Brown's Paradox: Speed, Mobility, Migration and Ressentiment in Global Politics

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I start with a quote from Wendy Brown's *Politics Without History*. I acknowledge it's lengthy, and yet it serves so effectively as a kind of a 'state of the union address' for life in an accelerating world that I just can't bring myself to cut it down.

> From every area of contemporary discourse, we know that the pace of contemporary social, cultural, economic, and political change is unprecedented. Technological obsolescence occurs at the inception of production, deracination in human lives is ubiquitous and normal, divorce rates have almost caught up with marriage rates, yesterday's deal is history, today's corporate giant is the material of tomorrow's dissolved or merged identity. If all that was solid melted into air in the last century, today's economic, social, and technological transformations occur so rapidly that they often do not even achieve solidity before metamorphosing into something else. This much we know and recount to ourselves regularly. But we do not know much about the relationship of this pace of change to the history that shapes and constrains it, nor to the future that it heralds...
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> Moving at such speed without any sense of control or predictability, we greet both past and future with bewilderment and anxiety. As a consequence, we inheritors of a radically disenchanted universe feel a greater political impotence than humans may have felt before, even as we occupy a global order more saturated by human power than ever before. Power without purpose, power without lines of determination, power without end in every sense of the word. (138-139)

It is this final paragraph that so successful sums up the paradox of our accelerated lives. On the one hand we find ourselves possessed of powers the likes of which the world has simply never seen. We have access to technologies that even a decade or two ago would have seemed like science fiction. Smartphones achieve the goal of ubiquitous computing, satellites ringing the planet provide us with instantaneous access to the sum total of human knowledge regardless of location, and the biosciences examine, splice and augment the human body. It is as if the velocity inaugurated with the industrial revolution has accelerated history beyond itself, landing us in the middle of our own future.

And yet, despite these incredible new tools, we also feel a "greater political impotence than ever before." This acceleration which seems to have overtaken the future also seems to have overtaken us, passing us by and dragging us along in its slipstream. Events happen too fast for us to effectively intervene in them. We are subject to a constant wave of contingency which denies us the possibility of stability or security. And what is more, this seems to hold across the globe. While it is true that the poor and disenfranchised have always been (and still are) more subject to change and uncertainty, now, even

those with the most effective access to futuristic technologies seem to have not much greater purchase on events (which is not to say that their experience of it is at all the same). And this is true in seemingly every facet of our lives: personal, political, economic and cultural. Indeed, it is the political that is perhaps most important sphere to observe, since it is the state – the unity and stability of political community – that was supposed to serve as a bulwark against the winds of change and earthquakes of uncertainty. And yet even that fortress seems to be succumbing to the acceleration of the world.

What is the answer to this contradiction, this dual sense of our own power and our own impotence; this feeling of both living in the future and being behind the times? This paper will seek to investigate Brown's paradox, both responses to it, and the way in which it might be constitutive of our accelerating world. I will begin by looking at two alternate political responses to Brown's paradox; the first, the neoliberal embrace and valorization of the uncertainty of an accelerating world, the second, the neoconservative and reactionary attempt to aggressively (re)secure the foundations of politics and society. The discussion of this latter approach will lead us to the central concept of this paper, the idea of a *ressentiment* against speed. The paper will discuss how this *ressentiment* inhibits our ability to productively respond to the challenges of an accelerating world, while at the same time frequently authorizing policies of violence, marginalization and exploitation against those constituencies which are already most subject to the conditions of accelerating globalization. Conversely, this understanding of *ressentiment* against speed will be used to point the way to a politics which, while not *resolving* the contradiction inherent in Brown's paradox, might teach us to live with it – and within it – in a productive and ethical manner.[1]

Dealing with Brown's Paradox

Neoliberalism

Now, the easiest way of dealing with any paradox is to simply decide that there is, in fact, nothing paradoxical about it, and thus nothing to overcome. In regards to Brown's paradox, this can be achieved by reinterpreting an unsettling acceleration as an enriching progress. In this account - which

finds its strongest advocates amongst an ascendant neoliberalism (although it echoes through other political positions) - the acceleration of transportation, communication, production etc. are making our world more developed, more efficient, wealthier, more egalitarian, and also more connected, humane and democratic. The world is changing at an astonishing clip, these prophets say, but overall for the better.[2]

From this point of view, the sense of political impotence Brown identifies is nothing other than the uncomfortable letting go of a belief in the ability of politics to effectively intervene in matters which are better left up to the molecular processes of market economies, scientific innovation and individual entrepreneurship. Our desire for 'stability' is nothing other than the superstitious vestiges of an obsolete ideology, one which might have been more 'stable', but was also less developed and less advanced. According to such an account, the state's attempts to provide us with 'security' (not just physical, but also economic and existential) was really doing more to hold us back, than prop us up.

Take the words of neoliberal prophet Tom Friedman. Friedman, is one of the great advocates of globalization, a process which he refers to as the 'flattening of the world'. He acknowledges that this flattening of the world does introduce a new level of uncertainty and instability into the life of the average person. However, from his perspective, the rewards that globalization brings so outweigh any dangers, that we simply must embrace it. In this context, any attempt by politics to put limitations on globalization are fundamentally hazardous to the future. In this context, citizens must learn to overcome their desires for stability, and states must overcome their desires to control and organize.

> The job of government and business is not to guarantee anyone a lifetime job -- those days are over. That social contract has been ripped up with the flattening of the world. What government can and must guarantee people is the chance to make themselves more employable.(2006: 367)

From this perspective, the way to reconcile Brown's paradox is for people to simply accept the new uncertainty of their lives, and learn to live within this newly fluid (yet flat) world.

> In the flat world, the individual worker is going to become more and more responsible for managing his or her own career, risks, and economic security, and the role of government and business is to help workers build all the muscles they need to do just that. (369)

A government (state, political community, society, in the eyes of the neoliberal they are the same.

Think of Thatcher's invocation 'There's no such thing as society') should not be there to provide

'protection' against the market. By doing so it simply constrains the efficiency of the market and

inhibits people's entrepreneurial natures. At its most involved, the government should be preparing

people to live in this newly accelerating world, helping them to adapt to this world of uncertainty and

to use those futuristic gadgets to navigate the flows and swells of this flat world (flat ocean?). Indeed,

this is what government is supposed to do, say neoliberals; empower the individual, not fictitious,

stultifying aggregations like 'society'. Such an approach will ultimately empower us all.

> We all have to be owners as well as wage earners. That is where public policy has to be focused
> -- to make sure that people have wealth-producing assets as they enter the twenty-first century,
> the way homeownership accomplished that in the twentieth century. (370)

The paradox thus resolves itself, as the security which we lose with the flattening of the world, we gain

in the establishment of an ownership society. The ownership of ourselves (ourselves as workers,

ourselves as human capital) is compared to homeownership in the passage above. Thus our ownership

of ourselves provides the grounding and security that our homes once did (now of course long washed

away by the tides of rising home costs and mortgage foreclosures). The new image of *homo*

economicus in a flat world: *homo gastropoda,* the snail-person, carrying her house around on her back,

at home where ever she finds herself because of her ownership in herself.

Of course for others, this accelerating world is less a world of opportunity, than an

intensification of the processes of exploitation that were already endemic in capitalist modernity.

Zygmunt Bauman has, since the turn of the millennium, done an exceptional job of tracing out the

violences inherent in an accelerating world. He expertly excavates the alienation and marginalization

lurking under the surface of Friedman's ownership society.

> Individual exposure to the vagaries of commodity-and-labor markets inspires and promotes
> division, not unity; it puts a premium on competitive attitudes, while degrading collaboration
> and team work to the rank of temporary strategems that need to be suspended or terminated the
> moment their benefits have been used up. 'Society' is increasingly viewed and treated as a

'network' rather than a 'structure' (let alone a solid 'totality'): it is perceived and treated as a matrix of random connections and disconnections and of an essentially infinite volume of possible permutations.(2007: 2-3)

He goes on to say

> the responsibility for resolving the quandaries generated by vexingly volatile and constantly changing circumstances is shifted on to the shoulders of individuals – who are now expected to be 'free choosers' and to bear in full the consequences of their choices. The risks involved in every choice may be produced by forces which transcend the comprehension and capacity to act of the individual, but it is the individual's lot and duty to pay their price, because there are no authoritatively endorsed recipes which would allow errors to be avoided if they were properly learned and dutifully followed, or which could be blamed in the case of failures. (3-4)

While Bauman is here discussing the experience of individuals, we could apply the same analysis to individual countries, as entire economies become subject to the fickle interests of the market, to currency speculation, debt crises, pressure from groups such as the IMF, World Bank and the various 'G's. These abrupt shifts, though conceived of by the neoliberal crowd as simple 'adjustments' or 'market pressures', bring with them untold levels of human suffering, and are equally likely now to hit the developed world as the developing (which is not to suggest that the impact is symmetrical, or that the one doesn't still benefit from the immiseration of the other). In this context, the neoliberal emphasis on progress becomes more of an eschatological faith, than it does a grounded economic 'law'.

> 'Progress', once the most extreme manifestation of radical optimism and a promise of universally shared and lasting happiness, has moved all the way to the opposite, dystopian and fatalistic pole of anticipation: it now stands for the threat of a relentless and inescapable change that instead of maturing peace and respite portends nothing but continuous crisis and strain and forbids a moment of rest. Progress has turned into a sort of endless and uninterrupted game of musical chairs in which a moment of inattention results in irreversible defeat and irrevocable exclusion. Instead of great expectations and sweet dreams, 'Progress' evokes an insomnia full of nightmares of 'being left behind' – of missing the train, or falling out of the window of a fast accelerating vehicle. (10-11)

Thus even when if you don't find oneself as one of the 'losers' of the neoliberal economy - even if you manage to leverage your 'wealth-producing assets' and take ownership over your own human capital - success is never secure, never stable. So-called 'progress' inculcates a sense of anxiety and instability as to how long the 'good times' will last (which makes you wonder exactly how 'good' those times really are).

Neoconservatism

The failure of Neoliberalism's claimed 'progress' to authoritatively manifest means that, for many people, it is inadequate to explain away the anxiety and immiseration of an accelerating world. In this case, this 'solution' to Brown's paradox – the neoliberal embrace of uncertainty as the pathway to greater wealth - is rejected. In response, we frequently see the opposite tactic emerge, namely a solution which tries to aggressively reassert the capacity of human intervention in the world via the political sphere.

The trouble with this strategy, of course, is that the sources of this insecurity – globalizing capitalism, colonialism and neoimperialism, the military-industrial complex – are both diffuse (and hence difficult to identify and target) and powerful (and hence difficult to effectively challenge). In these contexts, there is a tendency for this attempt to reassert control to be expressed through moralizing and reactionary political movements which target vulnerable constituencies that are taken as symbols of this new instability. Anti-immigration movements constitute one of the most obvious manifestations of this attempt to forcefully 'resolve' Brown's paradox. Let's look to just one case study of how this intersection between insecurity and reactionary politics can manifest, the *MV Sun Sea*.

In August of 2010, the *MV Sun Sea*, a ship carrying 497 Tamil refugees from Sri Lanka - fleeing the violent reprisals which Tamil populations have been subject to in the wake of the civil war (UNHCR 2010) - was captured and boarded by the Canadian Navy off the coast of Vancouver Island. The refugees were immediately detained. Most have now been released, and the courts are deciding whether to grant them permanent refugee status.

The initial response in Canada, however, was disturbing to say the least. Almost immediately upon news of the Sun Sea hitting the media, Prime Minister Stephen Harper and the ruling Conservative party began to fan the flames of fear. Canadian Daily *The Globe and Mail* reported that '[t]he Harper government said intelligence sources give it reason to believe the passengers include human traffickers and people linked to the Tamil Tigers terrorist group,' (Chase, Marten and Lindell

2010) this despite having little to no knowledge of who was actually on the boat (suspicions are that the intelligence source to whom Harper was deferring was the Sri Lankan government itself). Public Safety Minister Vic Toews claimed that that the Sun Sea was a 'test case', saying '[t]his particular situation is being observed by others who may have similar intentions and I think it's very important that Canada deals with the situation in a clear and decisive way.' (Ibid). All the while, Harper ominously intoned 'We are responsible for the security of our borders.' (Lablanc 2010) All of this served to effectively frame the case of the Tamil refugees not in terms of human rights, or social justice, but as a question of security. [3]

With the spectre of terrorists being smuggled into the country, and with hordes more apparently just over the horizon, a disturbing portion of Canadians embraced the government's fear-mongering. In an Angus Reid poll 'Fifty per cent of poll respondents want to deport the passengers and crew of the Tamil ship back to Sri Lanka, *even if their refugee claims are legitimate* [emphasis mine].' More broadly, '46 per cent of Canadians believe immigration is having a negative effect on the country, a five-point increase from [one year previous].' (Taber 2010) On the elite side of things a new right-wing think tank, *The Center for Immigration Policy Reform*, was launched, focusing on asserting 'moral contracts' with migrants. As Gilles Paquet, professor of governance at the University of Ottawa, and member of the centre's advisory board helpfully explained 'Canada is not a bingo hall. When you come to this country, I expect you to abide by a number of things.' (Ibbitson 2010) (This, I suppose, reassures those of us who were deeply concerned about the impending 'bingo-hall-ization' of Canada.)

Now, we might wish to dismiss this as a momentary xenophobic panic, whipped up in a fairly obvious bit of voter manipulation by desperate politicians. The Conservative party was, at the time, a minority government, having failed to win a majority in the previous two elections, and saw their poll numbers falling. We could therefore potentially write it off as a brief moment of cynical politicking by a right-wing party seeking to gin up controversy.

Unfortunately, there is a long history of this kind of panicked response to migrants and refugees

in Canada, happening in almost unnervingly similar ways, in seemingly regular cycles. Just a little over 10 years ago there was another public outcry over immigration, this time caused by the arrival of several boats of Chinese migrants, again off the coast of Vancouver Island. Their arrival again prompted sizeable protests and numerous denunciations in the press.[4]

These reoccurring uproars have to be put in the context of Canada's overall immigration situation. Canada has one of the highest per-capita immigration rates in the world - a rate which is rising. According to projections from Statistics Canada, by 2031 the Canadian population will be between 25% and 28% foreign born. Additionally, according to the report 'nearly one-half (46%) of Canadians aged 15 and over would be foreign-born, or would have at least one foreign-born parent.' (Statistics Canada 2010) As a result, between 29% and 32% of the Canadian population would be visible minorities, the first and second largest groups amongst which would be those of Chinese and South Asian descent.

These profound demographic shifts challenge easy and apparently stable images of what Canada, and Canadians, look like. In such contexts, attachments to supposedly cherished principles of 'multiculturalism' and 'diversity' run the risk of becoming weakened. Relatively progressive immigration and refugee policies might be an acceptable practice when one can guarantee that it will happen in a cultural context which is predominantly white, Christian, European and colonial. However, as white privilege in Canada becomes increasingly challenged, pluralism becomes much more of a gamble. Accelerating immigration unsettles established accounts of identity and puts pressure on stable narratives of identity and community.[5] Here we see once again the anxiety over an accelerating world. The perception of the loss of impermeable borders leaves people feeling adrift in a world of accelerating global flows. In such a context, there is a tendency to seek out authoritative narratives, ones which will hopefully re-affirm traditional borders and boundaries, securing both space and identity. Hence the seemingly widespread acceptance of the Conservative party's claims that these

migrants are 'terrorists and queue jumpers'. Such an account transforms the refugees into foreign others who can be legitimately excised from the moral and political space of the nation. This tactic re-inscribes the boundaries of identity and releases us from any responsibility for them, or sense of community with them.[6] Thus recently, the Conservative government has proposed a draconian overhaul of refugee and immigration policy in parliament. (Baluja 2012) Such reactionary movements must be understood in the context of global acceleration, and the desire to resist Brown's paradox through authoritative reimposition of political authority, even if only against the weakest and most vulnerable instantiations of this broad process.[7]

The story of the *MV Sun Sea* could be repeated *ad nauseaum*, both within Canada, and around the world. Anti-immigration movements, xenophobic panics and the scapegoating of migrants have become the norm. There are, of course, countless specific reasons that these movements pop up - particular histories of racism, nationalism, colonialism; particular economic, cultural, political, social and personal assemblages which allow these movements to gain ground. But in the contemporary world, at least one of the factors driving these reactionary movements is an increasing anxiety over acceleration, and a sense of insecurity that comes with the seeming dissolution of borders which provided stability for narratives of identity, morality, community, etc.[8]

What is more, anti-immigration movements are not the only manifestation of this fear and anxiety over acceleration. Everywhere in contemporary political culture, we see reactionary calls for 'security' and 'stability' in the face of acceleration. This frequently manifests itself as a move away from democratic deliberation and towards centralized authoritarian power. We have seen this in the rightward turn in Canadian politics over the last decade.

The current Conservative Party government's undemocratic policies and behaviour while in government have been well documented. Prime Minister Stephen Harper has been notorious for legislating through the Prime Minister's office, avoiding bringing key issues to a vote in parliament. The conservative party has muzzled government scientists, preventing them from discussing their work

with the media (Burgman 2012); attempted to control the flow of information to the press; used an unelected senate to - for the first time - veto legislations passed by the elected house of commons; and lied explicitly to parliament on numerous occasions. All of this lead to the Harper government being held in contempt of parliament, something that has never happened in the history of Canadian politics (indeed, something which has never happened in any commonwealth country ever).

For all this, in 2011, the Conservatives were rewarded with a majority government for the first time since 1993. This of course had to do with the unique institutional and regional composition of Canadian politics (indeed, it is worthwhile noting that they acquired the majority with only 40% of the popular vote). And obviously teasing out the specific roots of its electoral victory is the job of more knowledgeable specialists than I. However, the Conservative party, like many neoconservative movements, gained at least some success by preying on anxieties and insecurities over acceleration. I've discussed above the way in which they deployed xenophobic rhetoric regarding accelerating migrant flows as a way of garnering support. But this discourse had a broader resonance than just the this one issue. *The Globe and Mail*, the major national Canadian daily, in their endorsement of Harper and the Conservatives before the election, said '[o]nly Stephen Harper and the Conservative Party have shown the leadership, the bullheadedness (let's call it what it is) and the discipline this country needs.' What's curious is that the endorsement then goes on to criticize his anti-democratic behaviour saying

> Mr. Harper could achieve a great deal more if he would relax his grip on Parliament, its independent officers and the flow of information, and instead bring his disciplined approach to bear on the great challenges at hand. That is the great strike against the Conservatives: a disrespect for Parliament, the abuse of prorogation, the repeated attempts (including during this campaign) to stanch debate and free expression. (*The Globe and Mail,* 2011)

That last paragraph would seem like a damning indictment. And yet clearly it didn't stop *the Globe and Mail* from given Harper their endorsement. Indeed, given their appreciation for his 'bullheadedness', it's unclear what that could mean *other* than his willingness to ignore traditional constraints and democratic checks. Regardless, the tone of the Globe's endorsement (and the *Globe* is by no means the most conservative of Canadian national papers) is clear: democracy is good, but in a time of uncertainty, it is

more important that we have 'leadership' and 'discipline'. Thus, where the neoliberal approach seeks to 'wish' Brown's Paradox out of existence, the neoconservative approach seeks to force it out through sheer 'bullheadedness'.

Ressentiment against speed

In *The Politics of Speed*, Simon Glezos argues that this willingness to hand over authority to a centralized executives and reject democratic consultation is not due to the technical challenge of speed (Anymore than the panic over the *MV Sun Sea* had anything to do with any actual problems with the immigration system in Canada, the 500 Tamil refugees constituting a drop in the bucket of Canada's 250,000 annual new permanent residents), but rather its existential challenge. (31) This is to say that, in times of acceleration, people fear democratic consultation, and crave authoritative renderings because of the way in which stable identities and narratives come under threat.[9] This reactionary mindset is, he argues, rooted in a phenomenon I call *ressentiment* against speed. *Ressentiment* against speed is a kind of crystallized cultural dynamic which craves a stability and a certainty which the world is incapable of providing. This disappointment becomes activated as a drive for revenge - against the world which is viewed as the source of instability; against scapegoats who are identified with this instability; and ultimately against ourselves, through calls for authoritarian governance to control us. In this paper I wish to make a more thorough study of this concept of a *ressentiment* against speed, uncovering its specifically Nietzschean roots, which aren't extensively in the original text. This investigation is important, because I think that a *ressentiment* against speed is, in fact, one of the central components of Brown's Paradox. To understand this, we must understand Nietzsche's philosophy of *ressentiment* in greater detail.

Ressentiment cannot be confused with resentment. Resentment, a sense of anger over pain or injury we may have suffered (of whatever sort), is a natural response, as is the attempt to challenge or overturn the sources of these pains or injuries.[10] Nietzsche does not council a kind of aescetic rejection

of judgement, simply accepting everything as it comes (in which case, we would become, in his words, the ass which can only bray 'Yeah-yuh'[Nietzsche, 1976: 424]), nor is he arguing for a christian 'turning of the other cheek'. Being angry, resentful, unhappy, etc. are all perfectly acceptable to Nietzsche so long – and this is crucial – as they serve as a spur to action. So long as your resentment or anger become a vector for action, for productive intervention in the world, then they have the potential to be good or noble.

The trouble with *ressentiment* is that, counter to resentment, it does not act as a spur to action. Quite the contrary. *Ressentiment* is resentment crystallized and spiritualized, and thus focused not on any particular agent or actor, but rather simply on the world as a whole. *Ressentiment* expresses itself as a generalized resentment against a world that allows pain and suffering to occur. It frequently manifests as a rejection of the world, and the imagining of a world of perfection in opposition to this imperfect world (indeed, the very language of 'imperfect'...) . Nietzsche makes clear how this drive to idealization is linked to *ressentiment* and the spirit of revenge. 'To talk about 'another' world than this is quite pointless...we *revenge* ourselves on life by means of the phantasmagoria of 'another,' a 'better' life.'(1968: 49) This link between idealization and revenge are displayed quite strongly, Nietzsche says, in many of the major works of metaphysics in the wester canon.

> Psychology of Metaphysics – This world is apparent: consequently there is a true world; - this world is conditional; consequently there is an unconditioned world; - this world is full of contradiction: consequently there is a world free of contradiction; - this world is a world of becoming: consequently there is a world of being: - all false conclusions.... It is suffering that inspires these conclusions: fundamentally they are desires that such a world should exist; in the same way, to imagine another, more valuable world is an expression of hatred for a world that makes one suffer: the *ressentiment* of metaphysicians against actuality is here creative. (1968a: 310-311)

'It is suffering that inspires these conclusions' and *ressentiment* is 'expression of hatred for a world that makes one suffer'. This is the danger of *ressentiment* and how it differs from resentment. Resentment is a part of living in the world for Nietzsche, a world which produces suffering and which therefore must be responded to. But *ressentiment* takes one out of the world. It orients one's actions to other worlds,

worlds which don't exist.

In the context of a discussion of an accelerating world, *ressentiment* against speed manifests as an existential resentment over the refusal of the world to provide one with the stability - either in time or in space - that one craves. In response, we construct idealized spaces and times, located either in the nostalgia of the past, or in an eschatological future. Nietzsche discusses idealist philosophy and religious cosmologies, but we can just as easily see these drives expressed in political narratives of 'golden ages' or 'the good old days' or 'cities on the hill' or 'the end of history'. These space/times become refuges, defences, and weapons against an uncertain world of flow and becoming. Just as to live in the world is to suffer, to live in time is to be subject to contingency, and to live in space is to see that space always invade, reshaped, and de/reterritorialized. To wish otherwise is to close one's eyes and stop up one's ears, to refuse to intervene in the world as it is. This is exactly what *ressentiment* against speed produces.

Nietzsche's discussion of the philosopher's disdain for the 'world of becoming' shows how *ressentiment* is always already a *ressentiment* against speed.

> All that philosophers have handled for millennia has been conceptual mummies; nothing actual has escaped from their hands alive. They kill, they stuff, when they worship, these conceptual idolaters – they become a mortal danger to everything when they worship. Death, change, age, as well as procreation and growth, are for them objections – refutations even. What is, does not *become*; what becomes, *is* not .... (1968: 45)

This quote bring out another important elements of Nietzsche's thinking. Looking at Nietzsche's critique of idealism, we might begin to take him for a kind of vulgar realist, criticizing flights of philosophical fancy. This is to misunderstand the complexity of Nietzsche's conception of the world of becoming. Nietzsche never takes what the 'world' *is* for granted and, with his focus on creativity, even were 'one' to know what the 'world' *is*, the world – and 'one' – would almost certainly change immediately. But that is exactly the point. Nietzsche affirms that the world is a world of change, of becoming, of uncertainty, of contingency (and therefore necessarily of suffering and disappointment). This is the world that we live in, and the world we must act in.

Ressentiment and political action

This is the greatest danger of *ressentiment* from a Nietzschean perspective. Unlike that active power which a sense of resentment can potentially inculcate, *ressentiment* functions as a *reactive* power. Deleuze, in his analysis of Nietzsche, develops an important insight when he says that reactive powers are those which 'decompose, they *separate active force from what it can do*; they take away a part or almost all of its power. In this way reactive forces do not become active but, on the contrary, they make active forces join them and become reactive in a new sense.' (57) By orienting us towards idealized space/times, and rejecting intervention in 'this world', *Ressentiment* thus separates us from our power, from what we can do. This is the crucial point which brings us back to Brown's Paradox, with it's description of a state of affairs where we seem to have so much power at our fingertips, and yet seem able to do so little with it.

Note, the fact that *ressentiment* separates us from what we can do does not mean that we stop doing things. Indeed, quite the opposite. When under the sway of *ressentiment* we are just as prone to take action in the world. This is because in *ressentiment* we have judged the world and found it wanting. We find this world of becoming and speed to be a world of evil and suffering. This is why *ressentiment* also manifests as a spirit of revenge. We feel that the world has punished us and we wish to punish it back, and this frequently means seeking to punish those who are viewed as agents or avatars of that evil.

Once again, this is different than the active behaviour that might be undertaken in response to resentment. There the idea is to stop those who injure us, or overcome those things or people who block our way. It is never just the reactive desire for revenge, but always the active desire to achieve some goal, to further our plans, to assert our values. The reactive movement of *ressentiment* manifests as revenge. It is thus premised upon a moral judgement, and is itself a moralizing move (I.e. One acts primarily to punish an evil rather than achieve an end). Indeed, it is this ability to moralize suffering, to assign blame, that is so useful to the agent of *ressentiment*. Nietzsche explains the difference between

resentment and *ressentiment* quite well in the passage below.

> In my judgement, we find here the actual physiological causation of *ressentiment*, revenge and their ilk, in a yearning, then, to *anaesthetize pain through emotion*: - people generally look for the same thing, wrongly in my view, in the defensive return of a blow, a purely protective reaction, a 'reflex movement' in the case of any sudden injury or peril, such as that performed even by a headless frog to ward off corrosive acid. But the difference is fundamental: in the one case the attempt is made to prevent harm being done, in the other case, the attempt is made to *anaethetize* a tormenting, secret pain that is becoming unbearable with a more violent emotion of any sort, and at least rid the consciousness of it for a moment – for this, one needs an emotion, the wildest possible emotion and, in order to arouse it, the first available pretext. 'Someone or other must be to blame that I feel ill' ... (1997: 93)

This desire to seek out somebody to blame is the pattern we see time and again in the reactionary politics of *ressentiment*. It is what we saw above in the case of the *MV Sun Sea*, and in other anti-immigration movements like it. The attempt to identify and blame particular actors as representative of what are broader movements and social forces. To return to Wendy Brown's analysis

> If, as Nietzsche recognized, impotent rage inevitably yields a moralizing (re)action, how might we succeed in rereading contemporary political life through this recognition? Might it help us understand, for example, the contemporary tendency to personify oppression in the figure of individuals and to reify it in particular acts and utterances, the tendency to render individuals and acts intensely culpable – indeed prosecutable – for history and for social relations?(2001: 21-22)

And what is more, we tend to personify that oppression in the weakest, most vulnerable constituencies, themselves caught up in the same history and social relations as their attackers. This is because, having separated active force from what it can do, the politics of *ressentiment* naturally takes as its enemies those who are weakest, those who are most easily targeted and punished. In relation to these nationalist and xenophobic movements, it is instructive that, for Nietzsche, one of the most important contemporaneous examples of the politics of *ressentiment* was the anti-semite.[11]

But these moralizing expressions of revenge and punishment, and the feeling of power which comes along with it, does not actually lead to the empowerment of the individual of *ressentiment*. This is because the standards that it sets can never be achieved. A mindset overcome by *ressentiment* says that only a world free of suffering, of uncertainty, of insecurity, is of any value. One does not want less pain, but no pain. Not less insecurity, but no insecurity. Thus no matter what is done, it will always fall

short of this goalpost. Actual positive change which might improve their lot, or increase their power, is eschewed because it will never provide them with ideal world they crave. Better to engage in moralizing punishment which does nothing to solve their pain, but, as Nietzsche says, at least anaesthetizes them somewhat, gives them a feeling of moral superiority which will keep them going, at least for awhile longer .[12]

What is more, this craving for certainty, for stability, and most importantly, for moral superiority makes these sufferers of *ressentiment* easy prey for those who wish to exploit them and gain their support. Nietzsche discussed this in terms of 'the Priests', but in our days, in democratic countries, it is more useful to speak of the politician of *ressentiment*, the politician who doesn't just respond to the anxiety and fear of their public, but actively cultivates it. As Nietzsche describes it

> He brings ointments and balms with him, of course; but first he has to wound so that he can be the doctor' and whilst he soothes the pain caused by the wound, *he poisons the wound at the same time* – for that is what he is best trained to do, this magician and tamer of beasts of prey, whose mere presence necessarily makes everything healthy, sick, and everything sick, tame. (1997: 93)

The politician of *ressentiment* provides ever more targets and scapegoats for moralizing punishment, knowing that it will never actually solve the problems of their constituency (my god, if it did, where would they be then?). Indeed, it is not at all coincidental that neoconservative politicians of *ressentiment* frequently institute neoliberal policies, making the conditions of insecurity and acceleration which give rise to the *ressentiment* against speed even more prevalent.[13]

The politician of *ressentiment* relies on, and exploits, their constituency's craving for certainty and stability, by presenting him or herself as the potential source of the authority that will usher in this other world. The politician of *ressentiment* presents themselves to their constituency as "their support, defence, prop, compulsion, disciplinarian, tyrant, God". (92) People feel themselves incapable of bringing into being the world of security they desire, and therefore become willing to submit to anyone who claims that possibility. How else to explain the *Globe and Mail* endorsement which simultaneously decries the 'anti-democratic' behaviour of the Conservative party, while craving the

'discipline, leadership and bullheadedness' that they bring to government? In this regards we see the final stage of *ressentiment*, and the final ascendancy of 'The Priests', of the politician of *ressentiment*

> 'I suffer: someone or other must be guilty' – and every sick sheep thinks the same. But his shepherd the aesthetic priest, says to him, 'Quite right, my sheep! Somebody must be to blame: but you yourself are this somebody, you yourself alone are to blame for it, *you yourself alone are to blame for yourself*'... (94)

When we authorize increasingly centralized and authoritarian governments, when we do not jealously guard our civil liberties and democratic right, what are we saying, other than that we accept that *we* are the problem with politics, that we ourselves are to blame? Give us, then, a 'leader' who will provide us with the security we crave.

Once again, *ressentiment* as that which separates an active force from what it can do, as that which separates people and communities from their power. And this is the irony of the *ressentiment* against speed. As people feel impotent in the face of acceleration, they become more willing to give up what power they do have to increasingly authoritarian structures or, when they do express their power, do so by attacking the weakest elements of the systems they oppose, usually in ways which actually shore up the systems they are supposed to be opposing.

And, it should be noted, this desire for stability is not just something that shows up on the conservative right. *Ressentiment* against speed can manifest wherever there is the desire to secure the physical and discursive boundaries of specific spaces or communities, or protect key narratives of time from contingency and uncertainty. For example, we frequently see echoes of *ressentiment* in certain strands of leftist democratic thought which valourizes the small city-states of Ancient Greece, revelling in the sense of individual autonomy and mastery citizens could exercise in those contexts (all the while ignoring the constitutive role which slavery, patriarchy and xenophobia played in making such contexts possible). And in saying this, I am not devalorizing localist drives, or participatory democracy. These would be useful practices and techniques, and we would be well served by their proliferation. What I am concerned about is the way in which such drives can be affectively linked to, and fed by, desires for

spaces of mastery, spaces which bend themselves to human will. Such desires are ripe for *ressentiment,*

and make us ill-equipped to deal with genuinely democratic spaces and with the accelerating world that

any contemporary democracy will have to deal with. From wishing that our big messy globe were the

small, neat Greek city state, it is only a hop, skip, and a jump to the wish that the messy public *agora*

would shrink to a king's throne room.

We also see this in certain strands of marxist or radical thought, which base themselves on a

firm grounding of historical projection. When these teleological projections are called into question,

challenged by the contingencies of a world of becoming, such thinkers are just as subject to the affects

of *ressentiment* as anyone. Brown, again, provides an excellent examination of this phenomenon in

Politics Without History, stating

> Similarly, most radical and reformist actors remain wedded to progress, even when its
> credibility is in question, because they imagine all political hope to be invested in a progressive
> narrative. "Without a notion of progress," my students invariably lament, "what is the point of
> working for a better world?"(13-14) [14]

and going on to state

> Just as leftists are not free of attachment to total critique and total transformation, so liberals are
> not free of attachment to ontological and political universalism and hence to assimilationist
> politics. Neither leftists nor liberals are free of the idea of progress in history. (21)

The craving for certainty and stability knows no ideology. And hence a *ressentiment* against speed can

manifest almost anywhere. Indeed, the threat of *ressentiment* might simply be part of the human

condition, since we all find ourselves in world of becoming, which means we are always in a world of

uncertainty and suffering (although it should be mentioned also a world of joy, love, wonderment, etc.).

Any political theory, of whatever stripe, of whatever ideology, which wishes to engage ethically with

'this world', must take seriously the challenge of *ressentiment.*

Living with/in Brown's Paradox

The result of this analysis is that we find both attempts to 'solve' Brown's paradox unsatisfying. The

neoliberal approach of embracing the uncertainty and instability of this accelerating world as progress

requires us to ignore the violence and exploitation which goes along with it, and pretend that this 'progress' is evenly distributed. Furthermore, it dismisses our very real desires for stability and security in our lives - and livelihoods - as somehow quaint, or even childish. We see how the frequent neoliberal complaint that 'government cannot provide for everything' borrows the tropes of parenting, making the dissatisfied citizen into nothing more than a peevish toddler, rather than a stakeholder in a social contract with a legitimate grievance. Any response to Brown's paradox will require that we acknowledge the very real inequality and violence that are currently part of our accelerating world, and the impotence that most people feel in the face of it. It must also therefore have some sort of program for empowering people, for challenging these inequalities and violences, for providing people with genuine opportunities, rather than the neoliberal offer of 'owning' one's own subjugation.

And yet, at the same time as we try to empower people, we must be sure that our desire for stability and security, our desire to oppose the uncertainty of an accelerating world, doesn't manifest itself as a *ressentiment* against speed. Some measure of uncertainty and instability in the world is ineradicable. Our teleological projections will always be disturbed by irruptions of radical futurity, and the borders we try to police will always be criss-crossed by deterritorialized lines of flight. What is more, these contingencies are not necessarily bad things. First of all, they open us up to new experiences, new possibilities, new worlds. Brown wasn't lying when she said that we now live in "a global order more saturated by human power than ever before." We must be careful how we think about, and use that power, but we cannot just ignore it or give it up lightly. Indeed, in terms of achieving our first goal, a willingness to interact constructively with the powers and opportunities our accelerating world provides us with will be crucial. Second, and more importantly, genuinely slow worlds, worlds with firm borders and thoroughly policed lines of time, usually require deep authoritarian power to maintain those borders and narratives. Indeed, it is exactly in the *ressentiment* of speed that the reactionary call for control is invoked; in the attempt to extinguish the novel, the unexpected, the different, the other. Our response to Brown's paradox must, therefore, be careful not to

turn stability and control into a fetish, to acknowledge the intractability – and also the benefits and pleasures – of a world of contingency, a world of becoming, a world of acceleration.

We must therefore begin to cultivate a third way, a response which does not so much try to resolve Brown's paradox, as re-inflect. Such an approach would seek to embrace the power and opportunities which an accelerating world provides, using them to resist the exploitation and violence inherent in the contemporary world. However, at the same time as it sought some amount of security for individuals, it would be willing to accept that a certain amount of contingency and instability in the world is ineradicable. It would ensure that this desire for stability didn't manifest as a reactionary drive for the exclusion and erasure of difference, nor through a totalitarian drive for complete mastery over contingency. It would thus be a politics that attempted to express itself as, in Nietzsche's words, an 'active force', which is to say a force which expresses itself, which builds a world to its specifications, but does so with an understanding, and even affirmation, of the limitations of life in 'this world'. Such a politics therefore would rigorously have to root out the sense of *ressentiment* against speed, and become comfortable with living, organizing, and taking action, in an accelerating world of becoming. [15]

Endnotes

1. In doing so, this paper will contribute to a growing body of scholarship which focuses on speed in global politics, which includes such works as (Rosa 2003), (Scheuerman 2004), (Tomlinson 2007), (Mackenzie 2002) and (Glezos 2011).

2. For just one example, see (Bhagwati 2004).

3. For a discussion of the securitization of migrants and refugees in the European context, see (Huysmans 1995)

4. For an excellent discussion of this incident, as well as prior incidents of the naval interception of maritime refugees in Canada, see (Watson 2009: Ch. 3). For a broader discussion of the way that maritime refugees constitute particular challenges to, and opportunities for, state authority is discussed in (Budz 2009)

5. It should be noted that the effect of these demographic shifts are only intensified by Canada's status as a settler nation which has never properly dealt - politically, ethically or psychologically – with indigenous peoples and its colonial past and present. In recent years, settler society has becoming increasingly unable to continue its traditional approach of ignoring First Nations demands for justice and self-determination, through a combination of increasingly successful legal challenges, political activism, and demographic growth which, in many ways, mirrors that of immigrant populations.

6. For further discussion of this political exclusion of the refugee, see (Nyers 2003), (Dillon 1999) and (Edkins and Pin-Fat 2005).

7. Budz provides a strong account of the way in which the punishment of these archetypally mobile actors serves shore up the reinforce the apparent solidity and stability of the state. "The shifting justifications, as well as the necessary, if minimal, compromises made by government actors in the management of these maritime incidents work to produce the impression of an effective social ordering, in which people are correctly categorized and managed, where borders are impermeable, society is safe and the state is sovereign. Each new ship represents a potentially valuable opportunity to perform the ordering process and symbolize the strength of the state." p. 21

8. For a discussion of the increasingly complex legal, political and governmental assemblages which organize borders in an era of ubiquitous mobility, see (Salter 2007).

9. Again, to return to Huysmans' account of migration in Europe he states "The European context is therefore relatively highly unstable, and this leads to an urge for stabilizing strategies. The securitization of certain problems is one among these strategies, and migration seems to be one of its favourite targets." (63)

10. For an excellent discussion of the distinction between 'resentment' and '*ressentiment*' see (Connolly, 1995: 213-214)

11. "A word in the ear of the psychologists, assuming they are inclined to study *ressentiment* close up for once: this plant thrives best amongst anarchists and anti-Semites today, so it flowers like it always has done, in secret, like a violet but with a different scent." (Nietzsche, 1997: 48)

12. We can see this moralizing drive for punishment over results in countless aspects of contemporary politics from the 'War on Terror' to the 'War on Drugs' to mandatory sentencing laws to the drive for abstinence only education to the criminalization of poverty. For a discussion of this drive to revenge in the "War on Terror" see (Butler 2006). For a discussion of it in relation to criminal justice, see (Connolly 1995).

13. For further discussion of this 'neo-neo' synthesis, see (Steger 2005: 96), (Harvey 2006: 61) and (Brown 2006). What is more, though it is somewhat beyond the scope of this article, if we press on this line of thought a little harder, we can see the way in which neoliberalism itself carries the marks of a *ressentiment* against speed. With its eschatological faith in progress, neoliberalism just as much seeks refuge from the suffering and uncertainty of the world of becoming. Only in this case, the idealized space/time it constructs is not in the nostalgic past, but in the future, in the coming salvation of the perfectly free market. (For further discussions of the *ressentiment* laden character of neoliberalism, or, at the very least, of the resonance between neoliberalism and *ressentiment* driven fundamentalisms, see [Connolly, 2008]).

14. Brown also discusses this phenomenon in (1999)

15. For a discussion of the contributions which Nietzsche can make to IR theory, see (Saurette 1996)

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