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An Intellectual Guide to Why Citizens Vote Against Their Interests

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

To Professor Steve Redhead, 1952–2018.
This book began life with his statement, "we must never normalize this behaviour."
Steve saw the rise of Trump. May we witness the decline and understand how the aberrant, the confused, the ignorant, and the foolish were accepted, validated, and valorized.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Tara Brabazon is the Dean of Graduate Research and Professor of Cultural Studies at Flinders University, Australia. She is the winner of six teaching awards and has published eighteen books and over 200 refereed articles and book chapters. Her best known books include *The University of Google*, *Digital Dieting* and *From Revolution to Revelation*. She is also a columnist for the *Times Higher Education*. Her personal website is www.brabazon.net

Steve Redhead was the Professor of Cultural Studies at Flinders University, Australia. He was also Adjunct Professor of Cultural Studies in the Faculty of Graduate Studies, York University, Ontario, Canada. Steve published seventeen books including *Theoretical Times* (Bingley, Emerald, 2017) and *We Have Never Been Postmodern: Theory at the Speed of Light* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2011). He was editor of the Bloomsbury book series *Subcultural Style* and *Deviant Leisure* for Emerald. While Steve died in March 2018, his personal website remains at www.steveredhead.zone

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INTRODUCTION: TOUGH KNOWLEDGE AND DIFFICULT KNOWING IN IGNORANT TIMES

New phrases jut from our complicated present. Innovative tropes. Transgressive theories. Provocative slogans. Defiant knowledge.

> Extreme anthropology. Deviant leisure. Ultra-realist criminology. Brexit criminology. Trump Studies.

Such terms and tropes open red wedges, disruptive interdisciplinarity, and dangerous intellectual opportunities. These spaces are available and ready to enter and expand by radical and progressive scholars after the Global Financial Crisis, post-Brexit, and post-Trump. At such a moment, banality rules but theory beckons. We certainly live, interestingly, in theoretical times.[1] Previously we lived, theoretically, in interesting times. In the last decade, studies on and by the global left have attached themselves to 'theory' and 'theorists.' But there has also been a mining of popular culture, high and low.[2] The celebrity intellectual culture which developed through the 2000s produced open access online journals devoted to theorists such as Jean Baudrillard[3] and Slavoj Zizek.[4] This is open knowledge in a time of commercialized

research. However, these theorists also confront antagonism from within the neoliberal – zombie[5] – higher education sector. Zizek expressed, "my anxiety about being excluded from academic apparatuses and not recognized as a 'serious' philosopher."[6] This book probes and challenges the separation of serious and trivial, academic and popular culture. We affirm that the nature of the interregnum in which our social, cultural, intellectual, and political lives are placed, means that the very definitions and expectations of intellectual work are transforming.[7] While many of the later chapters in this book activate the theoretical conceptualization of the interregnum, it is important to place a clear definition in this introduction so that the term can bounce, jar, jab, and hook throughout the remainder of this text.

In its historical and science fictional[8] manifestations, an interregnum is a gap, a break, or an aperture in governmental organization and social order.[9] Originally used to describe the space between the reigns of monarchs, the word also captured the social unrest in these periods,[10] invoking succession wars or foreign invasions. Failed states jut from interregna.[11] Powerfully, Henrique Carvalho and Alan Norrie configured this period as "between an old (the broken promise of the liberal Enlightenment) and a new (a world that is emancipated across a variety of social registers), generating a variety of morbid symptoms in the dystopic present."[12] Antonio Gramsci's interregnum was much more precisely constituted, emerging from his writing about the 'crisis' in late 1920s and early 1930s Italy. There is a suspension of expectations and a parking of future hopes. In such a moment, the powerful often deploy violence to sustain some mode of order. However, a "crisis of authority" emerges.[13] There are no answers. No normative parameters. Instead, there is a blockage to the formulation of solutions. It is not a surprise that Zygmunt Bauman found resonance and value in Gramsci's

interregnum and summoned it to explore its functionality in a period of globalization and financial crises, including the ambivalent positioning of the nation state through transnational banking failures.[14]

Therefore, scholars – academics – researchers – philosophers – must also be agile and move between the intricate and complex choreography danced by the powerful and the powerless, the formal and the informal, the stoic and the conversational. These are times of divided nations, where parents are separated from children in the name of immigration control,[15] where social media disseminate the howling fear of those children,[16] and 'strong' men impose those renderings of masculinity upon delicate social structures with the force of a stainless steel cookie cutter through foam.

Therefore, we return to Extreme Anthropology. Deviant Leisure. Ultra-Realist Criminology. Brexit Criminology. Trump Studies. Combining high theory and high popular culture, radical, edgy, cold, and hard scholarship is emerging in and from this tough, brittle time. This potent knowledge is not budding from the Ivy League, Russell Group, or the Group of Eight universities. Instead, this dangerous knowledge is pulsing from unstable, daring institutions. Deviant Leisure emerged from Plymouth University. Ultra-realist Criminology sprang from Teesside University and now resides at Northumbria. Extreme Anthropology originated from Oslo. Physical Cultural Studies bolted from Waikato, Bath, Bournemouth, and Maryland. Sports Humanities emerged from Waseda. Post-digital studies comes from Coventry University. This is not centered and safe knowledge. This is discourse from the edges. It is pervasive and promiscuous knowledge that does not abide by disciplinary rules. It is not only highly theoretical but anti-empirical. Its relationship with science, and scientific methods, is similarly critical. While there are multiple marches for science,[17] there is no

fight or protest for thinking, learning, and intelligence. While confirming the value of empirical science is worthwhile in a time of climate change deniers, where is the public support for tough, non-empirical knowledge? In these theoretical times, theories and theorists matters. The Brexit result and the Trump victory cannot be studied in a laboratory. It is not bench-derived knowledge. The silent majority will not sit in a petri dish, waiting to be researched. Different locations, positions, and strategies are required.

In such a space, Trump Studies emerges, but with a distinctive political and theoretical imperative. A significant, passionate, and powerful edition of *Cultural Anthropology* appeared in January 2017 to probe the intellectual, personal, and professional consequences of the Donald Trump campaign and election victory. Michael Taussig opened this edition with the phrase and discursive flourish of "Trump Studies," arguing that "there is no normal anymore."[18] Powerfully, Taussig posed the key intellectual question: how can scholarly research engage with, understand and transform the Trump presidency? He asked, "Can Trump Studies match its object of study?"[19] Similar questions and problems emerge from Media Studies, Cultural Studies and sub-disciplines such as Fan Studies. The changes to media platforms are more exciting than the research tracking them. The technology is more exciting than the academic investigations into that technology. Fan behavior is more innovative and incisive than Fan Studies can capture or recognize. The intellectual problem spanning these once provocative and now weak sub-disciplines remains the understanding of the political economy in late capitalism. The meta intellectual problem is how to 'be' an expert in an era of post-expertise, or how to manage "the mastery of nonmastery."[20] This post-expertise ideology is also post-consciousness and post-experience. Being black, a migrant, a woman, gay, or lesbian is no

longer – was it ever? – the basis of credibility and authority in academic life and beyond. This denial of Karl Marx's mantra – where life does not determine consciousness[21] – means that ageing white men and women 'whiteout' the lived experience of disempowered communities that have negotiated the daily consequences of discrimination, prejudice, and oppression.

Repression and oppression are only one filament in this story. The active forgetting of the past, and the inelegant grasp of historiographical reconstructions of this past for contemporary political imperatives, means that surprise greeted the Brexit and Trump election results. Theresa May's non victory in the 2017 election and the rise of Jeremy Corbyn were – similarly – bizarre and unexpected. Nancy Love expressed the paradox of this surprise.

> *A lingering question is why so many Americans seem so surprised by Trump's victory. When Trump referred to Mexicans as rapists, called Democratic Senator Elizabeth Warren, Pocahontas, and refused to denounce David Duke, former Grand Dragon of the KKK and Republican candidate for Governor of Louisiana, he was reaffirming the history of white supremacy in American politics and culture, or the racial formation of the United States (US) as a white nation. Surprise at Trump's victory suggests that many Americans still deny the full extent of this history, and hence failed to realize that white supremacists were remobilizing support among disaffected and dispossessed voters.*[22]

Similarly, the long burn of colonial England, the 'little Englanders' who could not manage the decline of empire and the notion that the UK is but one of many powers in Europe,

infiltrated the Brexit referendum and the subsequent seething resentment through its implementation. Obviously, the UK Independence Party (UKIP) had kept home fires burning, or perhaps flickering, perpetuating a neo-colonial, anti-immigrant rage in the press and through layers of government. But when confronted by a choice, the majority of voters in England, rather than Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, voted for a glorious past of little England, rather than a collaborative, robust and complex European future.

This book uses the odd events of the late 2010s to probe the dense and disturbing nature of knowledge, thinking, learning, the self, community, and belonging. Yes, there are answers in these pages to the key questions: why Trump and Why Brexit? But this is not an event-driven monograph. Instead, it offers new, uncomfortable and difficult knowledge that sits awkwardly in a higher education system which is empowering the boundaries of traditional disciplines, entrepreneurship and easy ideas that can transfer to industry. The scholars writing this book are black and white, male and female, and senior and junior academics. This plurality of perspective matters, as our expertise aligns into a singular project: to tether Cultural Studies and Trump Studies, to angular, disturbing, dangerous, productive, and dynamic knowledge systems. This is not following Stuart Hall's 'Great Moving Right Show.'[23] We are now watching – and living – this show. This article by Hall was published in 1979. He was wrong at that time. He is right now.[24] The question is what scholars will do with this reality and the visions passing before us in this 'Show.' We grasp Jean Baudrillard's theorization of 'banality' and 'the end of the social' to offer a strategy to theorize the place of knowledge in anti-intellectual times.

The word intellectual is used with intent and care in the subtitle of this book. It is an invasive blade of a term.

'Intellectual' does align with 'scholar,' 'academic,' 'teacher', and 'researcher.' But also, the separation of the intellectual from the scholar, academic, teacher, and researcher is important. Andrew Goodwin, at the start of the 2000s, revealed the pathway to our contemporary reality, where experts are demeaned and ridiculed and universities are conveniently flat packed away from wider social concerns.

> *This point was made for me recently at an academic conference where the audience heard from a distinguished panel of journalists and academics, who, as is usual, talked past each other about their work. What invariably happens is that the academic, eager (like me) to find ways of addressing a non-academic audience, make all kinds of concessions to the difficulties and limitations of journalism, eager to auto critique concerning the politics of academic writing, and discuss our yearning to work as or with media producers, and so forth. We are then greeted to career histories from the practitioners, who berate the professors for using bloodless 'jargon,' without revealing the slightest interest in figuring out why academics use technical language, or what forms of knowledge might be produced on campus that cannot emerge in a 200-word record review. Because they operate just a little closer to the marketplace than the professors, the critics evidently believe that they are also closer to 'the street.'*[25]

Since Goodwin published those words, his realization has poured from academic conferences and awkward 'dialogues' with journalists, and into digitization and social media. The concessions made by academics have extended far beyond journalists and into 'communities' of bloggers, YouTubers,

Instagrammers, Snapchatters, and Tweeters. There has been a confusion between experience and expertise, credibility and credentials.

Let us provide an example of this confusion. Henry Jenkins argued that, "even at its best, the academic theorizing seemed to be reproducing concepts that the fans had themselves generated to explain their activities, placing them into more academically respectable language."[26] Such a statement muddies epistemology, ontology, and methodology. In other words, it is completely wrong. Ethnographers may watch, evaluate, and research the practices of others. Participant observation, as a method, may agitate insider and outsider status in a range of communities, but academics must not confuse text and context, banal reality and high theory. The problem with Jenkins' argument is that it is anti-intellectual. It is assuming that people with knowledge know little. This paradox must be noted with clarity and precision. He argues that those who hold knowledge are not knowledgeable. Such an argument is disingenuous and dangerous.

What has been weathered in the democratic desire to make connections beyond the gates and gardens of the university is a recognition that qualifications, credentials, and specialist knowledge hold value. Teachers and scholars have given away not only power and authority, but the value of intelligence. It is now journalists that complain about their loss of credibility through 'citizen journalists' and tweeters.[27]

They have a point. The unreflexive nature of user generated content that celebrates the intrinsic value of the digiliterate, offering their opinions to the world, has meant that the inexperienced or ill-educated attacks on others goes unmentioned. The idea that the digitally literate with time on their hands – a dangerous combination in itself – would abuse those with more expansive literacies, who spend their days dedicated to the education of others, demonstrates the