

[front cover]

ANARCHY 115

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McLuhanism a libertarian view by Kingsley Widmer

[inside front cover]

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Cover by *Rufus Segar*

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ANARCHY 115 (Vol 10 No 9) SEPTEMBER 1970

Students and community action

R.BRYANT

I WOULD LIKE TO SUGGEST that there are three major questions which the NUS should consider when planning its proposed community action programme.

1. What forms of community action are students going to be encouraged to engage in?
2. What are the potential dilemmas involved in students engaging in direct community work with local groups?
3. What constraints are likely to be imposed upon student community action by academic commitments and the very organization of British higher education?

In relation to the first question it is necessary to recognise at the outset that community action can cover a wide range of different activities and can be informed by a variety of different values, methods and aims. There is no one distinctive approach to community action and there is no one set of principles which provide a guideline for community action initiatives. Community action can be conservative, liberal-reformist or revolutionary according to the ideas and aims of the actors involved.

If I was a public relations man hired by the NUS to advise them on what form and style of community action would most enhance the present student image I would, without hesitation, recommend the approach of "community service". In recent years there has been a growth in organizations which are specifically designed to involve young people in community service, e.g. Task Force, Young Volunteer Force, Community Service Volunteers. The rhetoric of these organizations tends to be aggressively trendy and dynamic, they deliberately seek to avoid an identification with conventional voluntary service and consciously attempt to project an image of a generation which is determined to shake up the World. In an article entitled "Not for Love, Not for Money, but for People" Anthony Steen, the Director of the Young Volunteer Force Foundation, has provided a useful

This is the text of a paper presented at the Birmingham conference of the National Union of Students.

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example of this approach.

"The function of the foundation is to promote the role of the young volunteer by guiding his energy and enthusiasm into tackling urgent social problems. The Foundation believes that young people have a major role to play in Britain's development, and is conscious of the importance of each individual in a society which tends to overlook those who cannot fend for themselves. Yet a community service scheme which merely shows up gaps in an inadequate Welfare State, without anything else in view, slows down the pace of change; giving community service an end beyond itself, the Foundation can make it an instrument of change and broaden the very basis of involvement."¹

All this sounds wonderful but how really different is this new style community service from the traditional approach to voluntary service? I would suggest that while the rhetoric is different the actual content of the work has not substantially changed. The traditional approach to voluntary service is essentially concerned with remedial tasks and with the pioneering of new personal social services. Luncheon clubs for old people, youth clubs, summer camps for deprived children are the type of practical activities which spring to mind. The style of work tends to be directive and paternalistic, a service is defined for the client and the client is usually ascribed a very passive role. He receives what services are offered and is detached from the decision-making process. Looking at the new style community service organizations we can, I think, identify a similar activity pattern. A central emphasis is upon providing rescue and emergency services and with few exceptions participation in the design of programmes is restricted to the volunteers and to local elite groups drawn from political and church organizations.²

A major criticism which can be levelled against community service approach concerns its focus upon the individualised expressions and external symptoms of social problems. In the words

of C. W. Mills “private troubles” are not related to “public issues”³: needs and problems are defined only within the context of the local milieu and are not defined with reference to the total social structure of society. As a consequence the community service approach tends to pre-empt any dialogue and action which is directly concerned with the broader issues of social policy—e.g. inequalities in the distribution of wealth and power, the social costs of private enterprise, government priorities in resource allocation, the physical and social segregation of different ethnic and economic groups. Questions about the relationships between these broad issues and the problems of local areas seem rarely to be posed. While the patronage some community service groups receive from private business and local and central governments would seem to create further barriers to the development of any radical debates and action programmes. This failure to define community action within a structural context is one reason (among many) why I would not support the recent proposals for a “social army of young people”, such a scheme could only be an exercise in social containment rather

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than in social change. The upholders of the status quo should certainly applaud the suggestion—not merely would it channel youthful energies into apolitical directions but it would also provide a further rationale for concentrating upon the symptoms of social need rather than upon their underlying causes.⁴

What are the alternatives to the community service approach? One alternative is suggested by those American community groups which have developed out of the civil rights movement, for example the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) project in Newark and the New York Welfare Rights movement. While also worthy of attention is the work of the American Community organizer Saul Alinsky, who has been active in forming “people’s organizations” since the 1930s. In Britain the emergence of a radical style of community action has been much more gradual, but the activities of the Birmingham Claimants’ Union, the squatters, and the People’s Associations in Notting Hill and Moss Side provide important examples of the potential that exists. Although the assumptions and detailed aims of these groups differ they do tend to share a common identity on two major points—they are concerned with encouraging the development of community organizations which are controlled by local people themselves and they consciously attempt to increase the political power and economic bargaining strength of the poor and the disadvantaged. These two concerns immediately place their activities within a wider framework of reference than that provided by the local milieu. Posing questions about community control and community power is the starting point for engaging in dialogue and action which relates “private troubles to public issues”. Inevitably this approach to community action involves social and political conflict, encouraging disadvantaged groups to define their own needs and their own solutions immediately challenges many of the conventions of politics and administration. The welfare client who no longer passively accepts his ascribed status becomes a source of embarrassment to the official or the social worker, while the emergence of a popular local action group which is intent upon voicing its grievances is likely to provoke a defensive and even at times an openly hostile response from local authorities and councillors. Alinsky is perhaps the most outspoken and abrasive advocate of a conflict strategy for Community Action.

“The first function of community organization is community disorganization. Disorganization of the accepted circumstances and the status quo of the arrangements under which they (the poor) live—these circumstances and arrangements must be disorganized if they are to be displaced with changing patterns, providing the opportunities and means for citizen participation ... The character of the means or tools through which change can be effected must be clearly understood by the people at all times—it is power through organisation ... No individual or organization can negotiate without the power to compel negotiation.

“This in essence is the function of the community organizer. Anything otherwise is wishful non-thinking. To attempt to operate on good will

rather than on a power basis would be to attempt something which the world has not yet experienced.”⁵

I think it would involve stating an obvious set of points if I was to detail the political and social differences which exist between the Alinsky approach and the community service approach cited earlier.

Regardless of the approach which is adopted students engaged in direct community action are likely to encounter a number of dilemmas and are likely to experience certain constraints which are imposed by their own academic commitments and by the organization of higher education.

Community action, whether it is concerned with forming a tenants' association or helping in a youth club, cannot be seriously undertaken for a six weeks' period in the summer vacation or on a once a week basis during the spring term. In contrast to some of the glib publicity and rhetoric community action is not dramatic and spontaneous. It is time-consuming, problematic, tension-ridden and often demands a quality of commitment and a continuity of involvement which some people find impossible to make. For example, in York a local group has spent over four years developing an adventure playground which is still desperately short of resources, while a two-year campaign for a permanent gypsy site in the city has only recently achieved any degree of success. In addition to the time and continuity factor, the student volunteer will also have to face certain class and cultural barriers. When students intervene into a local situation they invariably do so as middle class “outsiders” who are identified as an elite institution which is often both physically and socially segregated from the rest of the community (e.g. the new universities). Thus the student who wants to establish working relationships with local people has to overcome a twin barrier—one represented by his own life-style, which is likely to be dissimilar to that of local people, and the other represented by his attachment to an institution which few, if any, local people will be familiar with.

Given these dilemmas, how realistic is it to expect students, who aren't specializing in community work as a part of a course, to engage in direct community work? My own feeling on this is that it is both optimistic and undesirable to anticipate large-scale participation of students in local community work. It is optimistic because the life situation of the student imposes limits on the degree of involvement possible and it is undesirable because large-scale student participation could tend to pre-empt the development of local self-organization and could become an end in itself rather than a means for providing positive assistance. On this point it is necessary to recognise that student involvement can, on occasions, be dysfunctional for community action. This is particularly so when groups attempt to act as leadership vanguards within the community or seek to make an impact without undertaking any preliminary local work. The vanguard approach invariably leads to the creation of organizations which are merely a front for outsiders and once the outsiders withdraw (as most students do after three years), the organizations often collapse. While

the approach which attempts to take “short cuts” creates the impression of activity without there being any local content and contribution. These types of approaches may provide the individuals involved with a sense of personal achievement but they rarely launch long-term initiatives which involve local groups, indeed they can be positively harmful in pre-empting developments. For instance a short-term intervention which promises much and achieves little can function to reinforce the feeling of powerlessness in an area and can prejudice people against all outside interventions.

Although I'm dubious about the large-scale involvement of students in direct community action, I would like to conclude by briefly suggesting that students can perform some very important supportive functions as resource providers. It is often assumed, particularly by social workers engaged in community work, that the very life style of disadvantaged groups prevents them

from becoming involved in collective initiatives. This assumption, which is heavily conditioned by class conceptions of leadership skills, tends to ignore the crucial point that such groups are invariably prevented from taking action by their non-access to those material and informational resources which middle-class pressure groups naturally tend to command. This factor is, I think, a far more important handicap than are alleged cultural deficiencies, and student groups could help furnish the necessary resources—e.g. printing and communication materials, research and information data on social issues, funds for initiatives—which would not obtain support from local authorities or which would only obtain support at the cost of yielding local control. University-based groups are in a unique position to provide this type of support and developing community resource strategies is also one way in which a start can be made in restructuring the whole relationship between universities and their urban settings. Traditionally universities have relied on local communities to provide them with the raw material for academic work (e.g. social science departments) and labour (often low paid) for servicing tasks. What I am suggesting is a reversal of this traditional relationship; we should start thinking about how universities can equip local groups with the resources they need to change their own life situation.

NOTES

¹ Steen, A. “Not for Love, not for money, but for people” (Young Volunteer Force Foundation).

² For a discussion of this point and others relating to the work of the YVF in local areas, cf. Holman, R.—“YVF-Community and Conflict” (YVFF).

³ Mills, C. W.—“The Big City: Private Troubles and Public Issues” in Horowitz, I. L. (ed.) *Power, Politics and People: The Collected Essays of C. Wright Mills*.

⁴ cf. Dickson, A.—“Conscripting a Social Army”, *The Guardian*, 10.2.70.

⁵ Alinsky, S., cited in Frieden, B. J., and Morris, R., *Urban Planning and Social Policy*, p. 206.

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Homage to Raphael Hythloday

DAVID AUSTIN and DAVID PAGE

I WAS WALKING PAST A JUNIOR SCHOOL THE OTHER DAY: a nice school—a clarity of glass and formal brick with a warmth to it. The children had finished their break, the whistle had blown, and they were moving in. Crumpled over the railing in front of the school was an elderly man: as I came nearer I realised that he was convulsed with laughter. Tears were running down his cheeks. I must have looked puzzled, because he gestured with his hand and said, “Excuse me,” and then, as he wiped his eyes, “but it is all so very extraordinary. I have just been to see your zoo,” he said, “and the parallel is exact. You put your young into houses, yes? And there are keepers to control and feed them. Only to watch the tea-party *here*, it is free.”

I must admit I was piqued, although I am not a specially patriotic man. “Look here,” I said, “it’s generally agreed that our educational system is pretty good; we have put up some splendid buildings and we’re working on the old ones. The teachers are decent and thoughtful, on the whole, and the methods are improving-gradually, but perceptibly. How much better do you do in your country?”

His eyes widened. “Oh, but-” he said, “you see, we do not shut small people away, and do things to them. We leave them free, and let them grow in their own way.”

I started angrily. "That's a completely Utopian idea ..." but he caught my hand and before I could say any more was pumping my arm like mad, laughing and smiling. "Come, come, we must have a drink together, you are the first person, the first, mark my words, who had guessed my country. Tell me what you know of Utopia."

Though of course, he told me; as we walked to a nearby pub we fell to discussing the stranger's outrageous view of a generally accepted and admired system. He was not, it seemed, as ignorant of our ways as had appeared at first; but the novelty of the Utopian system gave me the strangest sensation, like a man standing on a path in the early morning mist, perceiving an unfamiliar set of shapes and volumes, not recognising his own house.

"Without schooling," I said, "how can you possibly educate your

DAVID AUSTIN and DAVID PAGE wrote this article for the Spring issue of ARK (journal of the Royal College of Art), before they had read Paul Goodman's article The Present Moment in Education in ANARCHY 107. David Page writes, "It's cheering that such similar views can come up in more than one place, because it does show that there is a distinct current of thought about." Our acknowledgements are due to the authors and the editors of ARK. Readers unfamiliar with Raphael Hythloday should read Thomas More's Utopia, available as a four-shilling Penguin.

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Utopian children?"

"In Utopia No-one is Educated," he replied. On seeing the surprise and disbelief in my reaction he hastened to explain. "Our language does not have your transitive verb to *educate*. But what child would choose to go to school except following the Pied Piper, to find out where the other kids had gone? We have no schools to interrupt the process of learning, nor professional educators to corrupt it."

"*Corrupt* it," I cried, unable to restrain myself, "but the pedagogic profession is most highly respected among us: we keep the remuneration very low, precisely so that mere material gain shall not exercise those who enter it. It is regarded as the vehicle which transmits our culture from generation to generation."

"In Utopia," the imperturbable stranger replied pleasantly, "we are not as aware as yourselves of the generations. Furthermore your culture seems to me to be trimmed and distorted to fit your educators' own dimensions. Your educators, after all, need reassurance as to the effectiveness of their work, which they will get by asking questions. To ensure that they will be reassured indeed, they teach children the answers to those questions which they intend to ask. We have a joke in my country about a self-fulfilling Professorship. Indeed, it is *much easier* to pass on neatly ordered knowledge—to teach people a grammar in place of a language—and in the process English teachers produce philistines, and mathematics teachers produce tally-men."

We paused to buy some beer and sit down. I was in something of a brown study over my glass. "Supposing," I said, "that you are right; what then is the use of our educational system?"

"A good question," he replied. "Primary education is unnecessary—children learn to read and calculate from literate and numerate parents anyway. Children of illiterate innumerate parents do not learn anyway. It is no good teaching children: you must first teach parents. However, primary schools do keep children off the streets, where they might pick up something useful. Secondary schools perform largely the same function, meanwhile selecting a docile group for training as an intellectual elite. Of course, no one knows whether they *are* intellectually superior, since it cannot be tested, nor what such a phrase implies, but it is enough that everyone believes it to be true, for so one gets your Government by Consent. In tertiary education, then, this elite is trained in obsolescent techniques by those who can't or won't make their way in their own profession."

“It’s true,” I said, “that most would say their most intensive period of learning took place in the first two years after the course ended,” and he replied, “Why then postpone this experience?”

But I wanted to go back a point or two. “You said that it is parents who teach; but in this complex age what two parents could cover the range of learning needed?”

“Why two?” he said. “In Utopia a Wise Child Chooses All its Parents. Natural curiosity leads a child to those who can help him. In your country, contrariwise, two parents have two point five children, a dog, a cat, and three rose trees—and they build a wall around them!”

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“It’s natural to want privacy,” I retorted.

“By privacy,” he said, “you mean freedom from intrusion while you do all those things which it is more fun to do in groups. The children, locked in, destroy your ‘privacy’ far more effectively than the neighbours you lock out; yet they long to get away—and do indeed escape for some hours to the community—to a larger house, a larger walled garden, and teachers *in loco parentis* (a quaint phrase). And through their life they will be pursued by the spectral ideal of the Big Happy Family. In the meantime, however, you protect them from the people next door, and they protect their children from you.”

“But eventually,” I said, “their education comes to an end and they get on with the serious business of life.”

“You mean this education was not *serious*?”

“Not the same as work.”

“Aha, work. In Utopia Nobody Works. People make things, people create. But by *work*, in your society, you mean doing something for most of the day, by compulsion. I have tried to analyse this. As far as I can see your people do three kinds of work. They slave laboriously because they are cheaper than machines which could do the same job. Secondly they watch machines slaving because they are cheaper than machines which could watch the machines. Thirdly they organise this *money* which discovers the shocking cost of machines in terms of human labour, and organise it with such complication that everyone forgets what it means. And so you have Economics: the solemn study of the phenomenology of a metaphor. Perhaps the real use of your education is to accustom men to a pattern of work, and to suppress their creative impulse—otherwise who would stand for it? But I forgot, there is a consolation prize, and this too we have not got: In Utopia there is No Dignity of Labour.”

“Talking of dignity,” I said, “let us return to the old; how do you look after them?”

“I am glad you mention them, for I had been told that here it was impolite to do so.”

“But what do *you* do for them?”

“We do not make them different,” he said. “In Utopia we Give Toys on Every Birthday. With toys one explores the world; one stops needing them when one stops learning. While the old learn, they are no different from the young, and in our society the young pass on the culture of the tribe to the old. Here it seems to me, even those in middle age have stopped learning, are frightened. But I forgot your national hero, from your most famous book—looking at his watch and exclaiming ‘Oh my ears and whiskers, I shall be late’.”

At this point, suddenly, he would say no more. We played a game of darts, but I got little more from him but a visiting card.

I have not slept very well recently. I am haunted by the image of a man bent over a railing, helpless with laughter.

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The informed

conscience

MANAS

THE BROAD, GENERALIZING INTELLIGENCE OF PAUL GOODMAN is hard to beat. One purpose of generalization is to illuminate meaning in areas of decision and action, and to succeed in this the generalizer must choose for consideration matters and problems which a great many people are aware of and concerned about. Otherwise his conclusions will remain “academic”. He must be able to demonstrate that he has a comprehensive grasp of the commonly accepted if erroneous opinions about these problems, and to describe in a not distantly superior manner the familiar feelings and reasoning which shape such views. He must know how to avoid provoking quibbles and irrelevant dissent. Finally, he must be able to bring to bear on the “accepted knowledge” of the time the strong light of fresh insights and perspectives in order to show, as dramatically as possible, where and how this knowledge is misleading, yet how it might remain useful within the reorienting framework of a larger vision. Generalization which has this purpose will require the marshalling of various unpalatable and neglected facts and exposure of miscalculations and mistakes which typify the blindness of the age. With a large audience, such as Goodman is fortunately able to attract, this means finding and using for his facts some illustrations with meanings or implications which don’t need a lot of argument or “interpretation”, but which jump up for recognition like the point of a good joke. This sort of thing can’t be done in a mean spirit. Arrogance is completely out, and self-righteousness is a block. No one ever helped anybody to *see* anything important without having a noticeable generosity of mind.

Paul Goodman, we think, succeeds pretty well in these departments. In his article, “Can Technology Be Humane?” (*New York Review of Books*, Nov. 20, 1969), he puts together a large number of indisputable facts, shows that the dominant enterprises of the present, piloted by respected and influential authorities, are nearly all on collision courses; and then, by adding a historical analogy, he reaches what seems an extremely likely conclusion—one which, despite the self-destructive tendencies he has so clearly identified, has some hope and promise in it.

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His thesis is that science and technology cannot be abandoned—at any rate they will not be—and that the problem, then, is to make them both subservient to canons of authentic benefit to man. The first part of his article is devoted to showing that a good human society is bound to be one which decentralizes power, which relies more and more on the autonomous intelligence of individuals, who develop best in small, non-power-structure social formations. He heaps up illustrations to prove that the good qualities of civilization practically all arise in such environments. He shows that past social and cultural achievements degrade as they are centrally organized, and as human skills and capacities are exploited by managers whose chief objectives are power and the accumulation of wealth. This collection of evidence becomes Goodman’s ground for claiming that the guiding principles of a good society must be moral principles. The government and regulation of the practitioners of technology must be *self-government* and *self-regulation*—no other control can work. Technologists, in short, must learn to be moral philosophers. They must know enough about human life and society and the sources of goodness in human life to refuse to do what will be manifestly bad for human beings. Knowing facts and dynamics is not enough. They must practice the virtues. This, Goodman points out, is what ecology is all about, and ecology bids fair to be the most important science of the future. Ecology is *normative* science. Technique may be value-free, but technicians dare not be.

Goodman’s main point is that the growing dissent and revolt of the present, especially among the young, contains the promise of a great moral or religious reform. In evidence of this, he

proposes that the rejection of science, not as method or technique, but as a *religion*, has already begun within the scientific community itself, just as, hundreds of years ago, the Lutheran Reformation began within the religious community. This may explain some of the ambiguity in the unrest we see and feel all about.

How did science acquire “religious” status? Through its half-deliberate, half-accidental role of religious reformer. Why is it now losing its religious authority? First, because it never really measured up to this role—exposing the pretences of what had become a fraudulent basis for “morality” is not enough; and, second, as science became chiefly a means to power, and hired out to the highest bidder, it lost its meaning as natural philosophy and stopped being liberating in effect. This transformation is described by Goodman:

For three hundred years, science and scientific technology had an unblemished and justified reputation as a wonderful adventure, pouring out practical benefits, and liberating the spirit from the errors of superstition and traditional faith. During this century they have finally been the only generally credited system of explanation and problem-solving. Yet in our generation they have come to seem to many, and to very many of the best of

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the young, as essentially inhuman, abstract, regimenting, hand-in-glove with Power, and even diabolical. Young people say that science is anti-life, it is a Calvinist obsession, it has been a weapon of white Europe to subjugate coloured races, and manifestly—in view of recent scientific technology—people who think that way became insane. With science, the other professions are discredited; and the academic “disciplines” are discredited.

The immediate reasons for this shattering reversal of values are fairly obvious. Hitler’s ovens and his other experiments in eugenics, the first atom bombs and their frenzied subsequent developments, the deterioration of the physical environment and the destruction of the biosphere, the catastrophes impending over the cities because of technological failures and psychological stress, the prospect of a brainwashed and drugged 1984. Innovations yield diminishing returns in enhancing life. And instead of rejoicing there is widespread conviction that beautiful advances in genetics, surgery, computers, rocketry, or atomic energy will surely only increase human woe.

But why must this reaction against science have such an emotional, *all-or-nothing* character? The question has great importance, but for an acceptable answer we need more of the background of facts which Goodman provides. He opens his article by telling about a strong protest against the direction in which a great deal of science and technology is going, made by scientists themselves. The March 4, 1969, work-stoppage and teach-in called by teachers and students of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology was a demonstration by some of the brightest, ablest young men in the country. They were joined by students and teachers in some thirty other major universities and technical schools, making that day a nation-wide protest “against misdirected scientific research and the abuse of scientific technology”. This wasn’t an all-or-nothing rejection of science; it was an effort on the part of scientists and technologists to keep their profession and activity from becoming a disgrace and a travesty of its humane pretensions. Clear evidence of the anti-human effects of important areas of scientific practice had already aroused members of the profession to various forms of action, but the general picture kept on getting worse and worse. Goodman writes in summary:

After Hiroshima, there was the conscience-stricken movement of the Atomic Scientists and the founding of their Bulletin. The American Association for the Advancement of Science pledged itself to keep the public informed about the dangerous bearings of new developments. There was the Oppenheimer incident. Ads of the East Coast

scientists successfully stopped the bombshelters, warned about the fall-out, and helped produce the test ban. There was a scandal about the bombardment of the Van Allen belt. Scientists and technologists formed a powerful (and misguided) ad hoc group for Johnson in the 1964 election. In some universities, sometimes with bitter struggle, classified contracts have been

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excluded. There is a Society for Social Responsibility in Science. Rachel Carson's book on the pesticides caused a stir, until the Department of Agriculture rescued the manufacturers and plantation-owners. Ralph Nader has been on the rampage. Thanks to spectacular abuses like smog, strip-mining, asphaltting, pesticides, and oil pollution, even ecologists and conservationists have been getting a hearing. Protest against the boom has slowed up the development of the supersonic transport. Most recent has been the concerted outcry against the anti-ballistic missile.

Returning to the March 4 event, Goodman continues:

The target of protest has become broader and the grounds of complaint deeper. The target is not now merely the military, but the universities, commercial corporations, and government. It is said that money is being given by the wrong sponsors to the wrong people for the wrong purposes. In some of the great schools, such funding is the main support, e.g., at MIT, 90 per cent of the research budget is from the government, and 65 per cent of that is military.

Well, all this is informative, but it doesn't do much to explain the all-or-nothing psychology of the young, which Goodman has also described. We need his historical analogy for this. What really tore it for Martin Luther, what made him totally uncompromising in his rejection of Rome and all its works—what made him call the Church the whore of Babylon—was the hypocrisy he recognized in the justifications and apologies for what was going on. Ordinary human weakness we can live with. Ignorance, mistakes, even stubborn foolishness, can be borne with patience, perhaps good will. But *hypocrisy* succeeds only through deliberate betrayal. You can't deal with hypocrisy at all; it shuts out reason with debased argument; you can only walk away from hypocrisy, have nothing to do with it. Relations with a system whose spokesmen have trained themselves in the language of hypocrisy are hardly possible unless you are willing to be something of a hypocrite yourself. So, for those whose contacts with the wartime technological society are practically all through its publicists and spokesmen, the all-or-nothing solution begins to seem a compulsive necessity. The young experience only the society's public relations front, which means the lies and deceptions about the war, and the war is plainly a "scientific" nightmare—napalm is a technical triumph. There are the shallow come-ons and transparent distortions of commercial advertising, and an endless touting of the "progress" brought by scientific technology to satisfy abnormally stimulated wants at a time when a large part of the world lacks even bare necessities. Meanwhile, in our prosperous land, so many goods and services have been over-promoted and over-produced that a new kind of technology must be quickly improvised to cope with the massive *glut* that now afflicts our health and well-being. One need only list the applications of terms like Waste, Congestion, Pollution,

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and Noise to catalogue the after-effects of a technology that threatens to make life intolerable no matter what we do. Here Goodman, with some irony, proposes a simple restorative virtue which at

once marks him as a subversive. It isn't that he advocates socialism or anything like that. He just points out that some *modesty* would help:

Currently, perhaps the chief moral criterion of a philosophic technology is modesty, having a sense of the whole and not obtruding more than a particular function warrants. Immodesty is always a danger of free enterprise, but when the same disposition is financed by big corporations, technologists rush in with neat solutions that swamp the environment. This applies to packaging products and disposing of garbage, to freeways that bulldoze neighbourhoods, high-rises that destroy landscape, wiping out a species for a passing fashion, strip mining, scrapping an expensive machine rather than making a minor repair, draining a watershed because (as in Southern California) the cultivable land has been covered by asphalt. Given this disposition, it is not surprising that we defoliate a forest in order to expose a guerilla and spray teargas from a helicopter on a crowded campus.

Goodman, incidentally, makes what seems exactly the right answer to C. P. Snow:

In *The Two Cultures*, C. P. Snow berated the humanists for their irrelevance when two-thirds of mankind are starving and what is needed is science and technology. They have perhaps been irrelevant; but unless technology itself is more humanistic and philosophical, it is of no use. There is only one culture.

Our chief source of encouragement, Goodman believes, lies in the fact that the scientists themselves—some of them—are demanding a more humanistic science and technology. Biologists like Barry Commoner and Catherine Roberts are increasingly outspoken in this direction, and the reform in scientific epistemology launched by Michael Polanyi is acquiring distinguished collaborators and supporters. Some deep change of polarity in scientific thinking itself is under way, and behind it are the moral stirrings of which Goodman writes:

Science has long been the chief orthodoxy of modern times and has certainly been badly corrupted, but the deepest flaw of the affluent societies that has alienated the young is not, finally, their imperialism, economic injustice, or racism, bad as these are, but their nauseating phoniness, triviality, and wastefulness, the cultural and moral scandal that Luther found when he went to Rome in 1510. And precisely science, which should have been the wind of truth to clear the air, has polluted the air, helped to brainwash, and provided the weapons for war.

People who know something of the wonderful history of science

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and who have used their own talents to apply scientific knowledge for human benefit are simply unable to react to scientific abuses in an all-or-nothing way. They know from personal experience that science can be much more than the hired man of arrogant political power or greedy commerce and blindly expanding industry. But such intelligent individuals, if they would like to see an end to the emotional rejections of the young, must take on the sort of responsibility that was assumed by Luther. They must themselves oppose and expose the *hypocrisy* behind the Public Relations claims of the monstrous science-guided and science-powered enterprises of the times. They must learn to turn their undeniable abilities to clear critical understanding of how science and technology have extended the radius and penetration of meanness and indifference and cruelty, and admit that the revulsion of the young is not without cause. As Goodman says:

Many of those who have grown up since 1945 and have never seen any other state of science and technology assume that rationalism is totally evil and dehumanizing. It is probably more significant than we like to think that they go in for astrology and the Book of Changes, as well as inducing psychedelic dreams by technological means. Jacques Ellul, a more philosophic critic, tries to show that technology is necessarily over-controlling, standardizing, and voraciously inclusive, so that there is no place for freedom. But I doubt that any of this is intrinsic to science and technology. The crude history has been, rather, that they have fallen willingly under the dominion of money and power. Like Christianity or communism, the scientific way of life has never been tried.

Goodman's final point is that the best protesters, the ones important to listen to, are those who are themselves deeply entangled in the activities of science and technology. The authentic reformers of an age are people who wrestle with the moral contradictions they find *in their own lives*, in order to determine what can or ought to be done. His final paragraph is this:

The interlocking of technologies and all other institutions makes it almost impossible to reform policy in any part; yet this very interlocking that renders people powerless, including the decision-makers, creates a remarkable resonance and chain-reaction if any determined group, or even determined individual, exerts force. In the face of overwhelmingly collective operations like the space exploration, the average man must feel that local or grassroots efforts are worthless, there is no science but Big Science, and no administration but the State. And yet there is a powerful surge of localism, populism, and community action, as if people were determined to be free if it makes no sense. A mighty empire is stood off by a band of peasants, and *neither* can win—this is even more remarkable than if David beats Goliath; it means that neither principle is historically adequate. In my opinion,

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these dilemmas and impasses show that we are on the eve of a transformation of conscience.

Well, people who fancy themselves tough-minded realists could say that Goodman is arguing here from big intuitions and mere historical analogies, that it is "all very interesting", *but ...* And that is where the catch comes. The tough-minded really have nothing more to say after their "but". The fact is that they are not tough-minded enough to go on, nor clear-sighted enough to recognize that this is a moment in history when saying nothing more gives consent to a collision course. It was Luther's inward necessity of speaking out that began the Reformation. Luther was only one man, but when he did speak out he found that a lot of other people felt as he did; and when he stood up to be counted, *they* began to stand up, too. What did Luther stand for? In terms of the utmost simplicity, he stood for *self-determination* in the moral qualities of human life. A man, he said, can choose between good and evil, if only because he *must*. So Luther symbolized the awakening of conscience for the Western world. Then he tried to institutionalize the gain, but that didn't work. It never does. Yet the awakening—something which took place *inside* a whole lot of people—was nonetheless real. This is the kind of thing that Goodman is talking about. And conscience, today—because of the intellectual catharsis of the scientific revolution—has now a better chance of avoiding relapse into another consolidating "system". The many present inquiries into identity and selfhood, into creativity and the dynamics of self-actualization, have obvious bearing on this possibility.

Who, after all, will maintain that a deep alteration of human attitudes and values is not on the way? To help it along, we need to hear from as many men of *informed* conscience as we can. Goodman is certainly doing his share.

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Bakunin's 'God and the State'

PAUL AVRICH

*This man was born not under an ordinary
star but under a comet.*

—ALEXANDER HERZEN

IT WAS NEARLY A CENTURY AGO that Michael Bakunin wrote what was to become his most celebrated pamphlet, *God and the State*. At that time, anarchism was emerging as a major force within the revolutionary movement, and the name of Bakunin, its foremost champion and prophet, was as well known among the workers and radical intellectuals of Europe as that of Karl Marx, with whom he was competing for leadership of the First International.

In contrast to Marx, Bakunin had won his reputation chiefly as an activist rather than a theorist of rebellion. He was born into the Russian landed gentry in 1814, but as a young man abandoned his army commission and noble heritage for a career as a professional revolutionist. Leaving Russia in 1840, at the age of twenty-six, he dedicated his life to a struggle against tyranny in all its forms. He was not one to sit in libraries, studying and writing about predetermined revolutions. Impatient for action, he threw himself into the uprisings of 1848 with irrepressible exuberance, a Promethean figure moving with the tide of revolt from Paris to the barricades of Austria and Germany. Men like Bakunin, a companion remarked, “grow in a hurricane and ripen better in stormy weather than in sunshine”.¹ But his arrest during the Dresden insurrection of 1849 cut short his feverish revolutionary activity. He spent the next eight years in prison, six of them in the darkest dungeons of tsarist Russia, and when he emerged, his sentence commuted to a life term of Siberian exile, he

PAUL AVRICH wrote this account of Bakunin as the introduction to the new reprint of God and the State (Dover Books USA). He is the author of The Russian Anarchists.

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was toothless from scurvy and his health seriously impaired. In 1861, however, he escaped his warders and embarked upon a sensational odyssey that encircled the globe and made his name a legend and an object of worship in radical groups all over Europe.

As a romantic rebel and an active force in history, Bakunin exerted a personal attraction that Marx could never rival. “Everything about him was colossal,” recalled the composer Richard Wagner, a fellow participant in the Dresden uprising, “and he was full of a primitive exuberance and strength.”² Bakunin’s “love for the fantastic, for unusual, unheard-of adventures, which open up vast horizons, the end of which cannot be foreseen”, to quote his own words, inspired extravagant dreams in others, and by the time of his death in 1876 he had won a unique place among the adventurers and martyrs of the revolutionary tradition. His broad magnanimity and childlike enthusiasm, his burning passion for liberty and equality, his volcanic onslaughts against privilege and injustice—all this gave him enormous human appeal in the libertarian circles of his day.

But Bakunin, as his critics never tired of pointing out, was not a systematic thinker. Nor did he ever claim to be. For he considered himself a revolutionist of the deed, “not a philosopher and not an inventor of systems, like Marx”.³ He refused to recognize the existence of any preconceived or preordained laws of history. He rejected the view that social change depended upon the gradual unfolding of “objective” historical conditions. He believed, on the contrary, that men shape their

own destinies, that their lives cannot be squeezed into a Procrustean bed of abstract sociological formulas. “No theory, no ready-made system, no book that has ever been written will save the world,” Bakunin declared. “I cleave to no system, I am a true seeker.”⁴ By teaching the workers theories, he said, Marx would only succeed in stifling the revolutionary fervour every man already possesses—“the impulse to liberty, the passion for equality, the holy instinct of revolt”. Unlike Marx’s “scientific” socialism, his own socialism, Bakunin asserted, was “purely instinctive”.⁵

Bakunin’s influence, then, as Peter Kropotkin remarked, was primarily that of a “moral personality” rather than of an intellectual authority. Although he wrote prodigiously, he did not leave a single finished book to posterity. He was forever starting new works which, owing to his turbulent existence, were broken off in mid-course and never completed. His literary output, in Thomas Masaryk’s description, was a “patchwork of fragments”. And yet, however erratic and unmethodical, his writings abound in flashes of insight that illuminate some of the most important social questions of his time—and of ours.

God and the State is an excellent case in point. It is disjointed, repetitious, poorly organized, and full of digressions and long footnotes that tend to soften its polemical impact. All the same, it is forceful

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and energetic, and packed with arresting aphorisms that testify to Bakunin’s remarkable intuitive gifts. As a result, *God and the State* has become the most widely read and frequently quoted of all Bakunin’s works. But perhaps the main reason for its popularity is that, in vivid language and relatively brief compass, it sets forth the basic elements of Bakunin’s anarchist creed.

The keynote of *God and the State* is Bakunin’s repudiation of authority and coercion in every form. In a withering passage he vents his fury on “all the tormentors, all the oppressors, and all the exploiters of humanity—priests, monarchs, statesmen, soldiers, public and private financiers, officials of all sorts, policemen, gendarmes, jailers and executioners, monopolists, economists, politicians of all shades, down to the smallest vendor of sweetmeats”. But the leading institutions of man’s enslavement—“my two *bêtes noires*”, he calls them—are the church and the state. Every state has been an instrument by which a privileged few have wielded power over the immense majority. And every church has been a loyal ally of the state in the subjugation of mankind. Governments throughout history have used religion both as a means of keeping men in ignorance and as a “safety-valve” for human misery and frustration. More than that, the very essence of religion is the disparagement of humanity for the greater glory of God. “God being everything,” Bakunin writes, “the real world and men are nothing; God being truth, justice, goodness, beauty, power, and life, man is falsehood, iniquity, evil, ugliness, impotence, and death. God being master, man is the slave.” No less than the state, then, religion is the negation of freedom and equality. Thus if God really exists, Bakunin concludes, inverting a famous dictum of Voltaire’s, “it would be necessary to abolish him”.

Bakunin proclaimed an all-out war against the church and the state. If men are to be free, they must throw off the double yoke of spiritual and temporal authority. To accomplish this they must bring to bear the two “most precious qualities” with which they are endowed: the power to think and the desire to rebel. Human history itself began with an act of thought and rebellion. If Adam and Eve had obeyed the Almighty when he forbade them to touch the tree of knowledge, humanity would have been condemned to perpetual bondage. But Satan—“the eternal rebel, the first freethinker and the emancipator of worlds”—persuaded them to taste the fruit of knowledge and liberty. These same weapons—reason and rebellion—must now be turned against the church and the state. And once they are overthrown there will dawn a new Eden for mankind, a new era of freedom and happiness.

But the task of liberation, warns Bakunin, will not be easy. For already a new class has emerged that aims to keep the masses in ignorance in order to rule over them. These would-be oppressors are the intellectuals, above all Marx and his followers, “priests of science” ordained in a

new privileged church of superior education. The rule of the intellectuals, according to Bakunin, would be no less oppressive

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than the rule of kings or priests or holders of property. The government of an educated elite, like the worst religious and political despotisms of the past, “cannot fail to be impotent, ridiculous, inhuman, cruel, oppressive, exploiting, maleficent”.

With this warning Bakunin anticipated the “new class” label that later critics were to pin on Marx’s heirs in the twentieth century. He assailed the theorists and system-builders whose so-called “science of society” was sacrificing real life on the altar of scholastic abstractions. He refused to shed the fictions of religion and metaphysics merely to see them replaced by what he considered the new fictions of pseudo-scientific sociology. He therefore proclaimed a “revolt of life against science, or rather, against the government of science”. For the true mission of science and learning, he insisted, was not to govern men but to rescue them from superstition, drudgery, and disease. “In a word,” he writes in *God and the State*, “science is the compass of life but not life itself.” But how can this new form of despotism be avoided? Bakunin’s answer was to wrest education from the monopoly grasp of the privileged classes and make it available equally to everyone. Like capital, learning must cease to be the patrimony of the few and become the patrimony of all men, “in order that the masses, ceasing to be flocks led and shorn by privileged priests, may take into their own hands the direction of their destinies”.

Such was the powerful message of *God and the State*. But it did not appear in print until 1882, six years after Bakunin’s death. For it was only then that the manuscript was discovered among his papers by two well-known anarchists, Carlo Cafiero and Elisee Réclus, who had been closely associated with him during the last years of his life, when his libertarian doctrines saw their fullest flowering. The manuscript breaks off in mid-sentence, and Cafiero and Reclus, as they relate in their Preface, believing it to be part of a letter or report, undertook to search for the remainder. But their efforts were in vain, and they brought out the truncated text as a pamphlet in Geneva, having given it the title of *Dieu et l’état* (God and the State) by which it was to become famous. They did not suspect—nor were they ever to learn—that the manuscript was actually an unpublished segment of *The Knouto-Germanic Empire and the Social Revolution*, an ambitious work on which Bakunin had laboured fitfully between 1870 and 1872 but had never managed to complete.

The *Knouto-Germanic Empire*—the title derives from the unholy alliance between Russian and German authoritarianism to stamp out social progress—is one of Bakunin’s longest and most important literary efforts. He himself called it his “testament”, and devoted considerable energy to its composition, ranging in characteristically discursive fashion over a wide assortment of subjects from history and politics to metaphysics and religion. Part I, written against the background of the Franco-Prussian War, deals mainly with the resistance by the French to German imperialism, and was published in pamphlet

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form in 1871. What Cafiero and Reclus called “God and the State” was a fragment from the unpublished and unfinished Part II, for which Bakunin’s own title was “The Historical Sophisms of the Doctrinaire School of Communism”, which, apart from being unwieldy, bears but little relation to its contents. The “God and the State” section was written, as we know from Bakunin’s diary, in February and March of 1871, on the eve of the Paris Commune, but several of its themes—notably the idea that government and religion have always worked together to keep men in chains—can be traced to Bakunin’s then unpublished essay, *Federalism, Socialism, and Anti-theologism* (written in 1867), and were to crop up again in his polemics with Giuseppe Mazzini after the fall of the Commune in May 1871.

Within a short time after its initial publication by Cafiero and Reclus, *God and the State* became the most widely circulated of Bakunin's works, a distinction which, nearly a century later, it still enjoys. It has been translated into many languages, including English, German, Dutch, Italian, Spanish, Russian, Polish, Czech, Rumanian, and Yiddish. The first English translation, by the American anarchist Benjamin Tucker, appeared in Boston in 1883, scarcely a year after the original French edition. Tucker's rendering suffered, however, from a number of handicaps. Not only had Cafiero and Reclus altered Bakunin's text in a few places to give his French a smoother and more literary quality, but they had transposed several passages and occasionally misread Bakunin's handwriting, which was as chaotic as his other personal traits. When the first correct text was published in 1908, it was followed by a new English edition, which appeared in London in 1910. This was essentially the Tucker translation, revised to conform to Bakunin's actual text, that is, without the alterations of Cafiero and Reclus. Still another edition, of which the present volume is a reprint, was brought out by Emma Goldman's Mother Earth press in 1918, and is identical with the London version except for a few minor differences in wording and punctuation.

While the *God and the State* segment first appeared in 1882, it was not for another generation that the full text of *The Knouto-Germanic Empire*—Parts I and II, together with two additional fragments and the remainder of a long footnote—saw its way into print. It finally appeared in the six-volume French edition of Bakunin's collected works (1895-1913), edited by the Austrian anarchist historian Max Nettlau (Volume I) and by James Guillaume (Volumes II-VI), Bakunin's faithful Swiss disciple. The whole of Part II of *The Knouto-Germanic Empire* occupies pages 9-177 of the third volume, of which pages 18-131 contain the correct text of what Cafiero and Reclus had published under the title of *God and the State*. Pages 9-17 are prefatory remarks of little consequence, while the remainder (pages 132-177) is a continuation of an attack by Bakunin on the French liberal philosopher Victor Cousin (1792-1867) that begins on the final page of *God and the State*. Cousin was the founder of the "eclectic school" and, as the name implies, had drawn on a wide variety of theories in what

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Bakunin regarded as a misguided attempt to prove the existence of God and to justify the existence of the state.

The continuation of *God and the State* consists of thirteen numbered paragraphs, peppered with critical asides and footnotes, in which Cousin's doctrines are summarized and refuted. Paragraph thirteen breaks off in mid-sentence, and no conclusion has been found. Near the end, however, there is the beginning of a footnote which also breaks off in mid-sentence but the remainder of which was discovered by Max Nettlau and published (it runs to some sixty pages) in the first volume of Bakunin's collected works. Unfortunately, Nettlau headed the note "God and the State", thereby adding to the confusion, for when subsequent writers refer to "God and the State" it is sometimes hard to tell whether they mean Nettlau's footnote or the famous essay of the same name.

Nettlau apparently chose the title because the footnote elaborates upon a passage from *God and the State*, in which Rousseau is denounced as "a prophet of the doctrinaire state" and "the real creator of modern reaction". Resuming the attack, Bakunin rejects Rousseau's notion of social contract—by which men surrender part of their liberty to the state in exchange for security and harmony—as a shameless fiction and a subterfuge for tyranny. He refuses to accept even the smallest limitation of human liberty. "Every enslavement of men," he writes, "is at the same time a limit on my own freedom." "I am a free man only so far as I recognize the humanity and liberty of all men around me. In respecting their humanity, I respect my own." The social contract, moreover, while recognizing the individual and the state, overlooks society, which for Bakunin is the "natural mode of existence of people living together".⁶

Apart from the continuation of *God and the State* and the footnote on Rousseau, there are yet two more segments of *The Knouto-Germanic Empire* which did not appear in print till long after Bakunin's death. The first of these is a loosely constructed "Appendix" with the grandiloquent title of "Philosophical Considerations on the Divine Phantom, on the Real World, and on Man". Written in the autumn of 1870, it is divided into five sections: System of the World; Man: Intelligence, Will; Animality, Humanity; Religion; Philosophy, Science.⁷ The second, called "An Essay Against Marx", was drafted in November and December of 1872, shortly after the Hague Congress of the First International, at which the controversy between Marx and Bakunin reached a dramatic climax with the latter's expulsion from the organisation. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that Marx should be the villain of the piece. Bakunin assails him as "the dictator of the International", and compares his worship of the state and centralized authority with that of his fellow German, Bismarck. Marx, he says, impelled by his Teutonic urge to dominate, has forgotten his own stirring words from the programme of the International: "The emancipation of the workers must be the task of the workers themselves."⁸

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When Bakunin wrote this final segment of *The Knouto-Germanic Empire*, he had less than four years to live. But for generations to come his disciples continued to proclaim his anarchist message and to shower abuse upon the proponents of "scientific socialism". Again and again they warned that political power is evil, that it corrupts all who wield it, that government of any kind stifles the revolutionary spirit of the people and robs them of their freedom. Like Bakunin before them, they called for the overthrow of the church and the state, from whose ruins they foresaw the emergence of a Golden Age of justice and equality, a shining era of freedom in which men would direct their own affairs without interference from any authority.

NOTES

1 E. Lampert, *Studies in Rebellion*, London, 1957, p. 118.

2 E. H. Carr, *Michael Bakunin*, New York, 1961, p. 196

3 Iu. M. Steklov, *Mikhail Aleksandrovich Bakunin*, 4 vols., Moscow, 1926-1927, III, 112.

4 Carr, *Michael Bakunin*, p. 175.

5 M. A. Bakunin, *Oeuvres*, 6 vols., Paris, 1895-1913, II, 399; Steklov, *Mikhail Aleksandrovich Bakunin*, I, 189.

6 *Oeuvres*, I, 264-326. The whole of *The Knouto-Germanic Empire*, Part II, including *God and the State*, the continuation on Cousin, and the long footnote are conveniently brought together in a single volume of the Russian edition of Bakunin's collected works: *Izbrannye sochineniia*, II, Petrograd, 1922, 123-264.

7 *Oeuvres*, III, 179-405. For a summary with extracts in English, see K. J. Kenafick, *Michael Bakunin and Karl Marx*, Melbourne, 1948, pp. 331ff.

8 *Oeuvres*, IV, 397-510; *Archives Bakounine*, II, Leiden, 1965, 169-219.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING:

The standard biography in English is *Michael Bakunin* by E. H. Carr, London, 1937, Vintage paperback, 1961. A clear exposition of Bakunin's philosophy is Eugene Pyziur's *The Doctrine of Anarchism* of Michael A. Bakunin, Milwaukee, 1955. Another useful study is K. J. Kenafick, *Michael Bakunin and Karl Marx*, Melbourne, 1948. In addition, several works in English contain valuable chapters on Bakunin, notably Max Nomad, *Apostles of Revolution*, Boston, 1939, Collier paperback, 1961; Franco Venturi, *Roots of Revolution*, New York, 1960, Universal paperback, 1967; Richard Hare, *Portraits of Russian Personalities Between Reform and Revolution*, London, 1959; E. Lampert, *Studies in Rebellion*, London, 1957; Edmund Wilson, *To the Finland Station*, New York, 1940, Anchor paperback, 1953; G. D. H. Cole, *Socialist Thought: Marxism and Anarchism, 1850-1890*, London, 1954; and Alexander Gray, *The Socialist Tradition*, London, 1946, Harper paperback, 1968. See also George Woodcock, *Anarchism*, Meridian paperback, Cleveland, 1962; James Joll, *The Anarchists*, London, 1964, Universal paperback, 1966; Paul Avrich, *The Russian Anarchists*, Princeton, 1967; and Isaiah Berlin, "Herzen and Bakunin on Individual Liberty", in *Continuity and Change in Russian and Soviet Thought*, ed. E. J. Simmons, Cambridge, Mass., 1955. Finally, for a selection of Bakunin's writings in English translation, see G. P. Maximoff, ed., *The Political Philosophy of Bakunin*, New York, 1953, Free Press paperback, 1964.

McLuhanism: a libertarian view

KINGSLEY WIDMER

SINCE I FIND A SURPRISING NUMBER of libertarians taking seriously the quasi-theories of Marshall McLuhan, on the strange assumption that they are “new”, “revolutionary”, “liberating”, etc., I want to examine them a bit, focusing around his most recent book, *Counterblast*. McLuhanism is both a syndrome of and therapy for advanced cultural schizophrenia. A desperate melange of dated-ahead technocracy and displaced aestheticism, it attempts to adjust us to the fracturing of thought and feeling of our technological processing by exalting the illness. Priestly therapist McLuhan holds, like the traditional exuberant drunk, that you should swallow the dog that bit you. Disoriented by the mass media? Then become an addict and devotee of electronic fragmentation, your mind a low-toned montage of war overlain with show-biz chatter, of politics foaming from a deodorant can, of god dissolving to a rock beat in a seltzer ad, of thought as automated plastic flash-cards vibrating to sonic booms, and of cosmic love as stereo orgasm amidst the purple smog of a lunar blast-off. By masturbating media metaphors, you, too, can become a part-time electronic mystic.

Our mass media finally serve the society by social denaturing and psychic disorientation. Since no person or purpose can coherently contain the media material—the trivial and the tragic, the exploitation and the grotesquery, tend to cancel out—the processing itself remains as the major experience. Our media function as self-destruct machines for all content, at least in North America. Here lies McLuhan’s main insight: the packaging is all, though he disguises the nasty implications by claiming to find in the media processing the ultimate reality of our time.

The true McLuhanite, not only aficionado of synthetic tactility but traditional mystic questing for nothingness, tries to turn himself into an electronic package. According to the master’s prescriptions, he fuses with the “new environment” until it becomes his “nature” and he turns into the media of his media. If you stay tinglingly dissociated from place and time, on a continual surreal high, and hallucinatingly merge with the media “extensions” of yourself, you should reach the nonindividual and nonrational tribal state of McLuhan’s new

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man, “a super-civilized sub-primitive”. Be warned: this takes a positive and indiscriminate embracing of the media processing since we are caught in the conflict between pre-and-post “electronic culture”, which creates all of our intellectual, political, social and metaphysical problems. The problems get exacerbated, according to McLuhan, because of the “rear-view mirror” ideologies of literate intellectuals, traumatically, snobbishly and selfishly resisting the new technological environment and its mythic consciousness. McLuhan is the Agnew of the technocrat aesthetes.

His *Counterblast* partly comes out as an ideological tract by a literary intellectual against literary intellectuals and a demand for thinking in technological metaphors. As itself a medium, it is another small volume in his series of fancied up notebooks repeating the slogans, half-arguments, pastiche quotations and scrambled perceptions of his earlier works. Since McLuhan long ago pronounced his epitaph over book culture, he works at unhooking his books. He claims his fragmented text to be part of a “mosaic” method appropriate to the new consciousness. But the evidence of all of McLuhan’s writing suggests that he probably can do nothing else than this schizy splattering of jargoned rhetoric. To further unhook *Counterblast*, he uses blurting headlines, cutely

broken-up layouts and typographical eccentricities. (Harley Parker's design seems to be a dully mechanical imitation of "concretist" poetry.) No new technological environment here, only its archly literary symptoms.

Before suggesting a few counters to McLuhan's made-up myth of technological sensibility, let us give him his few literate dues. In small doses, his shock-effect inversions of usual sense and feeling—"implosions" he would call them—suggest as well as amuse. This short-circuited computerized pedant illustrates some of the weird fracturing of technology on sensibility. Furthermore, a small antique imp of sense and wit now and then lifts a sardonic eyebrow above the electronic self-mystification. Take McLuhan's main slogan: "The medium is the message." When this means anything, amidst the free-floating abstractions, it points out that packaging is never neutral and that for many people the effects of the packaging, not the avowed products and purposes, provide the main experience. This becomes especially true without technology because our media subordinate all to the techniques of presentation. We communicate little in a big way. In our media, ideas, art and attitudes get so reduced, cancelled out or transformed that the technological processing becomes the dominant significance.

A couple of books back, McLuhan punned on his own slogan to emphasize the visceral power of the media: "The medium is the massage." In *Counterblast* he puns again: "The Medium is the Mess Age." Coily true. But if the mess of our age makes the media what they are, then, with usual inconsistency, McLuhan talks not about a new-media sensibility but only about the technological confusions and exploitations of the old-and-new sensibility, the continuing human one. The more woozy utopians who have, with understandable

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desperation, latched on to McLuhanism's false promise of a technological "new man" should take another look.

For McLuhan, technology totally transforms sensibility. Or at least he repeatedly insists on such nonsense. To give our changes humanizing significance, he must claim a culture for the technology that destroys culture, any and all culture. He argues that those with senses not blocked by traditional media, by the "specialist artifacts" of art and intellect and the "privileged means of perception for the few", will achieve the new "nervous system" of the electronic media. Certainly most of our official-culture mandarins—publicists, teachers, editors, publishers, etc.—deserve McLuhan's denunciations; they are just slow-motion versions of the media manipulators. But how are these new mandarins any improvement?

Only in that they are technologically transformed. He gives them no other qualities. Finally, of course, he doesn't really believe in the transformation. For there is always that critical imp, the old style intellectual awareness with a point-of-view and a perspective beyond the flickering smog: "the citadel of individual consciousness ... is not accessible to the mass media". Ah, there is a ghost even in the electronic machine, an unalterable soul even in the transistorized barbarian, a vestigial cultured human being in a tower who remains impervious and antithetical to the technological transformation. McLuhan wants it both ways. He insists on the total transformation of our nervous system and sense of the world but placates us about our great, and justified, fears of the destruction of human individuality. Such genial confusion, typical mass media stuff, undoubtedly accounts for much of his popularity.

Most of McLuhanism consists of over-extended puns. In reading, we follow the "line"; ergo, "linear consciousness". He runs this metaphor throughout Western cultural history. Linear: Greek thought (the syllogism's one-two-three), Gutenberg's moveable types (the repetition of A-B-C), Renaissance perspective (point-of-view taken over from authorship), the Age of Enlightenment (the alphabetical encyclopedization of knowledge), the nineteenth century assembly line (step-by-step production), and all the rest of our visually sequential civilization. Because of Western civilization's bias away from the full range of senses, especially the aural-auditory—he must ignore our noise and that the new media do not really approach all the senses, however much we may think they stink—

our civilization ended, apparently a generation ago, in a straitjacket of linearity, of printed words, representation, industrialism, hard-lines, rationality and privateering individualism. Now the linearity is being blasted out by the instantaneousness, multiplicity, simultaneity, tactility, totalism, communalism, and pointlessness, of television and computers and the rest of our post-industrial and super-rational and beyond-literate technology. Thus linear responses, such as reading books and thinking individually, become not only irrelevant but reactionary.

Never mind that such a history of Western consciousness is like an instant beverage—a little condensed dust of learning and a lot of

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hot water. (McLuhan is a sort of late-night talk-show parody of those culture historians who have analyzed our warped consciousness in terms of the dominance of “clock time” or “Manicheanism” or the “cash nexus” or “the Protestant ethic” or “functionalism” or “the machine spirit”, etc., only he has the knack of optimistic simpleness and so reached a wider audience.) Also never mind that on any particular subject—literature, psychology, education, mechanics, etc.—McLuhan not only makes more errors than words and that he pursues puns and not tangible realities. For it’s McLuhan’s media to mix the media metaphors. His aslant charm comes from substituting media abstractions for philosophical or theological abstractions.

As a learned game, this should not be put down, though it should also not be confused with reality. Others can also play. Let me give McLuhan a new case for his media catalogue. Current protest—an area quite alien to McLuhan, and this makes him rather repulsive to me—can be seen, in the usual mode of McLuhanism, as the product of the “bull horn”. That new medium, used alike by cops and militants, not only makes street protest bullish but also louder and more mobile. Note, also, that the bull horn is characterized by varying directional focus and sudden decibel rise; that produces sporadic rioting, at one angle cops, at another angle protesters. The handy amplifier also encourages instantaneous elitism. How else would one identify in a mob the Chief of the Tactical Squad or the Leading Revolutionary Monitor, if it weren’t for their characterizing bull horns, of which they are the mere moveable stands? Small men now speak large, the old street fighter with the linear broadside now electronically enlarged and communally reverberating because of the bull horn. And since bull horns get heavy in the right hand, this accounts for the increasing leftist emphasis of long protests. But if we look to the future and technology’s new miniaturized calf horns, we may envision even more fluid street fighting on many fronts—every cop his own riot—with an increasingly pure rightist but less virile emphasis. While I could endlessly expound on this overlooked aspect of the new media—radical intellectuals are altogether too bookish to understand what they have been doing—any explication should really be done with an amplifier, not mere print. In sum: just think of all the metaphors connected with bullhorn protest, and you can become the latest, and horniest, model McLuhan.

However, you better not think in a linear-logical fashion. Is there really a condition to fit McLuhan’s major metaphor of “linear” consciousness? Of course. That is what we mean when we say of someone that he thinks “mechanically”, or when we disparage “rote learning”, or when we ask for a pattern or “gestalt” of more adequate perception, or when we demand the “depth” of true understanding. A few years ago, quite autonomously of McLuhanism, John Holt (*How Children Fail*) wrote of fearfully submissive pupils who memorized the sequence of a problem but did not understand arithmetical thinking, that they were taking a “linear” misapproach. People who read a poem as merely a series of printed words make an analogous

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mistake. More broadly, we all know the infuriating experience of talking with those who seem “logical” or “analytic” but miss all the richness and extension and life of a subject. These “linear” people make bad human mediums by reducing all to a narrow line. While McLuhan blames such

linearity on book-print culture and its abstraction “from all other senses”, a more basic rote-fundamentalism and denaturing of human response seems to be involved. Bland people in power most often reveal it. Linear consciousness is not a certain kind of responding but a failure of response, a characteristic pathology of our technological civilization.

Has the “linear” consciousness increased in our time? Apparently. More and more in our blandly processed schooling people “can’t learn”. And in many other areas, our “expertise” reduces a subject to its most organizable, controllable and efficiently objective—that is, linear—form. Business and government display a straight-ahead “rationality” close to total insensitivity and insanity. The American war in Vietnam provides many-fold illustrations of misplaced “linear” thinking, from the early “domino” theory (a linear-visual sequence) through the present logic of supporting the Saigon dictatorship (the-line-of-command) to the whole pattern of an imposed Western “rationality” on an alien and inappropriate tribal scene. Or as McLuhan puts it in one of his unexplained and rather dehumanized headlines: “Vietnam war is extravagant pedagogical effort to Westernize the East.” Commonsensically, one must add that new technology does not transform that war into a different mode of consciousness other than that of more death.

Elsewhere, McLuhan’s main claims for the new media come out of his principle that “modern technology ... installs us once more in the heart of primeval consciousness and experience”. From this we obtain a renewed “tribal” sensibility and the world learned from the media as a “global village”; we now live in a millennial “collective awareness” with a more visceral and “organic” culture. McLuhan pushes such tropes to comic perversity: “Bless Madison Avenue for restoring the magical art of the caveman to suburbia.”

We move here in the realm of theological figures of speech since at any practical level it is hard to see this neoprimitivism characteristic of those mesmerized by the boob tube, their knowledge IBM printouts, and their lives a circuitry stamping. In fact, our counter-culture—our beat-hippy-dissident movements—do turn towards these primeval qualities but from opposite ways to McLuhanism. All the attempts that we have towards new community, tribal styles and a renewed neolithic culture develop *against* technology. People “tactile” (good guys) rather than “linear” (bad guys) show, contrary to McLuhan, less, not more, dependence on the mass media. The signals in the young of the desire for communion and involvement and of the need for the immediate and kinesthetically human consist of putting down the electronic and plastic. They show a wise revulsion to technological destruction of the environment, to the exploitative processing of the media, and to the spurious scientizing of sensibility.

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The media “extensions of man” do not build sensitive communalism but institutional power networks. Instead of the young happily “learning a living” (apparently from professors of “communication”) they block out learning, including that little in schooling, as just another phony media substitute for doing and being. Mostly the tactile and communal impetus from the electronic serve as false substitutes for tangible experience. The technological stimuli could hardly gratify the thwarting of direct human touch and relation which they create. The media ersatz-tactile effects end in an imposed fetishism, proper pornography of our onanistic tubes, consubstantial fantasy commodities, projective lunacies and lubricities of institutional displacement of the fully and directly human.

McLuhan’s examples of the new culture usually seem topsy-turvy. He presents executive’s and official’s mania for conferences as a new humanization and pursuit of information patterns. More likely, as they run a dreary maze of aluminium and plastic airport-plane-airport-hotel-airport-plane-airport-office, ad nauseum, they should be seen as pathetic victims of a desperate effort at maintaining control by pseudo-personal contact in a fragmented ordering. Similarly, our “information overload” probably does not encourage new experiential “patterning” but, instead, mental blocking and withdrawal and resentment. Talk to almost any administrator these days, or just listen to the jargon in which they, and McLuhan, cushion their crippled sensibilities. McLuhan notes

the decline in oratory and all high-styled speech and claims it as “cool” media humanization. But the media replacement of individualized speech by the panel or “interview”—as all of us who have endured numerous television interviews should know—is a processing technique for control, censorship and deflation of all individual and passionate views. They “cool it” to cool us.

Our technology largely subserves patterns of social and ideological domination. The processing of the media can only be understood as efforts to restrict experience, ultimately to destroy it by systematic fracturing and substitution and disorientation. The organization and control of the media—frequently corrupt, fantastically bureaucratized, and almost always in the command of the most contemptible people—systematically closes out not only many people but much of human thought and feeling. Put ten honest men in it and it would collapse. While no simple conspiracy, our technology ultimately seems to be the cosmic programme of a schizophrenic deity seeking to reverse the creation.

Why does McLuhan miss all this and turn everything upside down? He concludes *Counterblast* with, in the biggest type in the book, a beloved slogan: “THE IVORY TOWER BECOMES THE CONTROL TOWER OF HUMAN NAVIGATION.” You didn’t think literary critics were dangerous? Here may be seen their revenge, the monomania of the aggrandizing aesthete. McLuhan calls from his minaret for prayers to the packaging, the one and only which only he truly knows. He obsessively quotes fragments (usually twisted badly out of context) of a narrow range of antiquarian literature of

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a few generations back (Mallarme, James, Joyce, Lewis, etc.)—essentially aestheticism. For it is not far from the old art-for-art’s-sake to his new media-for-media’s-sake. The decadent’s concern with the frissons of artistic sensation easily displaces into technological aestheticism.

Though not serious, the aggrandizing aesthetes of “technological culture” may be dangerous. McLuhan is an ideologue. In his first book, *The Mechanical Bride*, he savaged the media material of “mass culture”. For obscure but perhaps shrewd motives, he reversed field in his two-part theoretical pastiche around the history of media, *The Gutenberg Galaxy* and *Understanding Media*. The ivory tower critic not only put himself to sea with the big fleet but insists that he is at the helm. However, he cannot handle the larger navigating metaphors of cultural ideology (his characteristic dismissal, in *Counterblast*, of political radicalism as pre-electronic, as with most of his comments on society and politics and religion, comes out weakly silly). Since McLuhanism neither connects with large ideas or large realities—merely a fractured linearity—it attempts to ideologize a narrow line of media sensations. McLuhanism provides a nihilistic hedonism for a technology losing human proportions and a homeopathic treatment for poisoned sensibility. At its frequent worst, it also expresses a submissive worship of power-processing that can only result in increasing our diseases of human fragmentation and disorientation.

Tim Daly, author of *Jump, My Brothers, Jump* (ANARCHY 110), who was sentenced to four years’ imprisonment in 1969 for setting fire to the Imperial War Museum, has recently lost three months’ remission for “insubordination” and has been transferred from Maidstone to Wandsworth prison.

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**Prison is no place for
a boy like you**

STAN KOHLS

PRISON IS A GOOD PLACE FOR ANARCHISTS and pacifists to be, especially since they tend to come from white, middle-class homes; prisons are inhabited almost exclusively by poor people, who can show us a part of the world we rarely come into close contact with; jail can provide a challenging and interesting environment against which the entire gamut of middle-class and liberal values and beliefs are called into question.

Middle-class families generally have a strong aversion to personal violence which occasionally includes the violence perpetrated by the state. This is carried to ridiculous extremes by pacifists like myself, but to most prison inmates, and to the prison system, violence is a way of living. Individually, many prisoners are in jail because of acts of violence they have committed; to them violence is an appropriate response to many situations; unfortunately it is often illegal, and they get caught. Violence continues to be a part of their lives in jail, as a potential means of protecting themselves and getting what they want. To the prison system as well, violence is central. Prisoners are often captured using violence, are detained under the threat of violence, and the threat of violence is used to maintain their obedience to the prison system. To put men into iron cages and keep them there requires a daily exercise of violence. This constant exposure to violence is likely to be a shock to most nice, middle-class folks.

One principal argument of the anarcho-pacifist line is that coercion and oppression simply don't work in the long run. There's nothing like jail to show you what bullshit that is. The effectiveness of coercion in maintaining order and obedience and destroying the "bit of God in all men" exceeds the wildest hopes of wardens, guards and politicians. Prisoners are constantly involved in abusing each other, fighting among themselves, being far more angry at each other than at the system that has incarcerated them. Inmates will often get angry at a prisoner being hassled by a guard: it's his own fault for not keeping out of the guard's way ... everyone knows what a bastard that guard is, etc.

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I don't want to theorize about possible guilt that prisoners might feel at seeing one of their "brothers" punished; whatever the reasons, it's depressing to see just how much prisoners destroy their own integrity in the rush to identify with the system that is their oppressor. It's true that there are tidbits of resistance which may serve to maintain a prisoner's individuality, but the overwhelming phenomenon is absolute co-operation with the oppression of the prison, to the extent of punishing any "troublemakers".

An important part of the middle-class liberal ethic is a high value placed on creativity, personal warmth, friendliness, humaneness. This has reached an epitome among some of us who glory in being artsy-craftsy "freaks", loving everyone, seeing life as a game, "grooving" with every "trip", wanting the absolute freedom for everyone to do his thing, trying to look and be and enjoy the bizarre. Anarchists recognize the damage that the state and its institutions do to individual creativity, and therefore the state must go. It's something of a brutal blow to see how little goofing-off happens in prison, how humourless an existence it usually is, how the friendly inmate is seen as being "soft"; once again, an occasional inmate is able to break through the anti-play ethic and provide some comic relief, but the majority of prisoners are very much involved in trying to be "tough", blend in and conform to avoid trouble; friendliness and seeking fun are signs of weakness.

Many inmates are angered by a radical's recognition of the prison system as some horrible game; prison, after all, is serious business.

It's possible that this attitude is due to some extent to the lack of women and the general pressure towards homosexuality, which many of the prisoners may fear in themselves. Perhaps many fear that if they loosen up the prison will get to them and destroy them; this toughness may be the armour necessary to prevent complete personality destruction. Once again, the oppression of the system has triumphed. In an institution expressly designed to take away man's freedom, it is usually the inmates themselves who work hardest to destroy, in themselves and those around them, any expression of the free spirit. The middle-class liberal value placed on freedom is classified as "kid-stuff" and the pressure is to harden up.

To an educated, well-read, highly verbal middle-class person, the unstimulating dullness of the prison is part of the oppression. This is especially true of radicals, who tend to be word-junkies. In jail, reading matter is usually limited to local newspapers, a few *Reader's Digests*, some Zane Grey novels, and books on various trades and skills (books on TV repair are very big). Inmates can usually buy or get books sent in, but these are censored, as is all information within and from without. Prison education is recognized as a farce by prisoners, educators and prison administrators in candid moments. Prisoners attend classes usually because it is easier to get parole if you can indicate that you're taking advantage of prison to rehabilitate yourself. Courses are irregular and dull, part of the penal myth that prison provides an opportunity for the "criminal" to pay his debt to

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society and make himself a useful member of it. Most inmates recognize this as true bullshit.

Most distressing to prisoners from middle-class backgrounds is the feeling of a total lack of control over your own life, which many anarchists see as the only reason to remain alive. On the street, the middle-class kid, usually college educated, can generally talk himself into or out of almost anything, if he really wants to. In all other institutions of mass oppression—the army, the university, the corporation—there is someone in authority to whom the articulate person can talk to alleviate his problems or improve his condition. But in prison there is the realization that no one gives a fuck, even when you do get the rare opportunity to talk to someone who will admit that they have the authority to make a decision. You get the feeling that if they lost your file, you could stay there forever; there's no one to argue with about it, and that is really frustrating. One of your cellmates might be able to offer a suggestion for the proper form to request, but discovery of that sort of information is haphazard; no one really seems to know the rules and procedures, or if they know, they're not telling. Anarchists and pacifists tend to be great exploiters of rules and procedures. I've been told that if a person can make it at a large university or other bureaucracy, he can make it in prison. Middle-class people depend heavily on regulations when relating to an institution, and in prison, the regulations are often made up on the spot, changed without notice or simply unknown. Frustrating! !

I don't want to come off as being too pessimistic, so I should mention that my basic middle-class trust in people was substantiated in jail, much to my surprise. I found that my fellow prisoners were more concerned about my welfare than were the guards or prison administrators, and this seems to be the experience of most people I've talked to. Prisoners shared what they had with me, from bedding to information, informally, not quite openly, but without regard for who I was on the outside or what my crime had been. I am hassled more about my long hair by cops in Venice than by prisoners in New County. The atmosphere of jail may be tough, hard, brutal, unfriendly, violent, anti-emotional. But the prisoners live together, work together as a total society, a community, usually trusting each other, although rarely getting close. The men in prison with me were hardly open and loving, but neither were they as malicious as the cops who had put me in jail; on the contrary, the inmates wanted to do the right thing: to be Good and Just, according to their own lights. I went into my cell fearful, afraid to trust; I found that men in jail are no different from the people I knew out of jail. They too could be loved and trusted and respected. Although the values

that they held would rarely produce a humanitarian radical, and though they were often violent, inarticulate (with vital exceptions), uneducated and poor, they were nevertheless men living in a community, trusting and trustworthy.

Prison is a good place to be ... for a little while.

[inside back cover]

in
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ANARCHY 115

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Students and
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R. Bryant

[checked March 2019]