

EDGERTON'S BRITAIN

The *Rise and Fall of the British Nation*, by David Edgerton, which appeared three years ago, met with well-deserved success. In the extensive literature on the subjects with which it deals, the book delivers a stand-out synthesis of trenchant ideas and arguments. Coming from a historian whose professional interests have been principally economic and technological, its range is remarkable: covering not just industrial, but political, military and cultural matters with confidence and fluency. Characteristically, all these are enlivened by an excellent eye for detail. The book is filled with striking local facts and figures, recounted in a lively, vigorous prose.

Attractive too is the iconoclastic bent of Edgerton's writing, a general impatience with what he takes to be conventions of one kind or another. The leading pay-off of this temperament is a remarkable demystification of the history of British welfare systems. Beginning with a demonstration of the contrast between Lloyd George's reforms before the First World War and the bonanza enjoyed by rentier holders of the National Debt afterwards, the book proceeds to the striking difference between inter-war Conservative expenditures on welfare and defence, and Labour outlays on these after the Second World War, which reversed their emphasis, Attlee by comparison spending much more on weapons and less on social services than Chamberlain; exposes the meanness of the much-touted Beveridge Plan of war-time vintage; and ends with the 'minimal generosity' of New Labour, refusing to restore earnings-related pensions that Thatcher had cut. Intellectually, the reader encounters a writer who is cheerful, equable and original; politically, one for whom the world of the far left holds few mysteries, and arouses no phobias.

Against the very considerable merits of the book must, nevertheless, be set a number of limitations and inconsistencies. Telegraphically put, the

first of these is a want of conceptualization. Historians rarely take much interest, or feel at home, in conceptual questions—the vast majority are theory-naïve or theory-averse. But if they are otherwise skilled at their trade, this usually doesn't matter overmuch. In the case of *The Rise and Fall of the British Nation*, on the other hand, it does matter, since the organizing burden of the book is that no such thing as a 'British nation' ever really existed in what was a liberal, cosmopolitan empire before the Second World War, yet which arose after 1945 as a 'new nation' comparable to those emerging out of decolonization, before being in turn extinguished in the eighties under Thatcher. In developing this ambitious construction, however, Edgerton never stops to explain what he means by a nation, despite the abundant literature on this question. Amidst this consistent avoidance of conceptual reflection, conspicuous is the way the premier theorist of the issue in the UK is treated.

Tom Nairn is cited fifteen times in the book—I would guess, although I haven't made an exhaustive count, more often than any other single authority to which it refers (there are a further dozen or so references to texts in NLR, ULR or *The New Reasoner*). Yet at no point does Edgerton show much sign of having understood or engaged with Nairn's work as such, as opposed to picking passages to suit him from *The Left against Europe* and *The Enchanted Glass*, and (once) 'The Nature of the Labour Party'. *The Break-Up of Britain* is ignored entirely. One might even say: it has to be, since it is so much at variance with Edgerton's strained alternative. For Nairn, the Anglo-British state came into being in the late seventeenth century in a society that would see the first agrarian, then industrial capitalism in the world, in the process acquiring the largest empire on earth. That huge early developmental success meant that it was never forced to pass through the gateway to modernity in the nineteenth century that was the normal experience of every other advanced capitalist society, the emergence of a powerful nationalism—remaining instead a composite *ancien régime* yoking England, Scotland and Ireland together in a monarchy that was constitutional rather than absolutist, imperial rather than territorial.

In so far as this structure generated any equivalent of a modern nationalism, it was never just 'British' since the state on which it was based was not 'Britain' but *Great Britain*. The fact that Edgerton only intermittently alludes to this standard, official and popular, term for the country

speaks volumes. There was never at any stage a purified ‘British-only’ nation, detached from its imperial cast, as Edgerton’s own account of post-war Labour makes only too clear. The structure of the Ukanian state precluded one.

A second limitation of the book lies in the absence of comparison that is a mark of the work. The mental world of *Rise and Fall* is essentially self-contained, a universe in which no other advanced country, apart from—very passingly—the United States, features in either the narrative or the analysis of the book, whose bibliography is entirely monoglot. The premise of the book is that ‘the success or otherwise of British capitalism was the central issue of British politics through the century’.¹ But at no point is any sustained attempt made to measure this success or failure in the only terms that, of necessity, matter in a capitalist world economy—its performance compared with that of its competitors. The work is full of economic statistics, most of them interesting, many striking. But nowhere is to be found, in over 500 pages, a single table of comparative inter-country performance.

Another index of this blankness is the absence in *Rise and Fall*, otherwise so impressively broad in its domestic range, of foreign policy. Security, as it would now euphemistically be called, features graphically—the military record of Ukania’s relation to the outside world. But of its diplomatic history there is little or nothing. This resulting gap in Edgerton’s narrative means that he cannot say anything meaningful about Ukania’s relation to Europe—why exactly it entered the Common Market; how far it benefited from doing so; what the evolving structure of European integration meant for the British political order once inside it; why there was such strong resistance to Europe in the Labour Party in the seventies and early eighties, and then in the Conservative Party in the nineties and onwards; or why this should initially have been thwarted and finally have prevailed. Though plainly central to any discussion of a British nation or nationalism, in this work Europe seems to lie beyond Edgerton’s ken. Two examples may serve as illustration. Revealingly, in his solitary appearance in the book, De Gaulle is represented as vetoing British entry essentially as contrary to the interests of French farmers, with no mention of his geo-political concerns at the potential role of the United States

¹ *The Rise and Fall of the British Nation*, London 2018, p. xxiv; henceforth RFBN.

behind it.² Surprisingly, too, Edgerton can write that after Maastricht, ‘trade within the European Union was as free as it was previously within national economies’,³ whereas in fact there is no single market in services, which account for three-quarters of the Eurozone’s GDP.

Thirdly, and more paradoxically, the book seems to lack a stable political mooring. Edgerton regards himself, and in many ways certainly is, a radical historian. But here this is a somewhat anchorless radicalism, floating in different directions across the periods and claims of *Rise and Fall*, whose outcome more than once issues into what, to all appearances, is a bizarre intellectual and political incoherence. Some of the background assumptions of the book are completely conventional. British entry into the First World War is accepted without compunction as necessary to protect the homeland from German aggression, as if the conflict were not self-evidently a contest between rival imperialisms, and one that on any rational calculus did not require British participation. Likewise, the Cold War is taken for granted as a struggle in which British alliance with the United States was perfectly reasonable, even if leading at times to excesses of zeal. Since neither is foregrounded—each inconspicuously supplying as it were a neutral framework in which the story unfolds—these elements of conventional wisdom might be overlooked. Matters are otherwise with the central contention of the book, and its corollaries.

Declinism upturned

What are these? The overall arc of its argument is an inversion of the case it seeks to replace. Edgerton’s *bête noire* is ‘declinism’—namely, the idea that from Edwardian times British capitalism was suffering a long-term slippage downwards, which after seventy years yielded such acute economic and political crisis that finally a drastic cure for it came from a ‘revivalism’ of the right in the shape of Thatcherism, which returned it to health by restoring business confidence and labour discipline: under a strong government supposedly unleashing entrepreneurial initiative and market dynamism, the UK then became the envy of other capitalist regimes around the world. The truth was rather, Edgerton contends, just the opposite. In the twentieth century, not only did the British empire,

² RFBN, pp. 270–71. For an earlier reflection on the book, see John Merrick, ‘Gilding Postwar Britain’, NLR 122, March–April 2020.

³ RFBN, p. 474.

ruled from Campbell-Bannerman to Chamberlain by a succession of businessmen, remain without a global peer down to the outbreak of the Second World War, but British capitalism was never so industrially strong and successful as under the impetus of Labour administration after the war. Things went wrong only with the arrival of Thatcher and the veritable collapse of much of British industry with her system and what followed it. Rising from Attlee to Wilson, the 'British nation' fell with Thatcher to Cameron.

Intellectually, this inversion is gainsaid on Edgerton's own evidence. As is well-known, though left unsaid by him, anxiety about competitive decline was already a staple of political debate in the time of Joseph Chamberlain. Forty years later under Neville Chamberlain, he admits—in passing—that there was 'a want of investment in the national economy', even that it was 'partly true' that 'British industry was sacrificed in favour of the bondholding City and other investors overseas'.⁴ That was a period when Labour was 'always subservient'—'in office from time to time', while 'the industrial, military, financial and professional arms of the Liberal and Conservative parties were in power all of the time'. But once the majority of workers voted for it in 1945, giving the party for the first time command of parliament, Labour emerged in its true colours as a force that put nation before class, with a programme built—both ideologically and practically—around post-war reconstruction. To this end, it created a 'developmental state' deploying a battery of administrative incentives and controls: modernizing the country's infrastructure, achieving self-sufficiency in food, dominating export markets in manufactured goods—not least in cars—and driving scientific and technological innovation in a general make-over of the 'richest large economic area in Europe into the 60s'.⁵ This was not a socialist, but a nationalist project, for which Edgerton—accepting Tom Nairn's description of Labourism but reversing his verdict on it—makes plain his admiration. It was the era when a British nation for the first time came into its own. If towards the end of it the UK's share of manufacturing exports had fallen, that was no failure, simply convergence by other nations towards its standard of success.

Yet this triumphalist account is time and again contradicted elsewhere in Edgerton's narrative. Under the new developmental state, cotton textiles

⁴ RFBN, pp. 119, 129.

⁵ RFBN, pp. 197, 307, 11.

were not modernized, but wiped out.⁶ British shipyards were overtaken by German and Japanese as early as the fifties.⁷ One after another its technological wonders—nuclear reactors, supersonic airliners, missile systems, fuel cells, hovercrafts—proved mechanical or commercial duds.⁸ Half of all R&D was consumed by military expenditure. By the time oil was discovered in the North Sea, the country could not even supply the rigs for it.⁹ So attached, however, is Edgerton to a tale of epic efforts of the nation under Labour to streak ahead that even the most notorious debacle of the period, one which made its developmentalism a laughing-stock, its grand scheme for ground-nut planting in East Africa, is wistfully transformed into a ‘heroic’ bid for modernity. The confusion of the ensuing argument is nicely embodied in Edgerton’s description of the most technologically minded of Labour’s leaders. ‘The military-industrial complex’, he writes, ‘was for Wilson, a model for how the state could and should operate in other areas’. Twenty-five pages later, this is the same politician who sensibly ‘wanted to rein back the British military-industrial complex’.¹⁰

For Edgerton, the rise of the British nation culminates, paradoxically, in the seventies. Caricatured as the end of post-war growth and collapse of the post-war settlement, this was in fact a time when ‘far from expiring, British social-democracy and the welfare state were to be at their peak’, when ‘modernizing state investments were bearing fruit’ and ‘still underway’, when ‘oil promised the possibility of national regeneration’ (hadn’t it already occurred?), and ‘the state did actively and powerfully intervene in industry’.¹¹ Alas, this glowing prospectus then suddenly turned to ashes. ‘It was a moment of transformation that did not end up as expected’ (*sic*). An auto industry that was once the largest in Europe collapsed under the pressure of foreign competition. In short order the steel industry was on the skids. Overall, ‘by the 1970s British was no longer best. No one wanted the products British technocrats had argued would be essential to a successful economy. British R&D spending fell. The products of British genius went unsold’.¹² What caused such a baffling alteration of the nation’s position in the world? Edgerton vouchsafes no answer, and after having insisted at such length that those who spoke of a declining rather than a developmental UK were hopelessly wrong, he is in no position to do so. The ‘New Jerusalem’ of Correlli

⁶ RFBN, p. 317–8.

⁷ RFBN, p. 320.

⁸ RFBN, pp. 293–4, 329, 350.

⁹ RFBN, p. 298.

¹⁰ RFBN, pp. 347, 372.

¹¹ RFBN, p. 403.

¹² RFBN, p. 405.

Barnett's caustic coinage had proved, so far as industrial prowess went, a Potemkin village. Once British entry into the Common Market was confirmed in the referendum of 1975 and integration in it completed, 'the economic nation was over'.¹³

What was the upshot? Under Thatcher, manufacturing dropped even further, as all-round deregulation and abandonment of exchange controls devastated one domestic industry after another. In a chapter entitled 'A Nation Lost', Edgerton laments that 'in no other major capitalist economy was there no approximation to a national car firm, chemical firm, electrical engineering or electronic firm'.¹⁴ If productivity picked up a bit as foreign capital took over multiple sectors, ranging from motor vehicles and steel to water and electricity, it still lagged behind the country's competitors. 'Relative decline with respect to the rest of the world continued'.¹⁵ Economic nationalism was out and talk of revival without foundation.¹⁶

Coming on the heels of a paean to Labour's national rejuvenation, it might be thought that these judgments spell a crushing condemnation of Thatcherism. But no: abruptly switching lenses, Edgerton observes that 'from an internationalist perspective it is a story of progress, of equalization across now disappearing economic boundaries'. After all, 'between 1975 and 2000 total income nearly doubled'. Society was affluent as never before, offering prosaic pleasures to millions, as the quality of food and services improved, and consumption of desirable goods increased. 'The new internationalized economy was overall more productive than the old national one', bestowing a cornucopia of blessings: 'openness to the world, to other people as well as to other things, brought many benefits, and much happiness'.¹⁷ Reason, in effect, to celebrate the fall of the British nation?

In the periodization offered by Edgerton—a national economy and rise of the British nation under Labour from the 1950s to the 1970s as opposed to a denationalized economy and fall of the British nation under Thatcher and continuing into the 2000s—the dichotomy reveals a symmetrical, if diagonal, strain. In the case of the first, commendation of success is subverted by concession of failures; in the second, condemnation of failures is subverted by salutation of success. If the sequence is incoherent, the

¹³ RFBN, p. 274.

¹⁴ RFBN, p. 474.

¹⁵ RFBN, p. 470.

¹⁶ RFBN, pp. 453, 470.

¹⁷ RFBN, pp. 478–9.

reason is fairly clear: it postulates a discontinuity so ‘unexpected’—an economy thriving one day, caving in the next—that it defies explanation. What is missing in the narrative that would modify and make sense of it? The answer is two-fold and clear enough.

Missing pieces

To begin with, Edgerton’s history sidelines or scants the central role of finance across the half century or so of his two post-war periods. At no point in *Rise and Fall* does the City of London earn so much as a solitary page of attention; the sterling area, not even a paragraph. With their omission, the political history of successive post-war—above all Labour—governments becomes incomprehensible, and Edgerton does not attempt to recount it. The still greater weight of the City in the economy and politics of the country under Thatcher, after her abolition of exchange controls and Big Bang, is then waved aside with the simple pronouncement that, though the City might thereafter loom larger, ‘its power was something new’, without connection to the past, an excrescence no longer particularly British—London, having ceased to export capital, becoming little more than a tax-haven for foreign wealth.¹⁸

The reality, of course, is that the City was the one and only sector of the economy that, across successive mutations, flourished and swelled from 1950 to 2000 and beyond, and as the sole true ace in the hand of British capitalism, exercised a commensurate hegemony over its long-run development. Far from its later globalization being something new and alien to native soil, it was entirely in keeping with the logic of ‘eversion’ that set the direction of the Ukanian state and capital from early on, as classically described by Tom Nairn in texts Edgerton seems never to have consulted. Had he done so, he would have been spared his shock at the unawaited turn of the seventies that reduced the high hopes of British Leyland, the NEDC and the rest to dust, and propelled London into a stratospheric hub of planetary capital.

The long-term primacy of finance over industry in the British economy was not, however, the only critical continuity spanning the latter half of the century and beyond. The second could hardly be overlooked by Edgerton, since it was the very field of his specialism, and he devotes

¹⁸ RFBN, pp. 471.

many of his finest pages to it. Building and maintaining a warfare state, he shows, was central to the projects and commitments of Labour after 1945, which kept in being not only a large conscript land army but developed an array of new and sophisticated weapons for prosecution of the Cold War and repression of colonial rebellions. Top priority was given by Attlee and Bevin to acquisition of the atom bomb, on which vast sums were spent in secrecy from the Cabinet, in a programme that initially disconcerted even Churchill, to make Britain an independent nuclear power, along with the rest of a military arsenal costing more than expenditure on health or education. Wars duly followed, imperial in origin or anti-communist in purpose, or both, across four continents: in Malaya, Korea, Cyprus, Kenya, Yemen, Ireland, Falklands. Edgerton expresses no surprise at these, while pointing out that they cost more British lives than campaigns of the inter-war period. Nor does he take issue with the alliance with America that accompanied them. The insistence by London on retaining nuclear weapons after its failure to construct delivery systems for them, requiring purchase of US substitutes that made Britain's possession of an independent deterrent a fiction, is another matter, which he roundly condemns as an irrational waste of money.

Why then did the 'British nation' of the period—Kennedy years—persist? Why is Trident still with us? Edgerton can only lamely suggest that 'giving up even the pretence of a national bomb was too difficult' for any British government, since it seemed to emanate power and influence.¹⁹ But why so difficult? The answer is obvious enough. This was still, as it is today, *Great Britain*, bearer of the adjective Edgerton can scarcely bring himself to utter, in its negation of the illusion that there ever existed a British nation disinfected of the empire of its creation. The eversion of Ukania was not just an economic direction, it was a geopolitical projection too: finance and force, the power of money and the persuasion of weaponry, were intertwined in its DNA. The bomb was a matter of imperial prestige, as it remains.

What becomes the postlude to Edgerton's story only confirms, if that were needed, the continuing impress of this formation on the Great British state. After two hundred pages on the thirty years from Attlee to Callaghan, the less congenial thirty years from Thatcher to Brown are dispatched in eighty, and of these, New Labour receives just

¹⁹ RFBN, p. 435.

twenty-five. They are scathing. In adopting policies long espoused by the Conservatives and becoming in structure a party much like them, ‘not only was New Labour not Labour but it was barely New either’.²⁰ No bipartisan consensus had actually obtained in the fifties and sixties, when Butskellism was largely a myth. But now one did take shape, which Edgerton terms ‘Blatcherism’. So far as domestic policy went, since for New Labour ‘there was no longer a problem of underperforming British capitalism’, its principal innovation was the superaddition to Thatcher’s privatizations of PFIs contracting out residual public services—hospitals, schools, transport—to commercial enterprises, whose economic effect was to create a new layer of rentiers. Politically, New Labour’s achievement was not just to destroy any opposition dangerous to capitalism, but with ‘a polished cynicism disassembling the nature of power’, the very idea of opposition.²¹ Abroad, it ‘reinvented the United Kingdom as a global contender’, returning the country to interventions East of Suez by joining the disastrous wars unleashed by the United States in Afghanistan and Iraq. *Rise and Fall* ends with Thatcher’s catafalque rolling in a ceremonial gun-carriage to her funeral in St Paul’s, while Blair was busy ‘making money working for some of the vilest torturers and dictators on earth’.

Dazzlement

Politically speaking, the savagery of Edgerton’s conclusion does him every honour. Intellectually, however, it doesn’t cast the retrospective light it should on the British nation of his imaginary. The liberal imperialism he assigns to the epoch of Asquith and Baldwin, and assumes all but evaporated after the Second World War, was alive and well at Stanley and Basra, an heirloom retained, not reinvented. Fittingly, it was Brown who launched the slogan of ‘Britishness’ in the third year of war in Iraq, as the sum of the nation’s values and contributions to the world, to be inculcated in its citizens. Edgerton notes bitterly that this was opening the way to UKIP. But though *Rise and Fall* was published two years after the referendum of 2016, Brexit is not covered in the book, which draws no lessons from it.

Since its appearance, however, Edgerton has expressed himself with vehemence on the country’s departure from the European Union. That

²⁰ RFBN, pp. 503–4.

²¹ RFBN, p. 507.

it has any connexion with the British past is ‘bunk’. It is not a product of history. ‘Brexit is something new, not a throwback’. It has ‘no parallel in twentieth-century British history’, since ‘for the first time, a major change in policy generated internally has not been one first put forward, debated and refined by a great political party’.²² If ‘any prime minister in the past had shown such a determined ignorance of the dynamics of global capitalism, the massed ranks of British capital would have stepped in to force a change of direction’. Yet today, ‘the Tory party is no longer listening’. How has this become possible? Essentially, because not just big industry but even the City itself has become denationalized by foreign take-overs, so the party is ‘no longer stabilized by a powerful organic connection to capital, either nationally or locally’.²³ In this void, a hard-right faction in the party steeped in delusions of grandeur could force through a completely irresponsible break-out from the European Union, which no competent state elite now existed to prevent, by appealing to elderly voters nostalgic for a world of British self-sufficiency. The reality is that ‘the brief period of British nationhood’ is long over, and the best that can be hoped in future is the break-up of Britain—Scottish independence, Irish reunification and the emergence of a progressive new England, freed of all *folies de grandeur* and rethinking its attitude to Europe, as Anthony Barnett and others have argued.²⁴

In this diagnosis, blindness and insight jostle together. Insight: Edgerton is certainly right that key to the indifference of the leaders of the Leave campaign and the current Conservative government to business dismay at the prospect of separation from the EU is the denationalization of so many of the heights of the economy, weakening the traditional links between party and capital (he also correctly notes the reluctance of foreign investors to risk interference in domestic politics). Edgerton’s assessment of the diplomatic and administrative abilities of Ukania’s *hauts fonctionnaires* is no doubt equally accurate. The notion, however, that Brexit appeared out of nowhere is no more credible than the idea

²² ‘Brexit is not a product of history: it’s something entirely new’, *New Statesman*, 5 June 2019. A few months earlier, in his Preface to the paperback edition of *Rise and Fall*, written in January 2019, Edgerton had already announced that ‘Brexit has nothing to do with deep history’: p. xx.

²³ ‘Brexit is a necessary crisis—it reveals Britain’s true place in the world’, *Guardian*, 9 October 2019.

²⁴ ‘How Britain was sold’, *New Statesman*, 13 November 2019; ‘Boris Johnson might break up the UK. That’s a good thing’, *New York Times*, 10 January 2020.

that the British economy capsized unpredictably from ascent to descent overnight in the seventies. In each case, an implausible historical discontinuity is required to defend a vulnerable ideological position. As in *Rise and Fall*, the result is incoherence, since after strenuously asserting that Brexit was not a throw-back to any past, with which it lacks any connexion, Edgerton attributes its victory to the nostalgia of antiquated Conservative voters for the past—defined in this case as the sixties and seventies, to keep the founding fifties of British nationhood under Labour free of any compromising taint, and associated with British-made goods of that period rather than the memories of Great Britain that would certainly have meant more to them.

In 2019 the Conservative sweep across working-class districts of the North and Midlands under the slogan of Get Brexit Done also made it clear that powerful other discontents were at work in rejection of the EU at the polls, of which neither *Rise and Fall* nor Edgerton's subsequent writing take account, since these pay no heed to the EU and its bearing on the UK itself. Obvious here, and articulated from the very outset of British candidacy to the Common Market, are the facts that unlike any other major state in Europe, Britain was never defeated or occupied by a foreign power in the twentieth century, so possessed of a much stronger sense of inviolate external sovereignty; that its legislature claims an age-long degree of *internal* sovereignty, limited by no other authority than its own, unknown anywhere else in the world; and that the European Union had by the twenty-first century become, in the operation of its Commission and the confabulations of its Council, a force openly overriding the will of any democratic legislature within the zone of the single currency, should it breach budgetary or other diktats of Brussels, and regularly forcing the reversal of any popular consultation whose outcome was to its displeasure. That the tension between these two utterly contrasted systems of political decision-making was combustible was not a sudden revelation of 2016. It was long apparent, and the evolution of the EU post-Maastricht made it steadily more so. Brexit was many things. But one of them, and not the least salient, was a demonstration that, wretched though Ukanian democracy with its first-past-the-post and other fetters may be, it is less oligarchic in its structure than the European Union, and when push came to shove, was capable of resisting pressures, invincible everywhere else in Europe, to reverse the popular will as elite opinion—national and continental—demanded.

That Edgerton has failed to see this is no deep criticism of his work, which as he more or less explains, is the vision of a boy from Montevideo arriving in Britain at the age of eleven, dazzled by the sights and sounds of its modernity in the seventies, who then as a scholar discovered how modern its war-machine had been since Edwardian times, and, looking from its achievements inwards to British industry and administration rather than outwards to its role in defining the imperial state, generalized his specialism into an overall judgment of the economic and political order of the country as he first got sight of it—common judgements that this was sinking rather than rising becoming a King Charles’s Head to him thereafter.²⁵ Yet as a fine scholar, of notable honesty, his work would end as much illustrating as refuting the declinism he set out to dismiss. That, even if accepting certain pearls of conventional wisdom, and not infrequently taking with one hand what it gives with the other, it contains some of the most radical demystifications of the British past and brutal sentences on the British present, is cause for warm tribute.

²⁵ Returning to the charge again in ‘Why the Left must abandon the myth of British decline’, *New Statesman*, 6 October 2021, taxing in the friendliest way myself and Tom Nairn with perpetuating the illusion.