn to such messaging. In some rightwing and Third Positionist rhetoric, I see a search for truth and authenticity, which often leads to nationalism, racism, and antisemitism. But I also recognized an internal pursuit within myself for authenticity through left populist rhetoric and music that transcended politics, veering into esoteric or neo-gnostic realms and wonder if these could be opposite sides of a similar impulse. I think about overlaying that on the broader leftist sentiment at the time, the willingness to oppose even progressive establishment forces, and what that meant in material terms as opposed to

intellectual or identity-driven ones.

My tattoos depicted industrial civilizational collapse mixed with Celtic art from the Book of Kells. I was particularly drawn to these along with other crust and gothic aesthetics. At the time, these symbols didn't strike me as anything other than ideas that I had about the world and aesthetics that I liked. Since then, the right has coopted a lot of European pagan imagery. Much work has been done with on this phenomenon, especially regarding eco-fascism. Reading this, I can see how researchers could link these things into a narrative about either the populist left or early inklings of eco-fascism. While I didn't personally experience syncretic politics in the camp, I now realize that the aesthetics I was drawn to have, in some ways, been co-opted by the right. It's a fallacy to suggest that people who enjoy these aesthetics are all of a sudden members of the far-right. But again, I do wonder what exactly the initial draw was, which was in my mind apolitical, and how that might be analyzed.

It's important to reemphasize that I didn't come across any overt right-wing or fascist rhetoric in those spaces. I don't think it was present then, though I recognize that things could have changed or been different in other groups. I do see how, over time, there may have been opportunities for reactionaries to gain a foothold with susceptible individuals. The article "Against Green Reactionaries" provides valuable insight into eco-fascists within anarchist circles, referencing figures like Michael Moynihan, elements of the black metal scene, and esoteric authors such as Julius Evola.

I often reflect on how right-wing groups portray themselves as "volkish" and the implications of that. In particular, I think about the National Bolshevik critique that the German left was too abstract for workers, making it seem detached, aloof, and inauthentic. This makes me consider what initially drew me to certain ideas—perhaps a pursuit of authenticity over academic discussions or third-party organizing at that time. While it would be too simplistic to claim a direct cause-and-effect, I find myself pondering the desire for authenticity in politics or subcultures. Instead of forcing connections that weren't part of my own experience, I focus on what motivates people to follow such vastly different ideological paths.

I've always been perplexed by individuals like Keith Preston, who claims to be an anarchist but speaks at white nationalist events. It's a clear contradiction, but over time, I've understood how some people end up on this trajectory. My own experiences with anarchism were intertwined with antifascism and antiracism, but for others, that wasn't always the case. For many who ended up going down different roads, it seems that conspiracy was often the Trojan horse for reactionary idea. An example of this is Rob Miller from the bands Amebix and Tau Cross.

As mentioned music played a significant role in the broader scene. At the time, one of the most prominent bands, at least in terms of patches and shirts, was Amebix. They are often regarded as the godfathers of crust punk. Their apocalyptic

imagery and anarchist rhetoric resonated with a diverse audience both during their active years and afterward, leading to a cult following. I was certainly a proud member of that cult.

Amebix is interesting to bring into the conversation even though it had disbanded by the 1990's because they were hugely influential coming up from the U.K. anarcho-punk scene but never really belonged to it. They were comparatively dark, with apocalyptic imagery and a less overtly political message. Instead of specific politics they offered a critique of authority and advocated for anarchism with the slogan "No Gods, No Masters." Lyrics would sometimes delve into esoterism or use concepts like that of nature to combat oppressive systems.

It was undoubtedly shocking when Rob Miller, the lead singer and bassist of Amebix and later Tau Cross, shifted toward rightwing conspiracy theories later in life, ultimately ending up in the realm many do, of Holocaust denial. It's hard to express how unbelievable this seemed to fans. It contradicted the anti-authoritarian and anti-fascist values that Amebix stood for, making his shift feel like a betrayal of those principles. While still disappointing, Miller's descent into conspiracy theories and eventual embrace of Holocaust denial isn't entirely surprising. The two often go hand in hand, along with many other reactionary beliefs which make the acceptance of conspiracy on the left concerning.

That said, it's important to note that Amebix, the band, never endorsed any of these ideologies. Rob's brother, Stig, who played guitar in the band, stated that Rob's later political views had nothing to do with Amebix. Stig responded to the controversy by saying, "The internet rumors suggesting that Amebix was secretly a Nazi-sympathizing band are absolute bollocks. I haven't followed Tau Cross, but I feel sorry for the other members. As for my brother's behavior... I'm genuinely shocked." When Rob included Holocaust denier Gerard Menuhin's name in the liner notes of a Tau Cross album, the band was promptly dropped by their label, Relapse Records.

After the Tau Cross fallout, it became clear that Rob's bandmates were blindsided by his decision to include Menuhin in the album's liner notes. In their statement, they explained, "We were each asked to provide our thank-you lists, which included only family and friends. Now, we've learned that Rob Miller added a notorious right-wing author to the list. We are adamantly against this kind of ugliness and have been trying to get answers as to how this could happen."

I can't say that I know Rob, but I've had brief communications with him over the years via email and social media. Others with closer ties have also commented on the topic. However, I have communicated with him after the Menuhin incident to try and understand how he seemingly went so far off the rails. I'm not going to defacto platform him by offering up specific quotes, but in general, he is under the belief that he's continuing on the same mission he always had and that no censorship or caving to social pressure should stop him. Ideals that he claims are

consistent with the messages from Amebix.

I find Rob interesting in that it seems some of the core values and ways of thinking existed as he traversed political spheres. From my impressions of him, he's long had a moral certitude regarding the sense of betrayal by various institutions such as propaganda in formal education; he's employed patternicity to draw conclusions about how the world works, and he's distilled us vs. them to the individual vs. "them" while employing simplification of complex scenarios to create narratives.

In Amebix he implored people to "use your head, take control" in the song "Chain Reaction," and now he believes he's doing just that by unraveling "the greatest lie," which is, predictably, recycled and debunked claims of Holocaust denial. He proclaimed, "Our land, sea and sky!" in "The Power Remains," using nature as a resilient revolt against oppressive tyranny and now discusses immigration through the lens of ethno-nationalism. At the end of "Arise!" he mocked and condemned the audiences of his shows, and today, he continues that condemnation, labeling them the woke mob. He engages in fallacious reasoning, indulging in anomaly hunting and a misunderstanding or rejection of probability, all expressed in a poetic manner.

Rob may claim to transcend the left-right paradigm, but in truth, he echoes right-wing conspiracy theories and talking points, ultimately leading to antisemitism. He's a valuable case study because his shift toward antisemitism was so dramatic, yet it also illustrates how red-brown thinking can develop, fueled by conspiracy theories.

While I didn't gain much insight from discussing the topic with him, I now have a clearer understanding of how he personally ended up in such a troubling and disappointing place. If anything, it just proved how dangerous and flawed conspiratorial thinking can be and why it needs to be combated in all spaces even when deployed against seemingly shared targets. It isn't more authentic because of its contrarian nature, it doesn't provide special insight like that of the Gnostics, it isn't above politics because it generally brings people to the same reactionary stances, and it has nothing to do with "free speech." It's a logically flawed way of thinking, presented as a cheat code to knowledge that results in real-life pain and suffering.

However, the issue of antisemitism on the left also deserves attention. In the spirit of Amebix, not Rob, we should not bend the knee out of fear of condemnation, nor overlook the issues within our spaces or ourselves; there is plenty to critique. A starting place for learning about antisemitism from the left titled "Antisemitism Viewed from the Left: A Reading List" was provided to me by Spencer Sunshine who recently wrote "Neo-Nazi Terrorism and Countercultural Fascism The Origins and Afterlife of James Mason's Siege."

If the analysis is sound, then populist rhetoric and conspiracy are unnecessary. They add no value to the argument but serve as gateways to harmful ways of thinking and conclusions. Unfortunately, they are effective in driving media engagement,

leading to greater exposure and potential profit. For this reason, I would question the motivations of any individual or group that employs them.

The Holocaust denialism that Rob engages in mirrors the soft genocide denial found in the work of ostensibly leftist authors like Edward S. Herman, which became foundational in modern Western anti-imperialist thought. This approach enabled authors in the '90s to justify their revisionism regarding the genocides in Bosnia, Kosovo, and later Rwanda. The methodology, framed as both academic and a form of speaking truth to power, is disturbingly similar to how Rob presents his "facts." This type of denialism offers a partial admission, giving the appearance of reasonableness, before moving to question, downplay, or trivialize other key aspects in historical revisionism.

For example, Rob didn't deny the existence of concentration camps but the use of gas chambers. Similarly, authors like Chomsky didn't deny the existence of war crimes at Srebrenica during the Bosnian War, but denied that it was genocide. In both cases a malevolent actor was manipulating the narrative for their own advantage. When examined closely, not only do serious research flaws become apparent, but the troubling realities behind how the message is constructed also come to light. I have plenty more to say about this, but that will be reserved for a future article.

Superimposed on top of this "methodology" is what might be described as a conspiracy theory or theology of Western dominance. I say that not in dispute of Western imperialism and global influence but instead how the phenomena are analyzed, discussed, and presented. Too often rhetoric bleeds into populist generalizations that are reminiscent of those that gained traction during the 90's. Again, these tools are unnecessary if the analysis is accurate and open the door to flawed ways of thinking that can lead to confusing, harmful stances as we see today in many political spaces.

To return to my initial point, I believe it's crucial not only to critique what you oppose but also to critically examine your own spaces and yourself from time to time. Reflecting on the underground and anti-globalization activism of the 1990s, I see both an inclination to overstate left-right crossover but also the groundwork for future shifts. What happened wasn't so much a physical migration from one side of the political spectrum to the other in my experience, nor a direct result of the anti-globalization protests, but rather the adoption of a broad, populist analysis that paved the way for the normalization of conspiratorial thinking. That way of thinking is often a trojan horse for reactionary positions.

I reflect on my own privilege and how it benefited me in certain situations, whether in my interactions with police or with people who could have easily taken advantage of me. While I didn't hold reactionary views, at least to my knowledge, I recognize that I was likely in precarious proximity to them. This interests me because it could help explain how people find entry points into the very subcultures and politics that I've spent much of my life countering.

I reflect on how close I might have come to adopting dangerous beliefs, realizing that some of my earlier assumptions were naïve. This reflection prompts me to think about how it might shape my future research, especially in terms of avoiding incorrect methods that can echo conspiracy-style thinking. I'm increasingly aware of the dangers posed by conspiracy theories and populist rhetoric, and how similar starting points can lead people down vastly different paths. I truly respect anyone who stands against these forces, particularly in today's digital world with its growing social pressures and constant scrutiny.

There is considerable validation and profit to be gained from embracing syncretic rhetoric in digital spaces. Exploring connections between the far right and potential left-wing cross-pollination is vital. However, while this research is important and can also serve as personal reflection, it must be done objectively—avoiding the very pattern-seeking and flawed thinking it aims to expose.

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