Book Review: Terry Eagleton, *Reason, Faith, and Revolution: Reflections on the God Debate.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009.

Max Elliot Katz

STUDY THE STALLS OF A SEMINARY BATHROOM and chances are you will find the following scrawled out in ballpoint: "Nietzsche: God is Dead. God: Nietzsche is dead." The quip relies on a misreading—God, for Nietzsche, did not die like your grandmother or pet turtle might die. God died like a language might die. In a secular world, belief becomes unbelievable. But the bathroom graffiti retains a bit of truth. Nietzsche, writing in 1882, recognized the collapse of religion. Today, the situation has changed: God is undead.

Across the globe, a holy revanchism rages against secularized modernity. Gynecologists shot in Wichita, "godless" protesters kidnapped in Tehran, Muslims mowed down in Hebron or impaled in Gujarat, discotheques bombed in Bali. Beneath the periodic violence, the cells of belief metastasize: madrassas, mandirs, megachurches, storefront churches, Mormon temples. Although this desecularization first manifested itself in the Iranian Revolution of 1979, it took the 9/11 attacks to prompt a significant literature of disbelief: the so-called "New Atheism." Most prominent have been two wide-ranging polemics by Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens: *The God Delusion* and *God is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*. As their titles suggest, these are not subtle volumes. Dawkins and Hitchens wage unholy war against religion, detailing the crimes of the faithful and bashing traditional arguments for the existence of God.

British Marxist literary critic Terry Eagleton makes an unlikely defender of the faith. Yet the volume under review, first delivered as the Terry Lectures at Yale, mounts a sustained attack on the New Atheism. Eagleton makes two primary arguments, one broadly theological, the other political, against Dawkins and Hitchens, here quasi-wittily coalesced into "Ditchkins."

First, Eagleton argues that Ditchkins botches the essence of religion, and ends up attacking a "strawgod." Religion, for Ditchkins, boils down to the attempt to explain the world via appeal to supernatural agent: God, Allah, Ahura Mazda, etc. Prior to the dawn of modern science, such explanations may have made a certain amount of sense. To modify a familiar example: If, while walking on the beach, you came across a working laptop, you might reasonably assume that an intelligent agent created its intricate machinery. The natural world is many orders more complex than the laptop. Without any better explanation at hand, why not think that it, too, had a designer? Better explanations came along: Astrophysics teaches how the world was formed, geology shows how it was shaped, and evolutionary biology reveals our own origins. No more mystery, no more religion.

All wrong, Eagleton argues. Science explains the world, shows how things came to be the way they are. Religion, he insists, asks and answers a different set of questions: "Why [is] there anything in the first place?...Where do our notions of explanation, regularity and intelligibility come from? How do we explain rationality and intelligibility themselves?...Is it a matter for wonderment that we can understand so much of the deep structure of the universe, to no apparent evolutionary advantage?" (11) To blame religion for explanatory irrelevance commits a flagrant category error. It would be, in Eagleton's words, like "seeing ballet as a botched attempt to run for a bus" (50).

Eagleton's argument depends on understanding religion and science as two distinct, equally worthwhile spheres of action. Science gives causes, religion provides meaning. The evolutionary biologist can, without any conflict or inconsistency, worship at her local Congregationalist church. This is a pluralistic conception of religion, and within a limited compass, accurate. In certain leafy and pleasant environments, mostly university towns, science and religion stay out of each other's business. But the Cambridges and Hyde Parks of the world are rare, and Ditchkins is interested in the mean, not the outlier. Fundamentalists, of whatever creed, have small concern for the autonomy of science. Why should they? If religious doctrine is true, it should be true about everything. Think of the concerted effort to undermine the teaching of evolutionary biology: Though we tend to associate creationism with evangelical Christianity in the American South, the campaign is global and pan-confessional. Muslim creationists in Turkey have been especially successful: When asked whether "Humans beings, as we know them, developed from earlier species of animals," only twenty-five percent of Turkish respondents answered, "Yes."[1]

If Eagleton's first argument misfires, his second scores a glancing blow. The "New Atheists," he points out, ruthlessly criticize religion without ever explaining its conditions or causes. The so-called "avatars of Liberal Enlightenment...have much less to say about the evils of global capitalism as opposed to the evils of radical Islam. Indeed, most of them hardly mention the word 'capitalism' at all, however they might protest from time to time against this or that excess" (100). Like a doctor prescribing Tylenol for a brain-tumor induced headache, their critique is both superficial and inadequate.

Eagleton's argument is an old one. Ludwig Feuerbach in his 1841 The Essence of Christianity revealed each of the tenets of Christianity as misrecognized forms of human self-knowledge. Belief in creation ex nihilo, for instance, expresses a latent belief in the absolute and limitless powers of the human imagination. Feuerbach thought that unmasking religious belief would lead readers to abandon religion for humanism. No, Virginia, there is no Santa Claus. Or Jesus, either. It is the spirit of human cheer, brotherhood, and generosity that really exists.

A young philosopher and journalist living in Parisian exile saw a problem with Feuerbach's reasoning. Religion, Karl Marx argued, is not simply a matter of belief. The Church attempts to resolve real contradictions, offer a heart in a heartless world. If you want to overcome religion, the conditions that breed it must be identified and overcome. In some highly attenuated sense, Marxism begins from the critique of the critique of religion. Enlightened criticism, Marx recognized, will not in and of itself suffice. Philosophical problems must find practical resolution.

What was true of Feuerbach remains true of the New Atheists: Hitchens and Dawkins criticize the new fundamentalism, but do not reflect on its causes. It is a supremely convenient reluctance. By failing to reflect on the relationship between social reality and fundamentalism, the ambit of Hitchens and Dawkins's critique remains comfortably restricted. The problem, they suggest, is out there—yokels in the South, terrorists in the Middle East.

Eagleton begs to differ. He insists that the "West's" destruction of nationalist and socialist political movements helped create the fundamentalist revival. Among others, Eagleton takes the example of

> [T]he suppression of the leftist and secular anti-imperialist forces in Iran by the CIA sponsored coup of 1953, which restored the monarchy, eliminated the communists and social democrats, and created a bloodthirsty internal security force. The extreme autocracy of the Shah's regime, along with its intimate ties to the United States, were later to trigger a radical religious backlash in the shape of the Islamic revolution [that began in] 1978. With the assistance of the CIA, Iran had traveled from a nation which included secular leftists and liberal democrats to a hard-line Islamic state. (103)

In Eagleton's history, the Left has no agency of its own: It is pure victim. Nothing is said about the failure of domestic or international socialist parties and intellectuals to effectively oppose the rise of Khomeini. It is all America's fault. Eagleton's "anti-imperialism" may appear Marxist, but a clear distinction must be drawn. For Marx, religion functions as an inadequate attempt to resolve the contradictions of capital: End capitalism and you will end religion. Eagleton, too, believes that something called "capitalism" spawns religion. But Eagleton's capitalism appears, in practice, indissociable from "The West" and the "West" functionally indissociable from the United States, and the United States more or less indissociable from the CIA. As Eagleton writes, "One of the best reasons for being a Christian, as for being a socialist, is that you don't like having to work, and reject the fearful idolatry of it rife in countries like the United States. Truly civilized societies do not hold predawn power breakfasts" (11).

In the increasingly distant past, being a socialist meant belonging to an international revolutionary movement, millions strong. Today, socialism has become a subculture, identity politics for "radical" professors who "reject" America and love to sleep in. There is nothing objectionable about preferring brunch or dabbling in a little "continental philosophy." Aficionados ought to form Theory Clubs and host bingo nights: loser gets Zizek's new book. The problem comes with the blurring of personal preference into politics. Buy as many anti-capitalist bumper stickers as you wish, march in as many protests as you can bear: None of this will make you a "revolutionary." Nothing will, not in the absence of actual international socialist politics.

English plague doctors prescribed smoking of tobacco, carrying around fragrant flowers, and a high dosage of laxatives. If the patient managed to avoid death by diarrhea, the treatments accomplished nothing. Perhaps the semblance of cure offered some small comfort. Today, the plague doctors offer up many different remedies for the dying Left: populist strongmen, community gardens, Lacan. Dr. Eagleton prescribes theology. Apparently, "radical impulses" have migrated to the theology departments, where one can find "some of the most informed and animated discussions of Deleuze and Badiou, Foucault and feminism, Marx and Heidegger" (167). The specific prescription does not matter. Anything will work: the latest continental guru, the latest rebels in the jungle, the latest "economic crisis." Each provides warm comfort as the Red Death slips in and holds illimitable dominion over all. **| P**

1. "Did Humans Evolve? Not Us, Say Americans," The New York Times, August 15, 2006, <www.nytimes.com/2006/08/15/science/sciencespecial2/15evo.html>.

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Statement of Purpose

Taking stock of the universe of positions and goals that constitutes leftist politics today, we are left with the disquieting suspicion that a deep commonality underlies the apparent variety: What exists today is built upon the desiccated remains of what was once possible.

In order to make sense of the present, we find it necessary to disentangle the vast accumulation of positions on the Left and to evaluate their saliency for the possible reconstitution of emancipatory politics in the present. Doing this implies a reconsideration of what is meant by the Left.

Our task begins from what we see as the general disenchantment with the present state of progressive politics. We feel that this disenchantment cannot be cast off by sheer will, by simply "carrying on the fight," but must be addressed and itself made an object of critique. Thus we begin with what immediately confronts us.

The *Platypus Review* is motivated by its sense that the Left is disoriented. We seek to be a forum among a variety of tendencies and approaches on the Left—not out of a concern with inclusion for its own sake, but rather to provoke disagreement and to open shared goals as sites of contestation. In this way, the recriminations and accusations arising from political disputes of the past may be harnessed to the project of clarifying the object of leftist critique.

The *Platypus Review* hopes to create and sustain a space for interrogating and clarifying positions and orientations currently represented on the Left, a space in which questions may be raised and discussions pursued that would not otherwise take place. As long as submissions exhibit a genuine commitment to this project, all kinds of content will be considered for publication.

Submission guidelines

Articles in the *Platypus Review* range in length from 750–4,500 words. Submissions and inquiries may be sent to *review_editorial@platypus1917.org*. Submissions should conform to the *Chicago Manual of Style*.

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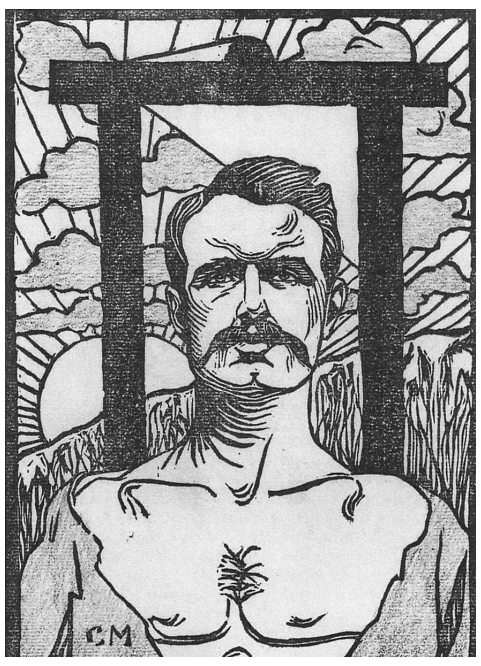
Rebelling Against the World

Book Review: Alex Butterworth, *The World that Never Was: A True Story of Dreamers, Schemers, Anarchists, and Secret Agents*. New York: Pantheon Press, 2010.

James Heartfield



An 1893 portrait of François Koenigstein, aka Ravachol, by Charles Maurin.

"THE TERRORIST IS NOBLE, irresistibly fascinating, for he combines in himself the two sublimates of human grandeur: the martyr and the hero" (127). The man who spoke these words was Sergei Kravchinsky, the Tsarist officer turned anarchist who went on to assassinate the chief of the Russia's secret police and expose that country's autocracy before the world in the best-selling book *Underground Russia*. Terrorism was not restricted to Russia's early revolutionary movement. In Chicago, the *Alarm* told its readers in 1884 that 'one man armed with a dynamite bomb is equal to one regiment of militia' (203-4). German immigrant Johann Most went further with a call to "rescue mankind through blood, iron, poison and dynamite" (203). "Enough of organisation," thundered Luigi Parmeggiani's *L'Internationale* in London in 1892, "let's busy ourselves with chemistry and manufacture: bombs, dynamite and other explosives are far more capable than rifles and 'barricades' of destroying the present state of things, and above all to save our precious blood" (309).

In the later years of the nineteenth century there was a rise in terrorist outrages like the explosion at the Greenwich Observatory fictionalized by Joseph Conrad in *The Secret Agent*, or the famous succession of bombings in Paris undertaken by François Koenigstein ("Ravachol") in 1892. The geographer and anarchist Élisée Reclus saw in Ravachol "a hero with a rare grandeur of spirit," while the symbolist poet Paul Adam praised him as a "violent Christ" (304-5). The list of establishment figures the anarchists shot and bombed is remarkable: Nikolai Rysakov of the People's Will killed Tsar Alexander II on 13 March 1881; the Pennsylvania industrialist Henry Clay Frick was shot by Alexander Berkman in 1892, but survived; the Chief of the Tsarist secret police Georgii Sudeikin was killed by Sergei Degaev for the People's Will in 1883; Gaetano Bresci killed King Umberto I of Italy in 1900; inspired by Emma Goldman, Leon Czolgosz killed President McKinley on 6 September 1901 in Buffalo; Kropotkin fan Gavrilo Princip killed the Archduke Ferdinand of Austria on 28 June 1914, precipitating the First World War.

One could easily account for the rise in terrorism in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by pointing to the violence of the state, and in the broadest sense this is correct. Repression in Russia, Germany and France, and the use of private militias against strikers in America, all raised the political temperature. Still, a closer look at the terrorists, such as that Alex Butterworth's *The World That Never Was* provides, shows that terrorism was taken up by people who were losing the argument with the mass of ordinary people. Violence, it was hoped, would be the shortcut to social change that was slipping from their grasp. The isolation of these small bands of would-be revolutionaries tempted them to see chemistry and dynamite as easier routes to social transformation than organization.

The political debate that foreshadowed the growth of terrorism took place amongst the radicals of the International Working Men's Association, or First International, which had affiliated parties in most European countries. The event that sharpened the differences was the war Napoleon III launched, but quickly lost, against Prussia in 1870, leaving Paris under siege from Bismarck's army. When Adolphe Thiers's government offered to surrender a disarmed capital to the Prussians, the Parisians rose up, making their own Commune to resist Bismarck and the French government alike. The International supported the Commune, and Karl Marx wrote a pamphlet announcing the first workers' government.

Marx's rivals in the International, the anarchist followers of Mikhail Bakunin, also supported the Parisians' revolution, but balked at Marx's conclusion that the Commune showed the need for workers to seize state power and use it to put down the propertied classes. Bakunin even showed up with a decree to abolish the state at the Town Hall in Lyons, where there was support for the Commune. But, having refused on principle to gather any armed back-up, Bakunin had to beat a hasty retreat from the gendarmes.[1] In Paris, by contrast, the Commune fought to the last against Thiers's army. The repression that followed was terrible, with thousands killed and thousands more deported to the Pacific colonies, while others fled to live as refugees in Britain, Switzerland, and America.

After the defeat of the Commune, the argument between Marx's supporters and the anarchists took a definite turn. Bakunin, and his young acolyte Kropotkin, denounced Marx as a centralizing dictator, wedded to violence. Engels remonstrated that "a revolution is certainly the most authoritarian thing there is; it is the act whereby one part of the population imposes its will upon the other part."[2] By contrast, Kropotkin put his faith in a spontaneous and instinctual revolution of the peasant masses, and here Butterworth speculates that Kropotkin's fierce anti-intellectualism might have stemmed from a guilty conscience over his own education (125). But the irony was that it was the anarchists that turned to violence, and with it the dictatorial methods of conspiracy, as the masses drifted away from the Communards' ideal.

In 1877, Bakunin's disciple Errico Malatesta, with Carlo Cafiero tried to launch an insurrection among the peasants of Matese, in the Southern Italian highlands, ransacking government offices. "If you want to, do something," shouted Cafiero, "if not, then go fuck yourselves" (118); but the Matese peasants could not understand his dialect, let alone his point. In 1879, Russian populists met at Voronezh to debate a new path. Lev Tikhomirov demanded violence and the "formation of an organisational elite to coordinate the new strategy" (141), to which Georgi Plekhanov, who would go on to be Lenin's mentor, responded, "you can count me out." At the same meeting, the anarchist Andrei Zhelyabov argued that he should be made 'Revolutionary Dictator' once they had killed the Tsar (149). Two years later, at the anarchist international meeting in London in July 1881, Élisée Reclus convinced Kropotkin of the need for small conspiratorial groups (167).

The anarchists became more ardent the less support they had. They loathed the masses for letting down the revolution: as if the world ought to bend to their will. Octave Garnier, a leader of the anarchist "Bonnot Gang"—the first stick-up crew to use a getaway car—wrote in 1911, "Why kill workers?—they are vile slaves without whom there would not be the bourgeoisie and the rich."[3] The difference between the anarchists and the Marxists was not that one side preferred violence: the use of violence in and of itself is not necessarily a matter of principle. The difference was that the anarchists could not accept that the revolutionary tide had ebbed, thinking that it was a failure of will alone. Their answer to the retreat was more and more aggressive actions. This left them waging war against the masses as much as the elite. "Long live anarchy and death to society!" cried Luigi Lucheni, the assassin of the Austrian Empress Elisabeth in September 1898 (369). Terror was a substitute for the harder work of winning over mass support.

As they got older, leading anarchists were dismayed to find that the path they had cleared led to the cult of the bomber Ravachol. Kropotkin rued that "a structure built on centuries of history cannot be destroyed with a few kilos of explosive" (303). This time Malatesta agreed, writing of Ravachol's followers, "It is no longer a love for the human race that guides them, but the feeling of a vendetta joined to the cult of an abstract idea, of a philosophic phantasm" (313).

Louise Michel, "the Red Virgin," whose bravery on the barricades and at trial made her into a heroine for many, expressed the frustration that many exiled Communards felt at the time. Returning from exile in the Pacific, Michel drew massive crowds and threatened retaliation against the oppressors. Michel was accompanied on her speaking tours by an equally remarkable figure of Victor Henri Rochefort, the Marquis de Rochefort-Luçay, who had become a member of the Commune government despite his aristocratic background. Like Michel, Rochefort had been exiled to the Pacific, though unlike her he had the finances to influence French public life, even founding his own newspaper, *L'Intransigeant.* Rochefort organised meetings for Michel to condemn the corruption of the Republic, though increasingly these took on a scripted or theatrical air. At the time, Louise's mother warned her, "you've become their pet exotic animal on the end of the leash, and they're making you dance to amuse the crowds."[4]

Having lost touch with the masses in the post-Commune years, the anarchists were shocked, when the Left began to recover and the Socialist International met in London in 1896, to find that they were not welcome. "What we advocate is free association and union, the absence of authority, minds free from fetters, independence," anarchist Gustav Landauer pleaded to the delegates: "it is we who preach tolerance for all—whether we think their opinions right or wrong—we do not wish to crush them by force or otherwise" (354-5). Landauer had changed records, and put Bakunin's old tune back on the turntable, asking that the issue not be put to the vote for fear of losing. Even Michel promised that "the bombs are past history." But the socialists had been too often derided as cowards for failing to start the revolution, had struggled too often to pick up the pieces after anarchist bombings, and had had to cope too often with the resultant police repression and popular disgust while the bombers themselves melted into the background. They voted to exclude the anarchists. Louise Michel protested that the Marx's followers had founded "a new Papacy."[5]

Reforms that extended the franchise and the growth of the socialist vote left the anarchists even more isolated than had the preceding decline in working class militancy, such that they more confused than ever about what to do. Louise Michel dismissed democracy, saying, "it does not matter who emerges from that false-bottomed trunk known as the ballot-box." Whoever wins, "he'll always be one of the bourgeoisie, one of your exploiters."[6] Rochefort's paper rallied to the cause of military government under General Georges Boulanger, and to anti-Semitic campaigns: first against the Jewish financiers of the Panama Canal Company, and then later joining in the denunciations of Lieutenant Colonel Alfred Dreyfus, falsely accused of passing military secrets to the Germans. Butterworth even goes so far as to make a case for Rochefort's authorship of the infamous anti-Semitic forgery, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion.* For her part, Louise Michel refused to condemn Rochefort's proto-Fascist Boulangism, insisting that the fight between democracy and military government "is not the moment for me to choose one side over another in a factionalist struggle."[7] She similarly refused to take sides in the Dreyfus Affair, declining to attend pro-Dreyfus meetings. But then the anarchists had been long accustomed to playing the anti-Semitic card: Years before, Bakunin denounced the London Congress of the International as "a dire conspiracy of German and Russian Jews" who were "fanatically devoted to their dictator-Messiah Marx" (64).

Kropotkin, too, disappointed his supporters in later years, rallying to the Allied cause in the First World War and returning to Russia to join the fight against "Bismarckism."[8] Malatesta returned to be detained under house arrest in Italy, where Il Duce graciously spared the life of the man who had once been his mentor when he was a young anarchist (409-11).

Butterworth's book is fascinating in its treatment of the many undercover agents and *agents provocateurs* in the anarchist movement. But he is generous to a fault, repeating many anarchist slanders against the Marxists. Nevertheless, he does not fail to make the critical point: that the anarchists' rage was impotent, their terrorism a sign of weakness, not strength. The story of the anarchists shows how destructive it is to make revolution into a moral imperative outside of its historical grounding. Years ago, the philosopher Hegel characterised the beautiful soul that "lives in dread of besmirching the splendor of its inner being by action…[T]o preserve the purity of its heart, it flees from contact with the actual world and…is reduced to the extreme of ultimate abstraction."[9] That was the psychology of the anarchists' love of "the two sublimates of human grandeur: the martyr and the hero" or the "violent Christ." Their insurrection turned from being a war to free the masses from repression into a war against the masses, dissolving in the end into the worst kind of opportunism. | **P**

1. "Marx to Beesley, 10/19/1870," in *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels: Selected Correspondence, 1846-1895*, ed. and trans. Dona Torr (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1941), 306.
2. Frederick Engels, "On Authority," in *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels: Selected Works*, vol. 2 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1969), 379.
3. Quoted in Richard Parry, *The Bonnot Gang: The Story of the French Illegalists* (London: Rebel Press, 1987), 125.
4. Edith Thomas, *Louise Michel*, trans. Penelope Williams (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1980), 187.
5. Ibid., 344.
6. Ibid., 298.
7. Ibid., 289.
8. Leon Trotsky, *The Russian Revolution*, trans. Max Eastman (London: Pluto Press, 1977), 687. For Kropotkin on Bismarckism, see Butterworth, 135.
9. G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 400.

Interview, continued from page 2

the system, and in demanding self-determination. We wanted to be out there with them and the way to do this was to adopt a "revolutionary solidarity" line. This is what became the justification for the Weather Underground: We were to be a white fighting force in support of black revolution. To this day some of my old comrades still believe in this.

This is something rarely discussed anymore. Certainly, it hasn't been analyzed. Still it is rare to find anyone who critiques Black Power or the implications of the slogan, "By any means necessary!" I now feel that non-violence was not at all played out. People were tired of getting attacked by the police and by racists and there was a desire to fight back, but the approach taken by the Panthers was ultimately a losing strategy.

SL: Did you read Harold Cruse's *Crisis of the Negro Intellectual* when it came out?

MR: I did not, but I should have.

SL: That book, which emerged out of Harlem in 1967, criticized both the limitations of the integrationist movement and black nationalism. It viewed the latter as an unfortunate symptom of failure, not as a way forward. You're saying that, retrospectively at least, you're sympathetic to that view?

MR: Was Black Power a winning strategy?

SL: No. I agree that black nationalism was a dead end for the left. But it is remarkable to hear you saying it.

MR: When I say this publicly people scream, "Racist!"

SL: Let's go back and talk more about what Marxism meant to the Weather Underground. How did this ideology concocted from equal parts Regis Debray, Che Guevara, and Ho Chi Minh represent a form of Marxism? What sort of emancipation from, or analysis of, capitalism did it offer? After all, one can think of Marxism as a politics of the working-class in the core capitalist countries; but you guys completely turned that on its head so that national liberation and the defeat of racism became the primary content of the terms "freedom" and "emancipation," or even "socialism." Beyond the defeat of American racism and imperialism, did socialism as you understood it really involve any fundamental transformation?

MR: For us, white skin privilege translated into American national privilege, so that all Americans were privileged economically because of the empire, which is true, incidentally. Almost the poorest person here lives better than most people in Africa. The depredations of capitalism have been exported to the Third World; the two-dollar-a-day wage shows up in our cheap goods at Wal-Mart. So, I do not think that what we were saying is totally wrong. On the other hand, we have to finance and produce manpower for wars to keep the thing going. So, there is tremendous stress and exploitation that takes place at home because of the militarist system.

But there is no simple remedy to this problem. Whether you think the Third World is going to bring down imperialism or you think workers in the United States are going to bring down imperialism, none of it works. It is all in the realm of idealism or even religion. Marxism is very nice as a tool with which to analyze the workings of a class society and I think that we could use a little bit more of it to understand stuff like the current economic meltdown. But if we want to know what is going to happen, Marxism doesn't work. The Third World did not rise up against US imperialism. The workers have nowhere risen up against the capitalist class. I have become anti-ideological. We just have to muddle along.

SL: To me, calling national liberation in the Third World and decolonization the realization of leftist political aims seems almost a mockery when we look at the prevailing poverty, degradation, and political corruption.

MR: The corruption especially. Vijay Prashad in his book, *The Darker Nations*, provides a fabulous analysis of the defeat of national liberation at the hands of the new elite that rose up everywhere. National liberation as the antidote to imperialism was an illusion. I have friends who died for this illusion and other friends who are in prison for it, probably for the rest of their lives. Some are still fully committed to the illusion of national liberation. I hate to tell you this, but I am a liberal democrat.

SL: If what liberal democrats do is critically reflect on political experience, then I am all for them. As regards the 1960s, one just hears the usual, "Well, the man was too big and too strong, but we tried our best." If we try to think the full depth of this problem, we have to ask ourselves, How we can imagine leftist politics as ever leading to anything but despair and disillusionment?

MR: I have been thinking a lot about this and have come to the conclusion that there is a potential progressive majority in this country, but only a progressive majority and not a revolutionary one. It has to be organized around simple ideas like the government as the embodiment of the national collectivity that has some responsibility for people, for the wellbeing of people and of the planet. This is simple, 18th century liberal stuff. Now what we have is a complete and total political and ideological victory of free market individualism and militarism. We have to combat it with the notion that there is such a thing as the collectivity and that the government has a responsibility for the wellbeing of people and of the planet. That is about as far as I can go.

SL: In the German context, when the student movement emerged there in the 1960s, the Marxist intellectual Theodor Adorno called into question the movement's leftist character and said, in essence, "These young people really seek only the narcissistic satisfaction to be achieved by direct action. They are not really interested in or capable of transforming the circumstances that generate the discontent." He thus took a critical position against what he saw as the authoritarianism rampant on the New Left in Europe. To what extent do you think authoritarianism was a factor both in your own particular political experience and on the American left as a whole in the 1960s?

MR: I think the popularity of Marxism-Leninism is a good gauge of that. Marxism-Leninism is essentially an authoritarian organizational strategy. It says, "Our little group knows best. We have the truth and we are going to impose it on everybody." And of course, the New Left wound up in the 1970s as a giant mix of Marxist-Leninist groupuscules. There is the authoritarian tendency, the idea that we know best about everything. To me it is reappearing in the kids in Pittsburgh who want to wear bandanas and march without a permit. They said, "Well, we know better than everybody else because we have the truth. We understand how terrible the system is. You are just a liberal and don't understand."

SL: What about the exclusive preoccupation with action? To my mind, this is what historically ties today's anarchists to the Weathermen. In both cases reflection has determined that the problem is reflection. It is almost a theoretical anti-theory, or an intellectual anti-intellectualism.

MR: That could be, but that was not our problem. Our problem was too much of both, too much belief in the propaganda of the deed and too much belief that national liberation was going to defeat US imperialism. So we had the worst of both worlds. We had the action plus the ideology. There has to be some way of testing the truth of ideas. The best I can figure out is growth of the movement, numbers. If you count how many people are at a demonstration and then, a year later, you count again and discover that your numbers have gone up, you are probably on the right track. If they have not, you are probably not.

SL: How do you know that the movement that is growing is the movement you want?

MR: You don't. Nobody can know. You just blunder along. That is why I am for non-violence, because at least you are adopting strategies and tactics that do not do irreversible damage. In my experience, almost everything I ever did that I thought it was going to turn out one way turned out another. That is why I am a liberal, because hopefully liberals kill fewer people than radicals. I am for nobody killing anybody else, and that includes governments, terrorists, and communists, though, of course, there are not that many of those left in the world anymore. **| P**

Transcribed by Brian Worley

1. Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam Books, 1987).

Adorno and Freud

The relation of Freudian psychoanalysis to Marxist critical social theory

Christopher Cutrone

ADORNO'S *HABILITATIONSSCHRIFT* was on Kant and Freud. It ended with Marx. Why did Adorno think that Marx addressed the problems of both Kantian and Freudian accounts of consciousness?

The distinction between Kant and Freud turns on the psychoanalytic concept of the "unconscious," the by-definition unknowable portion of mental processes, the unthought thoughts and unfelt feelings that are foreign to Kant's rational idealism. Kant's "critical" philosophy was concerned with how we can know what we know, and what this revealed about our subjectivity. Kant's philosophical "critiques" were investigations into conditions of possibility: Specifically, Kant was concerned with the possibility of change in consciousness. By contrast, Freud was concerned with how conscious intention was constituted in struggle with countervailing, "unconscious" tendencies: how the motivation for consciousness becomes opaque to itself. But like Kant, Freud was not interested in disenchanting but rather strengthening consciousness.

For both Kant and Freud, the greater possibilities for human freedom are to be found in the conquests of consciousness: To become more self-aware is to achieve greater freedom, and this freedom is grounded in possibilities for change. The potential for the qualitative transformation of consciousness, which for both Kant and Freud includes affective relations and hence is not merely about "conceptual" knowledge, underwrites both Kantian philosophy and Freudian psychotherapy.

But both Kantian and Freudian accounts of consciousness became utopian for Adorno. Adorno's Marxist "materialist" critique of the inadequacies of Kant and Freud was concerned with redeeming the *desiderata* of their approaches to consciousness, and not simply "demystifying" them. For Adorno, what Kant and Freud both lacked was a critical theory of capital; a capacity for the self-reflection, as such, of the subjectivity of the commodity form. Marx provided this. For Adorno, both Kant and Freud were liable to be abused if the problem of capital was obscured and not taken as the fundamental historical frame for the problem of freedom that both sought to address. What was *critical* about Kantian and Freudian consciousness could become unwittingly and unintentionally *affirmative* of the status quo, as if we were already rational subjects with well-developed egos, as if we were already free, as if these were not our *tasks*. This potential self-undermining or self-contradiction of the task of consciousness that Adorno found in Kant and Freud could be explicated adequately only from a Marxian perspective. When Adorno deployed Freudian and Kantian categories for grasping consciousness, he deliberately rendered them aporetic. Adorno considered Kant and Freud as providing descriptive theories that in turn must be subject to critical reflection and specification—within a Marxian socio-historical frame.

For Adorno, the self-opacity of the subject or, in Freud's terms, the phenomenon of the "unconscious mental process," is the expression of the self-contradiction or non-identity of the "subject" in Hegelian-Marxian terms. Because Kantian consciousness is not a static proposition, because Kant was concerned with an account of the possibility of a self-grounded, "self-legislated" and thus *self-conscious* freedom, Adorno was not arraying Freud against Kant. Adorno was not treating Kant as naïve consciousness, but rather attending to the historical separation of Freud from Kant. Marx came between them. The Freudian theory of the unconscious is, for Adorno, a description of the self-alienated character of the subjectivity of modern capital. Freud can be taken as an alternative to Marx—or Kant—only the degree to which a Marxian approach fails to give adequate expression to historical developments in the self-contradiction of the subjectivity of the commodity form.

One thinker usually neglected in accounts of the development of Frankfurt School Critical Theory is Wilhelm Reich. For Adorno, perhaps the key phrase from Reich is "fear of freedom."[1] This phrase has a deeper connotation than might at first be apparent, in that it refers to a dynamic process and not a static fact of repression. "Repression," in Freud's terms, is *self*-repression: It constitutes the self, and hence is not to be understood as an "introjection" from without. The potential for freedom itself produces the reflex of fear in an intrinsic motion. The fear of freedom is thus an index of freedom's possibility. Repression implies its opposite, which is the potential transformation of consciousness. The "fear of freedom" is thus grounded in freedom itself.

Reich derived the "fear of freedom" directly from Freud. Importantly, for Freud, psychopathology exists on a spectrum in which the pathological and the healthy differ not in kind but degree. Freud does not identify the healthy with the normal, but treats both as species of the pathological. The normal is simply the typical, commonplace pathology. For Freud, "neurosis" was the unrealistic way of coping with the new and the different, a failure of the ego's "reality principle." The characteristic thought-figure here is "neurotic repetition." Neurosis is, for Freud, fundamentally about repetition. To free oneself from neurosis is to free oneself from unhealthy repetition. Nonetheless, however, psychical character is, for Freud, itself a function of repetition. The point of psychoanalytic therapy is not to eliminate the individual experience that gives rise to one's character, but rather to allow the past experience to recur in the present in a less pathological way. This is why, for Freud, to "cure" a neurosis is not to "eliminate" it but to *transform* it. The point is not to unravel a person's psychical character, but for it to play out better under changed conditions. For it is simply inappropriate and impractical for a grown person to engage adult situations "regressively," that is, according to a pattern deeply fixed in childhood. While that childhood pattern cannot be extirpated, it can be transformed, so as to be better able to deal with the new situations that are not the repetition of childhood traumas and hence prove intractable to past forms of mastery. At the same time, such forms of mastery from childhood need to be satisfied and not denied. There is no more authoritarian character than the child. What are otherwise "authoritarian" characteristics of the psyche allow precisely these needs to be satisfied. "Guilt," that most characteristic Freudian category, is a form of libidinal satisfaction. Hence its power.

Perhaps the most paradoxical thought Reich offered, writing in the aftermath of the 1933 Nazi seizure of power, was the need for a Marxian approach to attend to the "*progressive* character of fascism." "Progressive" in what sense? Reich thought that Marxism had failed to properly "heed the unconscious impulses" that were otherwise expressed by fascism. Fascism had expressed the emergence of the qualitatively new, however paradoxically, in the form of an apparently retrograde politics. Reich was keen to point out that fascism was not really a throwback to some earlier epoch but rather the appearance of the new, if in a pathological and obscured form. Walter Benjamin's notion of "progressive barbarism" similarly addressed this paradox, for "barbarism" is not savagery but decadence.

Reich thought that learning from Freud was necessary in the face of the phenomenon of fascism, which he regarded as expressing the failure of Marxism. It was necessary due to Freud's attention to expanding and strengthening the capacity of the conscious ego to experience the new and not to "regress" in the neurotic attempt to master the present by repeating the past. Freud attended to the problem of achieving true, present mastery, rather than relapsing into false, past forms. This, Freud thought, could be accomplished through the faculty of "reality-testing," the self-modification of behavior that characterized a healthy ego, able to cope with new situations. Because, for Freud, this always took place in the context of, and as a function of, a predominantly "unconscious" mental process of which the ego was merely the outmost part and in which were lodged the affects and thoughts of the past, this involved a theory of the transformation of consciousness. Because the unconscious did not "know time," transformation was the realm of the ego-psychology of consciousness.

For Reich, as well as for Benjamin and Adorno, from the perspective of Marxism the Freudian account of past and present provided a rich description of the problem of the political task of social emancipation in its *subjective* dimension. Fascism had resulted from Marxism's failure to meet the demands of individuals outpaced by history. Reich's great critique of "Marxist" rationalism was that it could not account for why, for the most part, starving people do not steal to survive and the oppressed do not revolt.

By contrast, in the Freudian account of emancipation from neurosis, there was both a continuity with and change from prior experience in the capacity to experience the new and different. This was the ego's freedom. One suffered from neurosis to the degree to which one shielded oneself stubbornly against the new. This is why Freud characterized melancholia, or the inability to grieve, as a narcissistic disorder: it represented the false mastery of a pre-ego psychology in which consciousness had not adequately distinguished itself from its environment. The self was not adequately bounded, but instead engaged in a pathological projective identification with the object of loss. The melancholic suffered not from loss of the object, but rather from a sense of loss of self, or a lack of sense of self. The pathological loss was due to a pathological affective investment in the object to begin with, which was not a proper or realistic object of libidinal investment at all. The melancholic suffered from an unrealistic sense of both self and other.

In the context of social change, such narcissism was wounded in recoil from the experience of the new. It thus undermined itself, for it regressed below the capacities for consciousness. The challenge of the new that could be met in freedom becomes instead the pathologically repressed, the insistence on what Adorno called the "ever-same." There is an illusion involved, both of the emergently new in the present, and in the image of the past.[2] But such "illusion" is not only pathological, but constitutive: it comprises the "necessary form of appearance," the thought and felt reality of past and present in consciousness. This is the double-movement of both the traumatically new and of an old, past pathology. It is this double-movement, within which the ego struggles for its very existence in the process of undergoing change within and without that Adorno took to be a powerful description of the modern subject of capital. The "liquidation of the individual" was in its dwindling present, dissolved between past and future. The modern subject was thus inevitably "non-identical" with itself. Reich had provided a straightforward account of how accelerating social transformations in capital ensured that characteristic patterns of childhood life would prove inappropriate to adult realities, and that parental authority would be thus undermined. Culture could no longer serve its ancient function.

Freud's account of the "unconscious mental process" was one salient way of grasping this constitutive non-identity of the subject. Freud's ego and id, the "I" and "it" dimensions of consciousness, described how the psychical self was importantly not at one with itself. For Adorno, this was a description not only of the subject's constraint but its potential, the dynamic character of subjectivity, reproductive of both a problem and a task.

In his 1955 essay "Sociology and Psychology," Adorno addressed the necessary and indeed constitutive antinomy of the "individual" and "society" under capital. According to Adorno, there was a productive tension and not a flat contradiction between approaches that elaborated society from the individual psyche and those that derived the individual from the social process: both were at once true and untrue in their partiality. Adorno's point was that it was inevitable that social problems be approached in such one-sided ways. Adorno thus derived two complementary approaches: critical psychology and critical sociology. Or, at a different level, critical individualism and critical authoritarianism. Under capital, both the psychical and social guises of the individual were at once functionally effective and spurious delusional realities. It was not a matter of properly merging two aspects of the individual but of recognizing what Adorno elsewhere called the "two torn halves of an integral freedom to which however they do not add up." It was true that there were both social potentials not reducible to individuals and individual potentials not straightforwardly explicable from accounts of society.

The antagonism of the particular and the general had a social basis, but for Adorno this social basis was itself contradictory. Hence there was indeed a social basis for the contradiction of individual and society, rather than a psychical basis, but this social basis found a ground for its reproduction in the self-contradiction of the psychical individual. A self-contradictory form of society gave rise to, and was itself reproduced through, self-contradictory individuals.

The key for Adorno was to avoid collapsing what should be critical-theoretical categories into apologetic or affirmative-descriptive ones for grasping the individual and society. Neither a social dialectic nor a split psyche was to be ontologized or naturalized, but both required historical specification as dual aspects of a problem to be overcome. That problem was what Marx called "capital." For Adorno, it was important that both dialectical and psychoanalytic accounts of consciousness had only emerged in modernity. From this historical reality one could speculate that an emancipated society would be neither dialectical nor consist of psychological individuals, for both were symptomatic of capital. Nevertheless, any potential for freedom needed to be found there, in the socially general and individual symptoms of capital, described by both disciplines of sociology and psychology.

Hence, the problem for Adorno was not a question of methodology but of critical reflexivity: how did social history present itself through individual psychology (not methodological individualism but critical reflection on the individuation of a social problem). The "primacy" of the social, or of the "object," was, for Adorno, not a methodological move or preferred mode of analysis, let alone a philosophical ontology, but was meant to provoke critical recognition of the problem he sought to address.

In his speech to the 1968 conference of the German Society for Sociology, titled "Late Capitalism or Industrial Society?," Adorno described how the contradiction of capital was expressed in "free-floating anxiety." Such "free-floating anxiety" was expressive of the undermining of what Freud considered the ego-psychology of the subject of therapy. Paranoia spoke to pre-Oedipal, pre-individuated problems, to what Adorno called the "liquidation of the individual." This was caused by and fed into the further perpetuation of authoritarian social conditions.

For Adorno, especially as regards the neo-Freudian revisionists of psychoanalysis as well as post- and non-Freudian approaches, therapy had, since Freud's time, itself become repressive in ways scarcely anticipated by Freud. Such "therapy" sought to repress the social-historical symptom of the impossibility of therapy. Freud had commented on the intractability of narcissistic disorders such as melancholia, but these had come to replace the typical Freudian neuroses of the 19th century such as hysteria. The paranoiac-delusional reality of the authoritarian personality had its ground of truth, a basis, in society. The "fear of freedom" was expressed in the individual's retreat from ego-psychology, a narcissistic recoil from an intractable social reality. Perhaps this could be recognized as such. This, for Adorno, was the emancipatory potential of narcissism.

In his essay "Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda" (1951), Adorno characterized the appeal of fascist demagogy precisely in its being recognized by its consumers as the lie that one chooses to believe, the authority one spites while participating in it by submitting to it in bad faith. This was its invidious power, the pleasure of doing wrong, but also its potential overcoming. An antisocial psychology, not reducible to the sociopathic, had been developed which posed the question of society, if at a different level than in Freud's time. It was no longer situated in the "family romance" of the Oedipal drama but in society writ large. But this demanded recognition beyond what was available in the psychotherapeutic relationship, because it spoke not to the interaction of egos but to projective identification among what Freud could only consider wounded narcissists. For Adorno, we are a paranoid society with reason.

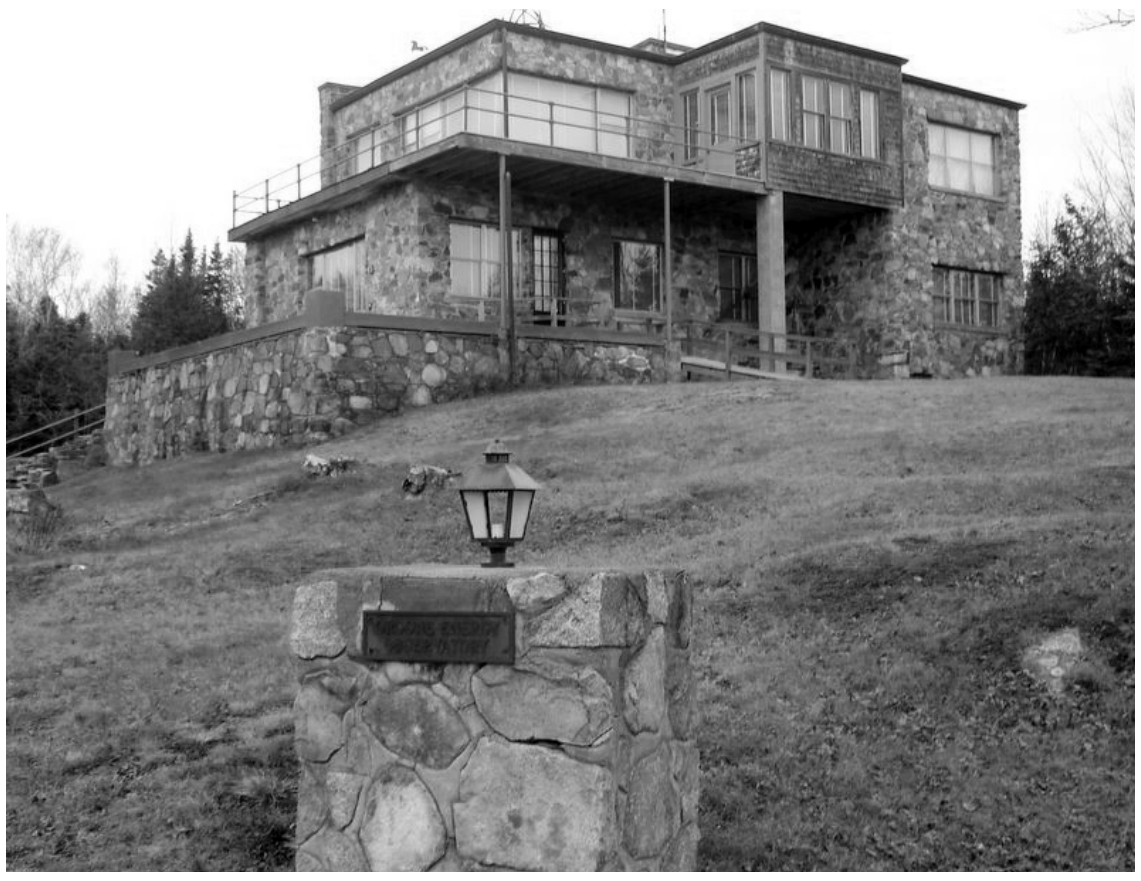
There had always been a fine line between therapy, providing for an individual's betterment through strengthening the ego's "reality principle," and adaptation to a bad social reality. For Adorno, the practice of therapy had come to tip the balance to adaptation—repression. The critical edge of Freudian psychoanalysis was lost in its unproblematic adoption by society—in its very "success." Freudian psychoanalysis was admitted and domesticated, but only the degree to which it had become outmoded. Like so much of modernism, it became part of kitsch culture. This gave it a repressive function. But it retained, however obscurely, a "utopian" dimension: the idea of being an ego at all. Not the self constituted in interpellation by authority, but in being for-itself.

After Freud, therapy produced, not problematic individuals of potential freedom, but authoritarian pseudo-individuals of mere survival. For Freud it was the preservation of the individual's potential for self-overcoming and not mere self-reiteration that characterized the ego. For Adorno, however, the obsolescence of Freudian ego-psychology posed the question and problem of what Adorno called "self-preservation." For Adorno, this was seen in individuals' "unworthiness of love."

If psychoanalytic therapy had always been above all pragmatic, had always concerned itself with the transformation of neurotic symptoms in the direction of better abilities to cope with reality, then there was always a danger of replacing neuroses with those that merely better suited society. But if, as Freud put it early on (in "The Psychotherapy of Hysteria," in *Studies on Hysteria*), as a result of psychotherapy the individual finds herself pressing demands that society has difficulty meeting, then that remained society's problem. It was a problem *for* the individual, but not simply *of* or "with" the individual. Freud understood his task as helping a neurotic to better equip herself for dealing with reality, including, first and foremost, *social* realities—that is, other individuals. Freud recognized the *challenge* of psychoanalysis. It was not for Freud to deny the benefits of therapy even if these presented new problems. Freud conceived psychical development as an open-ended process of consciousness in freedom.

The problem for Adorno was how to present the problem of society as such. Capital was the endemic form of psychology and not only sociology. What was the *psychological* basis for emancipatory transformation? For the problem was not how the individual was to survive society, but rather how society would survive the unmet demands presented by its individuals—and how society could transfigure and redeem the suffering, including psychically, of individual human beings. These human beings instantiated the very substance of that society, and they were the individuals who provided the ground for social transformation.

An emancipated society would no longer be "sociological" as it is under capital, but would be truly social for the first time. Its emancipated individuals would no longer be "psychological," but would be truly "individual" for the first time. They would no longer be merely derivative from their experience, stunted and recoiled in their narcissism. In this sense, the true, diverse individuation, what Adorno called "multiplicity," towards which Freudian psychoanalytic therapy pointed, could be realized, freed from the compulsions of neurotic repetition, including those of prevailing patterns of culture. At the same time, the pathological necessity of individual emancipation from society would be overcome. Repetition could be non-pathological, non-repressive, and elaborated in freedom. The self-contradiction of consciousness found in the Freudian problematic of ego-psychology, with its "unconscious mental process" from which it remained alienated, would be overcome, allowing for the first time the Kantian rationalism of the adequately self-aware and self-legislating subject of freedom in an open-ended development and transformation of human reason, not as a cunning social dialectic, but in and through individual human beings, who could be themselves for the very first time. | **P**



The Wilhelm Reich Museum, Orgonon, in Rangeley, ME, was Reich's residence and research center from 1940 until his death in 1957.

1. Wilhelm Reich, "Ideology as a Material Force," in *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, trans. Vincent Carfagno (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1970), 31. All references to Reich in what follows are from this text.
2. See Robert Hullot-Kentor, *Things Beyond Resemblance: Collected Essays on Theodor W. Adorno* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 83:

> [Siegfried] Kracauer…pointed out [in his review of Adorno's *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic*] that…[Adorno's] methodology derived from the concept of truth developed by Benjamin in his studies of Goethe and the Baroque drama: "In the view of these studies [i.e., Benjamin's] the truth-content of a work reveals itself only in its collapse….The work's claim to totality, its systematic structure, as well as its superficial intentions share the fate of everything transient, but as they pass away with time the work brings characteristics and configurations to the fore that are actually images of truth." This process could be exemplified by a recurrent dream: throughout its recurrences its images age, if imperceptibly; its historical truth takes shape as its thematic content dissolves. It is the truth-content that gives the dream, the philosophical work, or the novel its resilience. This idea of historical truth is one of the most provocative rebuttals to historicism ever conceived: works are not studied in the interest of returning them to their own time and period, documents of "how it really was," but rather according to the truth they release in their own process of disintegration.

You don't need a Marxist to know which way the wind blows

An interview with Mark Rudd

Spencer Leonard with Atiya Khan

Surfacing from underground, Mark Rudd surrenders himself to the Manhattan District Attorney, September 14, 1977.

On Thursday March 11, 2010, Platypus Review *Editor-in-Chief Spencer A. Leonard interviewed the prominent 1960s radical and last National Secretary of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), Mark Rudd, to discuss his recently published political memoir,* Underground. *In April, Leonard's interview with Rudd, prepared in conjunction with Atiya Khan, was broadcast in two parts on "Radical Minds" on WHPK-FM 88.5 Chicago. Podcasts are available at <platypus1917.org/2010/05/21/interview-with-mark-rudd-audio>. Below is an edited transcript of the interview.*

SL: I really appreciated the chapter on the SDS split in your recent book *Underground*. The kind of detail you go into there respecting the 1969 convention is rare. So, how you would characterize the '69 factional split within SDS in properly political terms—what were the parties and the lines of ideological fracture among them?

MR: My one-time ally and later opponent, Michael Klonsky, was the leader of a faction called the Revolutionary Youth Movement II. They had a slightly different line at the [last SDS conference in Chicago in 1969], but in the battle with Progressive Labor they were allied with us. In our conversation, Mike pointed out that the whole faction fight, the so-called split, happened among a very small number of people. Maybe a thousand members of SDS understood what it was about, whereas there were 99,000 more who had no idea. This faction fight between Progressive Labor on the one hand and the Revolutionary Youth Movement on the other was something happening among a very small group of people. The vast majority of both chapters and individuals in SDS were independent of the whole thing. Most were radicals in that they were opposed to the war, to racism, and, in some general way, to the system that gave us these things, though they might not have called themselves socialist. What we had in the split, however, was essentially a faction fight between different branches of Marxism-Leninism.

SL: This is what interests me. Of course, there is the mass student movement, but within it operates organized and ideologically driven politics.

MR: I just want to emphasize that this faction fight was hardly even understood by all members of SDS.

SL: Still, it has consequences even for those who do not understand it. That is the rub.

MR: There are a lot of rubs. We felt we were the heirs to the great tradition of 20th century revolutionary communism and that these battles—between [Che Guevara's] *foco* theory and the primacy of national liberation, or between dogmatic Maoism and the primacy of the working class line—we felt that all of this stuff was extraordinarily important because it was the culmination of a century-long struggle that would end in the defeat and downfall of US imperialism and of the monopoly capitalism that undergirded it. We didn't understand that we were really at the tail end of this whole business.

SL: One remarkable thing about the 1960s is that it was experienced as a kind of political high water mark and, for so many involved, a time of dramatic radicalization; however, when we look back, the 1960s seems more like the time when the Left entered into terminal decline.

MR: Yes. We made the fundamental mistake of believing that the war in Vietnam was the beginning of the end for US imperialism. We did not understand how deep American power went both economically and militarily. In retrospect, the military defeat in Vietnam was little more than a blip in the history of US imperialism. It was not the beginning of the end. Our group—which became Weatherman but which at the time of the split was known as Revolutionary Youth Movement I, adhering to what was called the Weatherman paper—thought that Che's strategy was a prediction of the future, which was to "create two, three, many Vietnams." We expected many more military defeats for US imperialism in the later part of the 20th century. We did not understand there was only one Vietnam which itself hardly mattered because the Vietnam War was not globally strategic. The Middle East, for example, is much more strategically located than is Southeast Asia. So yes, the United States was defeated militarily and forced to end its occupation of South Vietnam, but Vietnam never served as a model for any other revolution. In the 1980s, Noam Chomsky developed a line according to which the United States actually won the war in Vietnam in the sense that their only goal was to defeat a revolution that could serve as a model for others. After the United States completely destroyed North and South Vietnam, just devastating the country as a whole, then it could no longer serve as a model. Even though we and our puppet government in South Vietnam were forced out, even so we won the war because after that, nobody else wanted to get their country destroyed by the United States for attempting socialist revolution.

SL: And Chomsky's thesis calls into question the triumphal image that the anti-war movement concocted for itself?

MR: I would differentiate between the *anti-war* movement and the *anti-imperialist* movement. In our case, we had discovered imperialism. When I got to Columbia University in 1965 David Gilbert was already talking about imperialism and leading a study within SDS. This work culminated in a pamphlet called "U.S. Imperialism" by David Gilbert and David Loud, through which we learned that the United States had engaged in innumerable interventions around the world and that Vietnam was just one of these. We also studied *The Monthly Review*, John Gerassi, and David Horowitz's book *Free World Colossus*. The conclusion we drew was that national liberation movements throughout the world and, internally, within the United States were actually poised to defeat American imperialism. That understanding became the ideological basis of the Weatherman faction.

SL: I want to return to this and to the kind of "Marxism-Leninism" it represented. But first, I would like to take us back a bit. In *Underground* you discuss the roots of the split within SDS nationally and within your own chapter at Columbia. There you show how the split at Columbia was not isolated, but paralleled splits taking place on other campuses. I am interested in your perspective on the split within the chapter at Columbia between what was known as the Praxis Axis (which I understand to be more of an organization-building and consciousness-raising politics) and your own Action Faction.

MR: Here you are talking about a split among the SDS regulars. There was also a split between the regulars and the Progressive Labor Party which was ultimately reproduced in the split at the last national convention of SDS in June of 1969.

Among the SDS regulars at Columbia there were two tendencies. The Praxis Axis was composed primarily of older graduate students and people who oftentimes were red diaper babies, i.e. they were children of communists, socialists, and labor people. They had an organizing perspective according to which you build your base over a long period of time and, if everything turns out well, you will eventually have enough strength to act. It might be more accurate to call this a base-building or organizing tendency. And then along came kids like myself. Influenced by Cuba, we seized upon the idea that action galvanized mass support. This was kind of backwards in one way and vanguardist in another. It was backwards according to the organizing model of building a base first. But I must have sensed intuitively the potential of that spring of 1968 at Columbia after the Tet Offensive, the abdication of LBJ, and the assassination of Martin Luther King, because the base was already built. A lot of people at that time began to reconsider their own relationship to the war and to racism, so that when a few people acted, support appeared as if out of nowhere. So, what started with the demonstration of about 150 people at the end of March grew by April 23rd to 500 people. Then, with the occupation [of a campus building] the next day that support mushroomed to over a thousand people in the buildings. By taking action we took advantage of the support that had been developed through years of organizing.

SL: But, at that time, the success of the dramatic building occupations was viewed as a vindication of your Action Faction's tactics over those of the Praxis Axis. But now you are saying that this was a misreading of the situation, because it was really their tactics that were responsible for the success of your actions.

MR: Yes. Militancy and confrontation maybe could be thought of as a strategy, but basically it was a series of confrontational tactics. The overall strategy was education plus confrontation plus personal relationship-building. But at the time we misread it completely. We took the Columbia Revolt of April and May 1968 to be a vindication of Che's *foco* theory (i.e. the theory that a small group takes action and the masses join in once they see that guerilla warfare can work). That was a theory promulgated by the Cuban Communist Party in 1967 and 1968 and we lapped it up. Our Action Faction tendency and mentality fit in with the *foco* theory. At one point I made a speech quoted by Todd Gitlin in his book[1] in which I am reported as saying, "organizing is another word for going slow." I did not want organizing. I wanted speed and confrontation and militancy. After Columbia, however, almost every single application of this non-strategy of confrontation and militancy resulted in defeat and failed to build the movement.

SL: But it was the perception that those tactics had succeeded that catapulted you to a position of national leadership in SDS in 1968?

MR: Absolutely. It is bizarre but it has resonances and echoes even now, forty years later. No amount of actual testing of the ideas could deter us from believing that we were right. For example, in June of 1969, after the last national convention, when I was elected national secretary and Weatherman took over the SDS National Office as well as some regional offices, we called for an action in Chicago. We called it the National Action but later the press called it "Days of Rage" and the name stuck. In June we had about 500 people organizing for the Days of Rage, but when the time came only about 300 people showed up. But we just blew off the experience of going from 500 down to 300. We said to ourselves, "oh well, what we are doing is right. It is very tough to find people who will actually take on fighting the state and building a revolutionary army, so our small numbers only mean that we are right and we have to keep going." You would think the fact that we had de-organized from 500 down to 300 would have told us something. The problem was idealism: We thought that our ideas were right and we held to those ideas, despite the fact that the only proof we had of our ideas was that we held them.

But everybody was idealist. Klonsky's Revolutionary Youth Movement II went to the workers to build a revolutionary communist party and some people spent 10 or 20 years doing that only to have nothing come of it. Similarly, the Maoist Progressive Labor Party sought to build the worker-student alliance by uniting students with workers, because "ultimately the workers will make the revolution," because "it's a class question," and because "the proletariat is the revolutionary class in society." How did they know? Marx and Engels wrote it in 1848. Then there was the idea that the Black Panthers were the revolutionary vanguard. How did we know this? SDS said so. But what was our proof? Well, there has to be a vanguard and they were talking about revolution, picking up the gun, and chanting "Off the pig!" That must make them truly revolutionary.

Of course, the right wing has its own form of idealism. They say, "the United States is the greatest power the world has ever seen and can impose its view on the world." No amount of data can prove such a claim. So now it is seven years later and we are embroiled in two wars, both based on right-wing idealism.

SL: But theoretical differences, such as they were, were nevertheless at the heart of the factional struggles inside SDS. Here you are dismissing all ideology as "idealism." But is not "idealism" of this sort unavoidable, even necessary, especially on the Left?

MR: Well, it is and it is not. For example, Marxism has been so discredited now by the 21st century that there are only a tiny handful of young Marxists. The dominant ideology is anarchism among students and young activists. They are anti-state, of course, but in terms of strategy everything is reduced to self-expression, the need to express opposition to the state by wearing bandanas, breaking windows, and fighting cops.

SL: When you see these young anarchists, to what extent do you see them as your political offspring? How much do you find them romanticizing you and Weatherman in ways that you now find uncomfortable?

MR: It makes me very uncomfortable. The only value of the Weather Underground, it seems to me, is to learn what not to do. So when I see people making the same damn mistake, it upsets me. Last week I was in Pittsburgh and was arguing with some young people there who were involved in the G20 demonstrations back in September. They were a tiny faction of the six or eight thousand people there. About 200 of them wanted to march without a permit. They wanted to wear bandanas, and to show their militancy. They would not abide by the general agreement of nonviolence. So what I see is the need these people have to express their opposition rather than to think strategically about what will build the movement. This is the error we made. We went from organizing, which was essentially what built Columbia SDS, to swallowing an entire theoretical framework about revolution and anti-imperialism, militancy and support for the Third World, revolutionary solidarity, etc., all of which we took in the direction of self-expression. With the Days of Rage we believed that if by fighting the cops we showed people how militant and serious we were they would join us. But that does not build a movement. Today's anarchists are making the same mistake.

SL: What type of organizing did SDS engage in when you first joined the organization? How did it differ?

MR: It was talk. It was relation-building. It involved education. It involved engagement with people who did not think like us, but might be won over. So we would sit down and talk and find out what they thought about the war in Vietnam or about racism and tell them what we thought to see if there was any common ground. Such organizing took place over a long period of time—I am talking two to four years—and it paid off in the April 1968 confrontation. For instance, when I was a freshman at Columbia, studying in my dorm, David Gilbert, who was a senior and the chairman of the Independent Committee on Vietnam, a predecessor of the Columbia SDS chapter, comes knocking on my door. He was out organizing dorms, talking with people about the war and about racism.

Every day SDS had a table set up on campus. People would walk by and we would engage them in discussion about the war. I recently ran into somebody who remembers the brilliant arguments David made debating a ROTC guy in front of the SDS table. There was a lot of engagement with people rather than mere demonstrations of how deeply we felt about the war.

SL: So if we think about that in terms of its historical roots, some people in SDS were red diaper babies who inherited notions of base-building organization from the Communist Party. There were also streams coming out of the labor movement. So, to what extent do you think that these organizational strategies that people were improvising in SDS in the mid-1960s were actually new?

MR: We were the direct heirs of the Civil Rights and labor movement. The model for organizing came to us directly from those movements. The graduate students at Columbia had been in the south with SNCC, for example, and had learned organizing with Miss Ella Baker in Mississippi. To the extent that the anti-war movement grew, it was because of this organizing. I think that the mistake was believing after the Columbia Revolt that our self-expression politics, our confrontational politics, our hyper-militancy was what won people over. Certainly after Columbia it all failed. So my book is really the story of good organizing, SDS, followed by bad organizing, Weatherman, followed by no organizing at all, the Weather Underground. A friend of mine calls the Weather Underground "existential politics." A bomb here and a bomb there—this was our form of self-expression.

What I have discovered in the last few years talking with students on college campuses is that, however well intentioned, they have no conception of organizing. They think the anti-Vietnam War movement happened spontaneously. It was a good idea so people came together and protested. They have never heard of SNCC or Ella Baker, and have scarcely heard of Saul Alinsky. They have no notion that a movement must have a growth strategy. When in the March of 2003 millions of people went out to the streets, they thought this would stop the war. After all, they had demonstrated their feelings on the subject. But that is not what a movement is. Historically, that is not what built all the great social and political movements in this country. For that, one must look to the secret American tradition, the one of real organizing.

I find that young people are trying to get back to that tradition and to figure it out. They are reading Barbara Ransby's excellent *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement* or Charles M. Payne's *I've Got the Light of Freedom* about SNCC's operations in one town in Mississippi, to which Payne returns to talk to everybody who was involved to discover what was their method of organizing? The answer Payne gives is that it had to do with building strong relationships and leadership development at the base level. SNCC adapted this model from the practices of Southern black churches. It was led by women and was highly democratic. This is stuff that needs rediscovering. I have dedicated myself to helping people figure this stuff out now.

SL: On the subject of the Civil Rights Movement, the New Left was, so to speak, galvanized by that struggle and yet still, at the time of your politicization in 1965 the student left, including SDS, remained tacitly divided along racial lines. This strikes me as very bizarre, this whole idea of the white left and the black left. Why wasn't the Left already integrated? And since it wasn't, why was this not a primary goal in the second half of the 1960s?

MR: The Black Power movement that emerged from the Civil Rights Movement, specifically from SNCC, hit organizations like SDS very hard. It was very difficult to understand how to function within this new idea of black self-determination and black separatism. It was like a punch to the gut. At the same time, it was very radical. We knew we had to understand Black Power. We could not whine, off on the sideline, and say "gee, all we want is an integrated organization and non-violence." We had to understand what they were saying. They could not function in the same organization with white people because white people dominated because of internalized superiority or racism. The critique that Black Power made was enormous and, in a way, it drove us over the edge. This was especially true with the Black Panthers, because they seemed as if they were solving the problem for us by being both a Black Power organization and socialist. They recognized that there was both a class aspect and a racial aspect to oppression. So white leftists jumped on the Black Panthers' bandwagon as a group we could ally with and work with. Meanwhile, the Panthers were getting smashed by the police and by the feds, murdered, literally murdered, and they needed support. So we served a function for them. This was especially true because the base they had built up in places like Oakland and Chicago, and to some extent New York, was evaporating. Black people didn't want to die and to be involved with the Panthers was almost suicidal. In fact, that was the title of Huey P. Newton's autobiography, *Revolutionary Suicide.* Running around with guns and chanting "Off the pig!" meant that the feds and the local police were going to kill you. And that's what happened.

SL: So is it fair to say you inherited this split, derived from the Civil Rights Movement's failure to radically transform American society through integration?

MR: No. It seemed to us that integration was played out. Black Power superseded both it and non-violence. The Black Power elements were much more radical in understanding the depth of the system, the depravity of

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