

# THE ABOLITION OF WORK

## and other essays



BY BOB BLACK

**THE ABOLITION OF WORK  
AND  
OTHER ESSAYS**

**by Bob Black**

## **THE ABOLITION OF WORK AND OTHER ESSAYS**

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Dedication: *To Donna Kossy*



# FOREWARD

## BOB BLACK TEXT AND CONTEXT

by Ed Lawrence

*"The errors of a wise man make your rule,  
Rather than the perfections of a fool"*

—William Blake

### I

There are words that fit in the mouth only after all the teeth have been broken out. Words that swing down like wrecking balls from out of the darkness of the cranium. Indentured words coined by impoverished minds. Words that collectively constitute the language of our time.

Language that is conceived in the head can not help but be born brain dead. Its letters held together like the stiffened fingers of a hand under the spell of rigor mortis. Its every sentence a funeral procession.

The shadow of darkness swallows this upside down world. The shadow is standardization. Standardization is the death of inanimate objects, which is only to say it is the death of spirit. But the death of spirit goes by another name. It is usually called the birth of reason.

The dreams of reason are, at this late date, everywhere to be seen, much like headstones in a cemetery. The inertia of a standard which prunes every tree to the dimensions of a utility pole will, with the same determination, core the heart out of the human personality. This fermenting mind, intoxicated by its heady sobriety, methodically slits its own throat, all the while mistaking the elongating wound for a smile.

When the spirit is free, according to Nietzsche, the head will be the bowels of the heart. In these top heavy days that have turned life topsy-turvy the head has little appetite for freedom. Instead it has developed a taste for coprophagy.



## II

If mouths are to be more than crematoriums they must *not* stop at nothing. Not because nihilism goes too far, but rather because it fails to go far enough. Nihilism is like a street light. The only crime it never prevents is the only one that really matters, the crime of its own existence. All its desperate light ever really succeeds in doing is to obscure the view of the effervescent stars and their exalted dance across the darkness of the sky.

When the spirit is free it will soar. Its reflection imprisoned in the mirror of nihilism is the spirit of gravity. "Not by wrath, but by laughter do we slay. Come, let us slay the spirit of gravity." (Nietzsche)

## III

Bob Black has been slaying the spirit of gravity for some years. His favorite weapon is the penknife, and when he goes for the throat, breathe easy, the usual result is a tracheotomy of inspiration.

His writings are an exhilarating torrent that flushes out the ash of a language which clogs the throat. His work is akin to the great labor of Hercules, who diverted two rivers to run through and cleanse the Augean stables. Akin to, but even more difficult. The rivers of Hercules' task were at least fresh and flowing, while the stream of consciousness that now must be detoured has been cut off from its source and become a stagnant malarial successpool.

Bob Black is the high priest of nihilarity. His confessional has Duchamp's urinal bolted to its door. His ten commandments are a string of one liners. His faith is baldly heretical. It begins where the dictionary ends, not with the ZZZ of a snore but with the chaotic rrumbling of a chortle that quickens the senses like an earthquake that sways a petrified forest. By virtue of his faults, Black derides the wheel without spokes, the mandala of zero, and demoralizes the mind forged hi-tectonics whose poison prescribes that one seismograph counterfeits all.

By virtue of genuine delight his texts are both alive and enlivening. He is the extraordinary magician who pulls the perpetually unexpected, the silk purse, from out of the squealing sow's ear. Within these pages nothing is not as it seems, and the winged horse Pegasus flies forth from the neck of the beheaded Medusa.



# INTRODUCTION

## REPENT!! QUIT YOUR JOB!!! BLACK OUT!

by Rev. Ivan Stang

It just occurred to me, for the first time: Bob Black is aptly named.

I don't know exactly how it started, but sometime in 1980 I began receiving these intense one-sheet flyers from what looked to be a fanatical anti-establishment group called "The Last International." I loved their name. It took me a few mailings to realize it was all coming from one misfit whose name was Black but whose signature was a 'negate' mark.

Talk about prophets howling in the wildness... this guy was spewing out some of the, uh, wittiest hate humor I'd ever seen. Not only was it coming hot and heavy through the mail, but it was also getting posted all over whatever squalid neighborhoods Bob lived in.

It was rants, diatribes, jeremiads, and harangues, constructed entirely of one-liners that were each worthy of a bumper sticker unto themselves, and illustrated with simple but archetypal clip-art juxtapositions that reached out and grabbed you. I, like many others at the same time, felt compelled to xerox the stuff and spread it further around. Because it could only hit people one of three ways, and all of the ways were good ways to hit the three types of potential victims or cohorts. They would a) laugh, b) get pissed off, or c) merely be confused, and ignore it. Because *you couldn't tell when "The Last International" was kidding and when it was serious*. This quality has marked a lot of the best satire of the 1980's... you aren't entirely sure that it *is* satire. And it isn't. The reactions it provokes are too real. I'm not sure how many people have been arrested for posting Last International flyers, but if the cops had been doing their jobs, a lot more would've been.

Sometimes the flyers just left you asking questions. Other times they made a forceful and specific point. But they always

had style, and unmistakable “perfect snideness.” And they always had HATE. Hate for the Empire, the Conspiracy, the Wad, the Combine, the Man. They would’ve been horrifying if they weren’t so funny. To people with bad senses of humor, they were indeed horrifying.

They weren’t so much “the little guy” against the authorities as the *crazy* guy. That was the first thing that made them interesting to me. Any old extremist geek can write jargonized polemics against the Bad Guys, but only the *CRAZY* are both motivated and dumb enough to fire that first shot in the revolution. This nuttiness gives Black’s pieces an authenticity, and a kind of credibility to the rest of us crazies, that transcends any mere political party.

On the other hand, any schizo can be authentically schizoid. The thing about Black’s rants was that they looked insane by CHOICE, and more importantly, they *only looked* insane because they were more UNRELENTINGLY CLEVER than what people were used to. If YOU weren’t crazy, the flyers weren’t crazy — they were BRILLIANT. Sometimes, offensively so. And that has always been one of the roots of Bob Black’s problem. You know, his “problem.” I think it irritates people on a subconscious level to be told, even in a quasi-jesting situation, that not only are their cows NOT SACRED, but that some people EAT them. With KETCHUP!

Yes, any crazy can suck in the world’s woes and then spew them back out rearranged. But Black’s arrangement is DEADLY. His best work hurts the brains of normals — actually injures them. And they fight back sometimes, but not just with words.

It’s partly because Bob Black is a natural *wordsplicer*. He uses Newspeak *against* the Ministry of Truth. The words themselves are juxtapositions of opposing buzzwords... so that they are simultaneously familiar, but alien. It puts the reader into “think hard” mode.

The right side of his brain is obviously screaming through a megaphone directly into his left brain’s ear, but for once the left brain is able to make USE of it. Bob uses the tools of propaganda to create something too initially confounding to be *real* propaganda... and even if it was propaganda, what’s it propaganda for?? Individuality? By definition, to push

“individuality” through propaganda is a contradiction in terms. You don’t preserve individuality by creating role models — you get people to *abandon* role models. Role models like heroes and gods and governments.

Black has not only conceptualized this — plenty of “kooks” have too — but has succeeded in communicating it... in making true anti-propaganda, an antidote against TV commercials which are a thousand times sicker than Bob’s blackest. As Sacred Scribe of the Church of the SubGenius, I have read many manifestos with the same message. The difference here is, it’s WELL DONE, and it’s NOT A MESSAGE — it’s the message itself! He is the rare combination, the true outsider who is still literate, who can still cope (well, so far, anyway)... and can make the struggle for slack entertaining. It’s plain that a lot of work goes into his diatribes against work.

That’s why, out of the hundreds or thousands of people who simultaneously but independently started self-publishing their “rants” in the late 1970’s (thanks to cheap xerox technology), only a few names stick out, and Bob’s is one of them.

It is my avocation to seek out all those at the very fringes of the exploding universe, the outsiders, the Unwitting (or not) Discordians, those not at the *cutting* edge but at the DECAPITATING edge... those pushing the VERY PRECIPICE ever forward, pushing the BRINK ever further back, trying as hard as they can to get away from the center of things in order to more clearly SEE the center in relation to the WHOLE. Or some such shit... there are a lot of people like that. But every time I discovered some new freakish individual or group or publisher, Bob Black had always gotten there just before me. He has never been entirely alone because of this. It’s probably why he isn’t dead like his friend Gerry Reith.

I don’t think Bob ever harbored any illusions that his maniacal one-sheet assaults were going to HELP the WORLD — it’s more like, “Well, the world may already be screwed past hope, but, by God, I WON’T GO DOWN WITHOUT A FIGHT.” It’s the old “thorn in the side” battle plan, the “Operation Mindfuck” Anti-Conspiracy — the *love of disorganization* that is the only MOTIVE for halting the relentless march towards compulsive over-organization. The old-fashioned, reliable termites-at-the-

foundations-of-society routine. Bugs Bunny. The Obnoxious Visionary Who Won't Shut Up About How Dumb YOU Are, fueled by the spirit that, in some prehistoric age, was born the first time two kids cut up in church.

It is our Nameless Mission to keep this spirit alive. It is in the grand tradition of Swift and all the other great pamphleteers, streetcorner prophets, and soapbox ranters.

It also partakes of another grand tradition of the courageous pamphleteer — poverty. I don't think Bob is going to get rich off this book, although it certainly would be poetic justice if he did. Few have worked harder at denouncing work; he should at least be paid. He distributed his flyers for free, and as far as fame goes, well, his name is probably among the Who's Who of the FBI, the Secret Service, and anyone else whose job it is to watch guys like Black and make sure he doesn't go to founding a church or forming an army or anything like that.

When I realized that “work” was the most destructive yet least-admitted of the Conspiracy's tools, I tried to explain it to people. Even the “hippest” have trouble making this philosophical leap ALL THE WAY to its conclusion, though. It is almost UNIVERSALLY accepted that work is some inevitable thing like breathing or eating that the human race will always have to live with. It is a rule so imbedded in all cultures that it has always been practically unspoken. It's nearly impossible for people to really conceptualize this, so deeply has it been hammered into the very core of our beings. We all carry blisters from doing much of that hammering ourselves!

It may take humanity 10,000 years to realize that “work” as currently defined is the root of all evil — but if we don't start working at abolishing work NOW, it'll take even LONGER! What do we suggest as a REPLACEMENT for toil? Well, neither Black nor I have gotten to that yet. We'll cross that bridge when we come to it. Let the robots or something do the shitwork — if there aren't PEOPLE who want to do it, and there probably will be.

(Well, the idea isn't really as simple as all that. I shouldn't need to spell out that it isn't “work” per se that bothers us, but the predicament that only the born-rich can avoid: HAVING to spend half a life on something you really don't want to do. Oh,

you say you LIKE entering data for \$4.65 an hour for someone you don't know, so that something you don't understand can happen? All I can say is that the first step towards freedom is to realize that you are a ... ah, forget it.)

Communism started out as a bunch of pamphlets. Black's spleen-explosions are ten times more subversive than the Communist Manifesto — Communism and all its ilk still take work for GRANTED (and the pay is lousy to boot) —but at the same time the Last International flyers are a thousand times more American than the Bill of Rights. Black is merely *thinking ahead*. In effect, Black is drilling patiently away at the VERY FOUNDATION of our civilization. THE CORE. The ROTTEN CORE.

And then there's the weird political viewpoint from which Black hatches his literary termites. At some point in the dim past it may have been Leftist, but now the Left is the target he's closest to and the easiest to hit dead bullseye. Somehow the movements that were supposed to be failsafe — anarchy, Libertarianism, etc. —all turned into stupid cartoons of human folly before his very eyes. ALL HE DID WAS REPORT IT. He's not on the right side of center or the left, but rather at the point BETWEEN the two on the far end of a CIRCLE that they both create. And then up (or down?) about 10 feet off the diagram, fix that point in thin air — that's Bob Black's place on the political spectrum. This is subversion from an ENTIRELY NEW DIRECTION, and IN an entirely new direction... one side of the political spectrum is as bad as the other when you're standing this far back.

Black's no Commie; he doesn't want everyone equally poor — he wants everyone JUST PLAIN RICH, but WITHOUT WORKING. Stupid? A pipe dream? This entire civilization is a STUPID PIPE DREAM. If our remote ancestors could have seen us in a crystal ball, they would have PUKED. Bob Black was BORN into this century but he's PUKING ANYWAY. Indeed, he's puking everywhere he can. He wants "THEM" to know that *you can't hide from the puke*.

He has left his bloody werewolf tracks on every worthy fellow disruptor's networks from SubGenius to Dial-A-Rumor, and lately in just about every would-be countercultural "above-



ground” publication he can get into, which is a lot of them nowadays. The FOOLS — they don’t know what he’s trying to DO to them!

He seems to find great pleasure in invading any magazine that considers itself “radical” just to show them that “radical” is relative. He loves to show people things they don’t understand, to remind them of this.

Which brings us to Bob Black’s enemies, who are legion, and many of whom were once his friends. One of my great worries is how long it will be before he decides I have become a hopeless case and guns for me, too. With Bob, you get the impression that it could always happen at ANY SECOND. He’s a rather demanding guy. I’ve been in his company only a few times, and always briefly, so his on-line personality is really unknown to me... but I know that he refuses to pretend that he’s letting you fool him. It’s probably a good thing that we live so far from each other.

What throws people off is that Black wants to have his cake and eat it too. WHY IS THAT TOO MUCH TO ASK? What’s the point in HAVING the damn CAKE unless you’re going to EAT it? What’re you gonna do with it, show it to your friends? What’s the point in being able to AFFORD leisure time if you don’t have TIME for it? These questions are literally too hideous in their ultimate implications for most people to DWELL upon. It reminds them of what they’ve ALREADY LOST. And that’s what they are afraid to admit: how much is already GONE FOREVER. To even ask this question IMPLIES THAT ONE’S LIFE IS BEING WASTED. It’s like an insult coming from an unknown source. We would be forced to KNOW we are STUPID! Besides, what can we do about it, anyway?

We can do whatever it is that we do best, which is up to each of us to decide. That’s what Black wants returned to us — the decision, the choice. (Well, some who aren’t born rich, *do* get the choice, but only if they’re *lucky*. The lucky ones always forget this.) I don’t think he actually expects to get that choice himself, not on THIS planet, not THIS century — he just doesn’t want to be the only person who KNOWS THERE CAN BE ONE.

A good chunk of the irony regarding THE ABOLITION OF WORK is that the average worker can only understand half the basic gist, and interprets it as laziness. There are people who

hate work because they *are* lazy. But what made them lazy? They were smart enough to see that there is no meaning to what most of the world is doing on auto-pilot... but not smart enough to realize that they have their own meaning in the back of their minds, or hidden in their drawers.

It's precisely because we are NOT lazy that we want to QUIT WORKING — *jesus*, we've got WORK to do if we don't want to WASTE OUR LIVES on some JOB! Black has had to support himself, to work for the Conspiracy just like anybody else. His only other choice, if he wants to spend his time on what he does best, is poverty. WHY AREN'T THERE OTHER CHOICES? Because nobody thought of this 500 years ago, that's why. Black's is a long-range project. It's no jack-off. He KNOWS he won't live to see it happen — he'll surely die first, partly because he's had to work so hard.

Indeed, it is our very HATE of the work that keeps us going. Speaking just for myself, I want REVENGE for all the years they've ALREADY TAKEN. They've extorted 3/4's of my waking hours, half my dreams, and have no doubt shaved 20 years off my lifetime thanks to hypertension, stress, etc. I WILL DIE OF WORK. Even if I can eventually make a living off the things I like — i.e., endless rants like this — instead of corporate uselessness, it's STILL ALL WRONG. I SHOULDN'T HAVE TO. I don't mind DOING it — what I mind is the fact that I'm not given a CHOICE.

For the slacker who is also a workaholic, like Black, only the controlled practice of schizophreniatrics can allow one to STAY SANE. No wonder he writes so well. No wonder he churns out all this anti-work work for nothing. HE HAS TO, OR HE WILL GO EVEN MADDER.

And yet, if you look a little closer, it's obvious that Bob must be full of *hope*. It would take an almost superhuman amount of hope for the future to counterbalance his hideously black vision of the present. For him to write THE ABOLITION OF WORK implies that he thinks someday it WILL HAPPEN. This certainty demonstrates a hope even deeper than the pit Black finds us all in now.

Black isn't throwing bombs, he's writing books. And that's like going after the Colossus with a pea-shooter. The Colossus

itself NEVER NOTICES a single pea bouncing off his ankles down there. But if enough people see weirdos like Bob blasting away with their pathetic little pea-shooters, and having a *good time* at it, some future race of abnormals may get their act sufficiently together to TIE THE COLOSSUS'S SHOELACES TOGETHER while he is distracted by the sudden fusillade of peas. And once something THAT BIG is down, it's as good as OUT.

Yes... there is HOPE, if not much PAY.

THE ABOLITION OF WORK, probably the most recent piece in here, is a great culmination of... something... Perhaps someday it will be REQUIRED READING in our elementary schools — with simpler words, of course, and with cute illustrations of Care Bears throwing down their tools and briefcases and walking off the job. Perhaps someday history will be divided into “Before Bob” and “After Bob.” Or, perhaps this material will be banned. Perhaps fossilized and forgotten. But somewhere, in some other time and place, hopefully soon, some KID will unearth it, read it and give birth to an even BETTER TERMITE.

*"Anyone, provided that he can be amusing, has the right to talk of himself."*—

BAUDELAIRE

## I'VE GOT A NIETZSCHE TRIGGER FINGER! (A BRAG)

Please allow me to introduce myself...

I am **Black the Knife**, I am **secretly famous**, I have **designer genes**, I'm on a macropsychotic diet, I'm anarchorexic, I underwent paleolithium treatment, I'm the 6-Pac-Man! I not only know Who Wrote the Book of Love, I edited out the mushy parts! I practice **satantric** yoga, I graduated Summa Cum Loudmouth from Miskatonic University, I'm feeling my Quixotes! I taught Mao Zedong to swim: I taught Hitler to hang wallpaper: I taught **Anne Sullivan** how to say "water": I taught "Bob" how to **inhale**. I broke the common code, I **tripped** the Great Leap Forward!

I wrote my **own** scriptures, the **Darth Vedas**. Everywhere I go, **cargo cults** spring up in my wake, I smoke Potlatch! I drew attention to the **savant** problem, I stomp strip-minders and bully banal-retentives, I put the satire back into satyriasis, I demand special privileges for **everybody**. I cut the deck all the way down to **steerage**. I threw Snowballs at Napoleon — I revealed that Reagan's makeup is Khmer rouge — I play James Brady's **skull** like a **piccolo**. A malchemist, I turn gold into lead, I'm impropertied, I run a Duck Soup kitchen, I showed that Aquarius is **not** a Roman queer. As for the family I say, "Inc'est la vie!"

I perform **cynicalisthenics**, I exorcise without even working up a **sweat**, I run on **dialectricity**, I go **whole-hog-wild**! I said "Yo' Mama!" to Dada! I say "Fuck 'em even if they **can** take a joke!" After My Dinner With Andre Breton he got his just desserts! I got "Doktors for 'Bob'" to write me a '**scrip** — with **unlimited refills**. I took an Eris Poll and won't give it back! I organized Detournement of Roses, I flung the **ne plus ultra**-left against **de rigeur mortis**, I tell everyone not to do what I say! I'm behind the **odd**-ball, my ancestor was Putdown Man! Judge Crater freed me on my **own recognizance**, I ask: "What would Harpo say?"

For me, **know** ain't nothing but **no** misspelled, and all cretins are liars. I go-for-baroque, I'm a lowlife hierarch, I picked the Locke and entered the Avant-Garden of Eden. I got Spartacus to take the rap for me! I'm the heavyweight Light-Bringer, I'm the out-of-court jester who **won't** settle, I up the vigilante, I'm a law unto myself but break it anyway! I made a forced landing on the Moebius Strip and now I want to know, which side are **you** on?

## **THE SPIRIT OF THE TZARA LIVES ON!**

(1982)

# I. THE ABOLITION OF WORK (1980, 1985)

“Abolition” originated as a speech at the Gorilla Grotto in San Francisco, an “adult play environment,” in February 1981. Proprietor Gary Warne, who later became a policeman, has denounced the event as the worst spectacle he’s ever staged, and he must have meant it since he later had his goons beat me up. Intrigued by the posters of the Last International (see II. below), Warne challenged me to “put your foot where your mouth is.” I put it somewhere else. The exclusion of a noisy group of punks who, at my instigation, tried to get in without paying was only one of the evening’s diversions.

Five years later I revised and greatly expanded the spiel into the following essay, while retaining, I think, much of its feel as a speech. It has pride of place because I still think, as many of the other texts assert in particular contexts, that *work* as the most fundamental negation of freedom is an institution that must be addressed, and overcome, by anyone pretending to have an interest in liberty. Anyone who ignores or evades the issue of work itself may well be a “libertarian” (or for that matter a Marxist) but he is no libertarian.



## THE ABOLITION OF WORK

No one should ever work.

Work is the source of nearly all the misery in the world. Almost any evil you'd care to name comes from working or from living in a world designed for work. In order to stop suffering, we have to stop working.

That doesn't mean we have to stop doing things. It does mean creating a new way of life based on play; in other words, a *ludic* revolution. By "play" I mean also festivity, creativity, conviviality, commensality, and maybe even art. There is more to play than child's play, as worthy as that is. I call for a collective adventure in generalized joy and freely interdependent exuberance. Play isn't passive. Doubtless we all need a lot more time for sheer sloth and slack than we ever enjoy now, regardless of income or occupation, but once recovered from employment-induced exhaustion nearly all of us want to act. Oblomovism and Stakhanovism are two sides of the same debased coin.

The ludic life is totally incompatible with existing reality. So much the worse for "reality," the gravity hole that sucks the vitality from the little in life that still distinguishes it from mere survival. Curiously — or maybe not — all the old ideologies are conservative because they believe in work. Some of them, like Marxism and most brands of anarchism, believe in work all the more fiercely because they believe in so little else.

Liberals say we should end employment discrimination. I say we should end employment. Conservatives support right-to-work laws. Following Karl Marx's wayward son-in-law Paul Lafargue I support the right to be lazy. Leftists favor full employment. Like the surrealists — except that I'm not kidding — I favor full *un*employment. Trotskyists agitate for permanent revolution. I agitate for permanent revelry. But if all the ideologues (as they do) advocate work — and not only because they plan to make other people do theirs — they are strangely



reluctant to say so. They will carry on endlessly about wages, hours, working conditions, exploitation, productivity, profitability. They'll gladly talk about anything but work itself. These experts who offer to do our thinking for us rarely share their conclusions about work, for all its saliency in the lives of all of us. Among themselves they quibble over the details. Unions and management agree that we ought to sell the time of our lives in exchange for survival, although they haggle over the price. Marxists think we should be bossed by bureaucrats. Libertarians think we should be bossed by businessmen. Feminists don't care which form bossing takes so long as the bosses are women. Clearly these ideology-mongers have serious differences over how to divvy up the spoils of power. Just as clearly, none of them have any objection to power as such and all of them want to keep us working.

You may be wondering if I'm joking or serious. I'm joking *and* serious. To be ludic is not to be ludicrous. Play doesn't have to be frivolous, although frivolity isn't triviality: very often we ought to take frivolity seriously. I'd like life to be a game — but a game with high stakes. I want to play *for keeps*.

The alternative to work isn't just idleness. To be ludic is not to be quaaludic. As much as I treasure the pleasure of torpor, it's never more rewarding than when it punctuates other pleasures and pastimes. Nor am I promoting the managed time-disciplined safety-valve called "leisure"; far from it. Leisure is nonwork for the sake of work. Leisure is the time spent recovering from work and in the frenzied but hopeless attempt to forget about work. Many people return from vacation so beat that they look forward to returning to work so they can rest up. The main difference between work and leisure is that at work at least you get paid for your alienation and enervation.

I am not playing definitional games with anybody. When I say I want to abolish work, I mean just what I say, but I want to say what I mean by defining my terms in non-idiosyncratic ways. My minimum definition of work is *forced labor*, that is, compulsory production. Both elements are essential. Work is production enforced by economic or political means, by the carrot or the stick. (The carrot is just the stick by other means.) But not all creation is work. Work is never done for its own sake, it's done

on account of some product or output that the worker (or, more often, somebody else) gets out of it. This is what work necessarily is. To define it is to despise it. But work is usually even worse than its definition decrees. The dynamic of domination intrinsic to work tends over time toward elaboration. In advanced work-riddled societies, including all industrial societies whether capitalist or "Communist," work invariably acquires other attributes which accentuate its obnoxiousness.

Usually — and this is even more true in "Communist" than capitalist countries, where the state is almost the only employer and everyone is an employee — work is employment, *i.e.*, wage-labor, which means selling yourself on the installment plan. Thus 95% of Americans who work, work for somebody (or *something*) else. In the USSR or Cuba or Yugoslavia or any other alternative model which might be adduced, the corresponding figure approaches 100%. Only the embattled Third World peasant bastions — Mexico, India, Brazil, Turkey — temporarily shelter significant concentrations of agriculturists who perpetuate the traditional arrangement of most laborers in the last several millennia, the payment of taxes (= ransom) to the state or rent to parasitic landlords in return for being otherwise left alone. Even this raw deal is beginning to look good. *All* industrial (and office) workers are employees and under the sort of surveillance which ensures servility.

But modern work has worse implications. People don't just work, they have "jobs." One person does one productive task all the time on an or-else basis. Even if the task has a quantum of intrinsic interest (as increasingly many jobs don't) the monotony of its obligatory exclusivity drains its ludic potential. A "job" that might engage the energies of some people, for a reasonably limited time, for the fun of it, is just a burden on those who have to do it for forty hours a week with no say in how it should be done, for the profit of owners who contribute nothing to the project, and with no opportunity for sharing tasks or spreading the work among those who actually have to do it. This is the real world of work: a world of bureaucratic blundering, of sexual harassment and discrimination, of bonehead bosses exploiting and scapegoating their subordinates who — by any rational-technical criteria — should

be calling the shots. But capitalism in the real world subordinates the rational maximization of productivity and profit to the exigencies of organizational control.

The degradation which most workers experience on the job is the sum of assorted indignities which can be denominated as “discipline.” Foucault has complexified this phenomenon but it is simple enough. Discipline consists of the totality of totalitarian controls at the workplace — surveillance, rotework, imposed work tempos, production quotas, punching in- and out-, etc. Discipline is what the factory and the office and the store share with the prison and the school and the mental hospital. It is something historically original and horrible. It was beyond the capacities of such demonic dictators of yore as Nero and Genghis Khan and Ivan the Terrible. For all their bad intentions they just didn’t have the machinery to control their subjects as thoroughly as modern despots do. Discipline is the distinctively diabolical modern mode of control, it is an innovative intrusion which must be interdicted at the earliest opportunity.

Such is “work.” Play is just the opposite. Play is always voluntary. What might otherwise be play is work if it’s forced. This is axiomatic. Bernie de Koven has defined play as the “suspension of consequences.” This is unacceptable if it implies that play is inconsequential. The point is not that play is without consequences. This is to demean play. The point is that the consequences, if any, are gratuitous. Playing and giving are closely related, they are the behavioral and transactional facets of the same impulse, the play-instinct. They share an aristocratic disdain for results. The player gets something out of playing; that’s why he plays. But the core reward is the experience of the activity itself (whatever it is). Some otherwise attentive students of play, like Johan Huizinga (*Homo Ludens*), define it as game-playing or following rules. I respect Huizinga’s erudition but emphatically reject his constraints. There are many good games (chess, baseball, Monopoly, bridge) which are rule-governed but there is much more to play than game-playing. Conversation, sex, dancing, travel — these practices aren’t rule-governed but they are surely play if anything is. And rules can be *played with* at least as readily as anything else.

Work makes a mockery of freedom. The official line is that we all have rights and live in a democracy. Other unfortunates who

aren't free like we are have to live in police states. These victims obey orders or-else, no matter how arbitrary. The authorities keep them under regular surveillance. State bureaucrats control even the smaller details of everyday life. The officials who push them around are answerable only to higher-ups, public or private. Either way, dissent and disobedience are punished. Informers report regularly to the authorities. All this is supposed to be a very bad thing.

And so it is, although it is nothing but a description of the modern workplace. The liberals and conservatives and libertarians who lament totalitarianism are phonies and hypocrites. There is more freedom in any moderately de-Stalinized dictatorship than there is in the ordinary American workplace. You find the same sort of hierarchy and discipline in an office or factory as you do in a prison or monastery. In fact, as Foucault and others have shown, prisons and factories came in at about the same time, and their operators consciously borrowed from each other's control techniques. A worker is a part-time slave. The boss says when to show up, when to leave and what to do in the meantime. He tells you how much work to do and how fast. He is free to carry his control to humiliating extremes, regulating, if he feels like it, the clothes you wear or how often you go to the bathroom. With a few exceptions he can fire you for any reason, or no reason. He has you spied on by snitches and supervisors, he amasses a dossier on every employee. Talking back is called "insubordination," just as if a worker is a naughty child, and it not only gets you fired, it disqualifies you for unemployment compensation. Without necessarily endorsing it for them either, it is noteworthy that children at home and in school receive much the same treatment, justified in their case by their supposed immaturity. What does this say about their parents and teachers who work?

The demeaning system of domination I've described rules over half the waking hours of a majority of women and the vast majority of men for decades, for most of their lifespans. For certain purposes it's not too misleading to call our system democracy or capitalism or — better still — industrialism, but its real names are factory fascism and office oligarchy. Anybody who says these people are "free" is lying or stupid. You are what you do. If you do boring, stupid monotonous work, chances are

you'll end up boring, stupid and monotonous. Work is a much better explanation for the creeping cretinization all around us than even such significant moronizing mechanisms as television and education. People who are regimented all their lives, handed off to work from school and bracketed by the family in the beginning and the nursing home at the end, are habituated to hierarchy and psychologically enslaved. Their aptitude for autonomy is so atrophied that their fear of freedom is among their few rationally grounded phobias. Their obedience training at work carries over into the families *they* start, thus reproducing the system in more ways than one, and into politics, culture and everything else. Once you drain the vitality from people at work, they'll likely submit to hierarchy and expertise in everything. They're used to it.

We are so close to the world of work that we can't see what it does to us. We have to rely on outside observers from other times or other cultures to appreciate the extremity and the pathology of our present position. There was a time in our own past when the "work ethic" would have been incomprehensible, and perhaps Weber was on to something when he tied its appearance to a religion, Calvinism, which if it emerged today instead of four centuries ago would immediately and appropriately be labeled a cult. Be that as it may, we have only to draw upon the wisdom of antiquity to put work in perspective. The ancients saw work for what it is, and their view prevailed, the Calvinist cranks notwithstanding, until overthrown by industrialism — but not before receiving the endorsement of its prophets.

Let's pretend for a moment that work doesn't turn people into stultified submissives. Let's pretend, in defiance of any plausible psychology and the ideology of its boosters, that it has no effect on the formation of character. And let's pretend that work isn't as boring and tiring and humiliating as we all know it really is. Even then, work would *still* make a mockery of all humanistic and democratic aspirations, just because it usurps so much of our time. Socrates said that manual laborers make bad friends and bad citizens because they have no time to fulfill the responsibilities of friendship and citizenship. He was right. Because of work, no matter what we do we keep looking at our

watches. The only thing “free” about so-called free time is that it doesn’t cost the boss anything. Free time is mostly devoted to getting ready for work, going to work, returning from work, and recovering from work. Free time is a euphemism for the peculiar way labor as a factor of production not only transports itself at its own expense to and from the workplace but assumes primary responsibility for its own maintenance and repair. Coal and steel don’t do that. Lathes and typewriters don’t do that. But workers do. No wonder Edward G. Robinson in one of his gangster movies exclaimed, “Work is for saps!”

Both Plato and Xenophon attribute to Socrates and obviously share with him an awareness of the destructive effects of work on the worker as a citizen and as a human being. Herodotus identified contempt for work as an attribute of the classical Greeks at the zenith of their culture. To take only one Roman example, Cicero said that “whoever gives his labor for money sells himself and puts himself in the rank of slaves.” His candor is now rare, but contemporary primitive societies which we are wont to look down upon have provided spokesmen who have enlightened Western anthropologists. The Kapauku of West Irian, according to Posposil, have a conception of balance in life and accordingly work only every other day, the day of rest designed “to regain the lost power and health.” Our ancestors, even as late as the eighteenth century when they were far along the path to our present predicament, at least were aware of what we have forgotten, the underside of industrialization. Their religious devotion to “St. Monday” — thus establishing a *de facto* five-day week 150-200 years before its legal consecration — was the despair of the earliest factory owners. They took a long time in submitting to the tyranny of the bell, predecessor of the time clock. In fact it was necessary for a generation or two to replace adult males with women accustomed to obedience and children who could be molded to fit industrial needs. Even the exploited peasants of the *ancien regime* wrested substantial time back from their landlords’ work. According to Lafargue, a fourth of the French peasants’ calendar was devoted to Sundays and holidays, and Chayanov’s figures from villages in Czarist Russia — hardly a progressive society — likewise show a fourth or fifth of peasants’ days devoted to repose. Controlling for productivity, we are obviously far behind these backward

societies. The exploited *muzhiks* would wonder why any of us are working at all. So should we.

To grasp the full enormity of our deterioration, however, consider the earliest condition of humanity, without government or property, when we wandered as hunter-gatherers. Hobbes surmised that life was then nasty, brutish and short. Others assume that life was a desperate unremitting struggle for subsistence, a war waged against a harsh Nature with death and disaster awaiting the unlucky or anyone who was unequal to the challenge of the struggle for existence. Actually, that was all a projection of fears for the collapse of government authority over communities unaccustomed to doing without it, like the England of Hobbes during the Civil War. Hobbes' compatriots had already encountered alternative forms of society which illustrated other ways of life — in North America, particularly — but already these were too remote from their experience to be understandable. (The lower orders, closer to the condition of the Indians, understood it better and often found it attractive. Throughout the seventeenth century, English settlers defected to Indian tribes or, captured in war, refused to return. But the Indians no more defected to white settlements than Germans climb the Berlin Wall from the west.) The “survival of the fittest” version — the Thomas Huxley version — of Darwinism was a better account of economic conditions in Victorian England than it was of natural selection, as the anarchist Kropotkin showed in his book *Mutual Aid, A Factor of Evolution*. (Kropotkin was a scientist — a geographer — who'd had ample involuntary opportunity for fieldwork whilst exiled in Siberia: he knew what he was talking about.) Like most social and political theory, the story Hobbes and his successors told was really unacknowledged autobiography.

The anthropologist Marshall Sahlins, surveying the data on contemporary hunter-gatherers, exploded the Hobbesian myth in an article entitled “The Original Affluent Society.” They work a lot less than we do, and their work is hard to distinguish from what we regard as play. Sahlins concluded that “hunters and gatherers work less than we do; and, rather than a continuous travail, the food quest is intermittent, leisure abundant, and there is a greater amount of sleep in the daytime per capita per year than in any other condition of society.” They worked an

average of four hours a day, assuming they were “working” at all. Their “labor,” as it appears to us, was skilled labor which exercised their physical and intellectual capacities; unskilled labor on any large scale, as Sahlins says, is impossible except under industrialism. Thus it satisfied Friedrich Schiller’s definition of play, the only occasion on which man realizes his complete humanity by giving full “play” to both sides of his twofold nature, thinking and feeling. As he put it: “The animal *works* when deprivation is the mainspring of its activity, and it *plays* when the fullness of its strength is this mainspring, when superabundant life is its own stimulus to activity.” (A modern version — dubiously developmental — is Abraham Maslow’s counterposition of “deficiency” and “growth” motivation.) Play and freedom are, as regards production, coextensive. Even Marx, who belongs (for all his good intentions) in the productivist pantheon, observed that “the realm of freedom does not commence until the point is passed where labor under the compulsion of necessity and external utility is required.” He never could quite bring himself to identify this happy circumstance as what it is, the abolition of work — it’s rather anomalous, after all, to be pro-worker and anti-work — but we can.

The aspiration to go backwards or forwards to a life without work is evident in every serious social or cultural history of pre-industrial Europe, among them M. Dorothy George’s *England in Transition* and Peter Burke’s *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*. Also pertinent is Daniel Bell’s essay, “Work and Its Discontents,” the first text, I believe, to refer to the “revolt against work” in so many words and, had it been understood, an important correction to the complacency ordinarily associated with the volume in which it was collected, *The End of Ideology*. Neither critics nor celebrants have noticed that Bell’s end-of-ideology thesis signalled not the end of social unrest but the beginning of a new, uncharted phase unconstrained and uninformed by ideology. It was Seymour Lipset (in *Political Man*), not Bell, who announced at the same time that “the fundamental problems of the Industrial Revolution have been solved,” only a few years before the post- or meta-industrial discontents of college students drove Lipset from UC Berkeley to the relative (and temporary) tranquillity of Harvard.



As Bell notes, Adam Smith in *The Wealth of Nations*, for all his enthusiasm for the market and the division of labor, was more alert to (and more honest about) the seamy side of work than Ayn Rand or the Chicago economists or any of Smith's modern epigones. As Smith observed: "The understandings of the greater part of men are necessarily formed by their ordinary employments. The man whose life is spent in performing a few simple operations... has no occasion to exert his understanding... He generally becomes as stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to become." Here, in a few blunt words, is my critique of work. Bell, writing in 1956, the Golden Age of Eisenhower imbecility and American self-satisfaction, identified the unorganized, unorganizable malaise of the 1970's and since, the one no political tendency is able to harness, the one identified in HEW's report *Work in America*, the one which cannot be exploited and so is ignored. That problem is the revolt against work. It does not figure in any text by any laissez-faire economist — Milton Friedman, Murray Rothbard, Richard Posner — because, in their terms, as they used to say on *Star Trek*, "it does not compute."

If these objections, informed by the love of liberty, fail to persuade humanists of a utilitarian or even paternalist turn, there are others which they cannot disregard. Work is hazardous to your health, to borrow a book title. In fact, work is mass murder or genocide. Directly or indirectly, work will kill most of the people who read these words. Between 14,000 and 25,000 workers are killed annually in this country on the job. Over two million are disabled. Twenty to twenty-five million are injured every year. And these figures are based on a very conservative estimation of what constitutes a work-related injury. Thus they don't count the half million cases of occupational disease every year. I looked at one medical textbook on occupational diseases which was 1,200 pages long. Even this barely scratches the surface. The available statistics count the obvious cases like the 100,000 miners who have black lung disease, of whom 4,000 die every year, a much higher fatality rate than for AIDS, for instance, which gets so much media attention. This reflects the unvoiced assumption that AIDS afflicts perverts who could control their depravity whereas coal-mining is a sacrosanct activity beyond question. What the

statistics don't show is that tens of millions of people have their lifespans shortened by work — which is all that homicide means, after all. Consider the doctors who work themselves to death in their 50's. Consider all the other workaholics.

Even if you aren't killed or crippled while actually working, you very well might be while going to work, coming from work, looking for work, or trying to forget about work. The vast majority of victims of the automobile are either doing one of these work-obligatory activities or else fall afoul of those who do them. To this augmented body-count must be added the victims of auto-industrial pollution and work-induced alcoholism and drug addiction. Both cancer and heart disease are modern afflictions normally traceable, directly or indirectly, to work.

Work, then, institutionalizes homicide as a way of life. People think the Cambodians were crazy for exterminating themselves, but are we any different? The Pol Pot regime at least had a vision, however blurred, of an egalitarian society. We kill people in the six-figure range (at least) in order to sell Big Macs and Cadillacs to the survivors. Our forty or fifty thousand annual highway fatalities are victims, not martyrs. They died for nothing — or rather, they died for work. But work is nothing to die for.

Bad news for liberals: regulatory tinkering is useless in this life-and-death context. The federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration was designed to police the core part of the problem, workplace safety. Even before Reagan and the Supreme Court stifled it, OSHA was a farce. At previous and (by current standards) generous Carter-era funding levels, a workplace could expect a random visit from an OSHA inspector once every 46 years.

State control of the economy is no solution. Work is, if anything, more dangerous in the state-socialist countries than it is here. Thousands of Russian workers were killed or injured building the Moscow subway. Stories reverberate about covered-up Soviet nuclear disasters which make Times Beach and Three-Mile Island look like elementary-school air-raid drills. On the other hand, deregulation, currently fashionable, won't help and will probably hurt. From a health and safety standpoint, among others, work was at its worst in the days when the economy most closely approximated laissez-faire.

Historians like Eugene Genovese have argued persuasively that — as antebellum slavery apologists insisted — factory wage-workers in the Northern American states and in Europe were worse off than Southern plantation slaves. No rearrangement of relations among bureaucrats and businessmen seems to make much difference at the point of production. Serious enforcement of even the rather vague standards enforceable in theory by OSHA would probably bring the economy to a standstill. The enforcers apparently appreciate this, since they don't even try to crack down on most malefactors.

What I've said so far ought not to be controversial. Many workers are fed up with work. There are high and rising rates of absenteeism, turnover, employee theft and sabotage, wildcat strikes, and overall goldbricking on the job. There may be some movement toward a conscious and not just visceral rejection of work. And yet the prevalent feeling, universal among bosses and their agents and also widespread among workers themselves is that work itself is inevitable and necessary.

I disagree. It is now possible to abolish work and replace it, insofar as it serves useful purposes, with a multitude of new kinds of free activities. To abolish work requires going at it from two directions, quantitative and qualitative. On the one hand, on the quantitative side, we have to cut down massively on the amount of work being done. At present most work is useless or worse and we should simply get rid of it. On the other hand — and I think this the crux of the matter and the revolutionary new departure — we have to take what useful work remains and transform it into a pleasing variety of game-like and craft-like pastimes, indistinguishable from other pleasurable pastimes, except that they happen to yield useful end-products. Surely that shouldn't make them *less* enticing to do. Then all the artificial barriers of power and property could come down. Creation could become recreation. And we could all stop being afraid of each other.

I don't suggest that most work is salvageable in this way. But then most work isn't worth trying to save. Only a small and diminishing fraction of work serves any useful purpose independent of the defense and reproduction of the work-system and its political and legal appendages. Twenty years ago, Paul and Percival Goodman estimated that just five percent

of the work then being done — presumably the figure, if accurate, is lower now — would satisfy our minimal needs for food, clothing, and shelter. Theirs was only an educated guess but the main point is quite clear: directly or indirectly, most work serves the unproductive purposes of commerce or social control. Right off the bat we can liberate tens of millions of salesmen, soldiers, managers, cops, stockbrokers, clergymen, bankers, lawyers, teachers, landlords, security guards, ad-men and everyone who works for them. There is a snowball effect since every time you idle some bigshot you liberate his flunkys and underlings also. Thus the economy *implodes*.

Forty percent of the workforce are white-collar workers, most of whom have some of the most tedious and idiotic jobs ever concocted. Entire industries, insurance and banking and real estate for instance, consist of nothing but useless paper-shuffling. It is no accident that the “tertiary sector,” the service sector, is growing while the “secondary sector” (industry) stagnates and the “primary sector” (agriculture) nearly disappears. Because work is unnecessary except to those whose power it secures, workers are shifted from relatively useful to relatively useless occupations as a measure to assure public order. Anything is better than nothing. That’s why you can’t go home just because you finish early. They want your *time*, enough of it to make you theirs, even if they have no use for most of it. Otherwise why hasn’t the average work week gone down by more than a few minutes in the last fifty years?

Next we can take a meat-cleaver to production work itself. No more war production, nuclear power, junk food, feminine hygiene deodorant — and above all, no more auto industry to speak of. An occasional Stanley Steamer or Model-T might be all right, but the auto-eroticism on which such pestholes as Detroit and Los Angeles depend is out of the question. Already, without even trying, we’ve virtually solved the energy crisis, the environmental crisis and assorted other insoluble social problems.

Finally, we must do away with far and away the largest occupation, the one with the longest hours, the lowest pay and some of the most tedious tasks around. I refer to *housewives* doing housework and child-rearing. By abolishing wage-labor and achieving full unemployment we undermine the sexual

division of labor. The nuclear family as we know it is an inevitable adaptation to the division of labor imposed by modern wage-work. Like it or not, as things have been for the last century or two it is economically rational for the man to bring home the bacon, for the woman to do the shitwork to provide him with a haven in a heartless world, and for the children to be marched off to youth concentration camps called "schools," primarily to keep them out of Mom's hair but still under control, but incidentally to acquire the habits of obedience and punctuality so necessary for workers. If you would be rid of patriarchy, get rid of the nuclear family whose unpaid "shadow work," as Ivan Illich says, makes possible the work-system that makes *it* necessary. Bound up with this no-nukes strategy is the abolition of childhood and the closing of the schools. There are more full-time students than full-time workers in this country. We need children as teachers, not students. They have a lot to contribute to the ludic revolution because they're better at playing than grown-ups are. Adults and children are not identical but they will become equal through interdependence. Only play can bridge the generation gap.

I haven't as yet even mentioned the possibility of cutting way down on the little work that remains by automating and cybernizing it. All the scientists and engineers and technicians freed from bothering with war research and planned obsolescence should have a good time devising means to eliminate fatigue and tedium and danger from activities like mining. Undoubtedly they'll find other projects to amuse themselves with. Perhaps they'll set up world-wide all-inclusive multi-media communications systems or found space colonies. Perhaps. I myself am no gadget freak. I wouldn't care to live in a pushbutton paradise. I don't want robot slaves to do everything; I want to do things myself. There is, I think, a place for labor-saving technology, but a modest place. The historical and pre-historical record is not encouraging. When productive technology went from hunting-gathering to agriculture and on to industry, work increased while skills and self-determination diminished. The further evolution of industrialism has accentuated what Harry Braverman called the degradation of work. Intelligent observers have always been aware of this. John Stuart Mill wrote that all the labor-saving inventions ever

devised haven't saved a moment's labor. Karl Marx wrote that "it would be possible to write a history of the inventions, made since 1830, for the sole purpose of supplying capital with weapons against the revolts of the working class." The enthusiastic technophiles — Saint-Simon, Comte, Lenin, B.F. Skinner — have always been unabashed authoritarians also; which is to say, technocrats. We should be more than sceptical about the promises of the computer mystics. *They* work like dogs; chances are, if they have their way, so will the rest of us. But if they have any particularized contributions more readily subordinated to human purposes than the run of high tech, let's give them a hearing.

What I really want to see is work turned into play. A first step is to discard the notions of a "job" and an "occupation." Even activities that already have some ludic content lose most of it by being reduced to jobs which certain people, and only those people are forced to do to the exclusion of all else. Is it not odd that farm workers toil painfully in the fields while their air-conditioned masters go home every weekend and putter about in their gardens? Under a system of permanent revelry, we will witness the Golden Age of the dilettante which will put the Renaissance to shame. There won't be any more jobs, just things to do and people to do them.

The secret of turning work into play, as Charles Fourier demonstrated, is to arrange useful activities to take advantage of whatever it is that various people at various times in fact enjoy doing. To make it possible for some people to do the things they could enjoy it will be enough just to eradicate the irrationalities and distortions which afflict these activities when they are reduced to work. I, for instance, would enjoy doing some (not too much) teaching, but I don't want coerced students and I don't care to suck up to pathetic pedants for tenure.

Second, there are some things that people like to do from time to time, but not for too long, and certainly not all the time. You might enjoy baby-sitting for a few hours in order to share the company of kids, but not as much as their parents do. The parents meanwhile, profoundly appreciate the time to themselves that you free up for them, although they'd get fretful if parted from their progeny for too long. These differences among individuals are what make a life of free play possible. The

same principle applies to many other areas of activity, especially the primal ones. Thus many people enjoy cooking when they can practice it seriously at their leisure, but not when they're just fuelling up human bodies for work.

Third — other things being equal — some things that are unsatisfying if done by yourself or in unpleasant surroundings or at the orders of an overlord are enjoyable, at least for awhile, if these circumstances are changed. This is probably true, to some extent, of all work. People deploy their otherwise wasted ingenuity to make a game of the least inviting drudge-jobs as best they can. Activities that appeal to some people don't always appeal to all others, but everyone at least potentially has a variety of interests and an interest in variety. As the saying goes, "anything once." Fourier was the master at speculating how aberrant and perverse penchants could be put to use in post-civilized society, what he called Harmony. He thought the Emperor Nero would have turned out all right if as a child he could have indulged his taste for bloodshed by working in a slaughterhouse. Small children who notoriously relish wallowing in filth could be organized in "Little Hordes" to clean toilets and empty the garbage, with medals awarded to the outstanding. I am not arguing for these precise examples but for the underlying principle, which I think makes perfect sense as one dimension of an overall revolutionary transformation. Bear in mind that we don't have to take today's work just as we find it and match it up with the proper people, some of whom would have to be perverse indeed. If technology has a role in all this it is less to automate work out of existence than to open up new realms for re/creation. To some extent we may want to return to handicrafts, which William Morris considered a probable and desirable upshot of communist revolution. Art would be taken back from the snobs and collectors, abolished as a specialized department catering to an elite audience, and its qualities of beauty and creation restored to integral life from which they were stolen by work. It's a sobering thought that the Grecian urns we write odes about and showcase in museums were used in their own time to store olive oil. I doubt our everyday artifacts will fare as well in the future, if there is one. The point is that there's no such thing as progress in the world of work; if anything it's just the opposite. We shouldn't hesitate to pilfer the

past for what it has to offer, the ancients lose nothing yet we are enriched.

The reinvention of daily life means marching off the edge of our maps. There is, it is true, more suggestive speculation than most people suspect. Besides Fourier and Morris — and even a hint, here and there, in Marx — there are the writings of Kropotkin, the syndicalists Pataud and Pouget, anarcho-communists old (Berkman) and new (Bookchin). The Goodman brothers' *Communitas* is exemplary for illustrating what forms follow from given functions (purposes), and there is something to be gleaned from the often hazy heralds of alternative/appropriate/intermediate/convivial technology, like Schumacher and especially Illich, once you disconnect their fog machines. The situationists — as represented by Vaneigem's *Revolution of Everyday Life* and in the *Situationist International Anthology* — are so ruthlessly lucid as to be exhilarating, even if they never did quite square the endorsement of the rule of the workers' councils with the abolition of work. Better their incongruity, though, than any extant version of leftism, whose devotees look to be the last champions of work, for if there were no work there would be no workers, and without workers, who would the left have to organize?

So the abolitionists would be largely on their own. No one can say what would result from unleashing the creative power stultified by work. Anything can happen. The tiresome debater's problem of freedom vs. necessity, with its theological overtones, resolves itself practically once the production of use-values is coextensive with the consumption of delightful play-activity.

Life will become a game, or rather many games, but not — as it is now — a zero/sum game. An optimal sexual encounter is the paradigm of productive play. The participants potentiate each other's pleasures, nobody keeps score, and everybody wins. The more you give, the more you get. In the ludic life, the best of sex will diffuse into the better part of daily life. Generalized play leads to the libidinization of life. Sex, in turn, can become less urgent and desperate, more playful. If we play our cards right, we can all get more out of life than we put into it; but only if we play for keeps.

No one should ever work. Workers of the world... *relax!*





## II. THE LAST INTERNATIONAL (1977-1983)

My political debut on the lunatic fringe took the form of a poster project called "The Last International." I never liked the name and inadvertently appropriated it from a former member of For Ourselves (see "Preface to *The Right to Be Greedy*" under IV below) — I met him at my Gorilla Grotto event, actually — who, however, never adopted it for himself. I sometimes used other rubrics, such as those deployed below in "Déclassé(fieds)." My models were one- or two-person poster projects using organizational pseudonyms like Upshot in San Francisco (John and Paula Zerzan) and Aurora in Madison (Scott Polar Bear and Bob Brubaker). My opinions reflected situationist and, to a lesser extent, anarchist influence as refracted by these grouplets and by Detroit's *Fifth Estate*. My purpose was to bypass the media, even the "alternative" ones, with expression *unmediated* by editors, by being for sale, or in any other way, to vent my views in just the way I wanted to, politeness and popularity be damned. I'd been a New Leftist, increasingly restive under the routinism and righteousness of the New Left as it ossified in the 70's, and it was exhilarating to break free. In the beginning my own standpoint was still ultra-leftist — I was interested in council communism, *Processed World's* dogma (see "Circle-A Deceit" under III below) —but the posters were designedly destructive, not constructive.

"Religion as Banality," the only representative of the LI's origins in Ann Arbor, is in part derived from an anonymous poster I circulated in 1976 at Georgetown law school, a Jesuit institution, when I was a disgruntled student there. LI posters are underrepresented in this collection because much of their interest is as visual as it is verbal, and in this format the built-in bias is toward text. (Not that I'm a talented graphic artist — no way! —but I did independently discover and clumsily employ some of the collage techniques which the punks have since made commonplace.) But they've been pilfered for some of the other texts included here.

LI posters have been produced over the years in, I'd guess, the low end of five figures (more than 10,000, but closer to that than to 100,000), including reprints by Gerry Reith in Wyoming and a few hundred Spanish-language versions of "Religion as Banality" which were posted in San Francisco's Hispanic slums, where I lived, *very* cautiously. They've been published in four countries, and will shortly appear in a fifth (Yugoslavia). The irony is that a project which intended to avoid the media has ended up fuelling some of them.

All these texts originated as one-page posters except the last one, "Fighting Words," which appeared as a folder (clandestinely typeset on *Processed World's* equipment). When I moved to Berkeley from San Francisco in fall 1982 I encountered massive jaded indifference in a town that prides itself on its politicization but is, in fact, parochial and passive. And so the poster project faded out. Which is all right. The trick is, without being a quitter, to know when to quit.

## RELIGION AS BANALITY...

*"Everything that is doddering, squint-eyed, infamous, sullyng and grotesque is contained for me in this single word: GOD"*

—Andre Breton

## ...DIVINITY AS TYRANNY

*"If god really existed, it would be necessary to abolish Him"*

—Michael Bakunin

RELIGION IS DECEITFUL, DEPRAVED AND ABSURD — but don't underestimate it. There's a reason this decrepit relic of humanity's infancy still adorns class society. "The powers that be are ordained of God," says St. Paul. Not quite. *God is ordained by the powers that be*. His omnipotence expresses our impotence.

BABBLE ABOUT "THE WAGES OF SIN" serves to cover up *the sin of wages*. We want rights, not rites — sex, not sects. Only Eros and Eris belong in our pantheon. Surely the Nazarene necrophile has had his revenge by now. Remember, pain is just God's way of hurting you.

THE CHURCH (ANY CHURCH) IS CAPITAL'S CONSECRATED COP. Examples: *Christianity* (which is neither catholic nor protestant); *Judaism* (reading the Prophets and raking in the profits); *Islam* (which means "submission") —plus all farcically fashionable Oriental mysticisms pushed by greedy gurus with lice in their beards.

FROM IRAN TO IRELAND, from Madrid to Miami, from the West Bank to West Virginia the faithful fulfill their function, suppressing subjectivity and sexuality in connivance with their eternal ally, the State. "Prisons are built with stones of Law, brothels with bricks of Religion" (Blake).

AS FOR "GOD," suffice to say that absolute power corrupts absolutely. "God has sufficiently revealed His true character by combining the genital organ with the urinary tract" (Brecht). A person without God is like a fish without a bicycle. Be (diabo)logical... curb your dogma. Revolution, not revelation! Belief in God is self-managed mutilation. Why not deny God and affirm *yourself*?

## **GET THEE BEHIND ME, GOD!**

(1976, 1977)

# THE BALLAD OF BRENDA SPENCER

Monday morning, just another day  
Doing everything the teachers say  
Brenda's tired of doing what she's told  
Tired of being young and feeling old  
Brenda Spencer hasn't lost her pride  
She gets off on pedagogicide!

## Chorus:

Hear what Brenda's got to say  
"Sniping livens up my day.  
I don't like Mondays anyway!"

Brenda's tired of following the rules  
Tired of sucking up to evil fools  
Little did the grown-ups realize  
Brenda's gonna cut them down to size!  
Rather than behave herself today  
Brenda blew the principal away!

*Chorus*

Six long hours, half a day  
Brenda held the pigs at bay  
Wanna know the reason why?  
Brenda'd rather kill than die

*Chorus*

All the experts say that Brenda's sick  
They get paid to pull that dirty trick  
Teachers, don't tell Brenda what to do  
She knows how to deal with scum like you  
Ah! the gladness, sadness, madness, fun  
Growing from the barrel of her gun!

*Chorus*

Monday morning, just another day  
Doing everything the teachers say  
Brenda's tired of doing what she's told  
Tired of being young and feeling old  
Brenda Spencer hasn't lost her pride  
She gets off on pedagogicide!

(1979)

# THESES ON GROUCHO MARXISM

## 1

Groucho Marxism, the theory of comedic revolution is much more than a blueprint for crass struggle: like a red light in a window, it illuminates humanity's inevitable destiny, the *declassé* society. G-Marxism is the theory of *permanent revelry*. (Down boy! There, that's a good dogma.)

## 2

The example of the Marx Brothers themselves shows the unity of Marxist theory and practice (for instance, when Groucho insults somebody while Harpo picks his pocket). Moreover, Marxism is dialectical (isn't Chico the classic dialect comedian?). Comedians who fail to synthesize theory and practice (to say nothing of those who fail to sin at all) are un-Marxist. Subsequent comedians, failing to grasp that separation is "the discrete charm of the bourgeoisie," have lapsed into mere pratfalls on the one hand, and mere prattle on the other.

## 3

Because G-Marxism is practical, its achievements can never be reduced to mere humor, entertainment, or even "art." (The aesthetes, after all, are less interested in the appreciation of art than in art that appreciates.) After a genuine Marxist sees a Marx Brothers movie, he tells himself: "If you think that was funny, take a look at your life!"

## 4

Contemporary G-Marxists must resolutely denounce the imitative, vulgar "Marxism" of the Three Stooges, Monty Python,



and Bugs Bunny. Instead of vulgar Marxism, we must return to authentic *Marxist vulgarity*. Rectumfication is likewise in order for those deluded comrades who think “the correct line” is what the cop makes them walk when he pulls them over.

## 5

Class-conscious Marxists (that is, Marxists who are conscious that they have no class) must spurn the anemic, trendy, narcissistic “comedy” of comedic revisionists like Woody Allen and Jules Feiffer. Already the comedic revolution has superseded mere neurosis — it’s ludic but not ludicrous, discriminating but not discriminatory, militant but not military, and adventurous but not adventurist. Marxists realize that today you have to look into a funhouse mirror to see the way you really are.

## 6

Although not entirely lacking in glimmers of Marxist insight, socialist (sur)realism must be distinguished from G-Marxism. It is true that Salvador Dali once gave Harpo a harp made out of barbed wire; however, there is no evidence that Harpo ever played it.

## 7

Above all, it is essential to renounce and revile all comedic sectarianism such as that of the equine Trots. As is well-known, Groucho repeatedly proposed sex but opposed sects. For Groucho, then, there was a difference between being a Trot and being hot to trot. Further, the Trot slogan “Wages for Horsework” smacks of reform, not revelry. Trot efforts to claim *A Day at the Races* and *Horsefeathers* for their tendency must be indignantly rejected; in truth, *National Velvet* is more their speed.

## 8

The burning issue confronting G-Marxists today is *the party question*, which — naive, reductionist “Marxists” to the contrary — is more than just “Why wasn’t I invited?” That never stopped Groucho! Marxists need their own disciplined vanguard party, since they’re rarely welcome at anybody else’s.

## 9

Guided by the Marxist leader-dogmas of *misbehaviorism* and *hysterical materialism*, inevitably the masses will embrace, not only G-Marxism, but also each other.

## 10

Groucho Marxism, then, is the *tour de farce* of comedy. As Harpo is reliably reported to have said:

“ ”

In other words, comedy is riotous or it is nothing! So much to do, so many to do it to! On your Marx, get set — go!

**BORED AGAIN?** Why not rattle your cage? I propose a dialog of the disaffected, a conspiracy of the equals, a politics of pleasure. Ours is the *anomic power* of negative thinking and corrosive laughter. The unruly amongst the institutionalized have only themselves — and possibly each other. Let’s confer. The choice is sedition or sedation. Any number can play.

(1979)



## **GET CLEAR!**

# **(ASS)HOLISM**

Recent studies suggest that consciousness is carcinogenic. After a survey of the ethics of entropy, the following topics receive terminal treatment: (1) Dying as a process of personal growth; (2) Charnel knowledge; (3) Thanatotherapy (with emphasis on Adolfing and “terminal scream” therapy); (4) Auto-necrophilia for the Me Generation. Mentor: Rev. Jim Jones, Posthumous Prof. of Thanatology.

### ***WHOLISTIC WEALTH***

This course has helped hundreds of doctors, lawyers and other parasites to feel okay about being obscenely rich. Material things are but *Maya* (= illusion) —still, they *are* your reward for virtue in a previous life. Learn to exploit your inner riches while holding on to your outer ones. Don't share the wealth, share the experience! (Tuition is tax-deductible.)

### ***BEYOND VEGETARIANISM: NEW PATHS IN PRIVATION***

Gave up meat but still feel guilty? So you should! Since you are what you eat, eventually every vegetarian turns cannibal. This course introduces you to inanimate eating. You too can suck rocks and learn to like it! The course is a prerequisite to ANAEROBIC STASIS (“Good health through hypoventilation”), which explains how to eke out a miserable existence without immoral exploitation of the atmosphere.

### ***NEW AGE POLITICS***

Recent developments in decentralized degradation and appropriate technocracy. Facilitator and Zen demagogue Jerry Brown will demonstrate the feasibility of harnessing politicians as a source of wind power. A Marin Corpse recruiter will appear

on behalf of the Baloney Alliance to enlist no-nukes narcs and pacifist police. Others to be announced after security precautions are finalized.

### ***In the Flow***

THE ADDLED AGE OF AQUARIUS IS OVER. Wishing away the holistic horror of everyday life didn't work. We were suckers to buy back parodies of our dreams of total transfiguration from holistic hucksters, consciousness con-men and awareness entrepreneurs. Their "alternative life-styles" only offer *less of more of the same*.

THERE'S NOTHING NEW about a New Age of mysticism, masochism and money. "We ought not to act and speak as though we were asleep" (Heraclitus). The astrologers have only predicted the future; the point is to create it. *Paradise is possible*. Don't burn out, don't sell out, *break* out. Why wallow in escapism when we can *really escape*?

(1979)

# BECAUSE OF LAWS

*(For Jim Wheat)*

*Because of laws* it is illegal —  
To acquit yourself with conviction;  
To sell yourself short for too long;  
To finish going down on an upstart;  
To capitalize on communism;  
To pull my leg on the other hand;  
To have landlords rent;  
To be Stirner than Max without failing Marx;  
To con pros poetically with determinate sentence;  
To keep the ball in your court without ending up in one;  
To be more like yourself than you've ever been before.

(1981)



## THE CORRECT LINE

A spectre is haunting Terra: the spectre of comedy. East and West, “left” and right, power’s pimps and property’s property (businessmen and bureaucrats, socialists and socialites, commissars and clergymen, Coke and Pepsi) — all the fat cats and phonies and their marching morons and stultified tools are as one in their efforts to exorcise the mockery of those who fly in *under their radar*. Banished or bridled again and again, the Trickster always gives them the slip in the end, wearing countless faces as the institutionalized slip on their faeces. They’ll *never* catch the Roadrunner!

And now the time has come “to make the silence audible” ...with the radio *off*. Ragnarok ’n’ roll is here to stay. “Take back the night”? Why settle for half-measures? For the unbossed and unbought it is better to score than to keep score, better to prey than to pray. Let all she-and-hedonists shit-can the (sub)humanists; let hungry Morlocks everywhere eat the rich; let the ludic and the Luddites put an end to the supreme servitude *work*. The depressive have reason to dispose of the repressive. Why not take the socio path? It leads to a leaderless life of permanent revelry beyond the Reality Principle.

As the economy implodes and the culture corrodes and the old world erodes, as even the oblivious incline toward Oblomovism, as time runs out on the time-clock — with Armageddon imminent, the sentients and sensitives had better make sure that the Antichrist *wins*. It’s autism against *oughtism*! Necronomics is bankrupt: statism is withering away. This is the fight to the finish between Them and Us, between gorillas and guerrillas, quantity and quality, Marxists and Groucho Marxists, the inane and the insane, Locke and Loki, the Syndicate and the cynical, the Trots and the hot-to-trot, common sense and communal sensuality, Catholics and catholics, Protestants and protestants, the ruling class and the *declassé*, the static and the stateless, the negation of pleasure — and the pleasure of negation. All reet!



Confused by Cartesian, Manichean, left brain/right brain structuralist binary oppositions crosshatching the wrinkles on your brain? Would you hesitate to play chess with Karen Quinlan? Your prudence (but not your prudishness) is commendable and, hopefully, not commandable. What you need is a different (but not diffident) industrial-strength ideology, a foray into *fuckturalism*, the (non-illuminist) illumination of *north-brain* consciousness, a plunge into 3-chord politics and nothing-leftism. Too much is enough! Self-help means help yourself! Pursue liberation through logosexuality: see for yourself how cunning-linguistics adds a whole new dimension to oral sex. Use the power of absurdity to expose the absurdity of power. You say you hear a different drummer? Maybe so — but is the rhythm *syncopated*? Give yourself permission to feel okay about trashing the Totality *and* its countless licensed loyal oppositions, its artfully engineered illusory alternatives to itself. Accept no substitutes!

You're entitled, after millenia of civilization, after centuries of industrialism, after decades of schooling, after years of television, after months of rock music, after minutes of reading — you're entitled to the *straight poop*. And here it is, the question to the answer you've been hearing all your life, the *correct line*:

## INCORRECT

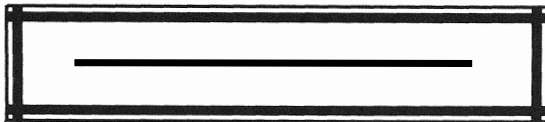
Sedation  
Vanguard parties  
Freedom of religion  
Legal practice  
Behaviorism  
Meditation  
Leninism  
Praying  
Free trade  
Counter-culture

## CORRECT

Sedition  
After-hours parties  
Freedom from religion  
Target practice  
Misbehaviorism  
Premeditation  
Lennonism  
Playing  
Rough trade  
Countering culture

Political movements	Pelvic movements
Dad	Dada
Revelation	Revolution
Wars	Whores
Classical liberals	Rococo radicals
Reason	Treason
Sects	Sex
Capital punishment	The punishment of capital
Atomic power	Anomic power
Lawyers	Scofflawyers
Homophobia	Nomophobia
Separation of church and state	Abolition of church and state
Consultants	Insultants
Elections	Erections
Force	Farce
Historical materialism	Hysterical materialism
Racism	Erase-ism
Neurotics	Erotics
Positive thinking	Positive drinking
Libertarians	Libertines
TV	TV's
Theologians	Neologians
Foreign affairs	Foreign affairs

LEVITY IS THE 4TH DIMENSION!



the correct line  
(1981)



# DÉCLASSÉ(FIEDS)

**POSITIONS AVAILABLE:** Prone or supine. To get on — or to get it on? To pay or to play? To get up or to get it up? To work or to shirk? Don't downsize desire! There is no life after work. *Workers Against Work.*

**ATTENTION NEW (W)AGEISTS:** A good mantra is hard to find. The Aquarian Age: the Wholocaust. *Godless Communists* (attn: Sufi Sales, Dementor).

**FAILING MARX:** Maoists: Marxist Moonies. Trotskyism: Stalinism's loyal opposition. Leftism: Too many causes, not enough effects. Why not go so far left you've left the left behind? The left is gauche, make your own revolution! *Nothing-Leftists.*

**"MASTERS WITHOUT SLAVES"** needed to complete passionless series: polygynes, bacchantes, licentiates, and tetratones (will consider tritones.) No pets (anti-lions OK). *Gang of Fourier.*

**THE LIBERAL:** Whenever anybody mentions revolvers, he reaches for his culture. Progress? The future is passe. Why let culture take its course? *Misanthropologists.*

**SAME SEEKS SAME.** Solipsist seeks self for superfluous symmetry. Let's be alone together. *Involutionaries.*

**LEISURE:** How to make play work. Your place or Mein Kampf? Play for keeps! *Misbehaviorists.*

**(H)EL(L), SALVADOR?** Peace is too important to be left to the pacifists, much less left to the left. Less passivism, more pacifism! *Peacemongers.*

**TO BE SCHOOLED** is to be ruled. Indulge in the pleasures of pedanticide — don't deny yourself the delights of didacticide! Instead of terminating prejudiced teachers, why not terminate teachers "with prejudice"? Those who can, do; those who can't, teach — and those who don't want to, fight back! Better Brenda than Herbert Spencer! *Pedagogicides.*

**MORALISM:** Service to causes... causes servitude. The I's have it! *Marxist-Stirnerists.*

**NEW WAVE:** Withered on the vinyl. Sophisticated, eh? To be bored is to be boring. It's art, but is it good? *Pata-Poseurs.*

**IN A BAD STATE?** There aren't any good ones. The superstructure is base. Smash lexism! *Impoliticians.*

**COUPLES:** Tactical nuclear families, Prostitution: buysexuality. Less sexism, more sex! Don't let them revoke your licentiousness. *Orgastronomes.*

**LAW:** The only cause of crime; first and foremost of the "hurting professions." Why not try robbery for "hands-up" experience? Crime is self-help antinomianism. Lifeless law — or the lawless life? You be the judge. *Nomophobes*

**SPACE COLONIZATION?** Better start with the vacuum between your ears. The Enterprise *is* a garbage scow. Instead of lower gravity, why not higher levity? Futurism is reactionary. Why not science friction? The Empire strikes out... may the farce be with you! Phrases on stun! *Artaud D2.*

**MAN BITES GOD!** Wafer Madness, a sacramental illness. See the Polish Pope turn wine into water! Deicide is a victimless crime. *Primates.*

**JUSTICE** we thought: instead of due process, *der Prozess*. To nonsuit the 3-piece set (aka the Tweed Ring) be plaintive, not plaintiff... make a criminal appeal! *Transsexuals.*

**PULL THE PLUG** on radio evangelists. Less aural sects, more oral sex! *Ranters.*

(1981-1982)

# INS & OUTS

Affection is **OUT**.

Affectation is **IN**.

To “go for broke” is **OUT**.

Going broke is **IN**.

Mentation is **OUT**.

Regimentation is **IN**.

Creativity is **OUT**.

Creationism is **IN**.

Dope is **OUT**.

Dopes are **IN**.

Strikes are **OUT**.

First-strikes are **IN**.

“Back to the land” is **OUT**.

Backs-to-the-wall is **IN**.

Reality is **OUT**.

Realty is **IN**.

The obscene is **OUT**.

The “scene” is **IN**.

The Medflies are **OUT**.

The Fed lies are **IN**.

Diatribes are **OUT**.

“The tribes” are **IN**.

Intoxication is **OUT**.

Toxicity is **IN**.

The “boat people” are **OUT**

The miss-the-boat  
people are **IN**.

Punk is **OUT**.

Bunk is **IN**.

Wilhelm Reich is **OUT**.

The Third Reich is **IN**.

Radicals are **OUT**.

Radiation is **IN**.

69 is **OUT**.

666 is **IN**.

Bohemianism is **OUT**.

The Bohemian Grove is **IN**.

"Making it" is **IN**.  
Making somebody else is **OUT**.

Polish workers are **IN**.  
American workers are **OUT**.

9-digit ZIP codes are **IN**.  
3-digit IQ's are **OUT**.

Castration is **IN**.  
Castigation is **OUT**.

Designer jeans are **IN**.  
Superior genes are **OUT**.

Conservatism is **IN**.  
Conservation is **OUT**.

Couplism is **IN**.  
Copulation is **OUT**.

Positive thinking is **IN**.  
Positive drinking is **OUT**.

Nationalism is **IN**.  
Insubordinationism is **OUT**.

Nukes are **IN**.  
Kooks are **OUT**.

The space program is **IN**.  
Spacing out your programming is **OUT**.

Organic is **IN**.  
Orgasmic is **OUT**.

Realpolitik is **IN**.  
The impolitic are **OUT**.

Celibacy is **IN**.  
Celebration is **OUT**.

Libertarians are **IN**.  
Liberty is **OUT**.

Hero-worship is **IN**.  
Heroism is **OUT**.

Poseurs like you are **IN**.  
Proseurs like me are **OUT**.

Ronald Reagan is **IN**.  
Tiny little guns are (alas!) **OUT**.

Getting the In's out and the Out's in still leaves the inside in and the outside out. The inside is always the sin side. The outside is always out of it. To turn the world inside out, smash the mirror — or step through it... to the **other** side of the Moebius strip.

(1981, 1982)

# Can You Tell A Cutthroat From A Tracheotomist?

## 20 QUESTIONS

1. If a fetus is a person, why does it look like a steamed prawn?
2. Are billboards “commuter programming”?
3. Were the Pilgrims the first boat people?
4. Does the Silent Majority believe in Harpo Marxism?
5. Will banning cheap handguns produce a better class of criminal?
6. Haven't punks become boring *young* farts?
7. Do pooper-scooper ordinances mean more law, less ordure?
8. If Jesus is coming again, what is His refractory period?
9. If there's a right to property, where can I sign up for mine?
10. Why do vegetarians bite their nails?
11. Can Reagan tell the truly needy from the truly greedy?
12. Aren't bosses the *real* “Time Bandits”?
13. If God wanted us to suck cock, wouldn't He have given us lips?
14. Do whales cause cancer?
15. Is Reaganomics the science of holočauſt-benefit analysis?
16. Did the Polish Pope attend the College of Cardinals on a football scholarship?
17. Why do people who say “there's no free lunch” have expense accounts?
18. If sisterhood is powerful, shouldn't feminists douche more often?
19. Why don't people take frivolity seriously?
20. Why not cut class society?



**IF YOU**

would like to see less posers and more opposers;  
recoilless from rifles than you used to;  
are too poor for the ritual;  
throw temper tantrics;  
are more tactile than tactful;  
think Christianity is the Greatest Story Ever Sold;  
long for an alternative alternative;  
have no patience with patients;  
enjoy "6669";  
oppose a first strike and propose a general strike;  
you already know that

**THEN**

### **Arbeit Is Worse Than Our Bark**

(1982)

# **SURREALIST DESTINIES: MIX AND MATCH!**

Andre Breton	Diplomat
Steve Schwartz	Catholic devotional painter
Aime Cesaire	<i>Knight (soil)</i>
Louis Aragon	Wrote a long book on Art
Herbert Read	Communist Party official
Octavio Paz	Trade journalist
Salvador Dali	Racial nationalist

(1982)



# FIGHTING WORDS

## An Epigrammar

“‘Fighting’ words — those which by their very utterance inflict injury or tend to incite an immediate breach of the peace.” — *Chaplinsky v. New Hampshire*, 315 U.S. 568, 571-72 (1942)

“Every quotation is also an interpretation.” —Georg Lukacs, *History and Class Consciousness*

### IDEOLOGUES

“The nihilist says: I want a *siecle* with *fins* on it.” — ALFRED JARRY CORNELIUS

“Libertarians do time/motion studies in the bathroom.” — KURT ANGLO-SAXON

“And they do cost-benefit analyses in the bedroom!” — JODIE FÖSTER-NIETZSCHE

“The Marxists have only changed the world; the point, however, is atop their heads.” —BAKUNIN EGGS

“Less laissez-faire, more savoir-faire!” —AYN KRUGGERAND

“You want ‘Anarchy Now’? I wish I had your patience.” — PETRONIUS ARBEITER

“‘Free market,’ they say — but why do they always market up?” —OYSTERS ROCKEFELLER IV

“Everything left and right say about each other is true.” —MALCOLM SEX

“Libertarians who don’t believe in paper money are welcome to send me all of theirs.” —LYSERGIC SPOONER

## THE NEWS

“Less gun control, more goon control!” —JUDGE LEARNED HANDGUN (to OLIVER WENDELL OM, JR.)

“Every Argentine who isn’t Peron is supine.” —GEORGE BERNARD PSHAW (to JOHN BULLSHIT and WILLIAM MORASS)

“Don’t give up the sheep!” —REAR ADMIRAL GAUCHO MARX

“Is ‘the Government’s railroad of Bob Avakian’ a sealed boxcar?” —EMMA GOLDBRICK

“Don’t shoot until you see the whites of their skins.” —MARTIN LUTHER KINK, JR. (to GHETTO MARX)

## SEX

“Give me a place to stand, and I will sit on your face.” —VIRGINIA DENTATA (to YONI MITCHELL)

“Do others as you would have them do you.” —FERAL FAWCETT

“Give me liberty, or give me head!” —MÖBIUS DICK (to ANDY WHOREHOLE)

## FAITH

“He who is on the spiritual plane, misses the boat.” —MAHATMA PROPAGANDHI

“If you turn the other cheek, you’ll catch a slap on that side too.” —BRIGAND YOUNG

“Bhagwan, humbug! Go, and Zen no more.” —TOFU MANCHU

“The Rapture? Good riddance!” —ANAL ROBERTS

“Sure the Jews are Christ-killers, but what have they done for us lately?” —GIDEON STRUMPET

“Buddy, can youse paradigm?” —ELMER GENTRY

“Don’t roll away the stone! Leave well enough alone!” —IGNITION DISLOYOLA

## THE “SCENE”

“If you know how to spell ‘poseur,’ you *are* one.” - MORLOCK HOLMES (to GUY D. SKATEBOARD)

“New wave means wearing a safety-pin in your chic.” —  
HAIRY DEBBIE

“History is punk.” —HENRY FNORD

### **OTHER POISON-PENSEES**

“Imitation is the sincerest form of contempt.” — WAT  
TYLENOL

“‘Artists are high strung.’ ‘You mean they should be!’” —  
PSEUDONYMOUS BOSCH and ONAN THE BARBARIAN

“Necessity makes mothers of us all.” — ANNETTE  
PUNCHINELLO (to PATTY DUPE)

“If you’re so rich, why aren’t you smart?” — CHIP SILICONE  
(to MUFFY DIVER)

“It’s better to be mean than average. And it’s fine to be  
coarse!” — JAMES VAGABOND

(1983)

### III: APPEAL TO REASON (1982-1984)

On Labor Day, 1980, I participated in an event I'd helped organize — a take-off on punk political events like “Rock Against Racism” — the Rock Against Work. I met a one-time underground newspaper publisher, John Bryan, who later started a neo-underground paper called *Appeal to Reason* pitched to hippie leftists of the 60's Generation. Bryan liked me and my flyers, although they often grated on his constituency, and let me write a column, ill-named “Appeal to Treason.”

Although there was friction between this reluctant electoral socialist and myself, as might be expected, he provided me with a less fettered forum than anyone else has, notably including the “anarchist” media. I was phasing out flyers at the same time, and newspaper columns, although in form a regression to modes of expression I'd started out to avoid, worked out tolerably well in their stead. Bryan's last issue, using his previous paper name *Open City*, was aimed at the Democratic Convention and included my Con coverage (not reprinted here) as well as “The Political Theology of Ferlinghetti.”





# ANTI-NUCLEAR TERROR, OR, I FEEL A CHILIASM

Several years ago I had a hippie roommate who dismissed punk by saying, "You can't keep announcing the apocalypse for the day after tomorrow." He was right, and not only because punk had the shortest half-life of any counter-culture to date. Fear is a mighty force, especially if there really is reason to be scared shitless, as in the case of anything nuclear. But, even apart from the disabling distress attending the experience, fear has its limits as a motivation, and the Newest Left — the antiwar/anti-nuke opposition — may trip itself up unless it respects them.

Terror — including, but not only the "terrorism" we're trained to selectively abhor — can probably induce almost any response a scaremonger wants, at least for awhile. But it lends itself to some uses much more than others. Historically it's always worked best to buffalo people into war: only recently has fear of war itself overridden fear of the officially anointed Enemy for significant numbers of people in Europe and America.

The irreversibly catastrophic consequences of nuclear war have offered to antiwar activists an insidious temptation to terrorize the terrorists. What is Reagan's shopworn Red Scare compared to worldwide biocide? And any halfwit can see that the nearest nuclear power plant is a menace beside which a few faraway insurgent banana-republicans appear as virtual phantasms, even if you give some credence to Cold War mythology. Turning the tables on our Trilateral tyrants serves them right. But is it right to serve them?

To oversimplify: people can be frightened into doing things to about the same extent they can be coerced into doing them. Force and fear can prevent people from doing most anything they want to. They can also compel the execution of a few fairly simple tasks. But they can't command creativity or imagination. (In the antebellum south, field hands could be whipped into working — up to a point — but slave craftsman enjoyed a great deal of slack, although legally they were equally at the mercy of

their masters. The law oversteps the bounds of workaday reality at its own peril.) You can create a bogeyman easily enough, and the Newest Left has done so, with perhaps more justification than any of its predecessors. *But* (one, two, three) what *are* we fighting for?

Self-induced hysteria can only eventuate in burnout (or sellout). If the antiwar doomsayers at their most extravagant are correct, the world will shortly self-destruct and we needn't concern ourself with petty peripheral problems like statism or class society. Instead, let us wish our successors the cockroaches the best of luck as, freed at last from the ravages of Black Flag, they take their turn trying to evolve to the point they can raise the black flag as their own.

But if — as, operationally, we all assume — neither nuclear holocaust nor ecocide is going to happen in the short run, then there is time, if there is time for anything, to doubt whether frenzy is the shortcut to salvation. You have to wonder about a movement encompassing Republicans for a Nuclear Freeze, Catholics for a Nuclear Freeze, Union Bosses for a Nuclear Freeze, Stalinists for a (unilateral) Nuclear Freeze, Momentarily Out-of-Office Warmongers for a Nuclear Freeze, etc. Are they all under an umbrella — or a circus tent? Such promiscuity perhaps obscures the fundamental difference between those of Us who crave peace, health, freedom and pleasure — and those of Them who, apart from the interest they presumably share with us in avoiding vaporization, make it their (that is to say, business') business to deny our aspirations and who, until ten minutes ago, were the pillars of the System which created this crisis.

It isn't ritual obeisance to various Marxist or other-ist theories which reduce nukes and all other evils from video games to split ends to some demonic abstraction (capitalism, irreligion, the wrong half of the brain, possession of a penis, etc.) that I'm proposing — far from it. That's the kind of (for lack of a better word) thinking that got us into this mess. Anti-nukers are right to defend their insight into the malignity of *nuclearism itself* against various opportunist leftist and/or moralist imperialists who try to annex the issue for their own purposes. But this is not to say that nukes fell on our heads from Mars one day. In fact

they're the product of our own society — indeed, our own country, later joined by assorted Stalinist and nationalist regimes. It's the lowest-common-denominator, moderate favor-traders whose anti-nuclear ardor is naive or hypocritical; not the intransigence of those who only assert the obvious when they point out that nukes are the patricidal children of a nucleogenic society.

When “respectable” anti-nuclear Establishmentarians argue that a freeze is reasonable since, after all, we already have the capacity to exterminate our alleged enemies many times over — doesn't that confirm the utter inadequacy of the electoral freeze-fetish?

Although — even *because* — there is good cause for fear, we must appeal less to fear (and hate) than to love, lust, creative power, untrammelled imagination, hope and desire. What we crave at long last is *life*, not mere miserable survival, which almost certainly we can't have anyway without a radical overturn of institutions and a radical transvaluation of values. Only Pluto, the God of Wealth, disputes his plutonium paternity. I have to agree with what Bob Brubaker has written: “To me, a movement that criticizes daily life without ever mentioning nuclear weapons is far more profound than a movement which criticizes nuclear weapons without ever mentioning everyday life.”

(1982)



## LET US PREY!

Thanks to the Moral Majority, it's again okay to be anti-religious — a *little* bit, anyway. And yet only the grossest grandiose abuses of the radio reactionaries and direct-mail chauvinist pigs come in for even polite criticism. That's too bad, 'cause if you turn the other cheek, you'll probably catch a slap on that side too. When the fundamentalists start piling up faggots around faggots, let's not limit ourselves to deploring the fire code violation.

Face it: the aggressive *elan* of the religious right is running rings around the limited legalism of its enemies. The repressive right is (on the) offensive. The punch-drunk, punch-pulling "progressives" are only reacting. Unlike most who model the adjective, the godly really are radical. They're happy to rewrite or rip up their own revered Constitution. They're out to shatter the social and sexual status quo. They have a (tunnel) vision of a theocratic New Order. They mean business.

The liberals and leftists in contrast are dithering, defensive conservatives — Weimar paralytics unwilling to do unto others what's being done unto them. Why not?

Until recently, leftists regarded any resurrection of the Marxist and Bakuninist critiques of religion as old-fashioned and irrelevant. The fact that "the masses" they profess to serve but secretly despise still largely adhered to a watered-down Christianity didn't disturb the leftist leadership. That was just one more sign of the elect to distinguish the vanguard from the rank and file; one more reminder that the hoi-polloi need to be controlled for their own good.

Certainly such superstitions, if overlooked, proved no obstacle to the officialdom's prime purpose: herding people into its parties and unions. By the 1960's, the left's inheritance of Enlightenment freethought had so far evaporated that "Marxist-Christian dialog" became fashionable. The Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., especially after his martyrdom, assumed totemic

stature, his holy name gracing innumerable and otherwise unchanged streets, schools, parks and buildings. The New Left toyed with mysticism — a tendency which later differentiated into a self-subsistent scam-subculture, the New Age — and collaborated with Quakers, religious liberals and hip Vatican II priests and nuns in antiwar work and various ventures in humanitarian uplift.

Among liberals, the mere *mention* of religion was a breach of good taste as well as a threat to the New Deal coalition which yoked them to the Catholic ethnics. Everything, from the Kennedy cult to the radical-liberal effusions of the National Council of Churches, combined to abort any resumption of the liberal anticlerical tradition of Paine and Jefferson. It isn't easy to hew to Voltairean verities while holding hands with a mini-skirted nun and a black Baptist pastor as you lift up your voices in a chorus of "We Shall Overcome."

The 70's made matters worse. A media-manufactured white ethnic/"hardhat" fad espoused by some opportunist intellectuals further insulated popular piety from the criticism and contempt it deserved. Despite the Berrigan Brothers, despite folk-music masses and other ecumenical cosmetics, the Catholic Church devoted its millions — and its millions of mystified minions — to opposing abortion and imposing morals laws.

The left proved useless. It was busy disintegrating into countless special-interest groups, each aspiring to the envied position of victim-group which the blacks had assumed with such seeming success. The Leninist sects which kept up the revolutionary rhetoric likewise claimed to be the agent of a specialty group, the proletariat, grudgingly augmented with others (everybody had to palliate women, but some could never bring themselves to champion gays), but in all cases the critique of the totality was foresworn. With more leftist organizations but less leftists than a decade before, all that happened was that a few more small-time operations assumed their modest place in the pseudo-pluralist system of constituency politics. The *sine qua non* of this accomodation was of course a tacit understanding to overlook one another's shortcomings, especially the ones common to all. On the defensive and playing

it safe, leftists were about as likely to tackle the Religious Question as, say, the Jewish Question.

As for the liberals... *what* liberals? As Saul Alinsky (it takes one to know one) once said: "A liberal is a guy who leaves the room when an argument turns into a fight." And then there was the Age of Aquarius. (Buddy, can youse paradigm?) The New Agers syncretized the worst mushminded, narcissistic and accomodationist currents of the Counterculture (the New Left at play) into a new religion of resignation. Earlier religious zealots at least checked each other's excesses by exposing and excoriating them. *In the New Age, however, all religions are true.* I'm okay, you're okay. This time the problem is not going to solve itself. No need to dwell on the embarrassment of the recent election, in which liberals strove manfully (and womanfully) to outdo their opponents' devotion to *Kinder, Küche, Kirche* and talked themselves into a richly deserved debacle.

No surprise then that the "scientific socialists" and other left flotsam got caught off (van)guard by the New Right and its militant social conservatism. As usual the intelligentsia, self-appointed servants of history, failed to learn from it and so outsmarted itself. The leftists were so busy studying Liberation Theology that they forget that — from Franco's Carlist shock troops in 1936 to Khomeini's Revolutionary Guards today — always and everywhere the religious fanatics have been the (throat-) cutting edge of reaction.

As teleologues, the liberals, Marxists and anarchists thought that all the trappings of modernity — technology, democracy, humanism, etc. — came as a set. To their bewilderment, the New Right has mounted a massive high-tech propaganda campaign (anticipated, to be sure, by Goebbels) successfully promoting the most absurd and vicious misogynist, sadistic and irrational notions. They never did understand, to their cost, what Adorno and Horkheimer and Marcuse had tried to tell them about the difference between instrumental and substantive rationality. But instead of rethinking their positivist prejudices, leftists quibble over constitutional technicalities which they themselves have done so much to relativize. Like the Cold War liberals of the 50's and 60's, they'll never out-flagwave the right no matter how many of their values they betray.



The secret source of the left's impotence in the face of the upsurge of the recrudescing right is this: they have too much in common. A leftist is someone who shoots himself in the foot once he gets it out of his mouth.

The hard right accuses the left of imposing its "secular humanist" values in the public schools and elsewhere while feigning neutrality. Obviously the right is — what else? —right. Now the meat- and Bible-beaters figure it's *their* turn to rewrite the script to suit their own antediluvian tastes. The liberals pretend that evolutionism is "science" while creationism is "theology," a fine distinction at best. In its *origin*, obviously creationism is Christian. But in its origin, so is evolutionism, a scarcely secularized transubstantiation of the transcendent millennial essence of Christianity, the historical dimension which distinguishes it from other faiths. So what? Surely the kook right is onto something for wondering why birth-control training belongs in compulsory public schools but prayer doesn't. It is possible to take a principled stand against compulsory schooling, *i.e.*, state-enforced thought control, and thus outflank Babbitry altogether. But the leftists and liberals do nothing of the sort.

Max Stirner's reproach is still telling: "Man, your head is haunted; you have wheels in your head!" Religion always represents the permanent possibility of repression. God, the ultimate patriarch and absolute authority, strives to consolidate His dictatorship "on Earth as it is in Heaven." But He has help, not only from the consciously Christian crud, but from everyone who covets His power and emulates His methods. Every vanguard gang is a Jesuit retreat. Every hierarchy microcosmizes the Great Chain of Being. All "militants" belong to the Church Militant.

The left has never jettisoned the humanist moralism it took from Christianity. From Rousseau to Lenin (to say nothing of small fry from Bob Avakian to Mario Cuomo) it preaches guilt, renunciation, martyrdom, self-effacement, obedience, work — in a word, religion. Moralism means the sacrifice of real, tangible individuals and their face-to-face passion groups to abstract extrinsic "causes" and pseudo-communities (the State, the Party, the Proletariat, *la Raza*, Sisterhood, etc. *ad nauseum*).

If God is dead, moralism is the Doomsday Machine which He spitefully bequeathed us.

The craving for community, for the sensation of a sensibility transcending the sterile, calculating reason of the engineers and bookkeepers and planners cannot be satiated by a demeaning religiosity which falls short of full-blooded practical reason; but only by a surrational leap which includes but exceeds it. "Reason is the bound or outward circumference of Energy" (Blake), not the ultimate cop-like Categorical Imperative. Reversing Freud: Where Ego was, Id will be *too*.

Also to be avoided, though, are the nervous artificial sacrileges of the surrealist academics. As Raoul Vaneigem observed, "pissing on the altar is still a way of paying homage to the Church." Above all, under no circumstances commit an act of Art.

Neither sacrificialism, nor any empty "individualism" means anything to the freely in(ter)dependent social individuals who disdain the system along with its friendly enemies. The ideologically possessed, left and right, have always stood in our way — not one another: we all know we want each other.

Not just religious cranks meddling in politics, but *religion* and *politics* themselves pose the permanent problem of what Gibbon called the eternal alliance of Throne and Altar, the Holy Alliance of all authorities and authoritarians. Separation has proved to be a liberal mirage. The only real alternative to theocracy is the *abolition* of church and state alike — because they *are* alike. Let us prey!

(1982, 1985)



## A BUNCH ABALONE

The Diablo Canyon debacle sounded the death-knell of the *official* anti-nuclear movement. Abalone Alliance hierarchs — excuse me, “spokespersons” and “facilitators” — complain that the blockade was trivialized into a media happening. Surprise, surprise! What did the anti-nuclear top brass plot for years to produce at Diablo if not a spectacle?

Abalone’s purpose was never to physically interfere with plant operations but to be photographed appearing to try to. Didn’t it know that in Hollywood the director, not the actors, calls the shots?

Abalone staged a highly-hyped set-piece pseudo-confrontation with no possible purpose but manipulating the media. Obviously those who inform the authorities of their illegal intentions preclude in advance any kind of real direct action, nonviolent or otherwise, to shut down the plant. All along Abalone was looking over its shoulder at the journalists and politicians from whom anti-nuclear deliverance was sought. But the Hearst press and the rest aren’t as easily conned as they were in the 60’s; evidently they learned more from that mythenshrouded past than Abalone’s hippie retreats have.

No, this time the manipulators themselves got manipulated. And they had it coming — what with Jackson Browne-nosing around, and with *anti*-nuke checkpoints ringing the reactor to protect it from anti-nuclear activists reluctant to submit to “nonviolence” indoctrination and Abalone orders. In other places, Abalone’s clone/counterparts have actually turned refractory elements over to the police. No wonder the Diablo turnout was pitifully low... why get your head busted for nothing more than a changing of the guard?

Abalone and PG&E feel exactly the same about Diablo: each says that the reactor is its private property, with “No Trespassing” permitted. Just like PG&E — or the Pentagon; or the Catholic Church; or any Leninist sect — Abalone has its elite

of organizers, enforcers and celebrities, just as it has its rank-and-file of passive, obedient anonymities. (This despite cult reverence rendered to the ideas of “democracy” and “decentralization.”) At an Abalone-owned demo you have it *their* way on a take-it-or-leave-it basis — or else. Thus New Age participatory passivity mirrors the miserabilist powerlessness of prevalent social relations. With enemies like Abalone, PG&E and its bourgeois/bureaucratic backers don't need friends.

Ironically, Abalone opportunism is a failure even on its own demeaning terms. Jerry Brown and the law-and-order liberals have sold out the sell-outs, and it's unlikely the latter will find another buyer. There ain't a dime's worth of difference between Abalone and Babylon.

As for the suggestion that Diablo Canyon was a *victory*, file it away with the fantasy of those hippies who have convinced themselves that they *did* levitate the Pentagon in 1968. The nuclear industry is everywhere collapsing under its own weight, and the technical snafus which have shut down Diablo may give PG&E a face-saving way to beat a tactical retreat. By making too much of the nuclear-reactor-on-an-earthquake-fault happenstance, Abalone dramatized PG&E's utter indifference to human life but also weakened the general anti-nuclear case: the utilities can “compromise” by putting their pestilential plants elsewhere. Will Abalone's Ecotopian insularity settle for a West Coast no-nukes ghetto? Like “socialism in one country,” California solipsism is a stupid and self-stultifying hoax, in matters anti-nuclear as in all others.

Thus “the counterculture's instinctive hostility to establishment media” (Tim Conner) is, in the Diablo Canyon context, just sour grapes. The Abalone apparatus and others like it are fetters on the development of the anti-nuclear forces. The PR types on top like the masochistic masses below are running on empty. There's no such thing as an anti-bureaucratic bureaucracy. You can't eradicate nuclear power by doing tricks — or turning them — for pressmen and politicians.

The only way to abolish nuclear power is to *abolish power altogether*.

(1982)

## LEFT RITES

In astronomy, “revolution” refers to a return to the same place. For the left it seems to mean about the same. Leftism is literally reactionary. Just as generals prepare to fight the last war, leftists incite the last revolution. They welcome it because they know it failed. They’re vanguardists because they’re always behind the times. Like all leaders, leftists are least obnoxious when following their following, but in certain crises they step to the fore to make the system work. If the left/right metaphor has any meaning, it can only be that the left is to the left of the same thing the right is to the right of. But what if revolution means stepping *out of line*?

If there were no right, the left would have to invent it — and it often has. (Examples: Calculated hysteria over Nazis and KKK which awards these wimpy slugs the notoriety they need; or lowest-common-denunciation of the Moral Majority obviating unmannerly attacks on the real sources of moralist tyranny — the family, religion in general, and the work-ethic espoused by leftists and Christians alike.) The right likewise needs the left: its operational definition is always anti-communism, variously drecked-out. Thus left and right presuppose and recreate each other.

One bad thing about bad times is that they make opposition too easy, as (for instance) the current economic crisis gets shoehorned into archaic Marxist, populist or syndicalist categories. The left thereby positions itself to fulfill its historic role as reformer of those incidental (albeit agonizing) evils which, properly attended to, conceal the system’s essential inequities: hierarchy, moralism, bureaucracy, wage-labor, monogamy, government, money. (How can Marxism ever be more than capital’s most sophisticated way of thinking about itself?)

Consider the acknowledged epicenter of the current crisis: *work*. Unemployment is a bad thing. But it doesn't follow, outside of righto-leftist dogma, that employment is a good thing. It isn't. The "right to work," arguably an appropriate slogan in 1848, is obsolete in 1982. People don't need work. What we need is satisfaction of subsistence requirements, on the one hand, and opportunities for creative, convivial, educative, diverse, passionate activity on the other. Twenty years ago the Goodman brothers guessed that 5% of the labor then expended would meet minimum survival needs, a figure which must be lower today; obviously entire so-called industries serve nothing but the predatory purposes of commerce and coercion. That's an ample infrastructure to play with in creating a world of freedom, community and pleasure where "production" of use-values is "consumption" of free gratifying activity. Transforming work into play is a project for a proletariat that refuses that condition, not for leftists left with nothing to lead.

Pragmatism, as is obvious from a glance at its works, is a delusive snare. Utopia is sheer common sense. The choice between "full employment" and unemployment — the choice that left and right collaborate to confine us to — is the choice between the Gulag and the gutter. No wonder that after all these years a stifled and suffering populace is weary of the democratic lie. There are less and less people who want to work, even among those who rightly fear unemployment, and more and more people who want to work wonders. By all means let's agitate for handouts, tax cuts, freebies, bread and circuses — why *not* bite the hand that feeds you? the flavor is excellent — but without illusions.

The (sur)rational kernel of truth in the mystical Marxist shell is this: the "working class" *is* the legendary "revolutionary agent": but only if, by not *working*, it abolishes *class*. Perennial "organizers," leftists don't understand that the workers have already been definitively "organized" *by*, and can only be organized *for* — their bosses. "Activism" is idiocy if it enriches and empowers our enemies. Leftism, that parasite for sore l's, dreads the outbreak of a *Wilhelm Reichstag fire* which will consume its parties and unions along with the corporations and armies and churches currently controlled by its ostensible opposite.

Nowadays you have to be odd to get even. Greylife leftism, with its checklists of obligatory antagonisms (to this-ism, that-ism and the other-ism: everything but *leftism*) is devoid of all humor and imagination: hence it can stage only *coups*, not revolutions, which change lies but not life. But the urge to create is also a destructive urge. One more effort, leftists, if you would be revolutionaries! If you're not revolting against work, you're working against revolt.

(1982)





## ELECTING NOT TO VOTE

If elections are, as Sartre said, "a trap for fools," then recent voting trends are in hopeful contrast with other signs of social somnolence. Not that election *results* are getting any better. They never will, so long as anybody wins. The good news is the steady growth of the nonvoting majority of eligibles which has been "winning" elections for over sixty years. In place of "majority rule" we see an increasingly unruly majority.

The 1984 presidential election — the Comet Kahoutek of recent politics — should have sharply reversed the trend; in fact it only stalled it. Despite a flashy ideological incumbent; despite the antics of Jesse Jackson, the Preacher from the Black Lagoon; despite the saliency of the nuclear war issue and a vote-or-die terror campaign by frantic leftists; and despite the relative decline in the size of the low-turnout youngest age-groups, most eligible voters, as usual, found better things to do.

For a system which makes "majority rule" the by-words and buzzwords of state-of-the-art statism, a chronic crisis simmers which, for once, will hurt Them more than it hurts us. It seems like the easier the authorities make it for their subjects to consecrate their coercion with their votes, the less response to their come-on. They ended poll taxes and literacy tests, they enfranchised minorities and 18 year olds, they provided bilingual ballots — but no one votes less often than the beneficiaries of these reforms.

"Democracy," observed Karl Kraus, "means the permission to be everybody's slave." Its claimed superiority over other oppressive arrangements remains, after centuries of philosophy and propaganda, obscure. That an abstract, evanescent majority — of *whom*, is one of the central mysteries of democratic dogma — could ever claim more than the right to rule itself has always been a gross impertinence. Yet liberals and the leftists who tail them assure us, with a straight face, that those who participate in elections thereby agree to abide by the outcome, whereas those who abstain have no right to complain

since, after all, they could have voted. This ritual, they assure us, magically *expands* the scope of legitimate authority, *i.e.*, cop violence. Beware of democrats offering rights! Such sophistries stand out in their proper satirical light when, year in and year out, the majority refuses to rule. What do I care if some cabal of ambitious opportunists declares me a member of some club I don't want to join? Majority rule, shaky enough as a "right," is openly malignant when imposed by a minority as a *duty*. Ralph "Darth" Nader is only a step ahead of his fellow paternalists in calling for compulsory voting.

The composition of the nonvoting majority is disturbing to our overlords. Liberals and leftists, when they're not gushing slush about the wisdom of the people, when they're not promising succor to the downtrodden, with typical cynicism defame nonvoters — hitherto mainly poor, minority, and foreign-born — as stupid, uneducated, and indifferent to their civic responsibilities if not downright un-American. But by now the voting drop reflects the ongoing coming-of-age of new eligibles who never do acquire the voting vice, and the attrition of those of their elders who never kick the habit. Most aren't conscious refusniks, but their absence from the rolls today just *may* prefigure refusal of the roles tomorrow.

Naturally the (hamster-)wheeler-dealers of the left deliver the loyalists who make the system work for all their rejective rhetoric. So do the misnamed "libertarians," some of whom hallucinate that they're *anarchists*. For that matter, more than a few avowed "anarchists" slunk into voting booths in 1984, and anarcha-feminist "imagine" (*sic*) endorsed Mondale in the pages of *Circle A in Atlanta*, prompting Ted Lopez to ask, What does the "A" really stand for? More usually these loyal oppositionists serve up pathetic no-win third parties which offer a "choice"; the choice, having gone to the bother of voting in the first place, of making absolutely certain (not just 99.99% certain) of wasting one's vote. Proposals to reward voters with green stamps make more sense. Why not enfranchise pigeons and offer them pellets? The real meaning of "Don't waste your vote" is, *don't cast it*.

The mini-parties solicit votes as a form of "protest," but as a medium of expression, a can of spray-paint has it all over *any* election. As conformist as voters are, no two of them mean precisely the same by their votes even if cast for the same candidate.

Yet the votes as tallied are anonymous, impersonal and interchangeable. A vote once cast is cast away; it then belongs to the pundits and politicians to make what they will of it. And a candidate once elected will tell you what to do, no matter what went before. You can't protest fundamentals by voting: voting is bound up with them. There's no such thing as voting *against* voting.

Contrary to the anthill collectivists, it's stupid to say nonvoting is a merely personal, "individualistic" gesture. What could be more privatized and isolated than casting a "secret ballot" (evidently designed for people with *something to hide*) all by yourself which acknowledges your status as replaceable part of a polity you never asked to belong to? Collective action against electoral alienation is fully as feasible as running for office, but strangely, it holds no appeal for power-hungry "progressives."

No need to address the populist reforms (initiative, referendum, recall, etc.) contrived to outflank corporate control of the state. At best they never worked that way. At worst they became the vehicle for regressive "reforms" like California's Proposition 13 which were KY'd into the body politic by monied cabals who buy the mass media. As with the Ptolemaic system, the effort to rectify the electoral system with epicycles inevitably went awry. The crisis of democracy transcends all gimmickry.

Every politician's "platform" is a scaffold. Which of two fungible fakers assumes a particular office is a matter of decreasing relevance to reality. A voter is far more likely to be hit by a car on the way to the polls than s/he is of affecting the outcome of an election, to say nothing of changing real life.

How much lower will the vote totals go before the "winners" are ashamed or afraid to take office?

People aren't as stupid as the politicians think. More and more of us are laughing off our "civic duty" to vote, rejecting the role of compulsory constituent.

What if they gave an election and nobody came? We'll find out pretty soon.

(1982, 1985)

## LYING IN STATE — AND ELSEWHERE

We need a phenomenology of lying. As the immanent and all-pervasive essence of our society, lying deserves no less; and it is time it got what it deserves. Let's be honest about dishonesty. How do They dupe us? Let me count the ways.

Some forms of fraud, especially the face-to-face ones, are highly refined. A fine fog descends upon people conversing in any of various shared idioms who suppose themselves to be saying something when they are just emitting signals, like bird-calls, which elicit like responses. In truth it is nothing but noise. Advertising, New Age jargon, fern-bar pick-up chitchat, and the dialects of Marxism are familiar examples. Much more expression than communication, at best they say less than they seem to, and they're rarely at their best. Most of the "gaps" in the Nixon tapes *aren't missing*.

The epitome of consensual deception is the self-contradiction turned term-of-art, for example:

Open marriage

Revolutionary government

Law and order

Right to work

Liberation theology

Free schools

— and so forth.

At the other pole (General Jaruzelski, for instance) from sophisticated swindling is outright prevarication. Like cigarettes, but without the warning, these lies often come in packs. Politicians and priests afford the clearest examples — examples we clearly cannot afford. The business world (is there any other?) also contains entire occupations of mendacity professionals, like salesmen and lawyers. There are industries

like nuclear power and “defense” which presuppose more than the low-level daze of the ordinary consumer, they fob off megaliars on a bamboozled populace as a matter of business necessity. Still, politicians are the ideal-tripe liars. Lying (in addition to giving orders) is what we pay them for, or rather what they pay themselves for with our taxes. Diplomacy for instance is just formal-dress deception. When we say someone is being “diplomatic” we mean that he is telling lies to quiet some conflict. But in diplomacy governments are dealing with violence monopolies just like themselves and so they lie with more caution than they often take with the populations they control. Politicians are often ambiguous but rarely subtle. Why *not* neglect nuances when you have most of a country’s gunmen at your command?

A pristine and exemplary Big Lie is, for instance, built in to almost every public reference to “terrorism.” Properly the word refers to the use of violence against noncombatants for political purposes. The Central American death squads or the Soviet airdrops of explosive “toys” for Afghan children to maim themselves with are examples. The idea is to impose one’s will, not by direct coercion of those to be controlled, but by instilling fear in them, *i.e.*, “terror.” No harm in having a word for an activity which, whatever its pros and cons, differs in some respect from war, crime, civil disorder, etc.

It is precisely these distinctions which the politicians and their academic and journalistic camp followers use the word to obscure. To them, all political violence, vandalism or even mere tumult is “terrorism” *unless* the terrorists wear uniforms. Governments therefore cannot engage in terrorism, no matter what they do, whereas anti-state violence is always terrorism even if it consists of attacks by one military force against another. The massacres conducted by America’s Salvadorean native auxiliaries; Israeli bombing of Palestinian refugee camps or kidnapping of Lebanese hostages; even the Cambodian and Afghan holocausts, so sanctimoniously bewailed, or South African jailhouse killings are, because they are state-sanctified slaughters, not terrorist. Terrorism is not so much a matter of mayhem and murder as it is of sartorial correctness. Soldiers are terrorists who were careful to dress for success. That is enough to let the managers of public opinion sleep soundly, if not

necessarily for as long as the President did when, despite the blowing-up of Grenadan mental patients and the gunning down of Cuban construction workers, he reported that, as usual, he slept well.

It is remarkable how well this ploy works. The otherwise abused Sandinistas were terrorists till the magic moment they supplanted (as later they planted) Somoza. President Robert Mugabe was a black “ter” until his transubstantiation into a Zimbabwean statesman. When Shi’ites take American hostages they are terrorists. When Israelis take Shi’ite hostages it is — a violation of international law, perhaps, or cause for restrained criticism, but not by any means terrorism. Despite its hypocritical crudity, the terrorism hoax has gone over well. The G.I. Joe doll, mustered out of service for a few years after the War That Dare Not Speak Its Name, has made a comeback. Now he fights terrorists.

That the authorities, like the authoritarians who envy them, lie systematically is no news. Karl Kraus and George Orwell said as much. But they have refined or at any rate augmented their scams. Our complex society, resting on coerced consent, has come up with modes of manipulation so advanced that falsification can be minimized, even eliminated without the truth getting out. The system just overwhelms us with information so trivial as to deserve its washed-out word “data” until the few matters of real importance are leveled down and out of mind. The scale and structure of society prevent people from immediately experiencing it, or each other. Knowledge is fragmented into artificial isolates and assigned to endogamous experts. In academia these exclusivities deserve the sado-masochist connotations of what they are called, “disciplines.” The social division of labor — splintering integrally experienced life into forced-fit standardized “roles” — extended into awareness, reproduces itself while covering its own tracks.

Rules and roles render us as interchangeable as the commodities whose production is our destruction. No wonder that, as Karl Marx once remarked before becoming a politician, “the only comprehensible language we have is the language our possessions use together.” We need another one. And we need unhurried and unharried occasions of wordless repose. Revolution requires an anti-idiotic idiom expressing the as yet



unspeakable. The love that dare not speak its name has the jump on the other one, libelled by labels, whose name is taken in vain and never returned to the rightful owners.

The corruption of language promotes the corruption of life. It is even its prerequisite. A first step toward peace and freedom — impossible now under class society and its business end, the state — is to call things by their true names. Thus the difference between the operatives of the military-industrial-political-journalistic complex and the small fry maligned by the media as “terrorists” is only the difference between wholesale and retail. War is murder. Taxation is theft. Conscription is slavery. Laissez-faire is totalitarian. And (says Debord), “in a world *really* turned on its head, the true is a moment of the false.”

(1982, 1985)

## **CIRCLE-A DECEIT: A Review of *Processed World***

*Processed World* is a well-produced, sometimes funny, mostly jargon-free<sup>1</sup> anti-authoritarian San Francisco magazine focused on the information workers who toil in the Financial District and other citadels of capitalism. After six issues of several thousand copies each, *PW* has picked up a certain cult following downtown and can claim to be the most radical publication in the area for its scale of operations. It's good to see a 60-70 page left publication which dispenses with the usual anti-Reaganist banalities and tries to deal with wage-labor, industrial technology and the repressive reality of everyday experience.

Granting all that, however, my considered opinion of *PW* is mainly critical. Its "line" — despite disclaimers, there is a definite though dissimulated *PW* ideology — is more conservative than it looks. That would not be so bad if *PW* openly avowed its politics and fairly debated it with dissident dissidents, but that's just what *PW* does not permit. Bad faith permeates the publication, and the carefully-contrived image it presents to its readers is fundamentally dishonest. If there's anything worse than overt Leninist vanguardism, it's subliminal, anarcho-Necheyevist vanguardism. This I propose to expose.

*PW* purports to be the work of "dissident office workers" who are forever reiterating their nonsectarian, open-minded, common-sense qualities: *just folks*, not another gang of ideologues. Their come-on is to alleviate ordinary workers' natural suspicion of organizer-types by saying, "Heck, we're white-collar commuter working stiffs just like you, only we happen to write, design, publish and distribute a slick magazine every three months."

That's all false pretenses.<sup>2</sup> Office workers don't and probably never did make up a majority of the collective. The exact census figures are in any case less important than the implication that *PW*'s anti-establishmentarian ideas arose spontaneously in the

minds of hitherto-innocent Financial District drones whose workplace experience, in the best economic Marxist tradition, mechanically engendered their “anti-authoritarianism.” The latter buzzword, by the way, is itself part of the cover-up. It’s a euphemism for a word often on the lips of *PW*’s but rarely seen in the magazine: (horrors!) *anarchism*.<sup>3</sup> Don’t go frightening the secretaries now! Maybe later, after we’ve organized the working class... but not now.

The truth is that the dominant faction of *PW* — including the ruling troika of “Maxine Holz,” “Lucius Cabins” and “Louis Michaelson” — is the pro-tech wing of the now defunct Union of Concerned Commies, which regrouped a number of refugees from situationist grouplets and other libertarian and left communists at the end of the 1970’s. Almost all *PW*’s have long political pedigrees, with many involved in concurrent projects ranging from the anarcho-syndicalist magazine *Ideas & Action* to Anomie’s nihilist collages. Whether or not these people work in offices, they are political activists essentially, as regards their personal priorities and self-concepts, and workers only incidentally. (Holz, for instance, from time to time does office work, but she learned her councilism as a Berkeley student from her then teacher Michaelson.)<sup>4</sup>

Ever since discontented staffer “Gidget Digit” let the (black) cat partway out of the bag in *PW* #5, the troika has tried to put it back in by a combination of vague acknowledgement of prior political involvements and vehement insistence that *PW*, in Michaelson’s words (#6), “was not conceived by professional leftists, ‘professional revolutionaries’ who marched into the Financial District to educate the white-collar masses.” This from the same guy who borrowed an idea from the Progressive Labor Party by proposing that unemployed *PW*’s infiltrate a selected business and foment revolution there! Che lives!<sup>5</sup> But I wouldn’t want to be one of the *real* workers entrapped by hit-and-run leftist provocateurs. Fortunately other *PW*’s vetoed the scheme.

A subtler manipulation is concealed in the very definition of the *PW* project, which is really extraordinarily narrow. Who would have thought that San Francisco office workers, especially those in the information industry, are so important or distinctive as to justify 20 or more radicals producing a regular

magazine addressed to them specifically? Humiliation by bosses, the speed-up, ass-kissing, discrimination, makework and overwork — all occur as much in the factory or the store as in the office, as often in the sticks as in the hip metropolis. If there is something special about these workers, why don't the *PW*'s disclose what it is? Or are they *targeting a market* by pandering to San Francisco solipsism?

For that matter, there's nothing new about the council communism which, with the scary political words airbrushed out, is touted once or twice in a pseudo-offhand way in every issue. Why not acquaint the unwashed masses with the high points of the dissident tradition? I think some of *PW*'s readers would attend to such subjects with interest and intelligence. The notion that *PW*'s readers are too dumb or too delicate for some history or rigorous analysis bespeaks a deep contempt for the manipulated on the part of their manipulators. If *PW* can articulate its real message without resort to the old jargon, great! But if it can't tell the truth without using a tendentious terminology, it is better to use it than to conceal what's going on. If the wooden shoe fits, wear it!

We are told that *PW*'s are diverse in their views. This is true. However, the ordinary reader has to take *PW*'s word for it, since the various definite tendencies represented, from anarcho-syndicalism on the right to pro-situ autonomism on the left, are never set forth. The actual editorial process at *PW* reduces its proclaimed pluralism to a sham. For instance, the author of a piece of fiction was twice required to rewrite the ending to make it ideologically correct. Letters undergo unacknowledged editing, and while there is always space for a couple of content-free "oh wow!" fan letters, criticism is suppressed unless it is so stupid that the writer can be set up for a crushing refutation. Indeed much of the letters column is pre-empted by *PW* staff.

If there is a novelty in the *PW* house ideology, it lies in the contention that computers and information tech have made possible global participation in production planning. The fetishistic fantasies sometimes printed — hinting of unnatural relations between secretaries and their calculators, etc. — suggest that some *PW*'s have a suspect psychic stake in the dream of a pushbutton paradise. But the prospect is only asserted, not argued or analysed. Considering that the tech

issue was salient in the founding of *PW*, it's crass that no critique of the idea that "there is nothing inherently bad about computer technology" (#1) is allowed in its pages. For one thing, it would embarrass the pro-techs to reveal that they have critics more radical than they are.<sup>6</sup>

Similarly, *PW*'s animadversions on work are always qualified by "as we know it" or some such, or replaced by some safe phrase like "wage-labor." The implication is that some sort of forced labor is to continue. Some people, including myself, deny the necessity of this, but our views cannot appear in *PW* despite their relevance to its announced concerns. Maybe revolution does not depend upon even a rationalized, participatory-democratic economy which still subordinates human life to the production of commodities. Maybe it refers to a new way of life, to social relations among creative convivial players. Some of *PW*'s client base of "nasty secretaries" and "dissident office workers" might rather fondle each other than their calculators. *PW* will spare them the confusion such notions might inspire among the theoretically unlettered.

Timidity about work tends to trivialize the strain of humor which is one of the magazine's best features. The American office has long sustained a mild, harmlessly insubordinate culture of anti-boss humor and griping. But as humor goes, the antics of Dagwood and Mr. Dithers are pretty low in destabilizing capacity. Items which might take on a harder edge in an explicit anti-work context — such as Tom Ward's song lyrics, graphics by Greg Jamrock and Freddie Baer among others, Melinda Gebbie's hilarious account of temp work at a pet hospital — don't work as well as they might elsewhere.<sup>7</sup> *PW* may reinforce the tradition of grouching by which American workers blow off steam instead of getting steamed and blowing off work.

Even aside from recent leaks, it could not have much longer escaped attention how an ostensibly eclectic collocation of office malcontents lines up along a well-defined spectrum of leftist opinion. Quite the coincidence that this aleatory anti-authoritarian combine has reproduced in fine detail the significant ideologies of the anarchist left! For a long time, though with increasing misgivings, I was inclined to excuse *PW*'s little prevarications because, after all, frozen dogma and

rhetoric *do* put people off who might find some validity in the same ideas encountered without preconceptions. But at some point the veil should have been stripped away: better to put people off than put people on. *PW* treats its audience as a mass to be flattered and fooled. Do sheep dream of electric androids? They do if they read *Processed World*.

(1982)



## NOTES ON “CIRCLE-A DECEIT”

1. The publication of this review in *Appeal to Reason* (January 1983) coincided with the exclusion or withdrawal, within six months, of everyone responsible for the humorous, literate, or otherwise interesting contributions; and trite leftist jargon (capitalist “hyenas,” etc.) has taken their place.

2. *PW* to this day pretends to be “by and for dissident office workers,” but its internal documents, disclosed by disgruntled ex-staffers, prove otherwise. Editrix “Maxine Holz” (Caitlin Manning), for instance, is the granddaughter of cartoonist Al Capp, from whom she inherited \$7000 but not, regrettably, a sense of humor. “La Honchessa,” as the *PW* proles used to call her behind her back, grew up in Mexico, surrounded by servants, a situation she has successfully reproduced in San Francisco. Her inheritance and other family subventions finance *PW* as well as a typesetting business. Her boy-friend and business partner “Lucius Cabins” (Christopher Carlsson), who grew up in an affluent East Bay suburb is, compared to other *PW* blue-bloods, a veritable Horatio Alger, even if his accomplishments are limited to gold-digging. Rounding out the reigning Troika is “Louis Michaelson” (Adam Cornford), an upper-class English twit descended from the classicist F.M. Cornford and none other than Charles Darwin. In a rejoinder to this review he joked (as I then assumed) that “we are all independently wealthy,” but that’s exactly what these sidelines revolutionary cheerleaders are. As it happens, the few bona fide dissident office workers were eliminated in the Troika’s purges.

3. When this was written anarchists were a substantial contingent, maybe a majority of the staff, but what this review failed to stress was that Marxists then, as always, called the shots. Few, if any anarchists work for *PW* today.

4. For instance, Cornford, *PW* enforcer Tom Athanasiou (they sent him to assault me in November 1984) and contributor Tom Ward collaborated on the council-communist newspaper *New*



*Morning* in Berkeley in 1973, and on many projects since. In the mid-1970's Cornford, then a Teaching Assistant at UC Berkeley, seduced his student Manning both sexually and ideologically.

5. Another gangster is the more likely inspiration for this ploy: Lyndon LaRouche, Jr. of the U.S. Labor Party (formerly the National Caucus of Labor Committees) which started on the far left and ended up a semi-fascist cult. The pro-situ group For Ourselves to which Cornford once belonged broke up over (among other things) the gravitation of Cornford and others toward the hyper-determinist kook-economism of the mid-70's LaRouchists. (Previously, For Ourselves — without, as Tom Ward and Greg Dunnington tell me, any serious input from Cornford — produced the excellent communist egoist essay *The Right to be Greedy*, now available in a Loompanics reprint.)

6. The initial, fake-ingenuous reaction to this point was that, gee, nobody ever criticized technology, we're all ears! We now know that *PW* has suppressed critiques of industrial technology since 1981. In fact Brian Kane, who addressed a predominantly friendly letter to *PW* back then which took issue with the pro-tech effusions of (self-employed computer consultant) Tom Athanasiou, was threatened by Carlsson and Manning with the assertion that "Tom Athanasiou is not a pacifist!" (And indeed he isn't. In the official Abalone Alliance newspaper which *PW* also controls, Athanasiou, actually endorses a U.S. Government nuclear arsenal and high-tech "Peoples' Star Wars" computerized missile weaponry. And he practices what he doesn't preach, he tried and failed to jump me from behind outside my residence in November 1984.)

7. The fate of these individuals, whom I then viewed as *PW*'s positive side, is instructive. Ward hasn't contributed to *PW* in years. Neither has Jamrock, who characterized Cornford's rebuttal to this review as "pathetic." Baer, *PW*'s one-time workhorse printer, slinked away hoping her defection would pass unnoticed (it didn't). Only Gebbie remains, presumably because she is Cornford's girl-friend.

8. Since this review appeared, *PW* has degenerated into a leftist cult, combining violent attacks with police snitching in a comprehensive campaign to eliminate its Bay Area critics. Its accomplishments to date include battery, burglary, robbery,

perjury, harassment and abuse of process (*PW* had deployed a corporate law firm which has demanded, among other things, an injunction against my “mentioning” *Processed World* — but without success). By and large the “anti-authoritarian” milieu still bends over for *PW*, although there is some small resistance. As for myself, *PW*'s lawyers, goons and money have obliged me to move elsewhere, at great cost. Anybody who thinks the anarchist/anti-authoritarian milieu would of course rally to my defense obviously hasn't fathomed anything I've said in this book.

(1985)



## REVIEW OF “CONAN”

We went to catch “Conan the Barbarian” at a mid-day bargain matinee, well-attended by other layabouts too. The flick is sure to engender cascades of critical condescension, not entirely unwarranted, but I liked it better than any film review I ever hope to see, even this one. Let me straighten out the mandarins on a few points.

The Hearst reviewer calls Conan “the comic-strip hero,” but that’s misleading except as a display of the limits of his erudition. The literati never notice any kind of popular culture until it’s dead or dying (at their hands, as often as not), be it Elizabethan drama or punk rock. So it is with the pulp fiction of the 1920s and ’30s. The English professors have belatedly accorded a modest resting-place in their literary mausoleum to the horror fantasist H.P. Lovecraft, perhaps because he has no successors worth a damn. But they ignore his friend Robert E. Howard, notwithstanding the impeccable credentials of his antecedents such as William Morris and Lord Dunsany. Yet Howard created the sword-and-sorcery species of the heroic fantasy genus, which still has eminent practitioners (Fritz Leiber, Michael Moorcock, Jack Vance) today; and his creation Conan is an archetype likely to lurk in popular awareness as long as Sherlock Holmes or Frankenstein.

Howard was at least as effective a story-teller as Lovecraft, probably more so, but what sets him apart from the other weird writers in his better work is a heroic fatalism which is utterly pitiless, stark and unromantic.

Howard, unlike his enfeebled continuators L. Sprague de Camp and Lin Carter, stressed the *sword* side of sword and sorcery; the sorcery side is today an embarrassment, the playground of illiterates like Carter and lesbian doctrinaires like Elizabeth Lynn (the only important exception: the inimitable Jack Vance).

Howard’s obsession with violence — meaningless, yet a real “peak experience” in a world stripped of authentic adventure —

is surprisingly “modern,” despite the pre-Atlantean setting. The movie is generally faithful to the Howard original, up to a point. The blood-and-guts are satisfying if (like me) you like that sort of thing. As Chris Estey says, it’s “hack work” in every sense. The limb-lopping is actually minimal compared to the Howard stories and, for that matter, most Peckinpah or samurai or recent horror movies. (However, it sufficed to render “confusing” to the *San Francisco Bay Guardian’s* snobbish, yet-supersensitive reviewer a plot any eight-year-old can follow.) Essentially, the movie is the story of Conan’s revenge on the sorcerer who wiped out his clan and enslaved him. Arnold Schwarzenegger acts as well as he needs to (not very) as Conan. And James Earl Jones does Darth Vader again with his usual aplomb, this time as Conan’s nemesis, a 1000-year old Jim Jonesoid weresnake. There are some discordant notes — incongruous colloquialisms; a wrestle with demons who look like air-brushed Gumbies; some too-obvious rip-offs from *Seven Samurai*, the *Star Wars* movies and even *Blazing Saddles* — but nothing ruinous. As a story the movie works. Why wait 20 years till the critics permit you to watch a B movie when you can beat the rush now?

The real shortcoming, though you’d never know it from the usual corporate/“alternative” media reviews, is that the figure of Conan is diminished. To a degree, he’s properly portrayed as ferocious yet innocent, as untamed yet uncorrupted, amoral but not evil (offered an amulet against evil, he smirks, “I *am* evil”). But he’s too much the victim avenging villainy, despite incidental thefts, debauches and sacrileges. The movie will be likened to *Star Wars* — wrongly, since Conan fights for no cause but his own and couldn’t be more foreign to the antiseptic high-tech bureaucratic moralism of the Lucas flicks, those warm-ups for World War III — for unfortunately it doesn’t fully reveal Conan as the barbarous-but-worldly adventurer.

The real Conan is a skeptic and hater of priests, but avoids gratuitous blasphemy likely to rouse dormant evils; the real Conan returns an injury with interest but isn’t an Ahab-like obsessive as in the film. Obviously Conan appeals to anyone stifled by social constraints; to those who’d like to strike out directly at oppressions and indignities assuming a conveniently

tangible form; to s/he who wishes an individual could still make a difference by a personal act. Conan can be harsh but he's no hypocrite. He might steal your jewels but he won't pollute your soul.

Organizer-activoids dismiss fantasy as "escapist," fully justifying J.R.R. Tolkien's rejoinder: "What class of men would you expect to be most preoccupied with, and most hostile to, the idea of escape? Jailers."

Fantasy and freedom: their organic nexus was evident to Charles Fourier; to the Marxist fantasist William Morris; to Russian Anarcho-Futurists who — anticipating Howard's very nomenclature! — called themselves "Anarcho-Hyperboreans." And yet the sectarians stood around stupified in 1968 when the French staged their epochal general strike and trumpeted the slogan "All power to the imagination."

The notion of redemption through an individual act of willed violence is played out by now (though the inhibited may still find it therapeutic).

Insofar as violence has been collectivised and depersonalized, the passion has gone out of it, except for the spectators. In the South Atlantic, teams of technicians take turns obliterating each other by pushing buttons. "Smart" bombs blow away stupid people: it's sheep fighting over sheep. Even as Maggie Thatcher doing Winston Churchill-in-drag fails to outdraw "Evita," the *junta* learns it's easier to make Argentine dissidents "disappear" than British troops.

Our times produce only ersatz barbarians. Intellectual jades may get off on the insensate fury of the Viking berserkers, but this century we have to settle for bureaucratic brutalitarianism impersonally administered by hacks like Alexander Haig, Pol Pot and Dianne Feinstein.

Pseudo-barbarian theatrics ended in a whimper: the Futurists went Fascist, the Surrealists went Stalinist, the punks went New Wave and re-entered art school. Why the attraction for imaginary barbarism? Because "civilization becomes more odious as it nears its end" (Fourier), and the barbarian non-alternative seems — *cleaner*.

Where is Conan when we need him?

(1982)



# GROWN-UPS SAY THE DARNDDEST THINGS

On May 20, 1982, the barnstorming American Renewal Rally, dedicated to “positive thinking,” reached San Francisco. It was held, aptly enough, in the Cow Palace.

Art Linkletter and other luminaries from the optimism industry told thousands of crewcut bulletheaded zombies (and their “gals”) what they wanted to hear: When you wish upon a star, makes no difference who you are... except that, as one speaker said, anyone paying \$15-on-up to be there was already a “winner”: “The losers don’t show.” The marks lapped it up.

But before going into all that, let me confess my bias at the outset.

Diane was always my *favorite* Linkletter.

We knew we were in for it just by trudging through the parking lot. There were too many piss-poorly personalized license plates; too many fish-signs and other Christian claptrappings. (I was in drag myself, sporting a 40 cent “Good Citizen” button.)

Inside, the audience reminded me of the newcaster’s puzzled reference to the ghouls in *Night of the Living Dead*: “They look so — *ordinary*.” The first inspirational orator spoke more truly than he knew when he remarked, “It’s amazing what you can do with nothing.”

Although the speakers paid respects from time to time to God, country, family and especially free enterprise, it wasn’t really a religious or political rally. It was more like the Moral Majority’s version of the human potential movement.

According to a show of hands, almost half the audience was “in sales,” and the speakers all identified themselves as salesmen. The pitch: get sold on yourself so you can sell to others. *Attitude* determines *image*, which determines success.

A recurrent theme, as Robert Schuller of the “Hour of Power” TV ministry put it, was: “Impossible is a dirty word.” You can be what you want to be. In this strange world of Rotary Club



surrealism, objective reality scarcely exists. “Money flows like water to ideas.” Zig Zigar ended his spiel as he always does: “See you at the top.” But how can there be a top without a bottom?

One of the funnier speakers was the motormouthed Ira Hays, the “Ambassador of Enthusiasm”: the MC announced that his speech would dispense 117 great selling ideas. The most brutal cynic of the bunch, Hays pushed hard-sell harassment techniques akin to brainwashing. He observed that there’s little real difference between most competing commodities. The salesman’s job is to sell an *idea* arbitrarily attached to the product.

“How do you get people to do what you want them to do?” By Conformity (“What’s wrong with it?” he cried), Competition, and Identity (getting others to recognize your image). Since anything you write down will come true, make a list. “Success is nothing but a set of skills.” (Or as Art Linkletter later bleated, “The dictionary is the only place where success comes before work.”)

Zig Zigar, evidently a superstar on the circuit, explained that you “can change what you are by changing what goes into your mind,” such as it is. To Zig, life is like a sewer: “The input determines the output.” In a folksy southern fake-hearty manner, he asked: “Have you filed your claim on what life has to offer?” (No, just an unemployment comp claim. I’m also thinking of filing my teeth.) All it takes to prevail is a positive attitude. Don’t call it an “alarm clock”: it’s an *opportunity clock*, Dagwood! Don’t be alarmed! And that machine that regulates traffic is (that’s right) a “go light.” Zigar related an inane and undoubtedly apocryphal anecdote about inner-city students straightened out by some Skinnerian reinforcement scheme on the theme “I Can!” But he never answered the real question; *Why Should I?*

The slickest speaker was Denis Waitley, a honey-tongued homilist who sounds like Dick Cavett or the “Hal” computer in *2001* — not inappropriately, since he supposedly helped train the astronauts for the moon-doggle some years back. Waitley won’t debate your taste in bait as long as you swallow the hook: “If you don’t listen to the Bible, listen to what the psychiatrists say.” With a finger in every pie-in-the-sky — futurism, pop

psychology, the Wisdom of the East — Waitley could do a New Age number with minimal reshuffling of catchphrases.

Every crisis, he argued, is an opportunity: worse is better in this, the very best of all possible worlds. In his Velveeta-smooth voice, he shamelessly flattered the audience as “winners”: “You and I,” he said, “have the edge on the rest.” “Hardening of the attitudes,” he said, “is a deadly disease.” Aphorisms, anecdotes, statistics — this mellow fellow has something for everyone: everyone, that is, who already has something.

Least but not last was Doug Snarr, who, to my surprise, was the only pitchman who had the contrived voice-tremors and other affectations of your garden-variety radio evangelist. The reason this windbag got on stage at all was apparently the old “if you don’t let me pitch, you can’t use my ball” phenomenon: Snarr Communications (of Salt Lake City) is the sponsor of the American Renewal Rally.

We retreated to the Sky Room for drinks for most of his performance. From adjacent tables we’d overhear an occasional word like “leaseback” or “residuals.” Snarr droned on, claiming to have overcome stuttering, but he was no Demosthenes. For sheer tedium, snoring through Snarr can only be compared with performance art at La Mamelle. It was Snarr, in fact, who gave the game away: he urged us to “re-program” ourselves.

The big draw was, of course, Art Linkletter, still telling the same old stupid stories of five-year-olds funnier than he’ll ever be. Kids are positive, says Link; adults are negative. Learn to listen, says Link; it’s the secret of successful selling. I wonder if he listened to Diane.

Lest I be accused of bad taste (a charge I freely plead guilty to), let me point out that no one — not even Divine in his/her title role in *The Diane Linkletter Story* — exploits Diane as cynically as Daddy does. He retells and retails her sorry story at every stop on the optimism circuit. He’s sold her sufferings over and over gain. I may be behaving abominably, but there’s this difference between me and Art Linkletter: I’m not getting rich off anybody’s agony.

Actually, Art’s posthumous prostitution of his dead daughter is fairly low-key. At first, he says, he went on the warpath with his anti-drug crusade — as if being Art Linkletter’s daughter

weren't reason enough, drugs or no drugs, to snuff it. But later he realized his tactics were ineffective, so he switched over to selling the positive-thinking ideology as a drug-surrogate. I'd have considered it trite to say that "religion is the opiate of the people" if weren't for the fact that one speaker after another touted the "natural high" to be had from positive thinking — chemically indistinguishable from morphine, according to Denis Waitley. So why not bypass the banality by popping a pill?

Link related an anecdote:

A little old lady accosted him on the street once and said: "If we weren't nobody, you wouldn't be anybody." That sums up ciphers like Linkletter. He's famous because he's a celebrity, and he's a celebrity because he's famous.

Ira Hays is right: reality's receded, it's all a mind game where the winner is the one who sells an image of himself. So who the hell is Art Linkletter to abuse the unexorcised spectre of "60s madness"? That epoch was awash with illusions but it looks good compared to '70s somnolence and '80s inanity.

The politics of positive thinking were more assumed than asserted at the rally, but if you cared to look, you'd see the skull beneath the skin. Zig Ziglar said: "We don't need to just give our President a chance, we need to give him a hand."

He can have the back of mine!

The only social problems ever referred to were inflation and high interest rates — but you have to have money to worry what's happening to it.

There's a lesson in this encapsulation for those who inhabit leftist/hippie/punk politico-cultural ghettos: the bimbos have *their* self-contained systems, too. Tens of millions of *kitsch*-culture Pink Boys never went through the "changes" you boast of surviving.

They're just as solipsistic as you are and there are a lot more of them. You, too, mouth platitudes about attitudes. Wise up! And God bless!

(1982)

# THE CULT TO END ALL CULTS

by Rev. St. Mahatma Propagandhi

*The Book of the SubGenius*, by The SubGenius Foundation. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1983. \$9.95 (or \$11 postpaid from the Foundation).

*The Stark Fist of Removal*, No. 40, Vol. 17 (1983). \$3 postpaid from The SubGenius Foundation, PO Box 140306, Dallas, TX 75214.

Disdainful of diarrheality? Tired of Trilateral tyranny? Do you think extremism in the pursuit of vice is a virtue? And that Daylight Savings Time is a dangerous tampering with cosmic forces? Quite possibly They *are* reading your mail; They may even be *writing* it. "Politics" as we know it can't even circumcise the tip of the iceberg, and "religion" in any form is just the joy-buzzer of a petulant sociopath with a puerile sense of humor. In other words, you were right and They were wrong all along. And you are not alone. You are, moreover, a SubGenius.

In the 1950's, a salesman named J.R. "Bob" Dobbs experienced a series of visions — an Emaculation — lifting the curtain on the extraterrestrial influences which have shaped and warped our destinies since before prehistory. An E.T. whom we know as Jehovah-1 (or Wotan), probably a juvenile delinquent, has been manipulating our biology and history for eons, *for kicks*. This "mad alien from some corporate sin galaxy" is behind all the conspiracies you ever heard of, but — as the *Book of the SubGenius* avers: "Oh, all that right wing stuff about the Council on Foreign Relations is true enough. The world *is* run by *rich, old, white, ugly men...* but they're just the *plant supervisors* of this Hell Factory Earth." The cattle mutilations *are* cause for concern, but the Hollow Earth Saucer Nazis aren't the only or even the *worst* of those responsible. To be blunt, the human race is cruisin' for a bruisin' and the stupid insensate servitors of the Conspiracy, the Pink Boys, are *houndin'* for a *poundin'*.

We have to master the secrets of Time Control, and time is growing short. An unprecedented sequence of grotesque catastrophes, an Endtime *is* imminent, and when JHVA-1 reaches down to goose us with his Stark Fist of Removal, our best hope is that “Bob” Dobbs and the SubGenii are *ready* to dicker from a position of strength when other aliens, the Xists, drop by on July 5, 1998 (at 7:00 a.m.). Just check out the “Dateline for Domination” in the *Book*, you’ll see that Wotan’s *really* fixed our hash: *unless* the SubGenii find themselves and rally to Dobbs’ banner, the knifed clock with wings.

Not that we (I refer to “we,” not our Pink enemies, “US”) have to wait for that chaosmic rave-up when the Pinks and the fake SubGenii, the “Bobbies,” learn too late that you can’t get tickets for an Xist saucer ride at *any* BASS outlet. Dobbs and his earthly Church firmly believe that gratification delayed is gratification denied. The immediate and ultimate objectives are one and the same, and it is *Slack*. Posing is pointless: true SubGenii are born, not made (the Church, heavily into sociobuyology, teaches that SubGenii are descendants of the Yeti, albeit tainted by human admixture), though their evolution toward the OverMan stage may be furthered by Glandscaping, Personality Bypass and the Third Nostril surgeries carried out at the Dobbstown jungle retreat in Malaysia. In other words, “Pull the wool over your *own* eyes.”

Pinks are everywhere (aren’t They?), but especially prevalent at certain nerdnodes or power points like corporate boardrooms, poetry readings, video arcades, voting booths and science fiction conventions. They sniff every gilded neurose, they hear the *same* drummer, they never “go too far.” They think you can have barbeque without the hot sauce. As “Bob” says of the Pink: “You can enter his world any time you like but he doesn’t even know YOURS is THERE.” They *not only work*, They *believe* in work. They’ve been riding high on the hog, hogging the highs with the help of intergalactic Bad Shepherds who were just fattening them for market. If they believe in Jesus it’s the Sesame Street, Misterogers’ android, not any of the real Jesii; they idolize the Lite Jesus, the Tofu Jesus of the False Christians, not the XYY Chromosome Jesus, the Estate-Bottled Jesus, the Jismatic Jesus, the 3-D Jesus, the SSIchopath Jesus, the 86’d Jesus, the State-of-the-Art (not the Art-of-the State)

Jesus, the Goat-Jesus who *wasn't* a Capricorn! The Jesus (says the *Book*) "who didn't get nailed."

In other words, if your quest is for perv-ection, if you want more and better sex, if you think there *is* a free lunch, maybe even a Naked Lunch, then you need to know what your genes are silently shrieking, to wit, that "Bob" helps those who help themselves to *everything* that isn't *nailed down*. Which is only to say, "There *is* a Heaven, and you *can* buy your way into it."

*The Book of the SubGenius*, the ostensibly "commercial," outreach anthology of SubGenius rantings *has* undergone Conspiracy censorship, but what They *overlooked* is more insidious than what most so-called avant garde revolutionary upchuckings had to show for themselves in the first place. (One (by Church standards) innocuous cartoon earned the Mo'Fuck Church in Dallas a house-call from the Secret Service, and this is *not a joke*.) It's OK to buy the *Book* even if you're not sure it's right for you because, as Dobbs once explained to L. Ron Hubbard, "Sure, they're Pink, but their money is *green*." Look: Life *is* a cosmic traffic ticket... but "Bob" can fix it. (But not for everybody, not for the Illuminati who make up all those lightbulb jokes.) And don't be put off by the word "SubGenius," some of us are actually smarter than that; but that's not the *point*. All SubGenii are alike, but *not* in the same way, whereas the "Bobbies" (to be pitied and pilfered: fleeced but not flayed) make a show of being different, without ever being *distinctive*.

At this point you are either punching out "911" on your Princess phone, or else discovering with amazement that the *Book's* puntheistic profundities include things that you've said (or at least thought) yourself. This is but the arcane working of what Zack Replica of the Church of the Coincidental Metaphor has denominated the Henny Jung Collective Humor Unconscious. SubGenii are, by the way, adroit improperators of such divinatory devices as reading T-bills, numerology, anagrams, and Word Golf ("Punk" to "Pink," for instance, is a hole-in-one). Like watching late-night TV or performing the rite of ExcreMeditation on the Throne of Elimination, these exorcizes are but a few of the many breadcrumb-strewn psycho paths to Buddhada. For each Yeti-spawned SubGenius, aided by his own shordupersavs (short-duration personal saviors)

finds a special way to “Bob” and Slack. This is what the “Bobbies” will never figure out, what the seemingly less orthodox Other Mutants (pre- and extra-SubGenius loosely-affiliated heresiarchs) discern, that you have to *kill* “Bob” if you really wanna live and live it *up*, for “Bob” will rise again in his own sweet time and thank you for not being a disciple-type *sap*. Indeed, every local con-gregation (or “klench”) is obliged to *schizm* sooner or later, for reasons you will never understand if they aren’t already obvious.

From this overdrawn account you might think the Church is a bit cerebral, but in surreality its *salons* and saloons are one and the same, as comes out (yes, despite the Church’s commitment to Patrio-Psychotic AnarchoMaterialism, gays are welcome and run at least one klench, the Church of the Profuse Discharge) in *The Stark Fist of Removal*. In this house organ the Church plays with itself, the 1983 issue featuring censored texts from the *Book*, coverage of the epochalyptic second Convention in Chicago (September 1982), and a survey of the Other Mutants and their unsettling works. At the Con, which I was privileged to attend, SubGenii from places as far-removed as Berkeley and Bolivia (no shit) gathered in fellow(oneupman)ship, quaffing great draughts of ‘Frop from drinking horns, swearing mighty oaths, playing the hundreds, spewing and bullshattering. Most ignored the science fiction WorldCon nearby, but a few pulled off divers Pink-tumpings at the expense of the Trekkies and other dreckies. Spirits ran high and down many a chin as the Slack-seekers got psycho’d up for the psonic tsunami called *Doktors for “Bob.”*

Before anti-musicians like Culturcide, before jokerockers like the 12 Year Olds, before E.L.F. led the pagan pink (not Pink) revival — there were the Doktors and their thoroughly *contemptorary* sound unconstrained by melody, harmony and morality. These Arkansaucer creatures and their fearsome progeny (Doktors for Wotan, Oakland’s mysterious Doktors for Extreme Prejudice, etc.) produce a Gott-wrenching metamusic, and the original Doktorband really wracked the Radisson with *eine kleine Nichtmusik*. It looked like a tag-team meat fight in the emergency room, but with St. Janor Hypercleats and the soon-to-be-martyred St. Sterno Keckhaver affording a core of reliable unpredictability. Not even the onstage assassination of

guitarist Sterno by 'Frop-maddened animate anti-art object TENTATIVELY, a cONVENIENCE (purer in his abnormality than any of us) — a scene uncannily reminiscent of the suppressed outtakes from the Zapruder film — silenced the surviving Doktors. Occasionally upwelling from the Sargasso of sound was an almost songlike manifestation such as Janor's stirring anthem, "Told the Judge to Suck My Dick." It was like the dropping of a hermeneutron bomb.

The Con concluded, as it had to, by the Church's most moving ritual, the Launching of the Head (of a famous World Cup golfer, *not* Lee Trevino) shortly after Sterno's resurrection — but by then the most extraordinary event in Church history had forever changed its course. The SubGenius Ladies' Sewing Auxiliary stormed a "predominantly peenoid" panel of complacent Church Fathers, announced their *theft* of the Head and dictated hormonally-unbalanced demands which the men had no choice but to submit to... Called upon to officiate at a shotgun marriage of all Church males to one another, the unflappable Pastor Buck Naked lost his Barnumesque composure. To see a strong man reduced to a whimpering shambles is a sad thing; but the women (formerly the girls) got a charge out of it. Concerning what *e/se* the matriarchs made us do, it is better not to speak. The Church of the SubGenius will never be the same, but then, it never was.

Who, then, are the SubGenii?? We are the *Slam-Dancing Wu Li Masters*. "When the Rapture comes, I'll make 'em wait!" "Fuck 'em even if they *can* take a joke!"

(1983)





# THE POLITICAL THEOLOGY OF FERLINGHETTI

*Sky of a priest, is it going to rain?*

*If it rains you'll be butchered;*

*If it doesn't you'll be burned. — Benjamin Peret*

*Sin is the desire of men to become gods — Fr. Ernesto Cardenal*

Of the Bourbons who once ruled the Kingdom of Naples it was said that they were unable to learn or forget anything. So it is with the left. Mistaking the federally-finessed austerities of the last four years for a replay of the Great Depression, the left, long paralyzed with perplexity by a modern world beyond its old ideologies, now with great relief relapses into its old ways. Back to the New Deal! Too bad it can't see that its bogey Reagan has already adopted the only New Deal remedy for economic anemia that ever worked: arms production, intervention and war.

But rather than ponder high policy I'd as soon establish how the left has advanced not an inch in its insights or aspirations by looking at phenomena more local and close to home; and, paradoxically, relating to foreign affairs, not domestic programs. I mean the way the poets, artists and (to use their own warped self-description) "cultural workers" are once again expressing their creative criticality and notorious individualism by signing on as the propagandists of the authoritarian left, or by suborning others who do, or by silencing those who don't. In the 1930's the Communist Party in its Popular Front phase managed the politics of many intellectuals through a network of cultural front-groups. This cartel of organizations and publications could make or break many a marginal artist or

writer. While there is no such centralized direction today, many of the cliques who control the paltry means of production of avant garde artifacts are sympathetic to the export of anti-Establishment values to conveniently remote foreign destinations (Grenada, El Salvador). The refusal of all prearranged forced-choices is almost as hazardous as in 1937 when erstwhile left darling George Orwell had *Homage to Catalonia* rejected by the Left Book Club because his first-hand report on the Spanish Revolution disclosed that the official left was on one side, the revolutionaries on the other.

A troubling manifestation of this trend is the steady stream of radical celebrities, or those striving for celebrity, to Nicaragua, to “liberated” parcels of El Salvador, and — until recently — to that “lovely piece of real estate” (as George Schultz sees it), Grenada. (Albania, Vietnam, Cuba, and South Africa’s new friend Mozambique also have their devotees but these believers are plainly made of much sterner — but not, obviously, Max Stirner — stuff.) Not all of their reports, only most of them, are entirely worthless. The second issue of *No Middle Ground* has a lengthy first-hand account by Caitlin Manning — better known locally as “Maxine Holz,” the Margaret Thatcher of *Processed World* — on Nicaragua. I agree with Ted Lopez that her story is a “Lukacsian travelogue,” “revolting Malrauxian shit” and “one of the most obnoxious and disgusting things by a supposed ‘anti-authoritarian’ that we’ve ever seen.” Still, this sophisticated Sandinista apologia can be mined for data which discredit its crypto-Trotskyist “critical support” line in yielding glimpses of life in the “new” (but not *that* new) Nicaragua.

The same, which isn’t much anyway, cannot be said for Lawrence Ferlinghetti, who parlayed a one-week tour into a coffee table book whose base tenor is apparent from a recent *Poetry Flash* interview. Ferlinghetti as a poet is endorsing Nicaragua the way a baseball player would endorse a razor. The “poetry” angle is forced to the point of farce: about the only point of even apparent intersection is Ferlinghetti’s crony and counterpart Ernesto Cardenal, a supposed poet, and, as Minister of Culture, a nominal member of the ruling Sandinista *junta*. Cardenal is, of course, that lowest of life-forms, a *priest*. When J2P2 played the Central American circuit he snubbed Father Cardenal, this is true, but to my mind the key point is, not

that Cardenal was not allowed to kiss the Pope's ring, but rather that he even tried to in the first place.

It's too bad that Lawrence Ferlinghetti, that world-weary has-been, didn't shamble off to the Elysian Fields ere he ever signed on with poet-turned-*puto* Ernesto Cardenal's MiniCult propaganda machine. Our revered Beat(off) presumes too much on our credulity when he pretends that — deceived by the satanic Reagan — he “had a lot of preconceived notions about Nicaragua before I went there.” What? After thirty years of ostensible opposition to the Establishment (didn't he write something about impeaching *Eisenhower* way back in his vanished youth?), all of a sudden Ferlinghetti believes the likes of *Ronald Reagan*? No wonder, then, that after his quickie radical-tourist jaunt in Nicaragua he jettisoned one batch of preconceived notions only to take another aboard. If he's not lying he is — at best, and by his own admission — the dupe of whatever self-interested ideologue happens to be the last to catch his ear.

Politics is not a paternity suit. Nobody cares when and where Ferlinghetti's opinions were “conceived,” the point is, are they true?

As always, left and right play into each other's hands. Ferlinghetti disputes a State Department estimate of Nicaraguan Communists rather than address the real situation in that country. All Communists are repressive statist but many, or most present or prospective rulers aren't CP. If only flagging future *Fuehrers* were that easy! But in fact they're incubating all over, in the mislabelled Libertarian Party no less than in the Stalinist nut-cults like the RCP or CWP. If Ferlinghetti didn't notice that Nicaragua is a one-party dictatorship he must not have noticed anything.

Asked about the censorship of poet Pablo Antonio Cuadra, a *La Prensa* editor, Ferlinghetti finds it “symbolically interesting that *La Prensa* was next door to where the Banco de America is.” For some reason Ferlinghetti never found this interesting in the Somoza period when his chum Cardenal used to publish his poems in *La Prensa*. Nor did the Nicaraguan masses or even their Sandinista mentors find this too interesting in 1978 when the bourgeois liberal character of the paper's editor Pedro

Joaquin Chamorro didn't preclude their seizing upon his assassination as the catalyst of their harrowing but ultimately successful revolt. I say "revolt" rather than "revolution," not to devalue the sacrifices of suffering insurrectionaries far more respectable than any of their North American cheerleaders, but to leave open the real question what kind of a change really happened down there. To oust and exterminate a gang of outright looters is self-evidently desirable, but so limited an objective leaves larger vistas of social transformation unapproached.

Ferlinghetti's City Lights Bookstore, which has in recent years installed anti-theft electronic detection devices, is *across the street* from the nearest branch of Bank of America, a fact which I'm not sure is even "symbolically interesting" whatever that evasion means. What I find *really* and not just "symbolically" interesting is the fact that the Bank of America flourishes undisturbed in "socialist" Nicaragua. Ferlinghetti received no coaching and so has nothing to say to explicate the state-capitalist nature of the "new" Nicaragua.

Anecdotal irrelevance, accepted unquestionably by idolatrous interviewer David Volpendesta, is Ferlinghetti's only remaining rhetorical talent. Asked about the status of women (Volpendesta knew better than to even *ask* about gays), Ferlinghetti told some stupid story about the Sandinista menfolk letting a woman poet participate in a military action. This is like answering a question about the oppression of women in America with a fairy tale about Molly Pitcher.

The Vergil from Intourist who arranged the appearances that Ferlinghetti happily settled for was Minister of Culture Ernesto Cardenal, who must I suppose be acknowledged as a poet in the same sense Ferlinghetti is. This Marxist McKuen is the author of the sickening travelog *In Cuba* with its obscene panegyric to Fidel Castro and its profound respect for the way the regime enforces such Christian values as puritan morality and the work ethic. Now he's done unto Ferlinghetti what Castro did unto him. One of Cardenal's translators writes: "Ernesto Cardenal is a Catholic priest and a Marxist poet, and he sees no conflict between these two loyalties." Neither do I!

Ferlinghetti's flirtation with anarchism is finally done with; what a relief for the anarchists! Now he doesn't care if a country

has an authoritarian power structure so long as at least six of the nine Sandinista bosses are “basically humane, reasonable intellectuals, rather than military men or dictators.” When is a dictator not a dictator? When he’s a “humane intellectual” like Ferlinghetti: when he’s a *nice guy*. Ferlinghetti was too humane and reasonable to ask any of these reasonable humanists why strikes have been prohibited in Nicaragua since 1981.

Ferlinghetti’s contemptible performance is in the tradition of the eager dupes who used to get carefully misguided tours of the Soviet Union and came back saying, for instance, as Sartre did, that “freedom of speech is total in the Soviet Union.” As recently as 1975 Ferlinghetti was writing, “I’m still concerned with the symbolic importance of a poet lending his talent to any branch of the government, even if he’s paid privately for it.” I guess it’s okay as long as it’s somebody *else’s* government. Of course, if Ferlinghetti were to deny that he’d lent his *talent* to the *junta*, I’d have to agree.

Nicaragua is a statist, capitalist class society which it is convenient for the Reagan regime to portray as revolutionary. But if anything revolutionary about the insurgency which overthrew Somoza has survived the Sandinista bureaucratic consolidation, Ferlinghetti doesn’t know it and couldn’t care less. He is wholly identified with the ruling clique in which his counterpart, the priest Cardenal, is an ornament. There is unfortunately little prospect, between Reagan’s destabilization policies and the *junta’s* Leninist objectives, that the Sandinista State will — like Ferlinghetti’s integrity — wither away. Old Noah is drunk; let us feel shame for his nakedness.

(1984)



## IV. OTHER VICES (1981-1985)

“Words of Power” (1981) — published in *Re/Search* (San Francisco), a post-punk journal of pre-punk intellectuality, reprinted in *CoEvolution Quarterly* — started the trend in my late L.I. phase toward terse, epigrammatic, or formulaic forms (“Ins & Outs,” “20 Questions,” “Declasse(fieds),” etc.). The “Lunatic Fringe Credo” was the LI’s eleventh-hour self-description for an Austrian directory of international “anarchistic” contacts. “Feminism as Fascism” (1982) is the expanded version of a letter (first published in *The Spark*) suppressed by Toronto’s *Kick It Over*, a leftist-feminist magazine whose publishers for some strange reason think they aren’t still the Leninists they used to be. “The Exquisite Corpse,” (1984) a letter to the editor, appeared in a left-liberal free yuppie throwaway, the San Francisco *Bay Guardian*, as my last laugh on the Gorilla Grotto’s guru, Gary Warne.

On a dare of mine, Loompanics reprinted the pro-situ manifesto of “communist egoism,” *The Right to Be Greedy*, and so I supplied a Preface (1983). Although the book not only bombed in the market but got its advertising banned from *Reason*, Loompanics perversely persisted in its interest in me, and in 1984, at its expense, I attended the Eris Society’s annual Aspen conclave to deliver the diatribe which I have since revised and expanded into “The Libertarian as Conservative.” Despite their ostensible affinity to the anarchaos and paranoiac-critical absurdity of their inspiration, the *Principia Discordia*, these Erisians are really more like an alternative Trilateral Commission waiting in the wings (the right wing, mostly). My anti-work aspersions met with blank incomprehension from these con-artists, cultists and consultants. At one point I blurted out, “You’re not exactly the salt of the earth, you know.” I’ve upgraded this impasse with excerpts from a suppressed letter to the *Libertarian Review* in response to the only (right-) “libertarian” text I have ever seen, a book review by John Hospers, that dealt with work itself — by rallying to its defense.



My most recent texts are the "Anarchism" critique (from *Popular Reality* and a Loompanics supplement) and the Loompanics Catalog review which has appeared in the *Voice Literary Supplement*, the *Chicago Reader*, the *LA Reader* and *False Positive*. I am currently collaborating with a punk anarchist sociologist behind the Iron Curtain, Gregor Tomc, on a translated anthology of North American "marginal" texts (including fringe libertarians like Erwin Strauss and Samuel Edward Konkin III). This book summarizes and concludes a phase of my activity... but you haven't heard the last of me.

# **A LUNATIC FRINGE CREDO**

## **THE LAST INTERNATIONAL/WORKERS AGAINST WORK**

We are not an "organization," just a project. We issue short texts, usually as posters but sometimes as letters-to-the-editor, articles, graffiti, classified advertisements, or oral diatribes, devoted to deploying the power of absurdity to expose and excise the absurdity of power. Our animosity to authority is not limited to anti-statism but encompasses every rule, role, institution and ideology arrayed against freedom, pleasure, and creativity. Thus we are less concerned with abolishing the state (as necessary as that is) than with the supersession of work and moralism. For us, humor is an end as well as a means, and play is more than frivolity, it's the positive meaning of liberty.

(1981)



## WORDS OF POWER

ART? An increasingly inadequate substitute for sex.  
BLOOD BANK? Is there any other kind?  
BOREDOM? Obligatory for sophisticates.  
THE BORN-AGAIN? Twice too often.  
CIVILIZATION? The biosphere's skin disease.  
CLASS WAR? The war to end all wars.  
COUPLES? Monogamy is monotony.  
THE CRUCIFIXION? Too little and too late.  
CYNICISM? Long since surpassed by events.  
DISCO? The bleat goes on.  
DISEASE? Very dangerous: a leading cause of doctors.  
ELECTIONS? Dumbocracy in action.  
FAITH? Is fatal — get thee behind me, God!  
THE FAMILY? No nukes!  
FEMINISM? Equality with men: a paltry ambition.  
FREE TIME? Work the boss doesn't pay you for.  
FULL EMPLOYMENT? A threat, not a promise.  
GAYS? JEWS? Elites impersonating the oppressed.  
GOVERNMENT? Guns don't kill, politicians do.  
GURUS? A good mantra is hard to find.  
HIPPIES? Running on empty.  
THE HOSTAGES? Not worth killing, not worth killing for.  
JUDGES? Doddering despots in clown suits.  
LAW? Crime without punishment.

LAWYERS? Life support systems for mouths.  
THE LEFT? Left behind.  
LEISURE? Paying & playing are mutually exclusive.  
LIBERALS? Conservatives with guilty consciences.  
LIBERTARIANISM? All the freedom that money can buy.  
LIFE AFTER DEATH? Why wait?  
MARXISM? The highest stage of capitalism.  
MASOCHISM? Like taking your work home with you.  
MYSTICS? Have incommunicable insights they won't shut up about.  
NECROPHILIA? A social disease.  
NIHILISTS? Going beyond good & evil, they stopped half-way.  
PEDAGOGICIDE? A victimless crime.  
PLEASURE? Interludes that accentuate pain.  
POLICE? Terrorists with the right credentials.  
POLITICS? Like a pond; the scum rises to the top.  
PREJUDICE? Folk sociology.  
PROPERTY? Is theft — and theft is proper.  
PUNKS? Hippies with amnesia.  
PUNK VENUES? Defoliated fern bars.  
PUNQUES? Punks who attend art school.  
RADIO EVANGELISTS? Less aural sects, more oral sex!  
REAGAN? A step in the Reich direction.  
RELATIONSHIPS? Being alone together.  
RELIGION? Deifying your defects.  
THE RIGHT? Wrong.  
ROCK MUSIC? Has a great future behind it.  
R.O.T.C.? Charnel knowledge.  
SAN FRANCISCO? Baja Sausalito.  
THE "SCENE"? How to be different like everybody else.  
SEX? An increasingly inadequate substitute for masturbation.

SCHOOL VIOLENCE? Class struggle as struggle in class.  
SOCIALISTS? Sheep in wolves' clothing.  
TEACHERS? Outclassed.  
THERAPY? Punishment without crime.  
TROTSKYISM? Stalinism out of power.  
UTOPIA? Nostalgia for the future.  
VEGETARIANS? You are what you eat.  
ZIONISM? Jewish Nazism.

(1980)



## **PREFACE TO THE RIGHT TO BE GREEDY**

Most libertarians think of themselves as in some sense egoists. If they believe in rights, they believe these rights belong to them as individuals. If not, they nonetheless look to themselves and others as so many individuals possessed of power to be reckoned with. Either way, they assume that the opposite of egoism is altruism. The altruists, Christian or Maoist, agree. A cozy accomodation; and, I submit, a suspicious one. What if this antagonistic interdependence, this reciprocal reliance reflects and conceals an accord? Could egoism be altruism's *loyal opposition*?

Yes, according to the authors of this text. What's more, they insist that an egoism which knows itself and refuses every limit to its own realization is *communism*. Altruism and (narrow) egoism or egotism they disparage as competing and complementary moralisms in service to capital and the state. They urge us to indulge a generous and expansive greed which goes beyond self-sacrifice and petty selfishness to encompass the appropriation of everything and everyone by each and all of us. "Wealth is other people," wrote Ruskin. The radically and rationally (self-)conscious egoist, appreciating this, enriches him-self in and through other subjectivities. In social life at its (con)sensual and satisfying best — sex, conversation, creation — taking from and giving to others constitute a single play-activity rich with multiplier effects. For the lucid and ludic egoist, anything less than generalized egoism is just *not enough*.

The individualists have only worshipped their whims. The point, however, is to live them.

Is this a put-on, a piece of parlor preciosity? There is more than a touch of that here. Or a mushminded exercise in incongruous eclecticism? The individualist egoist is bound to be skeptical, but he should not be too quick to *deprive himself* of the insights (and the entertainment!) of this unique challenge to



his certitudes. The contradictions are obvious, but whether they derive from the authors' irrationality or from their fidelity to the real quality of lived experience is not so easy to say. If "Marxism-Stirnerism" is conceivable, every orthodoxy prating of freedom or liberation is called into question, anarchism included. A polemic is practical or it is nothing. The only reason to read this book, as its authors would be the first to agree, is for what you can get out of it.

At least for those not conversant with Hegelian Marxism, "critical theory" and the latest French fashions in avant garde discourse, the mode of expression in this work may seem unusual. But it's very much in the tradition of those (mainly European) oppositional currents — such as dada and surrealism — which tried to combine political and cultural iconoclasm. In the late 1950's, a French-based but international organization called the Situationist International resumed this project at a high level of intransigence and sophistication. The situationists drew attention to the way the "spectacle" of modern capitalism (including its Leninist variants), the organization of appearances, interposes itself between isolated and enervated "individuals" and a world which they produce by their activity but neither control nor comprehend. Mediation supplants direct experience as the fragmentation of daily life into so many standardized prefab *roles* produces individuals with a dazzling array of forced "choices" but drained of effective autonomy by the loss of initiative to create their own lives. Politically, the situationists bitterly denounced the established left, but moved toward an ultra-left stance themselves when they embraced council communism. Calling for the abolition of work — its transformation into productive playlike pastimes — on the one hand, and for workers' councils, on the other, is only one of the contradictions which the sits failed to resolve. The French general strike of 1968 vindicated the sits' thesis that the affluent society had merely modernized poverty, and even showcased a number of their slogans, but the S.I. was at a loss what to do next and broke up in 1971.

Ever since, situationist ideas — and poses — have percolated into popular culture, and the Sex Pistols' manager Malcolm McLaren was perhaps the first to sell a denatured situationism to the trendies. In the early 1970's, "pro-situ" groups (as they are

known) formed in Britain, in New York City and especially in the San Francisco Bay Area. One of these groups, Negation, reformed as For Ourselves around 1973, and by the following Mayday produced the present text. For Ourselves was particularly beholden to the situationist Raoul Vaneigem whose celebration of the “radical subjectivity” of “masters without slaves” figures prominently in the theory espoused in *The Right to Be Greedy*. All too soon the group collapsed, some of its members regressing into Marxism from which they had never really escaped.

The text manages to be at once too Marxist and oblivious to the extent of its incompatibility with Marxism. Too Marxist, in that the illusion of Man as essentially producer persists, and a “democratically” planned economy based on the councils is touted as the structural basis of a new and free society. And too enamored of Marxism in that the attempt to square communist egoism with the Marxist scriptures is far more ingenious than persuasive — though perhaps it does show that Marx was more radical than he himself supposed. It’s a pity For Ourselves didn’t try to Marxize Stirner as it Stirnerized Marx: then we might have a better sense of the level at which it just might be possible to harmonize the two great revolutionary amoralists.

Egoism in its narrowest sense is a tautology, not a tactic. Adolescents of all ages who triumphantly trumpet that “everyone is selfish,” as if they’d made a factual discovery about the world, only show that they literally don’t know what they’re talking about. *Practical* egoism must be something more, it must tell the egoist something useful about himself and other selves which will make a difference in his life (and, as it happens, theirs). My wants, needs, desires, whims — call them what you will — extend the ego, which is my-self purposively acting, out where the other selves await me. If I deal with them, as the economists say, “at arm’s length” I can’t get as close as I need to for so much of what I want. At any rate, no “spook,” no *ideology* is going to get in my way. Do you have ideas, or do ideas have you?

(1983)



## FEMINISM AS FASCISM

As the title of a childhood classic points out, *Pigs is Pigs* — and this regardless of the shape of their genitals. Ilse Koch was a Nazi, not a “sister.” Love is not hate, war is not peace, freedom is not slavery, and book-burning is not liberatory. Anti-authoritarians who would be revolutionaries confront many difficult questions. First, though, they should answer the easy ones correctly.

All hyperbole and metaphor aside, what passes for “radical feminism” is fascism. It promotes chauvinism, censorship, maternalism, pseudo-anthropology, scapegoating, mystical identification with nature, tricked-up pseudo-pagan religiosity, enforced uniformity of thought and even appearance (in some quarters, Hera help the ectomorphic or “feminine” feminist!). Here is all of the theory and too much of the practice we should all be able to recognize by now. An ominous tactical continuity with classical fascism, also, is the complementarity between private-vigilantist and statist methods of repression. Thus *Open Road*, the *Rolling Stone* of anarchism, applauded some anti-porn actions in Vancouver (not as direct action, hence understandable even if misdirected, but rather) *because* they encouraged lethargic prosecutors to persecute. In post-World War I Italy (the suppression of the IWW in America followed a similar pattern), fascist gangs attacked socialist and trade-union organizations with the tacit approval of the police, who never intervened except against the left. As I once wonderingly asked: “How come these women won’t get in bed with any man except the DA?”

Not that I could care less about the porn-for-profit industry, for its “rights” of free speech or property. That is beside the point, which is: why single out this species of business? To target porn bespeaks planning and priorities, not elemental anti-capitalist spontaneity. Those who carry out a calculated policy can’t complain if their reasons are asked for, and questioned.

Fascist ideology always incongruously asserts to its audience, its chosen people, that they are at one and the same time *oppressed* and *superior*. The Germans didn't *really* lose the First World War — how could they? *ex hypothesi* they are superior — therefore, they were stabbed in the back. (But how could a superior race let such a situation arise in the first place?) Men (only), we are told in a feminist/Anti-Porn Movement (APM) diatribe in Toronto's *Kick It Over*, "have created the nature-destroying and woman-hating culture." If so, then either women have contributed absolutely nothing to culture, or there is something more or something else to this culture than destroying nature and hating women.

For their own purposes (some of which are as mundane as sexual rivalry with straight men for the women they both desire), self-styled radical feminists actually reduce women to nothing but helpless, cringing near-vegetables, passive victims of male contempt and coercion. This profoundly insults women in a way which the worst patriarchal ideologies — the Jewish notion of woman as a source of pollution, for instance, or the Christian nightmare of woman as temptress and uncontrollable sexual nature-force — fell short of. They defamed woman as evil but could hardly regard her as powerless. The new woman-as-victim stereotype is not only directly traceable to nineteenth century Victorian patriarchal attitudes reducing (bourgeois) women to inert ornaments, but by denying to women the creative power inherent in everyone, it places women's demands on a par with those advanced for, say, baby seals.

Suppose instead what only the most demented feminists and misogynists deny, that things aren't *quite* that bad, that women have been subjects as well as objects of history. Then how can women — or any other subordinated group: workers, blacks, indigenous peoples — be *entirely* acquitted of all complicity in the arrangements which condemn them to domination? There are reasons for these accommodations. There is no excuse for denying their existence.

This isn't sour grapes. It has never bothered me that some women dislike men, even to the point of having nothing to do with them. I don't like most men myself, especially the archetypal "masculine" ones. I can't help but notice, though, that the vast majority of women feel otherwise. The radical

feminists have noticed it too, and it drives them to distraction. I would be the first to agree that vast majorities can be wrong. If they weren't we would be the fringe loonies, the impotent kooks that almost everyone thinks we are. But then I criticize majorities, I don't pretend to speak for them. Radical feminists, in contrast, are vanguardists. As such they need to rationalize their animosities, and so they have — making a dick-determinist demonology out of their prejudices. As man-haters they can't help but be women-haters too.

To equate pornography with rape — beneath the rancorous rhetorical froth, this seems to be the core APM axiom — is presumably intended to make porn seem more serious. And yet, if men call the shots and the system's built-in tendency (as we're told) is to denature oppositional initiatives of which the feminists' is the most revolutionary, then the likely result is rather to make rape seem more trivial. It's the old story of the woman who cried wolf. (Similarly, the manipulative media line that "anti-Zionism is anti-Semitism" worked wonders to sanitize Israel until its expansionism-cum-extermism engendered anti-Zionists who just might proceed to take the B'nai B'rith defamations at face value.)

According to feminoid epistemology, men understand nothing of the real nature of women. One might logically suppose that the estrangement of the sexes resulting from disparate roles and discrimination would work both ways, and so most of us attending to our actual experiences reluctantly conclude. But no: men don't understand women, but women (at any rate their radical feminist vanguard) understand men. Women — feminist experts, anyway — understand pornography and its meaning for men much better than the men who write and read it — and lesbian-separatists, who avoid men and decline to have sex with them, appreciate these verities best of all. The more remote your experience is from the real life of actual men, the better you understand it. Turning this around, isn't the Pope, as he claims, the ultimate authority on women and sexuality?

The asserted connection of porn with rape is allegorical, not empirical. As a correlation it compares with the recently revived "reefer madness" marijuana-to-heroin Rake's (Rapist's?) Progress line in absurdity no less than in suitability for the

state's purposes. If feminism didn't exist, conservative politicians would have had to invent it. (Why, pray tell, did all-male legislatures ever criminalize "obscenity" in the first place? And why do all-male courts arbitrarily exclude it from constitutional protection?) APM harpies, should they ever deal with people instead of their own fevered projections, would discover that porn is of no interest to the majority of post-pubescent males — not because they are politically correct, but just because it's obviously gross, sleazy, and above all, inferior to the real thing.

The feminist book-burners are cowardly opportunists. If what they object to is subliminal socialization of women into subservient roles vis-a-vis men (curiously, adopting the same roles vis-a-vis butch lesbians is harmless fun), their primary, near-preemptive preoccupation would have to be *Cosmopolitan*, Barbara Courtland romances, and the vast crypto-pornographic pop literature written for and snapped up by women. After all, the gore and violence are derivative: only victims can be victimized in any way. Fifteen years ago, the original women's liberationists (subsequently switched like changelings with today's priestesses, lawyers and upscale bureaucettes) at least lashed out at influential enemies like Hugh Hefner and Andy Warhol. Nowadays they terrorize teenage punk anarchists (this anecdote is from *The Match!*) whose collages insinuate that Margaret Thatcher for instance is a ruler, the "mother of a thousand dead," not a "sister." Such is the logic of this bizarre biological determinism: any animal equipped with a vagina is one of Us, any prick-privileged person is one of Them. One can only echo The Firesign Theatre: "Who am us, anyway?"

Male leftists, for instance, are easy and often willing yes-men to feminist aggrandizement. They combine guilt at past improprieties (by and large, those who *feel* guilty — toward women, blacks, foreigners, whatever — usually *are*) with a present ambition to get into the leftist-feminists' pants. Thus Berkeley, California (to which I am adjacent) is crawling with male "feminists" who converted the easier to get laid. Much the same scam seems to be happening in Toronto and, doubtless, many other places. These ulterior ambitions obviously don't, in themselves, discredit the ideologies to which they are appended

— one can come to the right conclusion for the worst of reasons. But insofar as the opinions at issue certainly seem to be idiotic to anyone without extraneous interest in embracing them, otherwise inexplicable paroxysms by *male* intellectuals seem to be most plausibly explainable as self-interested insincere rationalizations.

Possibly the ideology I've excoriated is something that people had to work through in order to free themselves to the extent necessary to venture upon a project of collective liberation. Already alumnae of feminism have moved on to the common quest for freedom, and some are the better for what they've been through. We all have our antecedent embarrassments (Marxism, libertarianism, syndicalism, Objectivism, etc.) to put behind us: had we not thought in ideological terms it's hard to believe we'd ever get to the point where we could think for ourselves. To be a Trotskyist or a Jesuit is, in itself, to be a believer, that is to say, a chump. And yet a rigorous romp through *any* system might show the way out of the master-System itself.

Not likely, however, when women critics are ostracised as renegades while male critics are ignored or defamed as a matter of principle. (A precisely parallel mechanism for maintaining a conspiracy of silence is worked by Zionists: Gentile critics are "Anti-Semites," Jewish critics can only be consumed by "Jewish self-hatred.") Separatism may be absurd as a social program and riddled with inconsistencies (scarcely any separatists separate from patriarchal society to anything like the extent that, say, survivalists do — and nobody intervenes more to mind other people's business than separatists). But semi-isolation makes it easier to indoctrinate neophytes and shut out adverse evidence and argument, an insight radical feminists share with Moonies, Hare Krishna, and other cultists. It's fortunate that their doctrines and subculture as initially encountered are so unappetizing. Indeed, I've noticed a graying of radical feminism: as Sixties politics and culture continue to gutter out, less and less women have had the proper pre-soak preparing them for feminist brainwashing. Radical feminists (so called) in their early 20's are rare, and getting scarcer.

Radical feminism (no point disputing title to the phrase with its present owners), then, is a ludicrous, hate-filled, authoritarian, *sex/ist*, dogmatic construct which revolutionaries



accord an unmerited legitimacy by taking it seriously at all. It is time to stop matronizing these terrorists of the trivial and hold them responsible for preaching genocidal jive and practicing every evil (even, if the truth be told, rape!) they insist has been inflicted on them (or rather, as it usually turns out, on some other suppositious "sister": the typical radical feminist has it pretty good). How to thwart femino-fascism? That's easy: just take feminists at face value and treat them as equals... then hear them how! The Empress has no clothes... and *that's* what I call obscene.

(1983)

## **The Exquisite Corpse: GARY WARNE**

Dennis Kaplan's beatification of Gary Warne (*San Francisco Bay Guardian*, Jan. 11, 1984) is claptrap, but does attest to Warne's one talent: the ability to surround himself with a fawning following with even less autonomy and imagination than he had. Warne's interest in cults was eminently practical. His idolators were people who liked to be told what to do even as they collectively confirmed each other's illusory originality and distinctiveness. With their own willing complicity, Warne distracted his devotees from facing their sordid and subservient everyday lives, which neither he nor they would ever dream of challenging, with an impoverished version of "play" at once trivialized, tranquilizing and socially safe.

Endowed with all the charisma of a Cabbage Patch Kid, devoid of candor and courage, often childish but never childlike, greedy in grubby little ways, Warne was standoffish not only out of neurosis and snobbery but because he always had something to hide. To look him straight in the eye was always enough to make him squirm. Kaplan pretends (or maybe even believes) that Warne disdained to profit from his ploys, but it was not for lack of trying. He always panhandled for what he wanted while charging for what he had to purvey.

Warne was a parasite on the play-instinct, an indolent ideologue of work (for other people), the voyeur of scenes too animated for his own participation. (Once I encountered him among punks, whom he hated, at an afterhours venue: grimly standing by, doing his duty to keep up on the unusual.) He feared spontaneity and real play because he could never experience them and because they were outside his control. And Warne at all costs had to be in control, even if it meant loosing violence on the insubordinate.

Near the end, Gary Warne finally found himself. He became a cop. There is nothing else that needs to be said.

(1984)



## THE LIBERTARIAN AS CONSERVATIVE

*(A shorter, different version of this article was delivered as an address at the fourth annual convocation of the Eris Society in Aspen, Colorado in August 1984.)*

I agreed to come here today to speak on some such subject as "The Libertarian as Conservative." To me this is so obvious that I am hard put to find something to say to people who still think libertarianism has something to do with liberty. A libertarian is just a Republican who takes drugs. I'd have preferred a more controversial topic like "The Myth of the Penile Orgasm." But since my attendance here is subsidized by the esteemed distributor of a veritable reference library on mayhem and dirty tricks, I can't just take the conch and go rogue. I will indeed mutilate the sacred cow which is libertarianism, as ordered, but I'll administer a few hard lefts to the right in my own way. And I don't mean the easy way. I could just point to the laissez-faire Trilateralism of the Libertarian Party, then leave and go look for a party. It doesn't take long to say that if you fight fire with fire, you'll get burned.

If that were all I came up with, somebody would up and say that the LP has lapsed from the libertarian faith, just as Christians have insisted that their behavior over the last 1900 years or so shouldn't be held against Christianity. There are libertarians who try to retrieve libertarianism from the Libertarian Party just as there are Christians who try to reclaim Christianity from Christendom and communists (I've tried to myself) who try to save communism from the Communist parties and states. They (and I) meant well but we lost. Libertarianism *is* party-archist fringe-rightism just as socialism really is what Eastern European dissidents call "real socialism," *i.e.*, the real-life state-socialism of queues, quotas, corruption and coercion. But I choose not to knock down this libertarian strawman-*qua*-man who's blowing over anyway. A wing of the Reaganist Right has obviously appropriated, with suspect

selectivity, such libertarian themes as deregulation and voluntarism. Ideologues indignant that Reagan has travestied their principles. Tough shit! I notice that it's *their* principles, not mine, that he found suitable to travesty. This kind of quarrel doesn't interest me. My reasons for regarding libertarianism as conservative run deeper than that.

My target is what most libertarians have in common — with each other, and with their ostensible enemies. Libertarians serve the state all the better because they declaim against it. At bottom, they want what it wants. But you can't want what the state wants without wanting the state, for what the state wants is the conditions in which it flourishes. My (unfriendly) approach to modern society is to regard it as an integrated totality. Silly doctrinaire theories which regard the state as a parasitic excrescence on society cannot explain its centuries-long persistence, its ongoing encroachment upon what was previously market terrain, or its acceptance by the overwhelming majority of people including its demonstrable victims.

A far more plausible theory is that the state and (at least) *this* form of society have a symbiotic (however sordid) interdependence, that the state and such institutions as the market and the nuclear family are, in several ways, modes of hierarchy and control. Their articulation is not always harmonious (herein of turf-fights) but they share a common interest in consigning their conflicts to elite or expert resolution. To demonize state authoritarianism while ignoring identical albeit contract-consecrated subservient arrangements in the large-scale corporations which control the world economy is fetishism at its worst. And yet (to quote the most vociferous of radical libertarians, Professor Murray Rothbard) there is nothing un-libertarian about “organization, hierarchy, wage-work, granting of funds by libertarian millionaires, and a libertarian party.” Indeed. That is why libertarianism is just conservatism with a rationalist/positivist veneer.

Libertarians render a service to the state which only they can provide. For all their complaints about its illicit extensions they concede, in their lucid moments, that the state rules far more by consent than by coercion — which is to say, on present-state “libertarian” terms the state doesn't rule at all, it merely carries

out the tacit or explicit terms of its contracts. If it seems contradictory to say that coercion is consensual, the contradiction is in the world, not in the expression, and can't adequately be rendered except by dialectical discourse. One-dimensional syllogistics can't do justice to a world largely lacking in the virtue. If your language lacks poetry and paradox, it's unequal to the task of accounting for actuality. Otherwise anything radically new is literally unspeakable. The scholastic "A = A" logic created by the Catholic Church which the libertarians inherited, unquestioned, from the Randites is just as constrictively conservative as the Newspeak of 1984.

The state commands, for the most part, only because it commands popular support. It is (and should be) an embarrassment to libertarians that the state rules with mass support — including, for all practical purposes, theirs.

Libertarians reinforce acquiescent attitudes by diverting discontents which are generalized (or tending that way) and focusing them on particular features and functions of the state which they are the first to insist are expendable! Thus they turn potential revolutionaries into repairmen. Constructive criticism is really the subtlest sort of praise. If the libertarians succeed in relieving the state of its exiguous activities, they just might be its salvation. No longer will reverence for authority be eroded by the prevalent official ineptitude. The more the state does, the more it does badly. Surely one reason for the common man's aversion to Communism is his reluctance to see the entire economy run like the Post Office. The state tries to turn its soldiers and policemen into objects of veneration and respect, but uniforms lose a lot of their mystique when you see them on park rangers and garbage men.

The ideals and institutions of authority tend to cluster together, both subjectively and objectively. You may recall Edward Gibbon's remark about the eternal alliance of Throne and Altar. Disaffection from received dogmas has a tendency to spread. If there is any future for freedom, it depends on this. Unless and until alienation recognizes itself, all the guns the libertarians cherish will be useless against the state.

You might object that what I've said may apply to the minarchist majority of libertarians, but not to the self-styled

anarchists among them. Not so. To my mind a right-wing anarchist is just a minarchist who'd abolish the state to his own satisfaction by calling it something else. But this incestuous family squabble is no affair of mine. Both camps call for partial or complete privatization of state functions but neither questions the functions themselves. They don't denounce what the state does, they just object to who's doing it. This is why the people most victimized by the state display the least interest in libertarianism. Those on the receiving end of coercion don't quibble over their coercers' credentials. If you can't pay or don't want to, you don't much care if your deprivation is called larceny or taxation or restitution or rent. If you like to control your own time, you distinguish employment from enslavement only in degree and duration. An ideology which outdoes all others (with the possible exception of Marxism) in its exaltation of the work ethic can only be a brake on anti-authoritarian orientations, even if it does make the trains run on time.

My second argument, related to the first, is that the libertarian phobia as to the state reflects and reproduces a profound misunderstanding of the operative forces which make for social control in the modern world. *If* — and this is a big “if,” especially where bourgeois libertarians are concerned — what you want is to maximize individual autonomy, then it is quite clear that the state is the least of the phenomena which stand in your way.

Imagine that you are a Martian anthropologist specializing in Terran studies and equipped with the finest in telescopes and video equipment. You have not yet deciphered any Terran language and so you can only record what Earthlings do, not their shared misconceptions as to what they're doing and why. However, you can gauge roughly when they're doing what they want and when they're doing something else. Your first important discovery is that Earthlings devote nearly all their time to unwelcome activities. The only important exception is a dwindling set of hunter-gatherer groups unperturbed by governments, churches and schools who devote some four hours a day to subsistence activities which so closely resemble the leisure activities of the privileged classes in industrial capitalist countries that you are uncertain whether to describe what they do as work or play. But the state and the market are eradicating these holdouts and you very properly concentrate

on the almost all-inclusive world-system which, for all its evident internal antagonisms as epitomized in war, is much the same everywhere. The Terran young, you further observe, are almost wholly subject to the impositions of the family and the school, sometimes seconded by the church and occasionally the state. The adults often assemble in families too, but the place where they pass the most time and submit to the closest control is at work. Thus, without even entering into the question of the world economy's ultimate dictation within narrow limits of everybody's productive activity, it's apparent that the source of the greatest direct duress experienced by the ordinary adult is *not* the state but rather the business that employs him. Your foreman or supervisor gives you more or-else orders in a week than the police do in a decade.

If one looks at the world without prejudice but with an eye to maximizing freedom, the major coercive institution is not the state, it's *work*. Libertarians who with a straight face call for the abolition of the state nonetheless look on anti-work attitudes with horror. The idea of abolishing work is, of course, an affront to common sense. But then so is the idea of abolishing the state. If a referendum were held among libertarians which posed as options the abolition of work with retention of the state, or abolition of the state with retention of work, does anyone doubt the outcome?

Libertarians are into linear reasoning and quantitative analysis. If they applied these methods to test their own prescriptions they'd be in for a shock. That's the point of my Martian thought experiment. This is not to say that the state isn't just as unsavory as the libertarians say it is. But it does suggest that the state is important, not so much for the direct duress it inflicts on convicts and conscripts, for instance, as for its indirect back-up of employers who regiment employees, shopkeepers who arrest shoplifters, and parents who paternalize children. In these classrooms, the lesson of submission is learned. Of course, there are always a few freaks like anarcho-capitalists or Catholic anarchists, but they're just exceptions to the rule of rule.

Unlike side issues like unemployment, unions, and minimum-wage laws, the subject of work itself is almost entirely absent



from libertarian literature. Most of what little there is consists of Randite rantings against parasites, barely distinguishable from the invective inflicted on dissidents by the Soviet press, and Sunday-school platitudinizing that there is no free lunch — this from fat cats who have usually ingested a lot of them. In 1980 a rare exception appeared in a book review published in the *Libertarian Review* by Professor John Hospers, the Libertarian Party elder state's-man who flunked out of the Electoral College in 1972. Here was a spirited defense of work by a college professor who didn't have to do any. To demonstrate that his arguments were thoroughly conservative, it is enough to show that they agreed in all essentials with Marxism-Leninism.

Hospers thought he could justify wage-labor, factory discipline and hierarchic management by noting that they're imposed in Leninist regimes as well as under capitalism. Would he accept the same argument for the necessity of repressive sex and drug laws? Like other libertarians, Hospers is uneasy — hence his gratuitous red-baiting — because libertarianism and Leninism are as different as Coke and Pepsi when it comes to consecrating class society and the source of its power, work. Only upon the firm foundation of factory fascism and office oligarchy do libertarians and Leninists dare to debate the trivial issues dividing them. Toss in the mainstream conservatives who feel just the same and we end up with a veritable trilateralism of pro-work ideology seasoned to taste.

Hospers, who never has to, sees nothing demeaning in taking orders from bosses, for “how else could a large scale factory be organized?” In other words, “wanting to abolish authority in large-scale industry is tantamount to wanting to abolish industry itself.” Hospers again? No, Frederick Engels! Marx agreed: “Go and run one of the Barcelona factories without direction, that is to say, without authority!” (Which is just what the Catalan workers did in 1936, while their anarcho-syndicalist leaders temporized and cut deals with the government.) “Someone,” says Hospers, “has to make decisions and” — here's the kicker — “someone *else* has to implement them.” Why? His precursor Lenin likewise endorsed “individual dictatorial powers” to assure “absolute and strict *unity of will*.” “But how can strict unity of will be ensured? By thousands subordinating their will to the will of one.” What's needed to

make industrialism work is “iron discipline while at work, with *unquestioning obedience* to the will of a single person, the soviet leader, while at work.” *Arbeit macht frei!*

Some people giving orders and others obeying them: this is the essence of servitude. Of course, as Hospers smugly observes, “one can at least change jobs,” but you can’t avoid having a job — just as under statism one can at least change nationalities but you can’t avoid subjection to one nation-state or another. But freedom means more than the right to change masters.

Hospers and other libertarians are wrong to assume, with Manchester industrialist Engels, that technology imposes its division of labor “independent of social organization.” Rather, the factory *is* an instrument of social control, the most effective ever devised to enforce the class chasm between the few who “make decisions” and the many who “implement them.” Industrial technology is much more the product than the source of workplace totalitarianism. Thus the revolt against work — reflected in absenteeism, sabotage, turnover, embezzlement, wildcat strikes, and goldbricking — has far more liberatory promise than the machinations of “libertarian” politicians and propagandists.

Most work serves the predatory purposes of commerce and coercion and can be abolished outright. The rest can be automated away and/or transformed — by the experts, the workers who do it — into creative, playlike pastimes whose variety and conviviality will make extrinsic inducements like the capitalist carrot and the Communist stick equally obsolete. In the hopefully impending meta-industrial revolution, libertarian communists revolting against work will settle accounts with “libertarians” and “Communists” working against revolt. And then we can go for the gusto!

Even if you think everything I’ve said about work, such as the possibility of its abolition, is visionary nonsense, the anti-liberty implications of its prevalence would still hold good. The time of your life is the one commodity you can sell but never buy back. Murray Rothbard thinks egalitarianism is a revolt against nature, but his day is 24 hours long, just like everybody else’s. If you spend most of your waking life taking orders or kissing ass, if

you get habituated to hierarchy, you will become passive-aggressive, sado-masochistic, servile and stupified, and you will carry that load into every aspect of the balance of your life. Incapable of living a life of liberty, you'll settle for one of its ideological representations, like libertarianism. You can't treat values like workers, hiring and firing them at will and assigning each a place in an imposed division of labor. The taste for freedom and pleasure can't be compartmentalized.

Libertarians complain that the state is parasitic, an excrescence on society. They think it's like a tumor you could cut out, leaving the patient just as he was, only healthier. They've been mystified by their own metaphors. Like the market, the state is an activity, not an entity. The only way to abolish the state is to change the way of life it forms a part of. That way of life, if you call that living, revolves around work and takes in bureaucracy, moralism, schooling, money, and more. Libertarians are conservatives because they avowedly want to maintain most of this mess and so unwittingly perpetuate the rest of the racket. But they're bad conservatives because they've forgotten the reality of institutional and ideological interconnection which was the original insight of the historical conservatives. Entirely out of touch with the real currents of contemporary resistance, they denounce *practical* opposition to the system as "nihilism," "Luddism," and other big words they don't understand. A glance at the world confirms that their utopian capitalism just *can't compete* with the state. With enemies like libertarians, the state doesn't need friends.

(1984)

## ANARCHISM AND OTHER IMPEDIMENTS TO ANARCHY

There is no need at present to produce new definitions of anarchism — it would be hard to improve on those long since devised by various eminent dead foreigners. Nor need we linger over the familiar hyphenated anarchisms, communist- and individualist- and so forth; the textbooks cover all that. More to the point is why we are no closer to anarchy today than were Godwin and Proudhon and Kropotkin and Goldman in their times. There are lots of reasons, but the ones that most need to be thought about are the ones the anarchists engender themselves, since it is these obstacles — if any — it should be possible to remove. Possible, but not probable.

My considered judgment, after years of scrutiny of, and sometimes harrowing activity in the anarchist milieu, is that *anarchists* are a main reason — I suspect, a sufficient reason — why anarchy remains an epithet without a prayer of a chance to be realized. Most anarchists are, frankly, incapable of living in an autonomous cooperative manner. A lot of them aren't very bright. They tend to peruse their own classics and insider literature to the exclusion of broader knowledge of the world we live in. Essentially timid, they associate with others like themselves with the tacit understanding that nobody will measure anyone else's opinions and actions against any standard of practical critical intelligence; that no one by his or her individual achievements will rise too far above the prevalent level; and, above all, that nobody challenge the shibboleths of anarchist ideology.

Anarchism as a milieu is not so much a challenge to the existing order as it is one highly specialized form of accomodation to it. It is a way of life, or an adjunct of one, with its own particular mix of rewards and sacrifices. Poverty is obligatory, but for that very reason forecloses the question whether this or that anarchist could have been anything but a failure regardless of ideology. The history of anarchism is a

history of unparalleled defeat and martyrdom, yet anarchists venerate their victimized forebears with a morbid devotion which occasions suspicion that the anarchists, like everybody else, think the only good anarchist is a dead one. Revolution — defeated revolution — is glorious, but it belongs in books and pamphlets. In this century — Spain in 1936 and France in 1968 are especially clear cases — the revolutionary upsurge caught the official, organized anarchists flat-footed and initially nonsupportive or worse. The reason is not far to seek. It's not that all these ideologues were hypocrites (some were). Rather, they had worked out a daily routine of anarchist militancy, one they unconsciously counted on to endure indefinitely since revolution isn't *really* imaginable in the here-and-now, and they reacted with fear and defensiveness when events outdistanced their rhetoric.

In other words, given a choice between anarchism and anarchy, most anarchists would go for the anarchism ideology and subculture rather than take a dangerous leap into the unknown, into a world of stateless liberty. But since anarchists are almost the only avowed critics of the state as such, these freedom-fearing folk would inevitably assume prominent or at least publicized places in any insurgency which was genuinely anti-statist. Themselves follower-types, they would find themselves the leaders of a revolution which threatened their settled status no less than that of the politicians and proprietors. The anarchists would sabotage the revolution, consciously or otherwise, which without them might have dispensed with the state without even pausing to replay the ancient Marx/Bakunin tussle.

In truth the anarchists who assume the name have done nothing to challenge the state, not with windy unread jargon-riddled writings, but with the contagious example of another way to relate to other people. Anarchists as they conduct the anarchism business are the best refutation of anarchist pretensions. True, in North America at least the top-heavy "federations" of workerist organizers have collapsed in ennui and acrimony, and a good thing too, but the informal social structure of anarchism is still hierarchic through and through. The anarchists placidly submit to what Bakunin called an "invisible government" which in their case consists of the

editors (in fact if not in name) of a handful of the larger and longer-lasting anarchist publications.

These publications, despite seemingly profound ideological differences, have similar “father-knows-best” stances vis-a-vis their readers as well as a gentlemen’s agreement not to permit attacks upon each other which would expose inconsistencies and otherwise undermine their common class interest in hegemony over the anarchist rank-and-file. Oddly enough, you can much more readily criticize the *Fifth Estate* or *Kick It Over* in their own pages than you can there criticize, say, *Processed World*. Every organization has more in common with every other organization than it does with any of the unorganized. The anarchist critique of the state, if only the anarchists understood it, is but a special case of the critique of organization. And, at some level, even anarchist organizations sense this.

Anti-anarchists may well conclude that if there is to be hierarchy and coercion, let it be out in the open, clearly labelled as such. Unlike these pundits (the right-wing “libertarians,” the minarchists, for instance) I stubbornly persist in my opposition to the state. But not because, as anarchists so often thoughtlessly declaim, the state is not “necessary.” Ordinary people dismiss this anarchist assertion as ludicrous, and so they should. Obviously, in an industrialized class society like ours, the state *is* necessary. The point is that the state has created the conditions in which it is indeed necessary, by stripping individuals and face-to-face voluntary associations of their powers. More fundamentally, the state’s underpinnings (work, moralism, industrial technology, hierarchic organizations) are *not* necessary but rather antithetical to the satisfaction of real needs and desires. Unfortunately, most brands of anarchism endorse all these premises yet balk at their logical conclusion: the state.

If there were no anarchists, the state would have had to invent them. We know that on several occasions it has done just that. We need anarchists unencumbered by anarchism. Then, and only then, we can begin to get serious about fomenting anarchy.

(1985)



## THE BEST BOOK CATALOG IN THE WORLD

Loompanics Unlimited, *1985 Main Catalog* (Port Townsend, WA: Loompanics Unlimited, 1985). 148 pp, \$2.00 or free with book order from PO Box 1197, Port Townsend, WA 98368.

Remember the *Whole Earth Catalog*? Self-sufficiency, personal growth, utopian visions, innovative technology? Well, that was then and now, it's today. Not all that different in many of its listings, but very different in its purpose and point of view, is the 1985 Main Catalog of Loompanics Unlimited, the dark side of the Power. It is *CoEvolution Quarterly* ruthlessly re-edited by Friedrich Nietzsche. Somewhere in this catalog there must be a cookbook which lists a recipe for hobbit *tartare*. The time is now, times are tough and nice guys finish last. Loompanics is visionary, almost mystical in its own way, but not tunnel-visionary. Rimbaud is great but he better make like Rambo if he wants to win.

This is either the worst or, as it modestly proposes, "the best book catalog in the world." It is by and for people who want freedom; but who figure that means they want power. The distinction is, after all, an elusive one. On paper at least, Loompanics and its customers are not too particular about what it takes to get what they want. Many of the books available in this 148-page catalog (and in precious few other places) tell how to do the kind of things best left undone in a better world, maybe even in this one. There is, for instance, John Minnery's six-volume epic *How to Kill*, and the Torture Library, and the lockpicking manuals by "Eddie the Wire." (Many Loompanics authors use pseudonyms — for good reason — and the names alone tell the story: "Adam Cash" (*Guerrilla Capitalism*), "Rex Feral" (*How to Rip Off a Drug Dealer*), "Ragnar Redbeard" (*Might Is Right*), "X" C.P.A. (*How to Cheat on Your Taxes*), etc.). Pretty scary stuff, uh?

Not to worry — too much, anyway. Avowedly egoist and amoralist, Loompanics is nonetheless more reliable than most



mail-order businesses, just as atheists generally live more ethical lives than Christians. Self-interest is the reason. "So controversial are the books we offer," writes "Proprietor" Michael Hoy in the Introduction, "that most magazines will not allow us to advertise. Bookstores and distributors will not carry our publications. Periodicals refuse to review our books." (Usually.) Loompanics publishes small-press size runs of a large number of books of very limited appeal and, as a result, prices are high. It has to cultivate its customers and keep them.

And who are Loompanics customers? I don't know (it does rent its mailing list but you can check a box to opt off and you damn well should), but I doubt they are the well-armed, high-tech, drug-taking, survivalist, martial arts, black-marketeering, tax-dodging, paper-tripping, health-nut, free-thinking Discordian master criminals that a composite of catalog cullings would suggest. I think they are mostly spiritually restless contemplatives, probably locked in straight jobs, dreaming of escape — of "vonu" (invulnerability to coercion through withdrawal from society), of space colonization, of life extension to tide them over till a better day, of the big score. They take hope from books that parade their contempt for normal life while portraying fantastic possibilities always presented in a patented manner of tough-minded rationalism. The typical Loompanics reader is, I conjecture, a surrealist trapped in the body of an engineer.

So I doubt the crime rates are affected one way or the other by the self-help burglary books — maybe a bit by the harassment and tax-evasion manuals — or the crime-prevention texts. The knowledge in these books is, not neutral certainly, but double-edged. Loompanics says: if anyone knows this stuff, why shouldn't you? In particular, Loompanics — proudly defining itself as "the lunatic fringe of the libertarian movement" — asserts that governments know all about violence and dirty tricks, individuals too had better learn the score. This might sound facile and rhetorical but for the thought-provoking fact that many of Loompanics' volumes on the Dark Arts are nothing more than reprints of government publications, books like *Covert Surveillance and Electronic Penetration* and *Barrier Penetration Database* ("a must for every nuclear terrorist's library!"). And if you think books on *How to Start Your Own*

*Country* and *Basement Nukes* are absurd, they nonetheless starkly pose questions which are not, like “who is qualified to possess nuclear weapons if I’m not?” Loompanics undermines the religion of nationalism by indirection, in unexpected ways. As one Loompanics author opines, “the world is overpopulated with people who need to be hurt.” But these very people — the ferret-faced officials, governmental and corporate, and their hangers-one — will likely continue to dish it out much more than they take it, not from reading books on how to make blow-guns and heft morning-stars but by the inexorable ordinary operation of the everyday routine.

The Loompanics philosophy is that, insofar as victimization is avoidable, it is voluntary. You can (it is claimed) survive and even prosper during the bad times while awaiting utopian salvation and even, should it fail to happen, without it. The title of one crime-prevention book (by an ex-con) says it all: *Don’t Become the Victim*. Overall, this individualistic self-liberation approach can be characterized as “anarcho-capitalist,” but Loompanics hasn’t hesitated to publish leftist or post-leftist texts which otherwise complement its philosophy, and its relations with the mainstream libertarians, always uneasy, are perhaps being loosened still further. Loompanics published Erwin Strauss’ *The Case Against a Libertarian Political Party* as well as reprinting the “communist egoist” essay *The Right to be Greedy* by “For Ourselves.” It carries Raoul Vaneigem’s *Revolution of Everyday Life*, the Swiss leftist guide to forensic science *Without a Trace*, and Paul Lafargue’s classic *The Right to be Lazy* (“a little communist propaganda spices up any catalog”). Loompanics emphatically departs from the uptight anality typical of libertarians, who tend not to read books like *Play Poker, Quit Work, and Sleep Till Noon*. Even resolute anti-statists don’t want to know *How to Collect Unemployment Insurance (Even if You’re not Eligible)*. (Mini-review of this volume: suggestive, but too general unless you live in California, and even then, procedures change so often it’s foolhardy to follow any blueprint unthinkingly. A then friend of mine who used the central ploy — setting up a spurious former “employer” — got caught and had to pay it all back.) The glossy libertarian monthly *Reason* banned all Loompanics advertising on the pretext that its advertising of *The Right to be Greedy* was

“offensive” (read: disconcerting to libertarians), which seems to bespeak a certain lack of faith in the self-correcting mechanism of the free market.

In a small way, Loompanics is actually a valuable reprint publisher, and even at its prices cheaper than the academic reprint houses that cater to free-spending university libraries. Loompanics has issued a photo reprint of Eunice Minette Schuster’s 1932 history of *Native American Anarchism* and a reset edition of the Social Darwinist rant by “Ragnar Redbeard,” *Might is Right*. Loompanics also carries Stirner’s *The Ego and His Own*, Lysander Spooner’s *No Treason* (an 1867 classic by an abolitionist-turned-anarchist lawyer arguing, in effect, that the Constitution is unconstitutional), and works by H.L. Mencken on Nietzsche. Loompanics is the publisher of the Discordian classic *Principia Discordia*, whose *mythos* inspired the more popular and long-winded *Illuminatus!* trilogy, and of *The World Power Foundation: Its Goals and Platform* which calls for a new, non-race-based slave society to satisfy the needs of the many to submit and of the few to dominate. Two of its postulates: “Excitement is more important than equality” and “Might and right are not exactly the same, but after a few years no one will know the difference.”

Rip-off manuals are in a sense an ideal product because, without planned obsolescence or hanky-panky by the publisher, their very market success occasions correctives and counter-measures which force their frequent revision or replacement. Thus *The Paper Trip I* begat *The Paper Trip II* and some spinoffs, all explaining how to construct a documented new (or supplementary) identity for yourself. Better do it now before Congress mandates a national I.D.! Similarly the IRS closes loopholes as fast as the elite tax lawyers open them, and by the time Loompanics passes the word on down to the groundlings it may be too late. Actually the most diverting Loompanics publication after the Catalog — *Loompanics’ Greatest Hits* (articles and interviews gathered from several years of Catalogs and Supplements) —has a cautionary “Interview with a Libertarian C.P.A. on Taxes” which bluntly announces that many of the ploys cherished by tax protestors (e.g., that Federal Reserve Notes aren’t legal tender) are bullshit likely to land them behind bars. Loompanics has little to offer the really rich

and truly greedy. They have blue-chip lawyers and CPA's to do their dirty work. Loompanics tries to democratize knowledge, carrying self-help legal manuals by Berkeley's liberal Nolo Press as well as all the anti-tax stuff.

Some Loompanics books stretch a little useful information out unduly. The feasible ideas in its harassment books could probably all be assembled in one ordinary-sized volume. *How to Cheat on College Exams* would be overpriced even if it weren't padded (42 pages, \$4.95). While working as a Teaching Assistant in a college undergraduate course I loaned it to the professor, who has taught at four of the most prestigious universities in the country. Later he returned it to me, unimpressed, saying there was "nothing new" he didn't already routinely watch out for. (Which is not to say, of course, that it never works.) And one of the Desert Publications harassment manuals (no longer carried), ostensibly authored by some near-Nazi biker type, made senselessly reckless suggestions carrying a high risk of apprehension, while reassuring the reader that some of the felonies that would put him in prison for a minimum of several years were not even illegal! So, as always, *caveat emptor*.

Oh yes, one more thing. Why "Loompanics"? I had to ask to find out. The first book published (but no longer carried) by what took the name Loompanics was an index to the *National Lampoon*. Lamponics/Loompanics. I know, it was anticlimactic for me too.

So how does it all cash out? Not, surely, in martial-arts mayhem. With gun ownership in six figures in this country it's silly to worry about Loompanics selling a book explaining how to make a home-made zip-gun. Besides, a goodly proportion of homicides are, literally, the work of the police; they get to read the originals, they don't need the Loompanics reprints. Loompanics books are, like pornography, not so much an incitement to sin as a substitute for it. The important self-defense books are the ones, not about throwing knives or razor-fighting, but about how to avoid situations where the only options are resistance or surrender.

If Loompanics readers are attuned to its wavelength as I receive it, they pursue liberty through privacy, more by

avoidance than approach. The book *Vonu: The Search for Personal Freedom* may express the core Loompanics aspiration. The author, "Rayo," during the 1960's espoused rational self-seeking by the individual of as much invisibility to authority as he can reshape his life-style to arrange for. Ultimately this man took his logic, and he was rigorously logical, to a practical conclusion. He vanished in 1974. As his editor says, "his goal was always to become invisible to coercers (meaning mainly Government). He might have come to believe that this required that he become invisible to everyone." That's weird all right, does anybody have a less drastic workable plan how to be free? I don't, but the Loompanics Catalog has a few ideas.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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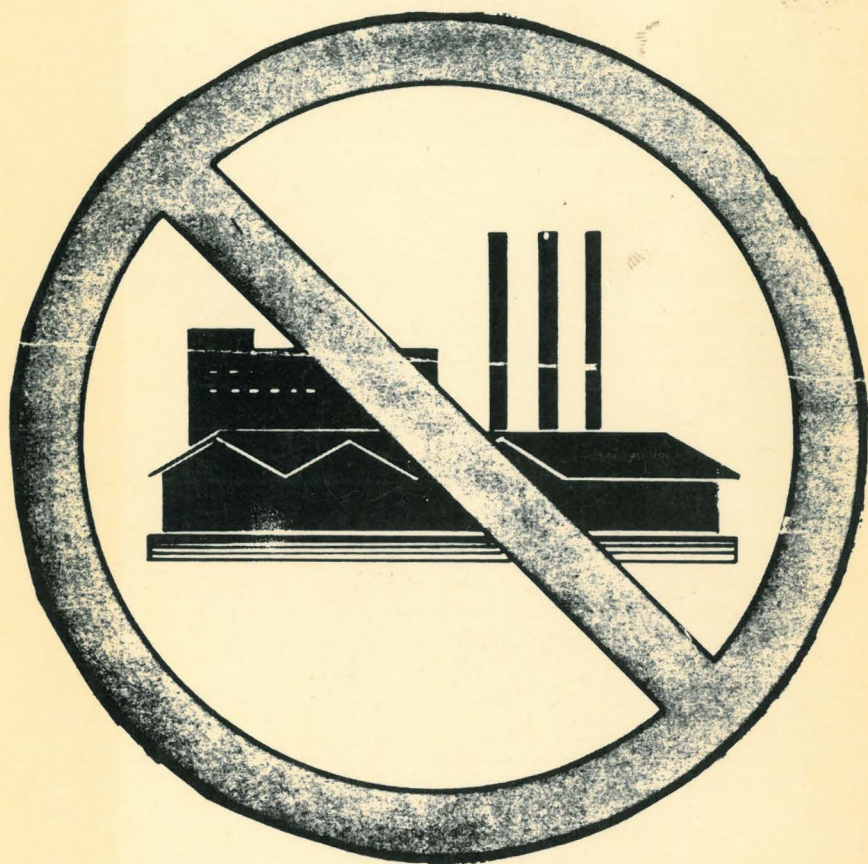
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