A PSYCHIATRIC CLINICIAN'S ANALYSIS OF THE US ELECTIONS: THE LAST EMBERS OF PATRIARCHAL SELF-CONFIDENCE

by Clay Whitehead, MD

I am writing a brief response to Herman Greene's recent letter, "[Are Ecozoans Now at War? Should They Be?](#)", and his essay, "[We Now Live in the Cabaret: Laissez les Bon Temps Rouler!.](#)"

Our world is a confusing and dangerous place which we humans have coped with by developing illusions of control through intellectual mastery and networking with groups. It seems that at the time of the Neolithic innovations, public power became highly masculinized and to some degree hid the underlying matriarchal strength. What we have seen in our age are the last embers of patriarchal self-confidence. This, Trump has tapped into, and has generated the very disquieting feelings described in your communications. The affect you seem to describe is, I believe, strangeness, that eerie feeling that things do not compute and are therefore rapidly becoming extremely dangerous in ways that are hard to grasp. You and I might agree that the way to proceed is to carry on "the Great Work." Unfortunately most of the world's people have never heard of this work and are too busy preparing a tantrum to much care.

Perhaps not surprisingly, this affect of strangeness has not been very carefully studied but it sounds like you have become a rapid expert as have many of the rest of us. At the individual's level the clinician observes regression, magical thinking, projection, increasing denial, and anger followed by ever deepening depression. At some point as observed during the cabaret era, increasing feelings of low self-esteem and rage dominate individuals as well as their cultures and, as happened in Germany after World War I, eventually lead to a final self-destructive explosion. These trends were described by Eric Fromm in the late 30s during the years that he was preparing to leave Germany. His book from this era, *Escape from Freedom*, today is absolutely riveting in its prescience. The basic idea is that when confronted with uncertainty one seeks authoritarianism. This is particularly likely to occur when cultural development and wealth are constrained and limit the support and biopsychosocial energy to move forward.

Self-destructiveness becomes a dominant dynamic, and interestingly is quite evident in Trump's biography, which is filled with so much illusion, deceit, and failed initiatives. His underlying self-destructiveness is one of the especially frightening dimensions of his rise. Remember Hitler was suicidal after World War I, and carried out his plan after World War II.

A final point: the present moment echoes origins in the enlightenment. This was much emphasized by the founding fathers and gave us a period of scientific, economic, and political leadership. It is sometimes forgotten that the underside of these achievements included religious tyranny, slavery, and the advent of nuclear warfare. We do not seem to have a way as yet to preserve the good and eliminate the bad in our nature.

Sustaining these largely unconscious polarizations has required enormous denial, as you point out. It is worth remembering that a good definition of denial is "negative hallucination." It is the

assertion that something that is not present is present, or its reverse. In this case the enormous self-other bi-polarities are reaching a lethal impasse and point to the central achievement required for survival: integrated thought and perception. This requires nothing less than transcending and repairing the splits of the Enlightenment. An ultimate expression of this view requires integrity in dealing with our home planet and with each other. Our only hope that this can be adopted is that the members of our species recognize that patriarchal persistence will soon kill our planet, and survival will eventually require better balancing of regression and pursuing constrained growth. This will eventually return us to something like "the Great Work."