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Editor's Introduction

Logos was created with the express purpose of stimulating a critical dialogue on modern society, culture, politics and the arts. In its inchoate stages as an online journal, the editors pondered topics such as the end of modern art, the crisis of liberalism and so on. But the events of 9/11 radically altered the scope and aims of *Logos*. Suddenly, it became all the more important to focus on the most crucial aspects of world society and it is this that the present issue of *Logos* is hopefully coming to grips with.

The contributions to this issue engage various aspects of the tragic events of September 11th but from points of view, and advancing theses, not typically seen in the mainstream media and in most current intellectual debates.

The contributions by Stephen Eric Bronner, Michael J. Thompson and Nadia Urbinati deal specifically with the issues of 9/11 and the political and cultural implications of those events. Jeffrey Goldfarb's article on anti-Americanism is a sober look at the important nuances required when criticizing American culture from abroad and the need to balance that critique with the various contributions that American democracy has to make to other nations. Robert Fitch's article on Immanuel Wallerstein is a critical foray into theories of global capitalism and one major theory of modernity: world system theory. Douglas Kellner's article on technology and modern education looks at the new ways that technology (specifically hypertextual information sources) can aid in the project of a more democratic culture through education.

An interview with Jürgen Habermas explores the implications of transcending the nation state and the new boundaries of a constitutionalism—and democracy—beyond the narrow borders of the modern nation state. As the globalization of capital expands, what are the hopes for the political alternatives to counter the trends of neo-liberal ideology?

There is also fiction by Matthew Perini and reviews of Barbara Ehrenreich, Ben Cheever, Tom Wells' biography of Daniel Ellsberg by Kurt Jacobsen and a history of the New Left in America by Scott A. Lamb.

We hope that *Logos* will enjoy a growing readership as well as stimulate debate and dialogue. Letters and submissions to *Logos* are accepted via web or snail mail. We look forward to hearing from our readers and continue the collective project of social critique.

Gandhi: Non-Violence and the Violence of Our Times*

by

Stephen Eric Bronner

I never saw Gandhi. I do not know his language. I never set foot in his country, and yet I feel the same sorrow as if I had lost someone near and dear.

--- Leon Blum

Thank you for inviting me on this occasion for celebrating the birthday, and reinvigorating the ideal of service, of the Mahatma: the great soul. I remember images of Gandhi from when I was a child. Cartoons produced by the Disney Corporation used to depict him, as a grotesque spindly creature with huge glasses and a loincloth looking something like an octopus. Only later, when I entered my teenage years, did I read the short biography, *Gandhi: His Life and Message for the World* (1954) by Louis Fischer that gave me a sense of his true stature: the beatings he withstood, the imprisonments to which he was subjected, the kindness and the generosity of his bearing. Over the years I would read many more books about him with wonder and admiration. The question today involves Gandhi's legacy following the attack on the World Trade Center.

Intoxication with the drama of revolutionary violence beginning in the cold war years made it easy to forget that the great modern struggle of the colonized for national self-determination following World War II began with the emancipation of India under the leadership of Mohandas K. Gandhi (1869-1948). His youth was undistinguished. In England while training for the law, he sought to ape the styles of the colonizer with little success. And then, following

his return to India, he failed in pursuing his chosen profession. Only upon moving to South Africa, and being tossed out of a first-class train compartment because of his skin color, did his political commitment become manifest. It was in South Africa, where he remained from 1893-1914 and where the young Nelson Mandela later heard him speak, that he developed the doctrine of passive resistance.

The roots of his doctrine were ultimately religious: Hinduism, the *Bhagavad-Gita*, and the Sermon on the Mount. Others like Martin Luther King, Jr. and Nelson Mandela would also employ non-violence in order to confront rampant discrimination in the name of a liberal rule of law. But none understood *ahimsa*, or “non-harming” in quite so radical a way as Gandhi. He connected non-violence with *satya*, truth and love, and *agraha*, or the discipline of the soul. Thus, the emergence of a movement grounded in *satyagraha*: the personal fused with the political, the individual with the community, religion with secular aims, and a new conception of mass action took shape. *Satyagraha* touched the world in 1930 when, opposing the hated salt tax imposed by the British, and in a remarkable display of solidarity among the lowly and the impoverished, Gandhi and seventy-eight of his co-workers began their famous “march to the sea” that, twenty days later, had swelled into thousands upon thousands thereby beginning a new phase in the struggle against British colonial rule that would culminate in an independent India.

Non-violence was, for Gandhi, not simply a political tactic, but an element in forging a moral way of life. The relation between oppressor and oppressed changed. Militant passive disobedience was meant both to instill discipline upon its practitioner and provide an example of moral rectitude in the face of a brutal enemy. The point was not merely to achieve solidarity among the oppressed, but to change the oppressor. Non-violence, in this sense, retains a universal dimension. Gandhi was more than the national leader of an independence movement or a fundamentalist fanatic who termed members of rival religions “pigs” and “monkeys.” Still less did he divide the world into believers and infidels.

Gandhi did not dehumanize people, but rather highlighted a common sense of decency. His notion of *ahimsa* points to the unity of all beings or, what in secular terms, we might consider as the harmony between humanity and nature. Gandhi was willing to let a hundred flowers bloom. The nationalism that became the hallmark of his influential journal *Young India* was never parochial, xenophobic, or intolerant, but rather linked to internationalism and a sense of planetary responsibility. Gandhi indeed provides a sterling rebuke to those like Frantz Fanon or Jean-Paul Sartre who would suggest that only violence is an appropriate response to imperialism.

Gandhi had his contradictions, as Manfred Steger noted in his fine book: *Gandhi's Dilemma* (St. Martin's Press: New York, 2001). A tension existed between the humanitarianism of the *mahatma* and his nationalism. He embraced liberal western values, but he rejected the western life-style. He also had his weaknesses. He knew little about economics and his use of the spinning wheel as a call for economic self-sufficiency, for all Indians to spin their own textiles rather than buy them from the British, can be seen less as an insistence upon what is now called "appropriate technologies" for economically underdeveloped nations than an implicit acceptance of Indian economic underdevelopment. In this same vein, intent upon personal purification, his renunciation of comfort verged on romanticizing poverty and turning it into what his contemporary, Hugo von Hoffmansthal, called an "inner glow."

But, for me, these failings only render Gandhi more human and his ultimate ideal more powerful precisely because it could not always be translated into practice. He was a politician, albeit, a politician driven by ethical imperatives. He knew that not the rhetoric of radicalism and power, but the language of peace and persuasion, the language of common humanity, would provide his movement with the moral high ground. But he also knew that principles divorced from interests are simply words. Gandhi's power derived from the way in which he connected his principles

with his interests, and his means with the ends he wished to achieve: equality for people of color and the liberation of India.

Perhaps the attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon was an example of what Chalmers Johnson has called “blowback” or the unintended consequences of the policies pursued by the United States in the Middle East. Its refusal to support democratic forces in the Middle East is as appalling as its alliances with many of the most reactionary forces in the Arab world. There is even a perverse irony in that the *Mujahedeen* received aid from the Carter administration and Osama bin Laden was supported in his subversive activities in Afghanistan against the Soviet Union by President George Bush, Sr. But it would be absurd to place responsibility for this crime against American citizens on the misguided policies of its government rather than on those who committed the crime. Seeing the attack on the World Trade Center as simply another occasion to expose American imperialism without privileging the need for a response to the attack is an insult to the victims: it is like going to a wake and then spitting in the coffin.

Simply invoking the oppression suffered by the perpetrators of this action, or those whom these perpetrators claim to represent, doesn't help matters. Every fascist movement was generated by the experience of real suffering on the part of its mass constituency. Each targeted the evils of capitalism and most castigated the imperialist ambitions of their opponents. It is time to consider that the determinate response to imperialism—rather than the indeterminate causes for it—is what requires political evaluation and judgment. The point for those with progressive politics is really very simple. There exists a moment of personal responsibility for political action, beyond the oppressive policies that may inspire it, which we ignore at our peril. Forgetting that those who perpetrated this crime are not our comrades, or simply dismissing the question of punishment and retribution, is both a moral and a political abdication of responsibility.

Especially on this day commemorating Gandhi, perhaps, it is useful to contrast him and his followers with the terrorists. He and King and Mandela were not only men of peace, but freedom fighters who brought out the best in their people. The means they employed were related to the achievement of realizable ends and they were not aimed at imposing their beliefs on others through coercion. Those whom Richard Falk has appropriately termed “apocalyptic terrorists,” by contrast, filled the heads of their followers with the most atavistic and intolerant interpretations of Islam, killed 5,000 and were willing to kill ten times as many people in their symbolic attack on capitalism. No group has claimed responsibility for the attack on the World Trade Center and the demands by Osama bin Laden concerning Palestine and the withdrawal of American troops from Saudi Arabia and the Middle East, while they have a long history, were relayed after the event. There is indeed no reason to believe that these terrorists would cease and desist even if their demands were met. Osama bin Laden and the Taliban have indicated in word and deed that they despise the most basic values any progressive holds dear and that they feel themselves engaged in an ongoing religious assault against modernity and “the great Satan.”

I never had much sympathy for the “just war” doctrine, which reaches back to St. Augustine, because every war breeds acts of injustice. Even when considering what has been called “the good war,” the Second World War, any decent person must shudder at the thought of the devastation wreaked upon Dresden and Hiroshima. The idea of the “just war” should be turned on its head. War always evidences injustice, which should always make it the tactic of last recourse, but some wars are less unjust than others. It is foolish, of course, to equate reasons with consequences. A moral judgment on whether military action is appropriate depends on the evaluation of the convictions and interests of the enemy no less than the harm done and the threat posed. In this vein, considering these apocalyptic terrorists as anything more than religious gangsters would be a travesty, and perhaps there is even something wrong with dignifying

their attack as an act of war rather than a spectacular crime. Enough supporters of the Islamic faith have condemned them for claiming to speak in their name. These people, too, understand the value of liberty.

We should be clear: that different communities have different customs and beliefs is a truism. This does not abrogate the need to make normative judgments about the conflicts between *and also* within these diverse communities. As far as I am concerned, the left should not put itself in the position of accepting the validity of traditions simply because they exist or embracing abstract notions of “community.” Otherwise the left will become tolerant of intolerance. Progressives should instead distinguish between repressive and progressive traditions and identify with those living within the “community” who resist its authoritarian and parochial constraints. The issue here is not religion or some “clash of civilizations,” but a clash over what is politically acceptable in the pursuit of interests—whether spiritually or materially defined—and what is not.

Terror is unacceptable. If it should go unpunished when undertaken by imperialist states in one set of circumstances does not excuse its employment or justify ignoring it in another. Terror is always totalitarian: it obliterates the difference between guilt and innocence, citizen and soldier, and it intensifies the difference between “us” and them.” Terror leaves no room for discourse and it denies any sense of common humanity or decency. The terrorists who attacked the World Trade Center are totalitarians in Islamic guise: they deserve to be treated the same way as other totalitarians. Too often in the past, partisans of the left found ways to excuse or mitigate the severity of terror in the name of “historical necessity” or the suffering of the oppressed. That is no longer possible. It has become evident that what is sown in the struggle against oppression is reaped in the new society that is created.

If freedom is the standard of judgment then few political figures demand respect or, better, a sense of reverence like Gandhi, the *mahatma*, “the great soul.” It is to him we look

when emphasizing the responsibility of political actors for the politics they choose and their ability to choose responsibly even in an immoral environment. But there is a profound difference between Gandhi insisting upon the employment of non-violence by a movement out of power and those who today insist upon a strategy of paralysis by a sovereign state whose citizens were attacked without warning. I do not believe that the United States can simply withdraw, or turn inward, in response to this provocation. It would be best, of course, if any military action were undertaken by the United Nations and this is a golden opportunity for the United States to endorse an international court of justice. Extraditing bin Laden would probably also require the use of force, however, and most of those opposed to military intervention in Afghanistan were equally opposed when bombing received international sanction in Kosovo. The bulk of military hardware and personnel would still come from the United States, even if support may diminish in a long war, eighty nations including the Palestinian Authority and various Arab nations have extended support for a military response.

This is understandable. The assault on the World Trade Center was different than the terror exercised by national liberation organizations in Algeria, Northern Ireland, and even Palestine. There was little doubt in any of these cases that the simple withdrawal of the imperialist aggressor or the introduction of certain policies would end the conflict. But that is not self-evident in the present instance when the goal has little to do with national self-determination, and when religious motivations are paramount. The new terrorists are internationalists, but they are unlike the best of those discussed by Michael Forman in his study *Nationalism and the International Labor Movement* (Penn State University Press: University Park, PA: 1998). These terrorists demonstrate a commitment to stamping out not just democracy, but even republicanism, and their most secure base of support can be found in an anti-liberal and often violent "Islamic Brotherhood" whose influence extends from Algeria and Egypt to Turkey. There is no justification

whatsoever for suggesting that a policy of passivity—not passive resistance, because the term has no meaning in this context, but passivity—will in any way mitigate the likelihood of further terrorist actions in the future. The strategy of *provoking* an over-reaction is not dependent upon any action that the victims of terror might take.

No counter-terrorist strategy can assure the capture of all those responsible for planning and abetting the attack on the World Trade Center. Bombing will not abolish terror and, as the terrorists use non-combatants to shield themselves, civilian casualties will prove a growing concern. There is also the possibility that this new “propaganda of the deed” undertaken by the terrorists will ignite a chain reaction of conflict between secular governments and fundamentalist movements throughout the Arab world. Tensions are high in many nations including Indonesia and Pakistan. Should the latter explode then India might invade Kashmir, which might result in a war with Pakistan, and perhaps even draw China into the conflict. But that there are real risks attendant upon military action, does not justify embracing a new version of the old domino theory. Bombing by the United States and Britain might not be confined to one nation. That is why political people on the left should urge a combination of vigilance and caution. It would ultimately be both irresponsible and self-defeating for progressive actors to beat the drums of war or endorse the stirrings of a disquieting new nationalism that harbors its own threats to tolerance and civil liberties in the United States. We must we wary of the rising tide of domestic militarism and the growing preoccupation with enforcing conformity in the name of patriotism. This is a time for uncertainty and tentative decisions

Nothing requires abandoning a critical standpoint on the imbalances of power in the United States in the interest of presenting a united front. Down the road, should obviously unacceptable consequences result from a widening military action, progressives must be prepared for going into the opposition. But then is not now. We should be guided by what Albert Camus termed a “principle of reasonable

culpability.” To strike at the bases of the terrorists, to seize the assets of their supporters, to pressure governments in supporting anti-terrorist measures, offers at least a chance that the activities of the terrorists will be hampered, that a measure of security will be gained, and that a minimum of retribution will be exacted. Perhaps the atavistic and authoritarian Taliban regime might fall; its demise would certainly be no great loss.

Gandhi knew that revenge is not politics or justice. The possibility is real of retaliatory bombing in Afghanistan turning into the first phase for an all-out conflict with the Islamic world in which any semblance of a connection between means and ends would be lost. The argument that the end—even the elimination of the terrorist international—justifies the means only begs the question: what justifies the end? There is really only one answer to that: the means used to achieve it. This was the answer Gandhi gave. And he gave it in absolute terms. Louis Fischer was correct when he wrote that: “Gandhi’s means were actually a means to a better means, a better man.” The “new man” was an integral part of his political vision. There is even a sense in which the image of the “new man” lies at the source of all revolutionary action. That vision motivated Mussolini and Hitler as surely as Stalin, Che Guevara and Mao Tse-tung. But the result was usually less a new man than a new monster. Only Gandhi did not betray the old utopian belief in the “new man.”

Gandhi was indeed the *mahatma*: “the great soul.” His politics evidenced the nobility and power of the human spirit. Purity was the end he sought. But that is not the goal for most of who are engaged in politics and, sadly, I think we must prove a bit more modest in our ambitions. The new man is a mirage and it has become necessary to admit the obvious: a secular rule of ethical conduct must rest with establishing a plausible, rather than an absolute, connection between means and ends. Especially we on the left must recognize that in this imperfect world a perfect symmetry between them is impossible to achieve. And the same can be said of violence. It is what all progressive people hope to

mitigate, try to abrogate, even if reality requires surrendering the belief that it can be completely abolished. That is indeed the most sobering thought of all.

**This talk was given on 5 October 2001, the day before the bombing of Afghanistan began, for the National Gandhi Day of Service at Rutgers University.*

How to be an Intelligent Anti-American

by

Jeffrey C. Goldfarb

The original idea for this paper dates back to 1996. At that time, I was teaching in Cracow, Poland, in a summer institute on democracy and diversity. Since 1992, I had been teaching a course at that institute on democratic culture, utilizing both the political theory of major western thinkers, particularly Hannah Arendt, and major thinkers and political actors from around the old bloc, particularly Adam Michnik and Vaclav Havel. Since the early seventies, I had studied and worked with the developing democratic movement in Central Europe, particularly Poland. The course was a continuation of these activities. But something new and different presented itself in '96. In a region where (outside official circles) Ronald Reagan could do no wrong, students started presenting fairly standard, but from this part of the world, very exciting, critical judgments of America.

The students came from East and Central Europe, Western Europe, North and South America. In the first years of the institute, the young Westerners automatic critical approach to liberal capitalism and their insufficient appreciation of the force of totalitarianism led to strong disagreements across the old political divide. Suddenly, in 1996, there was an informed and not so well informed anti-American consensus articulated around our seminar table, with some forceful dissenters. I found myself caught in between the consensus and the dissenters, between automatic condemnation and automatic celebration. With that in mind, for the last class, rather than proceeding with the seminar discussion and ending it on an informal note, as is my custom, I presented a formal lecture. It was my first anti-American advisory.

My second advisory was presented just a few months ago. One of the students in the original class, Jacek Kucharczyk, is now the vice-director of Poland's major social science think tank. He had an idea for a conference on European Integration. There were sessions on political, economic and cultural integration. My paper framed a discussion about the cultural relationships between Poland, Western Europe and the United States. The paper was received well, meaning that it stimulated a spirited discussion. Particularly pleasing to me was my friendly public debate with the Polish film director, Krzysztof Zanussi, over the films of Steven Spielberg. I was appreciative. He was dismissive.

The two advisories were presented to democratic and intellectual friends and colleagues. We were sympathetic critics of contemporary democratic practices talking among ourselves. I was trying to use irony to provoke a principled distinction between criticism of American practices with unthinking dismissal of the principles and promises of democracy. I present here the second of the two advisories. I believe the advisory to European colleagues is worth sharing more broadly. But I also must add a post 9/11. There are anti-Americans who need to be reminded of American democratic practice and promise to temper, refine and inform their criticism. They can become intelligent anti-Americans, which we Americans sorely need. But, there are also those who are anti-American because they are in principle against democratic practice and promise. In the twentieth century, totalitarians of left and right held this position. In our young century, such figures again revealed themselves in New York, Washington and Pennsylvania. They are much more than unintelligent anti-Americans. They are democracy's enemies. Anti-Americanism in our young century first appeared as comedy, than as tragedy. I present this advisory from New York, with a sense of profound personal loss, with a hope that the best way that I can combat the new postmodern totalitarians is to try to inform democratic criticism. With this in mind, here is my part of my dialogue with Polish and other European colleagues.

The Polish fascination with things American has long been coupled with a sense that there is something underdeveloped and naïve about the American way of life. Fascination is centered on American economic, military and geo-political power. Dismissal is centered on the cultural, even the political cultural. The “American model” has been viewed with profound ambivalence. On the one hand, learning from the bitter lessons of Communism, America’s steadfast anti-communism has been viewed with admiration, as its anti-statist approach to the economy has been judged as the height of wisdom. On the other hand, at least among the intellectual elite, American happy end, and the Hollywood mentality more generally, have been viewed with disdain. Especially on the latter point, Polish intellectuals have been good Europeans. As with all good Europeans, there is recognition of the vitality of American popular culture, but this is combined with strongly critical appraisals.

Things are even more complicated than this, of course. As a certain segment of the intellectual elite has been persuaded by the American political economic model, others, those on the short end of shock therapy who do not understand the workings of the global economy, have been very critical. And as the Polish intellectual elite shares its critical judgment of American mass culture with its West European colleagues, their compatriots (East and West Europeans) vote with their feet, so to speak, selecting Hollywood productions and African American hip hop culture over indigenous cultural fare. Elite sensibilities run up against popular, dare I say, democratic choice.

Everyone, East and West Europeans, the cultural elites, along with broader cross sections of the population have reasons to be anti-American. The elite is because of disdain for popular culture. The disadvantaged, and those concerned with the disadvantaged, are because of the perceived cruelties of the American economic model. This suggests a

need to pause and reflect. If everything seems to be the responsibility of the new hegemonic power, if the banalities of popular culture, the cruelties of the market, the heartlessness of globalism, is there not a danger that a new unthinking ideology is replacing the old verities of the cold war?

It used to be that anti-Americanism was the easy ideology of the Communist authorities. It would be a terrible shame if in the future the mirror image of such foolishness came to be understood as an entrance fee for full European status. It is a mark of political maturity that all things American are no longer automatically viewed in a positive light. It is also the mark of maturity to not unthinkingly move in the opposite direction. Intelligent pro- and anti-Americanism are two sides of the same coin. This means looking at American actions concretely, not as a unified model but as a set of experiences to be observed and judged from ones own distinctive point of view.

As far as the distinctiveness of the Central European point of view: first I must say that I realize that the people in Poland, and in East and Central Europe, more generally, have themselves experienced remarkable changes in the past decade, with major transformations of the systems of governance and the economy. The dictatorship of the proletariat and party vanguards are with you no more, and instead you have groping efforts to establish liberal democracy. Five year plans are things of the past, and instead you have attempts at raising foreign and domestic capital to fuel the economic growth of a free market system. The ways the population gets through its days, weeks, months and years have been reorganized. No longer do they pretend to work, and the authorities pretend to pay them. Now is the time to carefully plan careers and get on with the projects of personal and societal development, working to avoid a crushing unemployment rate and to address the economic conditions that foster it.

The changed circumstances have not only meant a redirection of personal lives and economic prospects. It also

presents fundamental challenges to the cultural and political life of society, with fundamental changes in the political culture of the region. Many of these are well known and often commented upon: the relative success of the countries of Central Europe in their efforts to establish a normal economy, the precarious nature of the democratization in Russia and its meaning for the stability of the region, the rise of xenophobic nationalism, which in the Balkans has meant a brutal war, the reemergence of anti-Semitism, without Jews, something which was present in the communist period, but which has reached new heights in recent years.

But the biggest surprise for an old East European hand, such as myself, is the rise of anti-Americanism in the region, although after the fact, upon reflection, it seems quite natural. There was a time, not too long ago, when it seemed that America could do no wrong in the eyes of East and Central Europeans. There was no place in the world where Americans were so openly welcomed. It seems like yesterday that I had to torturously explain to my bewildered friends why I did not think that Ronald Reagan was a perfect President, an ideal leader of the free world, and why the appearance of a McDonalds in Warsaw did not seem to me to be a sign of great cultural and economic progress. But today, dissatisfaction with American power and culture can be everywhere observed: from a resentment over the domination of American mass media, to a concern with the military strength of the American armed forces, to discontent with the presumption of American scholars and intellectuals with their models of economic, political and cultural life, which they propose to apply with happy results to the countries of the former Soviet bloc. American triumphalism is being rejected, and, as usual, we Americans are hard pressed to understand why this is.

I hope though that you would concede, at least for a little while, that good intentions are at the root of America's active participation in the internal affairs of the post-communist world. To be sure, these good intentions include the identification of the interests of American corporations and

the geopolitical interests of the United States with the principles of democracy and freedom. This is clearly something to be critically examined, but as good European realists you should not expect otherwise. You know that principles rarely wander far from interests. Yet, as an interested observer seeking to be objective, I would remind you that the specificities of the principles and the interests, and their relations, differ greatly, forcing us to examine both and judge them on their own terms. While democracy can not simply be identified with the American way of life, the history and potential of modern democracy is intimately involved in the history and promise of this way of life. While “democracy in America” is not the only way to realize democracy, its accomplishments and problems are instructive for those who consider their democratic commitments seriously. They can be considered with benefit for Americans and non-Americans alike. To criticize American practices is a necessity; to overlook the meanings of the American experience is folly.

It is a sign of cultural strength that you the citizens of East and Central Europe can now turn your critical eyes in the direction of America; but there is a danger that you will be blinded by your visions. In Latin America, the United States often played the role of an imperial power. It made and broke dictators, and often undermined the development of indigenous democratic political forces. Yet, it is now clear to those with critical disposition in the region, from both the left and the right side of the political spectrum, that the obstacles to a democratic life and a free society in that part of the world had at least as much to do with the political culture and institutions of the Latin American countries themselves, as it did to do with the interference from the big brother to the North. The loud shouts of “Yankee Go Home!” distracted those of democratic disposition from considering their own problems closer to home. Some were alarmed by the communist threat that often seemed to be looming behind the slogan; others thought that the realization of the slogan’s intent would solve all problems.

Such distraction and preoccupation with the foreign other, I

believe, may now exist on the East European horizon and it may be promoted from points more immediately West on the European continent. Yet, there is, no doubt, a need to develop a critical approach to the American role in the new world order that takes into account both the problematic influence of American power and culture and the importance of the democratic experiment that America is. There is a need to be an intelligent anti-American.

There is much to be critical about the American way of life. It is racist. It is unusually violent. The works produced by the American culture industry—the music, films, television programs and software products—often seek the lowest common denominator, a level of mediocrity that should not be acceptable to Americans or foreigners. We Americans are preoccupied with our own internal affairs and are remarkably ignorant of the rest of the world. There is only a dim recognition that some people beyond America's boundaries live in fundamentally different ways than we do, and there is also little awareness that what we do and do not do as a nation have direct effects on their lives, and not always for the better. Ours is a society, which has confused the pursuit of consumer goods with the common good, and we propagate this confusion to the rest of the world. Overly individualistic, we have lost a sense of community; overly materialistic, all sorts of spiritual fundamentalisms have invaded our public life. From certain points of view, from the critical point of view of radical socialists, to the point of view of Burkean conservatives, to the point of view of traditional Catholics, America seems to be at the vanguard of the decline and fall of the West.

But the problem with this opinion is that it is based on half-truths, ill-considered appraisals and a rush to judgment. America is judged as a caricature of itself, not as the complex society that it is. Consider American racism.

The fact that the exclusion of African Americans is at the core of American political culture is undeniable. The very definition of freedom, as it is understood by Americans, emanates as the opposite of the condition of servitude of

blacks in the United States. The long and harsh history of slavery, the unofficial reign of terror of the Ku Klux Klan in the South during the era of reconstruction following the civil war, the Jim Crow laws from the turn of the century to the 1960's, which yielded a state enforced apartheid in the South and a socially enforced system of segregation and subordination in the great cities of the North, all point to the unfreedom that makes freedom so dear. On one side: there is the slave, on the other, the freeman, in the language of the antebellum era. On the side of servitude is the unfreedom of separate and decidedly unequal economic and political life, and on the side of freedom is America as the land of opportunity.

And the problem of race is far from one that is exclusively historical; it overshadows much of our public life. The injustices of our educational, social welfare and judicial system, as they process blacks and whites, yield incredibly depressing statistics. There are more young black men in their teens and twenties caught in our prison system, as prisoners, defendants or parolees, than there are in the system of education as students. The income disparity between blacks and whites is still systemic: at all levels of education and for both men and women. African Americans still face daily indignities in their everyday life in a white dominated society. There is a systematic assumption that blacks are not capable to do both menial and challenging intellectual tasks.

For those who have been to America, remember and take as significant that you came across more immigrants doing attractive service jobs, such as driving airport limousines and positions in sales in lucrative enterprises, than African Americans, and this is indicative of hiring policies in small factories as well. Surveys of employers reveal a marked preference for immigrant labor over African Americans even among African American entrepreneurs. This bias, in effect, systematically relegates a large portion of the African American population to the rural and urban underclass, beyond the system of steady jobs and salaries, beyond the hope of upward social mobility. On the other side of the

stratification spectrum, affirmative action serves as an excuse for the racist to minimize the accomplishments of blacks who hold positions of power, prestige and privilege. For the racist, it seems that all these jobs held come off the backs of qualified whites. Black accomplishment defines a new white servitude.

But when you, in this part of the world, think about the problems of American society as they relate to you, I suspect that you are not much concerned with the problems of American racism. You all too readily understand the nature of our problems. Such a high level of heterogeneity as it exists in the United States is practically beyond East and Central European imagination. You may be sympathetic with our race problem. You may understand that the problem of American violence is somehow related to it. Your understanding may or may not have racist qualities. But given the different problems of race, ethnicity and nation here, you can hardly look in a self-satisfied way to our problems and contrast yourselves with us in a completely positive fashion. You know that we confront problems in the course of our domestic relations which have led here to modern barbarism, and while you may cast a critical glance on the problems of race in America, you would be well advised to consider how Americans struggle to deal with the problems of difference, with successes and failures, as the ugly face of xenophobia again raises its head in the lands of the European killing fields.

But lest you think that I am suggesting that the way to be an intelligent anti - American is to be pro-American, I should concede that your critical approaches to the American way of life are both important to the viability of your cultural identity and, in my judgment, may as well help us in our democratic life.

Probably the most unfortunate and problematic aspects of American life observable abroad are the products of our culture industry. There is much to dismiss here, much to be against, and, it seems to me that resistance to the idiocies of our mass culture wherever it comes from is welcome, the

more forceful the better. But be forewarned. The critique of American mass culture can easily slide into the rejection of democracy and the rejection of democratic cultural forms. The most famous case of this is the completely wrong headed rejection of jazz by Theodor Adorno.

An extraordinary American comic strip, Pogo, comes to mind. One of its characters famously announced concerning an apparently nonsensical interaction: "we have met the enemy and it is us." During the Vietnam War, when this strip was created, the referent hardly needed explanation. But remember that the key to the success of American mass culture is its popularity, both in the United States and abroad. We, as intellectuals, indeed as intellectuals who attempt to be intelligent anti-Americans, should be cautious in our condemnation of American mass culture, unless we are comfortable with the role of philosopher kings. Do we really want to hold an intellectual position that boldly declares we have met the enemy and it is the people? Can we commit ourselves to a politics or even a cultural position that claims to know better what is in the people's interest after the close of the bloody century of ideological wars?

Perhaps not, I hope you would reply, but surely we should take some care to distinguish the banal from the fine, the enriching from the stupefying. I agree. But an intelligent anti-American will proceed with caution. Some things are easy. The mindless violence of much American TV and films which more and more dominate the European and American markets should be condemned, boycotted; perhaps, even forms of national cultural policies, short of official censorship, should attempt to assure the creation of alternative local, national and regional markets to compete with Hollywood productions. The economies of scale make it so that Hollywood dominates the world market for slick film and broadcasting entertainment, disseminating a world view that is clearly often objectionable not only here in Europe, but also in the U.S., not only in South Africa, but also in Latin America and Central Asia. Our politicians attempt to make political points out of this and surely so will yours. The stuff Hollywood produces creates the greatest audiences:

establishing the conditions for the profitability of smaller audiences, clearly, is desirable, both here and there.

But I am referring so far to relatively easy matters. What about the situation where the line between trash and excellence is not so easily drawn? What about the exportation of works that intelligently address a mass audience in effective aesthetic fashion, but which with the power of wealth and know how overwhelm smaller, more difficult alternatives? To refer to a specific and telling case in point, what about films such as *Schindler's List*?

It is one of the oddities of life in Cracow, that one can go to the former Jewish section of Kazimierz and go on a guided tour of the sites of mass killings, the liquidation of the Ghetto, the Holocaust, as they were depicted and gained significance for a mass audience in Steven Spielberg's film. Given the facts of what actually happened on (at least very close to) those grounds, this is grotesque to the extreme, an awful Americanization of the perception of modern evil. It seems that for those who sponsor the tour and for those who would go on it, the grounds of great suffering gain a higher reality for having been represented in a film, than for the reality that they are. The film with its popularity and power has made the destruction of the Jews a reality for a mass audience. It facilitates memory, where horror and forgetting interacted in the service of ignorance. But I wonder, as I am sure some of you do, whether the melodramatic qualities of its story line, the focus on the good German and its happy ending, makes for a kind of memory which is worse than ignorance. If this should become the Holocaust on film, there is a danger that there will be little room to remember anything and anyone other than its memorable characters and their fate: the sadistic prison commandant, the loyal Jewish accountant, the German rogue who helps it all work out in the end, the hero of the story. From the perspective of what we know about the makers and victims of the Holocaust, the simplification is overwhelming.

Yet, simplification is not all that is there, and there is more to this brilliant film than the melodrama of its story line. In

its incredible portrayal of the liquidation of the Jewish Ghetto, the absolute horror of the experience of the Nazi terror becomes accessible to those who were not there. Using all the tricks and wealth of the American film industry, the world is able to remember things easily forgotten, to imagine things which are beyond the imagination of most of us. And, most importantly, all the problems of its presentation, as they exhibit the limitations of American movies, as opposed to the refinements of European films, contribute to the fact that it has reached a large and broad audience, many of whom have hardly ever thought about the Holocaust. The democratic art form that film is attains its distinction. Yes, the limitations of an American happy end are evident. Yes, more sophisticated treatments of the horrors of our century are available in all sorts of forms, often presented with far greater insight. But the great bulk of the Schindler's List's audience would never have turned to these. Intelligent anti-Americans, refine your criticisms, even when they generally apply.

Serious criticism of American activities in foreign lands are especially concerned with the anomaly that Americans are both remarkable ignorant of the world about them and remarkably willing to interject themselves in the world in which they are so ignorant. Perhaps even this presentation is vulnerable to this objection. Who am I to indicate to you what an intelligent form of anti-Americanism should be? Why do Americans think they can best advise people on the form their democracies can or should take? Is American advice on the problem of democracy too similar to the advice people in Poland and elsewhere received from the big brother to the East? Is democracy *à la Americain* just another dominant ideology?

These are difficult questions. But I think they can be answered simply. It requires a perception of the texture and not just the formal structure of democracy, America and anti-Americanism. When we consider the problems of democracy in a non-utopian way, in a way that is practical and not simply idealistic, we think of specific modern institutions: constitutions and elections, competing political

parties, modes of representation and association, liberal rights of free speech and property, the rule of law. But we must remember that these institutions require, if they are successful within a supportive cultural context, a democratic culture. Such a culture, in contrast to an authoritarian one is far from being univocal. It is filled with paradoxes and anomalies, tensions and dilemmas, which in principle can not be resolved definitively. It is unclear whether democracy requires more a common set of cultural commitments, as the advocates of Americanism believed at the turn of the century, or if differences can work to hold the democratic polity together, as advocates of multi-culturalism (and the pluralists before them) have maintained. Democracy is about the robust and open contestation between these positions. With such openness, it cannot easily function as an instrumental ideology in the fashion of Soviet Marxism.

Criticism of the American way of life is a basic part of the American way of life. In a sense, anti-Americanism is a great American tradition. When I propose to you an intelligent anti-Americanism as opposed to one that it is not so intelligent, I suggest it be based on knowledge of the problems of democracy in America. I suggest it be critical, but not cynical, informed about the accomplishments and promise of the American experiment in democracy, judged against existing practices.

Americans may, especially when they travel abroad, confuse the promise with the on going realities. This may be especially convenient for those who work in and for official government institutions. But it would be a pity if this tendency overshadowed attempts to overcome them. It would be a shame if independent voices of criticism were not heard, along with the voices of appreciation. When advice comes from America, you should judge the quality of its understanding of American society and its practices, and its understanding of the situation of the countries being advised. Likewise, when I hear anti-Americanism from abroad, I will judge it for its self-understanding and its confrontations with the complexities of American life. If it has such qualities, it will substantiate the prospects of the

democratic project. For we in America, like you in this part of the world, need intelligent anti-Americanism, i.e., a critical democratic culture.

Beyond Good and Evil

by
Michael J. Thompson

There is little question that political rhetoric is deeply imbued by moral categories. The act of passing judgment on the “Good” and the “Bad” was the very essence of Greek political thought, and has been the essence of governments—progressive and conservative—ever since. Politics was, for thinkers like Plato and Aristotle, the sphere of human activity where the Good could be realized and the Bad identified and resisted, if not transformed so as to *become* Good. How the difference between good and bad was distinguished was another enterprise, that of ethics and moral philosophy.

Modernity is no exception to this activity. And in this light, the months after the destructive events of September 11th have given rise to a curious situation in American political culture. It has given rise once more to a political rhetoric of good and evil in American politics and society: a codification of individuals, of cultures, as good and evil. More than merely moral categories, the branding of the terrorists and the various networks and cells which they apparently worked within—not to mention the demonstrations that have erupted in many Islamic countries—have exposed a tendency in American culture which has profound implications for American democracy. The political rhetoric surrounding the “explanations” of the motivations for the attacks on both the World Trade Center and the Pentagon drip with the rhetoric of evil whereas the response(s) that have followed have been counterposed against them as inherently “good” and “righteous.”

This is not meant to blur the real issues at hand: namely that there *is* right and wrong behavior, and political acts and policies that are both progressive and reactionary that fall

somewhere along this moral scale, but rather to emphasize a more complex point: that the reaction to the terrorist attacks—the only one of this magnitude on American soil—has served almost as a prism within which the actual nature of American democratic culture can be glimpsed.

In general, America's cultural and political perspectives on the world outside of itself (spurred on by decades of its political and cultural isolationism on the part of the mass public) has produced a situation where good and evil are the defining, moral and cultural categories that are applied to make sense of a multitude of political situations both here and abroad. The simplicity of these categories forces us into a specific way of seeing the world, one which is metaphysical rather than political and with connotations of the supernatural rather than the sociological. Of course, it is arguable that such folk ways of seeing the world have been common to a mass public and that it has been the task of journalists and of intellectuals to melt away such fuzzy thinking through explanation and critical analysis. But the weeks following the tragic bombings at the World Trade Center and the Pentagon have shown that dividing the political and cultural universe into good and evil may be more pervasive and dangerous than previously expected.

Indeed, one of the most explicit effects of this vision of the world is its damaging effect on democracy and a democratic culture more broadly. Democracy cannot be conceived as being merely a set of legal and political institutions; it is also a cultural mode of thinking: one that tolerates difference and tries to come to conclusions and policies by way of rational consensus. The present state of affairs in the United States gives us a glimpse at the one serious crisis point in American democracy: the shunning of any form of critical awareness which can transcend the simplistic description of a world divided by individuals, cultures and groups that are good and evil. This does not imply that America's politics has become wholly undemocratic, it merely indicates an imperfection in American democratic culture, one that must be located and transformed. Thinkers like Tocqueville were enamored of America's democratic populism, its ability to

balance community with individuality. Europeans were burdened, they argued, by the historical weight of feudalism and absolutist states. America was a place that could define its own place and achieve a pure democratic system not merely because of its institutions, which were quite new and revolutionary, but through a cultural mindset that emphasized a balance between individual and community.

As much as thinkers like Tocqueville have always enjoyed popularity as interpreters of American democratic culture, what has changed since the days of his observations has been the ascendancy of mass society and the precipitous decline of individual critical thought tied to the traditions of Enlightenment thought, and replaced by the unreflective values of American populism. In this regard, the lapse into the rhetoric of good and evil can be seen in a more profound and meaningful light. The lapse indicates a willingness to conform to irrational categories of explanation and a distinct unwillingness to critically engage with the subject at hand.

This brings us to a crucial concern: the possibility that the cultural dimensions of American democracy can endanger its political institutions of democracy. That its inherently acritical nature and penchant for conformism can lead to the erosion of democratic institutions as evidenced in the willingness of New Yorkers to subvert democratic elections in order to allow Mayor Giuliani to remain in office through the "crisis." But if this is correct, then it can be said that there exists a tension between the *institutions* of democracy and the *culture* of democracy. The rhetorical categories of good and evil are only one way of analyzing the difference between the appeal of charismatic leaders in a time of crisis and the critical perspective necessary for a thriving, actual democracy. The rhetoric of good and evil hints at a broader crisis point in American democracy.

Democracy must be consistently seen as being more than empirical governmental institutions. It must also be recognized that a culture of democracy (consisting most basically of pluralism, critical reflection and rational consensus). The extent to which we code certain individuals

and acts as good or evil is the extent to which this culture of democracy is sacrificed to a populist impulse. The greatest enemy to any modern democracy in the developed world is from within, not from without. It is only through the willingness of its citizens that a modern democracy can be eroded from the inside through the acritical, irrational elements which mass culture has encouraged and massaged for so long.

In fact, America has shown itself to be a particularly apt example of this thesis. September 11th put into motion more than an international anti-terrorist "crusade." It has also given us a glimpse into the true substance of the culture of American democracy. The extent to which, in recent months, critical discourse has been blindly subordinated to an overarching notion of patriotism, which itself has been pre-defined, largely through the rhetorical opposition of good and evil, is the extent to which democracy fails to capture the possibility for constructive, progressive change. The unqualified domestic support of the military actions in Afghanistan points toward a politics of retribution, and not toward a political solution to the issues which continue to create the terrorist impulse.

The effects of this political rhetoric therefore must be seen in a larger context. On the one hand, it fans the flame of populist angst and, in turn, serves as a means by which a mass public can grasp such an immense and seemingly incomprehensible event. But at the same time it discredits a critical discourse on the subject by simplifying its moral dimensions. This is not to say that a critical mentality is equivalent to an appeal to moral relativism. It is rather an insistence on the political analysis of events and a more sensible, constructive and long-term solution to the immediate problems like terrorism which are, instead, cast in absolute, moral terms. Answers lie more in American policies in the Middle East as well as the nature of political and cultural values within that region. This is, however, a minority view, and is rarely given voice in a mainstream forum, and it certainly does not inform the majority of the American populace.

Of course, this also touches upon a broader theme. One of the most interesting aspects of the proponents of the “clash of civilizations” hypothesis is that it is shared not only by conservative proponents in the West, but by the fundamentalists themselves. In other words, the rhetoric of good and evil not only saturates the American discourse on terrorism, but the fundamentalists’ philosophical worldview, and the West in particular. What is perhaps most frightening about this parallel is the fact that it forces each side to mutually define the other as evil or as the proponents of anti-civilization itself: anti-Islam in the case of the Islamic fundamentalists, anti-modern in the case of western modernity. The lack of immanent critique on both sides (the ability and the willingness to investigate the terms of each of their respective argument internally) necessarily puts us in a relativist position toward one another where little constructive dialogue or action can emerge.

In many ways capitalism and liberalism are antithetical to the type of Islam touted by the most conservative and radical fundamentalists. But whether due to the lack of modernization or the persistence of political-economic interests in the region (or a combination of both), the present discourse of good and evil is less understandable from the point of view of a pluralist democracy.

The need to transcend the discourse of good and evil need not result in nihilism or a form of cultural relativism. Quite to the contrary, the way for any ethical or moral situation to be properly applied is through an objective and cosmopolitan lens. That is to say that only by seeing and comprehending the interests of others can we understand and react to situations such as that of September 11th. The heinousness of those terrorist acts is undeniable, and attempting to understand why such an act was perpetrated is not morally relativistic but thoroughly democratic and cosmopolitan, something that the present state of American democratic culture is, perhaps, not able to realize. But as utopian as the idea of *cosmopolitanism* may initially seem we need only think of the Kantian inspired notion of cosmopolitanism which is an implicit development of the Lockean concept of

tolerance toward a moment of dialectical confluence between traditions, ideas and cultures. In place of tolerance of other groups, emphasis must be placed on mutual respect, understanding and a dialogue of ideas, institutions and values.

It is not all that absurd to put forth the idea that cosmopolitanism, rather than only toleration, will become the more necessary path toward integrating modernity with those cultures and nations that have yet to embrace it while avoiding the cultural imperialism—and possible rejection—of that act. But the rhetoric of good and evil makes this less likely. Instead of promoting mutual understanding and preliminary tolerance, it fosters fear and opposition. It perpetuates the anti-modern impulse of aggression and reinforces the stubborn nature of cultural opposition in contrast to cultural integration. Within America's borders, the culture of democracy has lasting contributions to make to modern civilization. But the limits of this culture are glimpsed once we consider the precarious balancing act American political culture performs between democratic values and populism. The extent to which the latter is fostered at the expense of the former is the extent to which democratic culture will erode and the political institutions of democracy can lose potency.

What the United States saw during its decades of the Cold War and its branding of the Soviet Union as "evil" was not an increase in democratic freedoms and institutions at home, but a state that strengthened its centralization and a populace that became habitually predisposed to distrust left political discourse. In the end, the present relapse into the rhetoric of evil gives us a glimpse of the underside of American political culture. It represents the cracks in the aging edifice of modernity; those weak points that liberalism was never quite able to seal up. The successes of political liberalism run into their most serious roadblocks once we consider the sphere of culture and the ability not only for intolerance in international terms, but also for the inability of the common American citizen as well as the intellectual institutions that inform him, to provide a more enlightened

view of the surrounding world and, in the end, of his own culture and social context. For now, almost three months after the attacks, the political rhetoric is still strong even as everyday life in America has largely gotten back to normal; it has become part of the basic backdrop coloring the cultural and political landscape of the world.

It was Friederich Nietzsche who made the first modern attempt to move beyond the moral categories of good and evil. Nietzsche's project, however, has not been commonly understood. Nietzsche wanted to transcend the opposition between "good" (*gut*) and "evil" (*böse*), or what is "morally evil," and replace it with an opposition between *gut* and *schlecht* or "bad," when something is "less than perfect," or substandard through no fault of its own. Moving beyond "good" and "evil" was therefore not a nihilistic approach nor was it—or *is* it—a morally or culturally relativist one, but an attempt to uproot the metaphysical categories of morality that continue to plague our cultural and political discourse. This has the end result of diminishing the political and sociological causes for the acts of September 11th, or of Saddam Hussein, Palestinian violence or any number of figures, states or peoples that commit acts of terror and violence. For, such an understanding can only be promoted once the impact of certain policies are grasped and once the historical dynamics that produce such events are engaged. Only a critical vantage point grounded in democratic cultural values can achieve this task and renew the prospect of democracy abroad as well as expand its possibilities at home.

Terror and Politics

by

Nadia Urbinati

The events that the war on terrorism has put in motion are succeeding one another so quickly that the spontaneous desire to suspend comments and reflections follows as well. The fronts of this war are too varied and different to allow the possibility of coherent opinions and considerations to take form. From September 11th, and particularly from the beginning of the bombardments in Afghanistan, the exception has become the norm. The politics of the exception dominates every scene, the international scene where it finds fertile ground, and the domestic scene where, to the contrary, exceptions are or should be minimal if not entirely absent, especially in democratic societies.

The principal objective of terrorism is to create fear, and this is the age of fear. Giancarlo Bosetti, in an editorial in *Caffeeuropa*, written immediately after September 11th, said that terrorism is a sign of weakness in those who perpetrate it, not of power. Nevertheless, it is a sign of weakness that has the power to create a real state of emergency and fear for its victims. If it has no future, terrorism has, nonetheless, the power to dominate the present. And the present, for those who have experienced terrorist violence closely, is immersed in brooding fear. If we turn our attention to American domestic politics of the last forty days, we see one theme and one preoccupation, which dominate the public debate: how to face the crisis, and how to guarantee the safety of citizens now and in the future. And it is a total crisis: economic, medical, security, fiscal. Despite this palpable condition of fear and uncertainty, the media and political leaders take great pains to repeat that everything is under control: that Bin Laden will be brought to justice; that

the reserves of anthrax antibiotics are more than enough; that airports and airplanes are safe; that New York is still the financial capital of the world; that life continues as before. In fact, there is more determination than before to do, to work, to produce.

In the meantime, our intelligence tells us that in reality everything is very different and uncertain. Finding and capturing Bin Laden will require time. Seeing justice prevail will prove a difficult task, for no court will be able to try him without passion or prejudice (Bin Laden is not indicted, he is already guilty). The healthcare system (with some local exceptions where something resembling a social state exists) is unprepared to deal with this kind of crisis because, the fact is, there is no national healthcare system. The private companies in charge of airport security are not fond of the idea of being replaced by federal and state security forces, and the tug-of-war between economic interests and security is disgraceful. The bases of financial corporations are leaving New York and her skyscrapers in favor of smaller buildings in New Jersey. New York is laboring to reclaim its usual role as financial capital of the world. Unemployment is becoming less of a dreaded possibility and more of a reality. The laissez-faire politics with which George W. Bush won the election are buried under the ruins of the Twin Towers.

The rift between words and things is so obvious that even the most naïve city dweller knows how unconvincing the assurances of those who inform and govern her are. It is the daily news that testifies to this rift. We all have received instructions and warnings to use certain precautions when opening the mail, to check what we eat, to not think twice about going in for a checkup. We all know, from the instinctual wisdom of survival, that it would be better to avoid crowded places. In this climate of real fear and crisis, what certainties do we have?

It seems to me that what we mostly do have are negative certainties. We know what is wrong and unacceptable, but we do not have a clear, positive response for how better to handle the situation. Or if we do, we know how difficult and

long-term our efforts would be, and how uncertain the outcomes would be. The same category of terrorism is completely unclear. There are those who have tried to compare this terrorism with the terrorism Europe knew in past decades. Although there are similarities in the psychological effects of fear the terror creates, the European terrorism spoke the language of its victims—a common political language. It made an instrumental use of violence to reach ends that were political: questionable and absurd but not obscure. The terrorists stayed in the shadows, but they publicly justified, with a grand profusion of printed-paper, their ideas and ends. The declarations of the *Brigate Rosse* were ideological and political analyses, interpretations of a revolutionary idea that everyone knew well, even if the majority were opposed to it. Our disagreement with them was also a disagreement over the interpretation of texts and languages we all knew.

This terrorism is completely different because it has the determination of religious faith, even if its deeper reasons are economic and political. There is, furthermore, an ulterior aspect disturbing and new. These terrorists have not stated in detail what it is they want (except the complete destruction of the American empire, which is so farfetched it cannot be taken seriously). They assign us the burden of deciphering and understanding their motives. This is a tremendous power they have, and one of the reasons (the least apparent but the most insidious) that drives our fear and makes us the authors of the narrative of our own fear. When we try to rationally explain or make sense of this terrorism we put ourselves in a condition that is contrary to the democratic values we hold so dear. The terrorists celebrate their loyalty to their own beliefs while instigating us to betray our own. We close our borders, we hunt down the perpetrators, we celebrate how different we are from them, and we declare them an absolute evil. These are the reactions that the terrorists expect of us, and, unfortunately for us, the ones they are able to instigate. The result is that they turn us into their doppelganger.

This is the new power of this breed of terrorism: a power that

derives from the absence of political language and objectives and that forces its victims to adopt the same language. In the tradition of the victims there is, unfortunately, a vast range of religious dogmatism and fundamentalism. It's a phenomenon that resembles cannibalism: to destroy the enemy we assimilate their characteristics in the conviction that this will allow us to surpass them in strength and, hence, annihilate them. The strength of this terrorism lies in its ability to translate human and social phenomena into religious language: justice becomes the Good; wrong becomes Evil; the political adversary becomes the Infidel. On this side of the fence we are doing the same thing—in Italy even more than the United States. Everyone suddenly makes themselves “experts” in the religion of Islam because in this part of the world it is “expertise” that grants authority—one form of the secularization of the sacred word. With this new expertise, intolerance is justified because in the West social and political action must be founded on justifications that are supposedly grounded in reason. But the search for reason in this case induces an elaboration of explanations that are unreasonable, indefensible, imprudent, and the origins of new uncertainties. Reason and civility beget irrationality and barbarism. In the West this story has been repeating for thousands of years: Athenian citizens democratically voted for a Sicilian military expedition without even knowing how large or distant Sicily was. And yet they discussed and deliberated using sensible arguments. As for us, in the name of reason and civility we fall into the trap of absolute, ultimate, and total righteousness—West versus East, Christianity versus Islam, capitalism versus barbarism. It is an old song, but one that is still audible.

Terrorism, this terrorism, is bringing politics back into the arms of religion and is renewing the kind of language to which half a century of cold war made us accustomed. Two conflicting worlds, each one of which is represented as a compact universe in and of itself—the dogmatism of good versus the dogmatism of evil. It's an easy habit of mind. It doesn't require the effort of making distinctions, it doesn't

impose on us the moral obligation to try a different road from the obligatory one: the stigmatization and rejection of anything that seems not to belong to our world, and its subsequent banishment and expulsion. Like the dualism of the two sides of the fence, this dualism presumes something that is exactly what one of the protagonists (the West) cannot reasonably sustain without contradicting its own principals: the fantasy that a democratic and liberal society is and must have a cultural and religious homogeneity.

Dogmatism is the anthem of mental sloth and for this it is tyrannical. When we take refuge in the East/West dichotomy we reward our atavistic mental laziness and the easy generalization. An individual, a group of individuals become examples of an entire world, a world we hardly know, which is now revealing itself to us extraordinarily clearly. Francesco Speroni, reports *The New York Times* of Saturday, October 20th, announced that Italy is ready to adopt a policy of “kicking out the Muslims” and he tried to ennoble this policy by compares it to that of the United States towards the American residents and citizens of Japanese origin after the attack on Pearl Harbor. Perhaps Speroni doesn't know that today the United States is ashamed of that racist policy and has agreed to ask forgiveness and make reparations. This article, like many that appeared in some Italian newspapers, is insulting to the intelligence and aesthetic sense of a culture of moderation. Those who participate in cultural politics should be cognizant, especially in moments like these, of the binding responsibility of words, particularly when words are no longer private opinions but cover the pages of a newspaper.

The simplicity of the generalizations is wrong, because human things and human society are not simple. The East and the West are not simple or homogeneous, and they don't exist in places that are easily identifiable and circumscribed. They are together in our cities and neighborhoods. They make up part of our world and they change the supposed character of our world. Homogeneous and conflicting universes are a religious construction, and in this case a true opiate for the masses, which serves to satisfy our desire

to silence our uncertainties, not our need for knowledge and freedom. Here we have a certainty that this terrorism gives us: the certainty of doubt against the simplification of emphatic truth, and the certainty that it is necessary that our reason does not capitulate in the effort to resist simplification. Dogmatism and terror speak the same language, which is absolute, irrefutable and indifferent to the complexity of the world of things and opinions.

Another certainty that comes to us from this terrorism concerns the relation between religion and politics, and consequently the specificity and strength of liberalism. Written with acumen in an article that appeared in Reset online, Sergio Noja Nosedá notes that one should ask religions for negotiation. It is politics that must worry about religions coexisting, and make this possible. Dialogue comes from a non-dogmatic outlook, and no religion can exist without a body more or less filled with dogmatic beliefs and arguments. The fall of the empire that today's fundamentalists preach, was preached during the origins of Christianity about the Roman Empire. Those fundamentalists, no less than today's, rather liked the decadence of a materialistic, immoral, epicurean world. The infidel (the pagan) was the real cause of the decline of Roman civilization, not the believer (the Christian) who, like a midwife, helped the manifestation of an outcome that was already written. *The City of God* by Saint Augustine is intriguing and surprisingly timely.

Liberalism—or rather democratic rules—can serve as a strategy of the dialog, a frame in which the puzzle of our experiences and culture can find a peaceful place, not as another faith. Liberalism is faced with a formidable challenge, because it creates a system of security that protects and also nurtures pluralism and diversity, and, at the same time, has to deal with the risks that diversity and pluralism can entail. Liberalism is indeed an art of tolerance but it is also an art of the limits of tolerance. To find the right limits, and especially to find the right rationale for these limits, is the most arduous challenge of today. Liberalism must know how to limit itself so as not to become

its own opposite. It must know how to give prominence to procedures, to rules, to rights, to cohabitation: or rather, to those instruments that, since John Locke, have defended the individual from the domineering attitude of the powerful and the dogmatism of the believers. Liberalism must resist the temptation to pose itself as the all-encompassing philosophy of the free world and thus put up high requirements for reception and inclusion.

The distinction between different forms of liberalism becomes indispensable at this point, and it must be made with great accuracy. There can be a fundamentalist nucleus in liberalism. This can present itself in the guise of religion, secular but no less canonized and intolerant: a religion of individualism as ontology and as a kind of handbook of the nature-like economic forms associated with the market, of the spontaneity of rational calculation and of the one-dimensionality of abstract free choice—a pack of truthful, undisputed arguments as a foundation and an object of faith by which those who don't accept them can be judged as “false” liberal. This form of liberalism is illiberal because it has a theological essence. Its followers are no less believers than those who believe in a god, and no less free from the credulity and temptation to exclude.

The need to de-theologize politics and to de-politicize religion is another certainty that comes to us from this terrorism. The religious rebirth of the new millennium was welcomed by some as a reawakening from the ideological torpor of the 60's and 70's. Communities of identity praised themselves, and the good of the individual identified itself with the community to which it belonged. The universalism of theories of justice rejected the politics of identity—be they religious, national, or ethnic. Each of these groups is in their own world excluding the others. Communitarianism was used to erode the social welfare state and the role of the state in distributive justice, for those who belong to a given faith, or ethnic group, or nation, create their own schools and they take care of the social needs of their members. They govern themselves according to their own traditions. This is what the slogan “less state more civil society” means:

a mortal embrace between neo-liberalism and communitarianism. And religions have expanded beyond the sphere of beliefs to become social glue, vehicle of violence, and exclusion together. Today we are faced with the extreme effects of the perniciousness of identity segregation.

Nowadays we read that there are faiths more reasonable than others. This is not a very good argument. As Noja Nosedá wrote, one mustn't pretend that religions negotiate, for reasonableness is a word that does not find fertile ground in the world of faith. It may seem that some religions are friendlier to liberal civilization than others. If this is so, it is because the liberal politics of the modern state have barred religions from political power, forcing them to limit their range of action. Religion has not become liberal. It was defeated in the fight against the liberal state and where the liberal state won, religion was forced to accept the rule of limitation. It was politics that limited the dominion of religions, not religions' own reasonability. And it was the defeat by politics that made room for the excesses of religions, for their ideal of homogeneity with the result of producing either exclusion (Judaism) or proselytism (Christianity and Islam). Fundamentalism and terrorism are the extreme results of the victory of politics. These extremes are functional to autocratic regimes that the West has unfortunately considered expedient to sustain in the Middle East for quite a number of reasons, but never for reasons favorable to the people living in the Middle East. They are functional because they justify autocracy and, therefore, don't offer their people reasons to consider the West as a symbol of liberty and justice.

Another important, positive certainty that this terrorism has made us consider is this: to restore negotiations, and to promote the democracy and respectable living conditions beyond the strongholds of the West. Peace in the Middle East is a diplomatic obligation, as is the implementation of a project for the reconstruction of economic and civil society in Islamic nations. The American strategy of protecting oil resources (in the name of national interests) sustains anti-liberal and anti-democratic regimes. This strategy is wrong

and ultimately harmful to the very interests the U.S. wants to protect. The same kind of strategy is at play when the U.S. uses an embargo to call for the respect of human rights by governments reluctant to respect them of their own accord. Nevertheless, it is not human rights, but human beings that should be the object of politics. We ought to be calling for the minimum and basic conditions of life and dignity. Rights can become an idealization that hides reality instead of respecting it. We must ask ourselves if an option like an embargo can be justified as easily if we say we want to use it to defend “human beings” instead of “human rights”: how can one justify a policy that starves the very people it purports to protect? Daniele Archibugi was right when, on *Reset online*, he said that the issues of democracy and social justice have become both global and pressing. We can disagree about the instruments and forms of democracy (like the cosmopolitan democracy proposed by Archibugi) but not about its object. This is the challenge that faces us. Fortunately, we are moving away from the simplicity of Good versus Evil and the myopic and offensive convictions that segregate the Western fortress so it can defend itself from the barbarians at its gates.

* *Translated by Greg Tuculescu. This article originally appeared in Italian in Reset of Rome.*

New Technologies/New Literacies: Reconstructing Education for the New Millennium

by

Douglas Kellner

As the third millennium unfolds, we are undergoing one of the most dramatic technological revolutions in history changing everything from the way we work, to the ways we communicate with each other and spend our leisure time. The technological revolution centering on computer, information, communication, and multimedia technologies, is often interpreted as the beginning of a knowledge or information society, and therefore ascribes education a central role in every aspect of life. This Great Transformation poses tremendous challenges to educators to rethink their basic tenets, to deploy the new technologies in creative and productive ways, and to restructure schooling to respond constructively and progressively to the technological and social changes that we are now experiencing.

I will argue here that educators need to cultivate multiple literacies for our multicultural society. These new literacies should include a more fundamental importance for print literacy to meet the challenge of restructuring education for a high tech and global culture. As new technologies are altering every aspect of our society and culture, we need to comprehend and make use of them both to understand and transform our worlds. By introducing new literacies to empower individuals and groups traditionally excluded, education can be reconstructed to make it more responsive to the challenges of a democratic and multicultural society.

Technology and the Restructuring of Education

To dramatize the issues at stake, we should consider the claim that we are now undergoing one of the most significant technological revolutions for education since the progression from oral to print and book based teaching. Just as the transition to print literacy and book culture involved a dramatic transformation of education, as Marshall McLuhan (1961 and 1964), Walter Ong (1988), and others have argued, so too does the current technological revolution demand a major restructuring of education today with new curricula, pedagogy, literacies, practices, and goals. Furthermore, the technological revolution of the present era makes possible the radical reconstruction and restructuring of education and society argued for in the progressive era by Dewey and in the 1960s and 1970s by Ivan Illich, Paolo Freire, and others who sought radical educational and social reform.

Put in historical perspective, it is now possible to see modern education as preparation for industrial civilization and minimal citizenship in a passive representative democracy. The demands of the new global economy, culture, and polity require a more informed, participatory, and active citizenship, and thus increased roles and challenges for education. Modern education, in short, emphasizes submission to authority, rote memorization and what Freire called the “banking concept” of education in which learned teachers deposit knowledge into passive students, inculcating conformity, subordination, and normalization. These traits are becoming obsolete in a global postindustrial and networked society with its demands for new skills for the workplace, participation in new social and political environs, and interaction within novel forms of culture and everyday life.

In short, the technological revolution renders necessary the sort of thorough restructuring of education that radicals demanded during the last century, indeed back to the Enlightenment if one includes Rousseau and Wollstonecraft, who saw the enlightened restructuring of education as the

key to democracy. Today, however, intense pressures for change now come directly from technology and the economy and not ideology or educational reformist ideas, with a new global economy and new technologies demanding new skills, competencies, literacies, and practices. While this technological revolution has highly ambiguous effects, it provides educational reformers with the challenge of deciding whether education will be restructured to promote democracy and human needs or whether education will be transformed primarily to serve the needs of business and the global economy.

There is, therefore, a burning question: What sort of restructuring will take place, in whose interests, and for what ends? More than ever, we need philosophical reflection on the ends and purposes of education, on what we are doing and trying to achieve in our educational practices and institutions. In this situation, it may be instructive to return to Dewey and see the connections between education and democracy, the need for the reconstruction of education and society, and the value of experimental pedagogy to seek solutions to the modern problems of education. A progressive reconstruction of education will urge that it be done in the interests of democratization, ensuring access to new technologies for all, helping to overcome the so-called digital divide and divisions between the haves and have nots, so that education is placed à la Dewey (1997 [1916]) and Freire (1972 and 1998) in the service of democracy and social justice.

Yet we should be more aware than Dewey of the obduracy of divisions of class, gender, and race, and work self-consciously for multicultural democracy and education. This task suggests that we valorize difference and cultural specificity, as well as equality and shared universal Deweyan values such as freedom, equality, individualism, and participation. Theorizing a democratic and multicultural reconstruction of education forces us to confront the reality that there are class, gender, and race divisions in every sphere of the existing constellations of society and culture. The latest surveys of the digital divide, however, indicate that

the key indicators are class and education and not race and gender, hence the often-circulated argument that new technologies merely reinforce the hegemony of upper class white males must be questioned.

Technology itself does not necessarily improve teaching and learning, and will certainly not of itself overcome acute socio-economic divisions. Indeed, without proper resources, pedagogy, and educational practices, technology might be an obstacle or burden to genuine learning and will probably increase rather than overcome existing divisions of power, cultural capital, and wealth.

First, however, I wish to address the technophobic argument against new technologies *per se*. I have been developing a critical theory of technology that calls attention to uses or types of technology as tools of domination, and that rejects the hype and pretensions of new technologies. A critical theory of technology sees the limitations of pedagogy and educational proposals based primarily on technology without adequate emphasis on pedagogy, on teacher and student empowerment. It insists on developing educational reform and restructuring to promote multicultural democracy. Yet a critical theory must also see how technology can be used, and perhaps redesigned and restructured, for positive purposes such as enhancing education, democracy and overcoming inequalities, while enabling individuals to democratically and creatively participate in a new economy, society, and culture.

A critical theory of technology avoids both technophobia and technophilia. It rejects technological determinism, is critical of the limitations, biases, and downsides of new technologies, but wants to use and redesign education technologies for democracy and social reconstruction in the interests of social justice. It is also, in the Deweyan spirit, pragmatic and experimental, recognizing that there is no agreed upon way to deploy new technologies for enhancing education and democratization.

Consequently, the question is not whether computers are

good or bad in the classroom or for education more broadly. Rather, it is a question of what to do with them: what useful purposes can computers serve, what sort of skills do students and teachers require to effectively deploy computers and information technology, what sort of effects might computers and information technology have on learning, and what new literacies, views of education, and social relations do we need to democratize and improve modern education?

Education and Literacy

Both traditionalists and reformists would probably agree that education and literacy are intimately connected. “Literacy” comprises gaining competencies involved in effectively using socially-constructed forms of communication and representation. Learning literacies involves attaining competencies in practices in contexts that are governed by rules and conventions. Literacies are socially constructed in educational and cultural practices involved in various institutional discourses and practices. Literacies evolve and shift in response to social and cultural change and the interests of elites who control hegemonic institutions.

As Dewey argued (1997), education is necessary to enable people to participate in democracy, for without an educated, informed, and literate citizenry, a robust democracy is impossible. Moreover, there are crucial links between literacy, democracy, empowerment, and participation, and without developing adequate literacies social and economic inequities cannot be overcome and both individuals and groups alike will be left out of the emerging network economy, society and culture.

To reading, writing, and traditional print literacies, one could argue that in an era of technological revolution and new technologies we need to develop new forms of media literacy, computer literacy, and multimedia literacies that I and others call by the covering concept of “multiliteracies” or “multiple literacies.”

Media Literacy: An Unfulfilled Challenge

In a new multimedia environment, media literacy is arguably more important than ever. Cultural studies and critical pedagogy have begun to teach us to recognize the ubiquity of media culture in contemporary society, the growing trends toward multicultural education, and the need for media literacy that addresses the issue of multicultural and social difference. There is expanding recognition that media representations help construct our images and understanding of the world and that education must meet the dual challenges of teaching media literacy in a multicultural society and sensitizing students and publics to the inequities and injustices of a society based on gender, race, and class inequalities and discrimination. Recent critical studies see the role of mainstream media in exacerbating or diminishing these inequalities and the ways that media education and the production of alternative media can help create a healthy multiculturalism of diversity and more robust democracy. They confront some of the most serious difficulties and problems that currently face us as educators and citizens.

Yet despite this ubiquity of media culture and the recognition that the media themselves are a form of pedagogy, and despite criticisms of the distorted values, ideals, and representations of the world in media culture, media education in K-12 schooling has never really been established and developed. The current technological revolution, however, brings to the fore more than ever the role of media like television, popular music, film, and advertising, as the Internet rapidly absorbs these cultural forms and creates new cyberspaces and forms of pedagogy. It is highly irresponsible in the face of saturation by Internet and media culture to ignore these forms of socialization and education; consequently a critical reconstruction of education should produce pedagogies that provide media literacy and enable students, teachers, and citizens to discern the nature and effects of media culture.

Media culture teaches proper and improper behavior, gender

roles, values, and knowledge of the world. Individuals are often not aware that they are being educated and constructed by media culture, as its pedagogy is frequently invisible and subliminal. This situation calls for critical approaches that make us aware of how media construct meanings, influence and educate audiences, and impose their messages and values. A media literate person is skillful in analyzing media codes and conventions, able to criticize stereotypes, values, and ideologies, and competent to interpret the multiple meanings and messages generated by media texts. Media literacy helps people to use media intelligently, to discriminate and evaluate media content, to critically dissect media forms, and to investigate media effects and uses.

Within educational circles, however, a debate persists over what constitutes the field of media pedagogy, with different agendas and programs. A traditional “protectionist” approach would attempt to “inoculate” young people against the effects of media addiction and manipulation by cultivating a taste for book literacy, high culture, and the values of truth, beauty, and justice, and by denigrating all forms of media and computer culture. Neil Postman in his books *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (1985) and *Technopolis* (1992) exemplifies this approach. A “media literacy” movement, by contrast, attempts to teach students to read, analyze, and decode media texts, in a fashion parallel to the advancement of print literacy. Media arts education in turn teaches students to appreciate the aesthetic qualities of media and to use various media technologies as instruments of self-expression and creation. Critical media literacy, in my conception, builds on these approaches, analyzing media culture as products of social production and struggle, and teaches students to be critical of media representations and discourses, but also stresses the importance of learning to use the media as modes of self-expression and social activism.

Developing critical media literacy and pedagogy also involves perceiving how media like film or video can also be used positively to teach a wide range of topics, such as

multicultural understanding. If, for example, multicultural education is to champion genuine diversity and expand the curriculum, it is important both for groups excluded from mainstream education to learn about their own heritage and for dominant groups to explore the experiences and voices of minority and excluded groups. Thus, media literacy can promote multicultural literacy, conceived as understanding and engaging the heterogeneity of cultures and subcultures that constitute an increasingly global and multicultural world.

Critical media literacy not only teaches students to learn from media, to resist media manipulation, and to use media materials in constructive ways, but is also concerned with developing skills that will help create good citizens and that will make them more motivated and competent participants in social life. Critical media literacy is tied to the project of radical democracy and concerned to develop skills that will enhance democratization and participation. Critical media literacy takes a comprehensive approach that would teach critical skills and the ability to use media as instruments of social communication and change. The technologies of communication are becoming more and more accessible to young people and ordinary citizens, and can be used to promote education, democratic self-expression, and social progress. Technologies that could help produce the end of participatory democracy, by transforming politics into media spectacles and the battle of images, and by turning spectators into cultural zombies, could also be used to help invigorate democratic debate and participation.

Indeed, teaching critical media literacy could be a participatory, collaborative project. Watching television shows or films together could promote productive discussions between teachers and students (or parents and children), with emphasis on eliciting student views, producing a variety of interpretations of media texts and teaching basic principles of hermeneutics and criticism. Students and youth are often more media savvy, knowledgeable, and immersed in media culture than their teachers, and can contribute to the educational process

through sharing their ideas, perceptions, and insights. On the other hand, critical discussion, debate, and analysis ought to be encouraged with teachers bringing to bear their critical perspectives on student readings of media material. Since media culture is often part and parcel of students' identity and most powerful cultural experience, teachers must be sensitive in criticizing artifacts and perceptions that students hold dear, yet an atmosphere of critical respect for difference *and* inquiry into the nature and effects of media culture should be promoted.

Media literacy thus involves developing conceptions of interpretation and criticism. Engaging in assessment and evaluation of media texts is particularly challenging and entails careful discussion of specific moral, pedagogical, political, or aesthetic criteria of critique. That is, one can, à la British cultural studies, engage the politics of representation discussing the specific images of gender, class, race, ethnicity, sexual preference, or other identity categories in media texts (Kellner 1995a). Or one could discuss the moral values and behavior represented, what specific messages or representations of social experience are presented, how they are interpreted by audiences, and potential pedagogical effects. One can also attempt to determine criteria for aesthetic evaluation, discussing what constitutes a good or bad media text.

But critical media pedagogy is in its infancy; it is just beginning to produce results, and is more open and experimental than established print-oriented pedagogy. Moreover, the material of media culture is so polymorphous, multivalent, and polysemic, that it necessitates sensitivity to different readings, interpretations, perceptions of the complex images, scenes, narratives, meanings, and messages of media culture which in its own ways is as complex and challenging to critically decipher as book culture.

Teaching critical media literacy, however, involves occupation of a site above the dichotomy of fandom and censor. One can teach how media culture provides

significant statements or insights about the social world, empowering visions of gender, race, and class, or complex aesthetic structures and practices, thereby putting a positive spin on how it can provide significant contributions to education. Yet we ought to indicate also how media culture can advance sexism, racism, ethnocentrism, homophobia, and other forms of prejudice, as well as misinformation, problematic ideologies, and questionable values, accordingly promoting a dialectical approach to the media.

It is also probably a mistake to attempt to institute a top-down program of media literacy imposed from above on teachers, with fixed texts, curricula, and prescribed materials. Diverse teachers and students will have very different interests and concerns, and will naturally emphasize varying subject matter and choose examples relevant to their own and their student interests. Courses in critical media literacy could thus be flexible enough to enable teachers and students to constitute their own curricula to address material and topics of current concern, and to engage their own interests. Moreover, and, crucially, educators should discern that we are in the midst of one of the most intense technological revolutions in history and must learn to adapt new computer technologies to education and to develop new literacies.

Computer Literacy: An Expanded Concept

Critical computer literacy involves learning how to use computer technologies to do research and gather information, as well as to perceive computer culture as a terrain containing texts, spectacles, games, and interactive multimedia which call for cultivating new literacies. Further, computer culture is a discursive and political location in which students, teachers, and citizens can all intervene, engaging in discussion groups and collaborative research projects, creating web sites, producing innovative multimedia for cultural dissemination, and engaging in novel modes of social interaction and learning. Computer culture enables individuals to actively participate in the production of culture, ranging from discussion of public issues to

creation of their own cultural forms. However, to take part in this culture requires not only accelerated skills of print literacy, which are often restricted to the growing elite of students who are privileged to attend adequate and superior public and private schools, but also demands new forms of literacy.

It is a defining fact of the present age that computer culture is proliferating and transforming every dimension of life from work to education. To respond intelligently to the dramatic technological revolution of our time, we need to begin teaching computer literacy from an early age. Computer literacy, however, itself needs to be theorized. Often the term is synonymous with technical ability to use computers, to become proficient in the use of existing programs, and maybe undertake some programming. I suggest expanding the conception of computer literacy from using computer programs and hardware to a broader concept of information and multimedia literacy. This necessitates promoting more sophisticated abilities in traditional reading and writing, as well as the capability to critically dissect cultural forms taught as part of critical media literacy and multimedia pedagogy.

Computer literacy comprises the accessing and processing of diverse sorts of information proliferating in the so-called "information society" (for critiques of this concept see Webster 1995). It encompasses learning to find sources of information ranging from traditional sites like libraries and print media to new Internet websites and search engines. Computer-information literacy involves learning where information is found, how to access it, and how to organize, interpret, and evaluate the information that one seeks.

Computer and information literacies also involves learning how to read hypertexts, traverse the ever-changing fields of cyberspace, and to participate in a digital and interactive multimedia culture that encompasses work, education, politics, culture and everyday life. There are two major modes and concepts of hypertext, one that is primarily literary, that involves new avant-garde literary/writing

strategies and practices, contrasted to one that is more multimedia, multisemiotic, multimodal, and that mushroomed into the World Wide Web. Hypertext was initially seen as an innovative and exciting new mode of writing which increased potentials for writers to explore novel modes of textuality and expression. As multimedia hypertext developed on the Internet, it was soon theorized as a multisemiotic and multimodal form of culture. This mode is now increasingly seen as the dominant form of a new hyperlinked, interactive, and multimedia.

Genuine computer literacy involves not just technical knowledge and skills, but refined reading, writing, research, and communicating ability. It involves heightened capacities for critically accessing, analyzing, interpreting, processing, and storing both print-based and multimedia material. In a new information/entertainment society, immersed in transformative multimedia technology, knowledge and information come not merely in the form of print and words, but through images, sounds, and multimedia material as well.

In my expanded conception, computer literacy involves technical abilities concerning developing basic typing skills, mastering computer programs, accessing information, and using computer technologies for a variety of purposes ranging from interpersonal communication to artistic expression to political debate. There are ever more hybrid implosions between media and computer culture as audio and video material becomes part of the Internet, as CD-ROM and multimedia develop, and as new technologies become part and parcel of the home, school, and workplace. Therefore, the skills of decoding images, sounds, and spectacle learned in critical media literacy training can also be valuable as part of computer literacy.

Multimedia and Multiple Literacies: The New Frontier

The term “multiple literacies” points to the many different kinds of literacies needed to access, interpret, criticize, and participate in the emergent new forms of culture and society.

The key root here is the multiple, the proliferation of media and forms that demand a multiplicity of competencies and skills and abilities to access, interact, and help construct a new semiotic terrain. Reading and interpreting print was the appropriate mode of literacy for books, while critical media literacy entails reading and interpreting discourse, images, spectacle, narratives, and the forms and genres of media culture. Multiple literacies involve reading across varied and hybrid semiotic fields and being able to critically and hermeneutically process print, graphics, moving images, and sounds.

The term “hybridity” suggests the combination and interaction of diverse media and the need to synthesize the various forms in an active process of the construction of meaning. Reading a music video, for instance, involves processing images, music, spectacle, and sometimes narrative in a multisemiotic activity that simultaneously draws on diverse aesthetic forms. Interacting with a website or CD-ROM often involves scanning text, graphics, moving images, and clicking onto the fields that one seeks to peruse and explore, looking for appropriate material. This might lead individuals to draw upon a multiplicity of materials in new interactive learning or entertainment environments, whereby they must simultaneously read and interpret images, graphics, animation, and text.

Cultivating new literacies and reconstructing education for democratization will also involve constructing new pedagogies and social relations. New multimedia technologies enable group projects for students and more of a problem-solving pedagogy in the spirit of Dewey and Freire than traditional transmission top-down teaching models. New literacies can enable students to engage in cultural communication and production, gain the skills necessary to succeed in the new economy and culture, and enhance their abilities to work cooperatively with others, and to navigate new cultural and social terrains. Such group activity may generate more egalitarian relations between teachers and students and more democratic and cooperative social relations.

Moreover, we are soon going to have to rethink SATs and standardized tests in relation to these new technologies; having the literacy and skills to successfully access, communicate, work, and create within computer and multimedia culture is quite different from reading and writing in the mode of print literacy. While traditional skills of reading and writing continue to be of utmost importance in cyberculture, they are sublated within multiliteracy, so eventually an entirely different sort of test is going to need to be devised in order to register individuals' multiliteracy competencies and to predict success in a new technological and educational environment. In this new environment, it becomes increasingly irrational to focus education on producing higher test scores on exams that themselves are becoming obsolete and outdated by the changes in the economy, society, and culture.

While there are certainly dangers that the technological revolution will increase divisions between haves and have nots, it is possible that old gender, race, and class divisions can be overcome in a society that rewards new literacies and provides opportunities for those who have developed competencies in the new technologies and culture. In this context, it is especially important that appropriate resources, training, and pedagogies be attained to help those groups and communities who were disadvantaged and marginalized during the past epoch of industrialization and modernity.

In addition, individuals should be given the capacities to understand, critique, and transform the social and cultural conditions in which they live, gaining capacities to be creative and transformative subjects and not just objects of domination and manipulation. This necessitates developing abilities for critical thinking, reflection, and the ability to engage in discourse, cultural creation, and political action and movements. Active and engaged subjects are produced in social interaction with others, as well as with tools and techniques, so social skills and individual capacities for communication, creativity, and action must be part of the multiple literacies that a radical reconstruction of education seeks and cultivates.

Crucially, multiliteracies and new pedagogies must become reflective and critical, aware of the educational, social, and political assumptions involved in the restructuring of education and society that we are now undergoing. In response to the excessive hype concerning new technologies and education, it is necessary to maintain the critical dimension and to reflect upon the nature and effects of new technologies and the pedagogies developed as a response to their challenge. Many advocates of new technologies, however, eschew critique for a purely affirmative agenda. For instance, after an excellent discussion of new modes of literacy and the need to rethink education, Gunther Kress argues that we must move from critique to design, beyond a negative deconstruction to more positive construction. But rather than following such modern logic of either/or, we need to pursue the logic of both/and, perceiving design and critique, deconstruction and reconstruction, as complementary and supplementary rather than as antithetical choices.

In all educational and other experiments, critique is indeed of fundamental importance. From the Deweyan perspective, progressive education involves trial and error, design and criticism. The experimental method itself comprises critique of limitations, failures, and flawed design. In discussing new technologies and multiple literacies, we also need to constantly raise the questions: Whose interests are these new technologies and pedagogies serving? Are they helping all social groups and individuals? Who is being excluded and why? We also need to raise the question both of the extent to which new technologies and literacies are preparing students and citizens for the present and future and producing conditions for a more vibrant democratic society, or simply reproducing existing inequalities.

Further, creating multiple literacies must be contextual, engaging the life-world of the students and teachers participating in the new adventures of education. Education requires doing and can be gained from practice and social interaction. As Rousseau, Wollstonecraft, and Dewey argued, education involves developing proficiencies that enable

individuals to successfully develop within their concrete environments, to learn from practice, and to be able to interact, work, and create in their own societies and cultures.

Moreover, as Freire reminds us, critical pedagogy comprises the skills of both reading the word and reading the world. Hence, multiple literacies include not only media and computer literacies, but a diverse range of social and cultural literacies, ranging from ecoliteracy (e.g., understanding the body and environment), to economic and financial literacy to a variety of other competencies that enable us to live well in our social worlds. Education, at its best, provides the symbolic and cultural capital that empowers people to survive and prosper in an increasingly complex and changing world and the resources to produce a more cooperative, democratic, egalitarian, and just society. Thus, with Plato, Rousseau, Wollstonecraft, Dewey, Freire, and others I see philosophy of education as reflecting on the good life and the good society and the ways that education can contribute to creating a better world. But as the world changes, so too must education that will be part of the problem or part of the solution as we enter a new millennium.

Traditional skills of knowledge and critique must also be enhanced, so that individuals can name the system, describe and grasp the changes occurring and the defining features of the new global order, and can learn to engage in critical and oppositional practice in the interests of democratization and progressive transformation. This process challenges us to gain vision of how life can be, of alternatives to the present order, and of the necessity of struggle and organization to realize progressive goals. Languages of knowledge and critique must be supplemented by the discourse of hope and praxis.

In the current turbulent situation of the global restructuring of capitalism and worldwide struggles for democratization, I believe that we have for the first time in decades a chance to reconstruct education and society. In this conjuncture,

technology is a revolutionizing force, whereby all political parties and candidates pay lipservice to education, to overcoming the digital divide, and to expanding literacy. Hence, the time is ripe to take up the challenge and to move to reconstruct education and society so that groups and individuals excluded from the benefits of the economy, culture, and society may more fully participate and receive opportunities not possible in earlier social constellations.

Immanuel Wallerstein's Planet

by

Robert Fitch

Just a couple of blocks south from where the legendary literary cafes of the Boulevard St. Germaine de Pres intersect the ornate embassies that line the Boulevard Raspail, stands a squat, dark gray, steel and glass structure, with dozens of bicycles tethered at crazy angles across the front entrance. It's the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, built in 1970 by Fernand Braudel, France's most revered modern historian, who led the celebrated Annales School during its years of greatest influence. Enter through the American-style revolving doors, take the elevator to the fourth floor, and you are in the offices of Braudel's most influential disciple, the wildly controversial inventor of World Systems Theory, the former Africanist turned global historian, Immanuel Wallerstein.

It's a fresh spring day in March. The wild chamomile is already blooming in the nearby Luxembourg gardens. And Wallerstein seems equally distant from the Grand Concourse in the Bronx where he grew up; from the semi-arctic winds still sweeping through his home base, the SUNY Binghamton campus in upstate New York. And from the innumerable controversies he's stirred up by his efforts to replace the principal actors of conventional historiography—nations, states, peoples, ethnic groups, classes, cultures, civilizations—with a total concentration on the “dynamics of the world system.”

Wallerstein has recently taken on a new job: President of the International Sociological Association, having succeeded Enrique Cardoso, who has since moved on to become the President of Brazil. After being twice defeated for the Presidency of the American Sociological Association, Wallerstein won the top position in the world organization by

canvassing the votes of third world sociologists. It's from his Paris office, now, that Wallerstein takes care of his new Presidential responsibilities. As well as his nearly non-existent duties at the Maison. "The Maison is really a teaching institution. But I can do what I want, I write the bill. If I want to do something I'll lecture or hold a seminar. If I don't, I won't. It's basically relaxed." Essentially, the Maison provides an office and office support. And SUNY makes it all possible by paying Wallerstein over \$145,000 to teach one class a year on two continents.

Nowadays, of course, the most highly prized scholars don't exchange lecturing labor for monthly wages; they loan academic institutions their cultural capital and get back interest in the form of cash, perquisites and freedom from lecturing. One way to estimate the market value of Wallerstein's cultural capital is to check the tables provided by the most recent five year SSCI Citation Index – which serves as a kind of S&P 500 for professorial stock. The more you're cited, the higher your value. At roughly 200 citations a column Michel Foucault leads all the Cited with 22 columns; Jürgen Habermas follows with 20; and then Talcott Parsons with 18. Among the living English-speaking social scientists, anthropologist Clifford Geertz and Oxford's Anthony Giddens both happened to have 13. And so does Wallerstein. But no other living American sociologist can match his total.

On the afternoon of my visit to the Maison, Wallerstein scans the morning mail which happens to bring letters from France's most famous sociologists—Alain Touraine and Pierre Bourdieu—who invented the concept of cultural capital. Touraine, it turns out, will be participating in a two-day international conference in April, devoted to exploring the themes of Wallerstein's work. It's being sponsored jointly by *Le Monde*, *L'Expansion*, *Le Nouvel Observateur* and the Paribas Foundation (created by France's most powerful investment bank formerly known as the Banque de Paris et des Pays bas). The sponsors bill him as Braudel's successor. "With his resolutely interdisciplinary scientific approach," the conference brochure reads, "we have invited him to

interrogate the recent past to be able to understand the present and the future.” Speakers and commentators form an intellectual bouillabaisse of academic disciplines, countries, and ideologies: from the Dakar-based Maoist, Samir Amin, the author of *Eurocentrism* to the Wall Street-based billionaire currency speculator George Soros.

It was *The Modern World System* that catapulted him to a pre-eminent status among American sociologists. At the time, in 1974, Andre Gunder Frank, the dean of Latin American dependistas, briskly lifted aside the velvet ropes to permit Wallerstein’s fast-track entry into the pantheon of modern historiography, declaring *The Modern World System* an “instant classic.” The next year, *The Modern World System* won sociology’s highest award, the Pitriam Sorokin Prize. The review in *Contemporary Sociology*, written by a former student, Michael Hechter, proclaimed it “the most important theoretical statement about development since the time of Max Weber.”

Wallerstein Explained

Wallerstein’s modern world-system comes with a kind of registered trade mark – the hyphen. Hyphenation, he explains, is designed to show that the modern world system is a system that’s not “in the world” or “of the world.” It is a “system that is a world.” World systems are made up of multiple cultures sharing a single division of labor. So far, explains Wallerstein, in an analysis he acknowledges is influenced by Columbia economic anthropologist Karl Polanyi, the world has known three systems. The first was “the mini-system,” (basically, tribes). In the mini-system, exchange among tribal hunter gatherers and simple agriculturalists takes the form of sharing and occasional barter. Tribesmen don’t arrange these exchanges however by market means.

What Polanyi called “re-distribution” marks the second systemic form: the world empire, “the so-called great civilizations of premodern times China, Egypt, Rome.” What linked the parts of a World Empire was a common political

system. Not market forces either. Of course the Romans and the Egyptians had long-distance traders and commodity producers, but imperial economies were based on tribute, not the price system. Long distance trade was administered by the political center which requisitioned the economic surplus; consumed it; and re-distributed the remainder. Thus, ancient empires were fundamentally different from 19th century. French, British “empires” which operated within the framework of a world-economy.

Wallerstein asks us to note that when he uses the term “world-economies” —the third form of world system also hyphenated and plural—it’s designed to reflect the pre-existence of previous world-economies. Wallerstein’s peculiar punctuation is designed to fence off his conceptual baby from competitors like Andre Gunder Frank. Ignoring distinctions between administered trade and market trade, Frank sees capitalism, not just history, beginning at Sumer. He theorizes a single unhyphenated world system going back 5,000 years. Wallerstein’s “world economies” share a common division of labor, but they’re not linked by a common political system. Historically, unlike empires that can stretch out for hundreds of years, they’ve tended not to last too long. Either they wind up as Empires, or they’re conquered by one. A world economy never became a world system until western Europeans turned the trick during the long 16th century (1450-1640).

Zonality is Destiny

How did they manage? Once upon a time, as Wallerstein tells it, there were landowners (or aristocrats) who squeezed surplus out of peasants in various ways. “But for a series of reasons,” says Wallerstein, “this system ran into serious trouble in Europe somewhere around 1250 or 1300.” Peasant revolts and declining population produced “the so-called crisis of feudalism.” The peasants kept on growing stronger, the landlords weaker.

To head off the threatened “kulak paradise,” says Wallerstein, the landlords decided on a new strategy. “Or if

that sounds too voluntaristic,” he adds as an aside, “such a strategy emerged. The strategy was the transformation of the feudal system into the capitalist world-economy.” The strategic goal was to shrink the problem of revolting peasants by expanding the geographical domain of the 16th century economy. Opening up new trading areas—especially Poland and South America—provided new revenues and allowed the capitalists to hand the dissatisfied producers a little larger slice of the economic pie. “The crisis of seigniorial revenues was no more,” says Wallerstein. “The crisis was now located in the revenues of the producers. The ‘poor’ had been created as a major social category.” (*The Capitalist World Economy*, 161-2)

The poor got that way because they found themselves on the wrong end of a spatial hierarchy: a new, exploitive geographical division of labor that now emerged between the western European core and the eastern European and south American peripheral zones. Instead of pumping surplus product from the serfs by force, the aristocrats-turned capitalists ensnared the Aztecs and the Poles within a trading system based on unequal exchange.

The Aztecs not slaughtered or killed off by disease were soon entombed in silver mines. The Poles became servile providers of cheap agricultural raw materials in exchange for high value Dutch linens consumed by the nobility. The high value of the linens was a consequence of the high wages paid the Dutch workers. The low value of grain was a consequence of the low compensation of the newly re-enslaved Polish producers. So the same amount of labor produced different market values depending on what zone you lived in. This was not just unequal exchange, it was the origin of all the other systemic inequalities and crises that would emerge over the next 500 years.

By squeezing the vast majority of the producers who lived in the periphera, capitalists from the core countries created perpetual underdevelopment and systemic economic crises. Because the low paid workers in the periphera couldn't buy back their product, underconsumption crises broke out,

generating regular patterns of wave-like instability for the next five hundred years. And far from leading to material progress, the capitalist world economy has led to absolute immiseration: vast increases in inequality, and even falling life expectancy—if you look at things globally.

For Wallerstein, Zonality is destiny. It is destiny because, in Wallerstein's system, Zonality is relational. In the Hindu caste system there can't be touchables without untouchables. So too, in the world system there is no core without the periphera and vice versa. There are no countries that produce low-end raw materials without high-end manufacturing countries—the two are just different zones within the same division of labor. Similarly, the strength of the core states can't be explained except in terms of their relation to the states of the periphera—which are weak because of the existence of the strong core states.

A country can no more escape the system than a hand can exist severed from the arm. And since there's no autonomy, it's senseless to try to grasp the workings of the system in units smaller than core and periphera. In *Unthinking Social Science* Wallerstein actually echoes Margaret Thatcher, insisting that "there's no such thing as society." They're looking at the world, of course, from different ideological ends of the sociological telescope. The Iron Lady sees no society because, for her, it is fragmented into individuals. Wallerstein doesn't see nation states as discrete, because for him, they are tied together organically as parts of a world system. As he puts it, there is "no society in the sense of people living together in bounded groups." It's an argument he takes to its logical conclusion in his essay "Does India Exist?" Answer: "No, it's an invention of the modern world system."

Essentially, volume I of *The Modern World System* is genealogical, revealing the hitherto undiscovered and very modest origins of European domination of the modern world system. Volumes II and III are deconstructive, explaining how what you thought you knew about history either didn't happen at all, or if it did, didn't amount to all that much.

Because after the 16th century, there is no change of the system. What we've seen for the last 400 years, argues Wallerstein, are just vertical and horizontal moves within the system. The system gets wider. Unlike the old world empires which were always more or less limited in geographical scope, the new capitalist world-economy has an unlimited dynamic because it has a different aim. Driven by the impulse of ceaseless accumulation, the capitalist world economy "steadily expanded until it became the world."

Within narrow limits, countries can go up or down within the system. Some nation-states move up from the semi-periphery to the core - like Great Britain in the 16th century. Others like Italy move down from core to semi-periphery - in the same period. But it's always a zero-sum game, Wallerstein insists. The rich core area doesn't grow: if a country is added, another must be subtracted.

Another vertical dimension of the system is the battle for hegemony. Countries within the core fight each other to see which one will assume the role of top nation. This is what Nazism was all about: "Germany's thrust of desperation to recoup lost ground." (*Capitalist World Economy*, 31) The same fear of downward mobility characterized the Bolshevik Revolution. It was less an effort to create a socialist country than a struggle to keep Russia from sinking further into peripheral status. Wallerstein wants us to forget the "bourgeois revolutions" too. The French revolution, for example, is another battle for hegemony like the one between the Nazis and the Allies. It's not a "revolution" in any substantial sense, since the system doesn't change: How could it, after all, since the bourgeoisie had been in power since the 16th century? Concludes Wallerstein: "The French revolution didn't change France very much." (*Unthinking Social Science*, 22)

The concept of the industrial revolution is similarly overblown and misleading, Wallerstein writes in *The Modern World System*, III. Not much economic growth really took place. Going on about an industrial revolution in the core "is a way of placing the burden of guilt on the Third World for

its inability to match the West's economic living standards.”
(*Unthinking Social Science*, 49)

Given the paucity of structural changes in the last half-millennium, everything points back to the overwhelming importance of origins and to the fateful question “why”? Why did the core incorporate the periphera instead of vice versa? Why instead, didn't Montezuma create a trading system based on unequal exchange that benefited the Aztecs at the expense of the Spaniards?

It's in explaining this pivotal point that Wallerstein deviates most clearly from conventional historiography. Historians have long sought to explain Europe's rise by investigating various internal developments that took place in the period 900-1400—between the illiterate empire of Charlemagne whose serfs worked the land with a scratch plow and the Age of Erasmus in which serfs had largely disappeared and a highly specialized agriculture had developed in northern Europe to serve the cities.

Wallerstein rejects any such effort to find some prior development that would explain Europe's transformation. He sees pure chance and sudden inspiration. European expansion was “a creative leap of imagination on the part of the (western European) ruling strata.” (CWE) There is no development to explain, since the technological and economic gaps that separate western European society from Poland and even from Aztec America were quite narrow. “In the 14th and 15th century,” he observes, “the social structure of eastern Europe wasn't markedly different from that of Western Europe.” (*The Capitalist World Economy*, 39) Between the Aztecs and the Spaniards, he argues the difference was chiefly one of weaponry. (*The Modern World System* v. I, interview)

Charles V Meets Goldilocks

The real reason why the core becomes the core and the periphera, can't be explained by the differences that existed in 16th century levels of economic development. For Wallerstein, what explains the division of the world into core

and periphera is not that the core started out more advanced than the periphera. “How certain areas became one and not the other is a long story,” he says, “but the key fact is that given slightly different starting points,” the elites in western Europe create strong state mechanisms, whereas in the east, the elites have very weak ones. “Once we get a difference in the strength of the state machineries, we get the operation of ‘unequal exchange’ which is enforced by strong states on weak ones.” (*The Capitalist World Economy*, 18) The key to the genealogy of the capitalist system, he argues, is to be found in the 16th century state-formation process. The soon-to-become peripheral countries didn’t put much energy into state-building. Whereas the for the nascent core countries of western Europe it’s the Age of Absolutism.

Wallerstein has a kind of Goldilocks theory of European absolutism. It explains not only why western Europe conquered eastern Europe, but also why Europe – and not the more technologically advanced Chinese world empire – emerged as the world’s first capitalist world-economy. It was because the absolutist states formed in the 16th century achieved just the right amount of strength. Strong enough so that they could promote commercial expansion into the periphera and put down domestic peasant unrest, but not so strong as in China where the court bureaucracies throttled the mercantile classes’ energies.

Without their absolute states, Europe might have gone the way of Imperial China. If the invading Ottoman Turks hadn’t been repulsed, or if Charles V, the Hapsburg emperor, had succeeded in creating a world empire out of the territory of his Italian, German and Dutch neighbors, Europe would have become a world empire instead of a world-economy. It turned out though that the Dutch successfully resisted the Hapsburgs and went on to become the capitalist world system’s first hegemon. And at the end of the long 16th century, by means of their absolute states, the hegemonic Dutch and the other core countries succeeded in imposing a new world-wide system of labor control on those countries which had weaker states: a second serfdom in Poland; slavery in the mines of the Peruvian and Mexican periphera;

while wage labor was reserved for white workers in the privileged European core.

Clearly, none of this is meant to be understood as past history. Wallerstein insists that we moderns are simply re-enacting the structural roles established in the 16th century. And responding to the same wave-like cyclical patterns. Writes Wallerstein: “the developments of 16th century Europe were essentially repeated in the 19th and 20th centuries. With Africa developing along the lines that Poland had in the in the ‘long’ sixteenth century.” (*The Capitalist World Economy*, 198)

The Man and the Meaning

Of the magnitude of Wallerstein’s achievement, there seems to be little doubt. Of the meaning, that’s a different story. His project has provoked extremes of skepticism and enthusiasm. “What Wallerstein has done,” says Columbia historian Charles Tilly, who brought *The Modern World System* to press as editor of the Academic Press series, “Studies in Discontinuity,” “is break with the idea that we can take countries or even civilizations and through analogies with persons produce a self-contained narrative history.” Americans are especially vulnerable to viewing our history as “a solo performance” the result of peculiar American genius. But studying small African countries like Ghana, Tilly suggests, broke Wallerstein of this penchant. He saw Ghana wasn’t the author of its own destiny. His insight was to see that as Tilly puts it, “you just can’t say that the accumulated experience of a country, the way it assimilates and transforms this experience, explains its behavior. That in itself is an extremely important understanding of social processes the last part of the 20th century.”

But has Wallerstein anachronistically riveted the now obsolete structure of 1960s dependency relations—onto the anatomy of the 16th century economic system so that both historical development and the uniqueness of the capitalist system disappear? This is one possible implication if his severest critics are right. They challenge his three key

premises: that the modern world system creates rather than just exploits pre-existing developmental differences; that the differences which emerged, originated because of the nature of trading relations; and that the exploitive pattern of trading relations was determined by differences in the strength of states—as a result of absolutism.

For Wallerstein's argument to hold up, the core states must be absolute states. And the peripheral states must be weak. Certainly, the peripheral states can't have absolute monarchies, yet they do. The case for Absolutism may be the least well substantiated portion of Wallerstein's entire enterprise. Harvard's Theda Skocpol can write, "I can think of no intellectual project in the social sciences that is of greater interest and importance than Wallerstein's." Still, she can say of such a fundamental point, "Wallerstein's attempt to equate the strong core state with the absolute monarchy doesn't work. The historical evidence simply doesn't fit the over-all pattern implied by the theory."

As Skocpol reminds Wallerstein, the main 16th century core states—Holland and England—didn't have absolute monarchs." The English monarchs had no large standing armies and no bureaucratic administration that penetrated the localities." The Dutch—who Wallerstein argues were the hegemonic power in the period and do most of the trading—had a state that was far less centralized than the English. On the other hand, Gustav I of Sweden is a good example of an absolute monarch who keeps his head. But unfortunately for the Wallerstein model, as Skocpol points out, Gustav rules over a peripheral state. Even worse, it's an absolute monarchy in a peripheral state that uses its power to invite core Dutch capitalists to take over its iron and timber resources. But instead of deepening underdevelopment, it turned out that selling raw materials on the world market to the core states, with the help of foreign capital lifted Sweden to the status of a regional power.

What's Wallerstein reply? Much of Volume II consists of responses to critics of his theory of absolutism and development in Volume I. He gives some ground, essentially

arguing that strong is as strong does: the Dutch state was strong enough to get the job done. But this reply was answered in advance by Skocpol in her original critique. She pointed out that if" Wallerstein claims that if the test of strength is 'did it work' then the entire argument would become circular and of course Wallerstein's initial focus on "Absolutism' would be belied." (*American Sociological Review*, 1085)

Brenner's Broadside

So forget about the theory of absolutism. Yet, as Skocpol says, "we still sense that Wallerstein's vision of an enduring exploitative division of labor is correct." For the vision to illuminate rather than obscure, however, Wallerstein has to be able to show that trade causes both underdevelopment and the new pattern of capitalist class relations.

No one has done more to call Wallerstein's emphasis on core-peripheral trade into question than UCLA's Robert Brenner—his sharpest and most persistent critic. Now Director of UCLA's Institute for Social and Economic History and a former fellow of the Princeton Institute for Advanced Study, Brenner has an international reputation not just as a specialist in late medieval history, but as a ferocious critic and a debater of the highest order. *The Brenner Debate*, edited by T. S. Ashton, President of the Economic History Association, represents his widely acknowledged demolition of the mainstream, *Annales*-Cambridge tradition of medieval history.

Brenner is probably Wallerstein's most damaging critic too, if only because trade is more fundamental to the foundation of the *The Modern World System* than absolutism. It would be nice to be able to explain the core/periphera relation in terms of the strong state/weak state distinction. But if he can't, the bottom explanatory line must be showing that underdevelopment and development along with the various "labor market control mechanisms"—slavery, serfdom, wage-labor—are all produced by the trading system that springs up in the 16th century.

But Dutch-Polish trade couldn't have brought about serfdom in Poland, Brenner points out, because it was well underway before the 16th century. He cites big chunks of Wallerstein's own Polish sources to establish the 15th century origin of the "second serfdom."

Trade with the Dutch didn't cause Polish serfdom, neither did it cause Polish backwardness. Wallerstein is simply clueless about the real motivation behind Polish serfdom, Brenner argues. "Wallerstein thinks that the reason why Polish capitalism doesn't develop is because the Dutch use their strong state crowbar to break pry open the door of the Polish market and force free trade on the weak-state Poles. In fact," he says, "the door was wide open: Polish lords promote free trade not because it's in the interest of the Dutch, but because they want to prevent free competition for labor power which would limit their ability to control the serfs by force."

If the grain for linen trade didn't cause Polish retardation, or Polish serfdom, it can't be held responsible for Dutch development either, argues Brenner. There simply was no such division of labor as Wallerstein describes. Most of the wheat that the Dutch imported from Poland they didn't consume, but simply re-exported to the southern Mediterranean. The Dutch were simply intermediaries between raw-material exchanging peripheral countries.

C'est magnifique mais n'est pas la sociologie

Michel Foucault once responded testily to his critics, "all my works are myths." Wallerstein has been more conscientious. But he, too, has sometimes succumbed to a tendency to double code his work as both conventional scholarship and as myth. The validity of Wallerstein's facts depends ultimately, he says, on his "metahistory": "It is our metahistory," he says, "which channels our formulation of the hypotheses which 'fail to be disproved.' It is our metahistory which, above all, legitimates our analysis of the data."

What is a metahistory? "A metahistory," Wallerstein

explained to me, “is what (Jean) Baudrillard calls a ‘grand narrative.’ It’s a statement about what matters; where things have been; the headings; the boundaries; who the players are; etc. And that determines of course our specific hypotheses.”

Surely, Wallerstein means not Baudrillard—who is famous for arguing that reality no longer exists, since the real is just a fantasy projection—but rather Jean Francois Lyotard, the author of *The Postmodern Condition* and who coined the term “metanarrative.” But he called for an end to metanarratives. According to Lyotard, modernism was marked by the effort to create grand historical theories that claimed scientific status and served as guarantors of Truth. But Science is just another set of narratives with no higher truth status.

What truth status does Wallerstein seek for his work? Wallerstein has created as impressive a critical apparatus as any modern social scientist. *The Modern World System* is legendary in academic circles for its multi-lingual scholarly back-up. Often the text itself would float at the very top of the page like foam tossed around by a deeper ocean of footnotes. And yet Wallerstein could write, “‘Facts’ do not add up to ‘history.’ The historian invents history in the same way that an artist invents his painting. The artist uses the colors on his palette and his vision of the world to represent his ‘message.’ So does the historian.”

Even his most unyielding critics however, have not interpreted *The Modern World System* to be what Wallerstein suggests it is now: an edifying myth meant to encourage the planet’s “anti-systemic forces.” Today, Wallerstein dismisses existing accounts of the origins of modernity as “old organizing myths.” Tellingly, though, he withholds conventional truth status for his own account. “I wish to propose,” he announces, “an alternate Fable for Our Time.” What’s needed, Wallerstein argues in *Unthinking Social Science*, is a new organizing myth. Of course, he points out that his myth has the advantage of being true.

African Origins

The practice of double coding, operating both on the level of conventional explanation and the level of therapeutic myth goes back to his first published book, *Africa Politics of Independence*. It was written in 1961, under the combined influences of Afrocentrism and African nationalism, but well before he'd discovered the dark continent of underdevelopment theory. In the same way General Motors stretches out a Chevrolet to make a Cadillac, The Modern World System represents a larger, more elaborate version of African Politics of Independence. It foreshadows Wallerstein's tendency to deny the reality of nations, states, tribes, classes, in favor of vaster spatial units. It contains the strategy of explaining vast disparities of development by emphasizing unfair trading advantages. African Politics of Independence also looks forward to the *tres longue duree* of world system theory.

The key to the creation of African unity, says Wallerstein is cultural revival. And the key to cultural revival is the question of finding more satisfactory historical origins. Africa needs better origins than those which emphasize technological backwardness and overwhelming European superiority. Burdened by such a history, African intellectuals will become Mau-Maus instead of modernizers. (123) He observes that if you go back far enough, if you can demonstrate the existence of the historical presence "over a long period of time," (Wallerstein's emphasis) "the disparity in technology between a given African society and any other society is less than at present." It may be possible to demonstrate not just the non-superiority of western civilization, but the superiority of African civilization, "if one pushes the analysis back sufficiently far back." (126) The further back you go, the less documents to scrutinize. Everything is "shrouded in mystery." What counts is not the scanty facts available but interpretation. (128)

It's on these pragmatic grounds that Wallerstein supports Cheik Anta Diop's Afrocentric interpretation of history. Diop, whose ideas appear in a more simplified form in CUNY

Professor Leonard Jeffries' sun-people/ice people distinction, counterposed a materialistic "Aryan" white people to "Dionysian" blacks. According to Diop, African civilization goes back 17,000 years. (This would make it 12,000 years older than Mesopotamia, thought by conventional archeologists to be the oldest.) Western technology, Diop claims, was actually borrowed from Africa, wrenched from its original humanistic context, and turned against its African inventors..

Significantly for arguments Wallerstein would use later in *The Modern World System*, Diop writes that the underdevelopment of Africa can't be understood as the result of colonization—which wasn't imposed until the late 19th century. Rather, it must be explained as the consequence of trade that began at the end of the 15th century. Indeed, writes Diop at the time of the first incursions by Portuguese and Dutch traders, African political organization was actually in advance of Europe. But Africa got entangled in the tri-continental division of labor dominated by the Europeans. (21-23)

Is this true? Wallerstein allows that Diop's claims are a bit "sweeping," but he has given us "a bold hypothesis, not without supporting data." Still, to think in terms of ordinary notions of true and false misses Wallerstein's essential point. Diop and the cultural nationalists are compensating for African feelings of inferiority and insecurity. "The reassertion of the values of African cultural unity, can instill a sense of security in Africa such that it will be able to adopt technological changes from outside Africa, principally the western world." (135)

If much of the historiographic strategy underlying *The Modern World System* comes from Afrocentrism, the holistic sociology is strikingly prefigured in the speeches and writings of African nationalist leaders like Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah and Guinea's Sekou Toure whom Wallerstein knew well and whom he cites in *African Politics of Independence*. They always insisted on the irrelevance of the social categories of the west. Wallerstein agreed: nations, states,

classes, not even tribes really exist. There are no classes because of underdevelopment; no true nation-states because they were just lines on a map drawn at the Berlin Conference by the European powers. No tribes because they are just artificial units created by colonialists to divide “the people,” chiefly of rebellious peasants and disaffected urban rebels which Wallerstein would later call “anti-systemic forces.”

In *African Politics of Independence*, exotic Africanist sociology and Afrocentric historiography re-enforce familiar American pragmatism. What’s important about historiography in general, says Wallerstein, is how useful a particular doctrine can be: “revival always implies a selection of the past, a selection that is made not only in terms of the exigencies of the present but of plans for the future.” (134)

James taught that meaning “can always be brought down to some particular consequence in our future practical experience.” “Truth,” was what was “expedient in our thinking.” Wallerstein stayed pretty close to this pragmatic spirit when he wrote a decade later in his forward to *The Capitalist World Economy*: “Truth is no longer defined as *wie es eigentlich gewesen ist*, a theoretically unrealizable objective (even if it were a desirable one, which I very much doubt). Truth becomes an interpretation, meaningful for our times, of the social world as it was, as it is, as it will be.” This pragmatic sense of truth and meaning chimes too with his 1990s doctrine of the need for a “new organizing myth.” Not just for Africans, but for all the “anti-systemic forces.”

Conclusion

In the quarter century since Volume I of *The Modern World System* appeared, the global economy may have changed as fundamentally as during Wallerstein’s axial sixteenth century. Who could have imagined then that European core countries would remain stuck in double digit unemployment for the better part of two decades? Or that median US non-supervisory wages would have regressed to the level of the 1950s? Most mainline trade economists deny that the fall

can be explained by vastly increased trade with the periphera. But certainly twenty years of declining wages and stagnating living standards in the US, along with double digit growth rates in some Asian countries, are incompatible with “unequal exchange.”

As for the idea that the clear triumph of “globalization” confirms Wallerstein’s insights, the case is exactly the reverse. For Wallerstein, globalization is not something relatively new; it begins five hundred years ago. It is not driven by computer technology or shrinking distance, but by the power of states to impose their high-value manufactured goods on raw material producers. Wallerstein’s globalization is about monopoly prices, not all-powerful competitive markets.

A Wallersteinian might still argue that the world systems model holds up better than ever. Look at inequality. According to a recent UN study, there are over one billion people in the third world who live on less than a dollar a day. And a transfer of income from just seven billionaires could eliminate their poverty. A closer look at the billionaires shows that some of those topping the list control manufacturing empires in the periphera former periphera—like Kim Woo Choon’s Daewoo Group from South Korea the Tata family in India and the Riadys of Indonesia. (New York Times, 19 June 1997, A23) You can’t “read off” inequality by just looking at what zone someone lives in. Most strikingly, the characteristic economic structures of the 1960s—a world market based on a sharp and static division of labor between poor raw material producers and rich manufacturing nations; the powerful Keynesian re-distributionist sates in the west; the antagonism between socialist and capitalist worlds—all these have been swept away making it impossible to shrug off the raw unfettered power of market forces as a Victorian myth.

In *The Great Transformation* Polyani wrote that the 19th century market society “could not exist for any length of time without annihilating the human and natural substance of society; it would have physically destroyed man and

transformed his surroundings into a wilderness.” He concludes: “inevitably, society took measures to protect itself.”

If Polanyi’s account of the Great Transformation is right, Wallerstein is wrong. The social democratic re-distributionist state descended from 19th century industrial struggles for reform, not as Wallerstein would have it, from the courts of 16th century absolutist monarchs. In Polyanian terms, the welfare state which triumphed over 19th century liberalism represented progress; late 20th century “neo-liberalism” is an historical regression.

Does this mean that Wallerstein has nothing to offer us now that the economic institutions of the 1960s have faded into the shadows? At the end of his career, Braudel paid Wallerstein the supreme compliment of making *The Modern World System* the point of departure for the concluding third volume of his magisterial *Civilization and Capitalism*. Braudel’s affection for Wallerstein and his respect for his achievement are palpable. But they are qualified by a belief that Wallerstein’s most important formulations are ultimately unacceptable.

Braudel portrays Wallerstein as someone who would impose “a rigid schema” on European history; who underestimates the importance of European influence on Asia and Africa prior to their “incorporation” in the 18th century; and whose *duree* is not *longue* enough. You can’t understand the origins of capitalism, Braudel says, if you start in the 16th century. “I have never been all that enamored of [Wallerstein’s] 16th century.” He sees Wallerstein not as a fellow historian, but as “a sociologist, and an African expert who is waging war on history.”

Braudel’s last word on Wallerstein is that he is “a little too systematic” but “extremely stimulating. And it is this success that deserves the most emphasis.” Indeed. No scholar in his generation or the next has come close to matching the scope of his theoretical ambition; demonstrated his passion for historical perspective; or equaled his power to convey in

broad, ugly, but unmistakable strokes, like those on a De Kooning canvas, the outlines of modernity. Wallerstein has produced the most memorable effort yet to bring the modern world economy into postmodern perspective. But perhaps because modernity has still not been truly understood, we seem condemned to repeat it.

But There Are Alternatives!

An Interview With Jürgen Habermas

Internationally renowned sociologist and philosopher Jürgen Habermas has left the tower of academia time and again to deal with the political controversies of the day. Before the German parliamentary elections, he confronted Gerhard Schröder with his thoughts about global capitalism.

His thesis is that the scope for effective politics is getting smaller, and that borders are becoming more fluid. The community of states is on a difficult road to a “postnational constellation” (also the title of his new book, published by Surkamp). Sobriety is in order, and Habermas looks at Germany’s circumstances and Schröder’s red-green project without any illusions. The following interview was held with members of the German newspaper, *Die Zeit*

Q: Mr. Habermas, for the first time in the history of the Federal Republic, a chancellor has been voted out of office. Can any conclusions about the state of self-awareness in our democracy be drawn from this?

Jürgen Habermas: I think so. Previously, it was the parties which decided coalition changes amongst themselves during the legislative period. This is why Ludwig Erhard and Helmut Schmidt had to go. Self-aware citizens are taking voting a chancellor out of office into their own hands. In a democracy, citizens must have the conviction that, at certain turning points, their vote can still influence a nationalized and self-

contained politics. In the Federal Republic of old it took several decades for such a democratic attitude to take hold. I am under the impression that this process has now been mutually confirmed.

Q: To you, Helmut Kohl always acted as a guarantor of the Federal Republic's western orientation. Are you going to miss him

Habermas: Every kind of criticism has been voiced. His historical contribution was linking national reunification with the unification of Europe. But people my age also see in him a companion of our generation. I'm thinking of the almost bodily denial of the kind of stately aesthetic that our elite minds, especially since 1989, demand. Kohl apparently did not forget the monstrous productions of the Reich Party days and the Chaplinesque political actors of National Socialism. Certainly, we often groaned about his provincial, unrefined gestures and words. But with the deflation of hollow standards and the trivialization of public displays, I also took a liking to Kohl. It contained a counterthinking, if I may take the liberty to say it, it was a mental constant in the old Federal Republic. The deep-rooted fear of the subversive expressed itself once again with the bloodthirsty mood in the fall of 1977. Kohl was no longer affected by these kinds of emotions.

Q: Now there is going to be a red-green government. Is this simply a political change? Or is this also a change in the cultural environment?

Habermas: The unprecedented degree of support for the Left on election night tended to remind many of us older people of a certain day in the spring of 1969. Heinemann spoke back then of a "changeover of power" after being elected president. A little while later, Willi Brandt also achieved this with a slim majority for the socially liberal coalition. Back then, the long-delayed end of the Adenauer era found its convincing embodiment in the conscientious figure of his opponent Heinemann. As I experienced it politically and morally, the preceding period was poisoned by fatal

continuities both in mentality and personnel. But ten years of relentless intellectual opposition followed by another ten years of aggressive confrontation had prepared the way for the aforementioned break. The politics had simply imitated the switch in the cultural climate back then. That cannot be said about today. Nothing here about the diffuse and crippling cultural climate has changed for years, not even through the few gleeful optimists who are having their fun at the interaction between chubby-faced neo-liberalism and fading postmodernism. The excitement about the landslide of yesterday is already nearly forgotten today.

Q: Can there even be a red-green project? Or are—in face of the limited scope for political action—only “variations of the middle” possible?

Habermas: There existed a red-green project until the end of the ‘80s, as long as you could count on Oskar Lafontaine winning the next parliamentary election. With the pressures of German unification and a globalized economy, this project was then reduced to the catchphrase “modernization and social justice”—blessed with a little tax reform, if only for the purposes of counter-financing. What disturbs me about this is not so much the return to pragmatism. After all, the whole perspective was based on the false premise that social and ecological restructuring could be achieved through a national framework. In the meantime, a politics which has largely been put on the defensive has to adapt to the conditions of a changed—that is, post-national—constellation. What disturbs me is the absence of a new perspective. Today, everyone is talking about a “post-ideological” age. But in the last fifty years since Daniel Bell’s *The End of Ideology*, this slogan has been thrown around too often, as if it could actually still be true. Nothing happens in politics without an issue on which sentiments are divided. And that is what is missing.

Q: Because of experience with the old projects, one is fairly wary of a new one. What do you understand by the term “project?”

Habermas: A “project” necessarily entails that you have a controversial issue for which you are proposing a particular analysis, which defines perceived problems more clearly and makes some political goals more plausible than others. That didn’t exist during the election campaigns. The challenger avoided any chance of polarization or confrontation anyway. And one could tell from the relaxed expressions on the faces of the losers that they hadn’t meant the charge of “taking a position” that seriously

Q: That means there are no alternatives.

Habermas: But there are. You don’t have to search long for the problem, the new government is face to face with it: What should it do about massive unemployment? But now the scope for action on the part of national governments has been diminished in two very delicate ways. The extent to which the state is able to take full advantage of its tax resources in the domestic economy is continually decreasing. And conventional tools of macroeconomic control are failing with an economy which is less and less limited to the domestic sphere alone. That is why the question about the relationship between politics and the economy is turning into a new, reflexive one. The political side has to ask itself whether it is willing to phase itself out ever further through the politics of deregulation. Stated in overly simple terms: Does the loss of influence on the part of national politics point to a complete abdication, or can the political medium be revived on a different level and catch up to transnational markets? This gives rise to another issue: Can and should there be a democratically legitimate exercise of power beyond the national state? The political goals will then crystallize out of the need for regulation at one’s own doorstep after the European Common Market has been achieved through a joint financial policy.

Q: In your new book *Die postnationale Konstellation*, you challenge politicians to finally escape their own shadows and reconstruct the welfare state on a supranational level. Would this commitment then serve as a measure of Schröder’s success for you?

Habermas: That's exactly my view. It actually goes beyond Europe and aims for a global "domestic" policy without a world government. But first it's a matter of deciding if we want to create a Europe that is able to act politically in the first place. Behind Waigel's slogan "The Euro speaks German," there is in reality only a pledge for an apolitical structure, the European Bank. Gerhard Schröder knows that instituting the Euro aggravates the problem of harmonizing tax codes. He illustrated that after the election using the example of gas prices.

It seems to me that, in the first place, one has to work toward a European agreement concerning social and economic politics if a race toward deregulation between the sociopolitical regimes of the different member states is to be avoided. On the other hand, neo-corporate procedures have their limits. Effective political measures of redistribution cannot simply be arranged in Brussels; they have to be legitimized democratically. Do we, then, need an effective European federal state if we want to avoid further increases in inequality and the emergence of an impoverished segment of society? That is a loaded question. We are already seeing a reversal in alliances. "Market Europeans" happy with the Euro are allying themselves with those who have been skeptical of the new currency. In the process, they are becoming set on the status quo of a Europe which was unified solely through the creation of markets.

Q: In light of the fact that there are few effective supranational structures, wouldn't it make more sense to first make use of national capabilities, instead of dismissing the nation-state?

Habermas: The nation-state is still the most important political actor, and will be for some time. It wouldn't even be possible to dismiss it that quickly. I think it is good, by the way, that we have a government right now which can be trusted to pursue every appropriately so-called reform in a national context first. I don't doubt that the "efforts on one level," which Schröder, following shrewd reform proposals and the usual methods, now wants to take upon himself,

could meet with some success. But that doesn't change anything about the new dependencies of the state on the fundamentally changed conditions of a world economy. The question is whether the new post-national constellation also requires other and more effective political actors.

Q: Isn't society more intelligent and aware of problems than one might think? Even the leading minds of the Deutsche Bank want to tame capitalism.

Habermas: I don't know what these leading minds are thinking. I'm just watching what leaders in the economy, politics, and science are doing when they, for instance, are negotiating the multilateral agreement concerning investments which is now up for approval. As far as I can see, this deals more with institutionalizing markets than "taming capitalism." It is concerned with legally securing investments—that is, with finding an internationally effective equivalent for what the private law achieves in a national context. It is far easier to create and institutionalize new markets than it is to correct them. Difficult problems require supranational agreements on environmental, economic, and sociopolitical measures.

Q: The strength of the political actors was barely sufficient for the Euro. What makes you think that the European project is simply going to catch up with economic developments?

Habermas: Even Kohl himself only aimed for a "Europe of Fatherlands" since the conference at Cardiff. The historical motives of the postwar generations—overcoming murderous nationalism and the reconciliation with France—somehow exhausted themselves. But Delors's fight for a "social dimension" is fed by other, more immediate motives. That is why, in the future, Joschka Fischer is going to be the more sound European. I have known him quite well for a long time—the passing of the torch in europolitical matters from Kohl to Fischer was a stroke of luck. Of course, popular sentiment in the various European states is rather rejecting of faraway Brussels. That's not only the case with Germany:

Nations have enough to deal with at home. And the political elites aren't going to listen, unless at least the intellectuals spark a few public discussions. Here they are doing that even less than in France or England. Unfortunately their skepticism is justified.

Q: Assuming a political union is achieved, who is going to supervise it? Are you going to content yourself with a diminished democracy—without the presence of a critical public?

Habermas: No, I am for a European federal state and that means for a European constitution. However, such institutions, which are still on the drawing board for now, can at most initiate those processes which provide their foundation. A common political culture cannot be created from scratch; nor does it spontaneously spring from economic ties. But one can want a constitution and a European party system. If a European public could be created, then associations, initiatives, and popular movements, which reach across borders, and a European civil society could develop. That's the sore point. But this project does not have to fail on account of the multiplicity of languages, which is what the Federal Constitutional Court thought it was supposed to determine with its Maastricht verdict. In Scandinavian countries or in the Netherlands, the educational system already provides for a bilingual population. Why does English—as a common second native language—have to fail on account of the narcissism of big nations?

Q: You are once again deluding yourself about the amount of influence the media has on society.

Habermas: Well, the influence of the media! The desublimation of the sublime—a flop is a flop—also has something refreshing about it in an egalitarian way. But if everything turns into a *Harald Schmidt Show*, if everyone becomes a show host, and all that's left is show hosts talking to show hosts, then the world is going to develop Luhmannesque features. I do not think I'm deluding myself

about the state of a general public for which a commercialized mass media is calling the tune. A lot of people are trying to get to the bottom of this virtual reality. But in *Faktizitaet und Geltung*, I viewed this matter from a completely different perspective . . .

Q: . . . from the point of view of democratic sovereignty.

Habermas: Yes. For our constitution still expresses the idea of a democratic community's self-determination. The mere statement that all state power issues from the people doesn't say much about actual circumstances, but it's better than nothing. Citizens, for example, would not come out to vote if they did not hold on to the intuitive belief that established procedures still have something to do with classic notions of democratic self-determination. This raises the question whether there is a way of rendering this idea so that it can't be cynically emptied of its content and won't, at first glance, crumble in the face of complex social realities. In the normative scenario that I am suggesting here, communication through the mass media plays an important role. Without having to pay a lot of attention, an absent-minded and almost exclusively electronically-wired audience can be educated about all kinds of topics and contributions by the mass media. And this can occur in the context of the small or private sphere and the fleeting moments of everyday life. Then, people can take assenting or dissenting positions, which implicitly they continuously do anyway. In this way they are taking part not so much in the articulation, but in giving weight to competing public opinions. Public communication between informal opinion formation and institutionalized processes which develop an informed opinion—a general election or a cabinet meeting, for example—acts like a hinge, and that is why the discursive state of the general public is important.

Q: Not even public service television is discursive anymore.

Habermas: It's true, the political public is part of a broader cultural public, and today both are tapped into the tainted channels of commercial television. In a *run to the bottom*,

public service television is even trying to compete with the basest content and presentation styles of commercial programming. At least the public form of organization, which certainly has its own problems, is inspired by the thought that not all areas of social operation can be adapted to the marketplace. Culture, information, and critique rely on their own obstinate forms of communication. In any case, cultural communication itself should not fall victim to the imperatives of television ratings. But to whom am I telling that?

Q: That raises questions about the future of the democratic party system, which depends on an intact public. Aren't we experiencing the end of the democratic party system these years? Parties are acting less and less as the locus for exercising politics. At the same time, social milieus, which provided the connection to these party milieus, are breaking up.

Habermas: Political scientists have described the trends well. If you think back to Lazarsfeld's radio research during the early '40s, not all of them are completely new. But the way in which leading politicians are personalized and brought closer to the audience by the media has considerably heightened the plebiscitory element and weakened the influence of party organization. Even if the attempts of parties at persuasion did not evaporate into mere marketing, the outwardly directed public relations efforts would still overshadow the internal discourse of the constituent organizations.

On the other hand, one has to look at the younger generations. Today, the general population is more intelligent, certainly better educated, and in many ways more interested than before. Changes in the forms of political participation don't have to be harmful *per se*. Social counter-movements could develop, should political parties continue to become ever more nationalized, and commercialize their activities to an ever greater degree. The Greens have once again performed the classic transformation from a social movement to a party. But it

doesn't have to stay that way. Other initiatives remain at the countermovement stage and, like Greenpeace, sometimes gain worldwide influence.

Q: Suppose the democratic party system disintegrates, then the old and new publics would be forced to act. There would be movement. But in order to take advantage of the opportunity this would offer, the rules of the media game would have to be redefined, and the United States and its type of media democracy would not be a very good example to follow. How might the rules governing the media be redefined?

Habermas: That is a good question, for which I don't have an answer. I have not thought about it enough. However, here in Europe we are far from witnessing the end of the democratic party system. The personnel is still chosen and schooled by the parties. The degree of professionalism among our politicians is not even that bad. There will always have to be oddballs, but God save us from enigmatic figures like Berlusconi and Ross Perot who come out of nowhere, so to speak.

Q: One can easily agree that the structurally conservative Federal Republic has its own mental barriers. Is the Republic too attached to its past, to the rules of social equality? What ballast has to be shed?

Habermas: It might well be that the mentality of German society is a little too conservative after all of the turbulent changes which it has experienced this century. But I do have some reservations when it comes to talking about this alleged ballast of the welfare state, which the neo-liberals are railing against. In plain English, flexibility means stripping labor of its unique personal qualities and turning it into a simple commodity. Didn't Marx teach us not to confuse the two?

Of course there are mental hang-ups. In the moment of national unification, many are having trouble grasping the idea that the end of the nation-state is upon us. Others are

refusing to face the issue of the end of full employment and the question of redistributing the reduced amount of gainful employment. After capitalism has imposed itself worldwide as the form of production of social wealth, the old questions about distributive justice are reappearing—questions which are concerned with the mechanisms of gainful employment distribution.

Q: There are cynics who see it as the only duty of the state to provide the possibility of a “market-receptive” existence. What do you think of this new realism?

Habermas: I don’t know if by “inclusion,” Dahrendorf did not rather mean an equal entitlement to inclusion. You are right: today there rages a type of normative brainwashing, which touches on the universal foundations of the 200-year-old egalitarian self-image of modernity. In Germany, this is coming more from the conservative, rather than the liberal, side. We’ve always had a strong tradition of anthropological pessimism. This pessimism takes a broad historical survey of the hierarchical societies and fatal mentalities of kingdoms past and lectures us about the illusion of equality and false understanding of human nature, which this short epoch holds. This fits together nicely with a skepticism toward all attempts to regulate runaway markets. If one follows the neo-liberal worldview through to its logical conclusion, then one arrives at an understanding of why the individual, who is highly mobile, released into a network free of norms, and guided only by his or her own preferences, has a fatalistic view of the whole situation. It could be the secular equivalent of the religious fatalism of past civilizations.

Q: Yet, the praise which the entrepreneur receives proves its realism. “Generation Berlin” now stands tragically out in the open and feels solidarity only with itself. Maybe it is sensitive to the fact that, after all the exercises in individualization, there is no more civil society. Political existentialism seems more attractive than democratic experimentalism.

Habermas: My friend Herbert Marcuse, who would not even deny the Berlinian intonation in English, would have called

the circulating models for a “Generation Berlin,” “a bunch of crap.” A new generation or a new culture, which would actually be desirable for the capital city, can hardly be announced. What marks a new generation is that it produces something new—a design is not sufficient. It isn’t as if we don’t know what has to be done. The cultural critique is missing an effective new language—a language with which we can mercilessly take on the new phenomena in the way Adorno did in the early Federal Republic. Botho Strauss’s *Fehler des Kopisten* however merely reflects the weakened state of awareness of intellectuals, who once again want to drape themselves in the togas of “great spirits.”

You mention the emotions which express themselves in those attempts at self-definition and self-discovery. That is interesting. After all, in the course of the decades following the war the mood of young conservatives rose up and then burst like bubbles, mainly in biotopes like the feature pages of the *FAZ*. The resentment felt by our big intellectuals on the right, who saw themselves as the representatives of authentic German continuities, but once again did not amount to anything after 1945, has left unmistakable marks on the political intellectual history of the Federal Republic. In any case, what was fostered in those circles was the conviction that our culturally western orientation was estranging us from our innermost roots. This conviction, which was becoming virulent after 1989, expressed itself aggressively only once, when a “New Right” tried to give the nation back its “self-awareness.” But this attempt failed in 1995 with the debate over the meaning, which May 8, 1945, retrospectively takes on for us. Apparently, similarly twisted desires are now looking for other, less conspicuous channels. I can’t really judge that.

Q: In the end, Helmut Kohl made the impression as if he quickly wanted to drive the ghosts of the “Berlin Republic” out again, which his eager political planners had brought back. Berlin is Bonn. Was that due to a fear of his own daring?

Habermas: You should be glad that Schröder emphasized

the Bonn-Berlin continuity after the election.

Q: But things aren't that clear. The fronts have almost been reversed. The SPD discovers culture and is infatuated with the idea of the standard-setting capital, which approaches an imitated city palace, but at the same time it rejects the construction of the Holocaust memorial. Why is culture making a career for itself?

Habermas: It is hard to tell what Schröder's PR gag will be good for. Maybe it will not actually do any harm. When you are in a tight spot domestically, cheap and media-effective political moves are popular. I'm afraid that, just as Blair has discovered constitutional reform, Schröder has discovered culture. But it is easy to slip up, as your examples demonstrate. Does one really want to put the fate of a civilized country's rich cultural infrastructure in the hands of sponsors? A closer look at the example of the United States is quite sobering. And as far as the way in which German—historically largely regional—culture is being represented abroad is concerned, the Goethe institutes are doing quite a good job.

Q: Time and time again, there is criticism about the Republic opening up culturally. There is an apprehension, for example, that in philosophy, continental and German traditions could fall victim to Anglo-Saxon themes and views. Can you understand this concern?

Habermas: Initiated by way of emigration, the close connection to Anglo-Saxon philosophy has opened up and immensely enriched postwar philosophy in Germany. As the pacesetter role of my friend Karl-Otto Apel demonstrates, the energetic appropriation of analytic philosophy and American pragmatism has created new momentum without harming the German tradition substantively. The exchange even is occurring in both directions. Richard Rorty's student Bob Brandom currently is in the process of cracking open the Hegelian safe through the use of analytic tools. And surely Rorty himself is a brilliant analytic philosopher. But his international standing is due to a synthetic style of

resorting to motives and relationships, which he owes to pragmatism's Hegelian background.

Q: In your opinion, which traditions of the Federal Republic are essential—if you want to take the turnaround of the “Berlin Republic” upon yourself?

Habermas: I believe we all want to live in a civilized country, which displays a cosmopolitan openness and cooperatively, yet cautiously inserts itself into the circle of nations. We all want to live among people who are accustomed to respecting the peculiarity of what is foreign, the autonomy of what is unique, as well as regional, ethnic, and religious diversities. Even the new Republic would do well to remember the role which Germany has played in the catastrophes of the 20th century, but also to keep in mind the few moments of emancipation and achievement of which we can be proud. In a quite unoriginal way, I would wish to see a disposition, which is suspicious of lofty and profound rhetoric; one that also rejects attempts to aestheticize the political and yet watches for that which borders on trivializing the integrity and obstinacy of intellectual creations.

**Translated by Brian Graf, Rutgers University. This interview originally appeared in Die Zeit, no. 42 (October 8, 1998): pp. 12, 14-15.*

Fiction

The Tricky Business of Image Making

by

Matthew J. Perini

Tomorrow is another interview. Phoenix Office Systems. Successful applicants will have blahblahblah, whatever successful applicants will have.

“You’ll be fine, honey,” my mother says. Technically, she is outside my bedroom but her head peeks in.

“You’re bright and energetic. Trust me, they’ll be banging down the door for you.

Ah, if only my mother were the one to conduct the interview. Or better yet, my sister Shirley, who is the one person in the world who actually looks up to me. Then it would just be, “Of course you can have the job, Jakey, as long as you tell me a story.” Then this waste of time in brushing up on the corporate profile and the hard, perpetual lump in my throat—the lump that makes me wish I could swallow my tongue and rub it into submission with the warm tip—then both—the self-sycophantic corporate literature (or at least my having to read it) and this awful lump would vanish and reappear on someone else’s bed, in someone else’s throat.

My mother and I exchange good-nights, leaving me to read the words in the little black box for only the second time:

Account Executives

Position requires real go-getters.

Great opportunity with dynamic and
growing company.

Must be willing to travel, possibly relocate.

Hard work, competitive atmosphere.

Chance for big \$\$.

Fax resume and cover letter to:

B. Majkowski (113) 465-2232

Already, I feel in-corp-o-rat-ed: anxious and bored at the same time. Receiving, down in Accounts Receivable, an enema with that inscrutable stream of numbers that flows along the bottom of the cable news channels and not feeling a damn thing. I hear myself saying things like *I really love to liaise with clients* and *I have a lot of stick-to-it-ive-ness* because someone in the office who makes \$175,000 a year said it, and I thought it sounded cool. But always anxious. Always the lump.

All right, enough. I imagine the interview:

“I’ve read your resume, Mr. Brentano. If we give you this job, this career opportunity, what we’ll basically be doing is giving you a shovel and a mule. We’ll say, ‘There’s California. Now go and find the gold.’ This job is about finding the gold. So tell me, Jacob, why should we hire you?” The lurch forward. “Sell yourself.”

I’m afraid of what I’ve conjured: an interviewer who wants to eliminate the comfort of form, who wants to see if I’m enough of a rugged individualist to chart my own course out of this interview and into the big leagues (I’ll bet he says that), who will take great pleasure in watching the little, wet-behind-the-ears college kid tie himself up in a tangle of confusion and catchwords as I remember at every fifth word or so what I think he wants to hear. *Um I know what hard work is all about, my resume and academic record shows that. Um, I have a great ability to communicate with all kinds of people, especially, you know, clients. Like in your company literature which emphasizes reliability. Reliable, that’s me. Hard working and reliable. When I was at The Art of*

Closing the Deal shines down on us like a religious icon from a steel gray bookcase.

I want to shout, "Do we need to be so obvious about what's really going on here?" Timeshares in Italy sell themselves. Hondas sell themselves. *Um, I get good mileage, I'm relatively inexpensive compared to other models, and you'll be able to run me into the ground.*

My interviewer eyes me up like a package of reduced meat, the excess blood squishing beneath the plastic wrap. "Maybe, Jacob, or can I just call you boy? Maybe boy, you're just a hypersensitive, groveling little wimp who's out here to make mommy happy. You think I don't see it? Maybe your precious little ethical dilemmas are there to hide your own lack of *cojones*. What we big shots in the corporate world call a waste of sperm. This is a tricky business, boy, and I sure as hell don't need you taking up my time while there's money to be made. You think I'd trust you to sell anything of mine?"

Good lord, if there were no such thing as selling, the man's vocal cords (and now I realize the testicles as well) would shrivel up, become vestigial.

I do see what's happening. He's testing my limits, finding the exact point at which I will abandon everything I claim to hold dear. Hold out. Hold out. "But I maintained a 3.8 grade point average at (but now instead of sounding romantically blue-collarish as it always had before, it sounds like a cheap state school; as I say it, it even sounds second rate to me, more like a correctional facility than a university) Raritan State.

"Hah!" he laughs as he looks at my resume. "German and English Literature? *That's* practical. Jesus, why do they keep sending me these people? Boy is too good for you. I'll call you faggot." He knows he has me.

"But maybe I'm like this for a reason. Maybe I can fix whatever's wrong if I just follow you around and see firsthand how you apply your American Business Creed. See how it works. Maybe I can absorb just enough of your greatness to effect my cleansing, no better, my rebirth.

Rebirth, get it? Phoenix Office Sys—ah, forget that literary shit, that's the old me. The new me says give me some tips on the swagger. The new me wants to know how I can be just like--

“People like you can never be like people like me.” And before I know what hit me, he's kicking me in the ribs with shiny black shoes that are harder than I would have imagined. Probably, he gets custom ass-kicking shoes made for wimps like me, probably has a direct line right to a fellow hard ass in Mexico or Taiwan. I fall into a tight, defensive crouch, bleating “Mama! Mama!” in a high-pitched girly shriek. I am afraid of being booted right through the window, which in true corporate-park style runs ceiling to floor. Luckily, his phone rings before the strength of the glass can be tested with my back.

And with that I leave whimpering on all fours.

Balls, I convince myself, only get you so far. OK, they'll usually get you what you want, but is that always good? Too much balls and you can't ever be truly happy, you know smell the flowers and all that. Too much and you'll be nothing more than a corporate conquistador who kicks milksops like me around, nearly out of windows. Admittedly, this is an inconsequential, unsatisfying, particularly intesticular kind of consolation. So, as I evolve into an upright creature somewhere between the copy machine and the elevator, I decide to take action. I go back and start to make an enlarged copy of my bare ass. I know it's trite, but it just seems so liberating to be plopped down on the ImageMaker 4000, Phoenix's workhorse model, the crown jewel of their line. The problem is, the secretary catches me and starts yelling “Mr. Majkowski! Mr. Majkowski! he's, he's. . .” so I don't get to sign it and slip it under the door of B. (for Ballsy?) Majkowski. The secretary, middle-aged and every bit a gossipy, blue-dressed cliché, looks at me with such repulsion that it's hard not to judge myself. Anyway, I get out and pull my pants up in the elevator. People snicker.

Coming back to a reality of business literature spread across

my bed, I realize it would be damn near impossible to have strayed much further from Tip #3 (behind “Prepare, Prepare, Prepare” and “Get a Good Night’s Sleep”) in *How to Knock ‘Em Dead at Interviews*, which states, “Visualize Success.”

Then there’s tip #4, which is not even a tip. It says, “You’re Worth More Than You Think.” Does this mean my mother’s right about me after all? Is it possible that her bias isn’t some kind of maternal dementia? Maybe I am worth a shot. Maybe in six months time I’ll be liaising with the best of them. Maybe I’ll be awarded salesperson of the month for exhibiting heretofore unknown levels of stick-to-it-ive-ness without thinking twice about it. Maybe no more lump.

Out of nowhere, my sister walks in. She is five years old and wants what she always wants, namely, me to tell her a story. “Please, please, please, please, please, please, *please!*” she begs as she lumbers onto my bed and thrusts her face into the cold shaft of light from a lamp suspended by a clamp—a leftover from college. “Please, please, please. Please, Jakey!” This lamp provides the only light in the house at 12:21.

“Shouldn’t you be asleep?”

“Nah. I’m awake.” She points to a picture of a copy machine. “What’s this?”

“That’s a copy machine, silly.”

“What’s a copy machine?” She makes a face like she has just swallowed something our mother has worked for an hour to get her to eat--a stuffed pepper maybe--in exchange for the promise of chocolate and marshmallow ice cream.

“Say you need to give one of your drawings to mommy, but you want to give one to daddy too. You put it in the copy machine and it copies it.”

“You mean it draws the whole picture over again?”

“Yep. You start with one picture and you get two. Isn’t that neat?”

“Yeah. That’s neat.” Shirley waits to make sure I’m done.
“Jake?”

“What?”

“Don’t leave us.”

I have to think about this. “I promise that if I go, I’ll come back again as soon as I can.

Shirley is silent. I am glad she is not old enough to shoot back, “Cut the equivocation bullshit and just admit you’re leaving. Hell, for a long time. Maybe for good. And it’s because you don’t care about anything. Because you have no idea what you want. You’ll just leave. Like that. Like nothing. Leave me, your adorable little sister, me, leave me. For what? Again: For what? A career? A job? An opportunity? A laptop and a cell phone so you’re never, ever completely away from work? For what, Jake? A chance to buy yourself some nice suits and a hurried walk under a neat little folding umbrella? Where might you go? Do you even know that? Did they tell you that? Where? Why?”

“OK. Now tell me a story.”

“How’s this: I get a job I believe in, make good money with no stress, get married, you move in with us, and we all watch cartoons every Saturday morning.”

“No, silly, that’s not a real one. I want a *real* story, not a make-believe one.” She grabs for a book on my floor. “How about this one?” It is *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, also a college remnant, one I still like to agonize to (“Everything conspires against me!”).

I begin, only half certain how to contort a story about unrequited love, chronic despair, and twenty-something suicide to meet her expectations. “It’s about a young man.

“You mean a boy?”

“Yeah, it’s about a boy who’s in love with a girl. The boy really wants to marry the girl. The boy’s name is VAIR-TER.

Can you say that?"

"VAIR-TER."

"And the girl's name is SHAR-**LOT**-TA."

"SHAR-**LOT**-TA." Shirley blinks hard and raises her nose as if she can sense the aristocracy lurking behind the names.

"But Werther can't marry Charlotte because of a man named Albert."

"Is Albert the bad man? Like Stromboli?"

"Yep. Albert's the bad man. Like Stromboli." Although it does not say so anywhere on my resume, I'm fully fluent in *Pinocchio*. "Werther and Charlotte fall in love. They do all the things people in love are supposed to do: they dance, they read together, they send each other letters."

"They're in love, like mommy and daddy?"

"Yes, just like mommy and daddy." The thought of my parents dancing or reading together seems unbearably sad.

"Then what happens? Then what happens?"

"They all get together. They have a big party and they sit down and they talk about their problems. About their problems with each other and all their problems. They just sit and talk about them. And laugh. And Albert hugs Werther. And Werther hugs Albert. And Charlotte hugs both of them and they all dance together. And they sing. They hold hands and sing like you and mommy sing in church. And they all live together and Werther doesn't have to blow his brains. . . and they all live happily ever after."

"That's a nice story," Shirley tells me as she slips out of the light. "That's a nice story," she repeats. "So don't cry."

Experiencing Working-Class Poverty:

A Review of Barbara Ehrenreich's *Nickel and Dimed* and Ben Cheever's *Selling Ben Cheever*

by

Matthew J. Perini

A current television ad for MasterCard shows a collection of hiply-dressed teenagers and twenty-somethings recalling their least favorite summer jobs. As the camera cuts to a typically boring episode from the workday of a gardener or a factory worker or an assistant janitor, we also see how much each job pays: \$5.15 an hour, \$5.40 an hour, \$6.10 an hour. The implication of the commercial is that no one mops floors or counts bottles on assembly lines for a living. Jobs like these are for summers only, part of the growing pains of self-development. After all, upward mobility is practically an American birthright, and once they get past such humorously ignoble beginnings, these kids will go on to become the doctors or lawyers or businesspeople they were meant to become. Surely, people don't get stuck in jobs like these, trying to eke out the rent and feed and clothe a family while making \$6.00 an hour.

Yet the hard facts of the U.S economy, which are exposed in two recent books, Ben Cheever's *Selling Ben Cheever: Back to Square One in a Service Economy* (Bloomsbury) and Barbara Ehrenreich's *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America* (Metropolitan Books), tell a markedly different story. Most working Americans are neither professionals nor managers. Most are hourly workers, and if you adjust for inflation, you'll find that a majority have incomes that are lower now than they were in 1973. In 1999, in the midst of unprecedented economic growth, 28.5 million workers made less than eight dollars an hour. Even workers in higher-paying jobs are not immune to the trials of low-income work.

Why? Because job security—once a selling point of corporate careers--has become, in Cheever's words "a fixture of the past" as proven by the forty three million Americans who have fallen victim to downsizing since 1979.

Although *Selling Ben Cheever* and *Nickel and Dimed* contain their share of sobering data, neither book is a cold recitation of facts. The main reason is that both books come from gifted writers who understand that the best medium for social criticism is a compelling narrative and that economics has more to do with people than with trends. As a result, both Cheever and Ehrenreich succeed in revealing, through personal experience rather than statistics, the dirtiest secrets of the world's strongest economy.

The overriding premise of *Selling Ben Cheever* is that every year, through corporate downsizing, millions of Americans are forced to start again in new jobs for significantly less pay. After failing to sell his third novel in 1995, Cheever became one of them: "I was a stranger, a foreigner in the service economy." In documenting his work life over the next several years, Cheever takes us through the stress of returning to the entry-level workplace: the seemingly futile want-ad searches and introductory phone calls, the awkward one-on-one interviews and the campy group interviews, the notion of self-determination pushed like a religion onto sales trainees, the unsavory routines of hourly wage-earning. Taking work as a Burns Security Guard, a Comp USA and Nobody Beats the Wiz salesman, a Cosi sandwich maker, a Borders book clerk, and a car salesman in the GM department of a local auto mall, Cheever realizes almost immediately that his employment history as a published novelist and senior editor at *Reader's Digest* is of little interest to prospective employers. Employers, it turns out, are interested primarily in the clarity of his urine and his willingness to cover the hours no one else wants. It is this sinking feeling of being nobody that Cheever captures so well, In flares of irony and indignation, often mixed together into one, increasingly insecure voice: "At six A.M. I went home. Nobody called to say, 'The place was robbed, dummy. What were you doing out there, reading Pascal's *Pensées*?' Nobody called to

say, 'You did good.' Nobody called at all."

The other important point to be made about *Selling Ben Cheever* is this: whether you're returning to it or have been in the thick of it for twenty years, the entry-level workplace is a rough and humbling world. It takes a thick skin and a decided tolerance for tension, public embarrassment, numbered lists of rules, and harassment at the hands of managers who only have bigger guns pointed at their heads. Yet, for all of this, the pay is ridiculously low, as low as \$5.15 in Manhattan (what delivery workers made at Cosi Sandwich Bar in October 1999). Not that Cheever's experiences are all bad. He learns to enjoy selling cars for instance, even if the promise of a \$40,000 salary—by far the highest offer he received—turns out to be a scam based on sales projections that conveniently double the typical monthly figures. But as we share in his small triumphs, we cannot forget that money is not an issue for Cheever, who is never compelled to try living on his earnings. Unlike his coworkers, he is free to chronicle the experience of low-paying work from a position of financial comfort, without having to confront the life-and-death struggle of having to make ends meet. As to how others do it, Cheever is baffled: "If you're going ask me how anybody can live on seven dollars an hour, then I'd have to tell you I have no idea.

Enter Barbara Ehrenreich, who places this life-and-death struggle, breezed over by Cheever, at the heart of *Nickel and Dimed*. Like Cheever, Ehrenreich accepts a series of low-paying jobs, including waitress, hotel cleaning lady, housemaid, and Wal-Mart retail clerk (or, in Wal-Martese, "associate," which goes along with "servant leaders" for managers and "guests" for customers). Unlike Cheever, however, Ehrenreich attempts to authenticate the experience by living in "economy" housing, using only her wages to support herself, and presenting herself to potential employers as an inexperienced single mother re-entering the job market after years of unemployment—exactly the same situation many women found themselves in under the policies of welfare reform. What Ehrenreich discovers during her experiment in survival is that the self-congratulatory

rhetoric of welfare reform, which regards any kind of paying work as both economic and human growth, is nothing short of a charade played at the expense of millions of needy--and hard-working--Americans. Worse, with its broad, bipartisan backing, few voices are willing to speak out against welfare reform and its tragic effects on America's poor.

The main reason for the failure of welfare reform lies in the disparity between wages and the cost of housing. What is especially ironic here is that in 1998, when Ehrenreich conducted her experiment, it was prosperity itself that exacerbated this imbalance. In direct opposition to the dictum "A rising tide lifts all boats," often used to defend economic policies that favor the affluent, Ehrenreich shows that a rising tide will lift some boats very high, but will also consume most of the available water. Rather than create trickle-down prosperity, the boom of the late 1990s actually cost America's poor by accelerating a trend begun in the early 1980s of allotting fewer and fewer budget dollars to low-income housing and public rental subsidies.

At the same time that the pool of affordable housing shrunk in response to increased productivity and profitability, wages, which theoretically should rise relative to these same forces, remained flat. Thus pricier housing matched with stagnant income—the kiss of death for hourly wage earners. For millions of Americans, the result of this situation is life pushed to the brink of homelessness and starvation. It is worth noting that even with an apparent downturn in economic growth (and especially with funds already earmarked for a stimulus package and corporate tax relief), the general problem posed by free-market housing remains the same. As Ehrenreich succinctly puts it, "When the rich and the poor compete for housing on the open market, the poor don't stand a chance.

Nickel and Dimed is as strong a retort as can be made to the smug, armchair economists who complain about the free-riding poor sucking up their hard-earned tax dollars. "There are no secret economies that nourish the poor; on the contrary, there are host of special costs" Ehrenreich writes,

and *Nickel and Dimed* demonstrates just how costly it is to be poor. Take housing, for example. Securing an apartment requires two months rent in advance, which, on six to seven dollars an hour and without the subsidies routinely provided to homeowners, is simply too tall an order for many hourly workers. Consequently “starter” hotels that charge by the week become long-term rent traps, where price gouging is standard practice and where workers can look forward to coming home to cramped spaces without locks or window screens or kitchens (meaning more money spent on prepared food). More comfortable and more reasonably priced living options tend to be between thirty and fifty minutes away from the workplace, thereby increasing gas and car expenses and consuming valuable time that could be applied to a second job—practically a necessity if you expect to survive without help from another wage-earner. Sadly, but not surprisingly, Ehrenreich encounters waitresses who solve the housing problem by sleeping in their cars, cleaning ladies who save money for rent by eating old hot dog rolls for lunch, and housemaids who subsist on ounce-sized bags of Doritos.

Then there’s the issue of health care. Meager or nonexistent plans render medical attention and prescription drugs too expensive for most low-wage workers. Hence, one waitress starts limping but is powerless to find out what’s gone wrong with her body, and another suffers from daily migraine headaches because she can no longer pay for her estrogen pills; hence, the boyfriend-roofer who loses his job after missing too much time because the antibiotics that would have prevented serious infection in his foot were simply not affordable.

In the workplace, management by stress rules the day. Pain and exhaustion and constant motion mark the different jobs, as do refusals to pay overtime and managers with little tolerance for what Wal-Mart calls “time theft” and which means “Doing anything other than working during company time, anything at all.” In some jobs, there are injunctions against going to the bathroom and drinking water. Meanwhile, potential labor movements are snuffed out not

only with warnings and threats, but also, as in the case of Wal-Mart, through elaborate smear campaigns that paint labor leaders as slick opportunists looking only to collect dues for organizations that have outlived their usefulness. If you get sick, you're generally asked to "work through it," as one manager repeats daily to the maids who work under him; they listen for fear of being penalized or fired and because they know that getting sick is too expensive a luxury for them to bear.

Everything, it seems in the world of low-wage work, comes at a cost. Even getting free assistance has a price attached, as Ehrenreich learns after a tortuous bureaucratic runaround yields nothing but a few processed and canned food items: "Bottom line: \$7.02 worth of food acquired in seventy minutes of calling and driving, minus \$2.80 for the phone calls."

There is through all of this, Ehrenreich's characteristic feistiness of spirit and hard-hitting sense of humor. And as we witness Ehrenreich's transformation from academic celebrity to exhausted wage earner at the edge of solvency, we are made to see, through the sharpness of her prose, the staggering distance between classes in America. For example:

But as the days go by, my old life is beginning to look exceedingly strange. The e-mails and phone messages addressed to my former self come from a distant race of people with exotic concerns and far too much time on their hands. The neighborly market I used to cruise for produce now looks forbiddingly like a Manhattan yuppie emporium. And when I sit down one morning in my real home to pay bills from my past life, I am dazzled by the two- and three-figure sums owed to outfits like Club Body Tech and Amazon.com.

The problems of poverty and class in America are serious ones. But they are problems that a mature democracy and an economic juggernaut cannot turn a deaf ear towards. When we drift across passages like the one above, there

should be no doubt that Ehrenreich is calling on us to start making the proper noise.

Review: The Arcades Project

by Walter Benjamin

Reviewed by: Paul Lucas

For many, Paris has been more than a city or urban center, it has been an experience all its own. Locked within its streets and circuitous walkways, one encounters the most variegated and organic city plan imaginable. Parks, monuments, shops and dwellings all conspire to produce the experience which is Paris, its essence never wholly grasped and its effect immediate yet infinitely sustained.

Like many other great cities, fashion has come and gone and this frequently manifests itself in architecture and styles of life. The Parisian arcades (*les passages*) were such a passing fashion, culturally as well as architecturally. Emerging first in the decades after 1822, these arcades were enclosed streets with glass ceilings ribbed with iron-work and lined with the storefronts of shops and vendors of all types. They were the forerunners of the great department stores of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and, therefore, the ultimate precursor to the shopping malls of today.

When Walter Benjamin, the now-revered cultural critic and philosopher, chose the arcades as a project which would, in his eyes, illuminate the dialectics of modern bourgeois culture, few were intensely interested. Nonetheless, the translation and publication of his Arcades Project (*Passagen-Werk*) has been long in coming and is a work difficult to assimilate and understand. It spent years hidden in the *Bibliothèque Nationale de France* where it was housed until its publication in 1982 in German. Hints of its existence were first intimated by the German philosopher, and former friend of Benjamin, T. W. Adorno in an essay published in 1950. In an age of hyper-academic, and dense postmodern rhetoric,

much of Benjamin's magnum opus may strike one as excessively opaque and impenetrable in the modern style, but it is more a work-in-progress which needs to be elucidated before it can be read which requires entry into a truly unique mind.

Benjamin, who in 1940 committed suicide while attempting to flee the Nazis in Spain, began research on the project in 1927 and continued work on it until his death. At that time, his inquiry into the arcades was for a short magazine article. It quickly grew into a manuscript of notes, reflections and quotes of over 900 pages in length. For Benjamin, the arcades were more than manifestations of fashion and the evolution of city life in the nineteenth century. Rather, the arcades are that place by which modern culture is defined. History is not a collection of dead events which remain stagnant in the past. All past events possess a "now-time" (*Jetztzeit*) out of which the present eternally feeds and out of which it constructs itself. We define our present by the forms of the past, and our cultural imprisonment and alienation is also carried from epoch to epoch until it is smashed by critique.

Thus, to penetrate the essence of the arcades, their character, *raison d'être*, and their cultural implications, is to free the present from the past. The world of buying and selling and commodification first root themselves culturally on a large scale in the arcades, and it is this characteristic of modern culture which Benjamin saw as problematic. Stemming from his Marxian view of culture, he saw the arcades as the beginning of cultural alienation where exchange value begins to permanently replace use value. The result was, what Benjamin calls, *phantasmagoria* or *Blendwerk* which is an image which deceives the viewer into perceiving the commodity as a product of nature and, therefore, into seeing capitalism as natural thereby obfuscating the link between genuine need and the fetishized desire for an object.

Breaking the grip of the past would therefore bring about the

messianic redemption of the present. For Benjamin, the ideological cover which capitalism had created through commodification concealed a deeper truth, a “primal history” (*Urgeschichte*), a term he derived from Goethe, which was the collective memory—embedded in society’s collective unconscious—of a classless society, without divisions and completely unalienated. Such was the purpose of the Arcades Project: to free humanity from the constraints of historical time and memory.

The manner in which this was executed, however, is a different matter. Benjamin wanted to let the actual representations of Parisian life in the arcades speak for themselves and reveal their inner meanings on their own. His commentary and critique would creep to the background, occupying the very margins of the text. This dialectical method was wholly his own, and Benjamin sought to bring it about through literary means. By juxtaposing various quotes and passages of descriptions of everyday life in Paris and within the arcades, Benjamin hoped to “discover in the analysis of the small individual moment the crystal of the total event.”

These were collected in a series of convolutes (*Konvoluten*), or distinct bundles of quotes and passages, which examine, as if it were a roving camera, the various pores of the arcades and the city which surrounds them: sales clerks, fashion, the collector, the streets of Paris, photography, lithography, the Seine, gambling, prostitution, boredom. There are also sections on Marx, the stock exchange, Baudelaire, and the theory of knowledge and progress. For Benjamin, the reality of what he termed “the eternal return of the same” meant that all these subjects needed to be broken from the cycle of repetition which would make each epoch endure them again and again albeit in different guises and forms.

Benjamin’s entire project, although never completed, seems initially more tempting as an idea than as a literal reality. It survives more as a testament to Benjamin’s complex philosophical method of “seeing” than to any sociological

analysis of the origins of modernity. But it is precisely here that its power can be fully seen. For, even within the highest moments of modernity we can still, today, glimpse its limits. And it is here that Benjamin's insights seem even more prophetic, ever more telling. As long as the modern world exists without transformation, it would seem that Benjamin's multitude of insights are not only relevant, but even prophetic.

Review: *The New Left: A History*

by William O'Neill

Reviewed by: Scott A. Lamb

The popular understanding of the sixties by people of Generation X (of which I am a member) is one of peace and free love, the Vietnam Conflict and civil rights. It is generally understood through the Beatles, the Doors and Woodstock, through Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X and the Kennedys and through retro fashions that popular culture has recycled. However, seldom is the politics of the late 60s deeply explored. We may know the names of Johnson and Nixon, the Great Society and the War on Poverty, the Silent Majority and the Tet Offensive, but we have little understanding of the actuality of the time period. William L. O'Neill helps us understand this era in *The New Left: A History* by focusing on "The Movement," the radical initiative of university students. It is an eye-opening account. While O'Neill is at times sarcastic in his presentation, and his conclusions are to some degree right of center (indicating an anti-left bias), his presentation of the New Left's emergence and disintegration is right on target. However, his explanation of the reemergence of a decentralized yet autocratic Academic Left turns an otherwise straightforward history into a political statement in line with the New Democrats and the Washington Consensus.

O'Neill splits his account into five chapters. First, he writes of the emergence of the New Left embodied by the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). Tom Hayden is the most prominent leader of this group and the writer of its "Port Huron Statement." The SDS represented the small yet growing project of the New Left to push for participatory democracy. However, as time marched on the lack of a coherent mission and principles would drown the SDS in a quagmire of consensus building. Being completely open to

membership and having no formal organization, the SDS became essentially anarchic. This left the SDS open to being conquered. The Progressive Labor Party (PL) signed up and took over.

Furthermore, the SDS's original adherence to the civil rights movement's non-violent tactics was subverted and turned toward more overt revolutionary violence. Demonstrations turned to chaotic riots. Hayden and others visited Hanoi to depict socialist superiority while ignoring its military oppression. The enormous march on the Pentagon closes out the chapter. While we typically recall the flower power of this event—when a young long hair inserts a flower into the barrel of a soldier's rifle—the event also incorporated Abbie Hoffman's stuntsmanship of spiritual chanting with the goal of levitating the Pentagon, and ended with an attack on protestors by the military

Next we get the increasingly disturbing account of violence that surrounded the New Left and its inability to maintain any solidarity, cohesion or direction. Beginning with the occupation of Columbia University's administration building a split SDS chapter accomplished little beyond its push for laid-back classes, i.e. less rigorous scholarship. Outside the college campus, the riots in Chicago outside the Democratic National Convention (DNC) are highlighted. Tom Hayden and other New Leftists had organized the initial demonstrations but had little control over the ultimate outcome.

Further fragmentation continued as the SDS, now controlled in large measure by the PL, could not come to consensus on most everything. The emergence of the openly violent Weathermen, which separated into cells like most organized terrorist organizations do, further demonstrated the marginalization and disintegration of the New Left. The SDS, for all intents and purposes, folds at its 1969 convention. O'Neill concludes this section with the statistics of demonstrations and consequent violence and the reactionary trend of mainstream politics toward the right mainly through the elected Republican administration of Richard Nixon. O'Neill convincingly argues that it is Nixon who ended the

war in Vietnam, not the protestors inspired by the New Left.

O'Neill's account of the flamboyant antics of the Yippies and Hippies, while a humorous account, is a correlative illustration of how the New Left made itself increasingly irrelevant over time. The main actors were Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin. O'Neill correctly shows that while at first their pranks and showmanship were shocking, their lack of coherence in stating any real message would be their ultimate undoing. Abbie Hoffman, the most famous of the theatrical Yippies, helped organize the previously mentioned demonstrations at the Pentagon and the DNC as well as other enigmatic happenings such as the dropping of dollar bills on the stock market trading floor. Jerry Rubin made his statements when he was subpoenaed to appear before the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). While he never actually testified (to his disappointment) it was widely publicized that for the first hearing he dressed up as a Revolutionary War soldier and at the next showed up in an amalgamation of clothing easily identified with various international revolutionary movements. Other members of the so-called Chicago Seven were also tried for inciting the riots at the 1968 DNC, some of whom were convicted. All convictions were subsequently reversed on appeal.

O'Neill then turns to the later history of those associated with the New Left Movement: the terrorist group Weathermen Underground, Timothy Leary, Abbie Hoffman's depression and suicide, Jerry Rubin's turn to business and Tom Hayden's career as a California state politician. O'Neill then outlines the reason for the New Left's failure, which at this point is quite evident to the reader. They were unorganized, unprincipled students who alienated the majority of Americans. Leadership changed hands so frequently due to the fact that students are usually in school for only a few short years, i.e. they graduate or drop out. Reaction to the radical nature of the New Left pushed many Americans toward the Right to counter what they saw as the undoing of American values and institutions. Furthermore, and perhaps most importantly, the SDS and other New Left organizations disintegrated because of their insistence on the unrealizable

goal of consensus building which inevitably led to factionalization and a turn to violence. Having left the model of the Civil rights movement, the New Left lost the tools which had been proven effective: economic boycott and non-violent (and morally-ascendant) demonstration

Finally, O'Neill's analysis of the Academic Left, while having many good examples of particularist scholarship and poor administration, is the weakest part of the book. O'Neill's political position against leftist ideas in general is fully revealed as he uses carefully chosen examples to make the case that there is an entrenched leftist ideology in the American university system. The Academic Left's alleged agenda for political correctness, multiculturalism, postmodernism, affirmative action and an end to sexual harassment are each in turn is given short shrift with examples of how each has turned to authoritarian means and/or self-serving ends to promote the goals of a transformed New Left. Indeed, the examples O'Neill presents are often reprehensible and irresponsible: when the freedom of speech is unconstitutionally abridged through the enforcement of speech codes; when sexual harassment policies are wielded as a weapon rather than as a principle; when Afrocentrism introduces absurd fictional accounts into the curriculum of history; when particularism and relativism in the humanities replaces the search for meaning with seemingly infinite examples of how rich white men have subjugated all other.

It would be a mistake to characterize all of secondary education in this light. Certainly the left (which is mostly contained within the universities) has pushed an agenda, as all interests do. However, it must be recognized is that behind political correctness is a desire for sensitivity and civility. Behind multiculturalism is the desire for a recognition of, and a respect for, diversity. Behind postmodernism is a search for the hidden histories of minorities and women, which are so often glossed over. One need not explain the purpose behind the desire to end sexual harassment.

Of special interest is O'Neill's commentary on the role of affirmative action within the university system. His criticism, which appears well documented, misses on two accounts. Firstly, it does not take into account affirmative action as a whole, within the university and the post-university working world. It simply focuses on admissions to the university. Perhaps this can be overlooked since he is dealing with the *Academic Left*. Secondly, his criticism is off target because his solution to the "problem" of affirmative action is to replace it with another form that could just as easily be called "affirmative action." *He* just doesn't call it that.

Case in point: as O'Neill explains that with the passage of the Proposition 209 referendum, the California State University system was forced to abandon affirmative action admissions. However, the admissions application process allows for special consideration due to economic hardship. Is this not another version of affirmative action? Another case in point: O'Neill highlights Texas's legislation called the "Ten Percent Solution" by which anyone who graduates in the top ten percent of his or her high school class is admitted to the public universities of the state. Is this not another version of affirmative action? Both the California and Texas examples are alternative versions of affirmative action without the controversial label. Also, it must be noted that O'Neill *does* correctly point out the elementary problem with affirmative action, which is that it can never work effectively until primary education adequately prepares *all* students for higher education. Statistics on the high fail-out rates of minority students can easily be understood when one realizes that students without the proper tools will have a harder time because of their need to play catch-up on the fundamentals they should have already been taught.

Furthermore, a study by Harry Holzer of Georgetown University and David Neumark of Michigan State University recently highlighted in a recent issue of the *Journal of Economic Literature* found that the claim that affirmative action is largely ineffective is inaccurate. The study incorporated both a review of more than 200 other scientific studies and interviews with thousands of supervisors. The

final analysis showed that both minorities and women, having benefited from affirmative action in the job market and university admissions did not end up hurting either the economy or the academy. Rather, evidence only showed a change in the ability for women and minorities to have new opportunities, a vindication of affirmative action's ability to create positive social change.

O'Neill undoubtedly helps us understand why and how the New Left significantly handicapped the left as a whole. In today's popular consciousness all leftists are directly associated with the violence and license-without-responsibility that the New Left of the late 1960s all too often embodied. Also, the liberal Democratic Party has been falsely associated with the "Movement" by those on the right for their own political purposes. The resultant popular reactionary shift to the right thus ushered Nixon into the White House. The New Democrats of late are further examples of this shift. For example, President Bill Clinton's support of conservative welfare reform legislation in 1996 a few months before his re-election gutted and effectively began the dismantling of one of the only real social supports for the poor and disenfranchised, exemplifying the Democratic Party's populist response. Actual constructive change was not even discussed for fear of alienating voters.

Yet it must be argued today that the shift to the right should inform critical thought and humanistic tendencies toward an enlightened, principled, yet pragmatic and socialistic, constitutional, democratic left to counter the corporate-capitalistic, religious, technocratic, hegemonic right. The reemergence of valid and useful ideas on the left is now dependent upon the healing of the fractures caused by the Academic and Activist particularist ideologies that are currently at odds with each other. The Left needs to embrace such universalist principles as democratic participation, human rights and the integrity of the community without infringing upon these same principles in practice. The sundering of the left by some on the left does not imply a need to shift to the right but the need to rework organization and ideas. Thus, the spirit and validity of the left is, in the

final analysis, ignored by O'Neill to further the ideas that today are associated with the Washington Consensus.

Wild Man: The Life and Times of Daniel Ellsberg

by Tom Wells

Reviewed by: Kurt Jacobsen

Here is a hefty tome that only a devout national security operative could love. Well, RAND Corporation shrinks also might enjoy it inasmuch as the author endorses their assessments of legendary whistleblower Daniel Ellsberg not only before he leaked the Pentagon Papers—the Defense Department's secret history of the deliberate plunge into Vietnam and deception of the American people—in June 1971, but afterward too when Nixon's plumbers urged them to dig for dirt.

Tom Wells, author of a fine study of Vietnam era dissent, unaccountably abandons his usual acuity to produce an uninhibited hatchet job. The prickly subject and likewise prickly biographer clearly did not click, so Wells winds up dignifying virtually every smear about Ellsberg that he hears. Ellsberg, alas, failed Wells's personal hero test, as would anyone else if the criteria were the same as those applied to picture book nuns and monks.

“Corn pone opinions,” Mark Twain wrote in a rueful essay of that title, “are the kind held by people who cannot afford views that threaten their paychecks.” (“Tell me whar a man gets his corn pone, en I'll tell you what his 'pinions is.”) Humanity, Twain observes, abounds with folks who exhibit physical courage. Yet precious few ever display any moral courage, which often demands that one go against the popular grain and risk disapproval. People—especially high-flyers—mostly conform and they are utterly flummoxed by anyone who upsets their cozy consensus. Daniel Ellsberg, Harvard Ph.D., Marine officer and Defense analyst, bit the hands that fed him, and in a most spectacular way. Wells is

baffled by this ungrateful act so he resorts to the customary derisive ploys that it is fame or gain or, better yet, neurotic compulsions, that explain the heretic.

People usually act out of a rich mix of conscious and unconscious motives and what should intrigue biographers is why some troubled souls come to reassess and to painfully change the course of their privileged lives. Wells offers no help in assessing whatever struggle Ellsberg underwent to shrug off his seductive indoctrination into the devious ways of Washington power elites. Most colleagues were razor-toothed opportunists who, Wells himself demonstrates, later lied prolifically in court to protect not their country—for the country's security was not at stake—but their precious jobs. How dare Ellsberg disturb their comfortable and orderly universe simply for the sake of helping to end a hideous and unnecessary war? Why did this canny fellow transform from a “crackpot realist” into a fierce foe of the war, and of the whole apparatus behind it? Instead of exploring this personal transformation, Wells dismisses it. The author early on decided that Ellsberg was a jerk and is dead set on having his readers believe so too. The problem is that this grim vendetta results in a book brimming with contradictions, inconsistencies and incoherent inferences.

One marvels at the folks whom Wells, who ought to know better, approvingly cites as witnesses for the prosecution. Would you credit the word of a Walt Rostow or William Bundy or Henry Kissinger over that of Ellsberg? Even G. Gordon Liddy, that noted fancier of Nazi memorabilia and values, is treated as if he were a supremely neutral party. This is quite a bizarre form of “objectivity” in action. It's rather like relying heavily on Pontius Pilate and the Pharisees in order to get the real lowdown on that troublemaking Gallilean prophet and his grubby apostles. Wells concedes that “tremendous envy” surrounded Ellsberg, who is described as “amazing, attractive and magnetic” as well as typically the highest paid member on whatever staff he worked, which had to rankle rivals. Wells blithely proceeds as though this trifling fact did not color the testimony of many interviewees.

The biographer curiously insists that young Ellsberg “was not political” even though Ellberg in his teens developed liberal reformist views alongside a cold warrior’s outlook: pro-union, anti-McCarthy, and opposed the AMA’s lock on private medicine. Sounds precocious to me. At Harvard Ellsberg was widely agreed to be brilliant and innovative. Ellsberg also is described as sympathetic, humorous, self-aware and “a real human being, not a cold analyst.” He was, however, intense (“not a relaxed dude”), which seems to be a very bad thing indeed in Wells’ preferred world of languid new mandarins who casually guided the massive slaughter of Asians and an accompanying waste of mostly lower-class American lives right up to the bitter end of the war.

Ellsberg regrettably cheated on his first wife who then became a vindictive blabbermouth to the FBI. For her Wells summons great compassion. Yet many colleagues, who were faithful to their wives, were perfectly happy to spend their days devising new ways to barbecue Asian peasants and gull the American citizenry who footed all the bills. Domestic virtue isn’t everything, nor are Ellsberg’s ascribed vices all that strange or damning or even relevant. Ellsberg likes the spotlight. None of the rest of us does. He likes sex a whole lot. None of the rest of us does. He has an ego. None of the rest of us does. Ellsberg did not want to go to jail. None of the rest of us would feel that way. He was often conflicted as to the right thing to do. None of the rest of us ever is. Certainly not Wells.

Ellsberg “couldn’t cut it as a Pentagon aide” yet authored several splendid assessment papers and made other policy interventions, including supplying new Defense Secretary Clifford Clark with data he needed to resist the Pentagon request after the 1968 Tet offensive for several hundred thousand more troops. Ellsberg allegedly lusted for fame by age 40, suffered writer’s block, had a tendency to exaggerate, dropped acid, cruised around Vietnam with John Paul Vann, and reveled in combat.

He was still contriving ways to win the war in late 1967

which is when he began work on the Pentagon papers project, amounting to 7000 pages recording government duplicity and hubris. By December 1967 Ellsberg was “clearly agitated about the war, and somewhat overwrought” and was regarded by other insiders as a “kook.” I mean, why would anyone get overwrought about a totally needless and unjustifiable war in which mass murders occur almost every day? According to Wells, the turnabout came not because Ellsberg had a moral reckoning of any kind but because of personal pique and the fact that he couldn’t keep a secret; he had a “compulsive need to leak” (the latter diagnosed by that noted psychoanalyst, Todd Gitlin).

Neither Senators McGovern nor Fulbright risked the liability of releasing the papers and so foisted the responsibility right back on Ellsberg because, as Fulbright said, “we knew we were playing hardball with some tough people [in Nixon’s administration]. It was war.” Wells mocks Ellsberg for believing the Papers’ revelations would end the war. A million and a half copies of the Bantam edition sold that year, suspicions were startlingly confirmed and commitment against the war reaffirmed. The Nixon administration subsequently shook itself to pieces. The result was the plumber’s burglary in the office of Ellsberg’s psychiatrist to “plug leaks,” and, soon after, in the Watergate.

Nixon, who boasted about leaking the Hiss case to the press, moaned that even Erlichman was too “high-minded” to do the dirty work he desired. These are the glorious authorities that Ellsberg betrayed. How do you double-cross a bunch of ardent double-crossers? Nowhere does Wells try to grapple with the vexing dilemmas inherent in Ellsberg “violating his oath” to government under these extremely extenuating circumstances.

The catalogue of Ellsberg’s sins piles up: the papers were “badly mimeographed,” neighbors kvetched about his night owl habits; he wore suits at antiwar rallies and looked square. He even put the make on an associate’s secretary and, Wells adds, an unattractive one at that. Ellsberg wryly joked about being the only man beside Hitler on Time’s cover

without an interview inside and Wells solemnly pounces on this as evidence of gross insensitivity and self-inflation. Wells lazily assumes a “narcissistic personality” is simply someone who fancies him/herself, and really ought to look up the term. No one who grew up in the sixties would let the next sentence survive: “My wife balled him out”—at least not if it were meant to convey an unpleasant experience.

This implacable biographer resorts to the good old sixties fossil gambit too. Ellsberg, we are informed, “lives in the past” although he wrested himself free from terminal nostalgia frequently enough to get arrested 25 times at anti-nuke and anti-interventionist demonstrations in 1980s and 1990s. In a nutshell, Wells evidently decided that Ellsberg possessed no moral compass, which allowed the biographer, foolishly, to feel justified in abandoning his own. One supposes that any man who engenders such stunning pettiness in an otherwise intelligent biographer has a lot to answer for. Then again, maybe not. The only lesson one really can draw from this fatally compromised volume is, be nice to your biographer, or else.

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