

the Reading Group Reader: part 1

oct - dec 2007

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HAKIM BEY

“Poetic Terrorism”
excerpt from *T.A.Z.*

Poetic Terrorism

WEIRD DANCING IN ALL-NIGHT computer-banking lobbies. Unauthorized pyrotechnic displays. Land-art, earth-works as bizarre alien artifacts strewn in State Parks. Burglarize houses but instead of stealing, leave Poetic-Terrorist objects. Kidnap someone & make them happy. Pick someone at random & convince them they're the heir to an enormous, useless & amazing fortune--say 5000 square miles of Antarctica, or an aging circus elephant, or an orphanage in Bombay, or a collection of alchemical mss. Later they will come to realize that for a few moments they believed in something extraordinary, & will perhaps be driven as a result to seek out some more intense mode of existence.

Bolt up brass commemorative plaques in places (public or private) where you have experienced a revelation or had a particularly fulfilling sexual experience, etc.

Go naked for a sign.

Organize a strike in your school or workplace on the grounds that it does not satisfy your need for indolence & spiritual beauty.

Graffiti-art loaned some grace to ugly subways & rigid public monuments--PT-art can also be created for public places: poems scrawled in courthouse lavatories, small fetishes abandoned in parks & restaurants, xerox-art under windshield-wipers of parked cars, Big Character Slogans pasted on playground walls, anonymous letters mailed to random or chosen recipients (mail fraud), pirate radio transmissions, wet cement...

The audience reaction or aesthetic-shock produced by PT ought to be at least as strong as the emotion of terror-- powerful disgust, sexual arousal, superstitious awe, sudden intuitive breakthrough, dada-esque angst--no matter whether the PT is aimed at one person or many, no matter whether it is "signed" or anonymous, if it does not change someone's life (aside from the artist) it fails.

PT is an act in a Theater of Cruelty which has no stage, no rows of seats, no tickets & no walls. In order to work at all, PT must categorically be divorced from all conventional structures for art consumption (galleries, publications, media). Even the guerilla Situationist tactics of street theater are perhaps too well known & expected now.

An exquisite seduction carried out not only in the cause of mutual satisfaction but also as a conscious act in a deliberately beautiful life--may be the ultimate PT. The PTerrorist behaves like a confidence-trickster whose aim is not money but CHANGE.

Don't do PT for other artists, do it for people who will not realize (at least for a few moments) that what you have done is art. Avoid recognizable art-categories, avoid politics, don't stick around to argue, don't be sentimental; be ruthless, take risks, vandalize only what must be defaced, do something children will remember all their lives--but don't be spontaneous unless the PT Muse has possessed you.

Dress up. Leave a false name. Be legendary. The best PT is against the law, but don't get caught. Art as crime; crime as art.

REBECCA SOLNIT

“Viagra for Caribou”
and “Getting the Hell
out of Paradise”
excerpts from *Hope in
the Dark*

would've likely leaked all over creation. A beautiful coalition of the five local tribes, other local people, and anti-nuclear activists fought in the deserts and the courts and with the scientific facts for ten years before defeating the dump definitively a few years ago. On the West Texas–Mexican border is the small Latino community of Sierra Blanca, where another nuclear waste dump was planned but defeated. Go east to Oklahoma and you'll arrive at the sites where, in 1993, after years of work, environmentalists—including the group Native Americans for a Clean Environment—and the Cherokee Nation shut down twenty-three percent of the world's uranium production. All these places are places of absence, or at least the absence of devastation, a few of the countless places in which there is nothing to see; nothing is what victory often looks like.

The Angel of History says, "Terrible," but this angel says, "Could be worse." They're both right, but the latter angel gives us grounds to act.

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VIAGRA FOR CARIBOU

The Old Testament God rules with a heavy hand over a static moral world, but I believe that our world is instead presided over by an alternate entity, Coyote, the Native American deity, who is indestructible, lecherous, hilarious, and improvisational, straying into and surviving catastrophe (a little like his simplified great-grandson, Chuck Jones's cartoon character Wile E. Coyote). Many native creation myths do not feature a world that was perfect in the beginning, but one that was made by flawed, humorous creators who never finished the job. In that world, there was never a state of grace, never a fall, and creation continues (which is why it's ironic, or maybe comic, that white people like to situate Native Americans in the frozen diorama of Eden before the Fall). In Yahweh's world, only the good do good, and only virtue is rewarded. Coyote's world is more complicated.

It turns out, for example, that Viagra is good for endangered species. Animal parts that traditional Chinese medicine prescribed as aphrodisiacs and for treating

impotence—including green turtles, seahorses, geckos, hooded and harp seals, and the velvet from the half-grown antlers of caribou—are, thanks to the new drug, no longer in such demand. What more comic form of the mysterious unfolding of the world is there than this, which suggests that Viagra's ultimate purpose may be the survival of animals at the edges of the earth? Is the erotic toil of the Viagra-saturated not selfish but performed secretly on behalf of the caribou whose antlers are no longer being cut off while they're still tender, growing like small trees with blood for sap under that velvet? The sirocco winds carry the dust of African deserts to the humid parts of Europe, and another kind of wind, as powerful and amoral as a coyote fart, carries effects from Chinese bedrooms to Arctic tundra.

And in many places, the animals are coming back. There are wolves again in Yellowstone—and, as my friend Chip Ward asks, what kind of species have we ourselves become, to restore wolves to the places where we once strove so hard to eliminate them, to yearn to see or hear these creatures we once so feared and hated? There are more buffalo on the Great Plains than at any time since the great annihilation of the 1870s, and the vision of creating "buffalo commons" hundreds or thousands of miles long may become a reality—in part because the region is losing its human population anyway. All over New England, as land that was farms in Thoreau's time and even in

Robert Frost's goes feral and gets reforested, deer, moose, bear, cougar, coyotes, and other creatures are coming back in droves. Lyme disease, named after Lyme, Connecticut, is a problem largely because deer populations have skyrocketed and spread into suburbia—as have deer everywhere, from there to the canyons of Los Angeles. It won't be the wilderness that it was—passenger pigeons will never blot out the sky again, just for starters—but it is more than anyone anticipated. Great blue herons nest in both Central and Golden Gate parks, and coyotes find their way into more and more cities. Environmental historian Richard White tells of the return of hundreds of thousands of sockeye salmon to Lake Washington in Seattle and of the enthusiasm with which people greeted them. Their return was not, he adds, the revitalization of an ancient salmon run; they were hatchery fish returning to where scientists at the University of Washington had hatched them. They were no pure ancient past coming back, but they were one version of a future with room in it for some kind of wildness. As White puts it, "There is a hope in that for which we might gladly surrender purity."

The Angel of Alternate History asks us to believe in the invisible; Coyote asks us to trust in the basic eccentricity of the world, its sense of humor, and its resilience. The moral worldview believes that good is accomplished through virtue, but sometimes army bases become de facto wildlife preserves; sometimes virtue falls on its face.

Sometimes Las Vegas-style casinos give Native Americans visibility and political clout. Sometimes corporations and the military demand affirmative action because it benefits them, too. Sometimes Laura Bush pushes a poet to trigger an insurrection that lets thousands of poets speak out against her husband's war.

The Internet was invented by the US military and may be one of our most valuable weapons against it, for the decentralized dissemination of information and for the organization of citizen action. The Internet can be an elitist instrument, requiring access to computers—and, usually, to electricity and phone lines—and the knowledge to use them (though a nomadic friend tells me that all through the poorest parts of the world—Thailand, Bolivia—the young flock to proliferating Internet cafés). But the Zapatista revolution was the first to make serious use of the Internet; the shutdown of the WTO meeting in Seattle was organized to a significant extent by Internet communications; and so were the 2003 antiwar actions around the world. What can be said of a medium that sometimes seems to be made half out of cheesy porn sites and yet opens these doors? Just this: Coyote pisses on moral purity and rigid definitions.

14 GETTING THE HELL OUT OF PARADISE

Perfection is a stick with which to beat the possible. Perfectionists can find fault with anything, and no one has higher standards in this regard than radicals. In January 2003, when Governor Ryan of Illinois overturned 167 death sentences, reprieving everyone on death row, there were radical commentators who found fault with the details, carped when we should have been pouring champagne over our heads like football champs. But there's an increasing gap between this new movement, with its capacity for joy and carnival, and the old figureheads. Their grumpiness is often the grumpiness of perfectionists who hold that anything less than total victory is failure, a premise that makes it easy to give up at the start or to disparage the victories that are possible. This is earth. It will never be heaven. There will always be cruelty, always be violence, always be destruction. There is tremendous devastation now. In the time it takes you to read this book, acres of rain forest will vanish, a species will go extinct, people will be raped, killed, dispossessed,

die of easily preventable causes. We cannot eliminate all devastation for all time, but we can reduce it, outlaw it, undermine its sources and foundations: these are victories. A better world, yes; a perfect world, never.

A million years ago I wrote a few features for the punk magazine *Maximum Rock and Roll*. One of them was about women's rights, and a cranky guy wrote in that women used to make sixty-six cents to the male dollar and that now we made seventy-seven cents, so what were we complaining about? It doesn't seem that it should be so complicated to acknowledge that seventy-seven cents is better than sixty-six cents and that seventy-seven cents isn't good enough, but the politics we have are so pathetically bipolar that we tell this story only two ways: either seventy-seven cents is a victory and victories are points where you shut up and stop fighting, or seventy-seven cents is a defeat and activism accomplishes nothing and what's the point of fighting? Both versions are defeatist because they are static. What's missing from these two ways of telling is an ability to recognize a situation in which you are traveling and have not arrived, in which you have cause both to celebrate and to fight, in which the world is always being made and is never finished. What's missing, you could say, is a sense of Coyote's world instead of Yahweh's.

In South Africa, the apartheid system was overthrown after decades of heroic struggle of every kind, but economic justice has yet to arrive; it was a seventy-seven-cent

victory. Václav Havel was a gorgeous gadfly to the communists, but as president of Czechoslovakia, then the Czech Republic, he's been just a seventy-seven-cent politician. "We are winning," said the graffiti in Seattle, not "We have won." It's a way of telling in which you can feel successful without feeling smug, in which you can feel challenged without feeling defeated. Most victories will be temporary, or incomplete, or compromised in some way, and we might as well celebrate them as well as the stunning victories that come from time to time. Without stopping. Even if someday we get to dollar-for-dollar parity, that will just free us up to attend to something else (just as US women's wages have advanced compared to men's, but most working people's wages have diminished overall since the 1970s). "Utopia is on the horizon," declares the Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano. "When I walk two steps, it takes two steps back. I walk ten steps and it is ten steps further away. What is utopia for? It is for this, for walking."

Judeo-Christian culture's central story is of Paradise and the Fall. It is a story of perfection and of loss, and perhaps a deep sense of loss is contingent upon the belief in perfection. Conservatives rear-project narratives about how everyone used to be straight, God-fearing, decently clad, and content with the nuclear family, narratives that any good reading of history undoes. Activists, even those who decry Judeo-Christian heritage as our own fall from grace,

are as prone to tell the story of paradise, though their paradise might be matriarchial or vegan or the flip side of the technological utopia of classical socialism. And they compare the possible to perfection, again and again, finding fault with the former because of the latter. Paradise is imagined as a static place, as a place before or after history, after strife and eventfulness and change: the premise is that once perfection has arrived, change is no longer necessary. This idea of perfection is also why people believe in saving, in going home, and in activism as crisis response rather than everyday practice.

Moths and other nocturnal insects navigate by the moon and stars. Those heavenly bodies are useful for them to find their way, even though they never get far from the surface of the earth. But lightbulbs and candles send them astray; they fly into the heat or the flame and die. For these creatures, to arrive is a calamity. When activists mistake heaven for some goal at which they must arrive, rather than an idea to navigate by, they burn themselves out, or they set up a totalitarian utopia in which others are burned in the flames. Don't mistake a lightbulb for the moon, and don't believe that the moon is useless unless we land on it. After all those millennia of poetry about the moon, nothing was more prosaic than the guys in space suits stomping around on the moon with their flags and golf clubs thirty-something years ago. The moon is profound *except* when we land on it.

The Czech novelist Milan Kundera said several years before his country liberated itself from Soviet-style communism, "Totalitarianism is not only hell, but also the dream of paradise—the age-old dream of a world where everybody would live in harmony, united by a single common will and faith, without secrets from each other If totalitarianism did not exploit these archetypes, which are deep inside us all and rooted deep in all religions, it could never attract so many people, especially during the early phases of its existence. Once the dream of paradise starts to turn into reality, however, here and there people begin to crop up who stand in its way, and so the rulers of paradise must build a little gulag on the side of Eden. In the course of time this gulag grows ever bigger and more perfect, while the adjoining paradise gets ever smaller and poorer It is extremely easy to condemn gulags but to reject the totalitarian poesy which leads to the gulag by way of paradise is as difficult as ever."

Paradise is not the place in which you arrive but the journey toward it. Sometimes I think victories must be temporary or incomplete; what kind of humanity would survive paradise? The United States has tried to approximate paradise in its suburbs, with *luxe, calme, volupté*, cul-de-sacs, cable television, and two-car garages, and it has produced a soft ennui that shades over into despair and a decay of the soul suggesting that paradise is already

a gulag. Countless desperate teenagers will tell you so. For paradise does not require of us courage, selflessness, creativity, passion: paradise in all accounts is passive, is sedative, and if you read carefully, soulless.

That's why the poet John Keats called the world with all its suffering "this vale of soul-making," why crisis often brings out the best in us. Some imaginative Christian heretics worshipped Eve for having liberated us from paradise—the myth of the fortunate fall. The heretics recognized that before the fall we were not yet fully human—Adam and Eve need not wrestle with morality, with creation, with society, with mortality in paradise; they only realize their own potential and their own humanity in the struggle an imperfect world invites. When the Iraq war broke out, 20,000 of us in San Francisco shut down downtown, shut down streets, bridges, highways, corporations that first day and kept coming back for weeks. Out of all that conviction, all that passion, one phrase stood out for me: Gopal Dayaneni, one of the key organizers for the antiwar actions, was asked by the daily newspaper why he was getting arrested. "I have a soul," he replied.

Recent strains of activism proceed on the realization that victory is not some absolute state far away but the achieving of it, not the moon landing but the flight. A number of ideas and practices have emerged that realize this. The term "politics of prefiguration" has long been used to describe the idea that if you embody what you

aspire to, you have already succeeded. That is to say, if your activism is already democratic, peaceful, creative, then in one small corner of the world these things have triumphed. Activism, in this model, is not only a toolbox to change things but a home in which to take up residence and live according to your beliefs—even if it's a temporary and local place, this paradise of participating, this vale where souls get made.

This has been an important belief for activists who recognize that change happens as much by inspiration and catalyst as by imposition. You could describe activism as having two primary strains: the attempt to change something problematic outside itself, and the attempt to build something better—though the two strains are irrevocably and necessarily intertwined, which is exactly the point of the politics of prefiguration. This idea was itself prefigured by Walter Benjamin, who wrote, "The class struggle . . . is a fight for the crude and material things without which no refined and spiritual things could exist. Nevertheless, it is not in the forms of the spoils which fall to the victor that the latter make their presence felt in the class struggle. They manifest themselves in this struggle as courage, humor, cunning, and fortitude." They are present all along the journey; arrival is at best irrelevant, at worst undermining, at least to the goods of the spirit.

Reclaim the Streets, the rowdy British movement of the later 1990s, lived this out beautifully. The premise behind

RTS's street parties seemed to be that if what they were protesting was isolation, privatization, and alienation, then a free-for-all party out in public was not just a protest but a solution, if a solution in the mode that Hakim Bey called "Temporary Autonomous Zones." (Hakim Bey contrasted these moments of liberation with revolutions proper, which "lead to the expected curve, the consensus-approved trajectory: revolution, reaction, betrayal, the founding of a stronger and even more oppressive State . . . By failing to follow this curve, the *up-rising* suggests the possibility of a movement outside and beyond the Hegelian spiral of that 'progress' which is secretly nothing more than a vicious circle.") RTS and the Anti-Roads Movement took on what could be called the post-industrialization of Britain: the privatization of everyday life and the imposition of monster roads and freeways on still-vital landscapes and communities.

There were some beautiful moments: people taking up residence in trees to which they established legal residence by receiving mail there, a tactic to keep the tree from being cut; an RTS party in which people surged onto a freeway overpass and, muffled by rave music, smuggled jackhammers onto the concrete under the giant bell-skirt of a stiltwalking grande dame, then jackhammered openings in which trees were planted. Huge street parties in downtown London linked up with activists around the world to become global anticapitalist demonstrations.

Humor, creativity, outrageousness, and exuberance were among the group's hallmarks. That RTS didn't outlive its moment was also a kind of victory, a recognition that time had moved on and the focus was elsewhere. Instead, RTS's incendiary carnival spirit, global Internet communications, and tactics of temporary victory became part of the vocabulary of what came next, the global justice movement. RTS decomposed itself into the soil from which new flowers sprang.

One day I heard a Zen Buddhist abbot from Ireland quote the Argentinian Jew Jorge Luis Borges, "There is no day without its moments of paradise." And then the day continues.

SARAH KANOUSE

“Cooing over the
Golden Phallus”
published in the
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and Protest* vol. 4

I was also pretty confused by your website. As a person who advocates turning off your computer, you sure do have an extensive website with a lot of "campaigns" that seem pretty impossible to break into (unless you're a rich art student) kind of like the "activist scene" was when I first started, until I remembered I didn't care. Another element of confusion for me is the culture jamming you attribute to Christian fundamentalists. Excuse me for asking, but who the hell are you forging alliances with?

It's true that the religious right can control television, as evidenced by the American Family Association, Christian Leaders for Responsible Television, the Family Friendly Programming Forum, and other private censorship boards that make a mockery of "tv turn off week," contributing to the control of television content by advertisers (!!) through pre-screening, letting small, powerful pressure groups of "fundamentalist christian culture jammers" dictate the content and lay down moral guidelines by pulling out ads from shows that dare to question nuclear war, feature non-heterosexual couples, or dare to cover the complexity of controversial issues such as single parenting, abortion, assisted suicide, or the pill. Oppression, oppression! That kind of censorship in television, the watered-down television that results, frankly sucks more than public access does.

Living without dead time, to me, is about more than just following your "deprogramming guidelines,"—which, by the way, is a contradiction in itself.

Sincerely,

Yael Grauer, human being

Cooing Over the Golden Phallus

SARAH KANOUSE

In the documentary film *We Interrupt This Empire*, an anti-war demonstrator tosses a cream pie in the face of an argumentative reporter. The scene never fails to elicit uproarious laughter from the audience through the slow-mo playback of the event and subsequent footage of the indignant, then humiliated woman reporter crying, white goo dripping down her face. If the video were activist porn, this would be the money shot. While the environmental, feminist, and anti-capitalist activists of the loosely allied Biotic Baking Brigade have long been tossing pies in the faces of those directing the neoliberal economy, I hadn't before seen the action target one of their dutiful servants. Even though I laughed as readily as anyone else, the visual resonance with pornography was striking enough to make me uneasy. The pieing sequence occupied a central "climatic" moment within the film, an independent production geared toward the politically sympathetic. The dripping cream pie effectively upstaged the film's other scenes: interviews with activists, images of successful street closures direct actions before Bechtel. If a practical joke played on one lackey of empire assumes a central place in the histories we create for ourselves, then perhaps we had better reexamine our reliance on the prank—and the prankster figure—as a meaningful political tactic.

The prank's re-emergence on the stage of popular media promises renewed opportunities to hijack the spectacle, possibly for the sake of inserting alternate meanings, possibly just for the hijack itself. Most activist writing on the prank-as-tactic has been adulatory: pranks are accessible, funny, light-hearted, and photogenic—not dense, argumentative, pedantic, and visually bland. Some has been critical: pranks are snappy one-liners that run the risk of offending many of those who might

be persuaded to agree. While prankster tactics have long proliferated at the grassroots, they have recently achieved far broader visibility than they had back when Abbie Hoffman quipped, "It's embarrassing when you try to overthrow the government and you wind up on the bestseller's list."¹ Popular pranksters are now less likely to express such embarrassment.

Today, the prank seems a fairly reliable way to make it to the top of the bestseller or box office list. While Michael Moore's stated (though unrealized) goal with *Fahrenheit 9/11* was to change, not overthrow, the government, the enormous commercial success of his film was often considered proportional to its political effectiveness. Morgan Spurlock's *Super Size Me*, with a box office take of \$11.5 million, crept up the list of all-time top grossing documentaries to number four. Less widely distributed and commercially successful, *The Yes Men* (\$255,000 gross) brought the infiltrative satiric stunts of Mike Bonanno and Andy Bichlbaum, already well known in art and activist circles, to a more general audience.

Why have prankster-activists found such popular and commercial success lately? Conceived as counter-spectacle by activists like the Yippies who understood the need to struggle on the level of representation, pranks are designed to be popular. Like the Situationists, politicized pranksters of today harness broad dissatisfaction with contemporary society and express it in visceral, anarchic, experiential forms. The success of MTV hijinks shows like *Punk'd* and *Jackass* (whose 2002 film version grossed almost \$80 million worldwide) may have helped to pave the way for the popular acceptance of political pranksters, despite these shows' corporatism, apathy, and sexism. In this view, the political prank seems like "an idea whose time has come"—a clever reworking of a politically complicit cultural form into a gesture an audience of non-activists may find subversive but sexy.

While I am broadly supportive of the prank as tactic, the popularization of the form warrants a more nuanced examination of the ways it operates culturally and politically. Any discussion of "the prank" is over-general. Part of the task here is to identify significant differences in different prankster practices that impact their popularity, relation to other forms of activism, and above all, the underlying social schema they subvert or reinscribe, regardless of their overt political content. Specifically, what gender and economic relations are engaged by pranksters as they temporarily turn the tables on their powerful targets? Does the popular reception of prankster politics represent a fulfillment of its promise to make dissent more fun? If so, what kind of fun are we having and what kind of politics are we doing, or not doing, while we're having it?

LEFTIST COWBOYS

Perhaps an over-obvious starting point is the observation that the popular prankster is almost always male. Moreover, the male prankster's antics are dusted with a certain macho bravado that emphasizes heroic individuality. *Fahrenheit 9/11*, *Super Size Me*, and *The Yes Men* all feature charismatic, crusading male protagonists whose personalities are intimately linked to the film's narrative, production, and promotion. *Fahrenheit 9/11*'s poster portrays the solo figure of Moore against the sky, reaching out an envelope stamped "confidential." Despite the film's compelling interviews with a woman who lost her son in the war, the poster implies that Moore alone will lead the audience to the hidden truth. Similarly, the *Yes Men* are portrayed in their poster larger-than-life and atop the globe, "changing the world, one prank at a time". The *Super Size Me* website opens with a lone male silhouette confronting an apocalyptically glowing McDonald's, accompanied by a tongue-in-cheek heroic musical score. None of these activist pranksters are portrayed in relation to organizations doing the hard and boring work of organizing boycotts, attending meetings, and recruiting supporters. Indeed, their appeal is

predicated largely on their avoidance of the more mundane and feminized clerical and affective labor tasks of activism. Macho heroism is not confined to activists with respectable box office showings. Even the self-financed, little distributed, and prank-free *Weapons of Mass Deception* incorporated the crusading and quixotically macho figure of its producer Danny Schechter "The News Dissector." The Reverend Billy's riveting live performances are driven by his compelling persona as a charismatic, if vaguely sleazy, preacher, able to whip his faithful into an anti-consumerist frenzy as sexualized as the revivals he imitates.

With the reliance of some prankster politics on a crusading if comic male figure, the apparent differences from de-politicized sexist prank forms like *Jackass* should be reconsidered. The humor of the prank often hinges on a play on traditional gender relations. Like the sexualized image of the pied reporter, this play can be anything but progressive, reinscribing rather than subverting sexist imagery. Not surprisingly, such comic moments are enormously successful; few reviewers of *The Yes Men* could resist breathlessly cooing over the golden phallus that Bichlbaum exposes to unsuspecting textile industry executives. "Please see the movie just for this," begged the *Chicago Tribune*.² The irreverent bad-boy prankster earns laughs by successfully manipulating macho images like the erection of a gold lame appendage or the eruption of creamy pie in the face while doing little to deepen the level of analysis or to question the gender politics that make their pranks so funny in the first place.

Of course, not all pranksters who manipulate gender stereotypes for comic effect do so without attending to social consequences. The Pink Bloque, which has received some criticism for its advocacy of "tactical flirting" in tense demonstration situations, has combined a girls just want to have fun image with feminist performances on issues such as date rape and gendered income disparities. Ange Taggert successfully parlays

her position as a middle-aged white female consumer (and ex-kindergarten teacher) into an opportunity to cleverly criticize corporate practices while undermining the stereotype of docility in her demographic group. Significantly, both these examples are of pranksters who sidestep the macho individualism of many other prankster-activists and engage in the tradition of feminist collectivity.

CELEBRITY PRODUCTION

Just as obvious as the machismo of many pranksters is the observation that working on the scale of mass culture demands an infrastructure for funding production, distribution, and promotion— an infrastructure highly developed and tightly controlled by capital. While Moore encountered difficulties distributing his film an unprecedented number of theaters, regardless of their owners' ideologies, were willing to screen the documentary because of the huge profit it generated. While it is unclear if the outcome of last November's elections will reduce the number of political documentaries screened widely, studios and theaters now recognize a huge market for prankster films. And when there is a market, the entertainment industry will do its best to enlarge it, massaging the production of irreverent heroic personas to sell prankster politics to a new marketing niche. The failure of *Fahrenheit 9/11* to effect electoral change may actually make prankster activists more attractive products, as their promise of political engagement through spectatorship is fundamentally unchallenging to the mechanisms by which the studios and theaters turn a profit.

Foundations like Creative Capital and the artists' project @TMARK have been responsible for funding a number of smart, critical art projects, especially those with large price tags. Though the establishment of an infrastructure to support and raise the visibility of interventive work is without doubt necessary, the funding and promotion of high-cost, tech-heavy pranks run the risk of primarily benefiting those whose

skill-sets are already highly valued in the dominant economy. Support for a particular project can quickly become a "career maker" for the artist. Creative Capital, whose name and activities mimic corporate grantors' "capacity-building" programs, offers initial financial support for projects and longer-term career development "in strategic planning, fundraising, public relations, and marketing" through workshops and retreats to which, as CC's website notes, "many concrete opportunities for the artists, such as gallery representation and collaboration invitations, can be attributed."³ Despite the sometimes oppositional content of many of these artists' work and the small amounts of money available to them (especially in comparison to the R&D budgets of military contractors), prankster projects can, as Miwon Kwon has noted of other forms of institutional critique, "become extensions of the museum's own self-promotional apparatus, while the artist becomes a commodity with a special purchase on criticality."⁴ The ways and reasons institutions circulate resources and brand their activities easily recede into the background, overshadowed by the timeliness of the artist-commodity's work.

Significantly, @TMark deals with the naturalization of capitalist funding priorities by turning fundraising itself into a project. On their website project ideas are grouped into "mutual funds" in which donors might invest—enabling anonymous artists production. The ironic tension between a project's content and terms like "fund families" underscore the distance between @TMark's work and the priorities of capital. Similarly, the distribution of independent documentaries via free downloads and house-party screenings structurally critiques the art/entertainment industry while exploring political content on any number of different subjects. These examples illustrate how artists might deploy their work in ways that prefigure a democratic media system without making "the art world" or "Hollywood" the sole or overt subject of their projects.

CONSUMING DISSENT

When an artist develops a "persona" in order to seduce a larger audience, it becomes difficult to question the operation of image in politics, even if the specific content of the image is contested. The Yes Men describe their activism as "identity correction", a twist of the advertising term "identity development" that recalls *Adbusters'* "demarketing" spoof ad campaigns. Both *Adbusters* and the Yes Men use corporate forms (convention addresses, websites, news releases, print ads, commercials) to tarnish images that the multibillion-dollar PR industry works so effectively to polish. This is vitally important work because so much of politics, especially in the US, does happen on the level of representation. However, an acceptance of image as the primary site of political contest runs the risk of further occluding very real spatial and material dimensions of politics.

Pranks, culture-jamming and "identity correction" hope for equivalence between the manipulation of images and the manipulation of the power relations operating within the system they represent. Even when a project has generated some appreciable response, the link between perturbations of image and power remains very difficult to establish. As evidence of his film's effectiveness, Morgan Spurlock (whose reputation as an activist should be considered alongside authorship of an award-winning "corporate image piece" for Sony) pointed to McDonald's discontinuation of the super-size campaign just before *Super-Size Me* reached general release. While encouraging measures from a public health standpoint, the gesture also helped to update McDonald's corporate image for the ultimate purpose of selling more food to more customers. In their film, the Yes Men express surprise that the outrageous and inhumane proposals they made before assemblies of businessmen received not the least murmur of dissent. They attribute acceptance of their offensive speech to the businessmen's passivity in the face of presumed expertise or basic acceptance of the brutality of globalization, but perhaps everyone understands it matters very little what is said in meetings as long as

business goes on elsewhere as usual.

The attention of prankster activism to the superstructure, to use an old fashioned term, underscores the upper-middle-classness of its politics. The arena of consumption, the terrain engaged by pranksters, is where most middle-class people develop their identities, form their allegiances and live their politics. It's a key site for engagement, and pranks can be seen as contemporary popular education for those who already have a voice in consumer society. The Reverend Billy's Starbuck's exorcisms and Ange Taggert's disruptive purchase and return loops work so well because they speak to middle class consumers in their own language and have actors whose appearance is reassuringly familiar, even if their actions are not.

However, in privileging the position of consumer as a location of resistance, prankster activism runs the risk of presenting opposition as yet another lifestyle or (anti)consumer choice. *Adbusters* has incorporated product development and marketing into its anti-media/media: the creation of the Blackspot sneaker, an anti-brand brand of trendy labor and environment friendly shoes. Anticorporate consumers now needn't sacrifice style or comfort for their principles; we can have our cake and guiltlessly eat it too. Crimethink's neo-Situationist exhortations to disentangle ourselves from commodity dependence read like lifestyle advice columns for the voluntarily poor and anticapitalist. What gets lost in the shuffle is the fact that radical social change is not merely the adoption of a different set of consumer habits and the reality that attaining global economic and environmental justice will entail a high degree of sacrifice for those of us in the world's top income brackets (where almost every Euro-American Anglophone resides). We may admire the MST, be inspired by the piqueteros, and think nuts who die organizing Brazilian indentured workers are really cool, but very few of us (myself included) are willing to abandon the comparatively comfortable and glamorous work of creatively tarnishing capital's image.

We who use prankster tactics readily discuss cooptation, and it's just as important to talk about how much we have opted in. In shifting the focus of activism to the terrain of image manipulation, in insisting that successful actions must also be fun, how much have we internalized capital's emphasis on consumption and externalized the necessity of re-forming the relations of material production? How much might we be responsible for our own cooptation because macho, celebrity, consumerist agency is not so fundamentally oppositional after all?

THE CONSCIENTIOUS PRANKSTER

In criticizing the masculine, individualist, middle-class, and consumer-oriented elements of prankster politics, I risk appearing to advocate for nose-to-the-grindstone community organizing, appealing to some notion of proletarian authenticity, or expressing sour grapes over the popularity and commercial success of certain high-profile pranksters. As someone who has been periodically criticized as humorless, whose background is relentlessly upper-middle class and whose own work usually ducks issues of effectiveness, I may not be the best person either to ask or answer these questions. Rather than be dishonestly prescriptive, I hope to participate in a process of individual and collective self-evaluation that will bring about, over time, a collective, engaged, feminist politics that shapes equally the realms of representation, discourse and political practice.

In *Contestational Biology*, the Critical Art Ensemble (which has received support from Creative Capital) advocates for the tactical use of pranks in raising questions about applied genetic research. Their example—the release of hundreds of mutant *E. coli*—is more “funny weird” than “funny ha-ha,” and it targets both the spaces of the production of genetic research and its consumption. By foregoing the belly laugh and opting for the uneasy, CAE's tactic opens a terrain for open-ended but essential questioning.

While still offering a damn good time, the Pink Bloque's public performances and appearances at demonstrations offer cues as to how actions might be politically effective without having a specific "target" whose image must be "corrected". Their dancing street parties transform the (often highly macho) "cops vs. protestors" dynamic and proclaim the right of people, especially women, to inhabit public space as political agents. Their actions implicitly, and with good spirit, challenge the still-too-often sensually deadening mass demonstration. Their original adoption of these tactics was situated in a particular constellation of politics and police practices. Their decision to stop performing reflected a recognition that after three years of the "war on terror" and the second inauguration of Bush, the constellation had changed. The Pink Bloque was willing to forego becoming a branded fixture at protests in favor of continuing to respond creatively to a shifting political landscape.

Outside of the world of political artists, the 85% Coalition, an Illinois civil rights group, effectively used a prank to illustrate the lack of equal protection for gays. Long-term, same-sex couples applied en-masse for marriage licenses, which were refused. A hetero-seeming couple (actually a gay man and straight woman who didn't know each other) was easily able to secure a license, satirizing the state's standards for marriage. By fluidly extending years of demonstrations, guerilla theater, lobbying, and polling to provide protection of LGBTQ people under the state constitution, the group avoided isolating the marriage issue as the only relevant campaign for gays and lesbians. The fun event reinvigorated tired core activists and engaged a large number of supporters who otherwise had not been involved.

Readers of this essay will, no doubt, be eager to nominate specific practices as places where we might find threads of a conscientious pranksterism. It's certainly not as simple as staying small and not getting famous. Every project, including

the ones critiqued here, presents insightful solutions and inspiring models along with entanglements and unanswered questions. Only through cultivating permeable egos alongside open structures will we sketch the contours of an expansive, responsive, and challenging cultural and political practice.

Julianne Hoffman, on the success of *Steal This Book*, 1971.

William Benedikt, "Pointed Pranks by The Yes Men." *Chicago Tribune*, October 1, 2004, <http://pqweb.pqarchiver.com/chicagotribune/index.html?is=1113804390> (accessed April 16, 2005).

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STEPHEN DUNCOMBE

“Politics in the Age
of Fantasy” excerpt
from *DREAM*

of this would have been possible without the love and advice of my wife and unofficial editor, Jean Railla. This book is dedicated to our two sons, Sydney and Sebastien, who, more than anyone else, have taught me the power of imagination.

1. Politics in an Age of Fantasy

In the autumn of 2004, shortly before the U.S. presidential election and in the middle of a typically bloody month in Iraq, the *New York Times Magazine* ran a feature article on the casualty of truth in the Bush administration. Like most *Times* articles, it was well written, well researched, and thoroughly predictable. That George W. Bush is ill informed, doesn't listen to dissenting opinion, and acts upon whatever nonsense he happens to believe is hardly news. (Even the fact that he once insisted that Sweden did not have an army and none of his cabinet dared contradict him was not all that surprising.) There was, however, one valuable insight. In a soon-to-be-infamous passage, the writer, Ron Suskind, recounted a conversation between himself and an unnamed senior adviser to the president:

The aide said that guys like me were "in what we call the reality-based community," which he defined as people who "believe that solutions emerge from your judicious study of discernable reality." I nodded and murmured something about Enlightenment principles

and empiricism. He cut me off. "That's not the way the world really works anymore," he continued. "We're an empire now, and when we act, we create reality. And while you are studying that reality—judiciously, as you will—we'll act again creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that's how things will sort out. We're history's actors . . . and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do."¹

It was clear how the *Times* felt about this peek into the political mind of the presidency. The editors of the *Gray Lady* pulled out the passage and floated it over the article in oversized, multi-colored type. This was ideological gold: the Bush administration openly and arrogantly admitting that they didn't care about reality. One could almost feel the palpable excitement generated among the *Times* liberal readership, an enthusiasm mirrored and amplified all down the left side of the political spectrum on computer listservs, call-in radio shows, and print editorials over the next few weeks.² This proud assertion of naked disregard for reality and unbounded faith in fantasy was the most damning evidence of Bush insanity yet. He must surely lose the election now.

What worried me then, and still worries me today, is that my reaction was radically different. My politics have long been diametrically opposed to those of the Bush administration, and I've had a long career as a left-leaning academic and a progressive political activist. Yet I read the same words that generated so much animosity among liberals and the left and felt something else: excited, inspired . . . and jealous. Whereas the commonsense view held that Bush's candid disregard for reality was evidence of the madness of his administration, I perceived it as a much more disturbing sign of its brilliance. I knew then that Bush, in spite of

making a mess of nearly everything he had undertaken in his first presidential term, would be reelected.

How could my reaction be so different from that of so many of my colleagues and comrades? Maybe I was becoming a neocon, another addition to the long list of defectors whose progressive God had failed. Would I follow the path of Christopher Hitchens? A truly depressing thought. But what if, just maybe, the problem was not with me but with the main currents of progressive thinking in this country? More precisely, maybe there was something about progressive politics that had become increasingly problematic.

The problem, as I see it, comes down to reality. Progressives believe in it, Bush's people believe in creating it. The left and right have switched roles—the right taking on the mantle of radicalism and progressives waving the flag of conservatism. The political progeny of the protestors who proclaimed, "Take your desires for reality" in May of 1968, were now counseling the reversal: take reality for your desires.³ Republicans were the ones proclaiming, "I have a dream."

Dreams often make those who are left-of-center nervous. Fantasy and spectacle have been the property of Fascism, totalitarian Communism, and, more recently, the unspeakable horror known as *Entertainment Tonight*. Traditionally we are more comfortable with those things mumbled by the *Times* reporter underneath his breath: "Enlightenment principles and empiricism." But what are these things in which liberals put so much faith? Empiricism, put simply, is the theory that things exist and can be measured independently of those doing the measuring. There are facts to be discovered and truth to be discerned, if only we can separate out the desires of people. In the early 1600s the pioneering scientist Galileo Galilei wrote of the necessity of distinguishing qualities that "exist in external bodies" and can be measured—size, shape,

quantity, and motion—from qualities like color, smell, and taste, which are subjective judgments. The former have an autonomous and verifiable reality, while the latter “exist only in the sensitive body, for when the living creature is removed all these qualities are carried off and annihilated.” These latter, all-too-human impressions are, in Galileo’s wonderful phrase, “nothing more than mere names.”⁴ The job of science, then, is to hold human subjectivity in check in order to reveal the objective reality that precedes it. Reality, once freed from tradition and superstition and no longer clouded by imagination and emotion, is self-evident.

Self-evident reality was critical to the Enlightenment as well. Philosophers of the Enlightenment—the name bestowed upon a loose school of thought centered in Europe around the 1700s—believed that politics should strive to model itself upon the “real” of the world, including the real nature of man. For Thomas Hobbes, man was brutish and cruel; for Jean-Jacques Rousseau, he was noble and good; yet both held that any system of just and lasting governance must base itself upon this revealed “real.” That is, politics must be based in fact, not mere tradition or superstition. Another key tenet of Enlightenment thought followed from this. Man, in order to reveal this “real” and act upon it accordingly, must be able to reason and act rationally. Just as an empiricist astronomer could examine the trajectory of a planet without reference to heavenly bodies, the citizen imagined by the Enlightenment had the ability to discern the forces governing his or her life and make thoughtful decisions based upon the (judicious) study of such observations. Through reason a citizenry could intelligently choose one leader, policy, or system of government over the other. As a rational actor, *homo economicus* guided the invisible hand of the market. Reason and rationality, so the theory goes, were and are the cornerstones of democracy and capitalism.

It is not surprising that progressives feel an affinity for the Enlightenment and empiricism. It was empiricism that broke the Church’s grip on the interpretation of the world. By challenging the Church on its explanations of the physical world, the empiricists opened up an assault on its political and spiritual power as well. Likewise, the Enlightenment ideal of man as a rational, reasoning creature undermined the hierarchies of feudalism and the foundations of divine right. Traditional “common sense” held that common people could not govern themselves nor act orderly in the marketplace. Contesting these assumptions cleared the way for new forms of politics and economics.⁵ The religious festivals and entertaining spectacles mobilized by Church and crown to excite or divert the masses and cement religious or royal power could now be replaced by town meetings and coffeehouses where enlightened citizens debated the issues of the day. These reasonable citizens, understanding reality as it is and not as it is imagined, would guide democracy and rationalize the market, breaking forever with a reactionary past cloaked in magic, mystery, and manipulation. In other words, and more to the point, progressives throughout history embraced the Enlightenment and empiricism because historically these ideas were progressive.⁶

But all this is history. Appeals to truth and reality, and faith in rational thought and action, are based in a fantasy of the past, or rather, past fantasy.⁷ Today’s world is linked by media systems and awash in advertising images; political policies are packaged by public relations experts and celebrity gossip is considered news. More and more of the economy is devoted to marketing and entertainment or the performance of scripted roles in the service sector.⁸ We live in a “society of the spectacle,” as the French theorist-provocateur Guy Debord declared back in 1967. Yet, faced with this new world, progressives are still acting out a script inherited

from the past. This is a mistake, for those who put their trust in Enlightenment principles and empiricism today are doomed to political insignificance.⁹

This is largely where liberals and the left reside now. Consider the recent ghoulish spectacle of Terri Schiavo, the brain-dead woman kept alive by forced medical feeding against the wishes of her husband and the decisions of a court. In a roundabout effort to inch toward outlawing abortion, conservative politicians dramatized the tragedy as an epic struggle of the right to life, of the lofty primacy of the spirit over the body. Politician stood shoulder to shoulder with priest in an appeal for state intervention to prevent a helpless innocent from court-mandated death. It was grand theater, played to the hilt—despite opinion polls recording anywhere from 60 to 70 percent of Americans believing that government has no place in end-of-life decisions.¹⁰ How did the Democrats capitalize on their opponents' popular weakness? With meek statements about proper judicial process and respect for expert medical opinion—all the inspiration of a Sergeant Friday: "Just the facts, ma'am. No need to get excited." This was not merely a case of political ineptitude; it was the manifestation of an Enlightenment-era faith that facts are more powerful than fantasies.

To be fair, there are some things that progressives do reasonably well. We reveal the lies of institutionalized power through investigative reporting and media exposure (Watergate, torture at Abu Ghraib prison). We demonstrate to those in power that "the whole world is watching" by marshalling hundreds of thousands of people for mass protests (the ritual "March on Washington"). And we influence privileged youth through our relative dominance in the universities (even though this victory is never acknowledged since doing so would mean admitting that what we

teach is not simply the Truth). But these strengths are based upon a fundamental weakness: an Enlightenment faith that somehow, if reasoning people have access to the Truth, the scales will fall from their eyes and they will see reality as it truly is and, of course, agree with us.

To retain this faith, progressives have, ironically, closed their eyes to the reality of today's politico-cultural landscape. Despite repeated assertions that Saddam Hussein had nothing to do with al-Qaeda's terrorist attacks on 9/11 by nearly every respected news outlet in the United States (and even the not-so-respected governmental intelligence services), a majority of Americans believe there was a link. This is not some mass of illiterates living in a world where information is controlled by priests intoning in Latin. These are citizens of a highly literate nation awash in 24/7 information. Is there any better evidence that the problem is not one of access to the truth? The archaic concern with formal censorship has little validity in our age of informational overload.

Certainly U.S. propaganda gave the public's flight from facts a helping hand, but it was effective because the Pentagon understood that people often prefer a simple, dramatic story to the complicated truth. Weaned on endless advertisements, sitcoms, and Hollywood movies, we've learned to find comfort in compelling narratives and change the channel when confronted with messy facts. If Osama bin Laden is elusive and al-Qaeda ephemeral, Saddam Hussein and the easily recognized nation of Iraq seemed made for prime-time trouncing. When the Iraqis didn't welcome us as liberators, and catching Saddam proved anticlimactic, no matter: there was always *Saving Private Lynch*.

A climate of fear can fuel fantasy, as the Bush administration so effectively demonstrated in the days after the terrorist attacks on 9/11. When threatened and insecure, people will find a way to

go with the story—no matter how irrational—that makes them feel safer. And it may be that the pull toward the dramatic is basic human *modus operandi*. Jesus, after all, used parables instead of rational arguments to get his points across in the Gospels. But today spectacle is center stage, driven by a mass media and a consumer economy that panders to and profits off of emotional narrative and the overhyped story. Once there were a few hold-outs: news, education, and so on. Now “fair and balanced” Fox is in the living room and commercially sponsored Channel One in the classroom. Spectacle is our way of making sense of the world. Truth and power belong to those who tell the better story.

Walter Lippmann, the influential writer, popular newspaper editor, and informal political adviser to nearly every president from Teddy Roosevelt to Lyndon Johnson, argued that democratic theory has little to do with democratic practice. Democratic theory resides in the coffeehouses and government buildings where enlightened men examine evidence, hold reasoned conversations, and arrive at rational decisions. Theoretical democracy is a heady process. Its practice aims a bit lower. To win elections among a large and diverse population and get the majority to agree upon policy or go along with decisions, politicians, like their commercial counterparts in Hollywood and on Madison Avenue, speak to people’s fantasies and desires through a language of images and associations. By manipulating symbols, exploiting memories, and spinning stories, the political elite are able to guide the direction of public opinion. “The practice of democracy has turned a corner,” Lippmann argued in his 1922 book *Public Opinion*, “A revolution is taking place, infinitely more significant than any shifting of economic power.” He called this revolution the Manufacture of Consent.¹¹

Those of us opposed to rule by a political elite learned an im-

portant lesson from Lippmann. If democracy is to be sustained, and citizens are to truly govern their lives, then the manufacture of consent must be continuously revealed and deconstructed. Political stagecraft must be relentlessly attacked with our arsenal of facts and reason.

We learned the wrong lesson.

Progressives should have learned to build a politics that embraces the dreams of people and fashions spectacles which give these fantasies form—a politics that understands desire and speaks to the irrational; a politics that employs symbols and associations; a politics that tells good stories. In brief, we should have learned to manufacture *dissent*.

We need to do this for strategic reasons. Whether one approves of it or not, fantasy and spectacle have become the *lingua franca* of our time. Progressives can talk all they want about the Bush administration’s disregard for the truth and its dangerous flights of fancy, but no one other than the converted is listening. And when no one listens in a democracy, the alignment of power stays the same. If we want our ideas to lead and not trail the politics of this country, then we need to learn how to think and communicate in today’s spectacular vernacular.

Recently, progressive political writers such as Thomas Frank have argued that if the Democratic Party is to have a political future, it needs to adopt platforms and embrace policies that materially benefit the majority of Americans. Frank is absolutely correct.¹² But unless the Democrats develop programs to sell these real material gains and employ strategies that acknowledge the more immaterial nature of citizens’ hopes and dreams, they will continue to fail. With apologies to Galileo (who merely makes the mistake common to many modern Western thinkers), reality and fantasy don’t inhabit separate spheres, they coexist and

intermingle. Reality needs fantasy to render it desirable, just as fantasy needs reality to make it believable.

Progressive writers have pointed this out before, and a few are now being recognized. The cognitive linguist George Lakoff writes about how people use "conceptual categories and metaphors" to make sense of their world. These categories and metaphors allow us to translate hard information and direct experience into a conceptual form familiar and comfortable to us. As such, he argues, progressives need to think less about presenting facts and more about how to frame these facts in such a way that they make sense and hold meaning for everyday people.¹³ Jim Wallis, a left-leaning evangelical Christian, argues for a "prophetic politics," a spiritually based politics which transcends pragmatic policy and moves beyond reasoned critique. Building upon the prophetic tradition of religion, Wallis believes that progressives must articulate an alternative vision of the world—that is, a dream of the future.¹⁴

These are excellent paths to take, but the journey needs to go much further. Framing issues is important, but expanding the definition of what a progressive frame might constitute is essential. Politically minded prophets have long employed divinely inspired dreams, but we need a secular alternative, dreams recognizable for what they are—human constructs of our hopes and desires—but no less powerful for their transparency.

Progressives, secular as well as religious, need to make peace with the less-than-rational nature of politics. This will take some effort, for it means rethinking an entire tradition of political thought. Aristotle, the uncontested philosophical father of our political tradition, barely mentions the irrational in the eight books of his seminal work *The Politics*. From his infamous arguments justifying slavery to the quirky sections on the influence of climate

on the state, reason takes center stage. It is reason, after all, that distinguishes us as human. "Other creatures live by nature only; some live by habit to some extent. Man, however, lives by reason as well: he alone has reason."¹⁵ In his writings on theater and rhetoric, the great philosopher recognizes the importance of the irrational, but in politics the topic is taboo.

Eventually, in an incomplete fragment on musical education in the conclusion of the final book of *The Politics*, Aristotle touches upon the irrational but does so only in the form of a warning: music can be dangerous to the state. Why? Because music (particularly the use of wind instruments and the "orgiastic and emotional" Phrygian music, which were the electric guitars and rock'n'roll of the classical period) spoke to the heart and body instead of the discerning mind.¹⁶ Furthermore, such transcendent pleasure was the "feature common to all music, which appeals even to some animals and also to a great many slaves and children"—that is, music made disturbing alliances between citizens and noncitizens (and animals, so it seems) and threatened to undermine hierarchy and order.¹⁷ It seems odd to end a treatise on politics with a warning about losing oneself in music—but also fitting, for Aristotle was giving voice to what has become a common political dream: the ideal state will have no place for dreaming.¹⁸

Later political theorists rejected Aristotle's lengthy defense of slavery and his slavish insistence on the "golden mean" in all things, but his deep suspicion of popular emotionality and the pleasures that can come from both producing and losing oneself in fantastical constructs, be they musical compositions or political demands, remains.¹⁹ Liberal political theorists of the Enlightenment, such as Hobbes, Rousseau, and John Locke, the economist Adam Smith, and the statesman Thomas Jefferson, assumed the existence of a rational, reasoning being with the ability

to enter into social contracts, political debates, and democratic self-governance. Their conservative opponents, such as French Revolution critic Edmund Burke and the reluctant American revolutionary Alexander Hamilton, argued that it was exactly because the people were not capable of reason that politics should be kept out of their hands. (Burke was particularly haunted by the specter of the French hairdresser making political decisions.)²⁰ Radicals in the Marxist tradition ingeniously incorporated both sides of the argument. They acknowledged the seemingly irrational behaviors of the majority of people who act against their own political interests by supporting the ruling class, but held out the promise of the masses' eventual awakening to "class consciousness" when, in the words of the *Communist Manifesto*, "man is at last compelled to face with sober senses, his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind."²¹ For all their ideological differences, these thinkers agreed on one thing: reason should rule.

Outside of politics, other realms of human life acknowledge and exalt the fantastic. Consider the texts of the great world religions: the Red Sea parting for Moses as the Jews flee to the promised land; the terrible beauty of Krishna as he advises Arjuna to kill his friends and kinsman in battle; the dissonant symbol of Jesus, the son of God, crucified on a cross like a common criminal; the lyrical cadences of the words of the Prophet Muhammad. The Hebrew Bible, the Bhagavad Gita, the New Testament, and the Koran are all quasipolitical models for right behavior and community relations, yet stripped of their narratives and symbols they would have no power to move their audience, and thus no power at all. How many stirring sermons use the endless genealogies, the begets and begottens, of the book of Numbers as source material?

Fantasy inspires the bulk of our entertainment as well: movies, television, popular music, video games, theme parks, casinos, strip clubs, and so on. No matter what their differences, each form of entertainment constitutes a sort of spectacle that promises to transport the spectator outside their present reality. Complaints about the unreal fantasies of Hollywood and the "lack of representation" in television sitcoms miss the function of entertainment: to escape the here and now, to imagine something different, something better.

While there are fundamentalists who insist on the literal truth of religious stories, and media activists who would like to make entertainment into a bleak mirror of our everyday lives, most of us are drawn toward religion and entertainment for very different reasons: because both address our desires and articulate our dreams. So why is politics exempt? One might think that particularly in politics, whose purpose is the organization and arrangement of people's lives, one might find the irrational front and center. But looking out over the wide expanse of Western political theory, the irrational is hard to spot. When it is noticed, it is treated as a contagion to quarantine or a disruption to manage, a stain on the otherwise clean landscape of reason.

But again, this is theory, and practice is something else entirely. Take national political conventions in the United States. In theory these conventions are meetings held "to discuss and decide important matters," according to the *Dictionary of Government and Politics*.²² More specifically, the *American Political Dictionary* tells us a convention is "a meeting of party delegates . . . to decide on party policy and strategy and nominate candidates for elective office."²³ It is a reasoned process of discussion and decision and, finally, democratic action. But this, of course, is hooey. In

conventions past, backroom deals were cut by political bosses in private smoke-filled suites and physical fights broke out among inebriated delegates on the convention floor.²⁴ This was bare-knuckles democracy. Today even that semblance of debate and discussion is gone. All decisions have already been made by the time the campaign button-bejeweled conventioners invade their host cities. Illuminated by the bright lights of television, political conventions are floodlit stages on which to play out competing fantasies of the future of the country and its leader. The Republican candidate is presented as firm, resolute, and patriotic, awash in flags and martial symbols. The Democratic challenger conjures up the ideals of inclusion and opportunity, surrounded by faces of many races and stations. Or, as with the 2004 conventions, the parties swap fantasies; John Kerry played the war hero flanked by his Vietnam War Swift Boat comrades, a soldier-statesman leading a "Stronger America," while George W. Bush acted the down-home everyman surrounded by the Republican rainbow. The candidate's biopic, with its soft-focus images of candidate and country, packaged and produced months in advance, is the real star of the convention. The time when political parties decide instead to save money by staying at home and buying an hour's worth of prime-time TV space may not be too far off. It would be a much more efficient means to fulfill the real function of the modern political convention: a spectacle.

If progressives are to engage, rather than ignore, the phantasmagoric terrain of politics, we need to learn from those who do spectacle best: the architects of Las Vegas, video game designers, advertising's creative directors, and the producers and editors of celebrity media. This does not mean adopting flashy techniques to help us make sexier advertisements for progressive causes (though this wouldn't hurt). It means looking deep into the core of

these and other examples of popular spectacle to divine exactly what makes them so popular.

The immense popularity of commercial culture needs to be acknowledged and respected. To get us to open our wallets, legions of very smart and very creative people make sure that what they produce resonates with our most powerful and intimate desires. There is a lot to learn here. Too often these sources of potential knowledge and inspiration are, at best, criticized and, at worst, ignored by progressives. This makes us feel better about our cultural sophistication, our "specialness," but it also keeps us powerless. The entertainment state should be ruthlessly criticized, but the techniques used to create and maintain it need to be enthusiastically explored and exploited for their progressive potential.

This entails looking deeper than the current vogue of celebrating commercial culture as a "site of resistance." Sure, people enjoy culture in unpredictable ways: some of us may read romance novels as feminist texts, others modify video games to create unauthorized versions or customize imported autos into street racers. In resisting the sanctioned rules for "right" consumption we experience the thrill of making mass culture our own. But the political efficacy of a resistance tied to the everyday use (or abuse) of a commercial product is debatable. There is a big difference between rereading reality and acting to make it anew. To not recognize this distinction is to confuse the everyday action of making meaning with the much rarer tasks of creation and transformation.²⁵ Furthermore, this sort of "resistance" is often cultivated by marketers who understand it—correctly—as another way to get consumers engaged with their product. Toyota's new Scion division, for example, makes consumer customization of their cars—or the "remix," as they call it—part of their marketing

strategy, promoting this practice with the slogan "We relinquish all power to you."²⁶ Consumer culture always serves the needs of consumer capitalism, including making space for resistance when expedient or profitable.

Between arrogant rejection and populist acceptance of commercial culture lies a third approach: appropriating, co-opting, and, most important, transforming the techniques of spectacular capitalism into tools for social change. This is the fine art of transmutation, once practiced with great effect by the Church, which cleverly adopted components of pagan religions and forms of pagan ritual (the Christmas tree, for example) to do the work of Christianity.

To do this means recognizing that consumer culture—its crafted fantasies and stimulated desires—speaks to something deep and real within us. The American psychologist and pragmatist philosopher William James articulated this political strategy back in 1906 in a speech he gave to students at Stanford University on "The Moral Equivalent of War." The problem with pacifism, the pacifist James argued, was that it was presented in such a way as to seem weak and boring, a safe utopia where the lion lay down with the lamb. At their peril, pacifists ignored all the legitimate emotional needs that war fulfills: romance, valor, honor, and sacrifice. By not speaking to "the higher aspects of militaristic sentiment" in their appeals for peace, pacifists ignored the real passions that motivate people. The result was a contest between the vigor of Teddy Roosevelt and the pieties of a Sunday school teacher. The wars of the twentieth century loudly declared the winner. "Pacifists ought to enter more deeply into the aesthetical and ethical point of view of their opponents," James counseled, "then move the point, and your opponent will follow."²⁷ Progressives, long comfortable with disdaining and distancing themselves from

impure desire, need to learn to speak to it, through it, with it . . . and then move the point.

This won't be easy. Spectacular culture is most often designed to manipulate people and take their money, not set the stage for liberty, equality, and fraternity. It often appeals to our worst traits, while reaching progressive goals depends upon our more generous instincts. It is understandable to worry that by recasting progressive politics within the terms of spectacle we will sacrifice our ethical strength. But the point is not to denude the progressive movement of its essential characteristics but to expand its possibilities, addressing a larger sector of the public by acknowledging, and working with, all the desires we possess. The challenge for progressives is to create ethical spectacles.

Progressive dreams, and the spectacles that give them tangible form, will look different than those conjured up by the Bush administration or the commercial directors of what critic Neil Gabler calls *Life, the Movie*.²⁸ Different not only in content—this should be obvious—but in form. Given the progressive ideals of egalitarianism and a politics that values the input of everyone, our dreamscapes will not be created by media-savvy experts of the left and then handed down to the rest of us to watch, consume, and believe. Instead, our spectacles will be participatory: dreams the public can mold and shape themselves. They will be active: spectacles that work only if people help create them. They will be open-ended: setting stages to ask questions and leaving silences to formulate answers. And they will be transparent: dreams that one knows are dreams but which still have power to attract and inspire. And, finally, the spectacles we create will not cover over or replace reality and truth but perform and amplify it.

Illusion may be a necessary part of political life, but delusion need not be. Progressives cannot sell the dream of a world with

no medical bills without backing it up with promises and policies that guarantee universal health care for every American. We should not conjure up a utopia of pure skies and clean water unless we are serious about massive investment in alternative energy sources. To be certain, other sides don't have these qualms. Bush gutted the Clean Air Act with his "Clear Skies Initiative," and the oil companies fall over one another to tell us how green they are, but such hypocrisy is unethical. It is also not effective. Sooner or later myth and reality meet; witness the collapse of President Bush's triumphal declaration of "Mission Accomplished" in the face of daily casualties in Iraq.

I hope it is clear by now that my argument here is not some postmodern provocation that the real does not exist.²⁹ Semantics aside, there is an all-too-real "real" at hand: war in Iraq, growing national and world inequality, global warming and species extinction—the list goes on. Make no mistake, there is an empirical real. But no matter how real this reality may be, it only means something when we give it meaning.³⁰ As such we are forever constructing fictions from the truth. Not lies, but fictions. The world surrounding us may be full of eternal truths and constitute an everlasting real, but the world that we live within is an assemblage of data ordered by ourselves according to theories, stories, habits, customs, and prejudices. We *make* sense. In making sense of our environment we necessarily create a simulation of whatever it is that we are seeing, hearing, or reading (which can very well be others' simulations).³¹ It is not that reality doesn't exist—it is more that by itself it doesn't really matter. Reality is always refracted through the imagination, and it is through our imagination that we live our lives.

This does not mean that there is no such thing as truth. Truth with a capital T may be an Enlightenment fantasy (one ironically

shared by religious fundamentalists), but there are standards of evidence upon which we can judge small "t" truths, accepting some as valid and rejecting others as invalid. But the important thing, as any scientist will tell you, is making a convincing case. Take the recent debate about evolution as an example. The creationists are correct in one thing at least: evolution is not the Truth; it is a theory.³² But it is a good theory with a preponderance of evidence supporting it. "Intelligent design," the latest stalking horse of the creationists, which holds that a supreme being has guided evolution, is a lousy theory with no evidence behind it. What intelligent design does have, however, is a good publicity campaign. A public opinion poll in 2005 reported that 60 percent of Americans put their faith in theories of creationism or intelligent design, while only 26 percent believe in the evolution of life through natural selection, with the remainder not knowing or caring.³³ One side has the evidence, the other the compelling narrative.³⁴

Politics is also not science. There are no immutable laws of gravity determining the outcome of an election, nor empirically verifiable tests of what constitutes a good society. Political systems are human creations that are then evaluated subjectively. As such, it is largely the power of public opinion that determines their form and value. This is something conservatives seem to understand better than progressives. The Brookings Institution, a liberal think tank, spends 3 percent of its budget on communications. The conservative Heritage Foundation, on the other hand, devotes 20 percent to what former vice president of communications Herb Berkowitz describes as "the selling of ideas." Berkowitz elaborates: "Our belief is that when the research product has been printed, then the job is only half done. That is when we start marketing it to the media. . . . We are actively out there selling these things, day after day. It's our mission."³⁵

For years progressives have comforted themselves with age-old biblical adages that the "truth will out" or "the truth shall make you free," but waiting around for the truth to set you free is lazy politics.³⁶ The truth does not reveal itself by virtue of being the truth: it must be told, and we need to learn how to tell the truth more effectively. It must have stories woven around it, works of art made about it; it must be communicated in new ways and marketed so that it sells. It must be embedded in an experience that connects with people's dreams and desires, that resonates with the symbols and myths they find meaningful. The argument here is not for a progressive movement that lies outright, but rather for a propaganda of the truth. As William James once wrote: "Truth happens to an idea."³⁷

Embracing dreams and making peace with spectacle does not necessarily mean abandoning a faith in the Enlightenment and empiricism, only acknowledging it is only that: a faith. Perhaps people can study—"judiciously, as you will"—the reality of the world and then make reasoned judgments that lead to political decisions and actions, but this is a way of seeing and being in the world that cannot have any taken-for-granted epistemological foundation. It is, to use postmodern cant, a system of discourse that must be (re)created, imagined, operationalized, and dramatized to appeal to the public's imagination.

While progressives are historically wedded to reason and reality, empiricism and the Enlightenment, there is a counterhistory of the left that has long embraced the dreamscape of the imaginary, using symbolism and narrative in an attempt to create new realities. One can cycle back through time to find examples: the story of Exodus symbolically transforming the Jews from slavery and servitude to the chosen people of God, or the miracles of Jesus giving hope to the poorest of the poor. In more modern times, one

could consider the French Revolution, idealized in the name of reason and rationality but fought out on the streets in a swirl of competing fantasies. Examples closer to home might include the imagery of the Farm Security and Work Projects Administrations during the New Deal that gave form to a new vision of "the people," and Franklin Delano Roosevelt's intimate yet informative fireside chats that suggested a new understanding of citizens' relationship to political knowledge. Two decades later the ideal of reaching the promised land was transported from ancient Palestine to the black churches of the American South, animating the struggles for civil rights.

Consider the story of Rosa Parks. She is an ordinary woman who acts spontaneously from her own heart and changes the world. She is the Everywoman who hits that very American "I'm not going to take it anymore" breaking point. It is a moment of magical transformation, the "No!" that also becomes a "Yes!" affirming her dignity and humanity—and ours. It is also, as any serious student of the civil rights movement knows, a fiction, a deliberately perpetuated mythology. Rosa Parks may have been tired and wanting a seat, but she was not acting impulsively. She was a professional organizer, a secretary of the local chapter of the NAACP trained at the progressive Highlander Institute, who acted with a full understanding of the political ramifications of what she was doing. But what's more important, the history lesson or the myth?

Abbie Hoffman—the Yippie activist who dropped dollar bills on the stock exchange floor to create a miniriot of avarice and led 30,000 hippies in a mock-serious attempt to encircle and levitate the Pentagon—pursued an explicit strategy of mythmaking. Here he is explaining the logistics of organizing the protests that rocked the 1968 Democratic Party convention:

We are faced with this task of getting huge numbers of people to come to Chicago along with hundreds of performers, artists, theater groups, engineers. Essentially, people involved in trying to work out a new society. How do you do this starting from scratch, with no organization, no money, nothing? Well, the answer is that you create a myth. Something that people can play a role in, relate to.³⁸

Hoffman understood how the game is played and made no apologies in his advice to fellow activists.

Look at Michael Moore. In his film *Bowling for Columbine*, does he really lay out a rational, reasoned argument explaining the culture of violence in the United States? No. Does seeing Charlton Heston squirm under Moore's questioning bring us closer to the truth? No. But was that scene an emotionally powerful argument for gun control? Did the film put the issue on the table? Did it provoke millions of Americans to give serious thought to the culture of violence in America? Yes. Yes. And yes. Moore followed up on this successful narrative formula in *Fahrenheit 9/11*. Contrary to what conservative—and some liberal—critics have claimed, Moore isn't simply telling tall tales.³⁹ But through clever editing, heartfelt interviews, humorous stunts, and the insertion of himself into the film, he is telling a tale. Folding facts into an enraging, touching, funny, and personal narrative, Moore produced the most profitable "documentary" ever made.

Over the past few decades it has been activist groups to the far left who have taken on the mantle of imagination. Anticorporate globalization protesters in North America and Europe have eschewed the traditional model of mass protests in favor of a more spectacular form. The old model of protest was simple and staid: march, chant, and listen (to the truth from the leaders). The new protests look nothing like this. With environmental protesters

dressed in sea turtle costumes in Seattle, theatrical skits involving the militant jesters of the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army in London and New York, or *Ya Basta!* in their padded *tutti bianchi* (white jumpsuits) in Prague and Genoa, these protests are infected with a general spirit of spirited anarchy. Declaring that means are as important as ends (if not sometimes troublingly more so), these mass protests create temporary autonomous zones: a living, breathing, dancing imaginary form of a world turned upside down. It's more than telling that the organizers of the demonstration that shut down the City of London in 1998 called their protest a "Carnival Against Capitalism."

Further south, a man known only as Subcomandante Marcos, whose poetic speeches and whimsical, fable-laced communiqués weave a web of fantasy around the Zapatista rebellion in southern Mexico, recognizes that his comrades' black ski masks and automatic weapons, far more than providing actual security or a means of attack, are most effective as elements in a spectacle of resistance.⁴⁰ While to the east, in the Narmada Valley of India, antidam activists hold educational puppet shows, symbolically drown a dam demon, and pledge civil disobedience, drawing upon their local culture and traditions to create dramatic protests against the state's plans to flood their land.⁴¹

Ironically, progressives once had a near monopoly on political fantasy. Again, it was conservatives who wanted to defend the real and retain the status quo, while radicals wanted to move toward an imaginary future. After all, who is remembered for "I have a dream"? But now, plagued by their Enlightenment guilt complex, progressives regularly disown their own, often effective, history of mobilizing fantasy, declaring that spectacle is silly, and that their sense of superior seriousness will win debates, convince the public, and lead them back into the halls of power. Worse, spectacle

is what the *other* side does; a recent *New York Times* article listed one of the core qualities of Fascism as an "appeal to emotion and myth instead of reason."⁴²

Examples of spectacular dissent are not hard to find. But when not rejected outright they are too often marginalized, understood as merely a tactic and not an integral way of thinking about and acting out politics. Then it's back to the "real" work of politics: acting soberly in the name of self-evident reality. March, chant, and listen . . . or study, lobby, and regulate. "Everything is theatrical," says David Solnit, who, as a founder of the activist group Art and Revolution, had a key role in giving the protest that shut down the city of Seattle in 1999 its particular spectacular flair. But the problem, as Solnit explains, is that "traditional protest—the march, the rally, the chants—is just bad theater."⁴³

To be sure, many of the examples of spectacular dissent I have cited, and will describe in the pages to come, are marginal. Ironically, however, it may be political groups on the fringes that best appreciate and understand the mainstreams of culture in this country. Outsiders often have a clearer vision of the center than those deep within it, and for years these activists have been using their vantage point to observe how fantasy and spectacle are used by spinmeisters and marketers before trying such tactics themselves. For the most part the campaigns these activists wage and the demonstrations they stage engage hundreds, thousands, or tens of thousands of people, rather than millions or billions. But the potential for a spectacular politics is far greater, for everyday fantasy is employed effectively by the mass entertainment industry, and everyday spectacles are enthusiastically embraced by a majority of the world's population. The task at hand is to tap into this wide appeal and use it to build a truly popular progressive politics.

Perhaps the most important reason for progressives to make their peace with the politics of dreaming has little to do with the immediate task of winning consent or creating dissent, but has instead to do with long-term vision. Without dreams we will never be able to imagine the new world we want to build. From the 1930s until the 1980s political conservatives in this country were lost: out of power and out of touch. Recalling those days, Karl Rove, George W. Bush's senior political adviser, says: "We were relegated to the desert."⁴⁴ While many a pragmatic Republican moved to the center, a critical core kept wandering in that desert, hallucinating a political world considered fantastic by postwar standards: a preemptive military, radical tax cuts, eroding the line between church and state, ending welfare, and privatizing Social Security. Look where their dreams are today.

As I write these words, the right's phantasmagoria seems to be crumbling. Forced into a courtroom in Dover, Pennsylvania, the proponents of "intelligent design" acted out the part of mendacious fools on a public stage.⁴⁵ The story of stories that Christianity should be equated with the Republican Party is being rewritten as evangelicals in recent months have taken on "liberal" issues like the environment, poverty, and AIDS.⁴⁶ Revelations of manufactured evidence of weapons of mass destruction continue to reveal the cynical machinations of fantasy construction, and the bungling of the war in Iraq and the response to Hurricane Katrina have eroded the myth of the competency of Bush's CEO presidency. When centrist politicians like ex-Marine-now-Democratic-representative John Murtha publicly declare the war they once supported "a flawed policy wrapped in an illusion," it is tempting to believe that progressives were right all along.⁴⁷ Truth will out after all; stay the course and all will be fine. But this would be a miscalculation. The terrain of politics has irrevocably shifted.

False fantasies may have been revealed, but the dreams that animate them live on.

Progressives are at a crossroads. To continue straight on, confident of the inalienability of "Enlightenment principles and empiricism," is to cloak ourselves in the irrelevancies of the past. It is a safe journey, for even nightmares, as long as they are familiar, offer the solace of the known. But this journey leads nowhere. The rationality and reason that once freed us from authority now make us equivocating cowards, judiciously studying reality instead of changing it. The other way—to create reality using unfamiliar tools—is to take a leap into the unknown. This way is not secure: the leap can lead to the exuberance of the French Terror, the mass ecstasy of Nazi rallies, the apocalyptic dreams of jihad, or even the monstrous banality of Andrew Lloyd Weber's latest hit musical.

Theories (and theorists) of the politics of spectacle and fantasy have steered people to some pretty unsavory places. Gustav LeBon's observations on the irrational behavior of crowds was appreciated and applied by Adolf Hitler and Joseph Goebbels, as well as public relations pioneer Edward Bernays. Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy of will was appropriated by the Nazis. Georges Sorel's mobilizing "myth of the general strike" led him toward Fascism. And Walter Lippmann came to reject popular democracy as unworkable, characterizing the citizenry as a "bewildered herd" who, blinded by symbols and stereotypes, were best relegated to being merely "spectators of action."⁴⁸ I, however, do not think that recognizing the power of a politics past reason means a sure slide toward Fascism (or a career as a creative director on Madison Avenue). To clear another path we need to separate what has happened from what could happen.

First, we need to survey the terrain of today's imagination. We

need to take apart the current manifestations of dreams, study contemporary spectacles, and understand how the modern manufacturers of consent channel these dynamics. Then we can begin to imagine how popular desires might be expressed in other ways and via different vehicles.

Progressives like to study and to know. We like to be right (and then complain that others are not). But being right is not enough—we need to win. And to win we need to act. What follows are observations and suggestions that might guide our actions. I'm inviting readers, wherever they might fall on the progressive political spectrum, from pragmatic liberals to utopian anarchists, street activists to pissed-off voters, to join me in imagining a way of moving our dreams into reality. In these pages I do not lay out an ideological line to follow, nor will I prescribe policies to enact. Instead, this book offers up an alternative political aesthetic for progressives to consider; a theory of *dreampolitik* they might practice. Some of the political examples I use in the following pages may seem particular, and perhaps a bit peculiar. They are largely drawn from my activist experience on the far left, and the particular—and perhaps a bit peculiar—political scene of lower Manhattan. But there is no reason why this way of thinking and doing cannot be adopted and adapted by progressives who live in different places, come from different traditions, and have different personalities. Their practice of *dreampolitik* will look different—it should. This endeavor involves taking risks. There is also no guarantee that this strategy will work, no Enlightenment assurance that this is the one true way. To embrace dreams as part of a winning strategy for progressive politics may be just a dream itself, but really, at this point, what do we have to lose?

Notes

Chapter 1

1. Ron Suskind, "Without a Doubt," *New York Times Magazine*, October 17, 2004, p. 51.
2. See, for example, Molly Ivins's "The Reality-Based Environment," *AlterNet*, December 16, 2004, www.alternet.org.
3. In the spring of 2006 the streets of Paris were again choked with tear gas and clogged by protesters, but this time the students and young workers were on the streets not to overthrow the status quo, but to conserve the meager social programs still left in place. As a leader of the largest student union, the Union Nationale des Étudiants de France (UNEF), explained to a *Times* reporter: "We're not back there in '68. Our revolt is not to get more. It's to keep what we have." Elaine Sciolino, "Not '68, but French Youths Hear Similar Cry to Rise Up," *New York Times*, March 17, 2006, p. A6.
4. Galileo Galilei, cited in Lewis Mumford, *Technics and Civilization* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1934), p. 48.
5. Thomas Paine understood this when he named his revolutionary pamphlet *Common Sense*, for he was trying to overturn the common-sense notions about government and sovereignty. As an ace pamphleteer he understood that the best way to do this was to defend his new democratic message with the old stories of kings in the Bible—that is, practice the art of transmutation. Thomas Paine, *Common Sense*, ed. Isaac Kramnick (New York: Penguin, 1776/1983).
6. The U.S. Progressive Party at the turn of the nineteenth century was largely made up of professionals such as social workers, doctors, teachers, and engineers. These were people who fervently believed in the Enlightenment, confident that they could rationally understand and engineer society in the same way that the laws of mechanical physics could be discerned and a steam engine engineered.
7. I am hardly the first on the left to criticize the Enlightenment. This critique was central to the theories of Theodor Adorno and Michel Foucault, to name only two of the most famous. In the 1940s Adorno and his Frankfurt School colleague Max Horkheimer argued that Nazi barbarism and debased capitalist consumer culture, far from being aberrations of the Enlightenment, were instead its dialectical twin. The social and technological apparatuses to which reason had given birth were now working to undermine reason by reducing the world to things, to mere instruments "set free" for exploitation. In addition, the Enlightenment itself generated its own myth—"The world as a gigantic analytic judgment"—every bit as totalizing as the myths it was trying to do away with. In later decades Foucault brought the critique of the Enlightenment closer in, accusing it of engendering a new and intimate site of control in the guise of the autonomous reasoning subject. In such a subject, the locus of authority encompassed both body and mind, reason itself functioning as an internalized and thus inescapable disciplinary agent. These critiques are compelling; my own is less philosophical and more immediately political. My problem with the principles of Enlightenment and empiricism is that they don't work very well in the democratic contest for power. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectics of Enlightenment* (New York: Continuum, 1947/1989), p. 27; nearly all of Foucault's writings carry this theme, but see Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (New York: Vintage, 1979).
8. Robert Reich, *Work of Nations* (New York: Knopf, 1991); Scott Lash and John Urry, *Economies of Signs and Space* (London: Sage, 1994); Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class* (New York: Basic Books, 2002);

26. Scion USA Web site, www.scion.com.
27. William James, "The Moral Equivalent of War," *Essays in Religion and Morality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), pp. 165 and 168–69, respectively; emphasis is the author's. The moral equivalent of war that James suggests is a conscription civil service in the line of the Civilian Conservation Corps, Peace Corps, or AmeriCorps. This civil service would be used to wage what he describes, in an unfortunate turn of phrase, as a "war against nature."
28. Neil Gabler, *Life, the Movie* (New York: Knopf, 1998). As a good left-liberal, Gabler is predictably horrified by "how entertainment conquered reality." But, like all such writers, he doesn't move past the critique into what might be done with this new state we live in.
29. Critics have made an assault on reality. Jean Baudrillard argues that our "real" has been eviscerated by simulacra—a simulation of a simulation. And Slavoj Žižek identifies our passion for the real as merely our passion for a fantasy of the real, a mythic escape from the reality of the phantasmagoria in which we live our lives. But neither theorist denies material reality per se (though Baudrillard toes the line); they argue instead that "the real" must always be understood in and through its meaning. Exactly. Jean Baudrillard, "Precession of Simulacra," in *Simulations* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983); Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* (London and New York: Verso, 2002).
30. For instance, if I drop a pen, it falls, demonstrating the reality of gravity. But what we do with this reality is what I am interested in. A physical law becomes a metaphor—"What goes up must come down"—and this a way of *making sense* of the world.
31. Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, p. 10. Lippmann calls this simulation of a simulation "pseudoenvironment," predating Jean Baudrillard's use of the term "simulacra."
32. "Evolution is a fact," writes renowned biologist Richard Dawkins. "It is not a theory, and for pity's sake, let's stop confusing the philosophically naïve by calling it so." Such an assertion refutes the basic premise of conditional hypotheses which undergirds scientific research (philosophically naïve, indeed), but it is a pretty good example of the arrogance of Enlightenment ideology. Richard Dawkins, "The Illusion of Design," *Natural History*, November 2005, p. 37.

33. Poll conducted by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life and the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, reported in Laurie Goldstein, "Teaching of Creationism Endorsed in New Survey," *New York Times*, August 31, 2005, p. 9.
34. Global warming deniers, so it seems, also employ the flip side to the marketing of ideas: the power to censor them. Andrew C. Revkin, "Climate Expert Says NASA Tried to Silence Him," *New York Times*, January 29, 2006, p. 1.
35. Berkowitz quoted in Andrew Rich, "War of Ideas," *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, Spring 2005, no page. Years of comparison are 2004 for Brookings (3 percent of a \$39 million budget) and 2002 for Heritage (20 percent of \$33 million).
36. Other progressives have begun to realize this as well. Says Don Hazen, the executive editor of the Web site AlterNet.org: "Progressives have been under the illusion that if only people understood the facts, we'd be fine. Wrong. The facts alone will not set us free. People make decisions about politics and candidates based on their value system, and the language and frames that invoke these values." Discussing the Bush team's propaganda campaign to convince America of the need for the Iraq war, John Sellers, executive director of the activist training group Ruckus Society, says, "The truth doesn't matter anymore." Sellers is not making some grand metaphysical claim but, like Hazen, rather matter-of-factly asserting that the truth is no longer the deciding factor in people's opinions. Hazen quoted in Lakoff, *Don't Think of an Elephant*, p. xiii; Sellers from a personal conversation with Andrew Boyd, 2003.
37. William James, *Pragmatism* (New York: Meridian Books, 1907/1955), p. 133.
38. Free, aka Abbie Hoffman, *Revolution for the Hell of It* (New York: Dial Press, 1968), p. 64. Hoffman is one of the few activists I have come across who explicitly used advertising as a model for protest. In *Revolution for the Hell of It*, he draws upon the mostly visual ad for the Dreyfus Fund (a lion walking slowly down Wall Street) to make his point that images, and mystery, are more important than words and explanations in attracting people and making a point. See pp. 83–86.

39. Michael Moore has offered \$10,000 to anyone who can disprove the facts in his film. To my knowledge he has not paid anyone.
40. Frank Bardacke, "Epilogue," in Subcomandante Marcos, *Shadows of Tender Fury* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1995), p. 264.
41. The problem for the activists of the Naramada Valley protests, and even the insurgents of the Zapatista army, is less throwing off the weight of Enlightenment history than the resurrection, reconnection, and operationalization of indigenous traditions in which the real and the fantasy, the material and the imaginary, have no fixed lines. In this, activists of the south have a distinct advantage over their comrades in the north, who must learn to transform and employ the only real culture at their disposal: commercial entertainment and advertising.
42. Alexander Stille, "The Latest Obscenity Has Seven Letters," *New York Times*, September 13, 2003, sec. B, p. 9. Stille, a respected writer on Italian fascism, attempts to clarify what fascism is and is not by distinguishing a genuine political and philosophical system from a blanket epithet used by the left to denigrate anyone or anything they don't agree with. Ironically, by tarring any political system which speaks to emotion and mobilizes myth as fascist, Stille is guilty of the same sort of simplification and stereotyping he criticizes.
43. David Solnit, telephone interview, July 8, 2002.
44. Rove cited in John Cassidy, "The Ringleader," *New Yorker*, August 1, 2005, p. 53. Rove is referencing the state of conservatism following Barry Goldwater's 1964 defeat in particular.
45. Laurie Goodstein, "Intelligent Design Might Be Meeting Its Maker," *New York Times*, December 4, 2005, sec. 4, p. 1.
46. Joseph Alvarez, "World's Elite to Debate Global Health Challenges at U.S. Summit," *Christian Today*, November 1, 2005, www.christiantoday.com.
47. Rep. John Murtha, Speech in the U.S. House of Representatives, November 17, 2005, AlterNet, November 19, 2005, www.alternet.org.
48. Walter Lippmann, *The Phantom Public* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1924/2004), pp. 145 and 93, respectively.

Chapter 2

1. MSNBC's Bob Kurr and Fox's Josh Gibson, respectively. Cited in Rachel Smolkin, "Are the News Media Soft on Bush?" *American Journalism Review*, October/November 2003, www.ajr.org.
2. "Vegas by the Numbers," www.vegas.com.
3. Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1977), p. 154.
4. Walter Lippmann, *A Preface to Politics* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1913/2005), p. 42.
5. Ronald Steel, *Walter Lippmann and the American Century* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1980). Unless otherwise noted, all biographical details on Lippmann are from this source.
6. Lippmann, *A Preface to Politics*, p. 44. Using the influential 1911 vice report on "The Social Evil in Chicago" as an example, Lippmann shows how the respectable commissioners charged with investigating the problem of prostitution rarely asked the question of why men use prostitutes or why women become them. Instead, the 400-page report is filled with sanctimonious condemnations of loose morality and detailed recommendations for its repression.
7. Lippmann, *A Preface to Politics*, p. 49.
8. Borrowing the term from William James, Lippmann writes, "To find for evil its moral equivalent is to be conservative about values and radical about forms." *A Preface to Politics*, p. 52.
9. As singer Ice Cube rapped with NWA in the late 1980s: "We don't just say no. We're too busy sayin' yeah!" NWA (Niggaz With Attitude), "Gangsta Gangsta," *Straight Outta Compton*, Priority Records, 1988.
10. Lippmann, *A Preface to Politics*, p. 54.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 127.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 177.
13. This is Lippmann at his boldest. In other places he retreats to the Freudian orthodoxy of unruly passions that need to be civilized. For example, he writes elsewhere that "the task of politics is to understand those deeper demands and to find civilized satisfactions for them." *A Preface to Politics*, p. 54.
14. Lippmann, *A Preface to Politics*, p. 239. It is Freud's theories that Lippmann acknowledges, but the same insight was provided by his

GUY DEBORD

“Seperation Perfected”
excerpt from *Society
of the Spectacle*

The Society of the Spectacle

by [Guy-Ernest Debord](#)

Chapter 1 "Separation Perfected"

But certainly for the present age, which prefers the sign to the thing signified, the copy to the original, representation to reality, the appearance to the essence... *illusion* only is sacred, *truth* profane. Nay, sacredness is held to be enhanced in proportion as truth decreases and illusion increases, so that the highest degree of illusion comes to be the highest degree of sacredness.

Feuerbach, Preface to the second edition of *The Essence of Christianity*

1

In societies where modern conditions of production prevail, all of life presents itself as an immense accumulation of *spectacles*. Everything that was directly lived has moved away into a representation.

2

The images detached from every aspect of life fuse in a common stream in which the unity of this life can no longer be reestablished. Reality considered *partially* unfolds, in its own general unity, as a pseudo-world *apart*, an object of mere contemplation. The specialization of images of the world is completed in the world of the autonomous image, where the liar has lied to himself. The spectacle in general, as the concrete inversion of life, is the autonomous movement of the non-living.

3

The spectacle presents itself simultaneously as all of society, as part of society, and as *instrument of unification*. As a part of society it is specifically the sector which concentrates all gazing and all consciousness. Due to the very fact that this sector is *separate*, it is the common ground of the deceived gaze and of false consciousness, and the unification it achieves is nothing but an official language of generalized separation.

4

The spectacle is not a collection of images, but a social relation among people, mediated by images.

5

The spectacle cannot be understood as an abuse of the world of vision, as a product of the techniques of mass dissemination of images. It is, rather, a *Weltanschauung* which has become actual, materially translated. It is a world vision which has become objectified.

6

The spectacle grasped in its totality is both the result and the project of the existing mode of production. It is not a supplement to the real world, an additional decoration. It is the heart of the unrealism of the real society. In all its specific forms, as information or propaganda, as advertisement or direct entertainment consumption, the spectacle is the present model of socially dominant life. It is the omnipresent affirmation of the choice *already made* in production and its corollary consumption. The spectacle's form and content are identically the total justification of the existing system's conditions and goals. The spectacle is also the *permanent presence* of this justification, since it occupies the main part of the time lived outside of modern production.

7

Separation is itself part of the unity of the world, of the global social praxis split up into reality and image. The social practice which the autonomous spectacle confronts is also the real totality which contains the spectacle. But the split within this totality mutilates it to the point of making the spectacle appear as its goal. The language of the spectacle consists of *signs* of the ruling production, which at the same time are the ultimate goal of this production.

8

One cannot abstractly contrast the spectacle to actual social activity: such a division is itself divided. The spectacle which inverts the real is in fact produced. Lived reality is materially invaded by the contemplation of the spectacle while simultaneously absorbing the spectacular order, giving it positive cohesiveness. Objective reality is present on both sides. Every notion fixed this way has no other basis than its passage into the opposite: reality rises up within the spectacle, and the spectacle is real. This reciprocal alienation is the essence and the support of the existing society.

9

In a world which *really is topsy-turvy*, the true is a moment of the false.

10

The concept of spectacle unifies and explains a great diversity of apparent phenomena. The diversity and the contrasts are appearances of a socially organized appearance, the general truth of which must itself be recognized. Considered in its own terms, the spectacle is *affirmation* of appearance and affirmation of all human life, namely social life, as mere appearance. But the critique which reaches the truth of the spectacle exposes it as the visible *negation* of life, as a negation of life which *has become visible*.

11

To describe the spectacle, its formation, its functions and the forces which tend to dissolve it, one must artificially distinguish certain inseparable elements. When *analyzing* the spectacle one speaks, to some extent, the language of the spectacular itself in the sense that one moves through the methodological terrain of the very society which expresses itself in the spectacle. But the spectacle is nothing other than the *sense* of the total practice of a social-economic formation, its *use of time*. It is the historical movement in which we are caught.

12

The spectacle presents itself as something enormously positive, indisputable and inaccessible. It says nothing more than "that which appears is good, that which is good appears. The attitude which it demands in principle is passive acceptance which in fact it already obtained by its manner of appearing without reply, by its monopoly of appearance.

13

The basically tautological character of the spectacle flows from the simple fact that its means are simultaneously its ends. It is the sun which never sets over the empire of modern passivity. It covers the entire surface of the world and bathes endlessly in its own glory.

14

The society which rests on modern industry is not accidentally or superficially spectacular, it is fundamentally *spectaculist*. In the spectacle, which is the image of the ruling economy, the goal is nothing, development everything. The spectacle aims at nothing other than itself.

15

As the indispensable decoration of the objects produced today, as the general exposé of the rationality of the system, as the advanced economic sector which directly shapes a growing multitude of image-objects, the spectacle is the *main production* of present-day society.

16

The spectacle subjugates living men to itself to the extent that the economy has totally subjugated them. It is no more than the economy developing for itself. It is the true reflection of the production of things, and the false objectification of the producers.

17

The first phase of the domination of the economy over social life brought into the definition of all human realization the obvious degradation of *being* into *having*. The present phase of total occupation of social life by the accumulated results of the economy leads to a generalized sliding of *having* into *appearing*, from which all actual "having" must draw its immediate prestige and its ultimate function. At the same time all individual reality has become social reality directly dependent on social power and shaped by it. It is allowed to appear only to the extent that it is *not*.

18

Where the real world changes into simple images, the simple images become real beings and effective motivations of hypnotic behavior. The spectacle, as a tendency *to make one see* the world by means of various specialized mediations (it can no longer be grasped directly), naturally finds vision to be the privileged human sense which the sense of touch was for other epochs; the most abstract, the most mystifiable sense corresponds to the generalized abstraction of present-day society. But the spectacle is not identifiable with mere gazing, even combined with hearing. It is that which escapes the activity of men, that which escapes reconsideration and correction by their work. It is the opposite of dialogue. Wherever there is independent *representation*, the spectacle reconstitutes itself.

19

The spectacle inherits all the *weaknesses* of the Western philosophical project which undertook to comprehend activity in terms of the categories of *seeing*; furthermore, it is based on the incessant spread of the precise technical rationality which grew out of this thought. The spectacle does not realize philosophy, it philosophizes reality. The concrete life of everyone has been degraded into a *speculative* universe.

20

Philosophy, the power of separate thought and the thought of separate power, could never by itself supersede theology. The spectacle is the material reconstruction of the religious illusion. Spectacular technology has not dispelled the religious clouds where men had placed their own powers detached from themselves; it has only tied them to an earthly base. The most earthly life thus becomes opaque and unbreathable. It no longer projects into the sky but shelters within itself its absolute denial, its fallacious paradise. The spectacle is the technical realization of the exile of human powers into a beyond; it is separation perfected within the interior of man.

21

To the extent that necessity is socially dreamed, the dream becomes necessary. The spectacle is the nightmare of imprisoned modern society which ultimately expresses nothing more than its desire to sleep. The spectacle is the guardian of sleep.

22

The fact that the practical power of modern society detached itself and built an independent empire in the spectacle can be explained only by the fact that this practical power continued to lack cohesion and remained in contradiction with itself.

23

The oldest social specialization, the specialization of power, is at the root of the spectacle. The spectacle is thus a specialized activity which speaks for all the others. It is the diplomatic representation of hierarchic society to itself, where all other expression is banned. Here the most modern is also the most archaic.

24

The spectacle is the existing order's uninterrupted discourse about itself, its laudatory monologue. It is the self-portrait of power in the epoch of its totalitarian management of the conditions of existence. The fetishistic, purely objective appearance of spectacular relations conceals the fact that they are relations among men and classes: a second nature with its fatal laws seems to dominate our environment. But the spectacle is not the necessary product of technical development seen as a *natural* development. The society of the spectacle is on the contrary the form which chooses its own technical content. If the spectacle, taken in the limited sense of "mass media" which are its most glaring superficial manifestation, seems to invade society as mere equipment, this equipment is in no way neutral but is the very means suited to its total self-movement. If the social needs of the epoch in which such techniques are developed can only be satisfied through their mediation, if the administration of this society and all contact among men can no longer take place except through the intermediary of this power of instantaneous communication, it is because this "communication" is essentially *unilateral*. The concentration of "communication" is thus an accumulation, in the hands of the existing system's administration, of the means which allow it to carry on this particular administration. The generalized cleavage of the spectacle is inseparable from the modern *State*, namely from the general form of cleavage within society, the product of the division of social labor and the organ of class domination.

25

Separation is the alpha and omega of the spectacle. The institutionalization of the social division of labor, the formation of classes, had given rise to a first sacred contemplation, the mythical order with which every power shrouds itself from the beginning. The sacred has justified the cosmic and ontological order which corresponded to the interests of the masters; it has explained and embellished that which society *could not do*. Thus all separate power has been spectacular, but the adherence of all to an immobile image only signified the common acceptance of an imaginary prolongation of the poverty of real social activity, still largely felt as a unitary condition. The modern spectacle, on the contrary, expresses what society can do, but in this expression the *permitted* is absolutely opposed to the *possible*. The spectacle is the preservation of unconsciousness within the practical change of the conditions of existence. It is its own product, and it has made its own rules: it is a pseudo-sacred entity. It shows what it *is*: separate power developing in itself, in the growth of productivity by means of the incessant refinement of the division of labor into a parcellization of gestures which are then dominated by the independent movement of machines; and working for an ever-expanding market. All community and all critical sense are dissolved during this movement in which the forces that could grow by separating are not yet *reunited*.

26

With the generalized separation of the worker and his products, every unitary view of accomplished activity and all direct personal communication among producers are lost. Accompanying the progress of accumulation of separate products and the concentration of the productive process, unity and communication become the exclusive attribute of the system's management. The success of the economic system of separation is the *proletarianization* of the world.

27

Due to the success of separate production as production of the separate, the fundamental experience which in primitive societies is attached to a central task is in the process of being displaced, at the crest of the system's development. by non-work, by inactivity. But this inactivity is in no way liberated from productive activity: it depends on productive activity and is an uneasy and admiring submission to the necessities and results of production; it is itself a product of its rationality. There can be no freedom outside of activity, and in the context of the spectacle all activity is negated. just as real activity has been captured in its entirety for the global construction of this result. Thus the present "liberation from labor," the increase of leisure, is in no way a liberation within labor, nor a liberation from the world shaped by this labor. None of the activity lost in labor can be regained in the submission to its result.

28

The economic system founded on isolation is a *circular production of isolation*. The technology is based on isolation, and the technical process isolates in turn. From the automobile to television, all the *goods selected* by the spectacular system are also its weapons for a constant reinforcement of the conditions of isolation of "lonely crowds." The spectacle constantly rediscovers its own assumptions more concretely.

29

The spectacle originates in the loss of the unity of the world, and the gigantic expansion of the modern spectacle expresses the totality of this loss: the abstraction of all specific labor and the general abstraction of the entirety of production are perfectly rendered in the spectacle, whose *mode of being concrete* is precisely abstraction. In the spectacle, one part of the world *represents itself* to the world and is superior to it. The spectacle is nothing more than the common language of this separation. What binds the spectators together is no more than an irreversible relation at the very center which maintains their isolation. The spectacle reunites the separate, but reunites it *as separate*.

30

The alienation of the spectator to the profit of the contemplated object (which is the result of his own unconscious activity) is expressed in the following way: the more he contemplates the less he lives; the more he accepts recognizing himself in the dominant images of need, the less he understands his own existence and his own desires. The externality of the spectacle in relation to the active man appears in the fact that his own gestures are no longer his but those of another who represents them to him. This is why the spectator feels at home nowhere, because the spectacle is everywhere.

31

The worker does not produce himself; he produces an independent power. The *success* of this production, its abundance, returns to the producer as an *abundance of dispossession*. All the time and space of his world become *foreign* to him with the accumulation of his alienated products. The spectacle is the map of this new world, a map which exactly covers its territory. The very powers which escaped us *show themselves* to us in all their force.

32

The spectacle within society corresponds to a concrete manufacture of alienation. Economic expansion is mainly the expansion of this specific industrial production. What grows with the economy in motion for itself can only be the very alienation which was at its origin.

33

Separated from his product, man himself produces all the details of his world with ever increasing power, and thus finds himself ever more separated from his world. The more his life is now his product, the more he is separated from his life.

34

The spectacle is *capital* to such a degree of accumulation that it becomes an image.

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HUEY P NEWTON

“Speech Delivered at
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Power to the people, brothers and sisters. I would like to thank you for my presence here tonight because you are responsible for it. I would be in a maximum-security penitentiary if it were not for the power of the people.

I would like to petition you to do the same for Bobby Seale, our Chairman, for Ericka Huggins, for Angela Davis, for the New York 21 and the Soledad Brothers. For all political prisoners and prisoners of war. On the 28th and 29th of November we will have a People's Revolutionary Constitutional convention in Washington, D.C. We cannot have that convention if the people do not come. After all, the people are the makers of world history and responsible for everything. How can we have a convention if we have no people? Some believe a people's convention is possible without the people being there. As I recall, that was the case in 1777.

Tonight, I would like to outline for you the Black Panther Party's program and explain how we arrived at our ideological position and why we feel it necessary to institute a Ten-Point Program. A Ten-Point Program is not revolutionary in itself, nor is it reformist. *It is a survival program.* We, the people, are threatened with genocide because racism and fascism are rampant in this country and throughout the world. And the ruling circle in North America is responsible. We intend to change all of that, and in order to change it, there must be a total transformation. But until we can achieve that total transformation, we must exist. In order to exist, we must survive; therefore, we need a survival kit: the Ten-Point Program. It is necessary for our children to grow up healthy with functional and creative minds. They cannot do this if they do not get the correct nutrition. That is why we

have a breakfast program for children. We also have community health programs. We have a busing program. We call it "The Bus for Relatives and Parents of Prisoners." We realize that the fascist regime that operates the prisons throughout America would like to do their treachery in the dark. But if we get the relatives, parents, and friends to the prisons they can expose the treachery of the fascists. This too is a survival program.

We must not regard our survival programs as an answer to the whole problem of oppression. We don't even claim it to be a revolutionary program. Revolutions are made of sterner stuff. We do say that if the people are not here revolution cannot be achieved, for the people and only the people make revolutions.

The theme of our Revolutionary People's Constitutional Convention is "Survival Through Service to the People." At our convention we will present our total survival program. It is a program that works very much like the first-aid kit that is used when a plane falls and you find yourself in the middle of the sea on a rubber raft. You need a few things to last until you can get to the shore, until you can get to that oasis where you can be happy and healthy. If you do not have the things necessary to get you to that shore, then you will probably not exist. At this time the ruling circle threatens us to the extent that we are afraid that we might not exist to see the next day or see the revolution. The Black Panther Party will not accept the total destruction of the people. As a matter of fact, we have drawn a line of demarcation and we will no longer tolerate fascism, aggression, brutality, and murder of any kind. We will not sit around and allow ourselves to be murdered. Each person has an obligation to preserve himself. If he does not preserve himself then I accuse him of suicide: reactionary suicide because reactionary conditions will have caused his death. If we do nothing we are accepting the situation and allowing ourselves to die. We will not accept that. If the alternatives are very narrow we still will not sit around, we will not die the death of the Jews in Germany. We would rather die the death of the Jews in Warsaw!

Where there is courage, where there is self-respect and dignity, there is a possibility that we can change the conditions and win. This is called *revolutionary enthusiasm* and it is the kind of struggle that is

needed in order to guarantee a victory. If we must die, then we will die the death of a revolutionary suicide that says, "If I am put down, if I am driven out, I refuse to be swept out with a broom. I would much rather be driven out with a stick because if I am swept out with the broom it will humiliate me and I will lose my self-respect. But if I am driven out with the stick, then, at least, I can claim the dignity of a man and die the death of a man rather than the death of a dog." Of course, our real desire is to live, but we will not be cowed, we will not be intimidated.

I would like to explain to you the method that the Black Panther Party used to arrive at our ideological position, and more than that, I would like to give to you a framework or a process of thinking that might help us solve the problems and the contradictions that exist today. Before we approach the problem we must get a clear picture of what is really going on; a clear image divorced from the attitudes and emotions that we usually project into a situation. We must be as objective as possible without accepting dogma, letting the facts speak for themselves. But we will not remain totally objective; we will become subjective in the application of the knowledge received from the external world. We will use the scientific method to acquire this knowledge, but we will openly acknowledge our ultimate subjectivity. Once we apply knowledge in order to *will* a certain outcome our objectivity ends and our subjectivity begins. We call this integrating theory with practice, and this is what the Black Panther Party is all about.

In order to understand a group of forces operating at the same time, science developed what is called the scientific method. One of the characteristics or properties of this method is disinterest. Not *un*interest, but disinterest: no special interest in the outcome. In other words, the scientist does not promote an outcome, he just collects the facts. Nevertheless, in acquiring his facts he must begin with a basic premise. Most basic premises stem from a set of assumptions because it is very difficult to test a first premise without these assumptions. After an agreement is reached on certain assumptions, an intelligent argument can follow, for then logic and consistency are all that is required to reach a valid conclusion.

Tonight I ask you to assume that an external world exists. An exter-

nal world that exists independently of us. The second assumption I would like for you to make is that things are in a constant state of change, transformation, or flux. With agreement on these two assumptions we can go on with our discussion.

The scientific method relies heavily on empiricism. But the problem with empiricism is that it tells you very little about the future; it tells you only about the past, about information which you have already discovered through observation and experience. It always refers to past experience.

Long after the rules of empirical knowledge had been ascertained, a man by the name of Karl Marx integrated these rules with a theory developed by Immanuel Kant called rationale. Kant called his process of reasoning pure reason because it did not depend on the external world. Instead it only depended on consistency in manipulating symbols in order to come up with a conclusion based upon reason. For example, in this sentence "If the sky is above my head when I turn my head upwards, I will see the sky" there is nothing wrong with the conclusion. As a matter of fact, it is accurate. But I haven't said anything about the existence of the sky. I said "if." With rationale we are not dependent upon the external world. With empiricism we can tell very little about the future. So what will we do? What Marx did. In order to understand what was happening in the world Marx found it necessary to integrate rationale with empiricism. He called his concept dialectical materialism. If, like Marx, we integrate these two concepts or these two ways of thinking, not only are we in touch with the world outside us but we can also explain the constant state of transformation. Therefore, we can also make some predictions about the outcome of certain social phenomena that is not only in constant change but also in conflict.

Marx, as a social scientist, criticized other social scientists for attempting to explain phenomena, or one phenomenon, by taking it out of its environment, isolating it, putting it into a category, and not acknowledging the fact that once it was taken out of its environment the phenomenon was transformed. For example, if in a discipline such as sociology we study the activity of groups—how they hold together and why they fall apart—without understanding everything else related to that group, we may arrive at a false conclusion about the nature of

the group. What Marx attempted to do was to develop a way of thinking that would explain phenomena realistically.

In the physical world, when forces collide they are transformed. When atoms collide, in physics, they divide into electrons, protons, and neutrons, if I remember correctly. What happened to the atom? It was transformed. In the social world a similar thing happens. We can apply the same principle. When two cultures collide a process or condition occurs which the sociologists call acculturation: the modification of cultures as a result of their contact with each other. Marx called the collision of social forces or classes a contradiction. In the physical world, when forces collide we sometimes call it just that—a collision. For example, when two cars meet head on, trying to occupy the same space at the same time, both are transformed. Sometimes other things happen. Had those two cars been turned back to back and sped off in opposite directions they would not be a contradiction; they would be contrary, covering different spaces at different times. Sometimes when people meet they argue and misunderstand each other because they think they are having a contradiction when they are only being contrary. For example, I can say the wall is ten feet tall and you can say the wall is red, and we can argue all day thinking we are having a contradiction when actually we are only being contrary. When people argue, when one offers a thesis and the other offers an anti-thesis, we say there is a contradiction and hope that if we argue long enough, provided that we agree on one premise, we can have some kind of synthesis. Tonight I hope I can have some form of agreement or synthesis with those who have criticized the Black Panther Party.

I think that the mistake is that some people have taken the apparent as the actual fact in spite of their claims of scholarly research and following the discipline of dialectical materialism. They fail to search deeper, as the scientist is required to do, to get beyond the apparent and come up with the more significant. Let me explain how this relates to the Black Panther Party. The Black Panther Party is a Marxist-Leninist party because we follow the dialectical method and we also integrate theory with practice. We are not mechanical Marxists and we are not historical materialists. Some people think they are Marxists when actually they are following the thoughts of Hegel. Some

people think they are Marxist-Leninists but they refuse to be creative, and are, therefore, tied to the past. They are tied to a rhetoric that does not apply to the present set of conditions. They are tied to a set of thoughts that approaches dogma—what we call flunkysim.

Marx attempted to set up a framework which could be applied to a number of conditions. And in applying this framework we cannot be afraid of the outcome because things change and we must be willing to acknowledge that change because we are objective. If we are using the method of dialectical materialism we don't expect to find anything the same even one minute later because "one minute later" is history. If things are in a constant state of change, we cannot expect them to be the same. Words used to describe old phenomena may be useless to describe the new. And if we use the old words to describe new events we run the risk of confusing people and misleading them into thinking that things are static.

In 1917 an event occurred in the Soviet Union that was called a revolution. Two classes had a contradiction and the whole country was transformed. In this country, 1970, the Black Panther Party issued a document. Our Minister of Information, Eldridge Cleaver, who now is in Algeria, wrote a pamphlet called "On the Ideology of the Black Panther Party." In that work Eldridge Cleaver stated that neither the proletarians nor the industrial workers carry the potentialities for revolution in this country at this time. He claimed that the left wing of the proletarians, the lumpen proletarians, have that revolutionary potential, and in fact, acting as the vanguard, they would carry the people of the world to the final climax of the transformation of society. It has been stated by some people, by some parties, by some organizations, by the Progressive Labor Party, that revolution is impossible. How can the lumpen proletarians carry out a successful socialist transformation when they are only a minority? And in fact how can they do it when history shows that only the proletarians have carried out a successful social revolution? I agree that it is necessary for the people who carry out a social revolution to represent the popular majority's interests. It is necessary for this group to represent the broad masses of the people. We analyzed what happened in the Soviet Union in 1917. I also agree that the lumpen proletarians are the minority in this country. No disagreement. Have I contradicted myself? It only goes

to show that what's apparent might not actually be a fact. What appears to be a contradiction may be only a paradox. Let's examine this apparent contradiction.

The Soviet Union, in 1917, was basically an agricultural society with a very large peasantry. A set of social conditions existing there at that time was responsible for the development of a small industrial base. The people who worked in this industrial base were called proletarians. Lenin, using Marx's theory, saw the trends. He was not a historical materialist, but a dialectical materialist, and therefore very interested in the ever-changing status of things. He saw that while the proletarians were a minority in 1917, they had the potential to carry out a revolution because their class was increasing and the peasantry was declining. That was one of the conditions. The proletarians were destined to be a popular force. They also had access to the properties necessary for carrying out a socialist revolution.

In this country the Black Panther Party, taking careful note of the dialectical method, taking careful note of the social trends and the ever-changing nature of things, sees that while the lumpen proletarians are the minority and the proletarians are the majority, technology is developing at such a rapid rate that automation will progress to cybernation, and cybernation probably to technocracy. As I came into town I saw MIT over the way. If the ruling circle remains in power it seems to me that capitalists will continue to develop their technological machinery because they are not interested in the people. Therefore, I expect from them the logic that they have always followed: to make as much money as possible, and pay the people as little as possible—until the people demand more, and finally demand their heads. If revolution does not occur almost immediately, and I say almost immediately because technology is making leaps (it made a leap all the way to the moon), and if the ruling circle remains in power the proletarian working class will definitely be on the decline because they will be unemployables and therefore swell the ranks of the lumpens, who are the present unemployables. Every worker is in jeopardy because of the ruling circle, which is why we say that the lumpen proletarians have the potential for revolution, will probably carry out the revolution, and in the near future will be the popular majority. Of course, I would not like to see more of my people unemployed or become unem-

ployables, but being objective, because we're dialectical materialists, we must acknowledge the facts.

Marx outlined a rough process of the development of society. He said that society goes from a slave class to a feudalistic class structure to a capitalistic class structure to a socialistic class structure and finally to communism. Or in other words, from capitalist state to socialist state to nonstate: communism. I think we can all agree that the slave class in the world has virtually been transformed into the wage slave. In other words, the slave class in the world no longer exists as a significant force, and if we agree to that we can agree that classes can be transformed literally out of existence. If this is so, if the slave class can disappear and become something else—or not disappear but just be transformed—and take on other characteristics, then it is also true that the proletarians or the industrial working class can possibly be transformed out of existence. Of course the people themselves would not disappear; they would only take on other attributes. The attribute that I am interested in is the fact that soon the ruling circle will not need the workers, and if the ruling circle is in control of the means of production the working class will become unemployables or lumpens. That is logical; that is dialectical. I think it would be wrong to say that only the slave class could disappear.

Marx was a very intelligent man. He was not a dogmatist. Once he said, "One thing I'm not, I'm not a Marxist." In those words, he was trying to tell the Progressive Labor Party and others not to accept the past as the present or the future, but to understand it and be able to predict what might happen in the future and therefore act in an intelligent way to bring about the revolution that we all want.

After taking those things into consideration we see that as time changes and the world is transformed we need some new definitions, for if we keep using the old terms people might think the old situation still exists. I would be amazed if the same conditions that existed in 1917 were still existing today.

You know Marx and Lenin were pretty lazy dudes when it came to working for somebody. They looked at toil, working for your necessities, as something of a curse. And Lenin's whole theory, after he put Marx's analysis into practice, was geared to get rid of the proletarians. In other words, when the proletarian class or the working class

seized the means of production, they would plan their society in such a way as to be free from toil. As a matter of fact, Lenin saw a time in which man could stand in one place, push buttons and move mountains. It sounds to me as though he saw a proletarian working class transformed and in possession of a free block of time, to indulge in productive creativity, to think about developing their universe, so that they could have the happiness, the freedom, and the pleasure that all men seek and value.

Today's capitalist has developed machinery to such a point that he can hire a group of specialized people called technocrats. In the near future he will certainly do more of this, and the technocrat will be too specialized to be identified as a proletarian. In fact that group of technocrats will be so vital we will have to do something to explain the presence of other people; we will have to come up with another definition and reason for existing.

But we must not confine our discussion to theory; we must have practical application of our theory to come up with anything worthwhile. In spite of the criticism that we have received from certain people, the Party has a practical application of its theories. Many of our activities provide the working class and the unemployed with a reason and a means for existing in the future. The people will not disappear—not with our survival programs they will not. They will still be around. The Black Panther Party says it is perfectly correct to organize the proletarians because after they are kicked out of the factory and are called unemployable or lumpen, they still want to live, and in order to live they have to eat. It is in the proletarian's own best interest to seize the machinery that he has made in order to produce in abundance, so he and his brethren can live. We will not wait until the proletarian becomes the lumpen proletarian to educate him. Today we must lift the consciousness of the people. The wind is rising and the rivers flowing, times are getting hard and we can't go home again. We can't go back to our mother's womb, nor can we go back to 1917.

The United States, or what I like to call North America, was transformed at the hands of the ruling circle from a nation to an empire. This caused a total change in the world, because no part of an inter-related thing can change and leave everything else the same. So when

the United States, or North America, became an empire it changed the whole composition of the world. There were other nations in the world. But "empire" means that the ruling circle who lives in the empire (the imperialists) control other nations. Now some time ago there existed a phenomenon we called—well, I call—primitive empire. An example of that would be the Roman Empire because the Romans controlled all of what was thought to be the known world. In fact they did not know all of the world, therefore some nations still existed independent of it. Now, probably all of the world is known. The United States as an empire necessarily controls the whole world either directly or indirectly.

If we understand dialectics we know that every determination brings about a limitation and every limitation brings about a determination. In other words, while one force may give rise to one thing it might crush other things, including itself. We might call this concept "the negation of the negation." So, while in 1917 the ruling circle created an industrial base and used the system of capitalism they were also creating the necessary conditions for socialism. They were doing this because in a socialist society it is necessary to have some centralization of the wealth, some equal distribution of the wealth, and some harmony among the people.

Now, I will give you roughly some characteristics that any people who call themselves a nation should have. These are economic independence, cultural determination, control of the political institutions, territorial integrity, and safety.

In 1966 we called our Party a Black Nationalist Party. We called ourselves Black Nationalists because we thought that nationhood was the answer. Shortly after that we decided that what was really needed was revolutionary nationalism, that is, nationalism plus socialism. After analyzing conditions a little more, we found that it was impractical and even contradictory. Therefore, we went to a higher level of consciousness. We saw that in order to be free we had to crush the ruling circle and therefore we had to unite with the peoples of the world. So we called ourselves Internationalists. We sought solidarity with the peoples of the world. We sought solidarity with what we thought were the nations of the world. But then what happened? We found that because everything is in a constant state of transforma-

tion, because of the development of technology, because of the development of the mass media, because of the fire power of the imperialist, and because of the fact that the United States is no longer a nation but an empire, nations could not exist, for they did not have the criteria for nationhood. Their self-determination, economic determination, and cultural determination has been transformed by the imperialists and the ruling circle. They were no longer nations. We found that in order to be Internationalists we had to be also Nationalists, or at least acknowledge nationhood. Internationalism, if I understand the word, means the interrelationship among a group of nations. But since no nation exists, and since the United States is in fact an empire, it is impossible for us to be Internationalists. These transformations and phenomena require us to call ourselves "intercommunalists" *because nations have been transformed into communities of the world*. The Black Panther Party now disclaims internationalism and supports intercommunalism.

Marx and Lenin felt, with the information they had, that when the non-state finally came to be a reality, it would be caused or ushered in by the people and by communism. A strange thing happened. The ruling reactionary circle, through the consequence of being imperialists, transformed the world into what we call "Reactionary Intercommunalism." They laid siege upon all the communities of the world, dominating the institutions to such an extent that the people were not served by the institutions in their own land. The Black Panther Party would like to reverse that trend and lead the people of the world into the age of "Revolutionary Intercommunalism." This would be the time when the people seize the means of production and distribute the wealth and the technology in an egalitarian way to the many communities of the world.

We see very little difference in what happens to a community here in North America and what happens to a community in Vietnam. We see very little difference in what happens, even culturally, to a Chinese community in San Francisco and a Chinese community in Hong Kong. We see very little difference in what happens to a Black community in Harlem and a Black community in South Africa, a Black community in Angola and one in Mozambique. We see very little difference.

So, what has actually happened, is that the non-state has already been

accomplished, but it is reactionary. A community by way of definition is a comprehensive collection of institutions that serve the people who live there. It differs from a nation because a community evolves around a greater structure that we usually call the state, and the state has certain control over the community if the administration represents the people or if the administration happens to be the people's commissar. It is not so at this time, so there's still something to be done. I mentioned earlier the "negation of the negation," I mentioned earlier the necessity for the redistribution of wealth. We think that it is very important to know that as things are in the world today socialism in the United States will never exist. Why? It will not exist because it cannot exist. It cannot at this time exist anywhere in the world. Socialism would require a socialist state, and if a state does not exist how could socialism exist? So how do we define certain progressive countries such as the People's Republic of China? How do we describe certain progressive countries, or communities as we call them, as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea? How do we define certain communities such as North Vietnam and the provisional government in the South? How do we explain these communities if in fact they too cannot claim nationhood? We say this: we say they represent the people's liberated territory. They represent a community liberated. But that community is not sufficient, it is not satisfied, just as the National Liberation Front is not satisfied with the liberated territory in the South. It is only the groundwork and preparation for the liberation of the world—seizing the wealth from the ruling circle, equal distribution and proportional representation in an intercommunal framework. This is what the Black Panther Party would like to achieve with the help of the power of the people, because without the people nothing can be achieved.

I stated that in the United States socialism would never exist. In order for a revolution to occur in the United States you would have to have a redistribution of wealth not on a national or an international level, but on an intercommunal level. Because how can we say that we have accomplished revolution if we redistribute the wealth just to the people here in North America when the ruling circle itself is guilty of *trespass de bonis asportatis*. That is, they have taken away the goods of the people of the world, transported them to America and used them as their very own.

In 1917, when the revolution occurred, there could be a redistribution of wealth on a national level because nations existed. Now, if you talk in terms of planning an economy on a *world-wide* level, on an intercommunal level, you are saying something important: that the people have been ripped off very much like one country being ripped off. Simple reparation is not enough because the people have not only been robbed of their raw materials, but of the wealth accrued from the investment of those materials—an investment which has created the technological machine. The people of the world will have to have control—not a limited share of control for “X” amount of time, but total control forever.

In order to plan a real intercommunal economy we will have to acknowledge how the world is hooked up. We will also have to acknowledge that nations have not existed for some time. Some people will argue that nations still exist because of the cultural differences. By way of definition, just for practical argument, culture is a collection of learned patterns of behavior. Here in the United States Black people, Africans, were raped from the mother country, and consequently we have literally lost most of our African values. Perhaps we still hold on to some surviving Africanisms, but by and large you can see the transformation which was achieved by time and the highly technological society whose tremendous mass media functions as an indoctrination center. The ruling circle has launched satellites in order to project a beam across the earth and indoctrinate the world, and while there might be some cultural differences, these differences are not qualitative but quantitative. In other words, if technology and the ruling circle go on as they are now the people of the world will be conditioned to adopt Western values. (I think Japan is a good example.) The differences between people are getting very small, but again that is in the interest of the ruling circle. I do not believe that history can be backtracked. If the world is really that interconnected then we have to acknowledge that and say that in order for the people to be free, they will have to control the institutions of their community, and have some form of representation in the technological center that they have produced. The United States, in order to correct its robbery of the world, will have to first return much of which it has stolen. I don't see how we can talk about socialism when the problem is world

distribution. I think this is what Marx meant when he talked about the non-state.

I was at Alex Haley's house some time ago and he talked to me about his search for his past. He found it in Africa but when he returned there shortly afterward, he was in a state of panic. His village hadn't changed very much, but when he went there he saw an old man walking down the road, holding something that he cherished to his ear. It was a small transistor radio that was zeroed in on the British broadcasting network. What I'm trying to say is that mass media plus the development of transportation make it impossible for us to think of ourselves in terms of separate entities, as nations. Do you realize that it only took me approximately five hours to get from San Francisco to here? It only takes ten hours to get from here to Vietnam. The ruling circle no longer even acknowledges wars; they call them “police actions.” They call the riots of the Vietnamese people “domestic disturbance.” What I am saying is that the ruling circle must realize and accept the consequences of what they have done. They know that there is only one world, but they are determined to follow the logic of their exploitation.

A short time ago in Detroit, the community was under siege, and now sixteen members of the Party are in prison. The local police laid siege on that community and that house, and they used the same weapons they use in Vietnam (as a matter of fact, two tanks rolled up). The same thing happens in Vietnam because the “police” are there also. The “police” are everywhere and they all wear the same uniform and use the same tools, and have the same purpose: the protection of the ruling circle here in North America. It is true that the world is one community, but we are not satisfied with the concentration of its power. We want the power for the people.

I said earlier (but I strayed away) that the theory of the “negation of the negation” is valid. Some scholars have been wondering why in Asia, Africa, and Latin America the resistance always seeks the goal of a collective society. They seem not to institute the economy of the capitalist. They seem to jump all the way from feudalism to a collective society, and some people can't understand why. Why won't they follow historical Marxism, or historical materialism? Why won't they go from feudalism to the development of a capitalistic base and

finally to socialism? They don't do it because they can't do it. They don't do it for the same reason that the Black community in Harlem cannot develop capitalism, that the Black community in Oakland or San Francisco cannot develop capitalism, because the imperialists have already preempted the field. They have already centralized the wealth. Therefore, in order to deal with them all we can do is liberate our community and then move on them as a collective force.

We've had long arguments with people about our convictions. Before we became conscious we used to call ourselves a dispersed collection of colonies here in North America. And people argued with me all day and all night, asking, "How can you possibly be a colony? In order to be a colony you have to have a nation, and you're not a nation, you're a community. You're a dispersed collection of communities." Because the Black Panther Party is not embarrassed to change or admit error, tonight I would like to accept the criticism and say that those critics were absolutely right. We are a collection of communities just as the Korean people, the Vietnamese people, and the Chinese people are a collection of communities—a dispersed collection of communities because we have no superstructure of our own. The superstructure we have is the superstructure of Wall Street, which all of our labor produced. This is a distorted form of collectivity. Everything's been collected but it's used exclusively in the interest of the ruling circle. This is why the Black Panther Party denounces Black capitalism and says that all we can do is liberate our community, not only in Vietnam but here, not only in Cambodia and the People's Republics of China and Korea but the communities of the world. We must unite as one community and then transform the world into a place where people will be happy, wars will end, the state itself will no longer exist, and we will have communism. But we cannot do this right away. When transformation takes place, when structural change takes place, the result is usually cultural lag. After the people possess the means of production we will probably not move directly into communism but linger with Revolutionary Intercommunalism until such time as we can wash away bourgeois thought, until such time as we can wash away racism and reactionary thinking, until such time as people are not attached to their nation as a peasant is attached to the soil, until such time as that people can gain their sanity and

develop a culture that is "essentially human," that will serve the people instead of some god. Because we cannot avoid contact with each other we will have to develop a value system that will help us function together in harmony.

ÉDOUARD GLISSANT

“Poetics of Relation”
excerpt from *Participi-*
pation

Édouard Glissant

Poetics of Relation//1990

Influenced by Deleuze and Guattari's A Thousand Plateaux (1980), which advocates an incessant subversion of power via 'deterritorializing' gestures, the French-Caribbean author Édouard Glissant poetically argues for the active appropriation of colonial culture by the colonized, particularly on the level of language. In contrast to the culturally unifying concept of négritude, Glissant's Poetics of Relation (1990) advocates a unity understood as diverse and fluctuating.

Errantry, Exile

Roots make the commonality of errantry and exile, for in both instances roots are lacking. We must begin with that.

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari criticized notions of the root and even, perhaps, notions of being rooted. The root is unique, a stock taking all upon itself and killing all around it. In opposition to this they propose the rhizome, an enmeshed root system, a network spreading either in the ground or in the air, with no predatory rootstock taking over permanently. The notion of the rhizome maintains, therefore, the idea of rootedness but challenges that of a totalitarian root. Rhizomatic thought is the principle behind what I call the Poetics of Relation, in which each and every identity is extended through a relationship with the Other.

These authors extol nomadism, which supposedly liberates Being, in contrast, perhaps, to a settled way of life, with its law based upon the intolerant root. Already Kant, at the beginning of *Critique of Pure Reason*, had seen similarities between skeptics and nomads, remarking also that, from time to time, 'they break the social bond'. He seems thus to establish correlations between, on the one hand, a settled way of life, truth and society and, on the other, nomadism, skepticism and anarchy. This parallel with Kant suggests that the rhizome concept appears interesting for its anti-conformism, but one cannot infer from this that it is subversive or that rhizomatic thought has the capacity to overturn the order of the world – because, by so doing, one reverts to ideological claims presumably challenged by this thought.

But is the nomad not overdetermined by the conditions of his existence? Rather than the enjoyment of freedom, is nomadism not a form of obedience to contingencies that are restrictive? Take, for example, circular nomadism: each time a portion of the territory is exhausted, the group moves around. Its function is to ensure the survival of the group by means of this circularity. This is the

nomadism practised by populations that move from one part of the forest to another, by the Arawak communities who navigated from island to island in the Caribbean, by hired labourers in their pilgrimage from farm to farm, by circus people in their peregrinations from village to village, all of whom are driven by some specific need to move, in which daring or aggression play no part. Circular nomadism is a not-intolerant form of an impossible settlement.

Contrast this with invading nomadism, that of the Huns, for example, or the Conquistadors, whose goal was to conquer lands by exterminating their occupants. Neither prudent nor circular nomadism, it spares no effect. It is an absolute forward projection: an arrowlike nomadism. But the descendants of the Huns, Vandals or Visigoths, as indeed those of the Conquistadors, who established their clans, settled down bit by bit, melting into their conquests. Arrowlike nomadism is a devastating desire for settlement.

Neither in arrowlike nomadism nor in circular nomadism are roots valid. Before it is won through conquest, what 'holds' the invader is what lies ahead; moreover, one could almost say that being compelled to lead a settled way of life would constitute the real uprooting of a circular nomad. There is, furthermore, no pain of exile bearing down, nor is there the wanderlust of errantry growing keener. Relation to the earth is too immediate or too plundering to be linked with any preoccupation with identity – this claim to or consciousness of a lineage inscribed in a territory. Identity will be achieved when communities attempt to legitimate their right to possession of a territory through myth or the revealed word. Such an assertion can predate its actual accomplishment by quite some time. Thus, an often and long contested legitimacy will have multiple forms that later will delineate the afflicted or soothing dimensions of exile or errantry.

In Western antiquity a man in exile does not feel he is helpless or inferior, because he does not feel burdened with deprivation – of a nation that for him does not yet exist. It even seems, if one is to believe the biographies of numerous Greek thinkers including Plato and Aristotle, that some experience of voyaging and exile is considered necessary for a being's complete fulfilment. Plato was the first to attempt to base legitimacy not on community within territory (as it was before and would be later) but on the City in the rationality of its laws. This at a time when his city, Athens, was already threatened by a 'final' deregulation.

In this period identification is with a culture (conceived of as civilization), not yet with a nation. The pre-Christian West along with pre-Columbian America, Africa of the time of the great conquerors, and the Asian kingdoms all shared this mode of seeing and feeling. The relay of actions exerted by arrowlike nomadism and the settled way of life were first directed against generalization (the drive for an identifying universal as practised by the Roman Empire). Thus, the particular resists a generalizing universal and soon begets specific and local

senses of identity, in concentric circles (provinces then nations). The idea of civilization, bit by bit, helps hold together opposites, whose only former identity existed in their opposition to the Other.

During this period of invading nomads the passion for self-definition first appears in the guise of personal adventure. Along the route of their voyages conquerors established empires that collapsed at their death. Their capitals went where they went. 'Rome is no longer in Rome, it is wherever I am.' The root is not important. Movement is. The idea of errantry, still inhibited in the face of this mad reality, this too-functional nomadism, whose ends it could not know, does not yet make an appearance. Centre and periphery are equivalent. Conquerors are the moving, transient root of their people.

The West, therefore, is where this movement becomes fixed and nations declare themselves in preparation for their repercussions in the world. This fixing, this declaration, this expansion, all require that the idea of the root gradually take on the intolerant sense that Deleuze and Guattari, no doubt, meant to challenge. The reason for our return to this episode in Western history is that it spread throughout the world. The model came in handy. Most of the nations that gained freedom from colonization have tended to form around an idea of power – the totalitarian drive of a single, unique root – rather than around a fundamental relationship with the Other. Culture's self-conception was dualistic, pitting citizen against barbarian. Nothing has ever more solidly opposed the thought of errantry than this period in human history when Western nations were established and then made their impact on the world.

At first this thought of errantry, bucking the current of nationalist expansion, was disguised 'within' very personalized adventures – just as the appearance of Western nations had been preceded by the ventures of empire builders. The errantry of a troubadour or that of Rimbaud is not yet a thorough, thick (opaque) experience of the world, but it is already an arrant, passionate desire to go against a root. The reality of exile during this period is felt as a (temporary) lack that primarily concerns, interestingly enough, language. Western nations were established on the basis of linguistic intransigence, and the exile readily admits that he suffers most from the impossibility of communicating in his language. The root is monolingual. For the troubadour and for Rimbaud errantry is a vocation only told via detour. The call of Relation is heard, but it is not yet a fully present experience.

However, and this is an immense paradox, the great founding books of communities, the Old Testament, the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, the *Chansons de Geste*, the Islandic *Sagas*, the *Aeneid* or the African epics, were all books about exile and often about errantry. This epic literature is amazingly prophetic. It tells of the community but, through relating the community's apparent failure or in any

case its being surpassed, it tells of errantry as a temptation (the desire to go against the root) and, frequently, actually experienced. Within the collective books concerning the sacred and the notion of history lies the germ of the exact opposite of what they so loudly proclaim. When the very idea of territory becomes relative, nuances appear in the legitimacy of territorial possession. These are books about the birth of collective consciousness, but they also introduce the unrest and suspense that allow the individual to discover himself there, whenever he himself becomes the issue. The Greek victory in the *Iliad* depends on trickery; Ulysses returns from his Odyssey and is recognized only by his dog; the Old Testament David bears the stain of adultery and murder; the *Chanson de Roland* is the chronicle of a defeat; the characters in the *Sagas* are branded by an unstemmable fate, and so forth. These books are the beginning of something entirely different from massive, dogmatic and totalitarian certainty (despite the religious uses to which they will be put). These are books of errantry, going beyond the pursuits and triumphs of rootedness required by the evolution of history.

Some of these books are devoted entirely to the supreme errantry, as in the Egyptian Book of the Dead. The very book whose function is to consecrate an intransigent community is already a compromise, qualifying its triumph with revelatory wanderings.

In both *L'Intention poétique* (*Poetic Intention*) and *Le Discours antillais* (*Caribbean Discourse*) – of which the present work is a reconstituted echo or a spiral retelling – I approached this dimension of epic literature. I began wondering if we did not still need such founding works today, ones that would use a similar dialectics of rerouting, asserting, for example, political strength but, simultaneously, the rhizome of a multiple relationship with the Other and basing every community's reasons for existence on a modern form of the sacred, which would be, all in all, a Poetics of Relation.

This movement, therefore (one among others, equally important, in other parts of the world), has led from a primordial nomadism to the settled way of life of Western nations, then to Discovery and Conquest, which achieved a final, almost mystical perfection in the Voyage.

In the course of this journey, identity, at least as far as the Western peoples who made up the great majority of voyagers, discoverers and conquerors were concerned, consolidates itself implicitly at first ('my root is the strongest') and then is explicitly exported as a value ('a person's worth is determined by his root'). The conquered or visited peoples are thus forced into a long and painful quest after an identity whose first task will be opposition to the denaturing process introduced by the conqueror. A tragic variation of a search for identity. For more than two centuries whole populations have had to assert their identity

in opposition to the processes of identification or annihilation triggered by these invaders. Whereas the Western nation is first of all an 'opposite,' for colonized peoples identity will be primarily 'opposed to' – that is, a limitation from the beginning. Decolonization will have done its real work when it goes beyond this limit.

The duality of self-perception (one is citizen or foreigner) has repercussions on one's idea of the Other (one is visitor or visited; one goes or stays; one conquers or is conquered). Thought of the Other cannot escape its own dualism until the time when differences become acknowledged. From that point on thought of the Other 'comprehends' multiplicity, but mechanically and still taking the subtle hierarchies of a generalizing universal as its basis. Acknowledging differences does not compel one to be involved in the dialectics of their totality. One could get away with: 'I can acknowledge your difference and continue to think it is harmful to you. I can think that my strength lies in the Voyage (I am making History) and that your difference is motionless and silent.' Another step remains to be taken before one really enters the dialectic of totality. And, contrary to the mechanics of the Voyage, this dialectic turns out to be driven by the thought of errantry.

Let us suppose that the quest for totality, starting from a non-universal context of histories of the West, has passed through the following stages:

- the thinking of territory and self (ontological, dual)
- the thinking of voyage and other (mechanical, multiple)
- the thinking of errantry and totality (relational, dialectical).

We will agree that this thinking of errantry, this errant thought, silently emerges from the destructuring of compact national entities that yesterday were still triumphant and, at the same time, from difficult, uncertain births of new forms of identity that call to us.

In this context uprooting can work towards identity, and exile can be seen as beneficial, when these are experienced as a search for the Other (through circular nomadism) rather than as an expansion of territory (an arrowlike nomadism). Totality's imaginary allows the detours that lead away from anything totalitarian.

Errantry, therefore, does not proceed from renunciation nor from frustration regarding a supposedly deteriorated (deterritorialized) situation of origin; it is not a resolute act of rejection or an uncontrolled impulse of abandonment. Sometimes, by taking up the problems of the Other, it is possible to find oneself. Contemporary history provides several striking examples of this, among them Frantz Fanon, whose path led from Martinique to Algeria. That is very much the image of the rhizome, prompting the knowledge that identity is no longer completely within the root but also in Relation. Because the thought of errantry

is also the thought of what is relative, the thing relayed as well as the thing related. The thought of errantry is a poetics, which always infers that at some moment it is told. The tale of errantry is the tale of Relation.

In contrast to arrowlike nomadism (discovery or conquest), in contrast to the situation of exile, errantry gives-on-and-with the negation of every pole and every metropolis, whether connected or not to a conqueror's voyaging act. We have repeatedly mentioned that the first thing exported by the conqueror was his language. Moreover, the great Western languages were supposedly vehicular languages, which often took the place of an actual metropolis. Relation, in contrast, is spoken multilingually. Going beyond the impositions of economic forces and cultural pressures, Relation rightfully opposes the totalitarianism of any monolingual intent.

At this point we seem to be far removed from the sufferings and preoccupations of those who must bear the world's injustice. Their errantry is, in effect, immobile. They have never experienced the melancholy and extroverted luxury of uprooting. They do not travel. But one of the constants of our world is that a knowledge of roots will be conveyed to them from within intuitions of Relation from now on. Travelling is no longer the locus of power but rather a pleasurable, if privileged time. The ontological obsession with knowledge gives way here to the enjoyment of a relation; in its elementary and often caricatural form this is tourism. Those who stay behind thrill to this passion for the world shared by all. Or indeed they may suffer the torments of internal exile.

I would not describe the physical situation of those who suffer the oppression of an Other within their own country, such as the blacks in South Africa, as internal exile. Because the solution here is visible and the outcome determined; force alone can oppose this. Internal exile strikes individuals living where solutions concerning the relationship of a community to its surroundings are not, or at least not yet, consented to by this community as a whole. These solutions, precariously outlined as decisions, are still the prerogative of only a few who as a result are marginalized. Internal exile is the voyage out of this enclosure. It is a motionless and exacerbated introduction to the thought of errantry. Most often it is diverted into partial, pleasurable compensations in which the individual is consumed. Internal exile tends toward material comfort, which cannot really distract from anguish.

Whereas exile may erode one's sense of identity, the thought of errantry – the thought of that which relates – usually reinforces this sense of identity. It seems possible, at least to one observer, that the persecuted errantry, the wandering of the Jews, may have reinforced their sense of identity far more than their present settling in the land of Palestine. Being exiled Jews turned into a

vocation of errantry, their point of reference an ideal land whose power may, in fact, have been undermined by concrete land (a territory), chosen and conquered. This, however, is mere conjecture. Because, while one can communicate through errantry's imaginary vision, the experiences of exiles are incommunicable.

The thought of errantry is not apolitical nor is it inconsistent with the will to identity, which is, after all, nothing other than the search for a freedom within particular surroundings. If it is at variance with territorial intolerance, or the predatory effects of the unique root (which makes processes of identification so difficult today), this is because, in the Poetics of Relation, one who is errant (who is no longer traveller, discoverer or conqueror) strives to know the totality of the world yet already knows he will never accomplish this – and knows that is precisely where the threatened beauty of the world resides.

Errant, he challenges and discards the universal – this generalizing edict that summarized the world as something obvious and transparent, claiming for it one presupposed sense and one destiny. He plunges into the opacities of that part of the world to which he has access. Generalization is totalitarian: from the world it chooses one side of the reports, one set of ideas, which it sets apart from others and tries to impose by exporting as a model. The thinking of errantry conceives of totality but willingly renounces any claims to sum it up or to possess it.

The founding books have taught us that the sacred dimension consists always of going deeper into the mystery of the root, shaded with variations of errantry. In reality errant thinking is the postulation of an unyielding and unfading sacred. We remember that Plato, who understood the power of Myth, had hoped to banish the poets, those who force obscurity, far from the Republic. He distrusted the fathomless word. Are we not returning here, in the unforeseeable meanders of Relation, to this abyssal word? Nowhere is it stated that now, in this thought of errantry, humanity will not succeed in transmuting Myth's opacities (which were formerly the occasion for setting roots) and the diffracted insights of political philosophy, thereby reconciling Homer and Plato, Hegel and the African griot.

But we need to figure out whether or not there are other succulencies of Relation in other parts of the world (and already at work in an underground manner) that will suddenly open up other avenues and soon help to correct whatever simplifying, ethnocentric exclusions may have arisen from such a perspective. [...]

Dictate, Decree

[...] Summarizing what we know concerning the varieties of identity, we arrive at the following:

Root identity

- is founded in the distant past in a vision, a myth of the creation of the world;
- is sanctified by the hidden violence of a filiation that strictly follows from this founding episode;
- is ratified by a claim to legitimacy that allows a community to proclaim its entitlement to the possession of a land, which thus becomes a territory;
- is preserved by being projected onto other territories, making their conquest legitimate – and through the project of a discursive knowledge. Root identity therefore rooted the thought of self and of territory and set in motion the thought of the other and of voyage.

Relation identity

- is linked not to a creation of the world but to the conscious and contradictory experience of contacts among cultures;
- is produced in the chaotic network of Relation and not in the hidden violence of filiation;
- does not devise any legitimacy as its guarantee of entitlement, but circulates, newly extended;
- does not think of a land as a territory from which to project toward other territories but as a place where one gives-on-and-with rather than grasps.

Relation identity exalts the thought of errantry and of totality. The shock of relating, hence, has repercussions on several levels. When secular cultures come into contact through their intolerances, the ensuing violence triggers mutual exclusions that are of a sacred nature and for which any future reconciliation is hard to foresee. When a culture that is expressly composite, such as the culture of Martinique, is touched by another (French) that 'entered into' its composition and continues to determine it, not radically but through the erosion of assimilation, the violence of reaction is intermittent and unsure of itself. For the Martinican it has no solid rootstock in any sacred territory or filiation. This, indeed, is a case in which specificity is a strict requirement and must be defined as closely as possible. For this composite culture is fragile in the extreme, wearing down through contact with a masked colonization. [...]

Édouard Glissant, *Poétique de la Relation* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1990); trans. Betsy Wing, *Poetics of Relation* [footnotes not included] (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997) 11–21; 143–4.

STANLEY MILGRAM

“Dilemma of Obedience”

excerpt from

Obedience to Authority

1

The Dilemma of Obedience

Obedience is as basic an element in the structure of social life as one can point to. Some system of authority is a requirement of all communal living, and it is only the man dwelling in isolation who is not forced to respond, through defiance or submission, to the commands of others. Obedience, as a determinant of behavior, is of particular relevance to our time. It has been reliably established that from 1933 to 1945 millions of innocent people were systematically slaughtered on command. Gas chambers were built, death camps were guarded, daily quotas of corpses were produced with the same efficiency as the manufacture of appliances. These inhumane policies may have originated in the mind of a single person, but they could only have been carried out on a massive scale if a very large number of people obeyed orders.

Obedience is the psychological mechanism that links individual action to political purpose. It is the dispositional cement that binds men to systems of authority. Facts of recent history and observation in daily life suggest that for many people obedience may be a deeply ingrained behavior tendency, indeed, a prepotent impulse overriding training in ethics, sympathy, and moral conduct. C. P. Snow (1961) points to its importance when he writes:

When you think of the long and gloomy history of man, you will find more hideous crimes have been committed in the name of obedience than have ever been committed in the name of rebellion. If you doubt that, read William Shirer's 'Rise and Fall of the Third Reich.' The German Officer Corps were brought up in the most rigorous code of obedience . . . in the name of obedience they were party to, and assisted in, the most wicked large scale actions in the history of the world..(p. 24)

The Nazi extermination of European Jews is the most extreme instance of abhorrent immoral acts carried out by thousands of people in the name of obedience. Yet in lesser degree this type of thing is constantly recurring: ordinary citizens are ordered to destroy other people, and they do so because they consider it their duty to obey orders. Thus, obedience to authority, long praised as a virtue, takes on a new aspect when it serves a malevolent cause; far from appearing as a virtue, it is transformed into a heinous sin. Or is it?

The moral question of whether one should obey when commands conflict with conscience was argued by Plato, dramatized in *Antigone*, and treated to philosophic analysis in every historical epoch. Conservative philosophers argue that the very fabric of society is threatened by disobedience, and even when the act prescribed by an authority is an evil one, it is better to carry out the act than to wrench at the structure of authority. Hobbes stated further that an act so executed is in no sense the responsibility of the person who carries it out but only of the authority that orders it. But humanists argue for the primacy of individual conscience in such matters, insisting that the moral judgments of the individual must override authority when the two are in conflict.

The legal and philosophic aspects of obedience are of enormous import, but an empirically grounded scientist eventually comes to the point where he wishes to move from abstract discourse to the careful observation of concrete instances. In order to take a close look at the act of obeying, I set up a simple

experiment at Yale University. Eventually, the experiment was to involve more than a thousand participants and would be repeated at several universities, but at the beginning, the conception was simple. A person comes to a psychological laboratory and is told to carry out a series of acts that come increasingly into conflict with conscience. The main question is how far the participant will comply with the experimenter's instructions before refusing to carry out the actions required of him.

But the reader needs to know a little more detail about the experiment. Two people come to a psychology laboratory to take part in a study of memory and learning. One of them is designated as a "teacher" and the other a "learner." The experimenter explains that the study is concerned with the effects of punishment on learning. The learner is conducted into a room, seated in a chair, his arms strapped to prevent excessive movement, and an electrode attached to his wrist. He is told that he is to learn a list of word pairs; whenever he makes an error, he will receive electric shocks of increasing intensity.

The real focus of the experiment is the teacher. After watching the learner being strapped into place, he is taken into the main experimental room and seated before an impressive shock generator. Its main feature is a horizontal line of thirty switches, ranging from 15 volts to 450 volts, in 15-volt increments. There are also verbal designations which range from SLIGHT SHOCK to DANGER—SEVERE SHOCK. The teacher is told that he is to administer the learning test to the man in the other room. When the learner responds correctly, the teacher moves on to the next item; when the other man gives an incorrect answer, the teacher is to give him an electric shock. He is to start at the lowest shock level (15 volts) and to increase the level each time the man makes an error, going through 30 volts, 45 volts, and so on.

The "teacher" is a genuinely naïve subject who has come to the laboratory to participate in an experiment. The learner, or victim, is an actor who actually receives no shock at all. The point of the experiment is to see how far a person will proceed in a

concrete and measurable situation in which he is ordered to inflict increasing pain on a protesting victim. At what point will the subject refuse to obey the experimenter?

Conflict arises when the man receiving the shock begins to indicate that he is experiencing discomfort. At 75 volts, the "learner" grunts. At 120 volts he complains verbally; at 150 he demands to be released from the experiment. His protests continue as the shocks escalate, growing increasingly vehement and emotional. At 285 volts his response can only be described as an agonized scream.

Observers of the experiment agree that its gripping quality is somewhat obscured in print. For the subject, the situation is not a game; conflict is intense and obvious. On one hand, the manifest suffering of the learner presses him to quit. On the other, the experimenter, a legitimate authority to whom the subject feels some commitment, enjoins him to continue. Each time the subject hesitates to administer shock, the experimenter orders him to continue. To extricate himself from the situation, the subject must make a clear break with authority. The aim of this investigation was to find when and how people would defy authority in the face of a clear moral imperative.

There are, of course, enormous differences between carrying out the orders of a commanding officer during times of war and carrying out the orders of an experimenter. Yet the essence of certain relationships remain, for one may ask in a general way: How does a man behave when he is told by a legitimate authority to act against a third individual? If anything, we may expect the experimenter's power to be considerably less than that of the general, since he has no power to enforce his imperatives, and participation in a psychological experiment scarcely evokes the sense of urgency and dedication engendered by participation in war. Despite these limitations, I thought it worthwhile to start careful observation of obedience even in this modest situation, in the hope that it would stimulate insights and yield general propositions applicable to a variety of circumstances.

A reader's initial reaction to the experiment may be to wonder

why anyone in his right mind would administer even the first shocks. Would he not simply refuse and walk out of the laboratory? But the fact is that no one ever does. Since the subject has come to the laboratory to aid the experimenter, he is quite willing to start off with the procedure. There is nothing very extraordinary in this, particularly since the person who is to receive the shocks seems initially cooperative, if somewhat apprehensive. What is surprising is how far ordinary individuals will go in complying with the experimenter's instructions. Indeed, the results of the experiment are both surprising and dismaying. Despite the fact that many subjects experience stress, despite the fact that many protest to the experimenter, a substantial proportion continue to the last shock on the generator.

Many subjects will obey the experimenter no matter how vehement the pleading of the person being shocked, no matter how painful the shocks seem to be, and no matter how much the victim pleads to be let out. This was seen time and again in our studies and has been observed in several universities where the experiment was repeated. It is the extreme willingness of adults to go to almost any lengths on the command of an authority that constitutes the chief finding of the study and the fact most urgently demanding explanation.

A commonly offered explanation is that those who shocked the victim at the most severe level were monsters, the sadistic fringe of society. But if one considers that almost two-thirds of the participants fall into the category of "obedient" subjects, and that they represented ordinary people drawn from working, managerial, and professional classes, the argument becomes very shaky. Indeed, it is highly reminiscent of the issue that arose in connection with Hannah Arendt's 1963 book, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. Arendt contended that the prosecution's effort to depict Eichmann as a sadistic monster was fundamentally wrong, that he came closer to being an uninspired bureaucrat who simply sat at his desk and did his job. For asserting these views, Arendt became the object of considerable scorn, even calumny. Somehow, it was felt that the monstrous deeds carried out by Eich-

mann required a brutal, twisted, and sadistic personality, evil incarnate. After witnessing hundreds of ordinary people submit to the authority in our own experiments, I must conclude that Arendt's conception of the *banality of evil* comes closer to the truth than one might dare imagine. The ordinary person who shocked the victim did so out of a sense of obligation—a conception of his duties as a subject—and not from any peculiarly aggressive tendencies.

This is, perhaps, the most fundamental lesson of our study: ordinary people, simply doing their jobs, and without any particular hostility on their part, can become agents in a terrible destructive process. Moreover, even when the destructive effects of their work become patently clear, and they are asked to carry out actions incompatible with fundamental standards of morality, relatively few people have the resources needed to resist authority. A variety of inhibitions against disobeying authority come into play and successfully keep the person in his place.

Sitting back in one's armchair, it is easy to condemn the actions of the obedient subjects. But those who condemn the subjects measure them against the standard of their own ability to formulate high-minded moral prescriptions. That is hardly a fair standard. Many of the subjects, at the level of stated opinion, feel quite as strongly as any of us about the moral requirement of refraining from action against a helpless victim. They, too, in general terms know what ought to be done and can state their values when the occasion arises. This has little, if anything, to do with their actual behavior under the pressure of circumstances.

If people are asked to render a moral judgment on what constitutes appropriate behavior in this situation, they unfailingly see disobedience as proper. But values are not the only forces at work in an actual, ongoing situation. They are but one narrow band of causes in the total spectrum of forces impinging on a person. Many people were unable to realize their values in action and found themselves continuing in the experiment even though they disagreed with what they were doing.

The force exerted by the moral sense of the individual is less

effective than social myth would have us believe. Though such prescriptions as "Thou shalt not kill" occupy a pre-eminent place in the moral order, they do not occupy a correspondingly intractable position in human psychic structure. A few changes in newspaper headlines, a call from the draft board, orders from a man with epaulets, and men are led to kill with little difficulty. Even the forces mustered in a psychology experiment will go a long way toward removing the individual from moral controls. Moral factors can be shunted aside with relative ease by a calculated restructuring of the informational and social field.

What, then, keeps the person obeying the experimenter? First, there is a set of "binding factors" that lock the subject into the situation. They include such factors as politeness on his part, his desire to uphold his initial promise of aid to the experimenter, and the awkwardness of withdrawal. Second, a number of adjustments in the subject's thinking occur that undermine his resolve to break with the authority. The adjustments help the subject maintain his relationship with the experimenter, while at the same time reducing the strain brought about by the experimental conflict. They are typical of thinking that comes about in obedient persons when they are instructed by authority to act against helpless individuals.

One such mechanism is the tendency of the individual to become so absorbed in the narrow technical aspects of the task that he loses sight of its broader consequences. The film *Dr. Strangelove* brilliantly satirized the absorption of a bomber crew in the exacting technical procedure of dropping nuclear weapons on a country. Similarly, in this experiment, subjects become immersed in the procedures, reading the word pairs with exquisite articulation and pressing the switches with great care. They want to put on a competent performance, but they show an accompanying narrowing of moral concern. The subject entrusts the broader tasks of setting goals and assessing morality to the experimental authority he is serving.

The most common adjustment of thought in the obedient subject is for him to see himself as not responsible for his own

actions. He divests himself of responsibility by attributing all initiative to the experimenter, a legitimate authority. He sees himself not as a person acting in a morally accountable way but as the agent of external authority. In the postexperimental interview, when subjects were asked why they had gone on, a typical reply was: "I wouldn't have done it by myself. I was just doing what I was told." Unable to defy the authority of the experimenter, they attribute all responsibility to him. It is the old story of "just doing one's duty" that was heard time and time again in the defense statements of those accused at Nuremberg. But it would be wrong to think of it as a thin alibi concocted for the occasion. Rather, it is a fundamental mode of thinking for a great many people once they are locked into a subordinate position in a structure of authority. The disappearance of a sense of responsibility is the most far-reaching consequence of submission to authority.

Although a person acting under authority performs actions that seem to violate standards of conscience, it would not be true to say that he loses his moral sense. Instead, it acquires a radically different focus. He does not respond with a moral sentiment to the actions he performs. Rather, his moral concern now shifts to a consideration of how well he is living up to the expectations that the authority has of him. In wartime, a soldier does not ask whether it is good or bad to bomb a hamlet; he does not experience shame or guilt in the destruction of a village: rather he feels pride or shame depending on how well he has performed the mission assigned to him.

Another psychological force at work in this situation may be termed "counteranthropomorphism." For decades psychologists have discussed the primitive tendency among men to attribute to inanimate objects and forces the qualities of the human species. A countervailing tendency, however, is that of attributing an impersonal quality to forces that are essentially human in origin and maintenance. Some people treat systems of human origin as if they existed above and beyond any human agent, beyond the control of whim or human feeling. The human element behind

agencies and institutions is denied. Thus, when the experimenter says, "The experiment *requires* that you continue," the subject feels this to be an imperative that goes beyond any merely human command. He does not ask the seemingly obvious question, "Whose experiment? Why should the designer be served while the victim suffers?" The wishes of a man—the designer of the experiment—have become part of a schema which exerts on the subject's mind a force that transcends the personal. "It's got to go on. It's got to go on," repeated one subject. He failed to realize that a man like himself wanted it to go on. For him the human agent had faded from the picture, and "The Experiment" had acquired an impersonal momentum of its own.

No action of itself has an unchangeable psychological quality. Its meaning can be altered by placing it in particular contexts. An American newspaper recently quoted a pilot who conceded that Americans were bombing Vietnamese men, women, and children but felt that the bombing was for a "noble cause" and thus was justified. Similarly, most subjects in the experiment see their behavior in a larger context that is benevolent and useful to society—the pursuit of scientific truth. The psychological laboratory has a strong claim to legitimacy and evokes trust and confidence in those who come to perform there. An action such as shocking a victim, which in isolation appears evil, acquires a totally different meaning when placed in this setting. But allowing an act to be dominated by its context, while neglecting its human consequences, can be dangerous in the extreme.

At least one essential feature of the situation in Germany was not studied here—namely, the intense devaluation of the victim prior to action against him. For a decade and more, vehement anti-Jewish propaganda systematically prepared the German population to accept the destruction of the Jews. Step by step the Jews were excluded from the category of citizen and national, and finally were denied the status of human beings. Systematic devaluation of the victim provides a measure of psychological justification for brutal treatment of the victim and has been the constant accompaniment of massacres, pogroms, and wars. In all

likelihood, our subjects would have experienced greater ease in shocking the victim had he been convincingly portrayed as a brutal criminal or a pervert.

Of considerable interest, however, is the fact that many subjects harshly devalue the victim *as a consequence* of acting against him. Such comments as, "He was so stupid and stubborn he deserved to get shocked," were common. Once having acted against the victim, these subjects found it necessary to view him as an unworthy individual, whose punishment was made inevitable by his own deficiencies of intellect and character.

Many of the people studied in the experiment were in some sense against what they did to the learner, and many protested even while they obeyed. But between thoughts, words, and the critical step of disobeying a malevolent authority lies another ingredient, the capacity for transforming beliefs and values into action. Some subjects were totally convinced of the wrongness of what they were doing but could not bring themselves to make an open break with authority. Some derived satisfaction from their thoughts and felt that—within themselves, at least—they had been on the side of the angels. What they failed to realize is that subjective feelings are largely irrelevant to the moral issue at hand so long as they are not transformed into action. Political control is effected through action. The attitudes of the guards at a concentration camp are of no consequence when in fact they are allowing the slaughter of innocent men to take place before them. Similarly, so-called "intellectual resistance" in occupied Europe—in which persons by a twist of thought felt that they had defied the invader—was merely indulgence in a consoling psychological mechanism. Tyrannies are perpetuated by diffident men who do not possess the courage to act out their beliefs. Time and again in the experiment people disvalued what they were doing but could not muster the inner resources to translate their values into action.

A variation of the basic experiment depicts a dilemma more common than the one outlined above: the subject was not ordered to push the trigger that shocked the victim, but merely to

perform a subsidiary act (administering the word-pair test) before another subject actually delivered the shock. In this situation, 37 of 40 adults from the New Haven area continued to the highest shock level on the generator. Predictably, subjects excused their behavior by saying that the responsibility belonged to the man who actually pulled the switch. This may illustrate a dangerously typical situation in complex society: it is psychologically easy to ignore responsibility when one is only an intermediate link in a chain of evil action but is far from the final consequences of the action. Even Eichmann was sickened when he toured the concentration camps, but to participate in mass murder he had only to sit at a desk and shuffle papers. At the same time the man in the camp who actually dropped Cyclon-B into the gas chambers was able to justify *his* behavior on the grounds that he was only following orders from above. Thus there is a fragmentation of the total human act; no one man decides to carry out the evil act and is confronted with its consequences. The person who assumes full responsibility for the act has evaporated. Perhaps this is the most common characteristic of socially organized evil in modern society.

The problem of obedience, therefore, is not wholly psychological. The form and shape of society and the way it is developing have much to do with it. There was a time, perhaps, when men were able to give a fully human response to any situation because they were fully absorbed in it as human beings. But as soon as there was a division of labor among men, things changed. Beyond a certain point, the breaking up of society into people carrying out narrow and very special jobs takes away from the human quality of work and life. A person does not get to see the whole situation but only a small part of it, and is thus unable to act without some kind of over-all direction. He yields to authority but in doing so is alienated from his own actions.

George Orwell caught the essence of the situation when he wrote:

As I write, highly civilized human beings are flying overhead, trying to kill me. They do not feel any enmity against me as an individual, nor

I against them. They are only "doing their duty," as the saying goes. Most of them, I have no doubt, are kind-hearted law abiding men who would never dream of committing murder in private life. On the other hand, if one of them succeeds in blowing me to pieces with a well-placed bomb, he will never sleep any the worse for it.

CHAPTER

2

Method of Inquiry

Simplicity is the key to effective scientific inquiry. This is especially true in the case of subject matter with a psychological content. Psychological matter, by its nature, is difficult to get at and likely to have many more sides to it than appear at first glance. Complicated procedures only get in the way of clear scrutiny of the phenomenon itself. To study obedience most simply, we must create a situation in which one person orders another person to perform an observable action and we must note when obedience to the imperative occurs and when it fails to occur.

If we are to measure the strength of obedience and the conditions by which it varies, we must force it against some powerful factor that works in the direction of disobedience, and whose human import is readily understood.

Of all moral principles, the one that comes closest to being universally accepted is this: one should not inflict suffering on a helpless person who is neither harmful nor threatening to oneself. This principle is the counterforce we shall set in opposition to obedience.

A person coming to our laboratory will be ordered to act against another individual in increasingly severe fashion. Accordingly, the pressures for disobedience will build up. At a point not known beforehand, the subject may refuse to carry out this