P N Y X

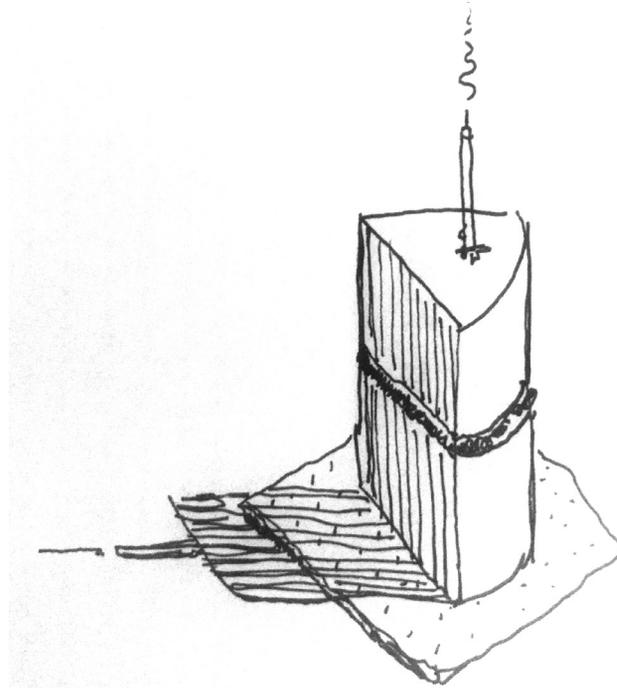## WEEKLY   COMMENTARY,   RESEARCH,   AND   REVIEW

WAITING FOR GATEAU

ON 29 MARCH, 2019 by automatic operation of law the UK will exit the European Union. Nothing about this operation requires a 'deal' between the UK and the European Union, no bureaucratic cushion to ease the effects of the UK's departure. If the two parties cannot arrange one, the possibility of which is entirely likely, it will not happen. Architectural students who began the year studying in a member state of the EU will find themselves finishing in one that is not.

Champions of a hardcore libertarian Brexit are cheering this no-deal exit; others believe an eleventh-hour deal will be done –the alternative being unthinkable–as has characterised other EU treaty agreements in the past. Whatever shape this deal takes however, if it happens at all, it will leave the UK sidelined and hobbled, its draw for Europe's young and creative diminished, the effects of the 2010 Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition's austerity program amplified for the country's poorest.

There is a small number of avenues by which Brexit could be avoided or delayed indefinitely, but only one–a kind of second referendum which for obvious reasons is being branded a People's Vote–has any kind of a chance of success. Even then, time is stacked against it and it risks bolstering the right's narrative that a 'Remain continuity' is endeavouring to corrupt the Brexit process. The People's Vote offers democratic clarification on the final deal the Government negotiates with the EU, offering a corrective to the destructive simplicity to which the question of the UK's membership of the EU was reduced in the first referendum. But whether the people will be asked to think again–or indeed if they want to be asked again–remains to be seen. Eighteen months later, this will be our only chance to shut down the operation of Brexit.

Emblematic of how the entire process of Brexit has emboldened the far right was the Tories' whipping of their 19 MEPs to vote against Article 7 proceedings against Budapest last week. The measures, which barely passed in the European Parliament, include a formal warning and eventually the revoking of Hungary's voting rights, and come in reaction to Viktor Orbán's ongoing authoritarian behaviour, such as the violation of press freedoms, state-led antisemitism, and the dismantling of the judiciary. In resisting action against Orbán, the Tory MEPs were joined by Poland's Law and Justice Party, France's *Rassemblement national* (formerly the National Front), Sweden Democrats, Italy's *Lega*, Austria's *Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs*, and UKIP, each bastions of xenophobic rightist populism. The Tory's justification for doing so can only be the support they need from Orbán–stalwart champion of Brexit as he is–as Brexit proceedings start to come down to the wire. Wittingly or not, they are sponsoring a virulent populism that threatens the fabric of the supranational EU.

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GERMANY HAS BEEN SHAKEN by far right riots in the town of Chemnitz (home incidentally to one of Erich Mendelsohns greatest retail buildings), a response to the murder of a local man allegedly by refugees. During the riots neo-Nazis and far right rioters engaged in violence and intimidation; one saw prominent members of Pegida and the *Alternative für Deutschland* marching alongside more bourgeois elements. In one of the more vulgar developments of the *Schwienemarsch*, white roses, historically the symbol of a group of anti-Nazi students and professors who were all savagely executed by the regime (some even beheaded), were appropriated by the right.

Its reputation of stability tarnished by electoral upset and the difficulties of coalition forming, Germany is cracking under the pressure of populist movements, but in 2018, among many central European member states, this is sadly par for the course. In Italy, general elections in May brought to power a right-wing coalition

between the 5 Star Movement (M5S) and *Lega*, with M5S's Giuseppe Conte Prime Minister and *Lega's* Matteo Salvini Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior.

Salvini and his party, Italy's foremost 'Little Mussolini' impersonators, have given speeches that echo those from the country's fascist past, but their racism and nationalism go far beyond mere rhetoric. Despite the migrant crisis ostensibly having ended (numbers being drastically down from 2015), the country has shut its ports to migrant ships still plying desperate courses across the Mediterranean, condemning hundreds to drowning. As has always been the case, actions like these have been given currency by fables spun by charlatans to (more or less) dormantly xenophobic and ignorant populaces, in a perverse farce of a democratic social contract. Flush with electoral victory, the right across the EU have been either implicitly or directly sponsoring humanitarians crises, from the coast of the Mediterranean to the refugee camps of Austria, in attempts to appease the ultimately unfounded but politically powerful fears of their constituencies.

This continent, once the epicentre of war, genocide and strife, has now in the age of infinitely available information and material abundance sought collectively to harm, humiliate and scapegoat those least able to fight back; those who have been a forced to leave their homes by war. The European Union itself shares this blame. Just as Germany's formerly separate east has never subscribed to the Christian Democratic ordo-liberalism of Chancellor Angela Merkel and her party, so too have many Eurosceptic movements never accepted the liberal federalist trajectory of the EU. So long as the union continues to fail to properly counter rightist narratives (as well as notable, misguided populist critiques such as those by certain factions of the UK's Labour), its covalent missions will fail.

Whatever its eventual shape, long after the UK departs, Brexit will remain emblematic of this dynamic. The triggering of Article 7, while small, is a good start in asserting the checks and balances that should characterise a strong union. But the solutions to rightist populism can never be solely technocratic, nor will it be met by lumbering, internally-riven efforts such the Remain coalition of 2016.

How should architects, designers, and artists position themselves in this context? The political future of Europe is deeply uncertain; the shifts in its landscape are outpacing the glacial timeframe of architecture. Yet ours is a profession with a particular capacity to think ahead, to project, to argue, to suspend disbelief–in short to imagine, represent and re-represent other paths. This is our challenge as students and practioners–not to embrace the insularity of our institutions but to confront our wider contexts head-on.–EDS

WHAT THE FUCK JUST HAPPENED? AN INTRODUCTION TO CONTEMPORARY SWEDISH POLITICS

Marcelo Rovira Torres

IN THE WAKE of this year's election, Sweden finds itself in the most serious political crisis of its recent history. The hitherto established political dynamic of two opposing coalitions–one comprising the conservative and economically liberal parties and the other the environmental and social democratic parties–has been dismantled by a third actor: the nationalist-populist Sweden Democrats (SD), who have managed to more than triple their support in less than a decade (from 5.7% in 2010 to 12.9% in 2014 and finally 17.5% this year). With their success, the far right has bulldozed its way into public discourse.

The SD were founded in 1988 by members with a long history of Nazism and neo-Nazism (one founding member fought in the *Waffen-SS* in WWII for the unification of the *Drittes Reich*). At its beginning the party was composed of a mixture of older committed Nazis and younger skinheads, who did not hesitate to use violence and fear as political instruments. The Nazi salute was a common sight at their public rallies well into 1994, the year in which the present party leader Jimmie Åkesson joined the party. But they have since sought to present the party as a viable, legitimate political alternative, attempting to do away with their coarser Nazi image, looking to appeal to voters who identify as neither right-wing nor left-wing, and concentrating on the simple message that immigration poses a substantial threat to the existence of the Swedish nation-state.

Historically speaking, Swedish political discourse has been dominated by one particular ideology–social democracy–in which collective and individual interests were synthesised in the construction of the modern nation-state of Sweden. This project has been all-encompassing, with architecture, education, and healthcare each understood as equally critical parts in its establishment. It not only helped the Social Democratic Party itself to establish political dominance in the 20th century but gave workers across industries agency in the construction of their country.

In the early 1990s the country suffered an economic crisis stemming from an unregulated bond market, which spiked speculation in real estate. The crisis eventually precipitated the end of twelve years of Social Democratic leadership, with a right-wing coalition taking control and helping to establish the coalition dynamic in place until now. But when the Social-Democrats regained power in 1994 little effort was made to reverse the neoliberal policies of the right–rather, they were were continued and to some extent endorsed by the returning leftists. The long term result of this permanent, rightward shift has been a major increase in wealth disparity, which this year reached its highest peak in modern history, as well as the selling off of state-owned assets and the privatisation of the commons.

In this fraught context the SD have developed their base, playing up the role of political outcast, polarising discourse in their favour, and for which they have been rewarded electoral victory. They have seized upon growing economic inequality and the collapse of the welfare state as arguments for the need for an 'ethnically pure' country. Ultimately it is immigrants who will pay for the failure of a neoliberal experiment and the abdication of duty by Sweden's political orthodoxy. Only this time the payment will not be made in cash but in flesh and blood.

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All images by PNYX.