

# **The Surre(gion)alist Manifesto and Other Writings**

Max Cafard

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# Foreword

Max Cafard became legendary when “The Surre(gion)alist Manifesto” first appeared in *Exquisite Corpse* in 1990. The question “Who is Max Cafard?” is still being asked with some regularity at our offices. Max Cafard became one of the “surregions” of his own generative imagination when his insurgent writing gave our readers the sudden frisson that they were in the presence of something new. One never forgets that frisson when first encountering Nietzsche, Cioran, Derrida, or Deleuze. Imagine the lucky contemporaries of those thinkers who were first on the scene when that writing appeared! The frisson is renewed by each encounter, but the original feeling of the discovery is unequalled. This was precisely my epiphany on encountering Max Cafard’s manifesto: I am in a new place.

What kind of place this is will be debated and delved into with all the voluptuousness attendant on every reader’s discovery. What I know is that the best philosophers create an appetite and by the size of their appetite you shall know them. The hunger Max Cafard’s writing creates is enormous, a hunger made bigger by a tradition that thrives on appetite and discovery from the Dao onwards. Max Cafard has “roots” in recognizable traditions, anarchism and surrealism among them, but these are floating, walking roots that can show up unexpectedly in the most remote (or familiar) regions. The rhizomatic attention of Cafard’s roots is doubled by their insouciance.

Welcome to Cafardia, a region that works both by *approfondir* (deepening) and by *especialisation* (wing-spreading). This is *globalite* against globalisation, *globulity* against globalism, *providentialism* against provincialism.

Andrei Codrescu

## Instead of a Preface

One looks to a preface to find the “original face” (the pre-face) of a work. The author has presumably read the book to the end, and is seemingly in a fairly good position to fill the reader in on what to expect. The preface thus bears a slightly absurd relationship to the work. It claims to face what is to come, but inevitably looks back to what is already completed. So the book begins in bad faith, shamelessly tricking the reader. And perhaps also the writer. This is one reason why Laozi, the anti-foundationalist founder of Daoism plays such an important role in what “follows.” He begins his own little book by saying that the words cannot really be written and the lines cannot be followed. The beginning is at the same time a non-beginning. There is no first word because there is no last word. If you follow the lines, or the lines of argument, they lead you off the page, into the cosmos and chaos that gave birth to these words, these lines, and the followers of this path. So there is no “original face.” Or there is, and one cannot find it here.

As Laozi’s successor Zhuangzi (who may well have preceded him) stated so succinctly: “Embody to the fullest what has no end and wander where there is no trail. Hold on to all that you have received from Heaven but do not think that you have gotten anything. Be empty, that is all.”<sup>1</sup>

If you follow the path of this book (some of which is actually in this book), you’ll find that we inhabit many regions, and regions within regions. These regions form the background for our existence and also pervade our very being. In a sense, we discover ourselves as strangely self-conscious, strangely empty regionalities.

One background region for this small surre(gion)al undertaking is the Empire, and a certain branch of Empire that I call Vespucciland or the United States of Amnesia. It’s the part of the Empire that happens to occupy the bioregion, the region of life, in which I live. Always implicit and sometimes explicit in surre(gion)alism is a critique of region as regime, of region as domination, possession and accumulation, and thus of Empire and its Vespuccian expression. In this, many will notice the ways in which surre(gion)alism carries on certain traditions that have confronted the two faces of Leviathan: the Megamachine and the Spectacle. Yet it carries on with a difference.

A half century ago, the Situationists imagined their most fantastical project of *détournement*: they would dye the Seine red, steal bodies from the Paris morgue, and float them in a river of blood. What a spectacular anti-spectacular event that would have been! But today the petrochemical industry dyes rivers, lakes and a multitude of other bodies of water red. And not only red, but a entire spectrum of unnatural hues, in addition to covering them with the most eerily theatrical of noxious vapors. Moreover, an ever-increasing number of bodies find their way into the waterways. The nightmares of the Situationists become business as usual. One might say that in the areas of both dyeing and dying, post-modern capitalist reality overflows (*déborde*).

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<sup>1</sup> THE COMPLETE WORKS OF CHUANG-TZU [ZHUANGZI], trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), p. 97.

\* \* \*

May I indulge myself in one brief account of Vespuccian reality? From the daily newspaper. Dateline: Hauppauge, N.Y. “Woman who thought she was running down Mickey Mouse gets 5 to 15.” The woman in question killed her husband by repeatedly running over him with her car. She explained that she thought, not that he was actually Mickey, but that he had been possessed by the legendary Mouse. The case raises important practical and metaphysical questions. One is why the court in its wisdom did not find her innocent by reason of insanity. Perhaps in our Vespuccian Fantasy Land the Spirit of Mickey is so powerful that the idea of someone being possessed by it seems not unreasonable, in fact quite sane.

Another intriguing question is why she would feel compelled to flatten her husband even if he had been possessed by Mickey. While there are news stories almost every day of crazed fundamentalists killing their children for allegedly being possessed by Satan, this case initially seems more perplexing. Nevertheless we may be able to discover a logic of psychosis here. Perhaps this particular demon-slayer stumbled on an apt new symbol of ultimate evil in our media-driven consumer society.

Though she may also have been Hell on Wheels, is she not also the Judge Schreber of post-modernity, the mad messenger of terrifying truths? Did she not during her psychotic death drive run into a profound truth? Mickey, as symbol of the consumptionist universe, is a Demon whose powers of possession, domination and destruction put poor old Satan to shame. It is this Demon that haunts the pages of this book.

\* \* \*

But surre(gion)alism is much more than critique, and is ultimately more about restoring our experience of and rediscovering our rootedness in the regions of being and non-being that lie beyond the bounds of domination and possession. Frida Kahlo once said that she was not a surrealist because she didn't paint her dreams, but rather reality. Whether or not her reality was a surreality, she certainly did venture into surre(gion)ality, for her work explored the interplay of psychoregion, mythoregion, ethnoregion, socioregion, technoregion. In these regionalities “dream,” “nightmare” and “reality” lose their fixed boundaries. Kahlo was perhaps indicating that some surrealisms place certain limits on the wandering of the imagination. Granted, it takes a considerable quantity of psychic energy to float one's favorite fruit or vegetable in thin air. But even a floating vegetable requires a certain minimum of roots. Surre(gion)alism goes to these roots, and is willing to follow them wherever they lead. The dominant tradition has never escaped from abstractionism, from disembodied reality, from the fallacy of misplaced concreteness (which leads in practice to the fallacy of misplaced concrete). Surre(gion)alism on the other hand is always embodied regionalism, and its body is ultimately the flesh of all being.

A friend suggested to me that this book's dedication is needlessly and perhaps willfully obscure. *Mea culpa!* Tara is the Buddhist goddess of compassion, and is also an earth goddess. “Tierra y Libertad!” is an anarchist revolutionary slogan meaning “Land — or Earth — and Liberty!”

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# The Surre(gion)alist Manifesto

## Dedication

Here we cast anchor in rich earth.

– Tristan Tzara, Dada Manifesto (1918)

“Just as the turtle cannot separate itself from its shell, neither can we separate ourselves from what we do to the earth.” Ted Andrews

For our Mother the Earth, we set sail on Celestial Ships. Anchored in Erda, we ride the wind. For Gaia, we take flight, spreading terrifying Cafardic wings. No longer trembling at the emasculating, defeminizing sound: the Name of the Father. We re-member Mama. Papa dismembered Mama. We now re-call the suppressed Names of the Mother. Anamnesis for anonymous Inanna. A surre(gion)al celebration, a Manifestival for Mama Earth. This is dedicated to the One we love. For the One Big Mother, in her thousand forms, here it is: the Mama Manifesto (1989).

## Principia Logica

Breton said “we are still living under the reign of logic.”

Today this is true more than ever. Indeed, we are now living under the Acid Rain of Logic.

There are Logics and there are Logics. Eco-Logics, Geo-Logics, Psycho-Logics, Mytho-Logics, Ethno-Logics, Socio-Logics, Astro-Logics, Cosmo-Logics, Onto-Logics, Physio-Logics, Bio-Logics, Zoö-Logics, et cetera.

Yet all of these are transformed into subsets of the one universal Techno-Logic. Techno-Logic, the death of Truth. Techno-Logic, the enshrinement of Truth. The burying of Truth under a crushing burden – under a Wealth of Knowledge.

Authentic knowing requires the “search for Truth,” the pursuit of Truth, the chasing after Truth, the hunger and thirst for Truth, the following of Truth along all her devious paths of Logic, through her labyrinths of the Logics. It means climbing logical mountains, plunging to logical ocean bottoms, traversing an infinitude of unparallelled planes. The search for Truth means always allowing her escape.

## Scrambling the Cosmic Egg

“The Region regions” said Heidegger the Egg-Hider, hiding his eggs. Edelweiss und Eselscheisse! Scion of a Scheisse-ridden race! Shyster Lawyer of Being! The “Region” does not “region.” It’s exactly the reverse. (For the Time Being).

Where is the Region, anyway? For every Logic there is a Region. To mention some of particular importance to us, the Surre(gion)alists: Ecoregions, Georegions, Psychoregions, Mythoregions, Ethnoregions, Socioregions, and Bioregions.

This is no joke! We are Bioregionalists only if we are Regionalists. And once we begin to think Regions, we discover a vast multiplicity. Of Regionalisms and Regions, of Regions within Regions, and Regionalisms within Regionalisms. Thus, Surre(gion)alism.

Regions are inclusive. They have no borders, no boundaries, no frontiers, no State Lines. Though Regionalists are marginal, Regions have no margins. Regions are traversed by a multitude of lines, folds, ridges, seams, pleats. But all lines are included, none exclude. Regions are bodies. Interpenetrating bodies. Interpenetrating bodies in semi-simultaneous spaces. (Like Strangers in the Night).

Region is origin. It is our place of origin. Where all continues to originate. Origination is perpetual motion. Reinhabitation means reorigination. We return to our roots for nourishment. Without that return, we wither and die. We follow our roots and find them to extend ever deeper, and ever outward. They form an infinite web, so all-encompassing that uprooting becomes impossible and unthinkable, deracination irrational.

Regions are multiple and arbitrary. Techno-regionalism says, in a Techno-Rational rage for definition, that when less than 90% of the species of one defined area are present in another defined area, then each is a separate Bioregion. How Techno-Logical! How Scientific! Or so it sounds. For such a definition is entirely self-annihilating, and absurd in its very technicality. This is, of course, its beauty. It is entirely valid, if taken as part of the Science and Logic of the Absurd. An infinite number of Regions can be defined by such criteria. Occasionally the Region will run after a stray organism (calculator in hand). This is a hallucinogenic Logic. (Though it is seldom taken in this way — even in small doses).

The Region always suffers the danger of capture by Techno-Logic. But Science can also be captured by the Aesthetic. Thales, the first metaphysician and scientist, said “All is Water,” and thus became the first humorist, also. And Technics can also be captured by Erotics. Fourier proposed a “New Amorous Order” in his Phalansteries, based on tactics of Utopian Technique

## Off Center

The Region is the end of Centrism.

Centrism is an obsession. Perhaps there’s nothing wrong with obsessions, as long as we know that we’re obsessed. Take, for example, Mr. Alan Fairweather, whose entire life revolves around his obsession with, study of, and consumption of potatoes. In Mr. Fairweather’s words: “I suppose you could say I have a potato-centric view of the world.” (Newsweek, 5/30/88.) But centrists are seldom so healthy.

Anthropo-centrism has been our world-champion Centrism. It’s come close to K.O.ing the Earth (a T.K.O. — a Technical Knock-Out). But it’s long been on the ropes. Astro-Logic knocked Anthropos off Cosmic center. Bio-Logic knocked him off Planetary center.

Psycho-Logic even knocked him off Ego center. And Techno-Logic itself melts him into air. We hardly need any post-structuralist Post-Logic to “de-center” the vapor that remains.

But do we need a new Centrism to replace the moribund one? Some suggest “Biocentrism.” This one will surely win if beetles and algae are given the vote. In a Bio-centric world, the undis-

puted center of “North America” is somewhere in the Achafalaya Basin. Probably in Grosse Tête (day gone gat a beeg had don dare, yeah!). A magnificent idea, and absolutely true in its own unique way. Strangely, Bio-centrism is the ecological counter-image of capitalist rationality. Quantity and accumulation are what count. But Biomass instead of Bucks.

Ecocentrism, which may be the the ultimate Centrism, has strange, surre(gion)al implications of its own. On being asked the meaning of the term, a prominent ecocentrist replied that it means that “everything is central.” The final truth of Centrism: all is central and thus nothing is central. The ecocentrist definitely has surre(gion)alist potential!

Decentering is inevitable today. But there are many species of decentering, some regionalist, others profoundly anti-regionalist. Some creative, others nihilistic and conservative (preserving the civilized path of Progress: annihilation, dissolution, evisceration, evacuation).

Capitalism abolishes Centrism. A European travels to some anti-center of Late Capitalism – perhaps Houston or Los Angeles. Accustomed to town squares, cathedrals, remnants of city walls, historical sites, signs indicating the geomythical center (Centre Ville, Centro Ciudad, etc.), this voyager asks, “Which way is the center?” What answer is possible? The hapless explorer is offered a myriad of decentered centers – every mall and shopping center in the vast urban sprawl. The Megalopolis is the economic triumph of decentering. Its reality flows – not like a river, but like Capital. It seeks, monster-like, hydra-like, only to grow, and never to return to its source. To grow and to consume, endlessly.

Regionalist anti-centrism is of a different quality. We surre(gion)alists proclaim an end to Centrism, but we seek to create and recreate a multitude of centers. Because there is no one Center (the Patriarchal God, the Authoritarian State, the Ineluctable Bottom Line), imaginative centers can proliferate. The human spirit has always found the center of the universe in places of significance. Indeed, any place can be the center. Such centers are centers of spiritual intensity, foci for the convergence of realities: The Altar. The Hearth. The Communal fire. The Town Square. The Sacred Mountain. The Clock at Holmes. (Note for extra-Mesechabeans: On the Clock, see J. K. Toole, *A CONFEDERACY OF DUNCES*).

Only someone really desperate, or, perhaps, inordinately hurried, would suggest as the center of the universe la Gare de Perpignan. Or was there a hidden, anti-subversive Grand Central Station in the Dalian mind?

## **Beyond Civilization**

For the Region, there is no State and there are no State lines. The State is a parasitical growth on the Region, something exterior, hostile, threatening. It has no life of its own, but drains vitality from the living Community. It has rightly been called the “cold monster” that steals even our words, and claims to speak for us. The State is inherently genocidal. It murders all that it cannot assimilate. What is left after this Pyric and Vampiric act is only a State apparatus, the State Machine. (Even the old “political machine” had to die – for not being mechanical enough, and perhaps for being too political, too Regional, for the age of “total administration.”) The State is the March of the God of Power on Earth, its History, the Cunning of Instrumental Reason. Regional politics do not take place in Washington, Moscow and other “seats of power.” Regional power does not “sit”; it flows everywhere. Through watersheds and bloodstreams. Through nervous systems and food chains. The Regions are everywhere & nowhere. We are all illegals. We are natives

and we are restless. We have no country; we live in the country. We are off the Inter-State. The Region is against the Regime — any Regime. Regions are anarchic.

For the Region, there is no Church. There is no upper-case R Religion, because there are as many religions as there are Regions. Heresy is the norm. There is no monopoly on the holy. There is no spiritual capital or spiritual Capitol. All Regions are spiritual, and for regionalism all realms are sacred. Regionalism abolishes both Theism and Atheism. Theism: the Idea that there is only one God — the God of Power, and that all must believe in Him. Atheism: the equal and opposite absurdity that this same God is the only One truly worthy of disbelief. Civilization's imaginary has been bound to monotheisms, and substitutes for monotheisms. Regionalism breaks the bonds and erases the line between the sacred and the profane. All busses go to Grace Land. Nothing is beyond the pale. Regions are of the land: pagan, paysan. The Regions give birth to a multitude of rites and rituals, a sacral of sites and cycles. The spirit of the Region is inspired, enlightened. By feu follet, Will o' the Wisp. By inner lights and outer. The spirit of the Region is the Free Spirit. To be in touch with the Spirits of the Place, the local Gods, is to have Tongues of Fire, to regain the stolen power of speech.

For the Region, there is no Race. Miscegenation is the rule. The Ten Thousand Races were born from the Ten Thousand Places, and they have multiplied to ten thousand times ten thousand. Those of us raised in a racial caste system were taught as children how to treat people of "the opposite race." But now the die is cast; the castes have died. Now we know there are no opposite sexes, much less opposite races. Nature just passes and repasses. It's all Mardi Gras. Under the mask, a mask. Ethnicity, like ethos, thrives on the play of difference. Enjoy the play! For the ideology of race, the play's a dismal tragedy. All is reduced to dull sameness and demonic otherness. True, paranoia has its own peculiar excitements, but misses the stimulation of subtle variation, texture, multiplicity, quality. Ethnoregionality. The topography of culture. The Carnival of Culture.

For the Region, there is no Patriarchy. The Region is certainly feminine. And at the same time, androgynous. The One gave birth to the Two, and the Two to the Ten Thousand Things. The Mother is both Mother and Father. As GENESIS explains, quite clearly, our Primal Ancestor was an androgynous being, who was later divided into male and female. For the Region, there remain no clear lines: paternity is not established. The family is extended, the tribe all-inclusive. The Region, like the Dao, is vague. Mountains and valleys flow into one another. Streams and rivers flow into one another. The maternal blood flows through the Region. But sometimes the blood boils. As modern "Man" is beginning to learn: it's not nice to rape Mother Nature! The kindly Maiden Aunt Nature of the Audubon Society, the jelly-breasted, nonjudgmental Momma Nature of the New Age, transforms herself into the Badass Goddess, the Angry Warrior Woman Nature, Vagina Dentata, the electrifying Shakti. Just when you think you've had her, Man — she gets you where it hurts!

For the Region, there is no Capital. There is no bottom line. All is recycled. Everything returns to the top, recirculates, and the bottom falls out. Life is uneconomical, inefficient. All economic rationality is ecological irrationality. The nature of nature is to waste, to spend foolishly, to squander. Capital requires scarce resources, but the Region is superabundance and has no resources. Only sources and the return to sources. Regions bankrupt the economic, they rupture, they break the bank, they overflow their banks. Regions are in balance, and need no balance sheets. Capital has already rendered its judgment on the Earth: the rich abundance of Life-the Bio-Logical,

Ethno-Logical, and Psycho-Logical Wealth that is the legacy of eons of evolution-is not cost effective.

For the Earth to live, Capital must die.

## **Anti-Theses on Regionalism**

Regions are wild. For State and Capital, wilderness means wasteland. They look upon the wild with a cruel and rapacious eye. They hunger to rape and plunder the wild. They yearn to subdue, control, exploit and kill all that lives freely. The antithesis of the wild is the domesticated – controlled for the ends of power. The same forces that seek to destroy wild nature, destroy wild mind. (See Gary Snyder’s “Good, Wild, Sacred”). Out of ancient forests and ancient communities, they produce tree farms & suburbia (tree farms, the suburbia of trees; suburbia, the tree farm of humanity).

“The antithesis of the wild is the domesticated – controlled for the ends of power.”

The Region, like the Dao, is vague. The “obscure object of desire.” The object of desire is always obscure. Buñuel’s famed object may be obscure in a special sense, but all objects of desire are vague, ambiguous, obscure. The system of domination attempts to make them more definite, more definable. By identifying objects of domination. By subordinating desire to an authoritarian code. By seeking to capture desire and then to direct and channel it in accordance with the demands of Power. Our challenge: to get beyond our bondage to this Desire Project. To reach the Elysian Fields of the liberated imagination. Where there are (contrary to rumor) no Poles, but only a meeting of the Antipodes.

Regionalists inhabit Regions. They are, in fact, creatures of habit, unpredictable though their habits may be. They are what they do, and they do it in that familiar, indefinable place: their Region. Regionalists almost dwell in Regions, and in fact, once did completely, until dwelling became so heavily laden with layers of mystique that their dwellings sank out of sight. (Especially true of swampy regions like the Mesechabe Delta). Regions are not systems. Systems are dead, mechanistic, and manipulable. Systems thinking is only the most advanced, and most mystified variety of instrumental rationality. Regions are incomprehensible and priceless. They are not systematic. They are not systemic. They are living and imaginary, and therefore surpass all system. Some Regions have systems, as persons have systems, but they cannot be reduced to one or more of those systems.

Regions are not World Class. The Political Insect (apologies to all authentic insects) can think of no greater compliment to the community than to call it World Class. It becomes World Class when it is filled with World Class Attractions: when all its living local and regional realities are murdered and replaced by World Class plastic imitations, to attract swarms of World Class Economic Insects who occasionally venture out from their sterile World Class Hotels and Convention Centers and dispense World Class Dollars to the embalmed natives. Regions are not World Class. The Bomb is World Class.

McDonald’s is World Class. Henry Kissinger is World Class. Global Warming is World Class. Auschwitz is World Class. The Capitalist Class is World Class. Regions are not World Class.

Regions follow Geo-Logic, and move in Geo-Logical time. Regions are served on plates. They are flowing, floating islands upon islands. (Follow my Drift?) Occasionally the Earth reminds us that from its point of view Geology is Destiny. That mountains and valleys are like waves on

the sea. The restoration of Geo-Logic relativizes the pseudo-politics and pseudoeconomics of all systems of Power. True Eco-Logic and Eco-Nomics cannot be upset by even the most powerful earthquake. But the myth that nature can be dominated lives on. Still the Army Corps of Engineers battles to control the course of the Mesechabe. But in a few years the Great River will have its way – with a vengeance. Still the power companies build their nuclear plants along the River. They forget that a century ago the earth shook violently, the Mesechabe flowed North, and that a small Mesechabean Atlantis still lies beneath the waters.

## **The Waste Land**

What hath civilization wrought? Vespucciland has already made the Mighty Mesechabe its sewer (Capitalist Sewer-regionalism), it has sent us garbage barges, and now it sends its wastes to the Delta in trains! Post-modern politics becomes auto-critique. Never before has there been a political cause célèbre like the “Poo-Poo Choo-Choo” presently incensing Mesechabean citizens. Indeed, the Mesechabeans would like to cast some aspersions on our 6 bene-factors (doers of their noble duty), who seek to transform our Mesechabe Delta, the Ravine of the World, into a veritable Sierra Merdre.

Outside the Region, all is excrement, all is waste, all is garbage. Capital and State are outside the cycles, outside the self-renewing Whole. Their Logic is accumulation, the Eternal Non-Return, the non-returnable bottleneck of being. They have accumulated much, and alas, it’s all Poo Poo.

Where is Reality today? When the corporate polluters spew poison into rivers and streams, direct actionists seal the pipes. The reality police are called out: the poisoners are protected; the protectors imprisoned. “This is not poison ... This is not a pipe ... “ When reality is the Waste Land, we must just say no to Reality. Surre(gion)al surreality is elsewhere.

## **“Is There a Pataphysician in the House?”**

Regionalists are Pataphysicians. Jarry, the founder of the Sublime Science of Pataphysics, made an inestimable contribution to regionalist thinking in his invention/discovery of Pataphysics.

Pataphysics, he says “will be, above all, the science of the particular, despite the common opinion that the only science is that of the general. Pataphysics will examine the laws governing exceptions, and will explain the universe supplementary to this one; or, less ambitiously, will describe a universe which can be – and perhaps should be – envisaged in the place of the traditional one, since the laws that are supposed to have been discovered in the traditional universe are also correlations of exceptions, albeit more frequent ones, but in any case accidental data which, reduced to the status of unexceptional exceptions, possess no longer even the virtue of originality.” (SELECTED WORKS OF ALFRED JARRY, ed. Roger Shattuck and Simon Watson Taylor. (New York: Grove Press, 1965), pp. 192–193.)

Pataphysics helps us recollect the oft-forgotten Truth that the Universe is itself the Great Exception – to the everyday ordinary course of Non-Being. Regions are, of course, entirely exceptional – exceptions even to themselves. Regionalists are exceptional people and should therefore, like Regions, be treated entirely differently. Heraclitus discovered 2500 years ago that Reality is always what it is not, and that it is always strange. As he put it, “if one does not expect the

unexpected, one will not find it out, since it is not to be searched out, and difficult to compass.” (FRAGMENT 18) Regions are where the unexpected always takes place. However mightily one struggles not to think some troubling thought, it is impossible to keep it out of consciousness — out of one’s Psychoregion. Thoughts such as: “The Marquise was out for the Count”; or “He rode off into the sunset on his pet pony, Trotsky.”

## **Green Politics: Militants Vs. Mirlitons**

We need a Green Politics that is a Politics of the Regions, and thus, a Politics of the Imagination. The old politics is dead — the politics of the State, of bureaucracy, of economism, of technocracy. It is overwhelmingly powerful, but it is dead. Burying it is another matter. It buries us. Poor old Krushchev said to the Capitalists: we will bury you. They are burying him and everyone else instead — in garbage. The old politics is a politics of plastic on asphalt. The politics of the inorganic, of disorientation, of placelessness, of necrophilia.

The Wobblies, the most radical of American labor movements (the only labor movement to appeal to hobos and surrealists) said it was “creating the new world within the shell of the old.” Today, the old one is an even more dried-out shell than ever. It’s time to begin growing a new world! This is the meaning of “Green Politics.” But sometimes it seems that what passes for “Green Politics” follows the slogan: “creating the new world by boring from within.” True, the old world must die, but we certainly cannot bore it to death.

Green Politics must become the Politics of the Regions — all the Regions, from the celestial to the subterranean. Let the next Gathering of the Greens conduct all its business in poetry. This will foreshadow the day when America will be Green. Even better, the day when for a small fee we do an international name exchange and America becomes a large frozen island, while Green Land extends from sea to shining sea. The day when Green Politics rules. The day when the President pantomimes the Inaugural Address and sings the State of the Union in falsetto. The day when the Supreme Court sits naked in powdered wigs and hands down rulings in Pig Latin. The day when the Congress throws a multi-party and dances all the Laws out of existence.

Our symbol — one of the thousand symbols of our polysymbolica — is the Sacred Mirliton. The Chayote. Chayotli. *Sechium edule*. The Mirliton (regional pronunciation: “Mellatawn”): in the subtropics, the regionalist plant par excellence. Spreading everywhere, covering all, trespassing all boundaries, respecting no lines of property. Greening promiscuously, abundantly, indiscriminantly. Equally green on either side of the fence. Offering its fruit to all, in limitless profusion. Green Politics, the Politics of the Mirliton. The Mirliton against the militant, the mechanical person. The Mirliton against the military-industrial complex, the mechanical State. Green vs. Machine. (No accident that the word “Mirliton” also refers to that most populist and anarchic of all musical instruments, the Kazoo.)

Green Politics is the Politics of Lagniappe. “Lagniappe” for us Mesechabeans signifies something extra, neither bought nor sold, freely given, weighed only on the human scale, a symbolic exchange, a tangible expression of the intangible, of the non-instrumental, of the nonfungible, of the communal, of the common wealth. A vague memory of the Gift. A token of the backwardness, the peripherality, the atavism of certain strange and remote ethnoregions — such as the Mesechabe Delta. Green Politics is the Politics of Lagniappe: it “decrees the End of Money.” It



looks to the day when we are no longer held symbolic hostages by the Signs of the Dollar. To the day when All is Lagniappe. And to the Night also!

It is of the nature of the Louisianian to create Order through Anarchy:

This is the lesson of Gumbo; this is the lesson of Jazz.

– Lafcadio Bocage, CAHIERS DU MOUVEMENT ANARCHISTE CREOLE (trans., M. Cafard)

What is true in our mysterious Delta region can, in its own way, be true anywhere. Let us never forget the words of the wise Mesechabean!

## **Ghosts Along the Mesechabe**

A phantom is haunting Europa. Breton stated it well, with all the power of inadvertency: “The earth, draped in its verdant cloak, makes as little impression upon me as a ghost.” What Breton consciously missed but unconsciously betrayed was the greatness of this impression. For what makes more impression on us than does a ghost – and is so resolutely evaded, except in our dreams?

We are like ghosts, Ghosts along the Mesechabe. Haunted by the Earth. When we are nowhere, existence is elsewhere.

The Region is the elsewhere of civilization.

# The Politics of the Imagination

## The Imagination in Power

The General Strike of May 1968 in Paris was a landmark in radical history. It is known in large part for the fact that it diverged from the expected. It is also known for its inspiring slogans: “Take your desires for realities”; “It is forbidden to forbid”; “Be realistic, demand the impossible.” Most of these slogans seem little more than radical nostalgia a generation later. But I would argue that one of these slogans has been realized-totally and absolutely-in the decades since the revolt.

The one successful aspiration of May '68: “L'imagination au pouvoir!” — “Power to the imagination!”

For the imagination is indeed in power today. Though, sad to say, it is not the one that the visionaries of '68 hoped for. Instead, it is the consumptionist imaginary that dominates contemporary culture. Our world is far from the one in which imaginative radicals inspire demassified masses to revolt against the dictates of dour reactionaries. Rather, we inhabit a world in which the most exciting sources of inspiration for the vast majority are the elements of the consumptionist system. A world in which we take their desires for our realities. In which “Coke is It” (Id). A world in which it is not only permitted to permit, but in which demanding the impossible is a way of life — and is great for the GNP!

It is the consumptionist imaginary that dominates contemporary culture.

The old world of hard work and production is not dead. The machine grinds on, and any serious threats to it are dealt with in a suitably productivist manner. Even as maddening echos of “Don't worry! Be happy!” torment our brains, we find that three-quarters of a million inhabitants of the Land of the Free are in prison, while the State proposes to double this carceral capacity. George Bush recently presented some ominous proposals concerning crime. He said he was going to reduce the crime rate and build more prisons. I have nightmares about all those big, empty prisons. Political dissidents beware!<sup>1</sup>

But the consumptionist/productionist system maintains its power not primarily through guns and repression, but rather through ideological control. If we are interested in critical practice and social transformation, it is important that we understand the consumptionist imaginary and its central place in the system of power. Ironically, this centrality consists precisely in its decenteredness — its dispersion throughout the culture. What is our relation to the dominant system — the system of consumptionism/productivism? Some members of the Green movement seem to suggest that our function is to make that system less ecologically destructive, more humane, more democratic, less violent, etc. We might call this project “toward a more sustainable system of domination.” Or, inspired by the image of Bush and Thatcher as “environmentalists,” we might call it “be realistic, demand the inevitable. What's Left?

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<sup>1</sup> Over the fifteen or so years since this was written, the state has managed not only to reach its goal, but even to increase the prison population to over two million. Ironically, the “Sweet Land of Liberty” may soon have a prison population as great as the entire population of the Republic at its founding.

Some Greens have proposed that we adopt the slogan “neither left nor right, but in front.” This would be equivalent to adopting the slogan, “neither left nor right, but totally confused.” Throughout the modern period, enemies of the established system of domination have always been called “the left,” while its defenders have constituted “the right.” It is no secret that factions from “the left” have often gained power and then reinstated systems of domination. But those who have then opposed these regimes in the name of freedom and justice have in turn become “the left,” or even the “ultra-left,” in relation to the new systems of oppression.

Why this fear of identification with the left — a fear almost unique to American Greens? The lame excuse is that it might puzzle the poor ignorant masses who will confuse the Greens with authoritarian Leninists. In other words, that the Greens should help perpetuate the lie that the left consists only of Godless, atheistic Communists who are agents of a foreign power. Submitting to this kind of thought control is equivalent to tolerating the related lies of the system of domination: that Blacks are lazy and unintelligent, that feminists are frustrated man-haters, that gays are child-molesters, and so forth. But we can accept none of these outrageous lies, so why accept an equally ludicrous one?

A slight digression on the ideology of language: Have you ever looked up the term “public enemy” (listed under “ENEMY”) in ROGET’S THESAURUS OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE? If you check it, you’ll find the following:

public enemy, enemy to society; anarchist, Red or red, terrorist, revolutionary, revolutionist; seditionist, traitor, traitress (fem.).

A veritable reactionary stream of consciousness! No wonder that there is a fear of being branded as “left” in a society that speaks such a terrifying and terrified language. Who wants to be thought a “traitor”? Or, even worse, a “traitress”? The difficult truth is that acceptance of the label “left” means acceptance of our oppositional relationship to the dominant culture. But face the facts, fellow dissidents: calling for a “new paradigm” means having a leftist relationship to the “old paradigm”!

So much for “neither left nor right.” And when the world’s going to Hell, who wants to be in front?

I propose to organize a new politico-spiritual tendency within the Greens! I am issuing a “call” on behalf of the “Left Daoist Network.” We Left Daoists have lacked nothing but a slogan, and this sad state of affairs is about to end. We considered calling ourselves “The Left Wing of the Right Brain.” But this will not do, since we Daoists, believing in the Yin and Yang of all things, cannot choose one brain over another, or even one piece of a brain over another piece. Thus, the slogan of the Left Daoists: “Neither Left Brain nor Right Brain, but A Head!”

## **Does Money Grow on Trees?**

At the last National Greens Conference, a delegate told me that he couldn’t understand all this talk about being against capitalism. “How could anyone be against capitalism?” he asked. “You have to make a living somehow!” The delegate, an intelligent person and a graduate of a major university (no necessary connection implied), had never encountered the idea that capitalism could perhaps be a historical phenomenon, or that any other mode of economic organization might be possible.

Another delegate, perhaps trying to absolve us from any lingering guilt-feelings about, as they say, “buying-in” to the prevailing system, assured us that “Money is Green.” “Novus Ordo Seclorum” Motto on the Dollar Bill: “New Order of the Ages”

“Money is Green”! A revolutionary slogan for our times!

There are, of course, other views. One prominent political philosopher, paraphrasing another prominent playwright, called money “the visible divinity — the transformation of all human and natural properties into their contraries, the universal confounding and overturning of things, it makes brothers of impossibilities. It is the common whore, the common pimp of peoples and nations.”

But today, “Money is Green.” Consider the implications. Money is green. Like skin is white. Like flags are red, white, and blue. Money is green and everybody drives a car.

We are badly in need of the radical imagination. We are sorely in need of utopian thinking. When a system of power has taken hold of the imagination, it is a totalitarian power. It can only be fought on its own ground — imaginary ground. The Politics of the Imagination

The modern project of domination has been based on both the repression of imagination and the “harnessing” of the imagination. Ideologically, the first stage of this project was a general war against imagination. (An undertaking which was itself a great feat of the imagination!) In fact, the true goal was the restriction and restructuring of imagination, and its channeling on behalf of the emerging systems of power: the modern nation-state, the developing system of capital, and individualized patriarchy.

The stridency and severity of the early modern attack on imagination is striking. For example, Descartes, the patriarch of modern rationalism, while exalting “pure intellection,” remarks that “this power of imagination ... is in no wise a necessary element in my nature, or in my essence, that is to say, in the essence of my mind, for although I did not possess it I should doubtless ever remain the same as I now am ...”<sup>2</sup> “2 The true fear, of course, is that with the imagination “in his nature,” he would ever remain different. That is, the unity of the imperious Cartesian intellect/ego would be shattered, and its transcendental purity irreversibly defiled.

Hume, the towering figure of empiricism, the other major branch of modern Western philosophy, showed no less hostility to the imagination. He urges “the limitation of our enquiries to such subjects as are best adapted to the narrow capacity of human understanding.” He notes that the “imagination of man is naturally sublime, delighted with whatever is remote and extraordinary, and running, without control, into the most distant parts of space and time in order to avoid the objects, which custom has rendered too familiar to it.” Sounds rather appealing — but Hume’s point is to recommend the ordinary over the extraordinary, to counsel walking in preference to running, and to propose a strategy of thought control, ironically consigning the objects of imagination, if not to the flames, “to the embellishments of poets and orators, or to the arts of priests and politicians.”<sup>3</sup>

Even Rousseau, the Father of Romanticism and a bit of a dissident in relation to the tradition, gives stern warnings concerning the dangers of imagination. “The real world has its limits: the imaginary world is infinite. Unable to enlarge the one, let us restrict the other, for it is from the

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<sup>2</sup> René Descartes, DISCOURSE ON METHOD AND MEDITATIONS. (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1960), pp. 127–28

<sup>3</sup> David Hume, AN ENQUIRY CONCERNING HUMAN UNDERSTANDING. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1977), p. 112.

difference between the two alone that are born the pains which make us truly unhappy.”<sup>4</sup> Granted, there is some wisdom in this approach, particularly if we apply it to the grotesque consumptionist imaginary of late capitalist society. But for Rousseau, the danger was in the imagination per se. If he did not share fully in the general enthusiasm for light of the thinkers of the *Siècle des Lumières*, he exceeded his rivals in his extraordinary fear of the Dark, that mysterious source of troubling images.

But from the beginning, the imagination has had its defenders. Perhaps the most radical critic of the splitting off of imagination from the self was Blake, who perceived, at a relatively early date, the importance of the control of imagination to the system of repression and domination:

The Spectre is the Reasoning Power in Man, & when separated  
From Imagination and closing itself as in steel in a Ratio  
Of the Things of Memory, It thence frames Law & Moralities  
To destroy Imagination, the Divine Body, by Martyrdoms  
& Wars<sup>5</sup>

This revolutionary defense of the imagination has continued. In 1968 the French and Czech surrealist groups stated in the “Platform of Prague” that: “The repressive system monopolizes language, to return it to the people only after it has been reduced to its utilitarian function or turned towards ends of mere distraction. Thus, people are deprived of the real power of their own thoughts; they are forced ... to rely on cultural agents who provide them with patterns of thinking which naturally conform to the good and efficient functioning of the system ... With such a vacuous language, people cannot formulate the ardent images that make the satisfaction of their real desires absolutely imperative ...”<sup>6</sup>

Long before, the Surrealists had read Freud. Not to find out that they should adapt to what Freud took for “reality” — capitalism, the state, patriarchy — but to find out that reality is “elsewhere.” Freud, despite himself, showed that the deadening world of commerce, of bureaucracy, of the endless repetition of the same, is not the world of the highest, or deepest, reality. The reason that Freud inspired the surrealists was that his analysis of dreams revealed that all of us — the clerk, the machine operator, the sign painter, even the political activist or the academic drudge — are poets, creators, masters of the image, the symbol, and language. We are all dreamers and all revolutionaries. A phantom haunts civilization, and it is not the working class. It is the imagination at play. The Phantom of Liberty.

## In a Bad Place

The highest aspirations of the imagination are called utopia. But utopia is just as much the enemy of the imagination, and is our own Nemesis. We live in the shadow of a terrifying utopia. And we must search the shadows for those other utopias that have been eclipsed.

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<sup>4</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *EMILE OR ON EDUCATION*. (New York: Basic Books, 1979), p. 81.

<sup>5</sup> From “Jerusalem”, Chapter 3 in *WILLIAM BLAKE: THE COMPLETE POEMS*. (London: Penguin Books, 1977), p. 793.

<sup>6</sup> *THE FORECAST IS HOT! TRACTS & OTHER COLLECTIVE DECLARATIONS OF THE SURREALIST MOVEMENT IN THE UNITED STATES, 1966–1976*, edited with introductions by Franklin Rosemont, Penelope Rosemont, and Paul Garon. (Chicago: Black Swan Press, 1997), p. 247.

Civilization has its feet firmly planted in the reality of domination, and its head firmly planted in the utopian imaginary. We must pull up both by their roots. The dominant utopia is the utopia of Progress, of the conquest of nature, of the rationalization of society. It is a utopia of infinite powers of production and infinite desires for consumption. It has taken on a multitude of forms, and inspires both of the systems of Super Power that threaten to destroy the earth: it is essential both to the Socialism of the Rich in the West and the Capitalism of the State in the East. Infinite desires for consumption.

The Mind of the Megamachine thinks Utopia.

Utopia in this sense is an abstract idea, a closed system, a weapon to use against the unenlightened or evil forces of resistance. Vaclav Havel wrote eloquently about such authoritarian utopianism, which (in rather uncharacteristically anarchistic phrasing) he describes as a reaction against “life’s outrageous chaos and mysterious fecundity.” Those who are “tragically oppressed by the terror of nothingness and fear of their own being” are led “compulsively to construct and impose various projects directed toward a rationally ordered common good,” thereby “putting an end to all the infuriating uncertainty of history.”<sup>7</sup> The result is what he calls, borrowing a term from Beloradsky, the “eschatology of the impersonal,” in which a monstrous automatic machine develops that is beyond the control even of its creators. In his view, there is a direct path from the utopia of denial to totalitarianism and concentration camps. As a Czech, he cannot but think, of course, of the progression from the productivist utopia of Marxism-Leninism to the Gulag of Stalinism.

But Havel is perceptive enough to see that the utopianism of the corporate capitalist West leads in a similar historical direction.

A rationally ordered common good

“Soviet totalitarianism was only an extreme manifestation ... of a deep-seated problem that also finds expression in advanced Western society” in which there is also “a trend towards impersonal power and rule by mega-machines or Colossi that escape human control.” It is the “jugger-nauts of impersonal power,” whether these be “large-scale enterprises or faceless governments,” that “represent the greatest threat to our present-day world.”<sup>8</sup>

This Utopia of domination is utopia as escapism. This danger is especially real for those utopians who have been frustrated in their efforts to realize their dreams, or who do not even reach the level of praxis. Utopia as escapism remains in the vacuous realm of what Hegel called the Beautiful Soul, of those Dreamers of Moral Perfection who are unable to cope with the ugliness and ambiguity of the world, and therefore cling to a bloodless Ideal.

The utopia of escape has its satisfactions. We believe because belief fulfills needs and satisfies desires. Utopia can be an escape from the imperfections of the world and their reflection within our own selves. It can be an escape from the exigencies of the real, from history and its unavoidable tragedies. It can be an escape from the minutiae of the everyday. It can offer an imaginary compensation for being denied real power or having real efficacy. If we can’t escape from the Bowels of the Beast, we can lose ourselves in the Bowels of the Movement.

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<sup>7</sup> Vaclav Havel, *OPEN LETTERS: SELECTED PROSE, 1965 – 1990*. (New York: Knopf, 1991), p. 301

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Robert Conquest, *REFLECTIONS ON A RAVAGED CENTURY*. (New York: Norton, 2000), p. 212. This grasp of the horrors of concentrated power led Havel to a rather radical decentralism that dissolved into little more than nostalgia for a less centralized era as he himself drew closer to the centers of power.

In this sense, utopia is neurosis, a defense mechanism, a convulsive reaction against self and world. It is the imaginary domination of reality, rather than the imaginative transformation of reality. It is thought's revenge against a recalcitrant reality.

Seize the Daydream!

In opposition to the utopianism of domination and escape is a utopianism which is a critique of domination and a vision of a reality beyond it. Ricoeur has said that the "deinstitutionalization of the main human relationships is ... the kernel of all utopias," and that though it "may be an escape, ... it is also the arm of critique." He has also noted that "utopia has two alternatives: to be ruled by good rulers — either ascetic or ethical — or to be ruled by no rulers."<sup>9</sup>

The latter possibility is what Marie Louise Berneri calls, in *JOURNEY THROUGH UTOPIA*, the libertarian utopia. The libertarian utopians "oppose to the conception of the centralized state, that of a federation of free communities, where the individual can express his [or her] personality without being submitted to the censure of an artificial code, where freedom is not an abstract word, but manifests itself concretely ..."<sup>10</sup> Indeed, as in the utopias of Fourier and Morris, the division between work and play dissolves.

For Fourier, the new society is to be founded on a harmony of the passions, which, rather than being repressed, will be expressed in socially complementary ways. This, he says, is not only his own theory, but that of God, the Cosmic Utopian himself:

Passions so much downgraded by philosophers, are the most sublime work of God, the one to which He applied the most profound calculus. Only one kind of harmony can be seen in other branches of movement; but all are united in the mechanics of passions. This is an immense orchestra arranged for five billion instruments or characters which will inhabit our planet — not counting the animals, vegetables, aromas, and minerals all of which enter into the framework of harmony of passions, the harmony with which everything is coordinated. This will be difficult to believe, but it will be demonstrated that God knew how to apply his theory of the harmony of passions the means through which each one of the five billion individuals will be useful for the happiness of all the others.<sup>11</sup>

For the radical utopian tradition, society has always been seen as "a work of art." Nietzsche knew it was music, though for him (like anarchist utopian Godwin) the music is primarily played solo. Fourier imagined it as an ecstatic communal symphony. Creole utopians in the Delta of Dionysius know that it's jazz.

While Berneri discusses a variety of libertarian utopian conceptions in literature, Ronald Creagh, in his study *LABORATOIRES DE L'UTOPIE*, has given abundant evidence that the quest for such utopian community has a rich history in the multitude of experiments in libertarian communalism carried out across the North American continent, from the Owenite and Fourierist experiments of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century to libertarian countercultural communes of the 1960's.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *LECTURES ON IDEOLOGY AND UTOPIA*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 299.

<sup>10</sup> Marie Louise Berneri, *JOURNEY THROUGH UTOPIA*. (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), p. 8.

<sup>11</sup> Translated from *OEUVRES*, VOL. X, p. 346, in Nicholas Riasanovsky, *THE TEACHING OF CHARLES FOURIER*. (Berkeley: Univ. of California, 1969), p. 32.

<sup>12</sup> Ronald Creagh, *LABORATOIRES DE L'UTOPIE: LES COMMUNAUTES LIBERTAIRES AUX ETATS-UNIS*. (Paris: Payot, 1983).

So it would be a disastrous error to look to utopian thinking only for visions of the future — no matter how libertarian, just, peaceful, ecological, or virtuous in any other way that future may be. For utopianism is above all about the present. The most utopian of utopianisms is also the most practical. It demands Heaven on Earth. It demands Paradise, not hereafter, but Now. Utopianism affirms the presence of the eternal, the sublime, the marvelous — in the present. As Erazim Kohak has phrased it, “Perhaps real success is not that time is transformed in its flux but that, in each moment, value ingresses in it, that each moment humans glimpse the glory of the true, the good, the beautiful, the holy ...”<sup>13</sup>

Utopianism finds these ultimates, not in some higher realm or some indefinite future, but in the depths of our being and the heights of our experience. Indeed, it finds them even in the false, the evil, the ugly, and the profane. Utopia is present in the all the creative play of energies, in spiritual and material voyages of discovery, and, of course, in everything touched by the transformative imagination. Utopia is already present or it is a fraud.

At it’s deepest surre(gion)al level, utopianism is merely a fully awakened topianism.

## Words from Green Lips

We sometimes look to the past for hints of what this awakening might mean. For example, we discover that in 1871 the people of Paris awoke to a rather radically utopian idea. They decided to abolish capitalism and the state. They undertook the creation of a free municipality, which they called the Paris Commune. The Commune is one of the most numinous episodes in the history of revolution, and in the history of the imagination. In its few short weeks of existence, it opened up possibilities that remain an inspiration well over a century later: possibilities of freedom, of justice, of popular participation, of social creation. While this experiment was brutally crushed by the forces of reaction, it lives on in the radical imagination.

I can hardly mention the Commune without remarking that as I was first writing these words Chinese students were in the process of carrying on the tradition of the radical imagination, fashioning images of a Goddess of Democracy, and creating what Premier Li Peng called “an anarchic state.” My reaction at the time was to remark as follows: “The American news media harp on the fact that the students are demanding ‘democracy.’ Unfortunately, in the context of American ideological discourse, ‘demand for democracy’ is immediately translated into ‘Big Mac Attack.’ Though the media have shown students demonstrating for democracy, they have never, so far as I know, identified the song that these democratic students sing endlessly. It’s called the ‘Internationale’ — and it is not about Big Macs. Actually, its more likely that their nasty leaders, rather than the students, will usher in the invasion of Big Macs — though they’ll probably rename them something like Deng-Burgers. (Hold the Mao.)”

Their singing of the “Internationale” now takes on a greater significance. That great anthem, written in the week following the crushing of the Commune, commemorates its triumph and tragedy. Thus the students sang of their ideals of freedom and justice, and at the same time foreshadowed their own fate. Their rulers saw the need for a military invasion to protect the long-term economic one on which their power depends.

The Commune lives on in many senses.

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<sup>13</sup> “Erazim Kohak, *THE EMBERS AND THE STARS*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 217. 14 Arthur Rimbaud, *ARTHUR RIMBAUD: COMPLETE WORKS*. (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), p. 238.



One of the most remarkable figures associated with the Commune was a young poet named Arthur Rimbaud, whose work (all of which he completed between the ages of 16 and 19) was a truly astounding expression of the revolutionary imagination. In one of his most delirious poems he ironically juxtaposes the banal rhetoric of advertising, the yearnings of desire, and the ekstasis of utopian imagination:

For sale-  
Priceless bodies, beyond race or world or sex  
or lineage!  
Riches in ubiquitous flood!  
Unrestricted  
sale of diamonds!

For sale –  
Anarchy for the masses;  
Wild satisfaction for knowing amateurs;  
Atrocious death for the faithful and for lovers!

For sale –  
Homesteads and migrations, sports,  
Enchantment and perfect comfort, and the noise,  
the movement and the future they entail.<sup>14</sup>

Forgive me for the prosaic translation, but he's saying that Coke is not the Real Thing, and what is you won't get with money. Echoes of Rimbaud can be heard in the words of all the movements of the revolutionary utopian imagination over the past century. In the surrealists, the situationists, and even in the most radical of the post-structuralists today. Whom or what will we echo? (Or are we capable only of videotaping and xeroxing?) Rimbaud is reported to have written a revolutionary constitution inspired by the Commune, proposing a system of direct self-rule, reminiscent of the Athenian polis, in which free and equal citizens would gather to deliberate and determine democratically the fate of the community. He thus wished to recreate the public space of the Polis, but to populate it not with rational Greek citizens but with mad Parisian anarchists.

I mention Rimbaud, this "great anarchist," as he was called by Walter Benjamin, for his fusing of the revolutionary imagination with revolutionary politics. I also mention him and the Commune because it allows me to close with an excerpt from a poem about that Commune. A poem that brings us back to our topic of "Green" and the politics of the imagination. I quote from Vermersch's "Les Incendiaires" (1871):

Today, in Paris, on the cobblestones  
They trample our dead underfoot;  
The fathers machine-gunned, the mothers disappeared,  
In their blood-stained cradles,  
The orphans, reaching out their hands,  
Plead for mercy From the triumphant assassins!  
What threat for the future is held  
In the hands of those little children;  
What words will some day be spoken  
through the green lips  
Of those bloodied corpses ...<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Arthur Rimbaud, *ARTHUR RIMBAUD: COMPLETE WORKS*. (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), p. 238.

<sup>15</sup> Vermersch, "Les Incendiaires" in *Les Temps Nouveaux*, No. 39 (1910)

This is our question. In this noisy world, how will they speak, the green lips of these bloodied corpses?

# The Dao of Capitalism or “Going with the (Cash-) Flow”

## The Dao of Capitalism, or, “Going with the (Cash)-Flow”

Laozi was the mythic “Old Sage” of ancient China. We’re not sure whether he actually existed but we do know that he founded Daoist philosophy. His legendary DAODEJING, the “Classic of the Way and its Power,” is a subtle treatise that radically challenges our views of everything — including ourselves, nature and the world around us. I like to call it “The Anarchist Prince,” for just as Machiavelli’s Prince is a manual for rulers who wish to master the art of ruling, Laozi’s classic is written for rulers who want to learn precisely how not to rule.

The Dao means literally the “way” or “path.” It is at once the origin of all things and the way — the “natural path” — of the entire universe. It is also the unique way of each being, including the human kind of being. So it’s something that each of us must discover personally, in our own lives. For Laozi, the way is not clearly marked, and finding it must be part of the journey. “The Dao that can be told of is not the eternal Dao.”<sup>1</sup> We foolish human beings usually assume we know the way ahead of time. We follow society’s blind prejudices and our own rigid, self-centered ideas. As a result, we miss the interconnection of things, the bigger picture and the deeper truths.

As Laozi puts it, we overlook the dynamic balance of yin and yang, the opposites that are really complements, the world’s underlying unity in difference. He also teaches the importance of fu, return or recurrence, a concept that challenges civilization’s naive ideas of linear progress, of conquest and domination, of infinite accumulation. And he speaks of wuwei, “doing without doing,” which includes “ruling without ruling,” or anarchic ruling. This means acting through ziran or spontaneity, thus not forcing the world to fit our expectations; in fact not even forcing ourselves to conform to our preconceptions of what we ought to be. Laozi shocked his own patriarchal, authoritarian society by taking as his models for the anarchic sage-ruler the child, who experiences life as play and who acts spontaneously, and the female, “the ravine of the world,” who nurtures and cares without dominating or taking possession.

In short, Laozi’s Dao is the absolute antithesis of all forms of domination — including concentrated economic power, the centralized state, patriarchy and the exploitation of nature. So it came as a bit of a shock to me when I began to find the world’s first philosophical anarchist invoked in defense of right-wing ideology and capitalist economics. Right Wing Yin Yang

Ronald Reagan seems to have started this trend in his 1988 State of the Union Address. Reagan lumped together such “great ideas” as individual initiative, free-market economics, and Laozi’s advice to “govern a great nation as you would cook a small fish; do not overdo it.” While Laozi

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<sup>1</sup> TAO TE CHING [DAODEJING] in Wing-Tsit Chan, A SOURCEBOOK IN CHINESE PHILOSOPHY. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), Ch. 1.

didn't explain precisely how one should cook a small fish, Reagan had no difficulty concluding that the Old Sage must obviously have been advocating laissez-faire capitalism.<sup>2</sup>

James A. Dorn, Vice President of the right-wing Cato Institute, outdid Reagan, discoursing with a straight face on topics such as “the Dao of Adam Smith,” and injecting the poor corpse of Laozi with a strong dose of the entrepreneurial spirit. In a speech entitled “China's Future: Market Socialism or Market Daoism,” he exhorted the wise leaders of China to go back to their own Daoist roots and “rediscover the principle of spontaneous order — the central principle of a true market system.”<sup>3</sup>

Of course, anyone vaguely familiar with the rulers of China — a gang of corrupt and amoral bureaucrats capable of brutal repression and even massive genocide — would think it highly unlikely that they would become converts to Laozi's anarchic path of “spontaneous order.” However, they just might be open to the idea that capitalism could offer them (just like the bureaucrats-turned-capitalists of Eastern Europe) a new means of plundering their country. And with a good dose of Daoism thrown in, it would all be so spiritual and happen so spontaneously!

A more ambitious attempt to marry Daoism and the marketplace is presented in the book *REAL POWER: BUSINESS LESSONS FROM THE DAODEJING*, in which quotations from Stephen Mitchell's feel-good, New Agey paraphrase of Laozi are coupled with commentary by business writer and consultant James A. Autry. Autry cites the *DAODEJING* extensively but very selectively (often cutting off a citation just before Laozi gets to an embarrassingly anarchistic point).

In fact, he cooks up his “Daoism” much the way Ronald Reagan would cook a small fish — and the result is fishy indeed. *The Way of the Jaguar*

To begin with, Autry completely ignores Laozi's harsh condemnation of the materialistic society. Autry advises his manager to “go ahead and celebrate the abundance, all the perceived symbols of success, everything from a luxury car to a condo in some vacation spot. But don't get hung up on whether you have this stuff or not, and never lament what you don't have.”<sup>4</sup> Sounds very tempting, doesn't it? “Go ahead, trade that BMW in for that Jaguar you've been looking at. It won't really mean anything to you anyway. Hey, you're a really spiritual kind of guy.” The question is: who's talking, Laozi or Mephistopheles?

The Old Sage himself sees the accumulation and concentration of wealth as being, far from any cause for “celebration,” a fatal snare to be avoided at all costs. He warns that “to have little is to possess” while “to have plenty is to be perplexed.”<sup>5</sup> And he is positively scathing in his judgment of the social consequences of luxury and economic inequality: “Elegant clothes are worn, sharp weapons are carried, foods and drinks are enjoyed beyond limit, and wealth and treasures are accumulated in excess. This is robbery and extravagance, this is indeed not Dao.”<sup>6</sup> Elsewhere he advises: “Abandon skill and discard profit; then will there be no thieves or robbers” and suggests that we should “have few desires,”<sup>7</sup> a dictum in absolute contradiction to the society

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<sup>2</sup> New York Times, 1/26/88. Another amateur scholar of Eastern thought who shares this view of Laozi is Murray Bookchin. In view of their collective wisdom we might call it the Reagan-Bookchin interpretation.

<sup>3</sup> The Cato Journal, Vol. 18, No. 1.

<sup>4</sup> James A. Autry and Stephen Mitchell, *REAL POWER: BUSINESS LESSONS FROM THE TAO TE CHING*. (New York: Riverhead Books, 1998),

<sup>5</sup> *DAODEJING*, Ch. 22.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, Ch. 53.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, Ch. 19.

of consumption, which is hell-bent on inflaming infinite desires for the unattainable. Autry wisely decides not to touch this chapter at all!

In fact, one of the most pervasive themes of the DAODEJING is the danger of certain desires – and particularly the desire for material accumulation – out of control. Autry quotes an entire chapter of the DAODEJING with the notable exception of this embarrassing passage: “Do not value rare treasures, so that the people will not steal. Do not display objects of desire, so that the people’s hearts shall not be disturbed.”<sup>8</sup> The market Daoists ignore the fact that the enterprises managed by their presumably incorruptible and virtuous managers have the goal of arousing in the consumer just such disturbing, destructive impulses.

## The Means Justifies the End Previous

For Autry’s manager, “the acceptance of non-control is the only way to manage things.”<sup>9</sup> “Non-control” (a variation on wuwei) is a concept dear to Laozi, the enemy of all conventional ideas of ruling. His anarchic “ruling-without-ruling” means that we should influence the world through our way of living and our personal example, rather than through hierarchical authority and coercion.

But such “non-control” is the antithesis of the role of today’s corporate manager, who is obviously an authority-figure in the corporate power structure, and whose job it is to make decisions for others. Laozi’s sage-ruler is one “whose existence is (merely) known by the people – or perhaps even “not known by the people” (depending on which ancient manuscript we follow).<sup>10</sup> You can be sure that in any corporation the employees will know precisely who the bosses are and where they rank in the corporate hierarchy. And most will be intelligent enough to be very careful around any manager who claims to practice “non-control”!

Whereas Laozi teaches that each must find his or her own way, Autry’s mellow, New Age manager (a bit like Plato’s Old Age Philosopher-King) arranges things to “assure that all employees are assigned [my emphasis] to do what they do best, in the interest of all.”<sup>11</sup> Is it possible that the bottom line might dictate that some are assigned to do things they don’t do best? Is it possible that the company needs their help in producing something that isn’t “in the interest of all”? If Autry’s Daoist manager actually tried to “assure” anything other than what serves corporate goals, that perennial optimist would soon be assuring him or herself that, as Autry puts it, getting fired may sometimes be “one of the greatest gifts” one can receive.<sup>12</sup>

So let’s face it. Autry’s managers will control – by controlling. But ironically, there is a grain of truth in his idea of the manager who is “not in control.” Enlightened managers should indeed consider themselves to lack such control, but not primarily because it discourages obnoxious managerial styles and evokes better compliance, as Autry says between the lines. It is rather because something else really is in ultimate control. In the typical business enterprise what ultimately controls are the structural constraints of operating in a competitive, corporate-dominated market economy, and the imperious necessity to maximize profit and economic efficiency.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, Ch. 3.

<sup>9</sup> REAL POWER, p. xiii.

<sup>10</sup> DAODEJING, Ch. 17.

<sup>11</sup> REAL POWER, p. 44.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p. 109.

This points out the biggest problem with market Daoism: its complete failure to confront the issue of means and ends. It is pervaded by bad faith and self-deception. Unless we want to lapse into some sort of ideological dream world, we must ask a question that Autrey and the market Daoists scrupulously avoid: what ends are served by the “real power” of managers? Let’s be realistic about this. The goal is to offer to consumers precisely those objects of desire that captivate their imaginations and win their hearts, to produce those very “rare treasures” that underlie the social hierarchy, economic status and prestige that Laozi condemns so scathingly.

This is what the Dao of the Bottom Line demands.

## Zen and the Art of Union-Busting

We eagerly await Autrey’s forthcoming work on this topic, but he has already given us some pointers. He optimistically informs his New Age managerial readers that “[u]nions form not primarily to increase pay and benefits; they arise in situations where employees feel denigrated.”<sup>13</sup> It’s an old story: “Workers of the world unite! You have nothing to lose but your wounded pride!” He suggests that horrifying disasters such as unionization can be avoided if employees such as “mail sorters” are not given the outrageously mistaken impression they are mere “little people” in the corporation, since this would “distort [sic] organizational hierarchy into a social class system within companies.”<sup>14</sup> Since class for Autrey is all in the mind, the idea that a hierarchy of power, status and wealth within an organization might actually be a social class system is entirely incomprehensible to him.

Autrey criticizes such dismal corporate tendencies as “downsizing” and “outsourcing,” and optimistically concludes that they are not really in the company’s long-term interest. He fails to consider the not-obviously-impossible case in which a company manages to benefit economically from doing both, or the even more troubling instance in which a company shuts down a plant completely and moves to a location with cheaper labor, no annoying unions, and a conveniently authoritarian state. His most relevant bit of advice to managers for such an occasion is to express the enormous, heartfelt respect that the corporation has for the laid-off employees (perhaps a perverse variation on the ancient tribal custom of expressing gratitude to an animal before killing and eating it).

For Autrey, the role of the “wise leader” is to assure that the employees “understand how their individual jobs connect with the greater purpose of the business.”<sup>15</sup> But what such a noble leader must systematically ignore is how that purpose connects to, or fails to connect to, the “greater purposes” of the Dao: how it might trample on the way of each person, devastate the way of the community, and lay waste to the way of nature. Will The Real Laozi Please Stand Up?

True, Laozi says that “the Dao is vague.” But that doesn’t mean that it’s no more than putty in one’s ideological hands.

The deeply revolutionary message of the DAODEJING is perhaps best expressed in the “three treasures” that Laozi advises us to “guard and keep”: compassion, simplicity and humility.<sup>16</sup> The Old Sage would never recommend that these treasures be tacked on to a job description and

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p. 34.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p. 33.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p. 4.

<sup>16</sup> DAODEJING, Ch. 67.

ignored in the larger picture of our lives, society, and nature. He would be appalled at the idea of managing in an amiable, frugal, and self-effacing way an irresponsible, destructive enterprise that promotes material accumulation, waste and pollution, social inequality, and status-seeking.

Laozi remarks in a crucial passage that “the Way of Heaven reduces whatever is excessive and supplements whatever is insufficient. The way of man is different. It reduces the insufficient to offer to the excessive.”<sup>17</sup> This early diagnosis of civilization is an apt assessment of the social and ecological consequences of the contemporary globalized market economy.

Elsewhere, Laozi states the related harsh truth that “Heaven and earth are not humane. They regard all things as straw dogs.”<sup>18</sup> Straw dogs were insignificant objects thrown into the fire in ritual celebrations. Laozi warns us that in the case of reality, we can’t “have it our way” (the metaphysical Fallacy of the Whopper), though we certainly should try to find our way. If we continue to follow the distorted, destructive “way of man” (and “economic man” in particular), we will suffer the inevitable fate of those who live a life out of balance. We’ll find out what it’s like to be a straw dog that thinks it’s top dog.

To put it another way, global capitalism looks increasingly like a very big fish spewing poisonous filth in its small and delicate pond. Alas, you would-be Managers of Dao. Your fish is cooked!

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid, Ch. 77.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, Ch. 5.

# “AnarChapters: Zhuangzi’s Crazy Wisdom & Da(o) Da(o) Spirituality”

## No Way

Wander where there is no trail. Hold on to all that you have received from Heaven, but do not think that you have gotten anything. Be empty, that is all.<sup>1</sup>

– Zhuangzi

Try to be empty and to fill your brain cells haphazardly. Go on destroying what you have in you. Indiscriminately. You could understand a lot of things, then.<sup>2</sup>

– Tristan Tzara

As Zen Master Wu-men takes us through the “Gateless Gate,” the Daoist Sages Laozi and Zhuangzi take us along the Wayless Way, the Pathless Path.<sup>3</sup> A contemporary pathless pathfinder tells us that “[t]here are paths that can be followed, and there is a path that cannot ... it is the wilderness.”<sup>4</sup> The Pathless Path of Zhuangzi takes us into that wilderness, exploring the wildness of the world and wildness of the spirit. We find this path in the Inner Chapters, the sections of the ancient “Zhuangzi” writings that are thought to come from Zhuangzi himself (or selves). The Inner Chapters, we will discover, are the AnarChapters. They are chapters on wildness, freedom, spontaneity – in short, on Anarchy.

Those looking for “mysticism” in Zhuangzi may be disappointed – unless they’re looking for the mysticism of discovering what’s right before their eyes. In Zhuangzi you’ll find strange, altered states of consciousness. Clarity of mind. Attentiveness to the things of the world. Vividness of imagination. Zhuangzi’s mysticism is less about merging the Self into the Quietude of the One than about scattering selfhood into the Maelstrom of Multiplicity and watching, and taking part in, the Whirl of the Real.

Is this a form of Daoist “spirituality”? The term “spirituality” inevitably has undertones of the vaporous, the vapid, or even the vacuous. But if Zhuangzi has a “spirituality,” it’s the quality of having a lightness of spirit (as in French, *spirituel* means “witty”), while at the same time being a fully embodied spirit. What usually passes for “Nature Spirituality” or “Earth Spirituality” (check it out at your local book chains) is vastly more transcendentalist than Zhuangzi could

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<sup>1</sup> Burton Watson, *THE COMPLETE WORKS OF CHUANG TZU*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), p. 97.

<sup>2</sup> Tristan Tzara, “lecture on dada” in *SEVEN DADA MANIFESTOS*. (London and New York: Calder Publications and Riverrun Press, 1992), p. 108.

<sup>3</sup> On Wu-men, see Zenkei Shibayama, *ZEN COMMENTS ON THE MUMONKAN*. (New York: Harper and Row, 1974) and Albert Low, *THE WORLD: A GATEWAY – COMMENTARIES ON THE MUMONKAN*. (Boston: Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1995).

<sup>4</sup> Gary Snyder, *THE PRACTICE OF THE WILD*. (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1990), p. 151.



ever be. It's usually fixated on an Idea of the Earth or Nature — almost inevitably a romanticized, sentimentalized, sanitized, or nostalgic Idea. Zhuangzi's spirituality has the smell of the Earth. It reeks of the Real and will no doubt offend those with excessively delicate aesthetic — and ontological — sensibilities. Watch out! You may be getting into deep Dada.

Yes, the radical spontaneity of Daoism links it to Dadaism. Daodao is Dada and vice versa. Tristan Tzara in fact said that Zhuangzi “was as dada as we are.”<sup>5</sup> Daoist spirituality is Dada spirituality. Zhuangzi's Daoism, like Dada, breaks down all the barriers, wanders off the path, and crosses all the boundaries. It takes us into wild, uncharted regions of nature, culture, and psyche. It's a surre(gion)al spirituality.

## Just Do It — Without Doing It

The AnarChapters are all about non-domination or anarchy. Daoists call this wuwei, doing without doing, doing without dominating. It's a concept that many know from its influence on Ch'an and Zen Buddhism. What's often called “Zen mind” has deep roots in Daoist wuwei. And so does Dada mind, as Tzara indirectly points out: “Dada isn't at all modern, it's rather a return to a quasi-buddhist religion of indifference.”<sup>6</sup> He might have said “it's a return to a Daoist spirituality of wuwei” since that's where we find the Pre-Ancientist origins of the spontaneity, non-egoism, non-duality and non-domination of experience that he has in mind when he says “indifference.”

One of Zhuangzi's most intriguing tales is his anecdote of Prince Wen Hui's cook, Ding, who could carve an ox without his knife ever touching a bone. Cook Ding explains that “the blade of the knife has no thickness. That which has no thickness has plenty of space to pass through these spaces. Therefore after nineteen years my blade is as sharp as ever.”<sup>7</sup> This story gives a prime example of wuwei. Cook Ding's skillful action is so natural that it is effortless, without striving, without resistance from an alien world that must be dominated or forced into submission.

Cook Ding's knife can also be seen as the sharp blade of ruthless analytical and intuitive consciousness. Daoist mind grasps (without grasping) the moment of unity of all things, but also the particularity and “thusness” of every phenomenon. In a sense, it can “cut through” things naturally without hacking them apart.

And finally, notice that the character in the story is a cook, someone who combines ingredients into a synthesis of creative expression, not a mere butcher who slices things into parts. The Daoist cook, rather than “murdering to dissect,” dissects to make whole. Cooks are familiar figures in both Daoist and Zen stories, often showing insight that learned monks and renowned scholars embarrassingly lack. Their skill expresses wuwei. Their art requires a sense of spontaneity and creativity. And they work in a realm par excellence in which spirituality and materiality converge: no wonder that the breaking of bread has been the center of both social and spiritual ritual.

“Discard wisdom!” says Laozi. (Don't be a do-nothing know-it-all.) “Get cooking!” says Zhuangzi. (Just do it — without doing it.)

In another of his stories, Zhuangzi writes of Liezi, who was renowned for possessing the skill of riding on the wind. The literal-minded may dismiss this claim as ancient superstition. But Zhuangzi was not referring to a literal feat that can now easily be surpassed by businessmen and

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<sup>5</sup> “lecture on dada,” p. 110.

<sup>6</sup> “lecture on dada,” p. 108.

<sup>7</sup> Gia-Fu Feng and Jane English, CHUANG TSU: INNER CHAPTERS. (New York: Random House, 1974), p. 55.

tourists on 707's, but rather to an experience that even the most frequent flyers seldom have. This is the Daoist experience of being attuned to the way and knowing the effortless ease of "doing without doing." Tzara also uses the wind as a symbol of Dadaist spontaneity. Dada, he says, "mingles its caprices with the chaotic wind of creation."<sup>8</sup> So Liezi was a Master of this (non-) practice of wuwei. But the merciless dialectician Zhuangzi cannot allow even the great Liezi to get away with anything. True, that sage "escaped the trouble of walking, but he still had to depend on something to get around." Instead he should have "mounted on the truth of Heaven and Earth, ridden on the changes of the six breaths, and thus wandered through the boundless."<sup>9</sup> Ultimately, we must depend on Nothing at All, or we will soon fall flat.

But Zhuangzi has more to say about that creative wind. He tells us that it blows through everything and makes "the music of heaven." It rushes through each thing, plays each thing like a musical instrument, so that each thing makes its own unique sounds, and sings its own song. He asks us whether we can hear this Music of All Beings, in all its harmonic and discordant multiplicity. What's most astounding is that this Music of Heaven plays all around us and even in and through us! "Joy and anger, sorrow and happiness, hope and fear, indecision and strength, humility and willfulness, enthusiasm and insolence, like music sounding from an empty reed or mushrooms rising from the warm dark earth, continually appear before us day and night. No one knows from whence they come. Don't worry about them. Let them be!"<sup>10</sup> Who ever decides, "Now I'll be angry," or "Now I'll be joyful"? And even if one did, would one ever first decide, "Now I'll decide to be angry," or "Now I'll decide to be joyful"? No, the wind merely blows through our reed and that of others; the music plays through us and all around us. Just as at times some exotic species of mushroom springs up within us.

Zhuangzi helps us discover an anarchistic epistemology and sensibility. He describes a state in which "you are open to everything you see and hear, and allow this to act through you."<sup>11</sup> Part of wuwei, doing without doing, is "knowing without knowing," knowing as being open to the things known, rather than conquering and possessing the objects of knowledge. This means not imposing our prejudices (whether our own personal ones, our culture's, or those built into the human mind) on the Ten Thousand Things.

## Anarchy Rules

Zhuangzi, like Laozi, is a Pre-Ancientist Anarchist. He looks back to the non-existent, more than real, yet historically-rooted Dynasty of the Yellow Emperor, the Era of the Uncarved Block. The age prior to the rise of domination — before the ascendancy of the State, Patriarchy, Class and the Megamachine. The establishment of this Many-Headed Monster was a huge historical mistake, a serious but also a laughable one. At once Theater of Cruelty and Comedy of Errors. Napoleon (who laid siege to nations and murdered multitudes in order to become Emperor of a small island) once said, "La Force n'est jamais ridicule." For Zhuangzi, all attempts to dominate reality and to force one's way are not only ridiculous but indeed absurd. Even the long saga of domination is at once both tragedy and farce.

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<sup>8</sup> lecture on dada," p. 110.

<sup>9</sup> COMPLETE WORKS, p. 32.

<sup>10</sup> INNER CHAPTERS, p. 22.

<sup>11</sup> INNER CHAPTERS, p. 68.

A propos the absurdity of the State, Zhuangzi quotes Xu Yu as saying: “You want to govern the world and the world is already well governed.”<sup>12</sup> The history of the State is the history of replacing good rule by evil. For over 99 percent of human history and 99.9998 percent of earth history, the planet was governed quite well. Then came the Many-Headed Monster. Zhuangzi, who lived in the Period of the Warring States (alias “interesting times”), recounts the opening act of this World Historical Tragicomedy, while we’re fortunate enough to have front-row seats for the dénouement.

For Zhuangzi, there is an alternative to this Tragicomedy: the Play of Anarchy. Anarchy, the anti-political politics of wuwei. The anarchic ruler rules without ruling. “No one is aware of him, but he brings happiness to every man. He stands on that which is not known and wanders in the land of nowhere.”<sup>13</sup> This is nothing like Bakunin’s anarchist Invisible Dictatorship that guides the Masses strategically from behind the scenes. A Dictatorship that is “without insignia, titles, titles or official rights, and all the stronger for having none of the paraphernalia of power.”<sup>14</sup> Zhuangzi’s ruler renounces all kinds of manipulation and even the subtlest forms of domination. Zhuangzi agrees with Laozi that “the Empire is a spiritual thing.” And the Spirit of the Empire is the Spirit of Anarchy.

What could such an anarchic ruler be like? For an example, Zhuangzi looks back to the ancient sage (traditionally called “The True Man of Old”) who “did not forget his beginning and did not seek his end. He accepted what he was given with delight and, and when it was gone he gave it no more thought.”<sup>15</sup> This sage was in many ways merely the ordinary person of a prior age before the Uncarved Block was chopped up, before the integrity of nature and humanity were shattered by the violence of the State.

In that world, both human society and nature were gift economies. People practiced primal “economics,” the nomos of the oikos: “home rule”! This was “economics” in the sense of the extravagant and automatic self-allocation of abundant non-resources. Before the rise of regimented agriculture, scarcity and exploitation, and Imperial Barbarism and social domination, human beings could still experience the rich generosity of nature, the overflowing of being. The Daoist sage preserves this Spirit of the Gift in a world gone insane with acquisitiveness and possessiveness.

If we fall under Zhuangzi’s spell (if we’re wooed by his way!), are we naively yearning for the permanent reality of a mere Temporary Autochthonous Zone of the imagination? Or are we lapsing into radical nostalgia for a romanticized distant past? As enjoyable as utopian fantasy and radical nostalgia may be, neither is required in this case. Zhuangzi was looking back to real history, as mythologized and poeticized as this history has been. Eden and all its variations have actual historical roots in gathering and hunting societies, and in the village communities of the late Neolithic.<sup>16</sup> But more crucially, Zhuangzi is describing a living world that anyone can enter in the present, through a wuweian practice that undoes the psychic mechanisms of

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<sup>12</sup> Burton Watson, *THE COMPLETE WORKS OF CHUANG TZU*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), p. 32.

<sup>13</sup> Gia-Fu Feng and Jane English, *CHUANG TSU: INNER CHAPTERS*. (New York: Random House, 1974), p.153.

<sup>14</sup> Arthur Lehning, ed. *MICHAEL BAKUNIN: SELECTED WRITINGS*. (New York: Random House, 1972), p. 180.

<sup>15</sup> *INNER CHAPTERS*, p. 114.

<sup>16</sup> On this history, see Marshall Sahlins, *STONE AGE ECONOMICS*. (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1972), Lewis Mumford, *TECHNICS AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT*. (San Diego: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1967), Pierre Clastres, *SOCIETY AGAINST THE STATE: THE LEADER AS SERVANT AND THE HUMANE USES OF POWER AMONG THE INDIANS OF THE AMERICAS*. (New York: Urizen Books, 1977), and Lewis Hyde, *THE GIFT: IMAGINATION AND THE EROTIC LIFE OF PROPERTY*. (New York: Random House, 1983). On the same topic from the

domination and allows us to open ourselves up to experience — to the absolute gratuity of all that appears. After all, that’s the way reality actually is, beyond the illusions of all reality “principles.” When everything is a gift, the only appropriate attitude to life is gratitude and joy at receiving completely undeserved largesse. Everything is lagniappe!

So maybe the only Emperor is the Emperor of Ice Cream (Quick. It’s melting!). Zhuangzi says or hints at a great deal about the qualities of this anarchic ruler (that is, just anybody who wanders along the Wayless Way). Scattered through the AnarChapters we find traits such as these: Calmness and equanimity. Intensity and spontaneity of feelings and passions. Skepticism about her own knowledge. Lack of concern for praise or blame. Freedom from guilt. Refusal to conform to the expectations of others. Rejection of all subservience and subordination. Humility. Creativity of thinking. Openness to every point of view. Love of solitude. Compassion for all beings. Absence of meanness, rancor and resentment. Lack of self-importance, egotism and arrogance. Reasonableness and fairness. Self(less)-confidence. Disdain for traditions and institutions. Fierce loyalty to the truth of experience and of things themselves.

Is this ruler-sage then a good example for others? Zhuangzi says that people tell him that the good ruler does what is right, promotes law and order, and makes sure that people are “never tempted to break the law.”<sup>17</sup> Doesn’t it sound fantastic? It seems much like some people’s idea of anarchy — everybody does what’s right not because of coercion, but because they follow the good example of others. But for Zhuangzi this isn’t nearly anarchistic enough. The problem is that it “subverts virtue,” by which he means that it undermines the creative power of each person to act rightly and skillfully in a given situation. Establishing such a system of rule is like “making a mosquito carry a mountain on its back.”<sup>18</sup> Zhuangzi would undoubtedly be nauseated by all the talk of “role models” that we hear in schools and mass media today. His own advice is for all of us to keep our own minds clear, follow our own way, impose it on no one, do what we can, and be satisfied. We should watch out for rulers, including the best of all rulers (maybe especially the best of all rulers), and avoid trying to be a good example.

The problem is the intrusion of the ego. One of Zhuangzi’s persistent themes — the very secret of wise (non-)rule — is, “Get rid of self-obsession!” Paradoxically, “the perfect man has no self, the holy man has no merit, the sage has no reputation.”<sup>19</sup> “No more gurus!” teaches Zhuangzi. And get rid of that inner guru! The more we think of our self, the more everything appears imperfect, unacceptable, and completely inadequate — including our own beloved self. The more we claim credit and recognition, the less we deserve it. And the less reason anyone would have to give it to us. The more we try to become heroic, self-asserting “individuals” the more we become pitiful puppets playing a ridiculous role.

## Being Good for Nothing

Zhuangzi was a radical relativist and perspectivist. Not in the nihilistic Post-Mortemist sense of losing all sense of materiality and rootedness in the real, but rather in the Pre-Ancientist sense of openness to both the radical uniqueness and the natural commonality of all beings. Openness

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standpoint of the history of consciousness, see Ken Wilber, *UP FROM EDEN: A TRANSPERSONAL VIEW OF HUMAN EVOLUTION*. (Boulder, CO: Shambala Publications, 1983).

<sup>17</sup> INNER CHAPTERS, p. 149.

<sup>18</sup> INNER CHAPTERS, p. 149.

<sup>19</sup> INNER CHAPTERS, p. 9.

to both their absolute emptiness and their dense physicality. According to Zhuangzi, we miss both the uniqueness of others and our commonality with them because “we cling to our own point of view, as if everything depended on it.”<sup>20</sup> We can’t shift our perspective. We can’t see the perspective of the other person, the other tree, the other fish.

Zhuangzi’s relativism seems to go to wild extremes. He might seem crazy for saying that “No one has lived longer than a dead child,” and that Peng Zu (who lasted a not negligible seven-hundred years) “died young.”<sup>21</sup> Yet any of us, like Zhuangzi, can pick up a piece of stone that is a billion years old. What’s the usual life span for us — insects of a day that we are — compared to that? Should we congratulate each other on every second that we manage to survive? And whatever the length of one’s life, it equals precisely one life. Peng Zu “alone is famous today for having lived a long time, and everybody tries to ape him. Isn’t it pitiful?”<sup>22</sup> Zhuangzi says that we’d be better off if we weren’t so pitiful and self-pitying. A shocking thought! Maybe the length of my life is suited precisely to someone like me.

We aren’t very good at “thinking like a mountain,” but most of us live as if we think we have the lifespan of a mountain.

Zhuangzi’s works are full of stories about the relativity of all things, and the human tendency to ignore the perspective, and the way, of other beings. He points out that a human who sleeps in a wet place will get aches and pains, but it’s a perfect resting place for an eel. A human who lives up a tall tree will be anxiety-ridden, but a monkey takes it in stride. He mentions two famous women who were thought to be the most beautiful in all of China. Yet fish, on seeing them, dive to the bottom of the water, birds fly away in horror, and deer run away terrified. Who is the true judge of beauty?

In one story, Zhuangzi is crossing a bridge with Huizi, points to the fish swimming around in a stream and remarks on how happy they are. Huizi replies, “You’re crazy! How can you know what it’s like to be a fish? You’re not a fish!” Zhuangzi replies, “How do you know I don’t know what it’s like to be fish. You’re not me!” In this tale, two profound truths hide behind one apparent sophistry. We can fail to recognize the experience of the other, and we can fail to recognize the otherness of the other.

And then there’s the story of the huge old tree that is no good for lumber. A carpenter dismisses it as completely useless, since he can’t use it. But its very uselessness has been useful to it in keeping it alive until it towers above all the other living things. In the story, the tree says to the carpenter, “You and I are both things. How can one thing judge another thing?”<sup>23</sup> An excellent question! Indeed, how can one being have the gall to impose its concept of value on every other of many billion times billions of beings in the universe?

One of the most famous of Zhuangzi’s stories is “Three in the morning.” He tells of a monkey trainer who decides to give the monkeys three acorns in the morning and four in the afternoon. The monkeys are infuriated. So the trainer says, “OK, you get four in the morning and three in the afternoon!” And the monkeys are all delighted.

A common reaction to this story is, “What stupid monkeys and what a brilliant trainer!” Those who jump to this conclusion put themselves in the place of the trainer, but they may be a

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<sup>20</sup> Gia-Fu Feng and Jane English, *CHUANG TSU: INNER CHAPTERS*. (New York: Random House, 1974), p. 22.

<sup>21</sup> Burton Watson, *THE COMPLETE WORKS OF CHUANG TZU*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), p. 43.

<sup>22</sup> *COMPLETE WORKS*, p. 30.

<sup>23</sup> *INNER CHAPTERS*, p. 82.

bit slower than the monkeys they laugh at. I can imagine Zhuangzi telling these dull-witted primates that the monkeys are the best judges of whether they're hungrier in the morning or in the afternoon! And he might point out that the trainer was not necessarily any genius either. He was just smart enough to figure out what the monkeys were rather obviously trying to communicate. And as for the monkeys — they got exactly what they wanted.

Beyond making monkeys out of certain overeducated Third Chimpanzees, Zhuangzi may be saying that we tend to hang on to our precious acorn distribution systems (what Wilhelm Reich called “character armor”) for no good reason. We try to control other beings (monkeys, people, the things of the world) in completely irrational ways, not realizing that there's really nothing at stake.

According to this interpretation, Zhuangzi is putting us in the place of the trainer and then showing what a ludicrous figure he is. But on a deeper level Zhuangzi may be also asking us to put ourselves in the place of the monkeys. In this case, the trainer is the devious ruler who dominates us through the absurdities of politics and economics. We are the kind of monkeys who can't catch on to the fact that the alternatives offered by our masters all come to the same thing. We are just delighted if the powers that be give us 4+3 acorns instead of 3+4 acorns! After all, isn't that what the Free World is all about?

Considering Zhuangzi's radical perspectivism, it wouldn't be surprising if he would challenge us to put ourselves in the place of both the trainer and the monkeys. In fact, maybe we should even look at the situation from the point of view of the acorn. For he might have added that if the world stopped wasting its time on systems of monkey-training, a few more acorns might grow into magnificent oak trees!

Throughout all these tales of many life forms, Zhuangzi develops a certain concept of value: what we would now call a non-anthropocentric one. He says: “You were born in a human form, and you find joy in it. Yet there are ten thousand other forms endlessly transforming that are equally good, and the joy of these is untold.”<sup>24</sup> By reducing everything to a narrow, monolithic standard of value — economic value, instrumental value, or even use value — we destroy these myriad modes of enjoyment, and finally make our own lives less than enjoyable as we survey a devastated landscape of domination. The Daoist rejects this sad, absurd reductionism and affirms the incomparable value of all the diverse forms of life and the manifold expressions of natural and human creativity. Johannes Baader said much the same of Dada: “A Dadaist is someone who loves life in all its uncountable forms, who knows and says that, ‘Life is not here alone, but also there, there, there (da, da, da).’”<sup>25</sup>

Both Daoism and Dadaism take a stand for all that is devalued according to the nihilistic calculus of civilization and domination. Zhuangzi comments ironically that “[a]ll men know the use of the useful, but nobody knows the use of the useless!”<sup>26</sup> And Tzara echoes the irony in his remark that “Dada is as useless as everything else in life.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> INNER CHAPTERS, p. 123.

<sup>25</sup> Johannes Baader, in *Die Freie Strasse*, Dec., 1918; quoted in Hans Richter, *DADA: ART AND ANTI-*

*COMPLETE WORKS*, p. 67.

<sup>27</sup> Tristan Tzara, “lecture on dada” in *SEVEN DADA MANIFESTOS*. (London and New York: Calder Publications and Riverrun Press, 1992), p. 112.

## Becoming a Bug's Arm

Zhuangzi says that when Laozi died, Chin Shih went to the funeral, “yelled three times, and left.”<sup>28</sup> The mourners were shocked and thought this was a disgrace. Zhuangzi, on the other hand, saw it as a quite reasonable response. Maybe Chin Shih was giving three cheers for old Laozi. Or maybe he was just getting his mourning over with quickly. Either way it makes perfect sense. The alternative is to hang on to what can't be caught. “The Master came because it was time. He left because he followed the natural flow.”<sup>29</sup> Zhuangzi was a rebel against all that is stupid, unimaginative, cruel, and oppressive, but he never saw the point in rebelling against our own nature and the nature of nature. For Zhuangzi, following the Dao means achieving “freedom from bondage,”<sup>30</sup> exactly as Spinoza said almost two millennia later in his ETHICS. Zhuangzi concludes his funeral story in the spirit of his great pre-Ancientist predecessor Heraclitus: “The wood is consumed but the fire burns on.”<sup>31</sup> We shouldn't be surprised that when we try to hold on to the wood we end up with a handful of ashes. And what kind of buffoon would try to hold on to fire?

Zhuangzi's spirituality of death is a refusal to fall into the death neuroses of civilization. His approach to death seems weird, shocking, and abnormal because it is neither safely tragic nor safely romantic. It seems unnatural because of its stark naturalism. He is actually willing to approach the unapproachable. He befriends the corpse. Old, dependable Death. “Brother Death, please mind the store.” He also avoids death psychosis, civilization's poisoned legacy from ancient barbarism. The delusion that death is neither tragic nor romantic because it's just not there. He announces loudly that the grinning corpse cannot be evaded. Grin back! Zhuangzi recounts the words of Master Li to the dying Master Lai: “How marvelous the Creator is!

What is he going to make of you next? Where is he going to send you? Will he make you into a rat's liver? Will he make you into a bug's arm?”<sup>32</sup>

In confronting the reality of death, Zhuangzi confronts the reality of life. To him, the idea that everything just changes form, so there is really no death, is a fraud. “One may say, ‘There is no death.’ What good does that do? When the body decays, so does the mind. Is this not a great sorrow? Is life really this absurd? Am I the only one who sees the absurdity?”<sup>33</sup> Apparently there was some New Age ideology floating around in the Ancient World, and Zhuangzi didn't buy it. Death is real, so life is irreducibly absurd. But we have no good reason to flee from this absurdity. Rather we need to embrace it — as part of life. The question is whether we are capable of embracing life itself, rather than clinging to our own ghostly phantasms of life.

Zhuangzi's affirmation of the laughable, sometimes outrageous, sometimes grotesque absurdity of real life runs throughout his stories and aphorisms. In this he was a precursor of the Carnavalesque. Bakhtin explains that the laughter of Carnival is an affirmation of our place in the Cosmos and Chaos of Nature. It “does not permit seriousness to atrophy and to be torn away from the one being, ever incomplete. It restores this ambivalent wholeness.”<sup>34</sup> Carnival is “the

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<sup>28</sup> Gia-Fu Feng and Jane English, CHUANG TSU: INNER CHAPTERS. (New York: Random House, 1974), p. 59.

<sup>29</sup> INNER CHAPTERS, p. 59.

<sup>30</sup> INNER CHAPTERS, p. 59.

<sup>31</sup> INNER CHAPTERS, p. 59.

<sup>32</sup> Burton Watson, THE COMPLETE WORKS OF CHUANG TZU. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), p. 85.

<sup>33</sup> INNER CHAPTERS, p. 25.

<sup>34</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, RABELAIS AND HIS WORLD (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984), p. 123.

true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change and renewal” and is “hostile to all that was immortalized and complete.”<sup>35</sup> In Carnival, people participate in “the wholeness of the world,” and affirm the fact that “they too are incomplete, they also die and are revived and renewed.”<sup>36</sup>

Zhuangzi is a Pre-Ancientist rather than a Post-Mortemist precisely because he faces both life and death.

## Don't Fall for It

For Zhuangzi, like Laozi, the Dao declined when everything was given a name, and when people began to make distinctions between right and wrong. “Then came men who distinguished between things ... Later they labeled them ... When right and wrong appeared, Dao declined. With the fall of Dao, desire arose.”<sup>37</sup> Nature and society were ruthlessly torn apart, dismembered into bits and pieces that could be labeled, judged, measured, dominated, controlled, and possessed. We are fallen along with everything we have dragged down with us.

Neo-Daoist Dadaism similarly attacks both the reduction of living realities to lifeless names, and the dualistic division of right and wrong. Tzara says that “a sensitivity cannot be built on the basis of a word; every sort of construction converges into a boring sort of perfection, a stagnant idea of a golden swamp, a relative human product.”<sup>38</sup> Has this ever been expressed more powerfully? The Golden Swamp, sublimely beautiful, teeming with vitality, is transformed by the objectifying, annihilating mind into a stagnant idea! The Psychic Swamp becomes the Psychic Apparatus. And regarding dualism, Tzara says that “the beginnings of Dada” are to be found in a “disgust with people who separate good from evil, beauty from ugliness.”<sup>39</sup>

Zhuangzi's Fall of Dao sounds a bit like Original Sin, but with a big difference. When Zhuangzi laments the Fall, he remains radically dialectical and ironic, adding that this fall is a fall that is not a fall. A conventional fall is one-directional, but to the Daoist dialectician the path down and up are still the same path, the same Dao. There remains the underlying Equality of All Things. So he adds, after discussing the rise and fall of things, “Is there really rise and fall?”<sup>40</sup> This lack of metaphysical seriousness is reminiscent of the Rg Veda, in which the author of the “Hymn of Creation” asks who can know the source of all creation. The reply is that only “He who surveys it in the highest heaven, He only knows,” but it is immediately added, “On the other hand, maybe He doesn't!”<sup>41</sup> So much for that Eternal Question.

And speaking of creation, is there a Creator according to Zhuangzi? Well, there's certainly Creativity, and it moves within all things. “There must be some primal force, but we cannot discover any proof. I believe it acts, but I cannot see it. I can see it but it has no form.”<sup>42</sup> Zhuangzi rejects the dogmatism of theism and atheism. He's like Heraclitus, who says that wisdom is both willing and unwilling to call itself Zeus. God may or may not choose to exist, but is certainly not

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<sup>35</sup> Bakhtin, p. 10.

<sup>36</sup> Bakhtin, p. 12.

<sup>37</sup> Gia-Fu Feng and Jane English, *CHUANG TSU: INNER CHAPTERS*. (New York: Random House, 1974), p. p. 34.

<sup>38</sup> Dada Manifesto 1918” in Tristan Tzara, “Lecture on dada” in *SEVEN DADA MANIFESTOS*. (London and New York: Calder Publications and Riverrun Press, 1992), p. 4.

<sup>39</sup> lecture on dada,” p. 112.

<sup>40</sup> *INNER CHAPTERS*, p. 32.

<sup>41</sup> Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Charles E. Moore, eds. *A SOURCEBOOK OF INDIAN PHILOSOPHY*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 24.

<sup>42</sup> *INNER CHAPTERS*, p. 25.



dogmatic about it. Zhuangzi would probably agree with Tzara's Dadaist quasi-theology: Dada is "the absolute and indisputable belief in every god that is an immediate product of spontaneity."<sup>43</sup>

This is a long way from the sado-masochistic metaphysics of monotheism. The theistic imaginary, caught between egoistic self-aggrandizement and egoistic self-deprecation, must either subserviently worship or desperately curse the Patriarchal Despot. "Why me, Lord?" complains the wormlike creature. "Why not you? You pathetic schmuck!" replies the Monster Divine. In return for submission and repression, the True Believer gets to participate vicariously in hierarchical power and domination. Such ideological debris of ancient barbarism still figures powerfully in the deadly dialectic between Capital, State and Cult and may yet allow Civilization to actualize fully all its magnificent omnicidal potentialities.

Zhuangzi's anarchic spirituality is at the opposite psychic pole from all this brutal barbaric seriousness. His outlook is much more in the spirit of the Vedic poet who said that Brahman created the universe in a spirit of *lila*, or play. Just foolin' around! Similarly, the myriad expressions of Daoist Creativity are greeted with wonder, amazement, surprise, humor, irony, amusement, gratitude, and a healthy dose of absurdism. This is nothing like Tertullian's *credo quod absurdum* — "I believe because it is absurd" — which has nothing to do with any actual grasp of the absurd, the cosmic joke.<sup>44</sup> The fanatic's absurd beliefs are dry abstractions, logical contradictions and factual unlikelihoods transformed into weapons for spiritual self-mutilation and the pacification of hostile otherness. Zhuangzi's sense of the absurd is the acute perception of the ironic relationship between all abstractions and the world we experience. The Ten Thousand Things can never be forced into the Twelve Categories of the Understanding any more than the subtle Art of Living can be reduced to Ten Convenient Commandments.

One problem: What about the indictment of "desire" as implicated in the fall from Dao? Does this mean that we should give up all of our desires, passions, and powerful feelings? It's easy to get the impression that ancient Daoism and Buddhism are extremely ascetic, life-denying outlooks. "Self-negating" in the worst sense of the term. Zhuangzi clears up this misunderstanding. When he says that someone has no desire, he means that "he does not disturb his inner well-being with likes and dislikes."<sup>45</sup> The fall of Dao meant the rise of desire in the sense of a destructive, insatiable craving for things that we can't in fact really possess and that consequently come to control and possess us. Desire that the past should not have happened. Desire that we have some self that is not us. Desire that we should be above nature rather than a part of it. Desire that we should have infinite power and live forever.

## The Truth is the Hole

Most of what has passed for dialectic in the West has quickly subverted all dialectical subversion by falling into dogmatism and harnessing an anarchic procedure on behalf of an imperious ego and the forces of domination. As Tzara put it, dogmatists use this pseudo-dialectic for "looking hurriedly at things from the opposite point of view, so as to impose their opinions indirectly,"

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<sup>43</sup> "Dada Manifesto," p. 13.

<sup>44</sup> Though let's face it, "grasping" the absurd is itself a rather absurd idea.

<sup>45</sup> INNER CHAPTERS, 108.

so it turns into a game of “heads I win, tails you lose, dressed up to look scholarly ... an amusing machine that leads us (in banal fashion) to the opinions we would have held in any case.”<sup>46</sup>

Daoist dialectic, on the other hand, resists closure and cooptation, leaping the abyss between theory and practice, between spirit and sensibility, between being and nothingness. It remains suspended above the abyss while at the same time firmly grounded in nature. From this powerfully precarious position it affirms the logic of the absurd and the absurdity of all logics, the metaphysics of physicality and the physicality of all metaphysics. It inhabits at once the utopian nowhere of meaning and the toposian density of earth. It is this intoxicating air and this rich and fertile soil that nourish Zhuangzi’s ironic spirit of affirmation.

Zhuangzi is a dialectical thinker, not merely as a vague precursor of the real thing, but in the most radical sense. In his world, all things are making each other what they are. Minds are creating realities and realities are transforming minds. Everything is in a process of incessant transformation. A thing always is what it is not, and is not what it is. As he explains, “‘That’ comes out of ‘this’ and ‘this’ depends on ‘that’ — which is to say that ‘this’ and ‘that’ give birth to each other. But where there is birth there must be death; where there is death there must be birth. Where there is acceptability there must be unacceptability; where there is unacceptability there must be acceptability. Where there is recognition of right there must be recognition of wrong; where there is recognition of wrong there must be recognition of right.”<sup>47</sup>

The self itself is entirely immersed in this delirious dialectic of relativities. In what may be his most famous story, Zhuangzi says that he dreamed he was a butterfly. On awakening, he wondered whether he had really dreamed he was a butterfly or whether the butterfly was now dreaming it was Zhuangzi! This is usually taken as an instance of Zhuangzi’s light-hearted skepticism, or an example of goodnatured and perhaps slightly sophistic philosophical playfulness. And it may very well be both of these. But it’s also an early expression of the injunction to “take your dreams for realities.” Not because you can then heroically will them to become real, but because they are already absolutely real. Zhuangzi’s butterfly-dream-mind is as much a reality as his human-being-in-the-world-mind. Mind, says Zhuangzi, surpasses the boundaries created by our illusion of the unified ego. Reality is surre(gion)al.

The Inner/AnarChapters end with a story about boundaries. It is the story of Hun Tun, or Primal Chaos. According to this tale, Light and Darkness decided to do Chaos the favor of giving him the seven openings by which the world can be perceived. So they drilled one hole in him each day for seven days. On the seventh day, he died. Dualism imposes on Chaos a differentiation that ultimately destroys it. Our access to the indeterminate, pre-categorical reality, the flesh of being, the primal source, is lost. Yet we have a way back to that source, since we are also that chaos. As Tzara expresses it, “How can anyone hope to order the chaos that constitutes that infinite, formless variation: man?”<sup>48</sup>

Zhuangzi’s dialectic accepts unity only if it’s pervaded by diversity, difference and multiplicity, and harmony only if it exists through opposition and discord. His holism is not pacification. “That which kills life does not die; that which gives life to life does not live. This is the kind of thing it is: there’s nothing it doesn’t send off, nothing it doesn’t welcome, nothing it doesn’t destroy,

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<sup>46</sup> “Dada Manifesto 1918” in SEVEN DADA MANIFESTOS, (London and New York: Calder Publications and River-run Press, 1992), pp. 8–9.

<sup>47</sup> THE COMPLETE WORKS OF CHUANG TZU. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), pp. 39–40.

<sup>48</sup> “Dada Manifesto,” p. 5.

nothing it doesn't complete. It's name is Peace-in-Strife. After the strife it attains completion.<sup>49</sup> As Proudhon said, "Freedom is the Mother, not the Daughter, of Order." Mother Chaos died giving birth to the Cosmos.

In speaking up for Hun Tun, Zhuangzi was a True Surre(gion)alist Of Old. He realizes that all regions overlap and interpenetrate. He knows that "the Way has never known boundaries."<sup>50</sup> It is only because of our imposition of our own conceptual categories, our creation of a "this," and consequently of a "that," that boundaries arise. This is what Laozi means when he says that "the way that can be wayed is not the eternal way," the path that can be followed is not the true path, and what Zhuangzi implies when he says that we should "wander where there is no trail." This pathless path is the way of experience, the way of awakened mind, rather than the dualistic way of already knowing, of preconceived ideas, of dominating and thus destroying a living, moving reality. Hun Tun died and did not die.

The moral of Zhuangzi's story of Hun Tun is left unsaid. One might imagine that it's something like this: "Hun Tun is dead. But don't mourn, disorganize!" Seek the unity beyond the dualities. Seek to resurrect Chaos.

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<sup>49</sup> "COMPLETE WORKS, p. 83.

<sup>50</sup> COMPLETE WORKS, p. 43.

# Nietzschean Anarchy and the Post-Mortem Condition

## Nietzschean Anarchy & the Post-Mortem Condition.

In a friend one should have one's best enemy" says Zarathustra [Z168]<sup>1</sup>, and Nietzsche certainly proves himself to be the best friend and the best enemy of anarchism.<sup>2</sup>

Even a cursory survey of Nietzsche's works reveals that the term "anarchist" is for him invariably a term of abuse. He sees anarchism as one of the most baneful expressions of that psychic malaise called resentment, and a symptom of modern society's grave and perhaps terminal illness — destructive nihilism. What better friend could anarchists possibly wish for than this brilliant and uncompromising enemy?

Yet there is beyond, and indeed beneath, Nietzsche's anarchophobia a Nietzschean Anarchy that is infinitely more anarchistic than the anarchism he assails.

It is nothing like the Nietzschean Anarchy that some recent observers have discovered. We will call these observers "Post-Mortemists" and their view from the crypt "Post-Mortemism." We will call these Post-Mortemists the "Waking Dead," because of their peculiar celebration of death. They find themselves to be "in the wake" of death. They consider their morbid celebration to be "a wake" for the dead. I say none of this in accusation: I only recount what they repeat endlessly about themselves. Ces revenants.

Endlessly. For the spirit of Post-Mortemism is pervaded by a certain kind of repetition compulsion, a fixation on certain images, certain figures of speech, even certain catch phrases (though in fact they catch little). For Nietzsche, "the scholar is the herd animal in the realm of knowledge," one who speaks and thinks as he does "because others have done so before him." [WP 226] The Post-Mortemists, these sheep in wolves' clothing, are just such herd animals, despite their ferocious exterior, despite their howling, wild enough to wake the dead.

Nietzschean Anarchy is not the Anarchy of Post-Mortem wakes, but rather the Anarchy of the Awakened Mind (a pre-Ancientist idea). The Post-Mortemist wake is the Party of Death. The Nietzschean Anarchist Party is the Party of Life.

We will call the Post-Mortemists the "Anarcho-Cynicalists." Cynicism is the disease of preference of our age, and Nietzsche has the distinction of being one of the first to diagnose its onset. Post-Mortemism is one of the most exotic growths to blossom in the decaying social body. It attacks the reigning cynicism on behalf of a more radical cynicism. The uncharitable Nietzsche would reserve a special contempt for those Post-Mortemists "who lost their high hope" and then "slandered all high hopes" [PN 156] using a borrowed tongue — often, ironically, a tongue borrowed from Nietzsche himself.

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<sup>1</sup> References to Nietzsche's works will be indicated in brackets by the abbreviated title and page number. See the bibliography of Nietzsche's works below for titles and abbreviations.

<sup>2</sup> This text first appeared in *Exquisite Corpse* #62 (2000)

For many, Nietzsche is a Post-Mortemist anarchist who inspires the somber celebration of the Death of God. But for us — Pre-Ancientists and Surre(gion)alists — Nietzsche is a Pre-Ancientist anarchist who celebrates the eternal Rebirth of the Gods.

“For us,” I say. But what right do we have to claim “Nietzsche” as our own? None at all, and we will not raise a hand if you attempt to carry off this rotten corpse to put it in some museum or reliquary.

Yet we will claim him anyway, justifying this outrage by our full recognition of the multiplicity of Nietzsches. Of course, it is a commonplace that there are as many Nietzsches as there are readers of Nietzsche. But beyond this, there are many Nietzsches within Nietzsche, and within the many Nietzsches. As the philosopher himself comments, there is a chaos within the creative self. And as the philosophical joker Chuang Tzu told in his Pre-ancient story, brutal interference, however well intended, causes the Body of Chaos (Hun-Tun) to die. We recognize then that we must refrain from violence against the chaotic body — the Body of Nature, the Social Body, the Spiritual Body. We recognize that we can have no knowledge of “self,” except as we explore the regions of self, regions that have no clear boundaries of selfhood, which extend deeply beneath the surface of selfhood, and outward beyond the borders of selfhood.

So our present surre(gion)al journey will explore — not “Nietzsche” — but certain Nietzschean regions. Regions that we might call, collectively, Anarchica. You are invited along on this voyage: “Travel to Anarchica and stalk the Cold Monster!”

In our exploration we will be guided by the strict science of Psychogeography. The earliest Psychogeographers discovered that not only does one never step into the same river twice, but that one never arrives at a single source. Whether this be the Source of the Nile, or the Source of Nihilism.

For this reason nothing would be more more pointless than to seek some true Nietzsche who “is” or “is not” an anarchist. A Prof. Basinski (under the influence of Martin “Dr. Death” Heidegger)<sup>3</sup>, assures us that Nietzsche never believed in the Will to Power, Eternal Recurrence, and the Übermensch. These were, we are told, no more than metaphysical illusions he created to hide his own nihilism.<sup>4</sup>

Of course Nietzsche didn’t believe in any of it! And the good Prof. Basinski cannot possibly believe any of these silly rumors he’s spreading about Nietzsche.

So we forsake the quest for the Promised Land of Nietzsche. There is no compass that could direct us to such a destination. Here as everywhere, Nagarjuna’s radical Awakened-Mind dialectic must be our guide. As we cross the non-existent borders of the Nietzschean regions, we find that we might explore the Nietzsche who is an anarchist, the Nietzsche who is not an anarchist, the Nietzsche who both is and is not an anarchist, and the Nietzsche who neither is nor is not an anarchist. Or more accurately, we might explore the ways in which the many Nietzsches are and are not all of these.

In what follows, we will hear from some of these Nietzsches.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> God(is-Dead)Father of Post-Mortemism.

<sup>4</sup> Journal of Value Inquiry 42:271

<sup>5</sup> The many Nietzsches are often brilliant, witty, satirical, ironic, incisive, analytical, subtle, intelligent, and profound, but not infrequently also superficial, pretentious, heavy-handed, pathetic, petty, fatuous, buffoonish. It would be tempting to turn our surre(gion)al travelogue into “A Tale of Two Nietzsches.” However, we will limit our visit for the most part to “The Best of Nietzsches.” There is, however, “The Worst of Nietzsches,” and this worst can be indeed abysmal. The abysmal Nietzsche emerges for example in a statement, quite appropriately, on the topic of “depth.” A

### The Antichrist Versus The Anarchist

Bakunin said, “the urge to destroy is a creative urge also.” But as Nietzsche pointed out, sometimes the urge to destroy is — let’s face it — an Urge to Destroy.

Of course, Nietzsche is well aware of the truth in Bakunin’s insight. In fact he expressed the same idea much more eloquently than did Bakunin: “The desire for destruction, change and becoming can be an expression of an overflowing energy that is pregnant with future ...” [GS 329] So, yes, it can be creative.

“But,” he adds, “it can also be the hatred of the ill-constituted, disinherited, and underprivileged, who destroy, must destroy, because what exists, indeed all existence, all being, outrages and provokes them. To understand this feeling, consider our anarchists closely.” [GS 329] This is almost touching: “our anarchists.” How many philosophers have been willing to claim as their own these oft-scorned stepchildren of politics? Nietzsche does, and even seeks to understand their feelings! What he discovers is that “our anarchists,” poor souls that they are, are in the grips of a nihilistic rage against reality.

When he speaks of “our anarchists,” Nietzsche has in mind a certain kind of anarchist. His model is not the anarchist who is a fanatic for freedom, but rather the one who is obsessed with injustice. For him, this anarchist is just the extreme type of a certain kind of revolutionary, one who expresses vicerally the revolt of the masses, of the downtrodden, of the “underprivileged.” The anarchist is thus the purest and most spiritually contaminated expression of a certain kind of reactivity, the perfect embodiment of reactive revolt. Nietzsche’s stinging charge against such an anarchism is that it is, at its deepest level, reactionary. Reaction is not the exclusive preserve of the right, in Nietzsche’s perceptive analysis.

Though Nietzsche doesn’t hesitate to cast aspersions on the “underprivileged” and their self-ordained champions, his critique is no simplistic defense of “privilege.” He can as well as anyone attack and demolish the smug pretensions of the privileged. After all, it is those very “privileged” who overturned the old order of privilege to create the mass society and herd morality that Nietzsche detests so fervently. He sides neither with the established order nor with those who struggle to topple it. For Nietzsche, to paraphrase Bierce, conservatives are those who heroically defend the old absurdities, while “our anarchists” are those who strive mightily to replace them with new ones. His critique is thus a diagnosis of a sensibility rooted in reactivity, resentment, and one-sided negativity. Those of “our anarchists” who fall prey to such an insidious sensibility become obsessed with the injustices of the existing world and with their own powerlessness in the face of such evil. They are in effect, the mirror image of those slavish souls who are entranced and corrupted by the awe-inspiring spectacle of power, wealth and privilege. But in the case of our rebellious little anarchists, the spirit is poisoned by an impotent, reactive rage.

It is Nietzsche the Antichrist who savagely attacks the Anarchist, since anarchism for him is a kind of Christianity. He does not, by the way, mean by “Christianity” the spiritually and socially inflammatory teachings of Jesus, which he shows to be ironically negated by the entire history of the Church. He means, rather, the reactive institutional Christianity that retreats into pessimism

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man, he says, “who has depth, in his spirit as well as in his desires ... must always think about women as Orientals do; he must conceive of woman as a possession, as property that can be locked, as something predestined for service and achieving her perfection in that.” [BGE 357] And savor the exquisite odor of this statement: “We would no more choose the ‘first Christians’ to associate with than Polish Jews — not that one even required any objection to them: they both do not smell good.” [A 625] On Nietzsche as a pretentious buffoon, see Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, part two, “Why I am So Clever,” and part five, “Why I am Such an Asshole.”

and nihilism in its utter dissatisfaction with the world. Nietzsche's indictment of Christianity and anarchism resembles Hegel's dissection of the "Beautiful Soul." For Hegel, the moral idealist creates a dream world with little connection to ethical reality, the embodiment of good in the actual world. But Nietzsche is much more scathing in his assault on such idealism. The "Beautiful Soul" is for him a quite "Ugly Soul," corrupted by its narrowness and alienation from the truths of experience and the virtues of the world.

If the higher person, the *Übermensch*, is like a vast sea in which immense evil is diluted and dissolved, the moral purist is a small stagnant puddle, in which the most exalted goodness putrefies. "The Christian and the anarchist: both decadents, both incapable of having any effect other than disintegrating, poisoning, withering, bloodsucking; both the instinct of mortal hatred against everything that stands, that stands in greatness, that has duration, that promises life a future." [A 648] The tragic flaw in both these character-structures results from an identification of the self with an ungrounded, ahistorical ideal. The result is a rage against the real, in which the most authentic achievements evoke the most intense reactive hostility, since they threaten the necessity of the absolute break with what exists, *l'ecart absolu*, that has become a psychological necessity.

Nietzsche's image of the anarchist is inspired by the classical anarchist revolutionary who was the reactive response to the industrializing, accumulative capitalism and the centralizing, bureaucratically expanding nation-state of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Yet much of what he says also characterizes — perhaps even better — various strands of Western anarchism that emerged in the 1960's and which linger on in certain subcultures. Such an anarchism defines itself practically by what it is against. It fumes and fulminates against "all forms of domination," by which it means every one of this fallen world's institutions and social practices, none of which has any liberatory potential.

This is the anarchism of permanent protest. The anarchism of militant marginality. The anarchism of sectarian theoretical purity. The anarchism of grand gestures that become increasingly petty and indeed meaningless as they are dissolved in the vast Post-Mortem Ocean of Signifiers. As sophisticated surrealism becomes the stuff of advertising and music videos, and the entire culture lapses into brutal cynicism tinged with irony, all homely gestures of resistance, all sighs on behalf of the oppressed, all "critiques of all forms of domination," all this becomes low-level noise, lost in a din of background noise (The High Deci-bel Epoque). Though if any of it happens to be mildly interesting, it can be recycled as bits and pieces of style.

Nietzsche once pointed out that the interesting question for Kantian ethics is not what actions are necessary according to the Categorical Imperative, but why belief in a Categorical Imperative was so goddam necessary for Kant. Similarly, we might ask why for certain classical anarchists cataclysmic revolution was an absolute necessity, and for certain contemporary anarchists sectarian dogmatism and the politics of permanent protest are a psychological necessity. Why does their spirit (and perhaps their nervous system) crave it so intensely? It has been asserted by some anarchists with evident satisfaction (and many more think it, whether with pride or guilt) that "everything our enemies say about us is true." According to their Manichean worldview, everything these enemies think to be so horrifying is in reality quite wonderful, and to be accused of it should be a source of boundless pride. Such anarchists thus recreate themselves in the reactive image of the reactive image that reactionaries have of them. Rather than negating the negation, they affirm the negation, achieving the bliss of some rather incoherent sort of pure negativity.

The particular anarchists that Nietzsche targets are only one variety of a nihilistic species that includes all kinds of “slanderers, underminers, doubters, destroyers.” [WP 26] It is for this reason that he places “anarchism” in a seemingly bizarre list that includes such other symptoms as “celibacy,” “sterility,” “hystericism,” and “alcoholism.” [WP 26]<sup>6</sup> Such an anarchism sees nothing but the negative in what is, yearns for revolutionary destruction, and finds hope (or perhaps merely a “principle of hope”) only in a post-revolutionary Utopia bearing little connection to anything that actually exists. Such an anarchism is a kind of Left Platonism, taking refuge not in Plato’s Realm of Eternal Forms, but in an equally ghostly and disembodied Realm of Eternal Forms of Freedom.

The critique of anarchism is merely a minor variation on Nietzsche’s major theme of the destructive nature of all varieties of resentment. “This plant,” he tells us, “blooms best today among anarchists and anti-Semites,” who seek “to sanctify revenge under the name of justice — as if justice were at bottom merely a further development of the feeling of being aggrieved — and to rehabilitate not only revenge but all the reactive affects in general.” [BGE 509–510] The wisest old anarchist I ever met once said to me (summing up his philosophy of life): “We deserve the best!” His entire life has been a celebration of as much of this best as we (all of us — no one is excluded from his Anarchist Party) have experienced and created. Yet for every anarchist with such a spirit, I have found many whose whole being proclaims the question, “Why have they done this to me?” Such an anarchist is a walking complaint.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century this resentment of revolt was embodied above all in Nechaev’s fanatical and murderous nihilism. But it also found expression in the side of Bakunin’s character that drew him so powerfully to Nechaev, the lumpenproletariat, and the brigands, and led him to fantasize vast revolutionary potential in every poorly-organized insurrection. In recent anarchist sectarianism resentment reemerges (“with a vengeance,” needless to say) in Bookchin’s anarcho-negativism, in which political theory and practice deteriorates into the politics of spleen.<sup>7</sup> The cult of negativity finds its *déraison d’être* in resentment — not only against “all forms of domination” but against every existing reality. Every practical attempt to transform the conditions of life is condemned as irrelevant, simpleminded, or else some sort of devious reactionary plot. And the more insidious it is, the more seriously it threatens to accomplish some good deemed unattainable according to the dictates of abstract dogmatism.

Post-Mortemists have depicted Nietzsche as the enemy of dialectical thinking. They presume that merely because he demolishes the sophistries and self-delusions of dialecticians that he is somehow anti-dialectical. Yet no one has ever but more teeth into a biting dialectical logic. “Whoever fights monsters should see to it that in the process he does not become a monster. And when you look long into an abyss, the abyss also looks into you.” [BGE 279] How many anarchists in their struggle against the state have reproduced a little state within themselves? How many leftists in their crusades against domination have turned themselves into domineering, powerseeking dogmatists? The monster signifies violence, fanaticism in ideas, rigidity of character, contempt for persons — all of which have been reproduced in abundance, even in more extreme forms, in the monster-slayers themselves. The warriors of being fall into the abyss of nihilism. “We are nothing but we shall be all.” But out of nothing comes nothing!

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<sup>6</sup> Bizarre, though to be honest, has there ever been a careful study of anarchist groups to see what proportion of their members are hysterical celibates or sterile alcoholics? Perhaps there is grant money somewhere

<sup>7</sup> Social ecology becomes anti-social egology



Such an affirmation of nothingness (a Bad Infinity, to be distinguished from the Nothingness of Affirmation of Gautame, Böhme, etc.) arises from the propensity to define oneself in relation to that which one is not; in this case the system of power and domination. By defining oneself as powerless, or merely subject to power, one overlooks the marvellous powers that are slumbering within one's own creative spirit. Just as "power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely," powerlessness corrupts and absolute powerlessness corrupts absolutely. In the case of the oppressed, or, rather those who allow themselves to be defined by the conditions of their oppression, their souls are poisoned by their reactive will to power. Their oppositional perspective comes to absorb their entire being. They are occasionally dangerous but always tiresome lions. The spirit of the child has been entirely extinguished in them. Their creativity, spontaneity, playfulness, and vitality are destroyed.

Nietzsche's message concerning such anarchist sectarians is the same as his message about all dogmatists, all who wield their truth like a weapon. "Avoid all such unconditional people! They are a poor sick sort, a sort of mob: they look sourly at this life, they have the evil eye for this earth. Avoid all such unconditional people! They have heavy feet and sultry hearts: they do not know how to dance. How should the earth be light for them?" [Z 405–406] In effect, Nietzsche says "If I can't dance, I don't want your anarchism!" Such "unconditional" anarchists, despite all their ideological purity, despite their incessant talk of "humanity" and "ecology," cannot love others, and cannot love the earth.

### **On Monsters Hot and Cold**

So Nietzsche proves himself to be anarchism's best friend and enemy. But his gift to anarchism goes far beyond his amicable hatred. For despite his scathing attacks on anarchists he shows himself to be not only a good friend and a good enemy of all anarchists but also to be a good anarchist.

One of the most distinctive characteristics of anarchism is its voluntarism — its opposition to the imposition of the will of one upon another through force and coercion. And no anarchist has stated the case against coercion more perceptively than has Nietzsche. Coercion is corruptive force, he says. But contrary to the conventional anarchic complaint, its most significant corrupting effect is on the victims, not the perpetrators. "Every power that forbids, that knows how to arouse fear in those to whom something is forbidden, creates a 'bad conscience' (that is, the desire for something combined with the consciousness of danger in satisfying it, with the necessity for secrecy, for underhandedness, for caution. Every prohibition worsens the character of those who do not submit to it willingly, but only because they are compelled." [WP 391] No wonder some anarchist rhetoricians become discouraged when their ringing condemnation of "all forms of domination" falls on deaf ears. They pay far too much attention to the injustices of the oppressors and to little to the ways in which power has transformed those who are coerced and dominated.

Nietzsche's imperious questioning of *techne* also betrays his deeply anarchistic spirit. His critique of technical rationality and technological domination is prophetic. Despite his well-known admiration for some varieties of "will to power," the will to dominate and manipulate nature is the object of his most scornful derision. "Our whole attitude toward nature, the way we violate her with the aid of machines and the heedless inventiveness of our technicians and engineers, is hubris." [BGE 549] He sees that our will to dominate nature inevitably produces a will to dom-

inate human nature also. “[O]ur attitude toward ourselves is hubris, for we experiment with ourselves in a way we would never permit ourselves to experiment with animals and, carried away by curiosity, we cheerfully vivisect our souls ...” [BGE 549] Certain impeccably anarchistic but nonetheless simplistic theories onesidedly trace the quest to dominate nature in the actual domination of “human by human,” but dogmatically dismiss the roots of social domination in the urge to conquer nature. In reality the relationship between the two dominations is — as Nietzsche, that great anti-dialectical dialectician, grasped quite well — dialectical.

Nietzsche is not only one of the most devastating critics of the state, but also one of the most accurately perceptive analysts of that institution. Few before him were quite so indiscrete in divulging the origins of the state in force, violence and domination. The state, he says, “organized immorality — internally: as police, penal law, classes, commerce, family; externally: as will to power, to war, to conquest, to revenge.” [WP 382] He grasps the ironic truth that “law and order” as carried out by the state is in fundamental contradiction with the nature of its subjects. The masses on whose subservience it depends are incapable of either the banal cruelties or the paroxysms of horror that define the monster. “How does it happen that the state will do a host of things that the individual would never countenance? — Through division of responsibility, of command, and of execution. Through the interposition of the virtues of obedience, duty, patriotism, and loyalty. Through upholding pride, severity, strength, hatred, revenge — in short, all typical characteristics that contradict the herd type.” [WP 382–383] This is not for Nietzsche a reproach against the state, however, but merely a statement of the brutal truth that the mass of state-worshippers refuse to recognize. “None of you has the courage to kill a man, or even to whip him, or even to — but the tremendous machine of the state overpowers the individual, so he repudiates responsibility for what he does (obedience, oath, etc.) — Everything a man does in the service of the state is contrary to his nature.” [WP 383] Here he does no more than taunt the good citizen with the blatant self-deception and hypocrisy on which every state is founded.

There is perhaps no more powerful assault on the state in Western philosophical thought than Zarathustra’s vilification of “The New Idol.” There Nietzsche indicts the state for its artificial, coercive, technical-bureaucratic reality that contradicts and undermines what is most valuable in any culture. “State is the name of the coldest of all cold monsters. Coldly it tells lies too, and this lie crawls out of its mouth: ‘I, the state, am the people.’” [Z 160] Not only is the state not “the people” it in fact devours the people and all that they have created. State versus people is one of the crucial chapters in the epochal story of the battle between mechanism and organism, between the machine and life. The Artificial Monster (“that great Leviathan ... that mortal god,”) consumes any organic culture:

“The state tells lies in all the tongues of good and evil; and whatever it says it lies — and whatever it has it has stolen. Everything about it is false; it bites with stolen teeth, and bites easily. Even its entrails are false. Confusion of tongues of good and evil: this sign I give you as the sign of the state.” [Z 161]

All vitality is drained from the living social organism so that the Cold Creature might live. The Monster is a grotesque parasite, a strange Gargantuan vampire, and the people understand this. “Where there is still a people, it does not understand the state and hates it as the evil eye and the sin against customs and rights.” [Z 161]

Nietzsche’s diagnosis of the state was still prophetic in the 1880’s, since the the triumphant Monster still had a century to fulfill its deadly destiny before beginning its precipitous decline

and decay. His strident indictment sounds rather dated, however, in the era of the new Monster, the corporate Global Golem. “On earth there is nothing greater than I: the ordering finger of God am I’ – thus roars the monster,” [Z 161] according to Zarathustra. Today such a roar would be met with laughter, except possibly in some Third-World dictatorship in which the secret police might be watching. For as Nietzsche himself had quite presciently begun to realize, in mass society nothing really seems so “great,” and cynicism reigns supreme. The state as “the ordering finger of God?” Ha! In this sad Post-Mortem world, God has given everything the finger.

So the state may be, as Nietzsche says, the Coldest Monster. But now there are cold, hot and even luke-warm Monsters at large. The late modern state, that Post-Mortem Monster, we are coming to discover, is no more than a Lukewarm Monster. Thus it lies only lukewarmly. It could not with a straight face say “I the State am the People.” It can, however, half-heartedly tell us that it feels our pain.

The dominion of the great Monster Leviathan has been superceded not by that of the Luke-warm Monster, but by the ascendancy of another Beast. One that is neither cold nor luke-warm. It has a rather dark, satanic, and hot interior, but a radiant, divine, and above all cool exterior. It is Moloch, the Monster that eats its young – the Consuming Monster.

Nietzsche in fact realized that mass society would have little place for the old authoritarian state. “Who still wants to rule? Who obey? Both require too much exertion.” [Z 130] He is slightly less prophetic on the topic of work, observing that “One still works, for work is a form of entertainment.” [Z 130] Under the reign of Moloch few would confuse the two. Today one still works not for amusement but because work is a means toward entertainment. On the other hand, in an ironic reversal of Nietzsche’s aphorism, entertainment has increasingly become a form of work. Just as producers were once taught to feel shame if their work was not up to par, consumers now feel suitably guilty if they are not entertained in the correct manner.

Furthermore, Nietzsche’s true object of attack in his assault on the state is not one particular historical institution but all the forces that are destructive of life. “State I call, it where all drink poison, the good and the wicked; state, where all lose themselves, the good and the wicked; state, where the slow suicide of all is called ‘life.’” [Z 162] Nietzsche’s primary target is often statist conformity – the dissolution of individuality into good citizenship, the homogenization of cultural diversity into official state Kultur, the merchanzation of life in a techno-bureaucratic world. But he also had strong intimations of where the corporate state was going, that the accent was to fall more on the corporate, the economic, and less on the state, the political.

What is the color of power today? “Behold the superfluous! They gather riches and become poorer with them. They want power and first the lever of power, much money – the impotent paupers!” says Zarathustra. [Z 162] As I read this passage late one night, I heard someone passing by outside my window, speaking these precise words (for I wrote them down immediately): “It’s not about black and white anymore. It’s about power and domination, and it has no color except ...” At this point the voice faded out and I could not hear the final word. I rushed to the door but found no trace of the passer-by. I’ll call the voice, “The Ghost of Nietzsche.”

Zarathustra was already on to the message of this Ghost. The progression in his successive tirades against “The New Idol” and “The Flies In The Market Place” prefigures a real historical movement. After warning us about the dangers of the state, Nietzsche cautions us concerning the threat of the developing economic society. “Where solitude ceases the market place begins; and where the market place begins the noise of the great actors and the buzzing of the poisonous flies begins too.” [Z 163] Nietzsche foresees the coming of the society of the spectacle, a world of

illusion in which “even the best things amount to nothing without someone to make a show of them.” [Z 163] He heralds the coming of those swarms of poisonous flies that now overrun the earth, spreading poison everywhere. They are poisonous indeed! Nietzsche sounds the tocsin for the rising flood of toxins that inundate the world. If we poison the spirit can the corruption of the body be far behind (or vice versa)? As Nietzsche predicted, the masses may have a long life of slow death to look forward to in this poisonous, Post-Mortem world. Perhaps God was lucky to die early and avoid the crowds. Or did he?

Nietzsche may have written the obituary for a certain ancient psychopath who sometimes goes under the alias “God.”<sup>8</sup> Yet this same Nietzsche heralds the coming of a new Post-Mortem God. “Verily he [the actor] believes only in gods who make a big noise in the world.” [Z 164] The culture of noise, the society of the image, gets the God it needs and deserves. Nietzsche had a prophetic insight into the coming domination of spirit and psyche by the what has with suitable irony been called “the culture industry” (presumably because it produces bacteria). Nietzsche understood with Blake “that All deities reside in the human breast.” But he also foresaw the day in which the the gods of pandering and publicizing, the gods of spectacle and sensationalism would supplant the old psychic Pantheon, the divinities of creative energy and wild imaginings.

Nietzsche is quite explicit in his judgment of the market and the society of the image. “Far from the market place and far from fame happens all that is great ...” [Z 164] The free market frees the masses from such burdens as creative imagination, spontaneity, depth of the spirit, solitude, playfulness, the joy of the present moment — all that is “great” and good according to the Nietzschean valuation. Freed from these, one is free to pay for everything else.

According to Nietzsche, culture and the state are “antagonists.” “One lives off the other, one thrives at the expense of the other. All great ages of culture are ages of political decline: what is great culturally has always been unpolitical, even anti-political.” [TI 509] What Nietzsche means, what he perceived so acutely under the Reich, was that culture is the enemy of the “political” in a quite specific sense — it is the enemy of empire and all that is imperial. Greatness of culture is annihilated by empire, whether this empire be political or economic.

Nietzsche is thus once again more anarchistic than the anarchists. It is true that he sounds rather authoritarian in his suggestion that “Genuine philosophers ... are commanders and legislators” who say “this shall it be!” [BGE 326] Yet what he intends is as anarchic as the dictum of the anarchist poet Shelley in his “Defense of Poetry” that poets are “the unacknowledged legislators of the world.” For Nietzsche’s philosophers also rule through their power of creativity. “Their ‘knowing’ is creating, their creating is a legislation ...” [BGE 326] And he does not mean the philosophers of the academy, but rather the philosopher-poets of the spirit. The question for Nietzschean Anarchy is who shall rule: either the masters of the state and of the market, with their heroic will to plunder and destroy, or the creators with their generous will to give birth, their gift-giving virtue.

We shall return to this anarchic Nietzschean question, but first another question concerning another Nietzschean Anarchy.

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<sup>8</sup> Though this still redoubtable personage, apparently thinking that rumors of his demise have been greatly exaggerated, lives on in certain circles in a state of indefinitely suspended senility. Some have accused the devotees of the patriarchal authoritarian God with worshipping a “white male God.” But their God really is a white male. How do we know? As criminologists have pointed out, that’s the exact profile for a serial killer.

## Nietzschean Anarchy and the Post-Mortem Condition: Post-Mortemist Nietzsche

“What is Post-Mortemism?” Above all, the “Post-Mortem” is a nihilistic form of consciousness emerging from forces of decline, separation, disintegration, negation, and, in short, Thanatos. Post-Mortemism, can thus, as the expression of an absolute spirit of negation, validly present itself as the most radical form of theoretical Anarchy. But despite attempts by Post-Mortemists to claim Nietzsche as one of their prophets, Post-Mortemism itself falls victim to Nietzsche’s anti-anarchist critique.

Nietzsche distinguishes between an “active nihilism” which is “a sign of increased power of the spirit” and a “passive nihilism” which is “decline and recession of the power of the spirit.” [WP 17] While Nietzsche’s most passionate anarchic dimension expresses his active nihilism, his destruction for the sake of creation, Post-Mortemist Nietzsche becomes the passionless prophet of passive nihilism.

Let us consider a favorite proof-text, much beloved by certain Nietzschean Post-Mortemists:

What then is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms — in short, a sum of human relations, which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which after long use seem firm, canonical and obligatory to a people: truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are; metaphors which are worn out and without sensuous power; coins which have lost their pictures and now matter only as metal, no longer as coins. [TL 46–47]

Post-Mortemists read Nietzsche as if this were all ever said about truth, as if he had no concern for the truth of the body and the truth of worldly experience.

According to such a view, “truths are illusions,” for Nietzsche, mere perspectives on reality. There is no “transcendental signified,” for we are bound by our chains of illusion, or perhaps, better, our chains of allusion, our chains of signification.

And indeed, Nietzsche did recognize the inescapably perspectival nature of knowledge. Nietzschean perspectivism is the insight that all perception, all knowing, all valuing come from somewhere. They arise out of, and are rooted in, some perspective, some position, some place. But unlike Nietzschean perspectivism, the Post-Mortem variety is deracinated, *à la dérive*. It is the annihilation of place, the view from nowhere.

Nietzsche’s view of truth cannot be reduced to a Post-Mortem nihilism, for it always retains a naturalistic core of pragmatic realism. Signification arises in the midst of a continuum of experience. “The feeling of strength, struggle, of resistance convinces us that there is something that is here being resisted.” [WP 290] Nietzsche would dismiss our contemporary Post-Mortemist theoretical Anarchy as the latest form of escape to the dream world of ideas, the terrorism of pure theory, in which comic revolutionaries fantasize heroic conquests of idea by idea, yet remain out of touch with a reality that resists their control.<sup>9</sup>

Post-Mortemist Nietzsche, we are told, is an enemy of the whole. And quite appropriately (and ironically) this Nietzsche emerges precisely through the dismembering of the Nietzschean

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<sup>9</sup> Despite all their anarchic pretensions, the failure of Post-Mortemists to join in this resistance constitutes a de facto collaborationism

corpus. A dissected Nietzsche-part does indeed tell us that “Nihilism as a psychological state is reached ... when one has posited a totality, a systemization, indeed any organization in all events, and underneath all events,” etc. [WP 12] Nietzsche attacks the “positing” of a fictitious Totality that can give value to one who feels valueless “when no infinitely valuable whole works through him.” [WP 12] Yet Nietzsche also shows that when the creative, gift-giving whole (as opposed to any fictitious Totality) does indeed work through the person, there is no need for such a “positing.”

Post-Mortemists ignore the Nietzsche who speaks of unity-in-diversity and the dynamic whole. This is the Dionysian Nietzsche:

The word ‘Dionysian’ means: an urge to unity, a reaching out beyond personality, the everyday, society, reality, across the abyss of transitoriness: a passionate-painful overflowing into darker, fuller, more floating states; an ecstatic affirmation of the total character of life as that which remains the same, just as powerful, just as blissful, through all change; the great pantheistic sharing of joy and sorrow that sanctifies and calls good even the most terrible and questionable qualities of life; the eternal will to procreation, to fruitfulness, to recurrence; the feeling of the necessary unity of creation and destruction. [WP 539]

Nietzsche’s attack on “decadence” as “the anarchy of atoms” is aimed at those forces that produce a the disintegration of the living whole. “The whole no longer lives at all: it is composite, calculated, artificial, and artifact.” [CW 466] In other words, it is state, spectacle, and megamachine. In opposition to such a spirit, Nietzsche’s Dionysian is based on an affirmation of one’s place in the living whole:

Such a spirit who has become free stands amid the cosmos with a joyous and trusting fatalism, in the faith that only the particular is loathsome, and that all is redeemed and affirmed in the whole — he does not negate any more. Such a faith, however, is the highest of all possible faiths: I have baptized it with the name of Dionysus. [TI 554]

Nietzsche is quite prophetic concerning the developing spiritual illness of Post-Mortemism. In fact, he helps us grasp the fact that the “Post-Mortem” is in fact nothing but the “Late Modern.”<sup>10</sup> Long before Post-Mortemism emerged as a seemingly revolutionary social transformation, Nietzsche saw the accelerating development of many of its salient themes. Eclecticism, diversification, style, discontinuity, artifice, speed, superficiality, coolness. An abundance of disparate impressions greater than ever: cosmopolitanism in foods, literatures, newspapers, forms, tastes, even landscapes. The tempo of this influx prestissimo; the impressions erase each other; one instinctively resists taking in anything; a weakening of the power to digest results from this. A kind of adaptation to this flood of impressions takes place: men unlearn spontaneous action, they merely react to stimuli from outside. [WP 47]

An apt diagnosis of the Post-Mortem Condition: in sum, an “artificial change of one’s nature into a ‘mirror’; interested but, as it were, merely epidermically interested ...” [WP 47]

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<sup>10</sup> PM=late.

And what of the universal will to power? Does this not lend support to Anarcho-Cynicalism? Does not Nietzsche proclaim that: "Where I found the living, there I found will to power; and even in the will of those who serve I found the will to be master." [Z 226] Post-Mortemists often find in Nietzsche nothing but affirmation of the will and discovery of powerseeking everywhere. He is of course a "master of suspicion." But is not suspiciousness a mark of the slave mentality that he detests? Is not an obsession with power a mark of the inferior sensibility? The highest metamorphosis of the spirit is the child, and only the most neurotic child wastes much time on suspicion. Nietzsche exalts the will only to forget it. "He must still discard his heroic will; he shall be elevated, not merely sublime: the ether itself should elevate him, the will-less one." [Z 230] The will attains its greatest power through its own disappearance.

And what about "difference"? Nietzsche, living at the height of productionist industrial society, thought that the great threat to individuality and creativity was the imposition of sameness. "No shepherd and one herd! Everybody wants the same, everybody is the same: whoever feels different goes voluntarily into a madhouse." [Z 130] History's dialectic of absurdity has moved one step beyond Nietzsche, so that the rage for sameness now takes the form of an obsession with difference. The consumptionist mind reaches new levels of brilliance in its sensitivity to difference, which has little to do with excellence, as Nietzsche might once have assumed. The code of commodity consumption creates a minute sensitivity to differences of symbolic import, connotation, image and style. Though sameness is alive and well, huge profits are to be made from the growing quest to "feel different" by means of an infinite variety of modes of consumption. Even "going voluntarily into a madhouse" becomes a form of commodity consumption that can be marketed as a distinctive (and quite profitable) mode of being different. And in academia, that zoo for Nietzsche's "herd animals of the intellect," stupidity finds a refuge in difference. Mediocre intellectuals pursue their quest for tenure and then fulfill their publication quotas through mindlessly mouthing the slogans and mimicking the jargon of Post-Mortemism. And one is subjected to the tortuous spectacle of Anglo-Saxons, or even more depressingly, Saxons, engaging in an unintentional parody of Gallic wit. The result has all the brilliance of a joke translated by a computer program.

But as much as we might wish to bury Post-Mortemist Nietzsche, his Specter remains very much alive. It has terrified more than one ill-informed anarchist. Murray Bookchin, certainly the most authoritative voice in contemporary anarchology, once opposed the idea of a seminar on Nietzsche at his Institute for Social Ecology on the grounds that it might undermine his pupil's values. He was terrified that the philosopher might corrupt the youth of his little polis. In a recent work, Bookchin undertakes the theoretical demolition of Nietzsche's supposedly pernicious influence. It turns out that Bookchin's Nietzsche is no more than a parody of Post-Mortem Nietzsche. At the hands of Bookchin, this genealogist of culture becomes a zany literary type who sees all of history as merely "a disjointed, variable, and free-floating collection of narratives."<sup>11</sup>

Yet Nietzsche went to some lengths to show that realities like "narratives" are symptoms of realities that are far from "free-floating" — realities such as systems of power and cultural institutions that interact with fundamental biological drives and psychological impulses in shaping the self. Bookchin, in his frenzied attack on the evils of Post-Mortemism, discovers a Nietzsche that reflects his own aversion to Post-Mortem textualism more than it reveals anything particularly

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<sup>11</sup> Murray Bookchin, *Re-enchanting Humanity: A Defense of the Human Spirit Against Anti-Humanism, Misanthropy, Mysticism and Primitivism* (London: Cassell, 1995), p. 179.

Nietzschean. Bookchin's Post-Mortemism is an incoherent jumble in which A: Derrida says that there's nothing outside the text, and B: Nietzsche influenced Post-Mortemism, ergo C: Nietzsche must have believed that history is nothing but textuality.

Anyone who is willing to take the plunge into the murky waters of Post-Mortality will search vainly for a Nietzschean view of history in Derridean textualism. As Nietzsche states in the "preface" to *The Genealogy of Morals*, "our ideas, our values, our yeas and nays, our ifs and buts, grow out of us with the necessity with which a tree bears fruit — related and each with an affinity to each, and evidence of one will, one health, one soil, one sun." [GM 452]<sup>12</sup> Nietzsche would never say that "il n'y a pas de dehors du texte." He would say that there is no life that is without perspective. But every perspective is rooted deeply in life, in the body, in the earth, in the great "dehors."

We might apply Nietzsche's naturalistic-imaginistic mode of critique to Bookchin himself. Nietzsche would never dismiss Bookchin's creation of his own fictitious character "Nietzsche" as a mere "free floating narrative." Rather, he would situate the Bookchinite imaginary Nietzsche within Bookchin's own peculiar narrative will to power, his creation of an authoritative theoretical edifice on behalf of which he must do battle with, and attempt to annihilate all theoretical (and intensely emotion-charged) threats. He would also explore the foundations of this edifice in Bookchin's own seething resentment, and indeed the foundations of this resentment itself — the forces that shaped an imperious will, the underlying states of health and malaise, the qualities of the soil in which it developed, the nature of that sun that infused it with energy, or which perhaps hid its face at crucial moments. Finally, Nietzsche might reflect on why such a marvelous example of the reactive character structure should have found its place of refuge and its field for raging self-assertion in anarchism, that most convenient utopia of self-justifying resentment.

Literary Anarchy: Forgetting Nietzsche's Umbrella

"It is the habitual carriage of the umbrella that is the stamp of respectability." — Stevenson, *Philosophy of Umbrellas*.

"i forgot my umbrella" — Nietzsche

"Jacques' umbrella is alive and living in Paris."

"Sometimes [an umbrella] is just [an umbrella]." — Freud

There is an Anarchy of the Text. Yet Nietzsche would have no trouble diagnosing Post-Mortem textual Anarchy as a form of what he calls "literary decadence." For Nietzsche "the mark" of such decadence is that "life no longer resides in the whole." Though he would no doubt admire the brilliant sense of multiplicity that it sometimes achieves, he would certainly conclude that its focus on diversity comes "at the expense of the whole" so that "the whole is no longer a whole." Its Anarchy is not the Anarchy of life, of the organic, of the dynamic whole, but rather "the anarchy of atoms." [CW 626]

Post-Mortemist Literary Anarchy is a rebellion against the absurd concept that texts are autonomous totalities, textual organisms in which subtexts are textual organs, textual cells, textual organelles. But in their haste to murder the textual organism in order to dissect it, the Post-Mortemist anarchists ignore the larger ecology of the text. Their urge to deconstruct is an ecocidal urge also.

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<sup>12</sup> Yes, Nietzsche did indeed say that "our butts grow out of us with the necessity with which a tree bears fruit" — another comment on the decadent life of the scholar, perhaps



Derrida exhibits this impulse, the urge to deconstruct totality transmuted into an impulse to murder the whole, to deconstruct that which defies construction. He directs this ecocidal impulse toward a “whole” that he calls “Nietzsche’s text,” quite appropriately invoking a Monster. Referring to a seemingly cryptic “fragment” found among Nietzsche’s papers, Derrida proposes that:

To whatever lengths one might carry a conscientious interpretation, the hypothesis that the totality of Nietzsche’s text, in some monstrous way, might well be of the type, ‘I have forgotten my umbrella’ cannot be denied. Which is tantamount to saying that there is no ‘totality to Nietzsche’s text,’ not even a fragmentary or aphoristic one.<sup>13</sup> (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), pp. 133, 135]]

Is it possible that a crucial difference between Nietzsche and Derrida consists in the fact that the former, when he has forgotten his umbrella, knows that it is in fact an umbrella that he, chaos that he is, has forgotten. Derrida on the other hand, might think that “il s’agit d’un texte, d’un texte en restance, voire oublié, peut-être d’un parapluie. Qu’on ne tient plus dans la main.”<sup>14</sup> Or as Derrida’s English translator renders this idea, those who seek meaning in Nietzsche’s aphorism “must have forgotten that it is a text that is in question, the remains of a text, indeed a forgotten text. An umbrella perhaps. That one no longer has in hand.”<sup>15</sup> Here we come face to face with the Anarchy of undecidability. We peer into an anarchic abyss. We are perhaps about to be devoured by the Monster of Post-Mortemism.

It is striking that Derrida chooses as an example of undecidability a text that alludes to the forces of nature, and, indirectly, to protection from the forces of nature. For textualism is itself a metaphysical umbrella that protects one from those very forces. Such strange Anarchy has lost touch with the atmosphere. We are dealing here with l’oubli de l’atmosphère.<sup>16</sup>

According to Derrida’s English translator, “I have forgotten my umbrella.”<sup>17</sup> is “[f]ragment classified no. 12,175 in the French translation of Joyful Wisdom, p. 457.”<sup>18</sup>

According to Derrida, “J’ai oublié mon parapluie.”<sup>19</sup> is “[f]ragment classé avec la cote 12,175, tr. fr. du Gai savoir, p. 457.”<sup>20</sup>

According to the original<sup>21</sup> German: “ich habe meinen Regenschirm vergessen” is a note classified “Herbst 1881 12(62)” in Nietzsche’s collected works.<sup>22</sup> On examining this “fragment,” we find that Nietzsche not only “forgot his umbrella,” he also forgot his punctuation. In this he is unlike Derrida and Derrida’s English translator, both of whom not only remembered this punctuation, but decided to give it back to Nietzsche. Interestingly, they appear to be incompetent to

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<sup>13</sup> Jacques Derrida, [[Spurs: Nietzsche’s Styles

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 130.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 131.

<sup>16</sup> See Max Cafard, “Derrida’s Secret Name: Or, What Transpired in the Auditorium of Gaea and Logos” in *Exquisite Corpse* 38 (1992): 2–3

<sup>17</sup> Derrida, p. 123. Guillemets in the original.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 159. Reversed italics in the original

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 123.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 159. Reversed italics in the original.

<sup>21</sup> N.B.: “the original,” that is, as it is represented in a book, and herewith re-represented. We feel compelled to admit that the following is not actually Nietzsche’s scap of paper

<sup>22</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Sämtliche Werke*, (München and Berlin: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag and Walter de Gruyter, 1980), Band 9, p. 587.

give him back his forsaken umbrella (no matter how severe the weather may be), yet they are perfectly capable of giving him back these little bits of forgotten text.

Furthermore, in view of Derrida's case for undecidability, the nature of his (and his translator's) restoration of Nietzsche's text seems highly ironic. First, he helps restore Nietzsche's ego, for Nietzsche seemingly defied the laws of punctuation in order to mark his "ich," even though it begins the statement, with a humble lower case "i". However, Derrida bestows on Nietzsche a masculine "J" reversing this self-effacement. Secondly, by restoring the initial capitalization, Derrida helps anchor the case of the umbrella firmly in time. Our floating forgotten umbrella affair now has a point of origination or initiation. And finally, in restoring the "period" he "puts a point" to the whole affair, as if the forgetting were previously held in suspension, but the umbrella is now, once and for all, and quite decisively, "forgotten."

Perhaps Derrida is right and this passage is undecidable, that is, in so far as it is a forgotten text, and therefore perhaps not about a forgotten umbrella. But how can it be nothing more than a forgotten text? Only in so far as we make a Derridean decision, a decision not to decide.

Jacques, you need to decide!

So we decide that it is une parapluie. We decide that it is un parasol. We decide that it is a shield against the domineering light of the Sun, that image of hierarchical power and domination. We decide that it is une ombrelle. We decide that it is un nombril. We decide that it is le nombril du monde. We decide that it is the axis of imagination around which turns the wheel of fate. We decide it is the vast Nietzschean umbrella, which points to the heavens, to the heights, to the lightness of Dionysius, and which opens up to infinity.

We decide, on the other hand, that it is a sad little text signifying that poor Nietzsche forgot his umbrella. Nietzsche As Prophet Of Pre-Ancientism

As we have seen, Nietzsche is not much of a Post-Mortemist (though he may be the Post-Mortemist's best friend!). And we have begun to discover that he is, at least in his best moments, a Pre-Ancientist. Let us call this Nietzsche "Pre-Ancientist Nietzsche" or PAN. The allusion to the pagan god is appropriately Nietzschean. For Pan, "this dangerous presence dwelling just beyond the protected zone of the village boundary" is the Arcadian counterpart to the Thracian god Dionysius, Nietzsche's favorite deity.<sup>23</sup> And as Bulfinch points out of Pan, "the name of the god signifies all," and Pan "came to be considered a symbol of the universe and personification of Nature," and later to be regarded as "a representative of all the gods and of heathenism itself."<sup>24</sup> PAN is the Nietzsche of pagan celebration, the Nietzsche of love of the Earth, the Nietzsche of life-affirmation, the Nietzsche of generosity and gift-giving.

PAN celebrates and endows with eternity that which appears. He "saves the phenomena" or "saves appearances" ("sauve les dehors") so to speak.

A certain emperor always bore in mind the transitoriness of all things so as not to take them too seriously and to live at peace among them. To me, on the contrary, everything seems far too valuable to be so fleeting: I seek an eternity for everything: ought one to pour the most precious salves and wines into the sea? [WP 547-548] His vision reminds us of another great Pre-Ancientist and anarchist, William Blake, who famously "held infinity in the palm of his hand" and saw "Eternity in an hour." Exactly such an affirmation of being becoming in all its diversity and particularity is the core of PAN's enigmatic doctrine of the Eternal Recurrence. It signifies

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<sup>23</sup> Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 81.

<sup>24</sup> Thomas Bulfinch, *Bulfinch's Mythology* (New York: Modern Library, N.D.), p. 136.

the infinite depth and richness of the present moment valued for its own being, not for any end beyond itself.<sup>25</sup>

Accordingly, PAN excludes only one philosopher from his general condemnation of the history of Western philosophy.

With the highest respect, I except the name of Heraclitus. When the rest of the philosophic folk rejected the testimony of the senses because they showed multiplicity and change, he rejected their testimony because they showed things as if they had permanence and unity. Heraclitus too did the senses an injustice. They lie neither in the way the Eleatics believed, nor as he believed — they do not lie at all ... But Heraclitus will remain eternally right with his assertion that being is an empty fiction. The ‘apparent’ world is the only one: the ‘true’ world is merely added by a lie. [TI 480–481]

PAN gives his fellow Pre-Ancientist Heraclitus well-deserved recognition, but does the latter an injustice in regard to his view of the senses. For Heraclitus the senses do and do not lie. And if they lie it is only to reveal truth through their lies. Heraclitus did the senses complete justice when he said “he prefers things that can be seen, heard and perceived.”

Pre-Ancientism is a critique of the illusions of centrism. And Nietzsche is one of the great critics of all centrisms, including anthropocentrism. “If we could communicate with the mosquito, then we would learn that it floats through the air with the same self-importance, feeling within itself the flying center of the world.” [TL 42] This is the message of Lao Tzu also: the universe does not revolve around us (unless we adopt a metaphysics worthy of a mosquito). “Heaven and Earth are not humane. They regard all things as straw dogs. The sage is not humane. He regards all people as straw dogs.”<sup>26</sup> PAN directs us back to pre-Ancient times, before the blockheads carved nature up, geometricized the world and prepared it for domination. The crucial step was the replacement of the multitude of spiritual centers with a centering of power in the ego.

Yet Nietzsche has been seen as a kind of philosophical egoist. One of the great Nietzschean ironies is that this critic of the heroic has so often been reduced to a rather adolescent sort of hero-worshiper. His reflections on the will point in a quite different direction. According to Zarathustra, “all ‘it was’ is a fragment, a riddle, a dreadful accident — until the creative will says to it, ‘But thus I willed it.’ Until the creative will says to it, ‘But thus I will it; thus shall I will it.’” [Z 253] One might ask who this self is that can be said to have willed all things, wills all things, and shall will all things. The small self with its small will seems to become a great self with a vast will. What is the meaning of this riddle that Zarathustra poses to us?

We find that this person with “creative will” is one who rejects another sort of will — the heroic will — and renounces the rebellion against nature. Such a person is, as that most anarchic of Pre-Ancientists, Chuang Tzu, calls her, the “man without desire,” who “does not disturb his inner well-being with likes and dislikes,” the “true man of old,” who “accepted what he was given with delight, and when it was gone, ... gave it no thought.”<sup>27</sup> Whoever possesses a “creative will” accepts life, experience, and the flow of being, the appearance of phenomena, as a gift, and realizes

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<sup>25</sup> Though some humorists say that it means that everything occurs over and over and over and ... We will call this the Twilight Zone interpretation

<sup>26</sup> Tao te Ching [The Lao Tzu] in Wing-Tsit Chan, *A Sourcebook in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Un. Press, 1963), p. 141.

<sup>27</sup> Chuang-Tzu, *Inner Chapters* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), pp. 108, 114.

that one can never have a proprietary claim on any gift.<sup>28</sup> While Heroic will is bound to the Spirit of Gravity and takes everything seriously, the creative will expresses the Spirit of Levity, and takes everything lightly. Nietzschean Anarchy knows the anarchic power of laughter.<sup>29</sup> “Learn to laugh at yourselves as one must laugh!” says Zarathustra [Z 404] Elsewhere he explains that it is through laughter that we kill monsters. So as we learn to laugh we learn to kill the self. We slay the Dragon of the Ego. As I-Hsüan said, “if you seek after the Buddha, you will be taken over by the Devil of the Buddha, and if you seek after the Patriarch, you will be taken over by the Devil of the Patriarch.” So:

Kill anything that you happen on. Kill the Buddha if you happen to meet him. Kill a Patriarch or an Arhat if you happen to meet him. Kill your parents or relatives if you happen to meet them. Only then can you be free, not bound by material things, and absolutely free and at ease... I have no trick to give people. I merely cure disease and set people free.<sup>30</sup>

When one laughs at the self one becomes other than the self that is laughed at. One finally gets the joke that is the ego.

Listen to PAN’s diagnosis of the causes of the awful ego-sickness of resentment:

For every sufferer instinctively seeks a cause for his suffering; more exactly, an agent; still more specifically, a guilty agent who is susceptible to suffering — in short, some living thing upon which he can, on some pretext or other, vent his affects, actually or in effigy: for the venting of his affects represents the greatest attempt on the part of the suffering to win relief, anaesthesia — the narcotic he cannot help desiring to deaden the pain of any kind.] [BGE 563]

PAN comes to much the same conclusion as does Gautama concerning this subject: our mental disturbances are rooted in suffering, a false view of causality, and the illusion of the separate ego. Our constructed ego cuts us off from the whole, we resist the flow of energies, we fight against the movement, we seek to step into the same river of selfhood again and again, we blame reality and time, we seek revenge through whatever convenient target presents itself.

PAN might have become an even more skilled physician of culture had he followed Gautama further in exploring the connection between ego, suffering, and compassion. He travels part of the way on this path as he reflects on eternal recurrence and amor fati. Just as he goes only part

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<sup>28</sup> As Nietzsche states it with unusual eloquence, “no one is free to be a crab.” [TI 547] His point is that we must always go “forward” — even if “downward” into decadence. A crab (in Nietzsche’s particular imaginary zoology) backs away from and rejects this gift of life, growth, change, transformation.

<sup>29</sup> This does not mean, however, that Nietzsche was funny, for unfortunately he was not. I once attended a lecture in which a philosophy professor spoke at great length on the topic of “Nietzsche and Humor.” His thesis was that Nietzsche was a member of that rare species — the funny philosopher! The Professor assured the audience that Nietzsche’s works were replete with humorous discussions, funny one-liners and hilarious episodes. Indeed, he revealed that when he reads Nietzsche he is often moved to smile, and even to laugh out loud! What he did not reveal was one single hilarious line from the entire collected works of Nietzsche, though this did not prevent many members of the audience from smiling broadly and even chuckling a bit. Apparently, the highly-developed sense of humor cultivated by certain professors of philosophy allows them to extract a certain quantum of hilarity from statements like “Nietzsche is funny.” Or did they get the other joke?

<sup>30</sup> “The Recorded Conversations of Zen Master I-Hsüan” in Chan, p. 447.

of the way down the path of that other great old Anarchic Doctor, Lao Tzu. PAN tears away ruthlessly at some of our most deeply-rooted illusions about ourselves. “Beyond your thoughts and feelings, my brother, there stands a mighty ruler, and unknown sage — whose name is self. In your body he dwells; he is your body.” [Z 146] It is true that he here describes the body as the true self, the “great reason,” that acts through the ego and the “little reason.” But he shows also that he sometimes thinks beyond this body. Zarathustra slips and gives away PAN’s more profound view when he says that “the mighty ruler” not only “is your body,” but is also greater than the body and “dwells in your body.” [Z 146] This is the self of the self of the ego-self, the great reason of the great reason of the little reason. For PAN, our embodiedness carries us not only beyond our little self toward a larger self, but beyond our little body toward a larger body. As Lao Tzu says, “He who loves the world as his body may be entrusted with the empire.”<sup>31</sup>

It is this wisdom of the body that is at the heart of PAN’s anarchic critique of the domineering ego and its herioc will. Domination has always rested on the hierarchical exaltation of the “world of man” — the human world — over the world of nature, and of the “world of man” — the masculine world — over all that is feminine or childlike. PAN is in accord with Lao Tzu’s anti-hierarchical prioritizing of the childlike and feminine aspects of the psyche. Zarathustra praises the child as “innocence and forgetting, a new beginning, a game, a self-propelled wheel, a first movement, a sacred ‘Yes.’” [Z 139] Lao Tzu goes one step further, asserting that “he who possesses virtue in abundance may be compared to an infant.”<sup>32</sup> Zarathustra surpasses even this, urging us to “to be the child who is newly born,” and noting that to do this, “the creator must also want to be the mother who gives birth and the pangs of the birth-giver.” [Z 199] An image that Lao Tzu also evokes when he asks, “can you play the role of the female in the opening and closing of the gates of Heaven?”*Ibid.*, p. 144 This is the secret of Nietzschean Anarchy — the opening of oneself to these forces of spontaneity, creativity, generosity, affirmation.

Nietzschean Anarchy is PAN’s Dionysian dance, it is child’s play, it is beginner’s mind.

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 165

# Derrida's Secret Name, or What Transpired in the Auditorium of Gaea & Logos

## Derrida's Secret Name, Or What Transpired in the Auditorium of Gaea & Logos

I recently discovered that Columbia University had decided to remodel the Audubon Ballroom, where Malcolm X was assassinated. The University planned to make it into a Biotechnology Center. There were protests against gutting the interior and effacing the traces of history. Columbia went on with its plans, but agreed to preserve the bullet-hole from the bullet that killed Malcolm. I imagine some future guide pointing out into space. "Over there is the famous bullet-hole: when the wall was demolished the hole was left intact, as you can see, for posterity." Inspired by Columbia, I have decided to create a Museum of Absences, which will contain famous holes, voids, vacuities, spaces, and other notable specimens of Non-Being. Columbia has been asked to donate its renowned bullet-hole. Richard Nixon has been requested to send the celebrated gap in his presidential tapes. Various dictatorships ("friendly" and "unfriendly," without discrimination) have been asked to be so kind as to send the Disappeared.

The immediate purpose of this communication is to request permission from Exquisite Corpse to include in the Museum's "Literature of Absence" collection Maria Goodwin's recent article "Jacques Derrida in Baton Rouge: The Philosopher in the City of Flayed Skins." (Exquisite Corpse, No. 37). The article is notable for the multitude of Absences contained within it.

First, MG informs us that her purpose was originally to interview Derrida and to ask him about the obvious influence of LSD on his work. We find instead the Absence of that interview.

Next, we discover that she proposes, in the Absence of the interview, a "summary of the lecture" that was given by Derrida. Fortunately, we are treated to no such summary, which is replaced a few sketchy remarks about the content of the lecture.

But finally, and most importantly, we discover the most significant Absence — let's call it the Dominant Absence — in the article. This is the Absence of Derrida's Secret Name. Ironically, the Dominant Absence depends on an abundant Presence. The Presence of "the philosopher," Jacques Derrida. Let's examine the way in which MG presents this Presence.

### **Maria Announces His Arrival**

MG prefaces her announcement with an apology for her failure to submit "the philosopher" to the acid test. She associates LSD with the Sixties, which are curiously Absent for her. And that which is associated with the Absent, must, according to the rules of strict logic, also be Absent. She reports: "I completely missed the Sixties myself, went straight from the Twenties to the Twenty-First Century." Someone capable of an oversight of this magnitude can be forgiven for overlooking most of Derrida's lecture, the topic of her absent summary. Moreover, we must

concede that the lecture did take place during the missing period between the Twenties and the Twenty-First Century. (It seemed, in fact, to take up a large chunk of that considerable time span). Furthermore, MG continues, her conversations with Derrida are not about things like LSD. When she “speaks with the philosopher” they “speak of Artaud, or of the Thirties, but mostly we speak of what I’ve seen in his work.” Perhaps as she discourses on his works, he fills her in on the Thirties, which, like the Sixties, she missed. Finally, MG gets to her lamentable conclusion: “There is no way in which I can ask Derrida if he ever took LSD.”

We must consider further MG’s inability to ask things of Derrida. At this point, I want only to note how close she came to the forbidden topic of hallucinogenic writing. Of their three acceptable topics of conversation, one is, of all things, “Artaud.” Why did it not occur to her to delicately remark “Jacques, something seems to have slipped my mind – what was it that Artaud used to do with the Tarahumaras down in Mexico?” They spoke of Artaud, the philosopher-poet who says he “did not renounce as a group those dangerous disassociations which Peyote seems to provoke and which I had pursued by other means.” And who adds immediately that he wished to “bring back” that which “lay hidden,” and “that it serve precisely by my crucifixion.”<sup>1</sup> Can she speak of this to “the philosopher”? No way!

“Derrida arrives late,” she reports. (It is still well before the Twenty-first Century, however.) “He greets me warmly, with our usual double bises.” MG is slightly deceptive here. To an Anglo-Saxon audience this might appear to be a shocking profusion of bises. Actually, it is the minimum number of bises ever given by any French person in any century. “We use vous,” she continues. This formality is, however, no reflection on the intensity of their friendship. No doubt for Derrida it merely indicates the multiplicity inherent in all subjects. But for MG, there is another rationale: “I have never dared go beyond that barrier.”

MG does not dare. Derrida is a Presence to be reckoned with. There are questions not to be asked, requests not to be made, words not to be spoken. We are getting to her point. This is a story of “Fear and Trembling.” Which is also, coincidentally, the topic of Derrida’s lecture, which MG recounts briefly.

### **The Scene of the Reading: Subtropism in the Subtropics**

“The room for the lecture, an antiquated amphitheater in the geology building, is packed.” Note that MG employs the tense of Presence. But she is interested only in a certain Presence. She fails to note the nature (the physis, the physicality) of Presence, the nature of the Being-Present, for the audience. The physicality of four hundred people packed into a room without ventilation. The physicality of the dismal surroundings. The physicality of the intense, penetrating heat (an intensity that does not intend like language, a penetration that does not penetrate like Logos). A physicality that amplifies itself before a word has been spoken, during the long delay as the assembled multitude awaits what they have come for: the Presence of “the philosopher.” From a certain point of view, this is merely a delayed gratification, and therefore no cause for complaint. From another point of view, it is not a delay at all. “We are late because we have all been at a reception, the speaker, the colloquium organizers.” Some have already received the Presence, while others wait for their reception.

“The philosopher” enters. His Presence is applauded. MG informs us that she always prepares for Derrida’s lectures by reading what Derrida plans to speak (or read) about. She is the auditor

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<sup>1</sup> ANTONIN ARTAUD: SELECTED WRITINGS, ed. Susan Sontag. (Berkeley: Univ. of California, 1976), p. 391.

made in Heaven! Knowing that it is to be his topic, she has read Kierkegaard's FEAR AND TREMBLING (on the story of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac). She has discovered that Kierkegaard's pseudonymous author Johannes DE SILENTIO "is ironic." She has discovered that Kierkegaard himself is ironic. She does not mention that Kierkegaard once called himself, not entirely ironically, "the master of irony" (he wrote a masters' thesis on the concept of irony).

"The philosopher" does not begin at once. The auditors are required to sit through a very long, adulatory introduction, by a certain David Wills, whom MG calls the "presenter." The presenter makes a feeble attempt to sound like an intellectual on LSD, but no one is convinced. The presenter concludes his remarks by present-ing Derrida, who is then fully Present. "The philosopher" begins to speak, or rather, to read. This is "lecture" in the sens littéral. He spends several hours reading the long text, one that is obviously written for publication — not for oral delivery, in English translation, to this particular group of auditors in this particular Geology Auditorium, in, as MG would have it, this "City of Flayed Skins." As MG notes of Derrida at one point, "I have listened to him intently for years." The audience knew the feeling very well that night. Even MG shows some awareness of the conditions of Derrida's Presence. At one point she herself rises to the level of irony: "I am painfully aware of sacrifices. We have been sitting for two hours." But, in general, MG is overwhelmed by what merely bathes others in sweat. She takes copious notes. As she exclaims at one point: "I am on my third pen — blue, black, red."

## **Derrida's Secret Name, Or What Transpired in the Auditorium of Gaea & Logos**

The title of Derrida's text is "Gift of Death — the Secrets of European Responsibility." The Gift of Death! — no doubt after several hours many in the audience began to pray for that gift. As the temperature soared and the oxygen-supply plummeted, some may have indeed come close to the ultimate sacrifice. We auditors became, collectively, Isaac, the child. We followed obediently, like little lambs. Our Father, Derri-DaDa finally spared us. He finally stepped back from the Altar of Sacrifice (a table conveniently and tellingly placed before him).

What do we make of the reference to "European Responsibility"? It would not be difficult to conclude that Derrida, in subjecting the audience to such torture, was one irresponsible European. But this would be a merely ethical judgment. We had entered the realm of the Father, the realm of the Teleological Suspension of the Ethical. So the audience had no right to complain. What may not be entirely clear is the nature of the Telos for which Derrida so harshly suspended the ethical. There could be only one possible justification: that the entire event, the Presence of the philosopher, was a brilliant joke. Derrida's experiment: to see how long an audience could remain passive, could suffer, could offer itself sacrificially, hoping to be magically impregnated by the logoi spermatikoi, the seeds of his Logos, the phallic wisdom of the philosopher. Derrida would, through his ironic persistence in such a travesty, reveal the absurdity of his own power.

Unfortunately, this is only wishful thinking. The Spirit of Gravity prevailed. As Kierkegaard pointed out, the ethical is not suspended for the sake of the aesthetic. MB got her categories right. She reports that the reading was about the "mysterium tremendum." But it is clear that for her the true mysterium tremendum is Derrida himself. She exhibits a truly religious awe. It is for that reason that there are questions that "cannot" be asked of him. She calls him "the philosopher," unquestionable comparing Derrida to the Aristotle of scholasticism, the ultimate authority-figure



among thinkers. But this reference, though not without validity, is deceptive. Is not the definition of a “philosopher” one to whom one poses questions — any and all questions? It is obvious that Derrida is seen as more than a mere “philosopher.” As we shall discover, he is the One with the Secret Name, the Name that she cannot utter.

After several hours of reading, “the philosopher” stops, and the event is over. No questions are allowed, from the audience any more than from MG. The tired, damp throng files out. They may go forth into the world and report that they experienced the Presence of Derrida.

Whose Presence was this? It was not that of Jacques Dérider, everybody’s favorite pen-pal, the Jacques who cracked us up, and himself, in LA CARTE POSTALE. Not that of the deconstructor of onto-logo-theo-phallo-centrism. It was the Presence of “Jacques Derrida,” “the philosopher,” and more than philosopher, the One with the Secret Name. It was a logocentric Presence. It was a theological Presence. It was a phallic Presence. MG writes of “monolinguisme” but she does not write of monotheism or monolingamism.

Who is this “Maria” and whose Name does she announce by its absence? She remarks that his words — his Logos — “take me to familiar places where Derrida has been before — don, crypte, secret.” What gift does he give? Into what secret places does he go? Does he leave stains? Or does he give immaculately? Will he come again?

Strangely, MG finds it worth noting that colloquium-participant Gayatri Spivak’s “voice is not Derrida’s but her own,” and that “her garment ... fits her perfectly.” (She does not note that Spivak had dyed her hair purple). Of Derrida’s garment we hear nothing, except perhaps a faint echo of “if I may but touch his garment ... “

It should be clear now that the Presence of the One with the Secret Name was a service. The audience’s reception of “the philosopher” was also a service. But we hear much more about services.

MG proposes politely to Derrida: “Je voudrais vous demander un service.” The favor is the interview, and perhaps a chance to pose the Corpse’s killer question. But no! Derrida declines, because “he’s tired” and “he fears interviews”! Un-huh, let’s not scare Derrida. Apparently, “the philosopher” has not entirely lost his sense of humor. Taking his latter comment seriously, MG suggests foregoing the interview and “instead producing a summary of the lecture.” Why MG thinks that readers of Exquisite Corpse would be interested in her notes on a text certain to be published in full is not clear. In any case, she gives up on the interview. “Je ne voudrais rein faire pour incommoder un ami de longue date,” she remarks, generously. But despite an amitié de longue conservation, Derrida doesn’t mind imposing considerable inconvenience on poor MG. In lieu of an interview he demands of her three pens (blue, black, and red) worth of incommodité! MG says, later, “I only condone those [sacrifices] that are symbolic and leave no red stains.” But here it is, a copious sacrifice of stains: black and blue, red. Jacques! Jacques! A paltry pair of bises and then this!

Later Derrida turns the tables on MG: “J’ai un service à vous demander,” he declares. It concerns his son. As MG puts it, “He has spent three hours talking about a father sacrificing his son, and he cannot help from thinking of his own.” Perhaps the three-hour lecture was Derrida’s mnemonic device for reminding himself that he had to send a letter to his son. “He needs to have a letter Fed-Exed to his younger son, with a photocopy of the genitor’s National Identity Card, for an official purpose which needs [sic] not be disclosed.” MG is a good friend, and is happy to accommodate “the genitor.” A more calculating would-be interviewer might take advantage of the situation and tell “the genitor”: I’ll mail your letter under two conditions: 1) You disclose what

the hell the official purpose is; and 2) You tell me whether you ever took LSD. But MG blows it, settling for the chance to see “the genitor’s” I.D.

In fact, this turns out to be even more revealing [put that under erasure: “more revelatory”] than even the LSD question. As she informs the reader, she discovers something that finally gets us to the Dominant Absence of her article, and qualifies it for inclusion in the Museum of Absences. “I discover his secret name.” She is getting to the climax of her story. The dénouement of the Not. Derrida, we now know, is “the genitor,” the Father. And we are now in the realm of the famous Name of the Father. *Le Nom du P.* (Père, Phallus, Philosophe). She does not reveal to us that Name, needless to say.

Little did MG know that Derrida had played his old postal trick. He’s been doing it ever since he wrote *LA CARTE POSTALE*, the most brilliant philosophical joke of the century. At every appearance he earnestly asks someone to send a fake I.D. to his non-existent son (“Isaac,” I believe). They talk about it for months afterward in the literature departments. MG fell for it. Derrida is a master at “Faking It.” “Faking Id.” “Faking I.D.”

### **Gaea Before Logos Except After Arche**

But an important question remains for us. Why was Derrida called to the Geology Auditorium — the Auditorium of Gaea and Logos? The Place of Gaea before Logos? Perhaps another mnemonic device was at work. That is, a device that undoes the vice of forgetfulness (a professional vice of philosophers). An urgent message from Gaea, by way of Mnemosyne, daughter and granddaughter of Gaea. Why was he called to the Auditorium of Gaea and Logos? For “the philosopher” to bring his Logos to his Auditors, but, perhaps more importantly, to give “the philosopher” the opportunity to listen to the voice of Gaea, who comes before Logos. Perhaps because “the philosopher” in his quest for Logos — even a Logos that purports to subvert the dominant Logos — tends to overlook the Earth. It escapes his notice. Perhaps if the Earth “had taken on the figure of a very rare and tremendously large green BIRD, with a red beak, sitting in a tree on the mound, and perhaps even whistling in an unheard of manner,” Derrida would have noticed it! Or perhaps that of a tremendously large green Word!

The fate that brought Derrida to the Auditorium, the place of hearing, destined us to hear his Logos and for him to hear Gaea. As “the philosopher” droned on, Gaea took her revenge. The heat of her anger pervaded the atmosphere. Could he hear the groaning of Gaea, the flowing of her salty waters? The Word is indeed Flesh. The Soul is indeed something about the Body. About the Terrestrial Body also.

# The Rorty of the Crowd, or Blood and Irony in Recent American Philosophy

The metaphysician ... does not question the platitudes which encapsulate the use of a given vocabulary, and in particular the platitude which says there is a single permanent reality to be found behind the many temporary appearances ... The ironist, by contrast ... thinks that nothing has an intrinsic nature, a real essence.

— Richard Rorty, *CONTINGENCY, IRONY, AND SOLIDARITY*<sup>1</sup>

... it is important to insist that a sense of shared national identity is not an evil. It is an absolutely essential component of citizenship ...

— Richard Rorty, *THE UNPATRIOTIC ACADEMY*<sup>2</sup>

Richard Rorty is ... “the most interesting philosopher in the world today.”

— Harold Bloom, on the cover of *CONTINGENCY, IRONY, AND SOLIDARITY*<sup>3</sup>

What can one make of Harold Bloom’s bizarre statement about his friend Rorty? It has nothing obvious to do with contingency. It was probably not written with conscious irony. But it undoubtedly shows solidarity.

Whether or not Rorty is the most interesting philosopher in the whole wide world, he is certainly the best-known contemporary American philosopher. That few Americans have ever heard of him says more about American philosophy and American culture than it does about Rorty. American philosophers have gone to extreme lengths to remain academic, insular and boring. American culture, on the other hand, continues to be anti-intellectual, popular and interesting — without even trying. What can the two possibly have to do with one another?

Rorty has decided to take a stab at bringing philosophy a bit more into the cultural mainstream. He has recreated himself as an American version of the *philosophe engagé*. Of course, political engagement is not a certain path to public recognition in the American intellectual world. Chomsky’s devastating critique of American foreign policy has only assured him of relative oblivion in this country, despite the fact that he is the most famous linguist in the world. Rorty has chosen a more promising approach. In *CONTINGENCY, IRONY, AND SOLIDARITY*, he defends a completely innocuous form of political liberalism that places him well within the bounds of political respectability. And as the fortunes of even his mild version of liberalism decline, he has discovered an even safer cause: patriotism. In “The Unpatriotic Academy” he takes a giant step toward most wholesome conformism. He courageously defends nationalism against the onslaught of unpatriotic academicians, and in the process undertakes to make a name for himself as the new State Philosopher.

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<sup>1</sup> Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, p. 74. Emphasis by Cafard.

<sup>2</sup> Op-ed article in *The New York Times*, (Feb. 13, 1994), p. E15. Emphasis by Cafard.

<sup>3</sup> Lack of emphasis by Cafard

Whether or not he and American philosophy will ever emerge from their obscurity remains in serious doubt. What is quite clear is the complete absurdity of the post-modern nationalism that he now espouses.

### **Rorty on National Identity**

While Rorty the post-modern ironist (that iconoclastic guy who believes that “nothing has an intrinsic nature”) demolishes the basis for any idea of an enduring personal or collective identity, Rorty the State Philosopher ironically discovers his faith in “national identity.” While Rorty the ironist rejects almost everything that is most fundamental to the masses, including all their most deeply held religious, moral, and social values, Rorty the State Philosopher makes an argumentum ad (this very same) populum for judging the legitimacy of political movements. Like every contemporary philosopher who is even vaguely au courant, Rorty duly and abundantly recognizes the importance of imagination. Yet Rorty the State Philosopher remains oblivious to the imaginary quality of nationalism, and, indeed, of the nation-state itself. Moreover, when he broaches the topic of the nation-state, he falls into the ultimate post-modern sin, “essentialism.” Whereas post-modern Rorty could proclaim that “nothing has a real essence,” retro-modernist Rorty finds essences everywhere, in “national identity,” in national traditions, even in national heroes.

His call for nationalist hero-worship is particular nonsensical. For example, he advises white Americans to “take pride in Martin Luther King,” since the latter is, of course, a certified Great American. The fact that most white Americans are far from sharing the passion for justice that Dr. King lived and died for should not stop them from feeling such pride: it’s enough that they just happen to come from the same nation-state. Chinese Canadians, on the other hand, presumably should not feel this pride, though Alaskan Eskimos should, thanks to the poor financial judgment of a long-dead Czar and his advisors. Gotcha, Richard, I’ll put MLK on my pride list, under the “Afro-American” heading. And if I meet any Alaskan Eskimos I’ll know what to tell them. That’s clear enough.

Yet Prof. Rorty’s Philosophy of Pride raises some perplexing questions for those of us who are struggling to be good, patriotic Americans. Should we be proud of Chinua Achebe, since he now lives in New York, or do we have to wait until he applies for citizenship? And why is “pride” the appropriate response to the message of someone like Dr. King, anyway? Turning prophetic figures into national heroes has always been a convenient method of burying their troubling questions and forgetting their scathing indictments. O, ye generation of vipers! Visit the Martin Luther King Theme Park! Rorty sings the praises of the nation and “its professed ideals.”

But nations come and go, and so do their ideals. The land stays there, more or less. My native land is the Mississippi Delta (the Spiritual Center of the Universe). Its ideals for thousands of years were tribal ones. The French, my ancestors, brought new ideals here a mere three centuries ago. The most exalted of these were to toil less, to make more money, and not to die of yellow fever. A strutting little macho Corsican despot sold us to Rorty’s Great Nation, so his vaunted ideals could become ours also. Still, we fought against it to preserve our own hallowed ideals and their latest incarnation in King Cotton, States Rights and slavery. Since we lost, we got the Enlightenment by default (though as in the case of the end of the War of 1812, the news has yet to reach us). If we had won, we’d still be here in our swamp, but Rorty would care about our ideals as much as he does about those of Jamaica.

So what's the message of this brief lesson in history? In a word: Contingency, Contingency, Contingency!

Yet for Rorty, despite all his talk of contingency, the last-minute arrival of certain ideals — courtesy of the State — is crucial. For some undivulged reason, we must “yearn to live up to the nation’s professed ideals.” We shouldn’t choose, for example, the highest and best ideals imaginable — maybe we don’t want to wear out our imaginations. We shouldn’t choose the ideals of our neighborhood. Those ideals are too small. We shouldn’t choose the ideals of the whole world. Those ideals are too big. We should choose “the nation’s professed ideals.” Those ideals are just right! Presumably, if we were to prefer any other ideals (say, the Native American ideals that existed here for 95% of human history) we would have some kind of yearning deficiency. For Rorty, if we fail to identify with the nation-state, “we fail in national hope,” and “if we fail in national hope, we shall no longer even try to change our ways.”

### **No Irony here from Mr. Contingency, just pure old ignorant Solidarity!**

Despite the chain of if-then statements, Rorty’s encounter with post-modernism seems to have rendered this formerly analytical philosopher logically brain dead. What he should have said is that if nationalists fail to identify with the nation-state, then they will no longer have national hope, and will no longer change, stay the same, or do anything else in a national way. For the rest of us — localists, regionalists, surre(gion)alists, anarchists, Earthlings and non-nationalists of every sort — we can find other identifications, other ideals, other kinds of hope and other reasons to change. Rorty on the Enemy of Conformism

It is particularly ironic that Rorty invokes Ralph Waldo Emerson and, specifically, that writer’s essay on “The American Scholar” in defense of his nationalist fundamentalism. According to Rorty, unless we are “proud of being the heirs” of various American heroes, we will not be capable of Emersonian “joyous self-confidence.” Such mindless appropriation of Emerson betrays our philosopher’s intellectual and moral flaws. Mr. Irony might have noticed a trace of his favorite quality in the fact that Emerson could entitle his essay “The American Scholar,” without intruding into it the slightest trace of American nationalism. His point was, as he states near the end of the essay, that the scholar “must take up into himself all the ability of the time, all the contributions of the past, all the hopes of the future.” The “chief disgrace,” he adds, is to be “reckoned in the gross.”<sup>4</sup> Emerson’s ideal “nation” will come into being not because it embodies Rortian “national pride” but because of its freedom and universality. It will exist because “each believes himself inspired [not by a impressive list of authors who have not been read carefully by those who cite them] but by “the Divine Soul which also inspires all men.”<sup>5</sup> It is based, in Emerson’s perhaps sexist but certainly not nationalist formulation, on something that vastly transcends the nation-state!

It is indeed puzzling that Prof. Rorty could make a hero out of the author of these words, while proposing a quite anti-Emersonian culture in which a large dose of national pride, but “no trace of divinity remain[s].”<sup>6</sup> It’s puzzling until we realize that Rorty doesn’t give a flying philosophical

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<sup>4</sup> Emerson, “The American Scholar” in *THE SELECTED WORKS OF RALPH WALDO EMERSON*. (New York: Modern Library, 1950), p. 63.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> It is indeed puzzling that X does Y” is contemporary Anglo-American philosophical jargon for “X is a complete asshole.” The quote is from *CONTINGENCY, IRONY, AND SOLIDARITY*, p. 45, with emphasis added. All future references to this book will appear in the text after the passage cited.

fuck what nonsense Emerson might have spouted. He's a famous guy, he's an American, so we might as well be proud of him!

But what exactly does Rorty mean when in his apology for patriotism he exhorts "American leftists" to "be proud of being the heirs of Emerson"? Should they experience some special feelings when they hear the word "Emerson" — certain warm sensations, shivers, euphoric states, dizziness, orgasmic impulses, or what? Somehow I can't manage to get a better feeling of any kind when I hear "Emerson," as compared to, say, "Rabelais," "Laozi," or "Hieronymus Bosch" — as undeniably un-American as all of these may be! No offense meant to the noble Waldo, that uncompromising New England individualist whom nationalists would do better to read than to betray by perverting him into a national hero.

Tellingly, Rorty invokes Emerson six times in his brief nationalistic editorial but, ironically, mentions him not even once in his lengthy discussions of social theory. It is an outrage that our budding State Philosopher seeks to implicate Emerson in his conspiracy to give thought a national pedigree. The same Emerson who in his essay on "Politics" proclaimed that "the wise man makes the State unnecessary."

He might have added that the foolish one glorifies it. Rorty on the Left

What Rorty ops in his op-ed article is the left that advocates the "politics of difference." Not surprising, since the line he promotes is a politics of sameness, founded (quel horreur postmoderne!) on a metaphysics of sameness. But as they say, the more things differ, the more they stay the same. Some people, including both nationalists like Rorty and also the partisans of difference he attacks, want to have it one way or the other. Is Rorty in any position to attack his political mirror images (who at least have the virtue of consistency between their politics and their anti-metaphysics)? Certainly not. Since those obsessed with difference [difference? difference? differ@nce?] tend to lapse into total incoherence, there is at least the logical possibility that they may be trying to say something quite extraordinary and wonderful. Rorty, on the other hand, writes rather clearly, so that there is no doubt that what he says is ordinary, mediocre, and self-contradictory.

In his various pronouncements on society, Rorty somehow manages to overlook such rather conspicuous phenomena as the State, Capital, and the technological megamachine. He attacks a silly left that babbles on about "difference." Yet he fails to notice any left that is concerned with these ineluctable social and political realities, which are far more significant to lefts everywhere — with the possible exception of those that reside in certain Departments of English.

Rorty complains that the left he attacks "refuses to rejoice in the country it inhabits." But what country is it that this left, Rorty himself, or anyone "inhabits"? Does anyone actually inhabit that horrendous hybrid of monster and abstraction, the nation-state? Rorty proclaims that we should "take pride in being citizens of a self-invented, self-reforming, enduring constitutional democracy." But does he really "take pride" in this? Does his contingent little self really swell up with pride that the genetic material that created its preconditions happened to configure itself appropriately in the good ole U.S. of A.? Beyond being horrendously bad philosophy, isn't this the most transparent bad faith?

As Rorty muses about the fate of the left, he is bold enough to make both an empirical claim and a prediction. The empirical, historical claim is that "an unpatriotic left has never achieved anything." The prediction is that such a left will in the future "have no impact" and become "an object of contempt."

The empirical claim is demonstrably false. Actually his own liberal tradition, before it became impotent and senile, was a hotbed for unpatriotic leftists. Some were traitors and revolutionaries. Early unpatriotic liberalism — loyal to principles, treasonous toward regimes — changed the course of history by overthrowing established orders in various countries, including Rorty's own. Perhaps when he thinks of his own revolutionary forebears, he becomes so choked up with nationalistic pride that he succumbs to appropriate nationalist amnesia and forgets that they were unpatriotic.

Of course, Rorty's liberal forebears were not the best example of a creatively unpatriotic left. The Spanish anarchists were the most unpatriotic left imaginable and created the most thoroughgoing social revolution in modern history — before they were slaughtered by nationalist patriots.<sup>7</sup> Rorty might acquaint himself with *Solidaridad Obrera* before he dares to write another book with “solidarity” in the title.

While it is clear that Rorty knows little about unpatriotic lefts of the past, how he purports to know that unpatriotic lefts in the future will “have no impact” is a mystery. If the nation-state is entering a period of crisis, it will probably be subject to various assaults from right and left, from super-patriot and anti-patriots alike, but a Richard Rorty is unlikely to shed much light on this subject.

Where he is, however, precisely on target, is in his recognition that a left that courageously attacks the bloody mythology of patriotism will, of course, be an object of contempt. Here Rorty's judgment is atypically accurate. The prejudiced are always contemptuous of, and indeed, enraged against those who call their biases into question.

But the left does not have to wait until it becomes courageous to elicit contempt. The left is already an object of contempt, in large part because the popular mind associates it with the kind of anemic, hypocritical liberalism that Rorty dispenses. A left that is enlightened enough to question popular prejudices, but duplicitous enough to pander to these same prejudices when it courts a public that it thinks too stupid to catch on.

### **Rorty on the Book Cover**

In his patriotic appeal, Rorty tells us that the academic left suffers from a “need to stay as angry as possible.” Why this is necessarily a disadvantage is not clear. As Nietzsche long ago pointed out, the dominant mood of modern society is resentment. They're mad as hell, they don't know why, and the whole idea of politics is to give them a good reason! If the academic leftists could harness the power of anger and resentment like a Rush Limbaugh, they might be as influential as he is — instead of merely being as annoying. But Rorty's liberals are not angry, and neither does he appear to be.

Consider his image as we see him on the cover of *CONTINGENCY, IRONY, AND SOLIDARITY*. He smiles, more or less. True, he does look a bit pained, as if forcing himself to make a face for the camera. But the intended image is obviously one of contentment. So let's take our philosopher at his image. He is the well-dressed philosopher, in his Oxford shirt (open at the collar), and sport-coat. He is a neat, conservative liberal. Relaxed. A bit of the country gentleman. We can

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<sup>7</sup> Conveniently forgotten by mainstream historians and liberal historians in particular, as Chomsky pointed out decades ago in “Objectivity and Liberal Scholarship.” See *AMERICAN POWER AND THE NEW MANDERINS*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1969), pp. 23–129.

almost hear him intone, “Ask not what your country can do for you; rather, ask what you can do for your country club!”

But there are deeper levels of meaning in this image. The symbolism betrays Rorty’s aspirations to be the State Philosopher. In his Times article, Rorty merely waves the flag. On the cover, Rorty becomes the flag. The dominating image consists of Rorty’s ruddy face, his white hair and jacket, and his blue shirt. Mr. Red, White and Blue. And just as the State creeps in subliminally, so does the Church. Behind our human flag rises a tree trunk, apparently intersected by a horizontal tree limb. The objects are not clear, but the image is. Behind Mr. Flag looms a large cross.

### **Rorty on Ironism**

It’s ironic how little irony there is in this ironist. Neither is there much humor. Ironically, the first words of his book are a quote from Kundera in which “those who do not laugh” are identified with “the non-thought of received ideas.” Rorty is not a very funny guy, so we should not be surprised that he ends up as a nationalist.

Rorty brings to mind the philosopher mentioned earlier who staunchly defended the proposition that Nietzsche is funny. He offered as evidence for his thesis the fact that he only laughs out loud when reading Nietzsche. He even had to suppress a little giggle at the thought of Nietzsche’s funniness. What I found rather ironic and perhaps even slightly funny was that no example of Nietzsche’s humor was ever given. I’m still amazed at the fact that he filled his twenty-minute quota of verbiage without stumbling into some feeble attempt at illustration. A truly Rortian achievement! A humorism that rivals Rorty’s ironism! Needless to say, Rorty finds Nietzsche absolutely hilarious. He refers to “Nietzsche’s boundless sense of humor.” (p. 108) Of course, he gives no examples.

Yet there are examples of funny philosophers. Marx, for one, had an absolutely boundless sense of humor. As he once said (more or less), “One morning when I was on safari in Virginia, I shot a liberal ironist in my pajamas. What he was doing in my pajamas I don’t know! Maybe he was practicing the Sleep of Reason.”

Rorty’s approach to sexist language is a bit ironic also. Instead of using literally egalitarian forms like “he or she” and “she or he,” Rorty alternates the “she’s” and the “he’s.” But rather than doing it randomly, he bestows on “her” and “him” different roles. For example, while “he” usually talks obsolete metaphysics, “she” spouts Rortian ironism. And when the “ironist” is specifically defined (p. 73) it is “she” who is endowed with all three of its essential qualities.

Perhaps we should take this as some kind of feminist gesture or an act of post-modern chivalry. But the effect is that wretched “she” ends up taking the rap for Rorty’s intellectual ineptitude. The liberal ironist comes across as somebody who doesn’t have the ovaries to own up to what she really thinks. And why does she wear that white sports jacket?

Rorty optimistically claims that the ironist “weaves candidates for belief.” (p. 84) The sad truth is that she only crochets nominees for disbelief.

### **Rorty on the Real World**

It is de rigeur for a State Philosopher to make pronouncements on such topics as contemporary history and popular culture. Accordingly, Rorty does so — and once again stumbles into the abyss of irony. Writing in the momentous year 1989, he opines that “it is hard to imagine



a diminution of cruelty in countries like South Africa, Paraguay, and Albania without violent revolution.” (p. 63) What is so striking about his statement is that he does not describe such a change as “unlikely” but rather as “hard to imagine.” At that late date, our patriotic intellectual should have had some strong hints about change that might have spurred his imagination on a bit. Ironically, at the same moment that Rorty was expressing these views, African National Congress leaders were explicitly rejecting the necessity for violent revolution, and advocating “neither too much violence, nor too little violence, but the precise level of violence called for by the existing conditions.”<sup>8</sup>

Rorty’s obliviousness to the changes occurring in Communist regimes is an even more flagrant example of his lack of contact with history. Summarizing the sad state of the world, he observes that “the capitalists remain as greedy and shortsighted, and the Communist oligarchs as cynical and corrupt (unless Gorbachev surprises us), as Orwell said they were.” (p. 175) Poor Orwell can hardly be blamed for the fact that the actual Soviet Union of 1989 did not correspond precisely to his fictional society based in part on the Soviet Union of 1948. But we may assume that Rorty was still alive enough in the late 80’s to check the news.

Rorty is also a bit weak on what’s been happening in his own beloved nation-state. According to the universe’s most interesting philosopher, “most non-intellectuals” out there in O.J. Land — in Beavis and Butthead Land — in Michael Jackson Land — in Super Bowl Land — in Elvis is Still Alive Land — most of those non-intellectuals “are still committed either to some form of religious faith or to some form of Enlightenment rationalism.” (p. xv) Isn’t that interesting? He believes that half of the general public thinks that Jesus is coming again soon, and the other half thinks that Voltaire is. You might begin to suspect that Mr. Irony is a bit on the oblivious side in the area of popular culture.

Not so fast! He is well aware of the fact that “the novel, the movie, and the TV program have gradually but steadily, replaced the sermon and the treatise as the primary vehicles of moral change and progress.”

(p. xvi) And he wants his “liberal utopia” to give this change its well-deserved recognition — through a turn away from theory and toward narrative. Irony attack! This momentous statement is followed not by a story or a TV program, but by a theoretical treatise. We still have to wait for CONTINGENCY, IRONY, AND SOLIDARITY: THE MOVIE.

Ever in touch with contemporary society, Rorty notes that “in our increasingly ironist culture, two figures are often cited ...” (p. 98) Guess who? Proust and Nietzsche! Yes, they’re often mentioned on the talk shows. Oprah is very big on Proust while Geraldo digs Nietzsche. “Our culture” is, of course, for our liberal ironist the minute subculture of a subculture that reads his favorite books.

## **Rorty (the Secular Humorist) on God**

Nietzsche’s Zarathustra says that the old gods all laughed themselves to death. In Rorty’s future liberal utopia, the gods will also have disappeared, but one suspects that they will have been bored to death. They will certainly have little to do in Rorty’s secular society.

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<sup>8</sup> This position had in fact been adopted long before Rorty published his comments on the subject. The formulation quoted is from Dr. Neo Mnumzana, the official U.S. representative of the African National Congress, in a speech entitled “South Africa: Still at the Crossroads,” presented on Oct. 12, 1988 in New Orleans.

According to Rorty, “in its ideal form, the culture of liberalism would be one which was enlightened, secular, through and through. It would be one in which no trace of divinity remained, either in the form of a divinized world or a divinized self. Such a culture would have no room for the notion that there are nonhuman forces to which human beings should be responsible.” It would also reject “not only the idea of holiness but those of ‘devotion to truth’ and of ‘fulfillment of the deepest needs of the spirit.’” (p. 45) In other words, the liberal utopia would carry to perfection all the nihilistic values of our economic society.

However, Rorty’s secularism — indeed his banishment of everything sacred — is lethal to all his patriotic pretensions. To begin with, it undercuts his fetishism of the State and national tradition. One reason why they retain their power is because most other forms of the sacred have been demystified by the society of consumption. When the sacred aura is taken away from these last mystical realities, their basis in illusion and imagination becomes apparent.

What’s more, if Rorty had the courage and honesty to profess his secularism as openly as he professes his patriotic faith, it would kill any appeal he might have to those masses to which he panders. On the other hand, it would no doubt endear him even more to those liberals who can’t manage to believe in anything but yearn to feel like more like those who can. I suspect that for the relativistic liberal the thrill of talking patriotic is much like the thrill for the fundamentalist of finding a prostitute and talking dirty.<sup>9</sup>

## Rorty on Philosophers

Ironically, the world’s most interesting philosopher can’t discuss one of the more interesting of philosophical topics, Nietzsche’s Superman, without making it entirely boring. Nietzsche would say that Rorty is under the power of the Spirit of Gravity, though we might call it the Spirit of Irony, in the sense that his *jeux d’esprit* go over like an iron balloon.

According to our iron-ist, when Nietzsche “starts explaining how to be wonderful and different and unlike anything that has ever existed [N.B.: This is Rortian literary breathlessness] he talks about human selves as if they were reservoirs of something called ‘will to power.’ The superman has an immense reservoir of this stuff, and Nietzsche’s own is presumably pretty big.” (p. 106) What can one say of a writer who can pen the phrase “The superman has an immense X, and Nietzsche’s own is presumably pretty big,” open up the abyss of irony and then fill it from his infinite reservoir of prosaism? Only that his is rather pathetically small (i.e., his reservoir of imagination, of course).

Rorty’s comments on Michel Foucault are much more interesting, not because his writing is any better, but because what he says is so outrageously ludicrous. Rorty refers to “the desire to avoid cruelty and pain” as “a desire which Foucault shared.” (p. 65) Well, we can forgive the academic philosopher for being oblivious to developments in the Soviet Union, South Africa and other places of mere theoretical concern, but ignorance of what was going on in Foucault’s bedroom is a truly unpardonable sin!

The truth is that not only did Foucault have no “desire to avoid cruelty and pain,” he loved it and reveled in it. He couldn’t get enough of it!

Although Foucault treated the subject obliquely in his writings as early as 1962, he openly discussed sado-masochism in texts published beginning in the late 70’s. His outlook in the late

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<sup>9</sup> See my analysis of the decline and fall of Jimmy Swaggart, in “Anti-Ecorotica: Sex Among the Televangelists,” in *Exquisite Corpse* #54 (1995): 6–9.

60's and early 70's can be epitomized by the injunction "be cruel," a principle that by 1972 led him to endorse a bloody uprising on behalf of a "popular justice" in which the masses might revive the charming custom of presenting "the head of an enemy on a stake, for public viewing."<sup>10</sup> He was always haunted by the masochistic appeal of suicide, which he described in 1979 as "the simplest of pleasures."<sup>11</sup> In an interview published in 1982, he praised sado-masochism as "the real creation of new possibilities for pleasure."<sup>12</sup> Biographer James Miller, in describing the diverse practices in which Foucault participated, comments that "there are not enough words for the colors of pain."<sup>13</sup> Foucault reported dreams that "seethe with cruelty and destruction."<sup>14</sup> Late in his life, he told an interviewer of "one of his best memories" in which he experienced "very, very intense pleasure." What he fondly recalled was his experience of being hit by a car and having for a few seconds "the impression that he was dying."<sup>15</sup> If only he had lived to read CONTINGENCY, IRONY, AND SOLIDARITY!

This is not the only case in which Rorty sabotages philosophy in his heroic pursuit of the Platonic Form of the Obtuse. While a significant literature was building up on the connections between Heidegger's philosophy and his Fascist politics, Rorty could still dismiss the problem through an appeal to crude psychological dualism. He remarks that "on the general relation between Heidegger's thought and his Nazism, I am not persuaded that there is much to be said except that one of the century's most original thinkers happened to be a pretty nasty character. He was the sort of man who could betray his Jewish colleagues for the sake of his own ambition, and then manage to forget what he had done." (p. 111) Rorty notes that "if one holds [his own] view of the self as centerless," then "one will be prepared to find the relation between the intellectual and the moral virtues," then "one will be prepared to find the relation between the intellectual and the moral virtues, and the relation between a writer's books and other parts of his life, contingent." (p. 111)

Rorty's comment is more than mildly ironic in view of the fact that the themes of forgetting and remembering are central to Heidegger's philosophy (and thus, we might deduce, for the benefit of Rortians, to his "books"). It seems rather strange, and also quite ironic, to conclude that the kind of forgetfulness into which this philosopher lapses is irrelevant to his thinking about forgetfulness, or to what he forgets to think about forgetfulness! More ironic still is that not only does he forget in "his life" (to use Rorty's absurd term for that which one does when not writing books, or, perhaps, when one is not officially thinking) such minor details as his betrayal of colleagues, but he also systematically forgets in his books the annihilation of whole peoples by a regime and movement in which he participated and which he failed (forgot?) to renounce. And what is ultimately ironic is the fact that our nasty but original philosopher's only public mention of this mass slaughter is an ironic one!<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> James Miller, *THE PASSION OF MICHEL FOUCAULT*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993, p.205.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 263.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 267.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 306.

<sup>16</sup> In a speech in Bremen in 1949, Heidegger, while discussing modern technology, quipped that "agriculture is now a motorized food industry, in essence the same as the manufacturing of corpses in the gas chambers and extermination camps ... " Quoted in Victor Farias, *HEIDEGGER AND NAZISM*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), p. 287.

Why is our liberal ironist unable to mine any of this irony? In Heidegger, Rorty might have finally discovered the quite interesting connection between philosophy, blood, and irony! Instead, he finds nothing more than a convenient instance to which to apply a Rortian “view.”

## **Rorty on Liberalism**

Rorty’s liberalism is ironic to the core because it is founded on a monstrous absurdity and a process of resolutely overlooking this absurdity. Philosophy professors sometimes like to give their freshman classes the classic Zen exercise of trying not to think about a monkey. Rorty’s liberalism is an exercise in trying not to think about a nine hundred pound gorilla.

For Rorty, “a liberal society is one whose ideals can be fulfilled by persuasion rather than force, by reform rather than revolution ... “

(p. 60) The liberal ironist, he thinks, makes a crucial distinction between “the use of force and the use of persuasion.” (p. 84) Liberals are the most uncompromising foes of force, coercion, and domination, right?

Guess again. The liberal ironist somehow forgets to apply these exalted principles of non-violence to a rather conspicuous phenomenon: the nation-state. A deliciously ironic oversight, equivalent to Kierkegaard’s paradigmatic example of obliviousness. Just as Kierkegaard’s pious churchgoer fails to notice one thing — the *Mysterium Tremendum*, alias God — our gentle, non-violent liberal philosopher ironically overlooks the fact that the nation-state he presupposes is, in practice and by its very definition, a monstrous system of force and coercion. The State is not a debating club! And a propos of clubs, as Bakunin once said, “if I’m being beaten with a club, it doesn’t hurt any less if the club is labelled ‘the people’s club.’” The nine hundred pound theoretical gorilla hangs tenaciously on the liberal’s back.

Neither does Rorty waste much time reflecting on how the economic oligarchy protects its investments through the force and coercion of the State, not to mention through the force of circumstance — the enforced constraints of “everyday life.” Certain kinds of force remain invisible to Rorty: they lurk in his imaginary blind spot. So don’t expect him to have much solidarity with the victims. He certainly doesn’t experience the force of economic necessity, and prison is definitely not part of the liberal academic lifestyle. His ideology conveniently and magically transforms all this force and coercion into the “suffering” that he laments with the coldest of intellectual sympathy.

Nor does he delve into the forces that dominate the mass media in which most of his vaunted liberal “free discussion” will take place. For Rorty, the true and the good are no more than “whatever is the outcome” of such “free discussion,” defined in a typically liberal manner as “what goes on when the press, the judiciary, the elections and the universities are free, social mobility is frequent and rapid, literacy is universal, higher education is common, and peace and wealth have made possible the leisure to listen to lots of different people and think about what they say.” (p. 84)

Fear not! We are well along the way to such a utopia of free discussion: a kind of zombie-like state in which growing amounts of leisure-time are devoted to gleaning truths from the talk-shows and TV hyperreality. One can reflect on the pro’s and (especially) con’s of daughters who think their mothers dress like sluts, cops cleaning the bad boys out of the hood, the latest visits of ET’s to Middle America, and the never-ending saga of O.J. And should any semi-serious politics somehow squeeze its way into the world of “free discussion,” Rortian liberalism gives us no reason

to question its ideological limits. We can just sit back and watch the right-wing bigot corner the shame-faced liberal, as the latter stands up for free enterprise, patriotism, and a small dose of compassion. We wait in vain for a “free discussion” of whether social oppression should exist, but we can tune in every day to stimulating debates about exactly how brutal it should be, and whether its victims fully deserve their fate, or whether they have earned our liberal sympathy.

Rorty’s defense of liberal society might be stronger if he had made it into some kind of distant ideal, like communism and the withering away of the state were supposed to be. But what he defends is already here, embodied in some of the nation-states whose citizens need from Rorty’s point of view to be more proudly patriotic. We get to compare actually existing liberalism to what Rorty says about it, and no liberal KGB shuts us up. No wonder liberals don’t need a sense of humor to make liberalism sound like a joke.

Rorty writes of “the sort of social hope which characterizes modern liberal societies — the hope that life will eventually be freer, less cruel, more leisured, richer in goods and experiences, not just for our descendents but for everybody’s descendents.” (p. 86) Everybody’s? Consider how these societies treat immigrants within and foreigners outside their borders. Of course, it’s cheap to hope, but what evidence is there that there is even any interest in the welfare of these others, much less hope for them? And far from cherishing such hope for everybody’s descendents, these societies are becoming increasingly cynical about such aspirations for anybody’s descendents. After all, what has the future ever done for you?

Near the end of the book, we finally get a concise statement of the foundations of Rortian political theory. I am aware that Rorty says that seeing them as “philosophical foundations” is the “wrong way” to read them. However, I am using the term “foundations” in the more basic department-store sense of “a supporting undergarment, such as a corset or girdle, especially one with an attached brassiere.” It is what underlies the Rortian corpus when the outer garments are stripped off — what is employed to give it shape and form. Rorty states that the correct way to read his statements about solidarity and obligations to others is “as a contribution to the attempt to achieve what Rawls calls ‘reflective equilibrium’ between our instinctive reactions to contemporary problems and the general principles on which we have been reared.” (p. 196) Rortian political philosophy thus reduces to philosophy at the service of gut reactions and conventional wisdom.

While the liberal ironist may struggle valiantly to reconcile conflicting feelings and beliefs, millions of blessed souls who can’t stand liberals and think that irony was sent by the Devil or is some kind of Jewish Communist plot are born into “reflective equilibrium.” “My daddy tol’ me they was no good, and I can look at ‘em an’ tell they ain’t no good!” Q.E.D.

## **Rorty on Cruelty**

Like many of his liberal predecessors, Rorty thinks that the infliction of pain and suffering are the greatest of social evils. He proposes that “liberals are the people who think that cruelty is the worst thing we do.” (p. xv) What “unites” ironists like Rorty with others is “just susceptibility to pain and in particular to that special sort of pain which the brutes do not share with the humans — humiliation.” (p. 92) Why it is just this [to echo Rorty’s emphasis] is not clear, and in fact doesn’t make much sense. Most of us probably think that a lot more positive things unite us with others. Presumably, from Rorty’s point of view if we became Zenlike enough or perhaps even catatonic

enough to detach ourselves from sources of humiliation we would disunite ourselves from the ironists and everybody else.

But while susceptibility to pain unites all of us, awareness of and concern about this susceptibility apparently doesn't. From Rorty's arrogant perspective, few people other than those Europeans and Americans who have had the benefit of his sort of liberal ideology have been able to develop the qualities required for such awareness and concern. "The ironist does not see her ability to envisage, and desire to prevent, the actual and possible humiliation of others" as an "essentially human" quality, but rather as "an ability and a desire" that is "associated primarily with Europe and America in the last three hundred years." (p. 93)

In reality, such abilities and desires have been central (if not "essential") to traditions that have spanned most of human history (though they have usually been more interested in preventing "actual" than "possible" humiliation). Twenty-five hundred years ago, Shakyamuni Buddha initiated a tradition that envisioned a "cure to suffering" through a compassion that aimed precisely at such a goal. Laozi's "Three Treasures" of "deep love, simplicity, and never putting oneself ahead" introduced a similar idea into the Daoist tradition at about the same time. Dorothy Lee describes numerous tribal cultures that have been based on a respect for the person and a careful avoidance of any act or expression that would judge a person comparatively, much less humiliate him or her. She writes of the Navaho workers who resisted giving orders to others and Hopi children who refused to keep score in games when the economic system and school system of modern, Western, liberal society imposed such practices on them.<sup>17</sup> None of these traditions seem to exist in World History According to Rorty.

His arrogant elitism sinks to its lowest when he reduces "the oppressed" to the status of passive victims. "As I said earlier, pain is non-linguistic: It is what we human beings have that ties us to the non-language-using beasts. So victims of cruelty, people who are suffering, do not have much in the way of language. That is why there is [sic] no such things as the 'voice of the oppressed' or the 'language of the victims.' The language the victims once used is not working anymore, and they are suffering too much to put new words together. So the job of putting their situation into language is going to have to be done for them by somebody else. The liberal novelist, poet, or journalist is good at that." (p. 94)

As I said earlier (remember?), this is arrogant elitism at its lowest! It is no accident that the diabolical Professor Rortyarty prefaces his comment on the oppressed with a reference to "beasts," for it is precisely beastlike qualities that he attributes to the victims of suffering. His liberalism requires that the oppressed be reduced to victims who can be conveniently represented by liberals. He seems unaware of the literature, poetry, journalism, film, art and other forms of self-expression of women, blacks, Hispanics, Native Americans, gays, poor rural whites, and many other oppressed groups. Since he doesn't believe in ideology, he can't understand how their voice might be eloquent, strong, and, to use a word he would disdain, truthful, yet often marginalized, distorted, and co-opted by the dominant system of power. Perhaps this situation is a bit too ironic for our ironist. For Rorty there is a simple, convenient and non-ironic explanation for their failure to get a fair hearing: the poor suffering wretches have been reduced to silence or incoherence. So let the literary liberals speak for them, and let the theoretical liberals explain to them their good fortune in having liberals around, so they don't have to bother to learn how to talk.

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<sup>17</sup> See Dorothy Lee, *FREEDOM AND CULTURE*. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1959), esp. pp. 5-26.

Ironically, Rorty says elsewhere that we “should stay on the lookout for marginalized people – people whom we instinctively think of as ‘they’ rather than ‘us.’ We should try to notice our similarities with them.” (p. 196) This must be rather difficult, since the differences are usually much more obvious. For example, that we have spare change and they don’t. Rorty obviously lives in one of the better neighborhoods, where a notable difference about the marginals is that they are nowhere to be seen, so that he has to “stay on the lookout” for them. Strange that the big difference he notices when he finally scouts out a few is that they can’t speak. Perhaps he has only encountered them as he passed them in his BMW, observed that they often carry signs, and hastily concluded that they are mute.

### **Rorty on the Platform**

On March 26, 1982, Richard Rorty spoke in New Orleans. He treated his audience to an excruciatingly boring reading of a manuscript he called “Post-Philosophical Man.” Despite the title, Rorty said rather little about the man in question, and he did not reveal whether she was a liberal or not. Perhaps Post-Philosophical Man needed the rest of the decade to discover her true identity. Rorty revealed himself to be only slightly more of an ironist in person than in print. He discussed, for example, “the fear that something will be lost if philosophy fades from the cultural scene,” a something that, he added, is “not just the employment possibilities for philosophers.” This statement was in fact more ironic than he thought, since Rorty actually said “fades from the cultural scene like theology.” Theologians Hans Küng and Gustavo Gutierrez later both came to the intellectual backwater (and, indeed, the veritable swamp) that I call home and spoke to packed auditoriums of eight hundred, while Rorty could pull in only a small fraction of that number. What is the grammar of the word “fade,” anyway? Near the end of an hour of Rorty’s tedious, uninspired reading, a bell rang loudly. As usual, our philosopher’s irony-meter was inoperative, since there was no evidence of a reaction as he droned on. (Fade-out).

### **On Rorty**

And lest the reader begin to hear the ringing of imaginary bells, let us conclude these reflections on the world’s most interesting philosopher. We must now ask how our patriotic academician rates as a budding State Philosopher, as the self-anointed prophet of blood and irony. Lamentably, he fails on two counts. His blood is thin, his irony weak. He suffers from a terminal case of irony deficiency anemia.

# The Dragon of Brno

Hanging above the entranceway to the Town Hall of Brno, the capital of Moravia, is a Dragon. The notorious Dragon of Brno. The Monster, which stares down through glassy eyes upon all who enter this seat of political power, was brought back long ago from a strange and distant land. Some might call this awe-inspiring beast a mere “crocodile.” But to the good citizens of Brno of an earlier age, it must have represented everything exotic and remote. In all probability, it was precisely such a creature that was called “Leviathan” in Biblical times. This specimen still hangs in the passageway as an enduring image of Otherness. In fact, at this late date it might be taken as the symbol of the conquest of the Other by Civilization. It is the once untamed nature, the archaic, the primitive, the anarchic — now safely embalmed and displayed for the amusement of the burghers and tourists.

Another less notorious Dragon was born in Brno on August 20, 1934. A Dragon who breathed fire against Leviathan. It might seem strange that I label Fredy Perlman a Dragon, since he was one of the great Ranters against Leviathan, an aspiring Dragon-slayer who announced the coming destruction of the Beast, and who was the avowed enemy of everything we think of as Dragon-like. But in fact he had much in common with another sort of Dragon. Not the life-destroying, monstrous Dragon of the West, but rather the more primordial, life-affirming one of the East. The Chinese, Daoist Dragon. The Dragon of dance, joy, celebration, and the affirmation of community and nature. The Dragon of Otherness, the very antithesis of the Western Dragon of Power and Domination. Fredy Perlman is the Anti-Dragon of Brno.

And yet a third Dragon has come out of Brno. One that is truly a monstrous Beast. For Brno is the birthplace of not only Fredy Perlman, but as he himself tells us, it is also the home of the nation-state, the modern incarnation of Leviathan. At the beginning of the modern epoch, the people of Moravia formed a defensive league and thereby inadvertently created a mutant Creature that was “a precursor of what we will call a ‘nation state.’” (p. 165)<sup>1</sup> The Dragon was called “Greater Moravia,” but its true importance was its identity as “the prototype of the Leviathanic form.” (p. 165) It was to become, as Nietzsche put it “the coldest of all cruel monsters.” It would also become Moloch, the awful Diety who requires the sacrifice of children by their parents. And it would become Behemoth, the gigantic and grotesque Creature inspiring horror and fear. And finally, it would become the most horrifying Dragon, the avaricious reptilian Beast that hoards all that it can conquer.

As his-story moves on, this Monster, this Dragon of Brno, takes on many aspects. To what degree the Monster is Capital, to what degree it is the State, and to what degree it is the technological Megamachine, is not always clear in this complex story. The Monster plays many roles in this tragedy called “the Slaughter-Bench of History.” We may call it Leviathan, Moloch, Behemoth or Dragon without fear of error. It is important, though, that we understand Leviathan’s greatest transformation, the one necessary before the Monster could finally turn upon itself. As Fredy

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<sup>1</sup> All citations are from Fredy Perlman, *AGAINST HIS-STORY, AGAINST LEVIATHAN*. (Detroit: Black & Red, 1983). The various names of Leviathan have been capitalized in accord with that text.



Perlman pointed out, this was its world-historical transition from Worm-Leviathan to Octopus-Leviathan.

But Leviathan has a long his-story before its final metamorphosis. Fredy Perlman announces that “it is my aim to speak of the Beast’s body. For it does have a body, a monstrous body, a body that has become more powerful than the Biosphere. It may be a body without any life of its own. It may be a dead thing, a huge cadaver. It may move its slow thighs only when living beings inhabit it. Nevertheless, its body is what does the wrecking.” (p. 5) He recounts in his great epic the entire ugly and brutal story of this Creature and its destruction of the Earth.

He begins the narrative at the Cradle of Civilization, where he turns back the world-historical baby blankets to reveal a monstrous, Satanic infant Leviathan. As we find the Creature in ancient Sumer, its apparatus of hierarchy and domination is already fully developed in the brutal class system. The “Lugal,” the paradigmatic Boss, and his staff of “Ensis” or underbosses, look to foreign captives to do their work. These captives are “the first zeks,” who are “the workers, proletarians, full-time laborers.” (p. 22) Quickly, though, the general populace is reduced to the same miserable status of zekhood, which is to be the ultimate fate of humanity in general.

The ideology of domination follows immediately. “The Lugal claims that his power comes to him from the violent spirit who lodges in the Ziggurat or artificial mountain. This sprawling man-made phallus shape is the real head of the Leviathan”(p. 27). The entire universe is reconceived as a Leviathan ruled by a psychotic, power-mad Boss. God the Father is born. Monistic metaphysics arises out of the monistic monopoly of power.

The business-man, the man who reduces all being, including his own, to economic value, also emerges in Sumer. This is “a human being whose living humanity has been thoroughly evacuated.” As Fredy Perlman’s story shows, the term “Belly of the Beast” is a far from pejorative term for such a being. It is rather the natural environment that breeds him and to which he is perfectly adapted. This business-being is indeed a kind of digestive bacterium for the Monster. He breaks down the living protoplasm of culture, soul and spirit into inorganic matter to be metabolized by the deathly body of the Beast. He is one “who thrives in, and on, the Leviathan’s material entrails. People reduced to things are among the objects in the beast’s entrails and obviously fair game to this hunter for profits.” (pp. 39–40)

The social and psychological cement that holds the entire Leviathanic edifice together is patriarchy. Leviathan is in a sense only the male ego and male aggressiveness expanded into a vast social or rather anti-social system. “When we speak of real History, of History proper, we mean His-story. It is an exclusively masculine affair. If women make their appearance in it, they do so wearing armor and wielding a phallus shape. Such women are masculine.” (p. 41) It is only in our own time that we can clearly see what such a “States-Woman” could possibly be. The most highly developed specimen thus far was Mad Maggie Thatcher, the Iron Lady, a Phallic Mother if there ever was one. For a more perfect example we must wait for a Woman of Steel, the deadly Stalinism of the future. Fredy Perlman points out the many aggressive, masculine images that pervade the dominating imaginary over the ages. “The whole affair revolves around phallus shapes: the spear, the arrow, the Ziggurat, the Obelisk, the dagger, and of course later the bullet and the missile.” (p. 40) This imagery is perhaps obvious, but worth remembering, as is the fact that these images are all phantom forms of the the phallic ego, the ultimate lethal, annihilating missile directed at everything in the world that still lives.

Fredy Perlman shows us that Leviathan’s long his-story is the story of the denaturing, objectification and mechanizing of all of reality. “As the generations pass, the individuals within the

cadaver's artificial entrails, the Ensi as well as the zek, the operators of the great Worm's segments, become increasingly like the springs and wheels they operate, so much so that sometime later they will appear as nothing but springs and wheels." (p. 37) The reduction of the universe to dead matter is not, as many believe, a product of the Enlightenment and the Newtonian worldview. The process is implicit in the history of Leviathan from the beginning. The Worm and the Octopus both eat away at the organic community and turn all to dead matter. The living world is slowly disenchanting or murdered symbolically, and then, to an increasing degree, it is literally killed. At the same time, dead objects are fetishized, given power as if they were animate beings.

Fredy Perlman is among the few who have understood the role played in this process by the politics of monotheism. Akhenaten, he says "was the first revolutionary totalitarian," who established monotheism, but "did not have to invent what had been the common practice of his Ziggurat-raising neighbors for more than fifty generations." (p. 52) Monotheism is the mortal enemy of the Spirit. It is at the core not only of every imperialistic religion, but also of every dogmatism and sectarianism, including dogmatic sectarian anarchism. It is even at the core of dogmatic, imperious atheism (most brilliantly shown by Flannery O'Connor, through Hazel Motes, the fanatically monotheistic atheist anti-hero in WISE BLOOD). Ironically, the remnant of latter-day revolutionaries still fight the good monotheistic fight against the monotheism of the Monster. Yet the Octopus has already mutated monotheism into polymorphous idol-worship. And the authoritarians long ago perfected monotheism, so the world is not interested in a new improved leftist, revolutionary or quasi-anarchistic version. The only alternative is to break with both orthodox monotheism and reactive crypto-monotheism. To affirm polytheistic Nature, the Household of many spirits, the Dao of many Daos, the sacred (Dis)Unity of diverse modes of sacred being.

Fredy Perlman traces the spiritual conflict between these alternative paths. It begins when Moses proclaims "Leviathan's declaration of war against all life": that Man should "have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth." (p. 59) Some want to find an idea of "stewardship" in this dominion, a concept that itself reflects delusions of human self-importance and control of nature more than it does human humility and forbearance. Rather, "dominion" expresses the imperialistic will of the Satanic God of Power who wars with Divine Love and Divine Wisdom (which are sometimes called "Satanic") between the lines in the Bible and other ancient texts that record this battle for the human Spirit. Perlman, like Blake, is one of the few eye-witnesses reporters on that war, though we have all lived history on its front lines.

While Moses speaks for the Satanic God of Power, Hesiod, having a memory of primal justice, denounces the "Monster Divine." He laments a fateful decline of humanity that will continue until a "race of iron" prevails for whom "might shall be their right," so that in the end "one man will sack another's city" and "men will praise the evil doer and his violent dealing." (p. 70) Fredy Perlman sees in Hesiod's ideas the beginnings of the critique of domination. He also sees that the great spiritual teachers of two and a half millennia ago were engaged in an archaic, anarchic critique of destructive power that was far more powerful than today's superficial radical "agendas." Not only Laozi, but also Zarathustra and Shakyamuni Buddha taught a Way of peace, non-domination and compassion in opposition to the devastating path of Leviathan. Ideals of the "Golden Age," "Eden," and the "Reign of the Yellow Emperor" (that is, the Earth itself) all judged Leviathan harshly in contrast to the memory of Primitive Anarchy. Later, Fredy Perlman points out, the anarchic critique continued as a certain "Joshua" spread the radical message that "the Kingdom

of God is within you,” rather than in the will of the Monster. (p. 109) In each case, the liberating visions were turned into hierarchical religions by kings and priests, reduced to fundamentalisms by defenders of the rigid ego, and finally, ignorantly attacked by fanatical leftist sectarians as nothing more than their travestied versions.

The quest for liberation did not, of course, die out, and it often reached new heights. In a much later age, the Movement of the Free Spirit spread over Bohemia and Moravia itself. Western history saw one of those rare periods in which the Spirit was willing, and the Flesh was too. Moravia became for a moment the spiritual center of the universe. Jan of Brno then revealed that “private property is the original sin.” (p. 215) Needless to say, the partisans of the Free Spirit were slaughtered in a brutal reaction, but a few survived, and quietly whispered their Secret to other enemies of Leviathan who were identified by the spark of life in their eyes. The Secret was transmitted from generation to generation in Brno, until Fredy Perlman would finally bring it to the New World. To Detroit, “the Strait,” symbolizing the long and narrow channel through which the truth must pass between the great sea of the primordial community and the vast Ocean of the Spirit lying in the future.

This battle against Leviathan continues, though the Creature has transformed itself radically over the ages. The crucial mutation of the Beast began in ancient times, though its consequences are just now beginning to become evident. “The Phoenician Octopus and its later Greek, Venetian and other offspring will come to be seen as something altogether different from the Assyrian Worm.” (p. 71) The Cold War thus began several thousand years ago in this separation of Leviathan into two incompatible forms. “There is no doubt that the two Leviathans differ. The artificial Worm’s claws and fangs, its armies, are usually attached to the body, whereas the tentacles of the artificial Octopus detach themselves from the body and can be said to move about freely.” (p. 71)

It is inevitable that mortal combat will eventually break out between the Worm, the heavy-handed and heavily-armed State, and the Octopus, the supple, stealthily-moving Capital. “Both live off the surplus product of zeks’ labor. But the Worm uses most of its surplus to enlarge its head and body, its officials and armies, whereas the Octopus keeps most of its surplus continually circulating between sources and destinations.” (p. 71) The State builds up a cumbersome vertical structure, a heavy, and finally unsupportable, external skeleton. Capital spreads out horizontally, like the tentacles of the Octopus, or a vast spider’s web. Better yet, we might call it a rhizome. In traditional battles between the two Monsters, “the one tends to have greater wealth, the other greater power.” (p. 72) But in the end, the triumphant Octopus has more wealth and also a much more subtle and effective form of power. Its tentacles extend ever further outward, first reaching each point in physical space and then invading every corner of the psychological and imaginary realms. The Octopus tames the Worms and transforms them one by one into additional tentacles. This is the New World Order.

Yet the Worm is not dead. The secret of nationalism is in the human tendency to revert to archaic mass-identifications. Out of the destruction of communal freedom came the authoritarian membership society, the breeding-ground of the Worm Leviathan. This grotesque social formation has been largely eroded by the Octopus Leviathan, but it remains a powerful atavistic psychological force. “Under the banner of the big lie, people whose free communities are repressed beyond retrieval nevertheless retrieve lost communities, lost kinship and lost freedom, but only during the instant when they slaughter imagined enemies of all they lost.”(p. 174) Beneath the exterior capitalist rationality of post-modernity seethes the psychotic, fascistic rage for egoistic,

sadomasochistic identification. The mass-man only feels good when he consumes, but haunted by Otherness, he only feels really good when he kills.

The final stage of his-tory is globalization by the Octopus Leviathan, as the Europeans “carry the Beast to the world’s last places of refuge.” (p. 267) The End of History is near. Not Mr. Fukuyama’s triumph of sham democracy, but rather the victory of the Plutocracy, of the Octopus-ocracy, of the last Leviathan. The European brain, the mind of the Monster, is fully absorbed into the Machine. Europeans (and this increasingly means everyone, as the global monoculture develops) “are zeks, administrative zeks and menial zeks, children and grandchildren of zeks.” But “the last Leviathan’s zeks are not conscripts but volunteers.” (p. 267) Those who do not go voluntarily into a madhouse go voluntarily into a workhouse. It’s important to add, though, that they hate the work, even though they’ve forgotten how to play. The Machine knows how to amuse the inmates just enough to keep them and itself running.

Leviathan’s process of universal conquest, its relentless globalization, is founded on its monistic view of reality. The Monster is driven toward the annihilation of the Other. “The monism is self-confirming. Everything is artifice, and whatever is not will soon be artifice. There is nothing outside but raw materials ready and waiting to be processed and transformed into Leviathanic excrement, the substance of the universe. Some raw materials resist the transformation more than others, but none can withstand the inexorable March of Progress.” (p. 291) What needs to be added is that the monism becomes more and more disguised in the pluralism of its manifestations. If the ecological worldview finds in free nature a non-dominating, self-realizing unity-in-diversity, the Leviathanic world of domination increasingly appears as an oppressive, destructive unity-in-diversity. The unity is in the Monster, the diversity in its infinite number of tentacles, which cover everything, intertwine, form the ultimate Gordian knot, and dominate our view of reality.

And where do we human beings, and what is left of our human community, fit into the End of History? Fredy Perlman’s diagnosis for our own age sounds at first rather dismal. History seems to become a Night of the Living Dead, with the hapless humans cowering before the advancing lifeless Creatures. Progress, he notes, always works on behalf of destruction, for the segments of the Worm, the tentacles of the Octopus “being dead things, may corrode” but “they never die.” On the other hand, as the monster destroys the social fabric, the “human communities, once dead, stay dead.” In short, “death is always on the side of the machines.” (p. 45)

Yet, we should not despair, for the segments do corrode, and the spirit that regenerates community does not die. The good news is that the entire Monster is beginning to destroy itself, and there is hope for a new beginning, for regeneration. Even the Octopus’s own ideology, post-modernism, if read carefully, reveals a fatal judgment on itself. While some insecure but eminently flexible radical theorists rush to adapt themselves to the post-modern tidal wave of the future, and others who are even more insecure are driven by panic into sclerotic reactive modernism, the logic of disintegration points us toward neither modernism nor post-modernism, but rather in the direction of Pre-Ancientism. Fredy Perlman — like we surre(gion)alists — was a radical Pre-Ancientist imbued with the spirit of creative regeneration.

Let’s begin again! The Earth does it every year! And History can do it occasionally too! The tradition of revolutionary Pre-Ancientism has always existed. At the beginning of Civilization and domination, people could still “remember that their own ancestors once lived in communities of free human beings,” and that they “communed with animals, with Earth, with the spirit of the sky and the spirit of the apple tree.” (p. 48) The memory has never been completely lost. The possibility for surviving the self-destruction of the Monster depends on our capacity to remain

in touch with our roots in nature and in our human community, and on our ability to express that creative Spirit that pervades nature and ourselves. We have grounds for hope. Once the Human Spirit slumbered within a small band of pathetic, gerbil-like creatures, hiding in the bushes, guarding their treasure of slowly gestating soul, waiting for the age of Monsters to end. Now the human Spirit hides in remote corners of the psychogeographical map, waiting for the latter-day Monster to collapse under its own weight. Perhaps there is gestating within it a new emergent realm of being. Perhaps we can venture out and strategically place a cosmic evolutionary banana peel in the Monster's path.

Fredy Perlman has helped us understand that the final contradiction of the dominant world order is neither economic nor political. In a sense it is ecological, but more basically it is metaphysical. Leviathan is the dream of Infinite Power. Leviathan is the Bad Infinity made historical. The Infinite in history ultimately runs aground on the finite. As Fredy Perlman puts it, "Leviathan, the great artifice, single and world-embracing for the first time in His-story, is decomposing." The story of Leviathan is the story of conquest of the Other, and there is now no Other left to conquer. The Cold War was the last battle in the conflict between the Worm and the Octopus, and the outcome was certain before the battle began. There is only one barrier left in the way of the End of History, and that is regressive mass political psychosis (in the form of nationalist fanaticism or religious fundamentalism).

With this qualification, Fredy Perlman's verdict is accurate: "Having swallowed everyone and everything outside itself, the Beast becomes its own sole frame of reference. It entertains itself, exploits itself and wars on itself. It has reached the end of its Progress, for there is nothing left for it to progress against except itself." (p. 301) Just as history begins with the death of the ancient Uroboros, the Cosmic Serpent, the closed Circle of Nature, it ends with the Dragon of Anti-Nature swallowing its own tail, and devouring itself. Leviathan cannibalizes itself, and seeks to devour everything else with it. The only question that remains is whether humanity and the living Earth can survive this final Fall into nothingness.

If we do survive our encounter with the Beast, Fredy Perlman will have helped us find our Way around the Dragon and the Abyss.

# Apocalypse and/or Metamorphosis

## Apocalypse and/or Metamorphosis: A Surregional View

Norman O. Brown's new book<sup>1</sup> is about philosophy and madness. And just in time, since the world has been almost destroyed by information and sanity. In fact, it is a book about several madnnesses, all of which deserve careful study. According to Brown, "Freud is the measure of our unholy madness, as Nietzsche is the prophet of the holy madness, of Dionysus, the mad truth." (p. 2) In the course of the essays included in this book, Brown at times sheds some light on all this madness, and at times leads us into the beautiful dark night that requires no illumination.

Brown has the rare courage to venture consciously into the politics of the imagination. To dream awake. "Very few are the Actaeons to whom destiny gives the power to contemplate Diana naked, and the power to become so enamored of the beautiful harmony of the body of nature that they are transformed into deer, inasmuch as they are no longer the hunters but the hunted." (p. 45) Beautiful harmony? Or fearful symmetry? Or beautiful disharmony? Or fearful discord? Or sublime cacaphony? Brown points us to one good myth — one of a multitude of equally and oppositely significant myths. He understands myth, and therefore he can play with it. The Left that can clench its jaw at the sound of "myth," yet salivate at the tocsin sound of "revolution," neither understands nor plays. Brown directs us to myth as the negation of all monotheisms, from Ra-theism, its dawn, to A-theism, its final truth. Atheism, the monotheistic will to disbelieve in the One and Only True God.

Brown understands that as long as Psyche exists, there will be neither the Triumph of God nor the Death of God, but rather the battle of the swarming deities and spirits that inhabit our vast multitude of psychoregions. This spiritual realm is where Anarchy reigns, despite the desperate efforts of serious priests, theologians, and materialists. The Daemon of Freedom springs out in the strangest of places! As Brown shows, it even appears in one of its most striking forms as a kind of Islamic anarchy or anarchic Islam. In the KORAN itself — and in many traditions stemming from it — "there is a mysterious regression to a more primitive statum, archetypal, folkloristic, fabulous, apocryphal. Historical material is fragmented into its archetypal constituents and then subjected to displacement and condensation as in dreams." (p. 88) The KORAN merges with FINNEGAN'S WAKE, with a "systematic violation of the classic rules of unity, propriety, and harmony; bewildering changes of subject; abrupt juxtaposition of incongruities." (p. 89) This could have a revolutionary effect on Middle Eastern politics: from "The Party of God" to "The Dionysian Orgy of God."

Brown helps uncover the liberatory dimensions of the history of philosophy and religion. Don't abandon Islam to the Ayatollahs (Christianity to the Church, Hinduism to the Brahmins, Shamanism to the New Agers, Zen to the Psychotechnologists, etc.). The world of spirit always

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<sup>1</sup> APOCALYPSE AND/OR METAMORPHOSIS. (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1991), xi + 200 pp. References in the text are to this work.

retains a subversive dimension. For Brown, much of Islam remains in touch with “the dream-life of the masses, the escatological imagination of the lowly and oppressed.” (p. 92) His analysis contributes to the continuing archaeology of revolutionary spirituality.

Brown writes above all of prophecy, a topic of urgent historical (and transhistorical) importance. In the West, the Left had a past in large part because it was a prophetic and visionary movement. Not because it had a blueprint for the future. Not because it had a good line. As prophetic and visionary, it was in touch with the immense but dormant powers within people and communities. Anyone can promise a great future, but only a prophetic and visionary movement can promise a great present. It also delivers (being the Midwife of Revolution), and thereby makes history. It transforms and makes sacred what is integral to life, what is most real to people – to take a pertinent example, the struggles and even the smallest victories of the oppressed. It creates things of infinite value in the midst of life. Prophecy is rooted in this reality and this creation.

Appropriately, therefore, much of Brown’s most interesting analysis – one fourth of the book, in fact – deals with Spinoza. In his imaginative reading, the philosopher becomes “Spinoza The Communist, “the prophet of a democratic communism yet un-realized. In a pertinent text, Spinoza quotes Moses’ words: “Would to God that all the Lord’s people were prophets!” And he comments, “that is, would to God that the right of consulting God resulted in the power being in the hands of the people.” (p. 111) For Brown, this means that democracy is the ultimate “theocracy,” as the “will of God” is finally transmuted into “the natural light of reason.” (p. 111) Of course, this “theocracy” would be the negation of both theos and kratia. The ultimate “theocracy” would become – perfecting and transcending democracy – “acracy” or “anarchy.” This is no news, for as Brown elsewhere notes, it was the message of Joachim of Fiore’s Third Stage of History, the era in which the Spirit moves within, and no external authority has validity. The Age of Spirit, the Age of Anarchy, the Age of Holy Communion/Holy Communism within/between Humanity and Nature.

For Brown, Spinoza is also a prophet and a “philosopher of the future” because he was the first to question the “notion of the individual self, soul or person as a substantial reality” that is fundamental to modern capitalism, state and bourgeois culture. (p. 123) He rejected the dualism that proposed “individualism, pluralism, and lofty idealism on the subjective side” and “monism and materialism on the objective side.” (p. 123) Spinoza inaugurates a great critical tradition extending through Marx, Nietzsche and Freud.

In fact, though for some reason Brown fails to mention it, Spinoza vaguely touched on surre(gion)alism in comprehending that there are no discrete realities, places or beings. Things are regions. Indeed, they are spaces and times in which many regions overlap and interpenetrate, giving the reality and illusion of fullness of being. Reason (as also passion and imagination!) leads us both inward toward these ontological sites and outward through the multitude of converging regions. Spinoza follows only a few of these paths and therefore makes a very limited contribution to surre(gion)alist thought. As a rationalistic lens grinder, he merely ground lenses for the Ground of Being. It was left (perhaps even ultra-left) for an Electrician of Being like Blake to unground the Ground of Being.

But what makes Spinoza a Communist? For Brown, it is his view that “men can desire ... nothing more excellent for the preservation of their being than that all should so agree in all things that the minds and bodies of all should compose, as it were, one mind and one body.”(p.

128) In a sense, it was his adherence to the idea that “the True is the Whole,” and his ability to remain in some ways true to this truth.

Brown also praises Spinoza for his rejection of mind/body dualism, and his consequent ability to recognize the rationality of the body. “He who has a body with very many aptitudes, has a mind of which the great part is eternal.” (p. 129) As social ecologists have pointed out, we should pay close attention to “the wisdom of the body,” and, indeed, even that of the cell. Similarly, Spinoza notes that “the body itself, simply from the laws of its own nature, can do many things which its own mind is amazed at.” (p. 134) But for Brown, Spinoza’s “body” becomes a Deleuzian “body without organs,” in which there is no “genital primacy.” And it is true that he avoids that particular hierarchy within the self, but there seems nonetheless to be a certain degree of “intellectual primacy,” even if rationality is seen to be as much bodily as mental. Spinoza’s philosophical psychology points much more toward CIVILIZATION AND ITS DISCONTENTS and the rational self than toward Anti-Oedipus and the schizo’s stroll.

Strangely, Brown wishes to attribute to Spinoza both “a philosophy of organism,” and the view that “the human body is not an (Aristotelian) natural growth but a machinelike construction or energy system, a ‘high energy construct.’” (p. 136) But what a terrible metaphor that is! Brown seems to be suggesting some kind of “desiring machine” concept. Uh-oh! Perhaps it is true that “as in Blake, the opposition of Body and Soul is overwhelmed in the concept of energy.” (p. 136) But for Blake this energy is “eternal delight,” the kind that usually smashes machines and breaks out of systems. Brown has slipped into a Bad Mythoregion here!

You’ve no doubt caught on to Brown’s problem. He’s temporarily wandered into the murky realm of post-Modernism. Sorry, wrong derangement! Let’s stick to the more creative delirium of pre-Ancientism!

A philosophoregion at which he soon arrives. Brown’s Spinoza is an often questionable but always stimulating one. He makes a good case for looking to Spinoza for a profound critique of many of the shortcomings — dualism, individualism, etc. — of modern philosophy. Yet he concludes that in the end Spinoza will not do. So in his path back from Freud and Marx, Brown trips over Spinoza and goes flying all the way back to — O blessed Fall! — Heraclitus. As he correctly concludes, Spinoza, for all his insights, lacks “movement,” “a philosophy of energy” that is one “of struggle,” “violence” and “death.” (p. 174) The history of philosophy — that chronicle of oblivion — forgot that “Nature is Heraclitean fire.” (p. 174)

And what does this fire burn? In calling his perspective “Dionysian,” Brown refers to “the god of madness,” a madness that “is also death.” The Dionysian, he says, signifies the recognition of realities like madness and death that have been so systematically repudiated by philosophy and civilization. He credits Bataille with helping him overcome dualistic thinking and thereby come to terms with this terrifying Otherness. Bataille revealed to him the “Dionysian or Heraclitean principle of the unity of opposites.” (p. 182) A principle, one might add, that is also fundamental to other traditions, from classical Daoist philosophy, through the entire tradition of dialectical thought to surrealism and social ecology.

Once we renounce the battle for victory over the Other, we are free for life, growth and creative self-expression. Though he does not mention it, Brown is reverting to the ancient idea of nature and being as self-manifestation, outpouring, effusion. He exhorts us to recognize ourselves as a part of these processes. We can thereby come to accept the universal drive toward excess and exuberance that has been hidden beneath all the institutional structure and character-armor of history. Brown is implicitly attacking the myth of scarcity that has been so indispensable to all



systems of domination. As Bataille pointed out, the basic problem for all societies has been how to expend the excess, the surplus. In fact, it is the problem of every human being also. Despite this, every historical society up to the most over-productive ones of today have indoctrinated the populace with the absurd idea that the issue is “survival.” Most historical societies have been so scandalized by the idea of excess that they have redefined it as necessity. But to recognize the reality of excess means recognition of freedom, creativity, abundance, death, wild nature, spontaneity, anarchy. Brown has caught on to a great deal in this area.

He points out a disquieting truth that defies much of what is called “ecological” and “environmental” and perhaps even “Green” today. What hope is there for “conservation” and “limits to growth” in a world in which Dionysian passions have been unleashed as never before? Well, “pseudo-Dionysian,” let’s say. Perhaps the pseudo-Dionysian can only be vanquished by an authentically Dionysian philosophy and mythology of humanity and nature. This hypothesis also defies much of what has been called “Left.” As Brown rightly points out, “capitalism has proven itself more dynamic — i.e, Dionysian — than socialism. Its essential nature is to be out of control: exuberant energy, exploiting every opportunity, to extract a surplus.”(p. 189). The Left has to be even more dynamic: more anarchic, energetic, creating unheard of and unimagined surpluses. Advanced capitalism gave up worldly asceticism long ago, but much of the Left has perpetuated a monasticism of militantism and sectarianism. If the Left is to have a future, it must begin thinking again about the almost taboo concept of freedom, and about the wonders of power. (Strange that in the Four Noble Pillars and Ten Key Mandments of the Green Movement, “Freedom” is never mentioned!)

Marx, for all his economism and political centralism, at least remembered that the question for humanity is the liberation of those “essential powers” slumbering within — and among — us. And we surre(gion)alists add: swarming all around and through us, in spirit and in nature. For Brown, the vision of exuberance requires “an identification with the exuberant life of the whole,” an achievement that Spinoza called “the intellectual love of God.” (p. 198) We might well ponder this challenge: That the hope for regeneration of humanity and nature lies with such a quest for a rational eroticism and/or an erotic rationality.

# Description of a Struggle

## The Castle

They came to the Castle for many reasons. Some sought the Truth, others yearned for Community, and still others dreamt of Power.

In August of 1995 a small band of anarchists and ecologists gathered at Castle Toward near Dunoon, Scotland for an “International Social Ecology Gathering.” The Castle’s cryptic name is quite appropriate. Its dark stone walls seemed to cry out: “Toward What?” A good question, for few of those who gathered realized the true historic meaning of the events in which they had participated. And few were aware of the storm that had gathered and then raged above the turrets of Castle Toward.

Those who gathered were told that the Gathering’s theme was “democracy and ecology” and its purpose “to strengthen the ties between political activists and thinkers interested in radical ecological politics, anarchism, socialism, and politics.” It is likely that most who were there saw the Gathering, and still look back at it, as no more than a pleasant Anarchist’s Holiday where they met like-minded people, socialized and exchanged ideas and addresses.

What they did not know was that the fate of the Gathering was being guided by an Invisible Hand. The Hand of Murray Bookchin, Patriarch of Social Ecology, prophet of “hidden tendencies” and “educer” of the “directionality” of all things. They did not know that the true purpose of the Gathering at Castle Toward was to defend Bookchin’s theoretical fortress, the “Castle of Social Ecology,” and to serve the true “Movement Toward” of History, its authentic meaning and “directionality.”

When the official version of the Gathering was recounted in the Bookchinite Social Ecology Network International, the hidden significance of the event was finally revealed. It was disclosed that the Castle had been the scene of a devious attempt to destroy Social Ecology itself, and that the true Champions of Social Ecology had rallied to its defense.

## The Metamorphosis

The cause of the uproar among the devout was the fact that a certain “C,” who has been for over twenty years one of the most energetic Defenders of the Social Ecological Faith, had the unmitigated gall to raise questions about some of the Patriarch’s ideas.

One is tempted to feel some sympathy for “C,” in view of the deplorable treatment he subsequently received from Bookchin and his allies for the unspeakable crime of critical thought. But to be honest, “C” fully deserves his fate. He is only paying the price for his long-term indulgence in the vice of sectarianism, a moral failing long endemic to the anarchist movement. For years, our poor tragicomic hero was fully aware of the fact that the Patriarch was far from an ideal Philosopher King and the walls of the Castle of Social Ecology were in serious disrepair.

Indeed the King often carried on scandalously, more in the style of a theoretical Court Jester. Yet the wretched “C” continued to patch together new theoretical garb for our often unclothed Philosophical Emperor, all in defense of his crumbling Fortress of Ideas.

The hapless “C” finally discovered to his dismay that such wishful thinking must founder on the shoals of sectarian reality. In a political cult like that of the Patriarch, there comes a time when one must either suppress one’s critical faculties in an act of wormlike submission or face expulsion. “C” had for some time been engaging in discrete questioning of certain Bookchinite dogmas, and the future of his social ecological wormhood already appeared in doubt. He now took on a task that sealed his fate: a detailed critique of some of the Patriarch’s most fundamental ideas. What is more, he brought along a draft of his critique to the Castle of Social Ecology itself and read and discussed some excerpts.

## **Before the Law**

The Patriarch was enraged that such a challenge to his authority would intrude to within the very Castle walls. While Bookchin faxed an urgent plea to the Castle, warning of dire consequences if his principles were not staunchly defended, his call to arms was not heeded. The participants listened politely and rather impassively to criticisms of Bookchin, his partisans failed to dominate the proceedings and impose his orthodoxy, and the group adopted a statement of principles that spurned Bookchinist sectarianism for the sake of a broader, non-dogmatic social ecology.

The pages of the Bookchinite International, however, told a different story. It published a long report on the Gathering in which all the presentations were summarized. All that is, except for “C”’s illicit critique. In this case, not a single point from the presentation was mentioned. Instead, the editors reported faithfully that “[’C’]’s very presence created some considerable debate,” though there had actually been not a word of debate on this topic. Furthermore, the activity to which the Gathering devoted by far the greatest amount of its time, and the only decision that was made by majority vote were consigned to the social ecological memory hole by the trusty editors of the International. Two days had been spent in the drafting of a document entitled “Principles Of The International Social Ecology Network,” which was then adopted by majority vote. However, the Bookchinite vanguard, exercising the famous Bakuninist principle of “Invisible Dictatorship,” decided to rewrite this particular bit of history according to its true Bookchinite “latent directionality,” ignoring such counterrevolutionary irrelevancies as the facts, and such trivialities as the actual decisions of the people who were there.

## **The Trial**

History having been corrected, it was not long before the forces of anarchist orthodoxy came down on “C.” The Patriarch deigned to reply to “C”’s relatively brief presentation at the Gathering with a lengthy diatribe, “Comments on the International Social Ecology Gathering and the ‘Deep Social Ecology’ of [’C’],” excommunicating “C” from the fold of Social Ecology. The contents of this document, unprecedented in the history of inadvertent political humor, are the basis for “C”’s “Confession,” which is reprinted here. While one might suspect that some of the ludicrous accusations have been made up to make the Patriarch look ridiculous, this is not the case. All

the indictments to which “C” pleads guilty actually emanated from the fevered imagination of Bookchin himself.

Next, “C” was purged from the International Advisory Board of the journal Democracy and Nature. “C,” a Board member and contributor since the inception of the journal, was dropped without discussion or even notification, and his subscription to the journal was immediately terminated. In addition, the editor, Takis Fotopoulos not only reprinted Bookchin’s diatribe, but also began a series of attacks on “C”’s critique of Bookchin, while continually refusing to publish the critique itself.

All Seekers of Truth are encouraged to procure a copy of Bookchin’s “Comments” and read this treatise carefully at their earliest possible convenience. If any work illustrates the “tendency” and “directionality” of Bookchinism, this is it. Indeed, it creates a new philosophical category for which Bookchin will long be remembered: Education to the Absurd.

Meanwhile, we offer you “C”’s “Confession,” which we take the liberty of retitling “Memoirs of an Ex-Worm.” Furthermore, we compliment “C” on finally realizing his evolutionary potential and present him with the “Max Cafard Slow Learner’s Award.”

## **A Postscript on the Castle**

After several days at the Castle, the word began to spread among those who had gathered. Castle Toward was not in fact an authentic Castle but rather a latter-day imitation of one. It was a false Castle, and indeed a bit of a travesty of one. The Chateau Fort was in reality a Chateau ... Faux.

However, it was also discovered that a true Castle existed — out of sight from the false one, but only a short distance away. Those who made the “steep and rugged ascent” to that Castle found, however, that it lay in ruins. The true Castle had been destroyed centuries ago in one of those perennial internecine slaughters in which certain latent tendencies of History are rendered so appallingly real.

# **Confession to Comrade Murray Bookchin, Chairman and General Secretary of the Social Ecologist Party and Founder of Dialectical Naturalism (DIANAT) by “C”**

## **Confession...**

I have reviewed the charges leveled against me by Comrade Bookchin in his lengthy account of my heinous crimes, treasonous activities, and egregious errors in thought and action. I recognize the overwhelming weight of evidence he presents of my guilt. Consequently, I have no alternative but to make a full confession of all my crimes against Comrade Bookchin, the Social Ecologist Party, and the Principles of Dialectical Naturalism (DIANAT).

I confess that I have consorted with a counter-revolutionary conspiracy of (as Comrade Bookchin so clearly identifies them) “Bioregionalists, Lifestyle Anarchists, and Deep Ecologists” (BLADE) to undermine and discredit Comrade Murray Bookchin himself, to destroy the Social Ecologist Party, and to render incoherent the Principles of Dialectical Naturalism (DIANAT). I have been under the complete control of and in the pay of agents of BLADE for the past eight years.

I confess that I am guilty, as Comrade Bookchin points out with admirable specificity, of advocating not only such pernicious and counter-revolutionary doctrines as bioregionalism, lifestyle anarchism, and deep ecology, but also liberalism, social democratism, right-wing libertarianism, surre(gion)alism, mysticism, Daoism, spiritualism, anti-Prometheanism, reformism, quietism, primitivism, anti-civilizationalism, naive nature romanticism, neo-paganism, irrationalism, Heideggerianism, Castoriadianism, elitism, personalism, nihilism, anti-rationalism, post-modernism, Derridianism and eclecticism.

I confess that I have, as Comrade Bookchin so poetically puts it, “been in the process of shedding” Social Ecology for years. Indeed, I have shamefully treated Comrade Bookchin’s profound and exalted doctrine as if it were some sort of contemptible reptilian skin. I have also, in the apt phrasing of Comrade Bookchin “assiduously flogged libertarian municipalism,” shamelessly treating it as if it were some kind of dead horse, instead of objective scientific truth, as the Principles of Dialectical Naturalism (DIANAT) have shown it to be. For all these eight years I have secretly been a Deep Social Ecologist, a monstrous hybrid between a clear-thinking, humanistic social ecologist and a mystical, misanthropic eco-brutalist. I have gone to great lengths to hide this disgraceful political miscegenation against which Comrade Bookchin has so vigilantly warned us in his attempts to save us from ideological impurity. Moreover, I have attempted to deceive the gullible by never in a single instance calling myself a “Deep Social Ecologist,” which, as only

experts such Comrade Bookchin and his worthy predecessors in the noble art of high-minded inquisition could divine, proves that I am precisely that kind of miscreant.

I confess that I distributed a malicious tract called “the Politics of Social Ecology” which included, as Comrade Bookchin pointedly typifies it, the “scandalous caveat”: “Note: This is a draft. Please do not copy or quote it. Comments are welcome.” I employed this ruse precisely as Comrade Bookchin so shrewdly grasps, “to immunize myself from criticism by abjuring people from explicitly quoting from [my] essay.” I confess that this tactic was “grossly dishonorable,” and that it, as Comrade Bookchin so lucidly phrases it, “exhibits an immorality that beggars some of the worst hypocrisies [Comrade Bookchin] has encountered in decades of political life.” As Comrade Bookchin instantaneously grasped, I did not in fact want any comments on my so-called “rough draft”. Actually it was not a draft at all, but rather the sole version I ever planned to produce. In reality, I hoped to distribute hundreds of thousands of what Comrade Bookchin has aptly called this “single-spaced propaganda tract,” thereby slandering Comrade Bookchin while preventing his legitimate response to my calumnies. The costs of this underhanded plot were to be underwritten by a consortium of Deep Ecologists, lifestyle anarchists, and the Prince of Wales (figures whose interconnection few other than the astute Comrade Bookchin have been able to fathom — for this, see his brilliant disquisition entitled “Theses on Social Ecology in a Period of Reaction”). I intended to continue to distribute this pernicious document as widely as possible in order to discredit Comrade Bookchin and the Principles of Dialectical Naturalism (DIANAT) and thereby to retard the march of revolution and save capitalism from destruction. My ridiculous claim that “comments” were to be used to “revise” my slanderous pamphlet for inclusion in a book called SOCIAL ECOLOGY AFTER BOOKCHIN, edited by a Prof. “Andrew Light,” is a complete lie. No such book is planned. “Andrew Light” does not exist. I made up the name in a beer-induced stupor.

I confess that I deviously distributed four copies of my libelous document at the International Social Ecology Gathering, with the express intention of assuring that copies would eventually appear everywhere in the world. I cunningly contrived to distribute these copies only to carefully chosen pawns who would accept every criticism I made of Comrade Bookchin and the Principles of Dialectical Naturalism (DIANAT) and who spend inordinate amounts of time at Kinko’s. Happily for the future course of world history, my insidious plot was foiled when a copy fortuitously (and entirely against my will) fell into the hands of a comrade loyal to Comrade

### **Bookchin and the true Principles of Dialectical Naturalism (DIANAT).**

I confess to making “pedestrian criticisms” of Comrade Bookchin and with being “a middle-class philistine,” despite my many trips to Comrade Bookchin’s Institute for Social Ecology in idyllic, rural Vermont, where he so patiently but futilely instructed me in the fine art of class consciousness. I wholeheartedly endorse his wise failure to reply directly to my feeble criticisms, which are so idiotically “pedestrian” that it would be demeaning to a true philosopher like Comrade Bookchin to lower himself to the point of an actual response.

I confess that my views are, as Comrade Bookchin so penetratingly reveals, “essentially mystical,” a fact that I craftily attempt to disguise by creating the illusion of using careful philosophical analysis and precise logical reasoning, processes in which I actually have no faith at all and see only as tools of mysticism and irrationality. My true goal has always been to merge “second nature” into “first nature,” and to reduce humanity to a vegetative state, thereby rendering it a

literal “slime of history.” Furthermore, as Comrade Bookchin has charged, I often expressed my ideas with qualifiers “such as ‘if,’ ‘maybe,’ ‘possibly,’ and ‘probably,’” and it is clear that I do not have “any concrete views of my own.” (Or at least I think that maybe I don’t.)

I confess that I tried to portray Comrade Bookchin as “a fickle thinker,” implying that he held ideas at one time that are in actual conflict with his present ideas. In fact, I have always known that he has never changed his views on any topic, and that the truths so brilliantly expressed in his earlier works have had a latent potentiality, a directionality and a nisus that leads precisely to the more developed verities of his more mature writings.

I confess that I have conspired with liberals “to demand of all of us a demeanor that is passive-receptive, quietistic, and ultimately submissive.” In pursuit of this end I have become entirely, as Comrade Bookchin puts it with such precision, “campus-bound.” I have chosen to restrict all my activities to campuses because they have been bastions of absolute quietism ever since Comrade Bookchin retired from his two Professorships and finished lecturing (as he has so often pointed out with justifiable pride) “at every major university in the United States.” While I have thus cloistered myself within campus walls, agents of BLADE and other counter-revolutionary elements have been authorized to spread false rumors of my participation in political demonstrations, movements and meetings in order to mislead the public.

I confess that even as I worked secretly for quietism, I publicly and ostentatiously supported movements for local control and municipalization of utilities, and duplicitously propagandized for democratization of local government. I also instructed agents of BLADE to spread false stories that I have for years been heavily involved in a fight against one of the world’s largest and most exploitative mining companies, while in reality I continued to help prop up capitalism against the ferocious onslaughts of Comrade Bookchin. At the same time, I made false and malicious statements about Comrade Bookchin himself, such as that the most concrete action he ever took against corporate capitalism was to complain about Ben & Jerry’s Ice Cream.

I confess that as part of my quietistic campaign I have secretly initiated a movement to — as Comrade Bookchin has brilliantly described my crime — “dispense with great, fervent revolutionary hymns like ‘The Marseillaise,’ ‘The Internationale,’ and ‘A Las Barricadas’ and replace them with the insipid saccharine fare of Mary Poppins.” Indeed, I have pressured my own organization, the Delta Greens, to begin and end every meeting by singing tunes from that pernicious musical, in order to undermine whatever truly revolutionary impulses may still have survived, despite my quietistic influence. Furthermore, I have viciously spread the disinformation that “The Marseillaise,” “The Internationale,” and “A Las Barricadas” are, respectively, a grossly heavy French sauce, a night club of questionable reputation, and a school of ravenous fish.

I confess that I have defended attempts by the renegade Howard Hawkins to “warp” the Left Green program, make “nonsense demands,” and “denature” the pathetically little that remains of the American Left as a result of not following Comrade Bookchin’s wise leadership. Furthermore, I have also remained a member of the miserable little counter-revolutionary sect called the “Left Green Network,” in order to promote liberal reformism and thereby aid the renegade Hawkins in his efforts to “legitimate capitalism,” as Comrade Bookchin so accurately labels the crime of that wretched traitor to the cause of Social Ecology.

I confess that in the world-historical battle (*la lutte finale*) between Social Ecology and Deep Ecology, the most important political and intellectual event of modern times, I “stood ‘above’ the fray” as Comrade Bookchin has so aptly put it. Not only did I exhibit complete “intellectual servility” in not justly condemning the enemies of the Revolution and indeed, of the entire human

race, but I also lied to certain close co-conspirators, claiming that my true motive was to avoid joining Comrade Bookchin “at the intellectual gutter level,” and even slanderously questioning whether this scholar of Hellenic civilization had, much like his beloved Parthenon, lost some of his Marbles.

I confess that as Comrade Bookchin, showing his acute memory for details, reminds me, I “perennially complained to [him] in the past of how poorly [my] own ‘affinity group’ meetings in New Orleans were attended.” This complaining, with which I burdened Comrade Bookchin unfairly, was especially malicious and deceptive, since I was never a member of any affinity group for all the time that I was annoyingly bitching about it to the long-suffering Comrade Bookchin.

I confess that I have supported the institution of “programs directed at navel-gazing, psychotherapy and ‘surregionalist manifestos” that were to be located in “a vast network of ashrams.” I made efforts to procure land (with promises of heavy subsidies from Deep Ecologists) on which such ashrams were to be built, and in which all these unsavory activities were simultaneously to take place.

I confess that I have invoked the great dialectician Hegel himself to viciously cast aspersions on Comrade Bookchin’s correct interpretation of Social Ecology and the Principles of Dialectical Naturalism (DIANAT), and that I have spread such lies as the “passive-receptive” idea that a dialectical thinker should look for the truth in various contending viewpoints, instead of taking that properly “robust” and “combative” approach for which Comrade Bookchin is so perfect a model.

I confess that the enormity of my crimes is immeasurable, especially at this crucial turning point in History as Social Ecology moves into a new period of revolutionary struggle and the appeal of Comrade Bookchin’s Dialectical Naturalism (DIANAT) spreads among the masses like some previously unknown strain of influenza.

No! I will not at this decisive historical moment leave our revered leader Comrade Bookchin and the faithful Explicator of his ideas Comrade Biehl without any remaining disciples among the intellectual workers!

I denounce bioregionalism! I admit that there are no bioregions, only municipalities and the stuff in between! I denounce Deep Ecology as a misanthropic, crypto-fascist, mystical form of eco-brutalism! I promise never to meditate, and to stay away from California and any places with large trees! I denounce lifestyle anarchism as a petty-bourgeois deviation! I promise to always eat meat, carry a gun and remain in air-conditioned places like Comrade Bookchin himself! Finally, I denounce Surre(gion)alism, that insidious form of nihilistic “wordplay” with absolutely no meaning that I myself criminally invented to sap the revolutionary energies of the youth of this country! I renounce all metaphors, strange and bizarre images, impertinent witticisms, words with parentheses inside them, and, especially, unsavory attempts at “satire” (which is no more than a degraded form of Comrade Bookchin’s own noble art of sarcasm), and I swear that I will remain on that sound and sober literal plane of meaning on which the final revolutionary struggle will ultimately be fought and won!

In sum, I confess all the crimes, conscious or unconscious, real or imaginary, that I have ever committed against Comrade Bookchin, the Social Ecologist Party, and the Principles of Dialectical Naturalism (DIANAT). I denounce every counterrevolutionary deviation into which I have strayed and every deformation of Comrade Bookchin’s vision that I have perpetrated. I denounce all the agents of BLADE, in whose employ I have despicably served for eight years.



I know that I deserve to spend the rest of my life hauling maple syrup in some social ecological re-education camp in the desolate Northeast Kingdom of Vermont. But I humbly beg Comrade Bookchin to pardon my misdeeds and to accept me back into the ranks of the Radical Intelligentsia, the ranks of those who are truly “rounded” and “robust.”

I swear that I will in the future be “ultimately submissive” to no one and nothing other than Comrade Bookchin and his immortal and immutable Principles of Dialectical Naturalism (DI-ANAT), which will henceforth be the “objective basis” for my life!

I LOVE BIG MURRAY!

# Bookchin Agonistes

## Bookchin's Best Defense

In his new book,<sup>1</sup> Murray Bookchin is out to clobber the competition. He's been in training for this one for decades. In his previous works, he explained the crucial importance of developing a "muscularity of thought," and revealed that his "ecological project" is a "social gymnasium for shedding the sense of powerlessness." After much working out in that gym, he's developed some enormous intellectual muscles, and is a powerful guy indeed. He's often told us of his contempt for those sissified Eastern philosophers and their weak, "passive receptive" outlooks. This philosophical Marlboro Man is firmly in the Western tradition, which is, he explains, "sturdier in its thrust than the Eastern." There will be no questions about the "sturdiness" of Murray Bookchin's "thrust"! He has passed through the steeling school of politics, which, he tells us, is concerned with "forging a self." Once out of the forge, the safely armored self will always be on its guard. For "the guarded mind," he says, is the only guarantee that we will be "guided by the thin line of truth." This "guarded mind," rigidly following the correct "line" is, he concludes, nothing less than "a fortress." *Eine feste Burg ist unser Geist*. When Murray Bookchin writes a book defending "the spirit," it's the spirit that comes out swinging.

Bookchin is convinced that the best defense of humanity or anything else is a good offense, and in this book we see him at his most aggressively offensive. Needless to say, such a muscle-bound thinker can "re-enchant humanity" only in the most ironic sense. And, indeed, his book is no breathless celebration of the wonders of humanity. Rather, it is a carping, acrimonious and often unscrupulous tirade against certain unfortunate humans who happen to disagree with Murray Bookchin's views about humanity. More appropriate titles for such a work might be *The Re-enchantment of the Kvetch*, *The Phenomenology of Spite*, or (*après s Jabès*)

## The Book of Complaints.

Please do not think that I underestimate the contributions of Murray Bookchin to the history of philosophy. With the "muscularity of thought" of which he is so proud he could certainly have made his mark as a lightweight, welterweight or even middleweight philosopher. He could even have made a career of beating up on featherweight and flyweight philosophers — a ploy that he has in fact used to his philosophico-pugilistic advantage in recent years. In short, philosophically speaking, he coulda been a contenda.

But no! He was never satisfied with such modest success and aspired to the heavyweight championship. Tired of waiting for his shot at the title, he finally appointed himself referee and

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<sup>1</sup> Murray Bookchin, *RE-ENCHANTING HUMANITY: A DEFENSE OF THE HUMAN SPIRIT AGAINST ANTI-HUMANISM, MISANTHROPY, MYSTICISM AND PRIMITIVISM*. (London: Cassell, 1995). xi + 273 pp. All references in the text are to this work.

judge, and then declared himself undisputed champion of the philosophical world by a yew-nan unanimous decision. He doesn't seem to realize that he's gotten way out of his class. At times he shadowboxes against real heavyweights and has serious trouble connecting. Or he spends his time stumbling around an imaginary ring, insulting the competition. Sometimes he comes across like a theoretical stumblebum. Which brings us to this book.

## Crimes Against Humanity

One of Bookchin's major targets in this "defense" of humanity is what he considers "anti-humanist" viewpoints, which he hastens to equate with "anti-human" and "misanthropic" ones. While he has recklessly leveled the charge of "anti-humanism" at numerous competing ecological thinkers, he now selects some for a more scathing indictment. Those who have any familiarity with the works of such amiable figures as E. F. Schumacher, William Irwin Thompson, Thomas Berry and Matthew Fox will be surprised by Bookchin's startling revelation that they are one and all card-carrying "anti-human misanthropes." But for Bookchin, slander has become, so to speak, "second nature."

While libelous charges should not be dignified with a lengthy rebuttal, a brief example of one of his most outrageous distortions will demonstrate the lengths to which our enchanted humanist is willing to go. In *THE DREAM OF THE EARTH* Thomas Berry describes humanity as "that being in whom the universe reflects on and celebrates itself." In a previous "analysis," Bookchin managed to dig up one carefully selected passage from the same work and quote it out of context to create the absolutely false impression that Berry sees humanity as nothing more than "a demonic presence" on this planet. Having perpetrated such a deception, Bookchin now feels justified in dismissing Berry as a "misanthrope" without even a pretense of documentation.

Referring to Schumacher et al., Bookchin comments that the views of these "presumably sophisticated anti-humanists are often the stuff from which the crassest of vulgarities are written for consumption by the New Agers of California and, in recent years, nearly all other points of the compass." (p.14) The result, he claims, is a "New Age mentality that demonizes human beings in whole or in part." (p. 3) It matters little to Bookchin that these thinkers have little in common with what is usually considered a "New Age" outlook. It matters little that actual New Age tendencies typically do not demonize humanity but rather project an unrealistic and simplistic image of human self-transcendence. Bookchin's single-minded (and often simple-minded) goal is to discredit the theoretical competition by any means possible. And since most of the potential readers of these theorists' works are presumably human beings, demonstrating the latter's complete and utter hatred for anything human must seem like a quite promising approach.

Bookchin's crusade against "anti-humanism" also focuses on thinkers like E. O. Wilson and Richard Dawkins, who, despite their scientific training and semblance of intelligence, supposedly fail to recognize differences between homo sapiens and other species. Much of Bookchin's polemic takes on an inadvertently Swiftian quality as he launches into a heroic and bombastic defense of the proposition that there are indeed differences between man and beast. He wastes many pages marshaling empirical evidence and fulminating indignantly on behalf of the proposition that nothing from an amoeba up to the best-educated chimp could possibly write the collected works of Shakespeare. One can almost hear him remarking: "and frankly — call me anthropocentric if you will — they couldn't even come up with a good sonnet!" Lest the reader think that I

unduly exaggerate, I must quote Bookchin himself, who hastens to assure us that “there is not a shred of evidence to support a belief that animals have faith in anything. Nor do we expect them to have faith, let alone act rationally, with respect to anything aside from their survival.” (p. 19; my emphasis) Whoops! So the clever little critters sometimes do actually have faith and act rationally. At this point we and the animals both begin to lose whatever faith we may have had in Murray Bookchin’s ability to write coherently, let alone think carefully.

As in so many of Bookchin’s “analyses,” he gives his opponent a less-than-gentle push down the slipperiest of slopes leading inevitably to fascism.

“Many of Wilson’s notions were previously advanced by the quasi-romantic biologicistic movements of central Europe during the 1920s, movements that took an exceptionally reactionary form between 1914 and 1945 and that fed directly into National Socialist ideology.” (p. 57)

Lacking the scientific background to reply coherently to Wilson, Bookchin (the enraged autodidact with an axe to grind) produces his all-purpose ideological one.

It is not only intellectuals who incur his wrath for their “anti-human” activities and who find themselves implicated in fascism. Bookchin also targets Earth First! members and bioregionalists when he harshly attacks those dangerous individuals who engage in “childishly howling around campfires” (p. 23) or participate in “a juvenile ‘Council of All Beings.’” (p. 23) What, one might wonder, is so objectionable about a bit of good-natured howling or pretending that one is a fish (if we may reasonably assume that participants in such councils do not get confused and actually think they are fish)? Bookchin complains that such “antics” can “easily become sinister when they are used to create atavistic movements, socially reactionary impulses, and dangerous fantasies that obstruct attempts to change an irrational society into a rational one.” By the end of the paragraph the unfortunate campers and fish-impersonators are found to exhibit “disturbing parallels to earlier movements” that helped “make the twentieth century one of the bloodiest in history.” (p. 23)

## **Ignorance of the Law of Karma Is No Excuse**

Topics on which Bookchin loves to make ex cathedra pronouncements based on the most patent ignorance are mysticism, “spiritual” phenomena, and Eastern philosophy and religion. In reality, he knows little if anything about the history, literature or phenomenology of mysticism. He has apparently met a few local mystics in Burlington, Vermont, heard about some in California (which he calls the “Mystical Zone”), and read a few popularized works. By Bookchinesque standards of scholarship this is a more than adequate basis for the most sweeping generalizations on the subject. Mysticism, he tells us, “makes its strongest appeal to the authority of belief over thought.” (p. 86) But this is complete nonsense. One reason why so many mystics have gotten into trouble over the ages is that their outlook so often clashes with systems of belief, including the most orthodox ones, and because it typically privileges direct experience over any sort of authority. Nor would most mystics recognize the mysticism of Bookchin’s parody, in which its salient characteristics are that it is “warm, subjective, caring, and feminine.” (p. 86) He seems to have confused his mysticism polemic with his standard diatribe against ecofeminism, another outlook that he considers irredeemably “passive-receptive” and lacking in that crucial “muscularity of thought.”

Bookchin is concerned with policing the ecology movement for the possible growth of such mystical tendencies. He grudgingly concedes that despite the dangers of mystico-misanthropy, not “all ecomystics are necessarily misanthropes.” (p. 87) No doubt some of his best friends are ecomystics. But this is hardly a generous concession, since misanthropy is rather difficult to find among mystics, “eco-” or otherwise. In fact, the best-known contemporary “ecomystic,” Starhawk, has nothing but the most affirmative sentiments about humanity, as anyone who has read her books or heard her speak can testify. This has not deterred Bookchin from sarcastically labeling her “Starvulture” and dismissing her ideas with complete contempt.

What Bookchin seems to find particularly repellent is the tendency of mysticism and Eastern philosophy to produce “passive-receptive personalities.” He has long propagated the view that Daoism has been historically nothing more than a means of keeping the peasants under control, and, when transplanted to North America, becomes a useful tool of capitalism. Such vulgar leftist platitudes continue in the present work. Indeed, they get worse. Returning to the topic of Eastern traditions near the end of the book, Bookchin sinks to a new level of ignorance and parochialism. Flippantly dismissing the charge that his view might appear “Eurocentric,” he pronounces “the fatalistic religion of the East” not to be “on a level comparable to revolutionary Puritanism,” and declares Daoism and Buddhism not to be “comparable to the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and socialism in its various forms, let alone to such great social eruptions as the English, American, and French revolutions.” (p. 257)

There is a great deal of nonsense in this statement, not the least of which is the idea that any single historical event, even an important revolution, could somehow be on a much higher “level” than Buddhism, the most significant cultural and philosophical force in Asia over a period of 2500 years. Nor is Bookchin qualified to make such authoritative pronouncements about where Daoism rates in his simplistic 1-to-10 scale of social phenomena. Although he has had this basic distinction patiently explained to him several times, he continually confuses ancient Daoist philosophy (the *daojia*) with the often superstitious and hierarchical Daoist religious sect (the *daojiao*). Their radically divergent principles are explained in any good introductory text in Chinese philosophy. Yet Mr. Rationality has continued, either deceptively or self-deceptively, to confound principles and practices when this is useful in his diatribes against Daoism and other spiritual traditions.

## **Shallow, and Frankly, Rather Anti-Social**

For ten years Bookchin has been obsessed with his vendetta against deep ecology. Despite his vague anti-corporate rhetoric, one will search Bookchin’s work in vain for a detailed analysis of the social and ecological transgressions of a single transnational corporation. On the other hand, one will find excruciatingly detailed explanations of how various deep ecologists are a clear and present danger to planet earth. But don’t bother to look. His valid points have been stated better by less rabid and more coherent critics, while the vast majority of his remarks have consisted of hasty generalizations, ad hominem fallacies, flimsy slippery slope arguments, and outright nonsense.

Bookchin’s comments on the influence of deep ecology illustrate his usual obliviousness to contemporary culture. He labors under the bizarre illusion that were it not for deep ecology and certain other cultural trends (including “lifestyle anarchism”) that he imagines to have deluded

the masses, American society would long ago have embraced radical politics, and specifically his radical politics, which he devoutly believes to have all the compelling qualities of revealed truth. For Bookchin, deep ecology has achieved its extraordinary success (which for him means that it has received considerably more attention than have his own ideas) because it “was an excellent analgesic for the intellectual headaches of a culture that felt more at home with Disneyland and Hollywood than with political radicalism.” (p. 93) Bookchin must get all his news from Green Perspectives.<sup>2</sup> To the extent that the mainstream culture is even aware of deep ecology, it sees it more as a latter-day Communist plot rather than a cure for its headaches.

Let’s be realistic. Had deep ecology never appeared, Bookchin’s political ideas would have remained as socially insignificant as they are at present, and he would be attacking some other competing philosophy as the new opiate of the masses concocted by those sly counter-revolutionaries. The lack of appeal of Bookchinism is caused neither by deep ecology nor by “lifestyle anarchism,” but rather by the fact that it is a narrow, culturally brain-dead dogmatism, enclosed within its own ideological universe and willfully out of touch with the messy realities of any world that might be vaguely familiar to actual people.

In a rather garbled statement, Bookchin notes that “not surprisingly, the phrase deep ecology first appeared as the title of a book which was in an anthology [sic] edited by Michael Tobias in 1984.”(p. 96)

He doesn’t bother to explain what might be either surprising or unsurprising about this obscure fact. However, what many might find not only surprising but indeed astounding, in view of Bookchin’s later indictment of anyone using the term “deep ecology” in an even vaguely positive sense, is the fact that he himself contributed an essay to the volume in question. In a footnote, he attempts to defend his decision to participate by hypocritically claiming that “at the time, I protested the use of this title for an anthology containing my article, ‘Toward a Philosophy of Nature,’ only to be reassured by Tobias that the anthology contained many people [sic] who were not deep ecologists, including Garrett Hardin!” (p. 117)

Bookchin is transparently engaged in rewriting history (as pathetically petty as the scale of this history may be). The fact is that Mr. Tobias solicited essays for a book entitled DEEP ECOLOGY and Prof. Bookchin voluntarily chose to contribute an article appearing under that rubric. If Bookchin did not want to include his essay in a work with that title, he was certainly free to exercise the great anarchist right of voluntary (non-)association and have nothing to do with the whole business. Furthermore, if Tobias actually presented to Bookchin the ridiculous argument that the latter recounts, this should have given him even more reason to reject the project. But no! Instead, he voluntarily agreed to the publication of his own article under the rubric of “deep ecology” and then went on to condemn others for using the same term in even the most generic sense, accusing them of everything from hatred of humanity to crypto-fascism.

Let’s look carefully at a bit of Bookchin’s supposedly devastating critique of deep ecology. His arguments almost invariably reveal his ineptitude in philosophical analysis. This is illustrated well by his discussion of the concept of “biocentric equality” that is held by some (though not all) deep ecologists. In his view, “[i]f the self must merge – or dissolve, as I claim, into rain forests, ecosystems, mountains, rivers ‘and so on,’ these phenomena must share in the intellectuality, imagination, foresight, communicative abilities, and empathy that human beings possess, that is,

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<sup>2</sup> An obscure publication that publishes nothing but articles by Murray Bookchin and his faithful exegete Janet Biehl.

if 'biocentric equality' is to have any meaning." (p. 100) In fact, "biocentric equality" is a rather confused concept that I have made good clean fun of elsewhere; however, one will not discover why by listening to Bookchin's superficial and unsupported "claims."

Bookchin once stated that "when a rational society is achieved, its citizens will at least be more rational than Max Cafard and his ilk." Admittedly, I (and perhaps even I and my entire ilk, taken collectively) have only a modest store of rationality. But let's talk reason.

## **Listen, Bookchin! Listen to reason**

First, if one contends that a human being and a river, for instance, are both part of a larger "self," this in no way implies that the river possesses any capacity for "empathy," any more than it implies that the human being thereby possesses the capacity to be a home for fish. Rather, it only implies that the larger whole of which they are both a part (called the "larger self" in this view) has both these capacities in some sense.

Secondly, the concept of "biocentric equality" has no implication of "equality of qualities" among those beings to whom (or to which) the equality is attributed. Indeed, this concept, like most concepts of moral equality, are significant precisely because they attribute such equality to beings that are in other important ways unequal. Deep ecologists and other ecophilosophers who employ concepts such as "equal intrinsic value" or "equal inherent worth" clearly mean that certain beings deserve equal consideration or equal treatment, not that they possess certain faculties or characteristics to an equal degree.

The fact that Bookchin takes as the only possible meaning for the concept of biocentric equality the one he can most easily attack betrays his habitual role of the amateur philosopher ineptly jousting with caricatures of his opponents' views.

## **Bookchin Defies The Laws Of Thought**

Unfortunately, even my extraordinarily indulgent editors will not allow me the space to summarize the collection of logical fallacies and faulty analyses this book has provided. I will therefore limit myself to a few of the most flagrant examples of Bad Analysis.

Bookchin has always been confused on the relationship between nature and culture. His vague statements about "first" and "second nature," and about things "grading" into one another now increasingly give way to more obvious confusion and self-contradiction. For example, he states that "[a]n institutionalized community, composed of structured family groups, constitutes the initial biological basis of second nature." (p. 29) He seems to mean by "second nature" something like human culture, and institutions and social structures are certainly cultural, not merely biological. How, then, can an institutionalized community, a product of and constituent of culture, be the biological basis for culture?

Bookchin does introduce one new theoretically category into his discussion of this topic. While for twenty years he's been propounding the presumably illuminating theory that "first nature grades into second nature" we are now vouchsafed a new revelation: second nature "eases in a graded way out of first nature." (p. 30) Some may find the idea of sudden qualitative jumps and things emerging unsuspected out of other things highly disturbing. Fortunately, Bookchin

has delivered us from such untoward dialectical movements. Things kind of just ease into one another. They sort of mosey into one another.

Often Bookchin refutes his own arguments by unwisely quoting too much of his intended victim's text. For example, he attacks Richard Dawkins for both incoherence and anti-humanism. While he fails in his sketchy analysis to give any evidence of Dawkins' incoherence, he quotes that writer to the effect that humans are capable of "pure, disinterested altruism," a quality "that has never existed before in the whole history of the world," and that "we, alone on earth, can rebel against the tyranny of the selfish replicators." (pp. 40–41) Whether this view is correct or not, it is enough, by Bookchin's own standards, to acquit Dawkins of the charge of anti-humanism. On the page after the quote, Bookchin comments that "antihumanist protocol insists that there is no objective basis for elevating humanity over the most elevated of apes in the primate world." (p. 42) Yet his own citations show that Dawkins, whom he is indicting for alleged anti-humanism, proposes precisely such a basis. This is not an isolated case of such incredibly sloppy argumentation. Only a few pages later, Bookchin attacks Lovelock's "cosmic antihumanism" for its "strong theistic features," after which he quotes Lovelock's statement that "for the present, my belief in God rests at the stage of a positive agnosticism." (p. 56)

It is instructive to examine one of Bookchin's rare ventures into the field of American popular culture. He attempts to assess the state of the contemporary American psyche based on a reading of *The Simpsons*. And what does he find noteworthy about this popular cartoon series? Certainly not the fact that this more than vaguely anti-authoritarian series mocks politicians, religious leaders, parental authorities, and the local police, that its most loathsome character is (of all things) a capitalist, that its favorite public menace is a nuclear power plant, and that its most heroic figure is a preadolescent, clear-thinking, compassionate, environmentalist, vegetarian feminist! Of course not! According to the sophisticated canons of Bookchinite cultural critique *The Simpsons* is nothing more than an expression of the infantile quality of American culture. "Like the new popularity of *The Simpsons*, a television cartoon series for adult audiences, the new infantilism seems to appeal to a still surviving sucking instinct in the psyche that is beyond the constraints of age and experience." (p. 114) One of the "constraints of age and experience" in Bookchin's case seems to be the complete obliteration of any sense of humor, irony or satire.

Bookchin's rantings about the noxious effects of post-structuralism on contemporary culture are reminiscent of Alan Bloom's ridiculous claim in *THE CLOSING OF THE AMERICAN MIND* that a major factor in the decline of American culture is "German philosophy." One major difference between Bloom and Bookchin (other than the latter's inclusion of dangerous French thinkers) is that Bookchin actually undertakes an explanation of the mechanism by which such an unlikely process takes place. He assures us that "Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, and Derrida speak to millions of people today through the impresarios of widely viewed television documentaries, such as Bill Moyers, David Suzuki, and Desmond Morris." (p. 232) One must be particularly curious about Desmond Morris's concept of the influence of onto-theo-logo-phallo-centrism on the naked ape and how that glib commentator surreptitiously conveyed it to viewers of his TV series.

Bookchin's obliviousness to the discourse in contemporary political thought becomes quite evident in his musings on the concept of justice at the end of the book. Arguing rather pointlessly for the superiority of his conception of freedom over other theorists' conception of justice, he contends that "[u]nlike justice, which works with the pretensions that all are equal in theory, despite their many differences in fact, freedom makes no pretense that all are equal but tries to



compensate for the inequalities that occur with age, physical infirmity, and different abilities.” (p. 260) Interestingly, after attacking the idea of equality, he describes his own goal as an “equality of unequals.” Bookchin becomes so lost in verbiage that he is unaware of the fact that both he and the theorists he attacks share the same general position: that people are equal in some respects (in deserving respect, consideration, attention to their needs, etc.) and unequal in others (in having different personal qualities, positions in existing society, etc.). But what is most ludicrous about Bookchin’s self-congratulatory discussion is that he seems completely oblivious to the debate in political theory over “justice” for the past twenty years. While he seems to think his concept of “compensation for inequalities” to be a bold new advance over “theories of justice,” the most famous theory of justice in the history of modern political thought (that of Rawls) embraces precisely such a principle.

## **Bookchin Assaults The English Language**

An area in which one must certainly recognize Bookchin’s revolutionary creativity is in his use of language. This self-professed anarchist boldly defies the oppressive laws of grammar and linguistic usage. For example, one can be confident that whenever Bookchin refers to anything as being “literally” any particular way, it is most assuredly that way in a metaphorical sense only. For example, he reports that “the counterculture’s mysticism literally exploded in California,” (p. 92) which might cause one to wonder why he is still concerned about it. On the other hand, he seems to be literally referring to himself when he comments that “[o]ne may literally get lost in this ecomystical shuffle.” (p. 87)

He is also a creative genius with figures of speech. He informs us, for instance, that “[c]oercive measures here or harsh demographic policies there do not usually come in bits and pieces, like candy bars from a slot machine.” (p. 64) Bookchin’s British editors probably thought that this meant something intelligible in ordinary American English. They should be informed that American slot machines do not ordinarily pay off in mangled candy bars. In referring to Paul Ehrlich’s *THE POPULATION BOMB*, Bookchin quips that it “found readers across political, social and cultural lines with the carelessness of an infant scrawling on a blank page.” (p. 65) We can all agree that the book should certainly be more careful when it’s out looking for readers.

Bookchin has long been a master of the mixed metaphor, and occasionally even manages a double mixed metaphor. In seeking to delineate deep ecologists Deval and Sessions’ relationship to the previously mentioned mystical detonation, he remarks that “their academic cloister did not render them immune to the mystical viruses that were exploding.” A moderately inept stylist might wonder at the fact that that their academic cloister didn’t protect them from mystical vices, or perhaps that their academic bomb shelter didn’t protect them from exploding missiles of mysticism, but only in l’imaginaire Bookchinesque can one envision an academic cloister besieged by exploding mystical viruses.

As Bookchin’s world has increasingly contracted into the sphere of his own polemics, his language has become progressively more Pickwickian. For example, he finds it important to point out that “[t]he majority of animals, moreover, merely dwell in their environment.” (p. 17) Why, one might ask, would he consider it important to think of the majority of animals — all those little zooplankton, beetles, etc. — as “dwelling”? The secret is that he is annoyed that some deep ecologists and Heideggerians like to talk about human beings “dwelling.” He’s convinced that

there's something "unsavory" about this concept, but he's not very clear about what it is. The convenient solution is to make "dwelling" something that mere animals do — so that the deep ecologists are once again trying to reduce us all to a sub-human state! The fact that hardly anyone who learned English as a first language would talk about animals "dwelling," much less think that it's what they habitually spend their time doing, makes no difference in the tin-eared world of Bookchinism.

Bookchin has always had a very ambiguous relationship with WEBSTER'S DICTIONARY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE. He quotes it with the alacrity of an energetic undergraduate when he thinks that it will buttress his argument, while he obliviously rewrites it when actual usage is an obstacle. For example, he asserts boldly that "hierarchy is in fact a social term — hierarchies are found nowhere in first nature." (p. 49) But in fact, the word "hierarchy" is used to refer not only to non-human organisms, but even to non-living entities that are arranged, as we native English-speakers say, in "hierarchical" order. While Bookchin intensely dislikes what he calls "mysticism," he often falls prey to what has aptly been described as word-mysticism, in which a term magically means just one thing.

In this case, that thing is whatever Swami Bookchin needs for it to mean for his polemical purposes.

## **Bookchin Found Not Guilty of Anthropocentrism**

Because he's guilty of egocentrism, and everything can't be in the center.

One of the most "repellent" (to use one of his favorite words) aspects of Bookchin's diatribes is his tendency to exaggerate absurdly his own importance in developing certain concepts, and to ignore or even denigrate others who made important contributions in the same area. His claims of originality go to bizarre lengths. He has seriously maintained that he was the first person ever to come up with the rather obvious observation that "the American Dream has turned into a nightmare" — though he forgot to say it in print — and it would not be surprising if he eventually claims credit for "it's not the heat, it's the humidity."

In the present work, Bookchin attacks Arne Naess's ideas "on local autonomy, decentralization, and 'soft technologies'" as being "old hat" when Naess wrote about them in 1972. Bookchin points out that he himself mentioned some of these ideas as early as 1962. Why Naess should be criticized for supporting such ideas in 1972 is far from clear, since he made no claims of having invented them. Bookchin, on the other hand, claims for his own private property ideas that have a long history extending from ancient times to the work of some of his own recent libertarian predecessors such as Ralph Borsodi and Lewis Mumford. It is ironic that Bookchin refers to what he calls Arne Naess's "acolytes" no less than four times in the space of about a page, even though Naess has shown no interest in seeking followers, creating a rigid dogma, or founding a school. Bookchin, on the other hand, has always acted in a dogmatic and sectarian manner, treated his ideas as if they were copyrighted private property, and demanded of his followers the deferential attitude befitting an acolyte.

Other of Bookchin's efforts at self-promotion are more amusing than annoying. He has always fantasized being at the center of a Great Revolution (of the authentic, First World type, rather than the second-rate, Third World variety, which interests him little). The best opportunity he's had was the 1968 events in Paris, and for many years he's told of hopping on a plane to make

the revolutionary scene before Thermidor hit. If we read carefully, we now discover that his first-hand experience of May '68 came, unfortunately, in the month of July. He reveals that he made a "lengthy" visit to Paris "in mid-July [sic] 1968, when street-fighting occurred throughout the capital on the evening before Bastille Day." (p. 202) Bookchin is obviously trying to convey the impression that he was in the midst of things during the historic "events" of 1968. But as one history summarizes the events after the June 23 elections: "France closes down for the summer holidays while some students organize a 'long march' and 'summer universities' open to all."<sup>3</sup> Apparently open to Bookchin, soixante-huitard manqué, who got a short course in insurrection during his "long visit" of mid-July. Most Parisians on the other hand, including the students, had already made their "long march" ... à la plage. When I was in Paris shortly after Bookchin, I found "the capital" to be unusually quiet and scrubbed by the counter-revolutionaries to a positively un-Gallic degree of cleanliness. The only writing I saw on the usually graffiti-laden Parisian walls was the ubiquitous Défense d'Afficher. Perhaps the non-Francophone Bookchin thought that this was a revolutionary slogan. A Parisian friend who was there when Bookchin passed through tells me that our traveling revolutionary philosopher must have taken some raucous 14 Juillet parties for street fights.

## **Am I Guilty of Residual Bookchinism?**

Probably so. Some may suspect that in the spirit of the Master of Malice himself I have unjustly emphasized the negative aspects of his book, and neglected its strengths. I willingly concede that I would probably need a long stay in the Mystical Zone to be drained of all the spleen I no doubt absorbed by osmosis during the time I spent during my misguided youth on the fringes of the Bookchin cult. Yet, I don't think that I have been unfair in my assessment of this abysmally awful book. Although I have focused on a few of its more glaring flaws, they typify the spitefulness and mediocrity of thought that pervade the entire work. It simply has no significant strengths, other than the fact that it illustrates so well certain qualities of Bookchin's character and thinking.

As Hegel quips in the preface to *THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF SPIRIT*, "the true is the Bacchanalian revel in which all the participants are drunk; yet because each participant collapses as soon as he drops out, the revel is just as much transparent and simple repose."<sup>4</sup>

If the dialectic is indeed an orgy of drunken revelry, the old brawler Bookchin shows himself in this work to be a bit punch-drunk. He's obviously on the ropes, and should know when to drop out. Yet, in his own muscle-bound mind, he remains the heavyweight champion of the philosophical world, defending his crown against all takers. No repose for this slugger. Still in the ring, still fighting.

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<sup>3</sup> "Vladimir Fisera, ed., *WRITING ON THE WALL: MAY 1968: A DOCUMENTARY ANTHOLOGY*. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1978), p. 40.

<sup>4</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF SPIRIT*, trans. A.V. Miller. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), "Preface," section 37

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