This essay uses confidence as a metric for contemporary capitalism, which relies upon aggressively propertizing, individuating, and consumption-oriented epistemologies. My argument is that market based logics often involve: a) unitary and materialistic theories of economic actors, goods, and services on the one hand; and b) the notion that these actors, goods, and services are not only highly symbolic, but also deeply multivalent on the other. The friction between these ideologies gives shape to discourses of crisis -- particularly in times of reliance upon digital mediation. Following the work of James Boon, I cross-cut my reading of Herman Melville with selected texts from economics, as well as current journalistic takes on the looming threat of government shutdowns.

Confidence is the indispensable basis of all sorts of business transactions. Without it, commerce between man and man, as between country and country, would, like a watch, run down and stop. Herman Melville, The Confidence Man

Alexander Dent’s work uses notions of performativity to analyze mediation, language, policy, piracy, Intellectual Property (IP), and music. His first book, River of Tears: Country Music, Memory, and Modernity (Duke, 2009) explored the dialogic relationship between traditional and commercial forms of Brazilian `country` as a way of getting at late capitalist rurality. More current work investigates the ways in which IP policing seeks to control the unruly materializations at work in digital reproduction, as well as the ways in which the United States Trade Representative's practices delimit the "publics" in "public interest." Dent received his PhD from the University of Chicago (2003). He lives in Washington DC, where he is a practicing musician.