Communication (2)
THE NET

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Keep an eye on *Freedom*

The price of freedom is eternal vigilance, and vigilance means keeping yourself informed. To avoid the depredations of caterpillars, keep inspecting your organic cabbages for butterfly eggs. To prevent the government from becoming more powerful, keep noticing what new laws are proposed. Information is the essential prerequisite of action.

On the other hand, the price of *Freedom* the anarchist fortnightly is still only 50p. But it is a good idea to keep informed about it. Produced by unpaid, opinionated volunteers, it changes in editorial style from time to time, so if you have not seen it for some time (or even if you have never seen it) write for a free specimen copy now.

Ask for a Freedom Press Bookshop stocklist at the same time.

Neil Birrell

Introduction

There have been two problems involved in preparing this edition of *The Raven*. Firstly, lack of space. More articles are coming in or are expected and so we will be able to produce another edition on this subject sometime in the near future. Here there is only room for a few words. We hope to say more about the issues we are raising in the next edition. The second problem was the title. Originally we had decided on 'Language and Communication'. The first element of that formula is missing and will be covered in the next edition. By default, therefore, this edition is about communication but this is an area which immediately overlaps into other areas: media, technology etc. Perhaps this is unimportant. Rather than the title, we would wish you to focus on the content. Despite lack of space we still just have room to introduce some of our contributors and are pleased to note how many new names there are among them.

We never intended the discussion to be dominated by the question of anarchists and the internet but we have no reason to be dismayed that it has worked out that way. Radio as a medium is also well represented, and indeed we have given it a section on its own for that reason. We are confident that the follow up edition will cover other issues and will, we feel, restore a sense of balance if it is missing here.

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John Perry Barlow was, I understand, a lyricist for the Grateful Dead. Here he opens this edition of *The Raven* with a declaration that people have been invited to sign in response to recent governmental attempts in the US to censor the content of the internet. Although not intended as such it contains some elements of what is elsewhere referred to as technophilia ... hence the antidote which follows – 'Cyber Slavery' – a true statement of scepticism with regard to the 'net.

Karl Young offers us two pieces trying firstly, in 'Disturbing History', to put some of the new forms of media in a historical context and secondly in 'Net Lists' to give a feel of how e-mail operates in the anarchist communities on the 'net. Karl has been involved in publishing

for many years where he has been able to pursue his love of poetry. Elsewhere he has been a committed activist in the peace movement a subject we hope he will return to in a future issue we are working on.

We then leave the internet to 'cook' as we turn to the world of Radio. Much from this section has been gleaned from a book, *Anarquisme: Exposici Internacional* published in Catalonia in 1994 following the successful international conference which took place in Barcelona. All translations have been prepared for Freedom Press, including pieces on **Radio Contrabanda** and **Radio Libertaire** which have already appeared in *Freedom*'s 'Anarchy in Action?' column. Two further items on Radio Libertaire are included for the first time in an English language publication.

A. Presenter here offers a piece detailing her experience of censorship. An old friend of Freedom Press, A. Presenter is currently working single handedly on a project aimed at restoring British Telecom to profitability.

Joe Toscano in Australia has kindly contributed an article outlining the experience of Australians working in the local radio structure in that country. This is an issue we will return to in the second part of this *Raven*.

Also taken from *Anarquisme: Exposici Internacional* is the piece telling of the experiences of the Portuguese journal *A Batalha* which will bring a smile to many who have had similar experiences. Pleasingly we can report that *A Batalha* has indeed recovered from the problems it faced in the 1980s and now appears regularly every other month.

Gary Moffat supplies us with a bridge back to our main focus of interest here. Gary's thoughtful article first appeared last year in the Canadian journal *Kick it Over* which is fast developing as an important reference point for the development of the anarchist position.

The editorial to *Techno-Sceptic* comes from a pamphlet issued last year carrying various articles of interest about the internet. Valid in itself it points to other articles in that edition of *Techno-Sceptic* which discuss the issue at more length.
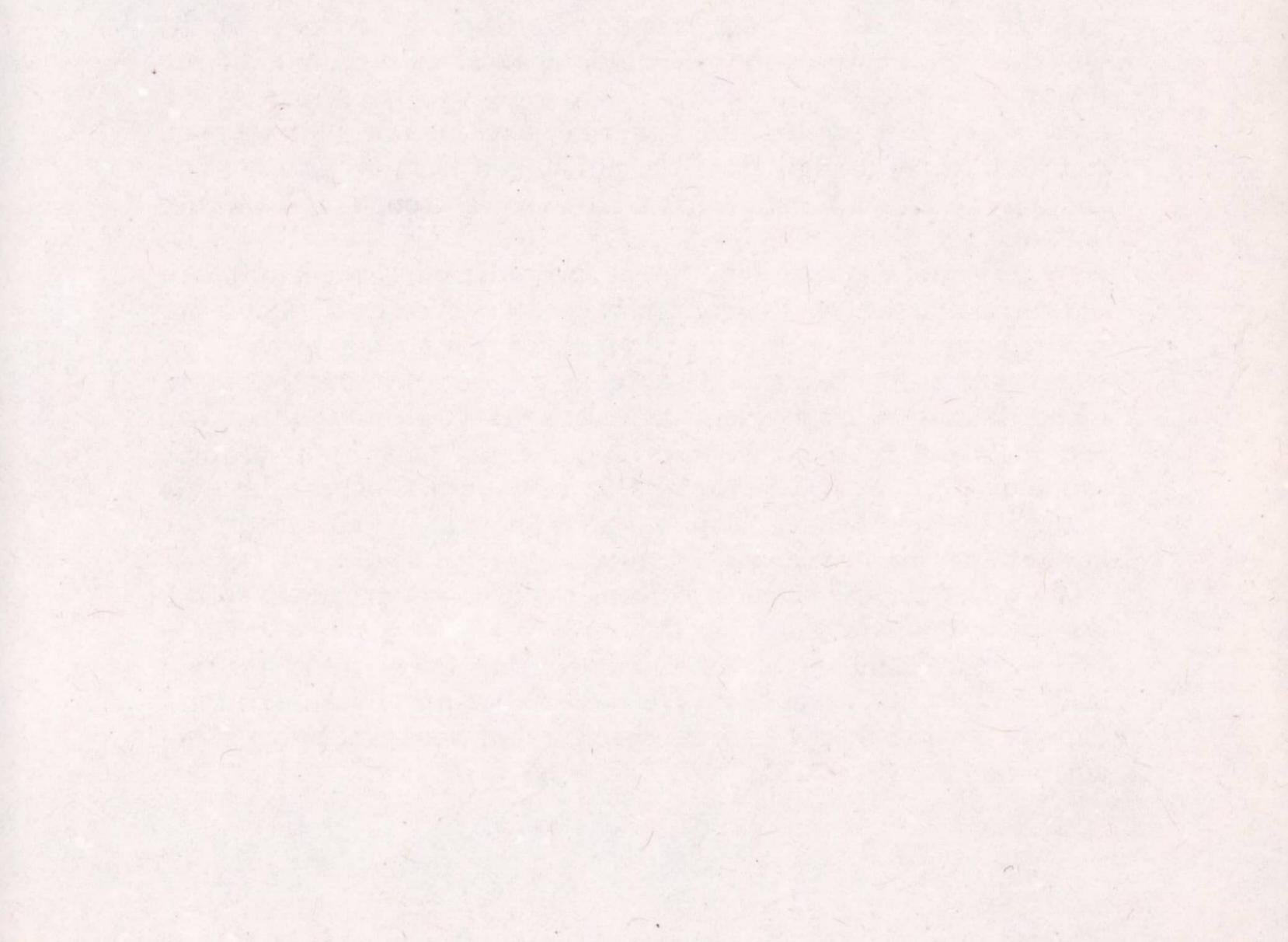
Then, after 'Net Lists', we have **John Pilgrim**'s updated article 'Bulletins of Freedom' which first appeared in *Freedom* in 1994. John will be known to many of our readers not least for his excellent work as an editor of previous editions of *The Raven*.

Last but certainly not least comes **Jesse Hirsh**'s delicious parody detailing his personal experience at a conference in Canada which raises serious issues as to where the new technologies are going. Jesse

is one of those untiring activists who has done much to help Freedom Press work out how it should relate to the internet recently. You will hear his name again.

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Further ideas for editions of *The Raven* are already in the planning and we would like to take this opportunity to invite contributions from our readers. Further contributions on the subject of 'Language and Communication' would still be welcomed and we would be particularly interested to receive reaction to that material which is included here. After that we hope to produce an edition entitled '(Anti) Militarism and (Non) Violence' giving a matrix of some four areas for thought. Also planned is an edition on 'Anarchism and the Americas', some material for this has already been received or discussed but currently this is very much at an embryonic stage. We look forward to hearing your suggestions.

John Perry Barlow

A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace

Governments of the Industrial World, you weary giants of flesh and steel, I come from Cyberspace, the new home of Mind. On behalf of the future, I ask you of the past to leave us alone. You are not welcome among us. You have no sovereignty where we gather.

We have no elected government, nor are we likely to have one, so I address you with no greater authority than that with which liberty itself always speaks. I declare the global social space we are building to be naturally independent of the tyrannies you seek to impose on us. You have no moral right to rule us nor do you possess any methods of enforcement we have true reason to fear.

Governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed. You have neither solicited nor received ours. We did not invite you. You do not know us, nor do you know our world. Cyberspace does not lie within your borders. Do not think that you can build it, as though it were a public construction project. You cannot. It is an act of nature and it grows itself through our collective actions.

You have not engaged in our great and gathering conversation, nor did you create the wealth of our market-places. You do not know our culture, our ethics, or the unwritten codes that already provide our society more order than could be obtained by any of your impositions.

You claim there are problems among us that you need to solve. You use this claim as an excuse to invade our precincts. Many of these problems don't exist. Where there are real conflicts, where there are wrongs, we will identify them and address them by our means. We are forming our own Social Contract.

This governance will arise according to the conditions of our world, not yours. Our world is different.

Cyberspace consists of transactions, relationships, and thought itself, arrayed like a standing wave in the web of our communications. Ours is a world that is both everywhere and nowhere, but it is not where bodies live.

We are creating a world that all may enter without privilege or prejudice accorded by race, economic power, military force, or station of birth.

We are creating a world where anyone, anywhere may express his or her beliefs, no matter how singular, without fear of being coerced into silence or conformity.

Your legal concepts of property, expression, identity, movement, and context do not apply to us. They are based on matter, There is no matter here.

Our identities have no bodies, so, unlike you, we cannot obtain order by physical coercion. We believe that from ethics, enlightened self-interest, and the commonweal, our governance will emerge. Our identities may be distributed across many of your jurisdictions. The only law that all our constituent cultures would generally recognise is the Golden Rule. We hope we will be able to build our particular solutions on that basis. But we cannot accept the solutions you are attempting to impose.

In the United States, you have today created a law, the Telecommunications Reform Act, which repudiates your own Constitution and insults the dreams of Jefferson, Washington, Mill, Madison, DeToqueville, and Brandeis. These dreams must now be born anew in us.

You are terrified of your own children, since they are natives in a world where you will always be immigrants. Because you fear them, you entrust your bureaucracies with the parental responsibilities you are too cowardly to confront yourselves. In our world, all the sentiments and expressions of humanity, from the debasing to the angelic, are parts of a seamless whole, the global conversation of bits. We cannot separate the air that chokes from the air upon which wings beat.
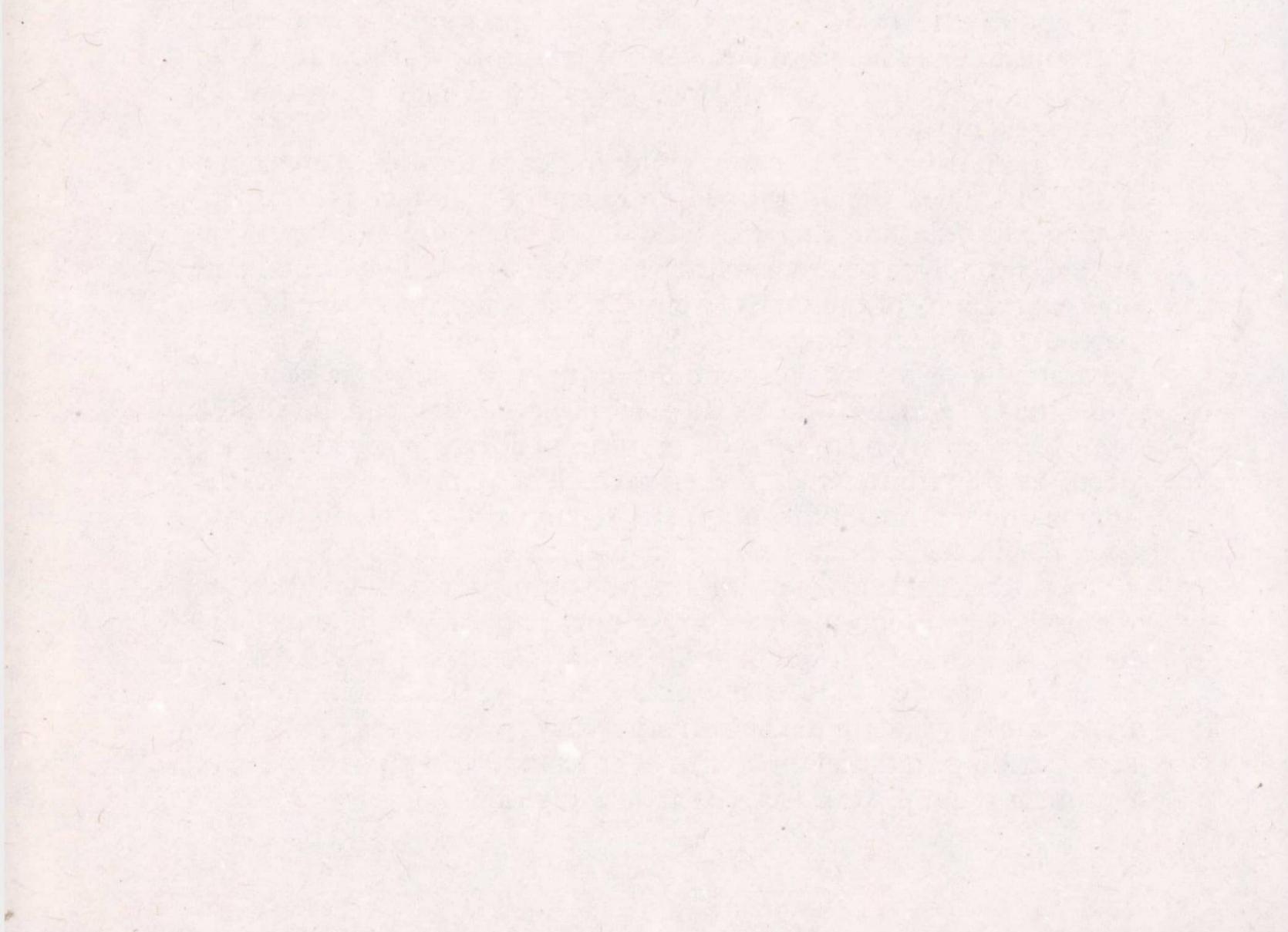
In China, Germany, France, Russia, Singapore, Italy and the United States, you are trying to ward off the virus of liberty by erecting guard posts at the frontiers of Cyberspace. These may keep out the contagion for a small time, but they will not work in a world that will soon be blanketed in bit-bearing media.

Your increasingly obsolete information industries would perpetuate themselves by proposing laws, in America and elsewhere, that claim to own speech itself throughout the world. These laws would declare ideas to be another industrial product, no more noble than pig iron. In our world, whatever the human mind may create can be reproduced and distributed infinitely at no cost. The global conveyance of thought no longer requires your factories to accomplish.

These increasingly hostile and colonial measures place us in the same position as those previous lovers of freedom and self-determination who had to reject the authorities of distant, uninformed powers. We must declare our virtual selves immune to your sovereignty, even as we continue to consent to your rule over our bodies. We will spread ourselves across the Planet so that no one can arrest our thoughts.

We will create a civilisation of the Mind in Cyberspace. May it be more humane and fair than the world your governments have made before.

Davos, Switzerland
February 8, 1996
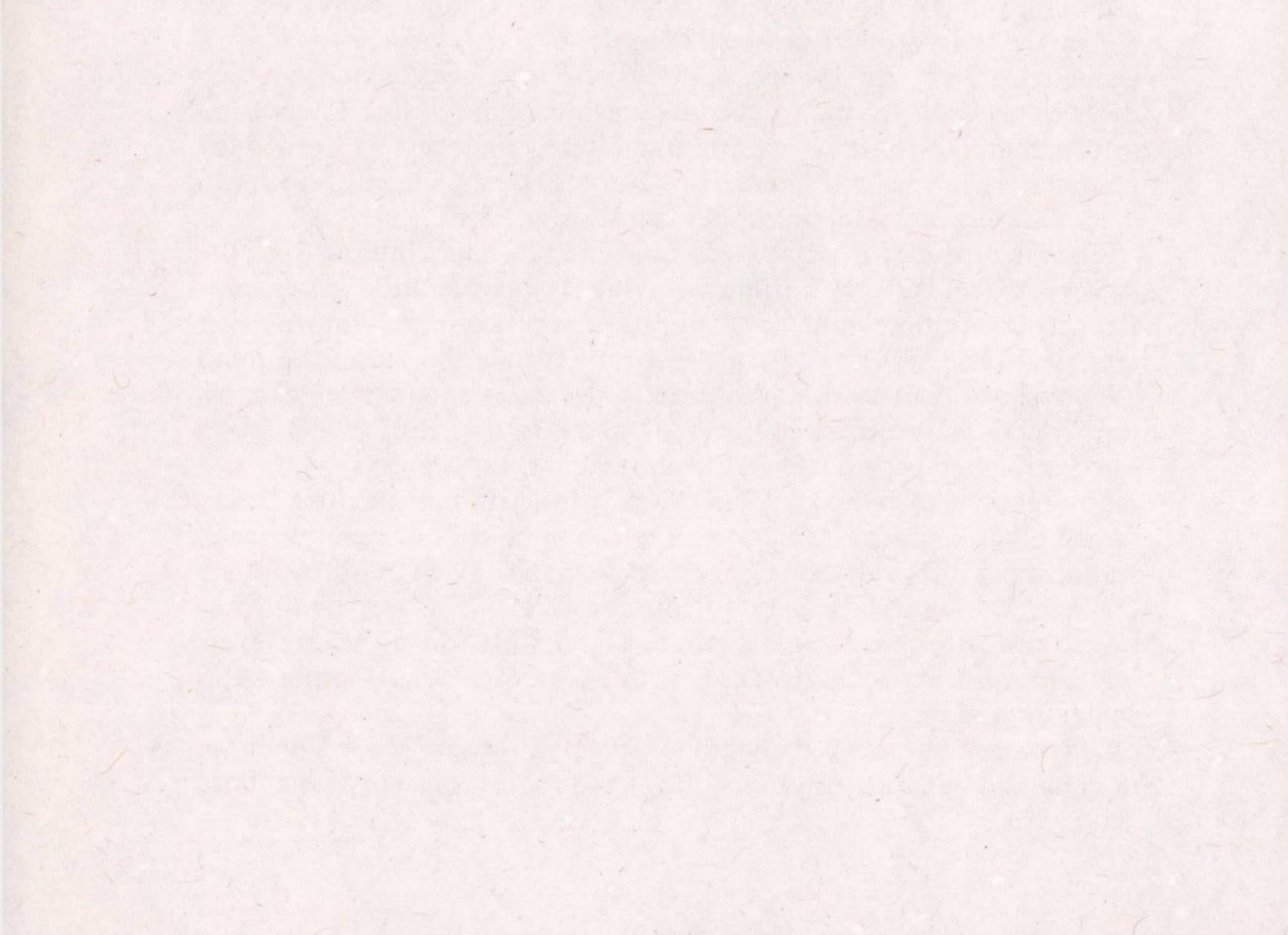
The Anarchist Media Institute

Cyber-Slavery

As you sit there staring at your own reflection on the computer screen. As you wait to log onto the World Wide Web (WWW), think about what you're doing and how many hours of your life are going to evaporate as you answer your e-mail and scour the known universe looking for information and kindred souls. Cyberspace is an illusion, virtual reality is not reality, instantaneous communication with bodies huddled over computer screens is not communication.

It's funny how many people have swallowed the WWW bait. People itch to go home and log onto the WWW. People may not know or care about their neighbours, community or family but they are willing to embrace the WWW. People may not be interested or know anything about what's happening in their street or neighbourhood but are keen to dart around a myriad of bulletin boards around the known universe. There's no doubt that the WWW is a device which can help individuals and groups communicate instantaneously. There's no doubt that this form of communication cannot be controlled by governments or police. There's no doubt that the telecommunication corporations are raking in money hands over fists.

What is in doubt is what social and human contribution does the WWW make. WWW surfing is a lonely private little enterprise. Irrespective of how many hits you make and how much information you glean, the WWW does not and cannot take the place of human relationships. As television has turned cities into virtual private ghettos, the WWW has turned millions of users into private information junkies. Cyberspace has become another form of slavery.

The reality created by cybersurfing is little different to the reality created by chemical addiction. Each creates its own reality, each wants more of your being. Each makes social beings into private consumption units The hype surrounding the WWW is hype that has been manufactured to create a market for a whole new telecommunications network that limits personal development and social interaction.

Cyberspace has created a whole new set of slaves. These slaves are not chained to their computers, they have voluntarily, shed what little

freedom they have so that they can create a cyber reality that blocks out the reality that they think they cannot change. As long as millions of people believe that the only way to change reality is to change their heads, the possibility that radical egalitarian social change can be a reality grows dimmer by the hours. Religion, drugs and cyberspace create private realities that block out the day to day realities that people face. Each in its own way adds another link to the chain that keeps each and everyone of us a slave to the reality we think we cannot change.

Karl Young

Disturbing History

In discussing the 'electronic revolution' in publishing that many claim is now going on, savants often slide into the techno-determinism most cleverly formulated by Herbert Marshall McLuhan and put on the robes of old testament prophets. There are serious dangers in such stances. I would like to address some of these problems from an historical perspective, and make a pedestrian proposal that might seem outrageous to some readers familiar with the discussion of new technologies.

In looking at the history of communications, I will have to deal quickly with long periods of time. This has its uses, but the great diversity of the large numbers of individuals involved should not be forgotten in the process, as is common in contemporary 'media' discussion. This cannot be stressed too much: none of these comments has any meaning if divorced from the people involved. When discussing the advent of printing, we must bear in mind the lives not only of scholar-printers like Aldus or Estienne but also the street toughs employed by them to cut punches because of their skill with knives. When speaking of education, we must remember that teachers have run a wide gamut from sadists who liked to see the backs of unruly children bleed to sincerely dedicated people who enthusiastically and selflessly devoted themselves to bettering the lives of their students, often for wretched pay if any at all. When speaking of developments in paper making, we must not lose sight of those who lived their lives in the stench of the mill, resenting every tedious working day, or those who added to the process in small, slow, and anonymous increments, spending many sleepless nights trying to figure out how pulp could be better refined or how drying screens could be improved. When speaking of the present moment in the history of communication, we negate the discussion if we do not consider the many diverse skills and intentions of a mind boggling number of people who deserve our respect, whatever our differences in belief and evaluation – even if this moment should prove a dead end or if its results should be other than what we expect or want.

Several lines of electronic publishing are now in the works, and may

partially fulfil the claims made by technophiles for electronic books of the future. You can get a lot of text on a CD-ROM, and if we get past the puerile 'Great Books' approach of 'Library of the Future', it should be feasible to produce tailored CDs that could give nearly anyone of moderate means the equivalent of a public library. If the obscenity of censorship can be prevented, the equivalent of immense libraries on CD-ROM wouldn't be necessary: many libraries could put their public domain works on-line, and arrangements could be made to digitise a great deal of work under current copyright. Some universities are already doing this. Organisations such as Project Guttenberg digitise standard classics and make them available in plain ASCII format, a language that can be read by almost all computers. Spunk Press has been making Anarchist texts available on-line for several years. Spunk's library now contains some 1,400 items. Spunk's URL is:

http://www.cwi.nl/cwi/people/Jack.Jansen/spunk/Spunk_Home.html

You can find my 'Light and Dust' archive of contemporary poetry, fiction, and criticism at the following URL:

http://www.thing.net/~grist

Grist On-Line includes a number of other web publishers, hosted by John Fowler. One line of prophecy combines hardware and files: reading devices about one by five by eight inches could be manufactured easily and inexpensively. Instead of turning pages, the reader would go from screen to screen by scrolling a knob at the side. Copy for these readers could be sent by modem and down-loaded into the readers easily. This could significantly reduce production and distribution costs. Such a reader could be used in virtually any situation: you could read from it in your favourite chair, at your desk or workstation, in bed, on a bus or train, in the bathtub, outdoors in the shade of a tree or on your front porch. Theoretically, the amount and range of material available could be virtually infinite. In some instances, it might be desirable to give the person reading from such a device the option of changing type face or point size – this could be a great benefit for people with visual impairment or some kinds of dyslexia.

Along with the prophets who wax eloquent on the advantages of electronic publishing, there is also a growing chorus of prophets decrying the advent of electronic publishing. Perhaps the strongest line of argument from this group points out the danger of the supplier of texts becoming a stifling and extortionary monopoly in total control

of transmitted material. Whether under private or government control matters little: as a negation of free speech and an instrument of propaganda, this would be a free reader's worst nightmare come true.

This line of prophecy also includes those who fear that electronic publishing will bring about the end of printed books, thus reducing the 'great accomplishments of western civilisation' to the standardised barbarity of lights blink in a plastic box. My favourite statement along these lines came from the novelist Paul Metcalf, who initially expressed reservations about being included in the Light and Dust archive. Among the usual objections, the following struck me as irrefutable: Paul said that every computer he'd ever seen looked like it came from Toys- R-Us, an enormous toy store chain in the US. In many ways he's right – computers tend to look like video game sets, and even the most serious programs they run often resemble such games.

It would be nice – perhaps even easy to resolve – if the problems of new media leant themselves to simple yes/no, positive/negative dichotomies. They don't. And, perhaps more importantly, if they are like other changes in communication, their main functions in the long run will not be immediately apparent. To understand the problem better, let's take a step back and look at the problem in a larger context. Dullness and standardisation have been a long time coming, and only custom, sales technique, and context prevent us from seeing most books as Toys-R-Us items at the present time. Bookstore chains like Waldens, Daltons, and Borders could just as well be called Books-R-Us. It's taken quite a bit of preparation to get us ready for Books-R-Us, much of it institutional, and much of it in the name of education, culture, child rearing, and progress.

The main course of writing in western civilisation has been towards ease of assimilation. Although most writers on the subject act as cheerleaders for this movement, each step has involved loss of one sort or another. Apparently the largest transition was from signs with intrinsic pictorial and symbolic value to characters that recorded speech. We can see some of the loss involved in this transition if we compare the Roman alphabet with the Chinese writing system. Although a European language such as Latin may be more flexible and easier to learn, there are expressive potentials in the graphic and etymological components of written Chinese that simply don't exist in the Roman alphabet.

The first phonetic scripts represented consonant phonemes only; a giant step came with additional symbols to represent vowels. The clarity and grace of the Roman alphabet as it existed by the fourth

century AD apparently contributed to the ability of at least a few people to read silently. Roman political structure also permitted publishing in something like the modern sense of the word. Though the Romans had no printing presses, they did control plantations in Egypt where slaves grew papyrus plants; another class of slaves made papyrus sheets; and another transcribed books dictated to them in large sweatshops. Separating words from each other by putting spaces between them, combining majuscules and minuscules to create the distinction between what we now call (following later printing practices) upper and lower case letters, the addition and diversification of punctuation took place slowly over many centuries. These developments contributed more to the possibility of printing from movable types than any other factor.

Earlier writing systems required close cooperation between student and teacher, and between mature reader and community. Reading was not a solitary practice, nor was it silent. It was a form of social behaviour that involved not only a personally transmitted tradition but also discussion and communal use. Moving away from this made both learning to read and reading itself easier, and contributed to a greater sense of individuality for the reader. Although breaking ties of authority and group restraint marked a real advance, the accompanying loss of community and cooperation should not be underestimated. As Plato, who more or less invented prose as an art instead of a simple expedient, observed, one of the costs of basic literacy was a loss in memory. This can still be seen in parts of the world where 'pre-literate' people look askance at anthropologists, missionaries, etc., who can't remember events precisely and conversations verbatim for very long.

Advances in legibility made it easier for people to learn how to read, and by the mid fourteenth century, literacy rates were higher than they had been since the days of the Roman Empire, probably exceeding those of the classic Roman world. From a contemporary point of view, it's hard to see any loss in that. The increase in the number of people who could read contributed to the success of movable type: to put it in modern terms, an industry of this sort needs a fair number of consumers to amortise production costs and allow an acceptable profit margin. People writing on the revolution in communication of the mid fifteenth century stress the mechanics of invention because it's easy to do, and in doing so they can create semi-mythic heroes like Guttenberg, yet the centre of the story is the social and economic dynamics that made print viable. The rise of a

middle class that could afford books and wanted the prestige associated with them, and strangely subversive religious groups such as the Brothers of the Common Life, actively engaged in teaching reading to all social strata, created a strong push toward more legible writing and a larger output of books. The same applies to most technological advances. If Charlemagne could have commissioned a telephone, what could he have done with it? He could not have set up a hotline to Haroon al Rashid without the support of hundreds of thousands of telephone users and thousands of workers who could set up and operate telephone networks.

Since the fifteenth century, refinements have continued along similar lines. By the sixteenth century, savants in England and France were clamouring for standardised orthography. Since English and French are essentially creoles, spelling was considerably more confusing than for languages such as Italian that followed a different evolutionary path. This reform went over somewhat better in France than in England, and since it was conducted in part by scholar-printer-publishers, it is one of the reasons why French continues to use diacritical markings. But serious standardisation had to wait for ideological and technical changes before becoming absolute. After the US war for independence, the puritan element in the US found an outlet for its need to control every detail of life in figures like Noah Webster, who equated standardisation with moral probity, and saw correct spelling as next to Godliness. The need to repress unruliness of any sort runs under the surface of Webster's spelling-bees and related activities, and forms part of the basis for the regimentation, and hence cost efficiency, of mass education. This kind of regimentation and quashing of individuality played a crucial role in creating the industrial workforce of nineteenth century America. The task of breaking the spirits of agrarian workers so they could make efficient factory drones had to come in the guise of education, and, since it was aimed at children, required an element of play. The same system of embedding standardisation in the psyches of children also helped make them good consumers, willing to accept standardised products, putting aside the long tradition of bargaining for something better in daily transactions. It's hard to argue against mass education, but since one of its major advance evolved as an adjunct to wage slavery, it's also hard to miss the losses involved – and hard not to wish it had been brought about in a better way.

Book production went through several related stages of development. For the most part, renaissance printers worked their type to the point

of near illegibility. This and the rough finishes of the papers they used required a hefty punch in impression. As markets expanded, consumer purchasing power increased, and smoother printing surfaces became more readily available, printers strove for a greater evenness of impression and inking. Binders worked towards simpler and quicker methods. Since books could be mass produced, they didn't have to last long: this took a great deal of strain off the book binders as it took the strain off of the bindings of individual books.

As books became standardised, it became possible for some people to read silently more quickly than they could speak. This capability has been systematised and codified in the twentieth century as speed reading. Taught nearly everywhere, to children and adults alike, this ability can allow an adept to read more in a week than Shakespeare read in his lifetime. When the twentieth century was still relatively young, Beatrice Warde published her most important essay 'The Crystal Goblet'. This work stands with such classics as Trithemius's *De Laude Scriptorum* as a landmark in the history of commentary on book making and reading. In it she argued that type and all other aspects of book production should be 'transparent'. Using the analogy of a drinking glass, she maintained that someone who appreciates wine would prefer a glass that showed and delivered the wine to its fullest advantage, without any hindrance or distraction from ornament or irregularity. She extended the metaphor in several ways: the stem of the glass, for instance, was analogous to the margins of a printed page: both stem and margins provide handles so the fingers of the drinker or reader don't cover the real prize. According to Ms Warde, nothing should come between the reader and the words and ideas of the author. These are noble sentiments, and many elegant books have been produced by people who have taken Ms Warde seriously, almost as Gospel. Unfortunately, the craftspeople who have followed Ms Warde have been a tiny minority of book producers. The way things have worked out in practice has gone in a different direction, not toward craftsmanly restraint and selfless devotion to literature, but toward homogenised banality, and the worst breach of transparency possible: the obscuring of text under the illusion of transparency.

Many who argue against electronic publishing claim that computers will turn us into data processors instead of readers. That has already happened. Nearly all of the developments that have moved writing toward greater legibility have moved it farther away from speech, something that exists in what the producers of audio recordings call

'real-time', and toward a completely cerebral rate of assimilation. At the same time, these developments have moved writing away from expressive forms of visualisation. Standardised appearance of text has had the odd effect of making visual innovations in design all look alike because we have become fixated on the illusion of transparency. In effect, we were turning ourselves into data processors long before Turing started tinkering with his computing devices. Without that transformation, computers of the modern type probably could not have been made.

For many purposes, reading as data assimilation has its advantages. Given the volume of information with which the contemporary world seems to overwhelm us, the ability to assimilate a large volume of data may aid many people in making crucial decisions. If you're going downriver in a boat, you can only steer if you're moving faster than the current of the water. Then again, if you are required to make decisions before you've thought them through or even had time to check your basic instincts, you're probably going to make a lot of serious mistakes.

For most of what we think of as literature, and for the book as an art form, this development has been a disaster. Nowhere is this more evident than in poetry. Traditionally, poetry, like its near relative music, is an art based in time. When you start distorting time in poetry, you destroy it. To clarify this, let's use recordings of music as an example. If you play a $33\frac{1}{3}$ rpm record at 45 rpm, you will not only change the tempo, you'll also change the pitch. This applies equally to contemporary heavy metal rock and its nineteenth century predecessor, the operas of Wagner and Verdi; the music of John Coltrane and his eighteenth century antecedent, Johann Sebastian Bach. Changes in perception of time aided by reading rates causes serious problems in all areas of contemporary life, from the ability to handle anticipation to attention spans to the ability to make realistic plans and projections. With the advent of television came a quantum leap in distortion of perceptions of time. On one level, it brought about a greater desire for acquiring goods immediately, which in turn encouraged purchases on credit, in some instances reinstating perpetual cycles of debt. On another level, the time slots allotted for programs brought the mechanical schedule of the factory into peoples daily lives. Watching television also prepared people for using computers, which resemble televisions with keyboards.

Perhaps no other change in the history of literacy has developed as quickly as the move to computer technology. It's nature would be

hard to describe at this point, as its direction is still uncertain. It will probably take a long time for it to be possible to chart the gains and losses of the last decade, and changes will probably continue at an accelerating rate in the future. Even a simple list of pros and cons is a strange sort of see-saw of arguments.

For a minority (including me), computer technology has allowed people to work at home, setting their own schedules and re-integrating work with the rest of their lives. Many of these people can find and exploit niches in the economy that can't be handled profitably by larger corporations, and the volume of work they can turn out with the new technology gives them greater earning power than they could hope for under other circumstances. Computer usage gives many handicapped people who would otherwise be virtually unemployable the ability to earn a decent living. An example of this is the husband of a colleague of mine. He is blind, yet he works as a computer programmer. Instead of reading from a monitor, he reads from a pad over rods that produce Braille characters. My colleague first met him at a computer users' group, which suggests that computers need not be as isolating as many claim. There's no way that we can rightfully disparage the benefits to many handicapped people that computers have brought about.

But at this time, data feeds on data, and the techno-industrial complex that universal literacy made possible needs large numbers of people to gather, enter, transfer, and otherwise manipulate data. In the industrial world this has lead to computerised sweatshops that seem little better than those of the nineteenth century. In the US, much of this corpse of data workers are 'temps', people employed on a temporary basis at a pay scale below minimum wage, with no health, retirement, or other benefits. People in these data pools often develop job-related health problems that limit the number of years they can work. With union formation difficult if not impossible for temps, this makes them disposable workers. Often their rate of input is monitored through the computer systems on which they work, and they are docked or fired if they don't maintain a pre-determined speed. In many instances, simple amenities such as coffee breaks, time to go to the bathroom, the keeping of personal items such as family pictures at workstations are strictly prohibited.

In time, the functions of many of these workers could be taken over by more sophisticated computers. Combining computers with robotics has already taken over some services and types of industrial production, including unhealthy jobs in both data processing and in

computer chip manufacture. Ideally, this could mean a lot less drudgery for everyone. But this is simply another form of one of the old dilemmas of capitalism: without some means of distributing the advantage of reduced labour, it would simply mean the impoverishment of larger numbers of people.

Computers linked to the internet can work wonders in education, making vast resources available to schools with minuscule budgets, and making home schooling more practical. Students can learn at their own pace, and there are few more effective teaching methods than repeatedly correcting your own mistakes, as you do with a computer. The video game aspect of computers finds one of its most salutary uses among children. Those with learning disabilities, minor to major, can often overcome them or learn coping skills without social stigma or personal ridicule from teachers or other students. Through the net, many students can reach beyond the prejudices and limitations of their parents and teachers. Perhaps the fear of this is a major, though unspoken and perhaps unrealised, motive in the drive for censorship in the US To quote Barlow, 'You are terrified of your own children because they are natives in a country where you will always be immigrants'.

At the same time, a lot of what can be learned from computers has to do with the manipulation of information, not the conduct of life in the world. Many human teachers don't go for more than information transfer as is, but still computers can only make a bad situation worse. Data manipulation in favour of action and involvement in a larger context could act as a greater force in pacification and control of people than any programming that might be run in a computer. The earlier people become used to data in favour of experience, the more malleable they may become. If too much reliance is placed on computers, it can encourage solipsism and delusions of power or invulnerability. Computer dependency may hamper or eliminate social relations with teachers and other children, producing the kind of nerds that are at present more readily found in comics than in the world. Although the video game aspect of computers can make some sorts of learning fun, and hence encourage the students, it can also strongly deter students from learning that which is difficult, that which is *not* fun. Most of the most important things a child can learn are not fun and cannot be made so. If all a child learns is how to move little images around on a screen, he becomes little more than one of those little images himself. Instead of the computer being an extension of the brain, as the McLuhanites would put it, the child becomes an

accessory or, in computer sales terms, a 'peripheral' of the software.

There is an interesting parallel between software and Noah Webster's spelling-bees. The first generation of post-mainframe software was based completely on text – no images, no mice or other selecting or drawing devices. What you saw on the screen was no more than the letters you could type on a standard keyboard. This was largely supplanted within a few years by mouse operated graphic interfaces. In some instances, you can run elaborate programs without using a keyboard at all. These interfaces make computer use easier and more fun for many people. These cheerful interfaces made a quantum leap in the video game aspect of computing: no matter what task you're performing, you're always moving little figures around, while the computer responds with other images, many of them animated. This can take some of the strain off of work and make it more pleasant. It's interesting to note how computer magazines increased enormously in response to proliferating 'user friendly' software. It's hard to find a news-stand in the US today that doesn't carry at least a dozen computer magazines. Surely no other machinery has become a national hobby or sport the way computers have. When changes in computing occur at a dizzying rate, the video game component may be necessary for most users to learn new programs quickly enough to keep up with the demands placed on them as computers take over more functions. At the same time, the video game can encourage the user, particularly the younger user, to see work and life as a video game, and find it more difficult to cope with anything that doesn't work the same way. On the most sinister level, it may be no accident that the Gulf War, presented by US television as a video game, occurred during the period when graphic interfaces were generating large scale euphoria.

Another interesting parallel to graphic interfaces is the pre-columbian writing systems of central Mexico. This area was a sort of bottleneck for the indigenous peoples of the Americas in their patterns of migration and settlement. Here many distinct groups with different languages came together, lived in close proximity to each other, and often produced cultural, linguistic, and physiological hybrids. The writing systems of this area (as distinct from the Mayan systems to the south) were iconographic – that is, they were based on common icons instead of spoken languages, so that people who spoke different languages could read them. The advantages of this for a densely packed, heterogeneous population are obvious. The same may be partially the case for icon based software in the increasingly

interdependent yet linguistically disparate world of today. In addition to providing a crude common language, a system of icons associated with words could more or less effortlessly work toward the creation or acquisition of the rudiments of a universal spoken language.

The internet's ability to deliver mail around the world, often in a matter of seconds, creates opportunities of all sorts. On one level, I have been able to hold what amounts to conversations with people in Europe and Asia by passing e-notes back and forth. On another level, the speed of e-mail could allow coordinated action on a global scale. This could have endless benefits for quickly mobilising and implementing political action. If a global federation of unions arose to meet the problems of international capitalism, this speed of communication would be absolutely essential. It already has been in some environmental and human rights situations. On the other hand, if people use the net primarily for frivolous purposes, it becomes a good way of keeping large numbers of people from taking any kind of meaningful action on anything even fixing the plumbing in their homes.

The large number of diverse social and political organisations present on the net surprises many people in the political mainstream. It should not: the net didn't create that diversity, it simply allowed it to manifest itself in a way that older media have not. It's possible that exposure to alternatives could bring about changes in the attitudes of people inured to a painfully narrow spectrum. At the same time, it could help break down some of the insularity of people outside the sphere of the centrists and lead to cooperation and reorientation of activists of all sorts. On the other hand, the fear of such possibilities could lead to paranoia and repression on the part of people in power, accompanied not only by arrests, deportations, etc. but also attempts to use the net as a tool for thought control.

'Would that all God's children were prophets' wrote William Blake two centuries ago. In a sense, the proliferation of web sites could move toward something like Blake's vision, with everyone who had something to say in a position to be their own publisher, their own prophet. This seems to open up possibilities for freedom of expression almost beyond belief for the web, as long as it remains free and uncensored. Once it becomes censored, it becomes at least as slanted, as biased, and as stifling as the media we already have. A number of companies and organisations, under the guise of everything from protecting children to fighting sexism, are now engaged in a pitched battle to disembowel the internet, and turn it into nothing more than a means of peddling consumer trash. If this succeeds, the only

reasonable response to the success of the censors would be to sign off the net completely and leave it to run as the lowest sewer of capitalism, or be prepared to devote all your energy, resources, and possibly your life to fighting the censors, to providing the grounds for all to be prophets instead of extending the capacity to turn all God's children into nothing more than corporate profits. The internet's world wide web has the capacity to tailor every user's library to his or her needs, something never before possible. On the other hand, the web's potential for fragmentation has the potential for completely destroying all sense of context and meaningful interrelation. If this destruction of context became a way of thinking 'off' the web, in other areas of life, it could easily become the new technology's most completely, albeit most subtly, destructive characteristic.

This see-sawing of pros and cons could be extended considerably. I've just mentioned a few possibilities that seem important to me. I'm sure other contributors will add more, and you can find a wide proliferation of them in any computer magazine, or, for that matter, nearly any newspaper. Instead of pursuing them further, I'd like to make the pedestrian proposal I mentioned at the beginning of this article. It's something that doesn't sound like much in regard to the way we tend to see changes of the past. Okay here it is: accept the technology provisionally and try to humanise it. Don't accept it uncritically, don't be afraid to talk back to those who are guided solely by McLuhanite determinism, and don't be afraid to go against the grain. This of course does not mean making the new media conform to the old or ignoring the many new positive possibilities that new media may present us with that we did not anticipate. Many enthusiasts at the present time argue that you are doing something wrong if you do not do what is 'appropriate to the medium'. It would be more appropriate at times when the new technologies don't work for us to think in terms of 'abusing the medium before it abuses us'. An open secret that most polemicist seem to have missed or ignored in media discussion is that in the past whole armies of people have humanised technology, usually by working precisely counter to the grain, in small and usually anonymous increments.

The contemporary world would be a much more depraved and hellish place had they not done so. Now it is our turn. We seem to have many resources with which to humanise technology unavailable to people in the past.

One of the strongest deterrents to this kind of response is the futility of dramatic gestures. There have been a number of people who give

themselves Luddite names, sometimes even calling themselves Luddites, who write books and pull media stunts in protest against 'new technology'. Presumably none of them has ever seen or even considered the house-sized perfecting presses used to print their books, nor would they consider relevant the improved worker safety in the printing industry in the US during recent years, which has included improved machinery along with more intelligent use. But the thing that strikes me as strangest about these charlatans is their fondness for smashing computers with sledge hammers in front of television cameras. If they detest technology so much, why are they so enamoured of television? Perhaps because television, unlike a computer, is a passive medium? Whatever the case, stunts of this sort can do nothing to change the course of computer development. If we step back a little, we can see ways in which technologies could have been humanised by smaller steps taken by individuals and associations. In a time when everyone from teachers to secretaries had more clout than they do now, if there had been a movement to replace the standard QWERTY keyboard with the Dvorak layout, Dvorak keyboards would now be standard. Does this sound unimportant? Check the thousands of people who suffer from carpel tunnel syndrome and other disorders related to the use of a keyboard that was designed for mechanical expediency instead of human use. But in addition to that benefit, talking back collectively on smaller issues can give us the strength and the courage to talk back on larger ones. The way I usually argue this is in relation to telephones: If you can't say no to something as simple as call waiting, can you really expect to say no to something as complex and ingrained as racism?

The world wide web allows people to link into any site they choose. Although this can have many advantages, it can also completely destroy the context and hence the significance of a text or an image. My solution for this is to change file names whenever you find someone making this kind of link to something at your, thus sabotaging the link. A number of people criticise me for this, saying it goes against the spirit of the web or the nature of the medium or something of the sort. My answer is the spirit of the web or the nature of the media be damned whenever its function is to falsify or distort the labour of others. In like manner, many people with web sites take a proprietary interest in what they have, and become highly defensive or antagonistic when other people put up similar material, which they see as an encroachment on their own turf. If those of us with web site learned to cooperate with each other, we could share resources and

avoid duplication of labour in a way that would be a benefit to everyone – not simply the site holders, but readers as well. As important as many small, incremental acts of rebellion and cooperation may be in themselves, they may also be good practice for larger individual and collective actions. A lot of discussion of computers deals with education, and in a lot of this education is presumed to relate only to children and young people. Perhaps the most important, and least recognised, educational benefit of computers will come from educating ourselves to say no and to say yes, and to know when to do which. When it comes to collective action, there may be nothing more effective than computer interconnectivity.

Beneath a lot of the pro media rhetoric runs perhaps the most toxic strain of twentieth century thought and history. that is the 'technological imperative'. According to this notion, if you have a tool you will be compelled to use it. One of the reasons often sited for the US use of nuclear weapons against Japan is the technological imperative. We had it, hence we had no choice but to use it – and then spending fifty years making up lies about the necessity of its use. Following this line of reasoning, since we now have the means of annihilating the whole of the human race, we have no option in the long run but self annihilation. If we can't guide and control the development of computer technology (a technology we 'cannot' get rid of), what chance do we have of preventing the ultimate genocide? Looking at the future from the most optimistic point of view possible, we could wonder if one of the main advantages of computer technology may be to help us develop the self restraint and self discipline (those characteristics so woefully lacking in states) that will be necessary to prevent our self destruction.

RADIO

Radio Contrabanda FM
(Barcelona)

The airwaves are to the free radio stations what paper is to the journals. Without airwaves free radio couldn't broadcast and of course, just by chance, this area has always been completely monopolised by the State. The State has, in every country of the world, seized exclusive control of this area and has only just conceded, above all because of private initiative within the business world, a part of this exclusivity in the form of Users Licences. Not even the governments of the left, who currently hold power, have deigned to make of the radiophonic medium an area for communication and not simply an area of information dissemination and other things which has always typified its very character. For this reason the free stations, apart from demanding freedom of speech – something which we could say to a degree we have achieved – also demand the freedom to transmit, which entails of course prising a few crumbs from the exclusive control of the airwaves by the state. We want a slice, a simple slice, so that what the powers that be call freedom of expression can become a real possibility. The concept of free radio in itself is already a blow against this concept of sovereignty of the state over the airwaves and the free radios in fact have not demanded legalisation but rather the simple recognition of a basic right: the release of a section of space on the airwaves.

One might say that the free radios were born in Paris in 1978 when the International Federation of Free Radio Stations was formed at a meeting of The Association for the Liberation of the Airwaves (ALO) and the Federacione de Radio Emitenti Democratiche (FRED) which ended up being called ALFREDO 78. Many Spanish and Catalan comrades were at the meeting which gave rise to the first experiences of free Spanish radio in Catalonia in 1978 with broadcasts by Ona Lliure first from Santa Maria de Corco and since then in Barcelona currently from the Centre Civic in the Calle de Blay en Poble Sec, Barcelona. Contrabanda, the radio station I work with, has immersed itself in the philosophy of free radio. Contrabanda is not a libertarian radio station in the strictest sense of the term. At Contrabanda there
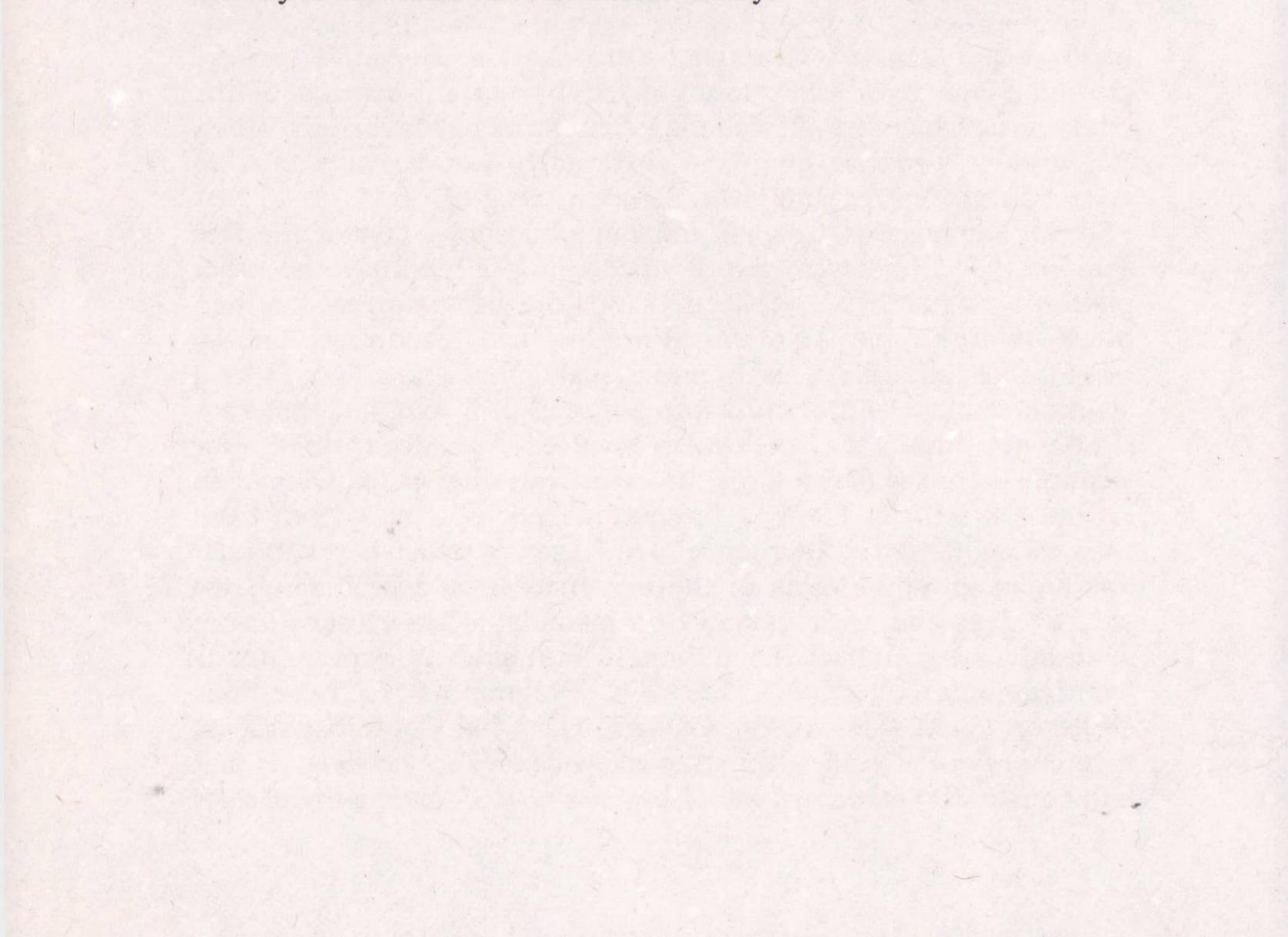
are libertarians, but there are also others who we might say are vaguely Marxist or people who defend ideas of Catalan independence, ecology or feminism. Personally I like it that way. I don't share the hang-ups of others and it's a good thing that there should be a wide variety of views on a free radio station like ours.

Contrabanda started running in September 1988 when, in the course of a meeting of people from differing ideological backgrounds, professions and so on, it was decided to set up a legal Cultural Association with the express intention of founding a free radio station. Our first move was to find premises, get subscribers to help get some minimal income, buy equipment and put into effect a variety of initiatives from selling 'solidarity bonds' or outings with food that we provided to help raise cash. Another problem from the word go was the passing of legislation in December 1988 which allowed the minister to go ahead with his plan for a complete clean up of existing free stations and pirate stations (which put out publicity). The last one to be closed down was Radio Pica. After that it became extremely hard to even contemplate trying to set something up, despite the fact that there had been calls from them, not least from the International Federations which were backing up calls for free radio in Spain. It was all in vain. The new legislation simply ended up promoting the interests of the private companies and the state sector including military communications and so on. Contrabanda, or the group that was trying to get it on the road at the time, decided that there was no point in trying to do things the hard way and for that reason it started negotiating with the Generalitat (Catalan local government) and groups within it that might listen sympathetically to the demands for freedom to broadcast. It was felt that without this softly, softly approach it would be impossible to broadcast transmissions with an acceptable degree of quality since the prohibition was a kind of Damocles sword, ever-threatening, and laying down the risk of seizure of equipment as had happened to Radio Pica and it would not be feasible to transmit at will. These negotiations took a long time before giving rise to – thanks to a collective petition put together by the radio stations and the parliamentary group Esquerra Republicana – the introduction in the Catalan parliament of a motion, not a law, calling for the recognition of the existence or the right to exist for the free stations and that as a result of this the government of the Generalitat should set up legally this right to exist. Curiously, or perhaps miraculously, this law got through. And I say miraculously because in the Basque Country a petition for a similar project which was put

before the Basque parliament by Euskadiko Ezquerra was rejected.

The Generalitat, seeing itself forced to legislate on the matter, decided to set up an experimental period for free radios until the end of 1990 which was permissible within the framework of existing legislation. This is not what the free radio stations wanted but they decided to put up with it. Anyway, the authorities identified three frequencies which would be made available to and could be used by the free stations. At the time there were six of us in the metropolitan area we split up the allotted frequencies. In January 1991 Contrabanda FM began transmissions, along with Radio Pica on 91.0FM for 24 hours a day. Contrabanda from 3pm to 3am and Radio Pica the rest. This continued until Radio Pica moved to 91.8FM. Contrabanda is a self- managed radio station. We work by assembly; the means are collective. The people who make the programmes pay to sustain the collective and all those who make programmes have a voice and a vote on the assembly. As I said earlier, Contrabanda is legally speaking a Cultural Association and amongst other initiatives we have recently set up a Counter-information Agency. Our philosophy could be defined as the cultural melting pot. On the one hand we should make it clear that we broadcast in Catalan. We believe our language has been monopolised by certain sectors of the bourgeoisie which has allowed the two to be mistaken for each other. We aim to use the language differently not so pure not so grammatically correct but giving it other strengths.

So our language is Catalan and our philosophy that of the free stations that is to say to give a voice to those who have no other platform. A number of collectives put the programmes together. Some 36-40 go out, 21 of which are internally produced, nine by outside collectives and six by individuals. News takes up 31% of air-time, culture 14.6%, music programmes 27% and the other 26% is non-stop music. The collectives involved are indeed varied – for example there is a Serbo-Croat broadcast; another called Demanem la Paraula; African Hour, a programme put out by women from Guinea; and also the Alternative News Agency, which is yet another libertarian group working in the information field producing two weekly slots and with whom Contrabanda works closely on an alternative news project. Then there is 'Immigrant Viewpoint' made by Magrebine collectives; The MOC Programme (Conscientious Objectors); The Red Missile (Gay). This is what Contrabanda puts together in order to allow for an open space for those collectives and individuals who otherwise would have no way of making themselves

heard. The financing, as I have said, is partly dealt with by 'solidarity bonds' paid for by those who are not necessarily connected with making programmes. They pay some five hundred pesetas per month. May I say that the best way to support the free radios is to tune in and listen to them in order to ensure that there is another means of communication. Contrabanda hasn't even been going for three years. The first years have been taken up, as is always the case, with fine tuning our technical skills and we now consider ourselves in good shape both internally and externally. We've come out well. In another field we've put together special programmes, as for example during the last general strike from 5am to 10pm covering the developments from the doorstep of a departmental store! The Working Woman's Day on 8th March is another tradition. To finish I would simply like to say that we call on you to help us in the ways we have described. If we get this support from the people there is no reason for us to lose this space we have found as has been shown by the experiences of Radio Klara in Valencia and others in the Basque Country. We hope one day to celebrate our tenth anniversary.

A. Presenter

Localism or Parochialism: the dilemma of local radio

In the mid seventies I presented a record programme on BBC Radio Manchester.

The idea was to feature what I termed the B roads of recorded sound. Poetry, folk music , the lyrical aspects of jazz, blues, comedy, Celtic music, African music.

A heterogeneous programme of music and recorded sound of one kind or another. The sort of thing that was missed in the mainstream programmes and that Andy Kershaw does so well today. In addition I was supposed to keep an eye out for items of 'local' interest to cater for local chauvinism. So when an album of canal songs came out I was ordered to play a song celebrating the Manchester Ship Canal and how it made the late industrial revolution a picnic for the benefit of the working classes.

Of course I ran into both political and moral censorship. Slim Gaillard's *Chicken Rhythm*, which can sound to the uninitiated like two people saying 'bugger' and 'fuck off', was forbidden, although I had first heard this same track on a BBC Children's show called *Pop Puppets*. (I never did work out whether the producer of that show was very hip or particularly deficient in street wisdom.) Anyway the same track was played on Alexis Korner's Sunday afternoon Radio 2 show a few weeks later without problems.

Another forbidden item was Gertrude Stein's splendidly barbed *How to be a Jewish Mother*. The whole point of the record was that one did not have to be either Jewish or a mother to achieve this status. What mattered was looking on the bad side when anything good happens, suffering without complaint in such a manner that everyone knows you are going through hell, and inducing guilt in one's nearest relatives at every available opportunity, e.g. the Jewish Mother buys her son two shirts for his birthday. When he wears one of them she looks at him sadly and says (with a rising interrogative) 'The other one you didn't like?'

This record is made by Jewish artists for a Jewish company. It was sold mainly in Jewish shops. Yet I was forbidden to play it in

Manchester as it was felt that the city's substantial Jewish community 'might be offended'. What would have offended them, I suspect, was being treated as if they had no sense of humour about their own culture. The argument didn't work though. The record stayed banned on local radio, although it was played on national networks. Something like that occurred every week.

Occasionally I even managed to get round these absurd prohibitions. On one notable occasion Pete Seegar's *Banks of Marble* was banned on the grounds that, and I quote, 'it was left wing and anti-capitalist'.

Indeed it was, but on a national programme there would have been no problem. The problem was that this was local radio, and Manchester local radio at that. Local vested interests had to be appeased. Besides my programme went out on a Sunday morning and religious susceptibilities could be involved. It was, after all, Manchester that gave rise to the idea that God was capitalist.

'Alright' I said. 'I'll play *Jesus Christ*'. This was a Woody Guthrie song that preached enough class war to satisfy the ACF. It ended with the words:

This song was written in New York City
Of rich man and banker and slave
Where if Jesus were to preach what he preached in Galilee
They would lay Jesus Christ in his grave.

Nobody appeared to notice at the time, but a few weeks later a memo came down saying that A. Presenter (whose formidable Lambeth accent was a cause of much Mancunian mirth) was 'far too Third Programme for Radio Manchester'. My beautiful series, an early inspiration to Andy Kershaw I'm told, was axed in the name of localism and local respectability. It was twenty years before I worked in radio again. And that was in the days before Thatcher, when local radio stations really were expected to encourage diversity

Nowadays they don't even try. Many of the local commercial stations now seem to consist of one person who answers the telephone and announces records which are chosen by a computer to pad the spaces between adverts. The deadening ideology of unitary listening has taken over.

I was told recently that the varied and balanced programme of music and words that twenty years ago I had presented on Radio Manchester, 'would never be permitted today'. 'When people listen to radio', I was informed, 'they want to hear the same type of music all the time'.

Really?

Well perhaps they are right. Somebody famously said that no one ever lost money through underestimating public taste. Yet the history of popular music trends since 1945 from the trad craze through skiffle to the regular waves of folk and blues revivals suggests that often these arbiters do get it wrong. One reason for the present vogue for Radio Two, so surprising to the BBC establishment, is that it does actually present some musical variety, rather than the endless diet of chart and would be chart material that characterises rival networks. This out of touch characteristic of BBC brass doesn't just apply to popular music.

At a time when the much mocked but generally excellent Radio 3 was under pressure with the advent of Classic FM the Beeb shot itself in the foot by transferring the schools broadcasts to the Radio Three network and introduced programmes of a 'music for mindless middle class morons' nature. Radio 3 undoubtedly needed broadening. It did not however need to be wrecked by the sort of relentless trivialisation that characterises any schedule where listening figures are the sole criteria of merit.

The real problem with local radio though is that by and large it responds most to those who already have too much power and influence. In my area that means business and agricultural interests. The voice of ordinary people tends to be heard little and only then in the name of balance. And it is in the name of ordinary people of course that ever sillier acts of censorship are carried out.

Recently I was reviewing a new and popular history of the blues. Unlike most books in this area the author had a vivid style and made fresh and original judgements.* He was being scathing about some of the fanciful symbolism of protest read into blues lyrics by folklorists and said, a little testily perhaps:

If a banana is sometimes just a banana, a boll weevil is sometimes just a no-good man and a crawling king-snake is sometimes just a stiff prick.

My excellent and considerate producer referred the problem upstairs. The answer came back I might not use the phrase 'stiff prick' even though it was a direct quote. However the words 'tumescent penis' might be substituted.

Isn't censorship wonderful?

Mind you there are reasons for local radio nervousness. I recently had a mildly abusive letter accusing me of leaving the Groundhogs

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* *The History of the Blues* by Francis Davis (Secker & Warburg).

out of a programme devoted to a boxed set of Chess recordings because of my obvious left wing bias. I don't know whether anybody remembers the GroundHogs but they certainly didn't record for Chess. This didn't prevent the letter's author from accusing me of bias against the band because they once recorded an LP called 'Thank Christ for the Bomb'. If we want to have our local stations take more notice of ordinary people we are going to have face the problem that nuts like this are going to develop greater nuisance value. And not just the classifiable nuts either. Our local MP, a notorious prat known in some newspapers as the 'True Barking One', has my local station manager in a permanent panic because of his sensitivity to anything that could be considered criticism of himself or the Conservative Party. The staff are right to be nervous. Heads roll all too easily in local radio.

The problem then is to make local radio responsive to a wider range of influences than the present restricted base from which it draws. BBC national radio can, and occasionally does, take chances. Local radio though, where real innovation should be developing, is still stifled by the modern equivalent of the squirerarchy. The first step is to listen to it a little more and react to it a lot more. We won't get real community radio that way but we might well get something less stultifyingly orthodox. Like anything else we get the sort of radio for which we are prepared to work.

Radio Libertaire

— PART ONE —

Firstly, I wish to express fraternal greetings from the Parisian anarcho and anarcho-syndicalist comrades to our friends in Barcelona.

Ignoring other aspects of the debate, I wish to confine myself to Radio Libertaire – something of a visiting card. Radio Libertaire in concrete terms is a radio station that came into being on September 1st 1981, that is to say twelve years ago now, and was founded by the Fedération Anarchiste Française (FAF). Today Radio Libertaire has a history of some 100,000 hours of broadcasting, functions 24 hours a day, is run by some 80 teams who assure political, syndicalist, anarchist, anti-militarist and cultural broadcasting.

Radio Libertaire is a series of programmes which last one, two or four hours and whose production is guaranteed by a team which is fully responsible for the functioning of the station during the broadcast. These 80 groups are made up in their totality of some 250 individuals and they broadcast in ten languages. In the Paris region our broadcasts are listened to – on a daily basis – by around 30,000 people and surveys show that one tenth of the regions population, that is to say approximately 1,000,000 people know of the station. Radio Libertaire is run by a secretariat of four people who are appointed by the congress of the FAF. These four have responsibilities for scheduling, finance, technical installations and legal matters.

The story of Radio Libertaire – well known to many of you – has been a bumpy one made more difficult in point of fact by the socialist government of M. Mitterand who would not tolerate the existence, particularly in Paris, of an anarchist radio station. Although it is true that other stations have been harassed, truly, without exaggeration Radio Libertaire has born the brunt of the government's fury.

Only ten years ago, on August 28th 1983, the French police, along with military units, mounted an operation to completely destroy Radio Libertaire's instalations. This provoked widespread movements of solidarity in Spain, Catalunya and many other countries with demonstrations in front of embassies and French consulates and this support from the anarcho and anarcho-syndicalist international movement was decisive in the moral battle of our comrades at Radio Libertaire. The annual budget of Radio Libertaire, ridiculous in

comparison to commercial stations but which for the anarchist movement was not insignificant amounted to 500,000 French francs (£40,000).

Those comrades who have already spoken have, rightly, insisted on the notion of freedom of expression which is the theme that guides Radio Libertaire.

We have tried to resolve this problem both internally and externally. Internally we have shown that a radio station that belongs to the FAF will give a platform to tens of thousands of people whilst still keeping to the essence of anarchist thinking. To achieve this we have employed technical solutions. In simple terms we have made available to our listeners various telephones they can use to call the station at any time to express their views on what is being said at the microphone and as a consequence of this it is the listeners themselves who appear live on air.

Externally, like Radio Contrabanda and the journals and 'zines of the anarchist movement, we are no more than an island of freedom in the heart of a world in which there exists a considerable number of communication media controlled by the state and corporate interest.

In conclusion I will say that Radio Libertaire Radio Contrabanda and other radio stations (perhaps tomorrow a libertarian television station) are in our view no more than modern means of communication which are available to us but that they are not the causes of social movements. To think the contrary would be wrong. These media are no more than a tool available to all those who wish to see profound changes in society.

— PART TWO —

It was the 1981 congress of the French Anarchist Federation which signed the deeds which set Radio Libertaire on the road. After long and heated debate the congress accepted, unanimously, the idea of launching a radio station which would be the voice for the FAF. At that time it had no name, no wavelength, no real goal, no presenters and for its launch a budget of (wait for it) 15,000F (£150)! No member of congress, at that moment could have predicted the events which were about to unfold other than that by the autumn anarchy would once again be on the airwaves.

As in 1921, when the insurgents in Kronstadt sent out radio messages; as in 1936 with Radio CNT-FAI in Spain, or again the participation of anarchists in the Free Radio movement at the end of the '70s, with, in particular, Radio Trottoir (Toulon) and Radio-Alarme whose producers were members of the FAF. It was on the 1st September 1981[1] in a damp cellar on the slopes of Montmartre that the radiophonic adventure began. And in a very rudimentary fashion, in conditions that defied the laws of broadcasting: a studio measuring twelve square metres, with an assortment of recuperated material and a mini-team of six. The first calls came in from our listeners, the first listeners cards went out ... and the jamming began! Meanwhile old hands of the Free Radio movement were putting together some very credible studios in order to go for a slice of the cake represented by the FM band. The spirit of the Free Radio was already beginning to agonise, victims of the financial appetite of some of those who had run the pirate stations.

In August 1983 the socialists put an end to 'the anarchy on the airwaves' by seizing a number of transmitters, including that of Radio Libertaire. On the 28th August at 5.45am the CRS appeared at the doors of Radio Libertaire. They broke down the door and seized all the equipment. The presenters were beaten up and arrested, the antenna cable and pylon were cut up into pieces. Neither the reinforced door, nor the numerous listeners who were present, were able to prevent our radio being seized.

The socialists, then in power with their chums in the French Communist Party, had not however reckoned with our determination and even less with the solidarity which was shown to us by thousands of listeners during the following two years. Two years during which, day after day, links of friendship between Radio Libertaire and its listeners were progressively strengthened. The reaction was immediate,

and impressive. The most important part translated itself, on 3rd September 1983, into a demonstration of 5,000 and Radio Libertaire back on the airwaves.

Moments of warmth and intensity were so many and the happenings so frequent that one article cannot do them justice:[2] galas, jamming by the 'Cop-Radios', scuffles with the authorities, the obtaining of legal dispensation – the demonstrations ... by enumerating these events we are setting down the essentials of the history of Radio Libertaire. However, in reality the most important can hardly be reported. This was the daily and collective history of Radio Libertaire, which all of us, listeners and producers, hold a part of. It's a history of tens of thousands of hours of transmission, telephone calls which brought with them letters, exchanges and meetings. Radio Libertaire was born with the passage of time. Everyone laid their own stone with their voice, their expertise, their ability or their energy. Radio Libertaire is also the listener who brought in a microphone ('You should be able to find some use for it'); that other one who left their visiting card ('I'm an electrician, if you need anything ...') and the pensioner ('I'm ill, and my pension isn't much ... but come round for a bite some day'), and the non-sighted person who, thanks to the mutual aid small ads, managed to go off to the countryside on a tandem with a young girl ... and brought flowers back to the radio station; it's all the letters that came in to 145 rue Amelot to help, ask a question, encourage, suggest, inform, criticise. It was when a 'zine, an association, an individual, a union, the FAF had something to say, the telephone calls, the meetings, the networks.

The station's cultural identity also came with time. The first producers brought their own records into the studio and introduced thousands to music by artists such as Debronckart, Fanon, Servat, Gribouille, Jonas, Utgé-Royo, Aurenche, Capart and many others. In 1982 another kind of music arrived naturally on the airwaves, another music that they were listening to in the squats, on the edges of the system: alternative rock. Then other styles found their place: jazz, blues, folk, industrial music, rap, reggae. And other artists found the radio station open to other forms of expression: cartoons, the plastic arts, theatre, literature, cinema.

Though the radio of the FAF, Radio Libertaire nevertheless opened its doors from the beginning to its friends: anarcho- syndicalists from the CNT and other unions, Libre Pensée, the Pacifist Union, the Hopeful Ones, the League of the Rights of Man. And it was there in this daily reality, in the struggles and the meetings that forged itself,

quite spontaneously, the links between Radio Libertaire and the social movement: strikers, the unemployed, shelterless, squatters, anti-racists, ecologists, conscientious objectors, refugees, ex-prisoners ... Surviving crises and the daily workload, Radio Libertaire rose to the demands of the times. It supported the student movement in 1986, and became the radio of the street report movement, round table discussion groups, an open station to report police brutality, permanent agit-pop. When war broke out in the Gulf Radio Libertaire was at the front announcing hour-by-hour demos, meetings, regional committees, whilst allowing for debates and analysis. Just as naturally it was during these times of crisis that Radio Libertaire really discovered its dimension as a 'radio for struggle'. Radio Libertaire is also a thousand reasons for listeners to be annoyed, rage and protest against the technical imperfections or those aspects that were judged incongruous, provocative, too reformist or too radical. But it was above all, we hope, an opportunity to discover the pleasures of debate, struggle and libertarian ideas. Shouting matches ... cries from the heart ... all was there and all was welcome! In a world of the market, the spectacle and dehumanisation where triumphant capitalism crushes both man and woman where thought, in the image of the economy is uniform and globalised, Radio Libertaire, with its strengths and its weaknesses, its faults and its qualities does it not seem to be simply human ... quite simply human?

Laurent Fouillard

1. At the time Radio Libertaire was transmitting from 6pm to 10pm on 89.6Mhz

2. See *Radio Libertaire, la voix sans mantre* by Yves Peyraut published by Monde Libertaire (50F). Obtainable from the Monde Libertaire bookshop.

— PART THREE —

'Femmes Libres' is ten years old!

The broadcast 'Femmes Libres' (Free Women) was born May 1986 – on the anniversary of the Spanish revolution. The name of the programme was chosen in homage to the organisation Mujeres Libres founded in April 1936 and bringing together more than 20,000 Spanish women anarchists.

The organisation's goal was, 'to free women from the three forms of slavery they were subjected to: a slavery of ignorance, slavery as producers and slavery as women'.

The early broadcasts were dedicated to a historic study of the organisation, throwing into relief the enormous work that was achieved in a war situation and the tremendous participation involved. Very soon I began to identify with their struggle which had its roots in a dual awareness:

- social and political, aspiring for the liberation of all oppressed people;
- feminist, aspiring to women's liberation.

It became clear to me that it was vital to create in an anarchist radical radio station a space for reflection whose object was the study of the specific oppression that affects women in a patriarchal and capitalist society based on male authoritarianism (which could also serve libertarians) and strategies both defensive and critical which also sought to reconstruct in the light of analysis the social relationships between the sexes.

Over the last ten years because of these two hours a week a very large number of women and some men came together to debate, give testimony to their struggles, their quests and their experiences.

The voice of the broadcast

As a general rule the programme comes in three parts: The first section is dedicated to promoting militant, anarchist and feminist meetings; personally I feel this is vital in so far as practically no (non militant) media outlet reports on anarchist and feminist demonstrations be they political or cultural.

The second section is comprised of a brief press review. I feel it is interesting to analyse the 'mainstream press' and how they do or don't take into account the concerns of women and to show that those who have no access to the feminist press can, if they are interested, have a

minimum amount of information and be equally aware of the discrepancy between the facts and the reporting of them. For example we spent months working with international feminist networks to ensure that the mass rapings whose victims had been women in the former Yugoslavia should be recognised and denounced.

The third section – the most important one – is given over to guests. Women, and very rarely men (they show little interest in feminist questions) come in to talk about their work, their research or, more simply, to tell of the oppression they suffer.

Three trends emerge. One, militant, emphasises grass root activity. For example the struggle for the right to abortion and contraception, the struggle against violence (battered women, incest, rape sexual harassment, discrimination, exploitation) solidarity with immigrant workers, women overseas, pacifism, anti-clericalism, anti-racism). A second, more intellectual, considers the theoretical analyses, feminist studies carried out by researchers (history, sociology, philosophy, science). The third strain is cultural and deals with creativity (literature, cinema, the plastic arts, theatre, song). All of this within an international context. Feminism, like anarchism, recognises no frontiers!

In point of fact, through this broadcast, I try to highlight on the one hand the immense suffering of women throughout the world and on the other the immense work which they have achieved – work which the various powers that be continue to exploit by denying its existence (be it domestic work, production, reproduction or feminist, Syndicalist and political struggle).

I hope that this information will help raise the level of consciousness, a raising of self-confidence and a desire to struggle because, let us not forget, that even if women have overcome the barriers of exclusion: 'When exclusion ends discrimination begins' (Geneviève Fraisse), e.g. equal work, equal pay.

If equality between the sexes was recognised this would be a famous victory against human stupidity ... Everywhere man suffers in a debased society but no pain is comparable to that of women ...

These two sentences could serve as a motto for the programme. They are still pertinent. Louise Michel got it right. She also said 'power is rotten' and women certainly are aware of that fact.

Nelly Trumal
'Femmes Libres' on Radio Libertaire (89.4FM)
every Wednesday 6.30-8.30pm

Joseph Toscano

Australia: The Hate Jocks Love it, Anarchists Shun it!

Millions of years of human evolution has produced an organism whose every fibre is programmed to produce and receive sound. Each and every fibre of our minds and bodies and the complex social interactions that human beings are involved in rely on our capacity to receive and produce sound. Speech is one of the major building blocks of human evolution. It's the cement that has allowed human beings to create complex societies which now dominate the globe. Reading, writing, television and the internet are a relatively new form of expression that add a visual perspective and permanency to human communication. Sound is the social cement that makes us the social animals we are. Radio is a medium that allows human beings to communicate simultaneously on an intimate personal level and on a mass level. It's immediate, it tugs at the very essence of our genetic make up.

The rise of the new right
The rise of new right ideology both in North and South America and Europe over the past decade can be directly related to the hate jocks manipulation of the radio waves. As the new left began the long march through the institutions in the 1970s, and seized parliamentary power in the 1980s, the purveyors of racial hatred and intolerance began to see the potential of radio. All across the world the hate jocks have used radio to rewrite current political and social agendas. From backyard community networks to privately owned and state-sponsored radio stations, the hate jocks have been able to create new social, cultural and political agendas. By the time the new left activists found that they controlled the physical structures that represented the state, they realised that the whole agenda had changed. Today as they struggle to maintain the trappings of state power, nation state after nation state is moving into the direct sphere of influence of the hate jocks. Radio

has been the vehicle by which they have been able to change the direction that the world is moving.

Personal experience

The Libertarian Workers for a Self-Managed Society is an anarchist group that has been active in Melbourne, Australia, since 1977. In 1986 the Libertarian Workers for a Self-Managed Society set up the Anarchist Media Institute to act as an interface between us and the mass media. Although we had been active in community radio since 1980 we didn't realise the full potential of radio till the mid 1980's. Since 1986 we have presented a one hour programme, 'The Anarchist World This Week', on Melbourne community radio, a radio station which can potentially be heard by three million people. The present listenership of the programme is estimated to be between 30,000 to 40,000 people. This is a regular programme which is heard week in week out. The work of 'The Anarchist World This Week' is also supplemented by interviews on mainstream radio and spot segments on community radio. Over the years we have been able to present ideas and initiate campaigns and activities that as a small group we would not have been able to do if we did not utilise radio. Radio is immediate, it's direct, it allows you to set the agenda and it gives you the mechanism by which you can knife dominant cultural and ideological viewpoints and present a different way of looking at the world. As anarchists we tend to forget that the great majority of people have no experience of or have ever heard of anarchist ideas discussed in a positive manner.

Radio creates the climate for change, it doesn't replace organisation and action

Before we get carried away by the potential of radio, it's important to look at its limitations. As radio is so immediate many activists think that time on the radio can replace the need to organise and the need to act. Radio is a forum that can prod people into thinking. It's a forum that can change their view of themselves and the world around them. It's a forum that can create a climate for change and in some situations it can change the social and political agenda of a community. Radio work is a beginning, it is not an end point. Unless the energy expended in radio activity is backed up by organisational work that eventually leads to action, it can become a self-indulgent activity. Any anarchist who becomes involved in radio needs to have some concrete alternative (even a discussion meeting) that people can become

involved in. Unless listeners have some way they can expand their interests, radio work is not being utilised to its full potential.

Will it work everywhere?

Access to radio is basically limited to anarchists who live in societies that are based on a parliamentary system. Any dictator worth his salt will ensure that the radio waves are controlled by his supporters and the State. Saddam Hussein and the Chinese Communist Party both understand that power does not come from the barrel of a gun, it comes from control of all forms of human communication. Although communication networks in parliamentary democracies are dominated, owned and controlled by capitalists and although they pump out the same competitive dog eat dog world view, possibilities exist that allow individuals and groups to muscle in on the fringes of the radio network. The advent of the satellite dish and cross border communication gives activists the luxury of beaming ideas even into the most rigidly controlled societies.

Where can I begin?

Think small, try to find out if any community radio stations exist in you city or local community. Many networks only cover a suburb, some are oriented towards special interest groups. Check community notice boards, local directories, local educational institutions, many have in-house radio stations. Look around, think about extending your activities away from the printing press, the public meeting and the false intimacy of the internet.

Once you've found a local community radio station, acquaint yourself with its principles of association, attend meetings, offer to help and learn the technical aspects of running the station. You won't have the luxury of a professional technician on a community radio station. You'll most likely need to learn how to run the station, as well as how to talk into the microphone. It may take you a few months to master the techniques, but the confidence you'll build up will be invaluable if you move onto bigger things.

Techniques

There are techniques to radio, not everyone is a natural, but most people can learn to be proficient in what they do.
A few practical points:

1) Prepare your programme beforehand.

2) If you're interviewing somebody, do some background preparation, work out why you're interviewing this person and what you hope to achieve.

3) *Never* read out material, radio is an intimate medium, it's conversational people turn off when you start reading tracts of material. If you have to read keep it to a bare minimum.

4) Use music or community announcements to break up the programme.

5) Always have a phone number even if you use the stations phone number that people can contact you on. Radio is immediate, people normally won't write.

6) If the station you're involved in has talkback – use it when you can.

7) Just pretend you're sitting in your own lounge room talking to a friend, don't worry about the fact that you may be talking to thousands of people. Just think of them as one person preferably somebody you like.

8) Try to become involved in the day-to-day running of the station you're involved in. Once you're familiar with the place, you may feel confident enough to make suggestions about programming, the way the station is run. How to incorporate more people in the stations work.

9) Always have some mechanism by which interested people can increase their involvement, offer a free sample copy of an anarchist publication you're involved with, advertise a public meeting or activity.

10) Be aware of the local libel laws. Know what you can and can't say. There are always ways you can say things without being libel liars. You don't want to find yourself in court defending libel accusations. A total waste of time and money.

What else can I do?
If you are not able or don't have the time and inclination to run your own programme on community radio, there are other ways you can use established radio networks both community oriented and corporate owned. If your not used to radio it is best to commence with community radio and graduate to corporate or public radio.

The humble media release

The media release provides a mechanism by which you can access community, public and corporate radio. Design a letterhead and find a suitable name for your organisation or group. It's also important to have a 24-hour telephone access point the media can contact you on (preferably not your home telephone number). A mobile telephone number or a 24-hour answering service can provide a good interface between you and the media. The Anarchist Media Institute in Melbourne has its own distinctly designed letterhead paper and also has a 24-hour human answering service. Anybody who calls the Anarchist Media Institute number has a human being (not an answering machine) take their details and a contact phone number and relays the message and their phone number onto a beeper that is carried by a member of the Anarchist Media Institute. The person who has the beeper can contact the media representative within a few minutes of their inquiry. Such a mechanism not only gives you direct access to media and interested peoples inquiries, it also protects you from nuisance calls and protects the anonymity of your home telephone number. As I was saying the media release provides a window of opportunity for you to organise a radio interview. Of all the mass media outlets that are available live radio interviews are the best. You may spend hours doing a newspaper interview, to find that what appears in the newspaper may bear no resemblance to what you have said. What appears is determined by the papers editorial policy as much as what you have said. Anarchists are normally totally at the mercy of newspaper reporters.

Television interviews are much the same, what you say is edited and intertwined with media footage that may have nothing to do with what you want to say or have said. With television interviews you are again at the mercy of the television stations editorial policy and their agenda. Live radio interviews are different. Irrespective of how difficult the interview is, you have an even chance of using the interview to elucidate and expand on your particular theme. The very nature of radio gives you control of the situation. Whether you hang yourself depends on how skilled you are in your debating techniques.

How do I start?

The media release is your opening shot. It can be issue oriented. It can be a theoretical article or it can revolve around a particular campaign or event. We normally never send out a media release that's longer than one page. Major media outlets receive hundreds of media

releases everyday. Your ideas need to be presented simply and they need to come to some type of point. You may want to provide an anarchist analysis on a film, alert you're local community of a public discussion meeting, a campaign, the beginning of a squat or a 100 and one other events.

Use you imagination. Before you send out your media release it's important that you have a list of radio station/producers and programmes you want to send it to. Don't just pick people who you think are sympathetic, go out of your way to pick programmes and individuals who you know are totally opposed to your ideas. No media release is ever wasted. Normally the radio station will open a file on your group and you may find they'll contact you on another subject.

Novelty value to nuisance

Don't forget that you are nothing more than a commodity to public and corporate radio stations. They are only interested in improving their ratings. What you have to say is of little or no interest to them. What their interested in whether you're a 'story' or not. Initially a media release from an anarchist group may be seen as novelty value. Considering all the misconceptions that exist about anarchism, some public or corporate radio outlets may run an interview with you as a bit of a laugh. It's important to accept the challenge and involve your self in debate with the particular interviewer. It's also important to remember that all the arrangements for the interview are done by the producer of the programme. The interviewer will not be prepared for the interview. This means you should be able to run rings around the person who is interviewing you. The main purpose of a live radio interview is the fact that you're trying to influence people who are listening to you. You want to provide an alternative to mainstream ideology which tend to smother all debate. During the course of the interview don't forget to mention a telephone number people can ring to find out more about anarchist ideas and the events you are publicising. They'll hate you doing it, but that's the name of the game. You want publicity for your ideas and events.

Through skilful use of mainstream radio you can create a climate where anarchist ideas can be seen as a legitimate option. After about a year of media releases and interviews, the media network you deal with may drop you because they realise you are a serious political movement and they have been given editorial instructions to ignore you. Once the novelty factor has worn off you'll have to concentrate

more on activities you as a group initiate than general media releases. If you're not confident about holding your own with public or corporate radio, set up workshops where you role play and initially concentrate on local community radio. As community radio is starved of interesting 'guests' it's possible to get local exposure and experience by being interviewed on community radio.

Don't despair!
Many anarchists shy away from radio because they'll think they'll be misrepresented. Of course people will try to misrepresent you. How can you expect the forces of the State or the corporate world to give you a fair hearing. Of course they won't give you a fair hearing. You're a commodity, but what you should remember is that you're a commodity with teeth. Live radio interviews give you the best chance to articulate ideas to a mass audience. The more unsympathetic the interviewer the better. If you can logically mount an argument and beat them at their own game, the more people you are able to influence. Remember you re the expert on the topic, they're just a radio jock who thinks you're just another commodity that is on their programme to boost their ego and ratings. No other medium gives you the opportunity to influence so many people.

Just to give you a small example. At the Australian Federal election in late February 1996, the Anarchist Media Institute conducted a vote informal campaign (voting is compulsory and encouraging people to vote informal is illegal; six months imprisonment). Although the campaign was based in Victoria, we were able to conduct four mainstream public and corporate radio interviews in South Australia. While our campaign was ignored by the radio in Victoria. South Australia had the highest informal vote in Australia (nearly 1.5% higher than any other State). The high level of informal voting in South Australia can be directly attributed to the Anarchist Media Institute's campaign being aired on radio.

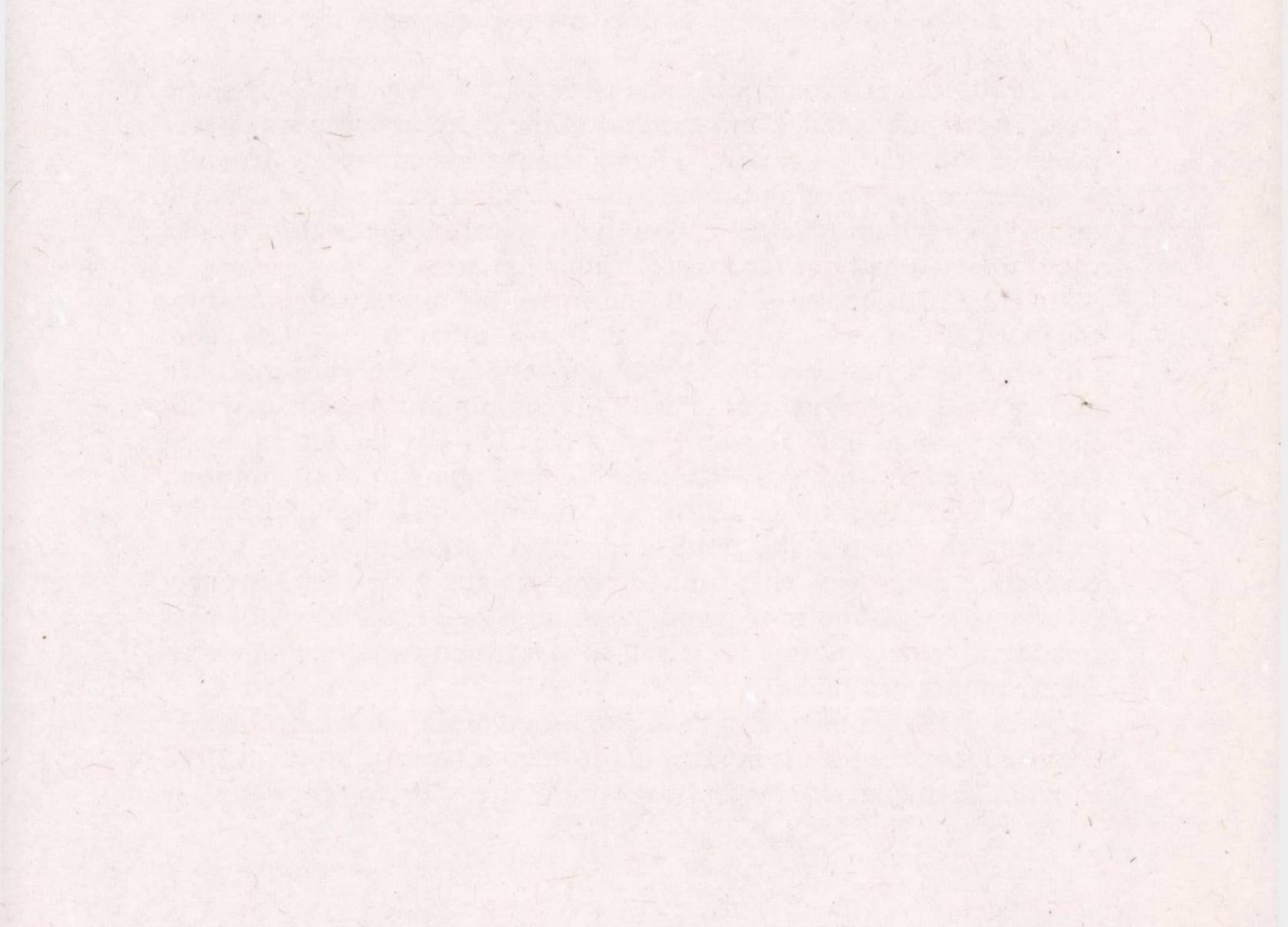### I want to set up my own radio station
Setting up a specific anarchist radio station is expensive and difficult to do. I have always believed that you need a large group to service this infrastructure. A radio station is not only limited by various libel laws, you also need to pay licences to the state and if your group is small you'll find that you'll waste all your time fund raising to keep the station on air. If you do succeed to keep the station on air (Radio Libertaire in Paris is a good example of an anarchist radio station)

you'll find your listenership maybe limited to a particular segment of the population.

You may decide to open a pirate radio station. Such a station is difficult to run and it's highly likely the state will track down the source of the station and confiscate your equipment. A very costly exercise.

Conclusion

Radio networks are there, why waste our time servicing and fund raising to maintain islands of anarchist radio. Try to work out strategies by which you can use other peoples networks for the benefit of the anarchist movement and the anarchist campaigns you're involved in. With a little bit of lateral thinking and a little bit of audacity you can emulate the cuckoo and raise your young in their nests without going to the trouble of building your own nest.

75 Years of A Batalha

Owned by the Uiâo Operario Nacional (UON) the Portuguese
newspaper *A Batalha* published its first issue on February 23rd 1919.
Not much later, at the Congreso Operario de Coimbra, the UON
transformed itself into the CGT (Confederaçao Geral do Trabalho)
and A Batalha became its mouthpiece.

Given the strong majority influence within the CGT of anarcho-
syndicalist and revolutionary syndicalist currents this became the
main orientation of the journal. Despite experiencing grave
difficulties trying to keep it afloat, *A Batalha* was published on a daily
basis from February 1919 until 1927, having reached the position of
the third highest selling daily newspaper in Portugal.

The difficulties became more insuperable as a consequence of the
military take over on 28th May 1926. Censorship and repression
became more intense and one year later the journal was definitively
closed down. The final issue, of the daily paper, carries the date 26th
May 1927.

In 1930, it began to appear once again as a weekly, but only some
issues were published. Until the end of the dictatorship it was never
possible to publish regularly. The constant persecution, destruction
of underground printing presses, the detention of the more capable
and active militants and the end of the syndicalist organisation whose
mouthpiece it had been were determining factors.

After the 25th April 1974, with the end of the military dictatorship,
the journal resumed publication. The first number in this phase came
out on 21st September 1974. The impossibility of organising once
more a syndicalist organisation with a revolutionary face ensured that
the paper would only appear irregularly. 1974 saw the setting up of
the 'Cooperativa Editora *A Batalha*' which, apart from the journal,
also published texts on anarchism, syndicalism and self-management.

During this period the publication paid special attention to the
revolutionary process that the country was going through, strongly
criticising the communist tendency to limit political and syndicalist
freedoms and promoting some self-management experiments which
seemed more genuine.

Up until 1976 a fortnightly was published and then a monthly. As
a consequence of the disbanding of the 'Cooperativa Editora' in 1978
A Batalha began to be published by the Centro de Estudios

Libertarios and continued as a monthly until 1984. From that time onward it became a quarterly.

The 1980s was, without doubt, one of the most difficult periods since the end of the dictatorship. The non-existence of a permanent base and the scarcity of active militants were more important factors than economic difficulties. The publication only appeared irregularly and the quality deteriorated.

Towards the end of 1988 reorganisation was attempted. The number of collaborators increased and an attempt was made to improve the publication both at the level of content and that of distribution and sales. Since that time we can note a progressive improvement in these areas and we have tried to stick scrupulously to publication dates. Looking at the results we hoped that in 1994, in the year that *A Batalha* would celebrate its 75th anniversary, we would be able to start to appear every two months.

The fact that we had failed to integrate ourselves into any of the existing syndicalist organisations and the clear impossibility of creating a movement of a revolutionary syndicalist nature in Portugal ensured that *A Batalha* would cease to be a purely syndicalist publication. Although this continued to be our regular theme it was considered to be important to include other subject matter such as ecology, feminism, anti-militarism, municipalism, etc., prominently in the publication.

This decision, to a degree emerged from several years experience working on *A Batalha*. We believe that most of the problems we have had to content with also affect the rest of the libertarian press and also some of these problems affect the press in general.

Some problems are of a general nature which can only be solved with difficulty in the short and medium term and others can only be solved with considerable effort.
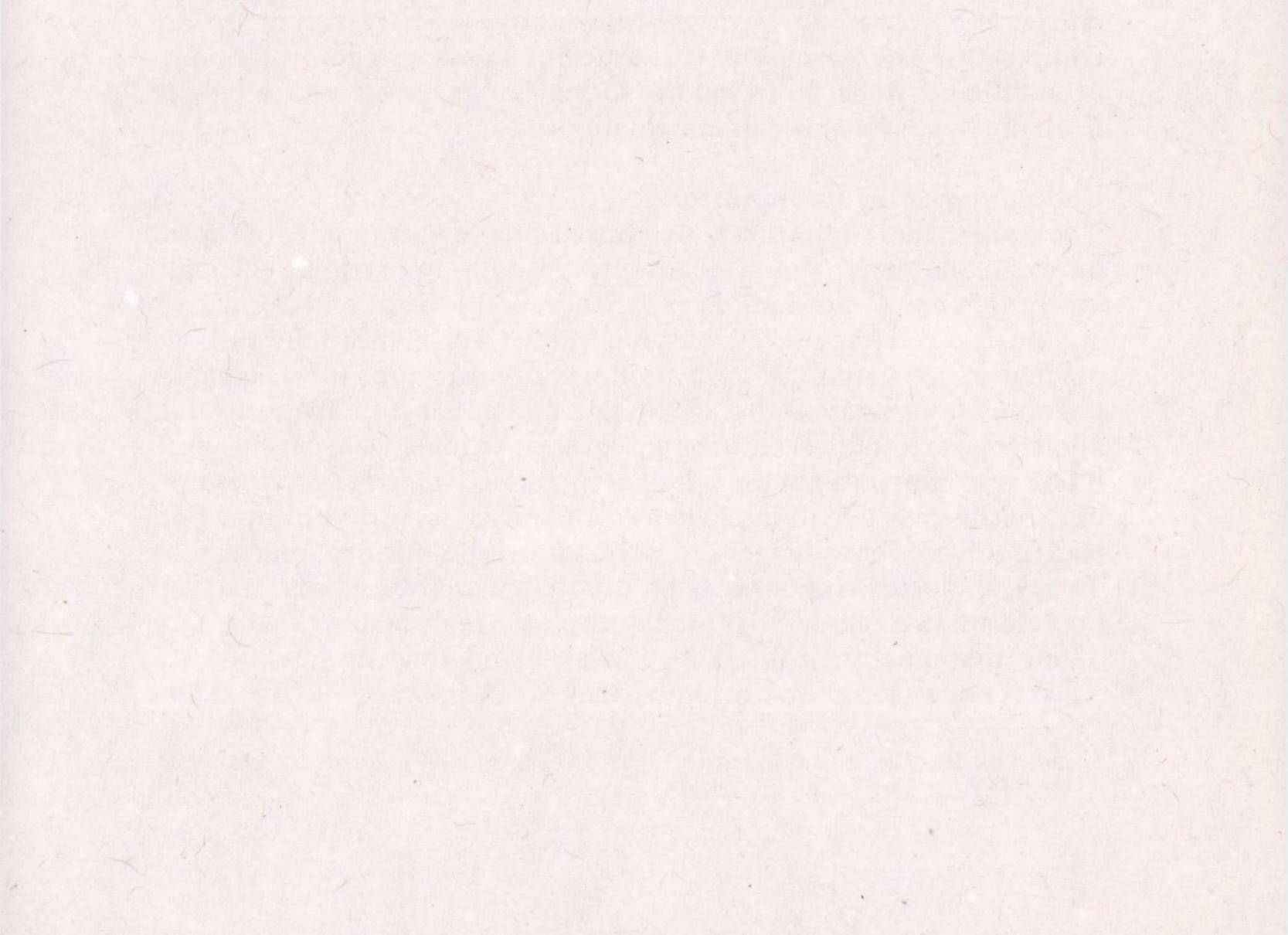
If the press in general is experiencing serious difficulties because of the domination of audio visual material the libertarian press is facing graver difficulties still. In fact those publications which are produced by non-professionals and with scarce financial resources can hardly survive faced with the dominance of State and commercially supported media. Today the means of communication – television in particular – are best placed to make and unmake news. Serious problems and conflicts which unfold over a period of years are front page news for a few days only and then completely forgotten. At the same time problems which deserve more prominence receive only a simple reference at best and are otherwise ignored. The way in which

these issues are dealt with also differs very little from one medium to another be it print, television or radio and be it controlled by the left or the right. The communication media obey their own logic which goes well beyond its basic function: to inform, to give political and economic information. Although they are called independent and go against the power or powers that be, they are in fact perfectly integrated into the reigning order. They accept it and obey and convey its norms. Thus the result is that the message transmitted is homogeneous and succeeds in becoming universally accepted as authentic.

The possibility of survival of those organs of the libertarian press will depend to a large extent on its ability to transform itself into credible and alternative means of communication. We feel the solution is above all to make publications more open and looking outward rather than inward. The subject it deals with should interest a public wider than that represented simply by the editorial board. This does not entail abdicating those principles we defend nor using the methods of the bourgeois press. Thus it is necessary that we stop using publications to foment differences between different groups. We should not confuse a daily or a journal with an organisations internal bulletin since they have utterly different objectives and readerships. If one wishes to criticise a particular group or individual one can send a letter or do it personally but not in the journal itself which is aimed at a wider public who are completely uninterested in these issues. To ignore this is to run the risk of producing a libertarian version of *Hello* magazine.

Another problem is the simple profusion of publications. It would seem that there is a tendency for any group, however low its membership, to produce some publication. Although there are positive aspects to this, almost always the abundance ends up producing low quality publications. It would be preferable for every country to produce one or two quality publications on a weekly basis instead of dozens of low quality ephemera. This will come about, obviously, when there is a capacity for tolerance and self-criticism amongst those involved rather than disagreement because they do not agree 100% with what is published or because their articles are not published.

On the other hand a strong dose of pragmatism and realism will be required with regard to the objectives and the means of achieving them. It is necessary to distinguish between the short and the long term; one should not expect overnight explosions in readership, nor should one expend energy and resources trying to achieve

unobtainable goals. Also it is necessary to take into account the limitations of those communication media which can, and must, play an important role in forming and transforming attitudes, but which are unable, on their own, to modify the social or political system. This task goes well beyond their remit.

It is undoubtedly vital that we develop links between these various publications that exist in the international libertarian medium, debate and share experiences, exchange information and articles. It is more important to solidify those links of cooperation and affinity rather than adopting that uncontrolled competition which would justify those patches that we are so keen to criticise in the existing socio-political model.

Gary Moffat

The More Information the Less Knowledge

Western culture is swamped with information; computer networks have reached the middle classes, and nearly everyone has access to a well-stocked public library.

Yet we are unable to solve any of our real problems. In the public sphere, we constantly vote against our own best interests and allow ourselves to be swept into hysteria at the whim of the ruling class and the mass media, the present pogromme against the poor in western countries being an example. In the private sphere, our inability to interrelate is destroying the family and attempts to create co operative institutions, leaving nothing to take their place except alcohol, drugs and crime. How can so well-informed a society screw up so completely? The purpose of this article is to ask why information is of so little use to us, and what the social change movement can learn from our society's abuse of information.

Technology and information

To explore these questions, we must learn to distinguish between information (facts), knowledge (the wisdom we acquire through synthesisation of information, experience, imagination and creativity) and intelligence (the process of synthesising, usually measured by how quickly we recognise patterns, connecting our input of observable phenomena to form models of thought and action). Intelligence and knowledge are not the same thing, but they do interrelate closely, and if one is in short supply the other likely is also. Information does not necessarily correlate to intelligence or knowledge; it may or may not lead us towards knowledge, and its quantity is not the deciding factor. Today, the other components of knowledge are being bulldozed on the information highway, as many people wrongly assume that a glut of information at their fingertips makes them knowledgeable.

To give one example of the limitations of information: the *New York*

Times is a considerably more informative newspaper than the *Chicago Tribune*, but since the spectrum of events and analysis that all the mass media refuse to cover is basically the same, readers relying on either newspaper for their knowledge of current events are equally bereft. What our corporate rulers call news, and feed to us on the mass media, is a monotonous recitation of 'facts' produced by the forces at work in our society, forces which they for obvious reasons make no attempt to analyse. Anyone who understands these forces could spend several years on a deserted island, without outside communication, and still have a pretty good idea of what's happening in the world. Radio stations that insist on interrupting their programmes every hour to repeat the same 'news' they gave us an hour earlier (and, with minor variations, a year earlier) are insulting their listeners' intelligence.

As for television, tempted though one may be to agree with Fred Allen that television is called a medium because nothing on it is well done, it has successfully completed the task for which it was designed by the corporate world – manipulating public perceptions of reality – all too well. It is the false perceptions engendered by the mass media, more than the dis-information itself, that are destroying society. For example, Americans in their last election voted for law-and-order in the belief that crime was rising in their country, whereas in fact it was decreasing. Now increased imprisonment will cause a real crime increase, much to the satisfaction of the right-wing politicians who use crime to scare the voters.

Information is the province of the corporate world, knowledge that of the counter-culture, so it's time we tried to understand how our knowledge can be used against their information. 'If you can't walk on quicksand and dance with electrons, you're going to be toast', a futurist tells a group of frightened executives who have paid five grand each to attend a five-day crash course on computers. One of them, a Coca-Cola executive, amplifies: 'You can't run the business if you don't have enough information. And if the information is on the system and you can't get at it quickly, then you get dependent on other people, you get the information later than other people and in a format that's probably not as rich as it can be through the system.' Computerised information becomes essential to survival in a hierarchical system whose workers trust computers more than each other. However, in a co-operative system whose members are more interested in finding ways of working with their fellows to satisfy mutual needs than in toasting them, a more holistic approach to knowledge than that provided by the computer screen is necessary.

Information is usually absorbed by one sense at a time (usually visually, especially in the computer age); knowledge is often absorbed by several senses at once. Information is sold or hoarded, knowledge is generously shared among all who seek it. Information dominates space via the mass media, knowledge dominates time. Harold Innis taught us that communications via space – dominating media (the mass media) reach a lot of people quickly and are quickly forgotten unless they are constantly reinforced, while communications through media which last in time (personal observation, the better books and teaching methods, for instance) reach fewer people, but are retained longer and sometimes become part of, our collective wisdom. This is why, when the state does something to harm its people such as going to war, it must complete the process quickly, before the media have time to reach them; the US failed to do this when it invaded Vietnam.

In prehistoric times there was too little information; the individual's perception of the world was limited to the experience of one tribe. The Renaissance had arguably about the right amount; we now use the term 'Renaissance Man' to describe somebody knowledgeable in a wide range of subject areas. The explosion of information created by the printing press and the nation state forced people to abandon general knowledge and specialise. Marshall McLuhan cleverly argues that the Renaissance destroyed Renaissance Man: 'Literate nationalism's tremendous speed-up of information movement accelerated the specialist's function that was nurtured by Guttenberg, and rendered obsolete such generalist encyclopaedic figures as Benvenuto Cellini, the goldsmith, condottiere, painter, sculptor and writer'.[2] Francis Bacon, in the early seventeenth century, was among the last to attempt mastery of all fields of knowledge.

Modern society's information glut has forced most people to specialise, to learn more and more about less and less, in order to hold a job. Most of us have become dependent upon scientific and technological procedures we don't understand. This does not mean that we should have stopped acquiring information in the sixteenth century, but rather that we have not paid sufficient attention to how this information can best be assimilated. Our education system has taken it for granted that its role is to cram as many facts as the human brain can absorb into young people, and given its highest grades to those most proficient at memorising these facts. Since the main goal of the education system has been to discipline the young, strengthen their elders' power over them and determine which of the young can be most useful to the corporations if allowed into the universities, the fact that most of the

information students learned was of no use to their future lives, and generally discarded after the examination, save in whatever field the student pursued, was of little concern to the System. Now we speak glibly of an 'information highway', which will transform those who can purchase and master computers and multi-channel television into information supermen, dominating the techno-peasants who lack such resources. This obsession with data is turning us into replicas of the character of that name in the 'Star Trek' series, robotised receptacles of information searching desperately for our souls.

Critiques of technology

Society has not lacked critics of this process. Several thinkers, the late Jacques Ellul being the most prominent, have urged moderation in our use of modern technology. One of the most eloquent recent articles on this theme was written by 'Sunfrog' in the Fifth Estate. This poetic article vigorously denounces electronic communication for supplanting the experience of interpersonal contact, contending that 'E-mail itself is not a primary source of misery in our fragmented lives; rather it is acutely symptomatic of general social trends of accelerated technology coupled with depreciation of sensual reality and deterioration of communities'. The information exchanges become a commodity; ever expanding, untrustworthy (we know nothing about the source of the information, and it can be intercepted by the police), subverting our own mental and imaginative powers. 'Any revolution which requires technology now insures our dependence on it in the future'.[3] Elsewhere, Michael Albert worries that an abundance of free information on the Internet will flood us with material of generally declining quality, because of its failure to generate revenues for research, and increase the competitive position of large-circulation magazines such as *Time*, which can offer free on-line versions of their publications by generating advertising revenues while progressive magazines, lacking advertising, must charge for access to similar but far less elaborate pages maintained by volunteer staff.[4]

Alas, however accurate such criticisms may be, we're stuck with computers. There are so many of the bloody things around now that the most dedicated Luddite could only hope to destroy a very small fraction. Attempts to fight an information war with the corporate elite are likely doomed to failure; they have total control over the mass media and a preponderance of control over the computer system, popular internetting notwithstanding. Although we have enough

information at our disposal to show that capitalism is totally disastrous, and that we can change to a co-operative form of social management with much less dislocation than we will experience if we cling to capitalism, we have no way to widely disseminate this information. Knowledge is in short supply on both sides; theirs doesn't appreciate that the money classes will be unable to escape the results of social and environmental collapse, and ours hasn't learned how to communicate with the general public, or even with each other, as our failure to establish an 'alternative society' in the '60s attests.

McLuhan imagines an electronic social conditioning system more effective than those of *Brave New World* or Walden Two:

The computer could programme the media to determine the given messages a people should hear in terms of their over-all needs, creating a total media experience absorbed and patterned by all the senses. We could programme five hours less of television in Italy to promote the reading of newspapers during an election, or lay on an additional 25 hours of television in Venezuela to cool down the tribal temperature raised by radio the preceding month. By such orchestrated interplay of all media whole cultures could now be programmed in order to improve and stabilise their emotional climate, just as we are beginning to learn how to maintain equilibrium among the world's competing economies.

Need we ask who would determine 'the given messages a people should hear?' Clearly, the same corporate leaders who have learned how to 'maintain equilibrium among the world's competing economies' in their own interests, and virtually no one else's.

Electronics and isolation

Aside from the problem of who controls information, computer technology raises the danger of making our knowledge even more top-heavy with information, at the expense of its other components. Computers have mesmerised a lot of people, particularly young people, and many who wouldn't be caught dead reading a book spend hours daily in front of their computer screens, despite evidence that they are thereby endangering their health. Computers are great at making facts available, but do little or nothing to provide the experience, creativity and imagination needed by our intellects in order to assimilate knowledge. One of the best sources of such stimuli is literature. No one is going to read *Antigone* or *War and Peace* on a computer screen. People who forgo such works in order to spend their reading time chattering on the Internet are depriving themselves of the best that western thinking has produced.

Moreover, the spectacle of solitary individuals hunched over their computers conducting written dialogues with other users whom they'll never meet face-to-face can only cause us to lament the relative loss of interest people have in leaving their homes to interact with others in clubs, coffee houses or whatever (even street gangs are usually preferable). Going to the movies used to provide some aspects of the collective experience that television completely lacks. Far from the collectivisation McLuhan predicted, computers and television are in many ways isolating us further in our homes. And this suits the ruling class just fine. Stuffing people with information is one way of keeping them cocooned, contented and conservative.

There would, of course, be good uses for computerised data networks: they could replace such tree-wasting pulp and paper commodities as dictionaries, directories, encyclopaedia, newspapers, popular magazines and telephone books. However, this seems a low priority among both controllers and users of computer data (although some popular publications are now 'on line'). Computers are inferior to books for presenting speculative topics, but today the Internet is loaded with the observations of anyone who can afford access, and can thus by-pass the necessity of gaining an editor's approval in order to 'publish'. This is a nice blow against censorship, but, as Albert fears, it means that a lot of mediocre (or worse) stuff will be as prominently displayed as the good material; the reader will need intelligence and knowledge in order to distinguish, and these commodities are now in short supply.

So what is to be done? Correcting popular mis-perceptions will take time, which we may not have in view of dangers to the environment and the social fabric, but I don't see any shortcut. Much of this time can be spent enhancing our own knowledge, through interpersonal contacts and serious reading. As initial steps, I would propose:

- Establishing venues for face-to-face communication, so those concerned with social change can compare their ideas with one another and reach out to wider areas of the public (i.e. autonomy centres, food and clothing distribution points).

- Making full use of such alternative means of communication as are available. They may not reach many people, but those they do reach are often the ones most susceptible to social change. Insisting that the education of our young be grounded in the Four Rs, adding Retrieval of Information to the traditional three. Once they know how to look up what they need, there's no need to memorise it

unless they consider it particularly significant. Reading must include the ability to define and appreciate good writing. Thus endowed, they can proceed to convert information into knowledge in their chosen fields. If this cannot be done through the school system, we must take our children out of it for 'alternative' schools or, failing that, home schooling.

• Networking into small groups, each with a survival plan for when things start to collapse (what, for instance, would we do if food stopped coming into the larger cities?). At present only right-wing survivalists seem to be doing this, and if we fail to evaluate likely post-collapse conditions in advance they may well be the strongest group emerging, destroying lives, knowledge and culture just as did the barbaric tribes during the previous Dark Ages which followed the collapse of the Roman Empire. To have input into the next civilisation that will rise, we must survive this one.

Facts and patterns

Before leaving the question of information, we must question its fundamental soundness. Information is based on facts, but is there really such a thing as a commonly established fact? Like the other components of knowledge, many so-called facts depend on the observer's vantage point. If I say 'it's a nice day' or 'Churchill was a fascist', somebody whose reality differs from mine is bound to disagree. If I say 'two plus two equals four', the measurement of agreement will be much wider, but even here some advanced mathematician may try to show me that there are times when two and two don't equal four. If I say 'no statement is entirely true', I create a paradox. Once upon a time, a fact was a fact. Then, in the 1920s, the physicist Werner Heisenberg introduced his uncertainty principle, now generally accepted, which states that all measurable quantities are subject to unpredictable fluctuations, and hence to uncertainty in their values. At about the same time, quantum mechanics were exposing the subtle way in which observer and observed are interwoven. Albert Einstein produced his theory of relativity. Today, some physicists believe that there may be no single set of rules by which the universe is run; any perception of such rules is based on one's circumstances (i.e. evolution culture, collected data), and an alien civilisation might construct very different laws. And this randomness and uncertainty has been extended by scientific discovery from physics to mathematics .[5]

As the contemporary physicist Paul Davies points out, this does not mean that the universe is irrational:

There is a difference between the role of chance in quantum mechanics and the unrestricted chaos of a lawless universe ... This statistical lawfulness implies that, on a macroscopic scale where quantum effects are usually not noticeable, nature seems to conform to deterministic laws. The job of the physicist is to observe the patterns in nature, and try to fit them in simple mathematical schemes.[6]

Facts are okay in their place, but they shouldn't be revered so absolutely as to stand in the way of a good theory.

Many of our century's best thinkers have sought patterns in their respective disciplines. One striking example is the way Harold Innis, by studying the pattern of Canada's growth as dictated by the needs of the fur and fish trade, and Marshall McLuhan, by studying English literature and pop culture, came to somewhat similar conclusions about the historic and present role of communications in society. Other examples of pattern seeking would include Arnold Toynbee's study of history, Northrop Frye's study of western literature, Aldous Huxley's of comparative religion, Carl Jung's of the unconscious, James Frazer's and Joseph Campbell's of comparative mythology, etc.

Such studies go beyond the mechanical materialism of such late nineteenth century thinkers as Darwin, Marx and Freud, who held that physical and social conditions produced preordained results with the inevitability of a Wagnerian leitmotif. With determinist faith shaken in our own century, thinkers have sought to organise knowledge not into immutable laws, but rather into patterns which may indicate directions in which we are headed and ways of controlling these directions to our advantage. To do this, they may emphasise certain 'facts' and downplay others. For instance, Toynbee based his *Study of History* on comparing the rise and fall of civilisations regardless of their time periods, rebelling against the concept of history as a chronological record of 'facts':

I do not think that history is a succession of facts, nor history writing the narration of facts. Historians, like all human observers, have to make reality comprehensible, and this involves them in continuous judgements about what is true and what is significant. This requires classification, and the study of the facts has to be synoptic and comparative, since the succession of facts flows in a number of simultaneous streams.

The process of articulation and classification undoubtedly misrepresents reality, but is an inescapable consequence of conscious

thought, the alternative being the mystic's wholly passive intuition of divine reality.[7]

When Toynbee published his Study, scores of lesser historians pounced on his data to discover various errors and distortions. What they failed to see was that even if all these 'errors' are accurately diagnosed (and many were, in fact, matters of interpretation) they don't alter the validity of what he was trying to do, i.e. to learn what makes civilisations tick. His study is not the last word on the subject, but it does point the way to further searching for patterns. The same is true of Huxley's *Perennial Philosophy* or Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism*. As Frye remarks, the irrefutable philosopher is not the one who cannot be refuted, but the one who is still being discussed after being refuted. Surely our students would be better off discussing this issue than memorising facts that they can look up in a library as they're needed.

Is there a common pattern?

Will the newly emerging patterns of knowledge ever be synthesised into a commonly accepted overview of how and why the universe was created, and the place of sentient life in it? The start of the search, only made possible by our liberation from religious dogma, is too recent for this question to be answered with any degree of certainty, but some thinkers accept this possibility. For instance, Stephen Hawking ends his *Brief History of Time* by concluding that, if a complete theory of the universe is discovered 'it should in time be understandable in broad principle by everyone, not just a few scientists. Then we shall all, philosophers, scientists and just ordinary people be able to take part in the discussion of why it is that we and the universe exist. If we find the answer to that, it would be the ultimate triumph of human reason, for then we would truly know the mind of God'.[8]

This sounds to me a little too much like the physicist's equivalent of Fukiyama's 'end of history'. I doubt that we'll ever get common agreement on what social system to embrace, let alone how or why the universe began. There are too many plausible theories, and the trail has grown cold. But we should look for one anyway; we'll pick up a number of interesting and helpful concepts along the way even if they can't be elevated to the status of 'facts'. The same is true of the other disciplines. I don't think physics alone will provide answers; if we ever do find the complete theory Hawking speaks of, it will have to combine the various fields of study which, as we have seen, are just

beginning to explore the possibilities of flnding patterns. While our short-term quest for knowledge must be related to the immediate problem of saving society from environmental and economic collapse, tllese long-term goals of learning emore about humanity's place in the universe must not be neglected.

1. Murray Campbell, 'Cybersurvival 101' in *Toronto Globe and Mail*, 25th March 1995.

2. Marshall McLuhan interview, *Playboy*, March 1969. To my knowledge, his most lucid explanation of his philosophy.

8. 'Sunfrog' in *Fifth Estate*, Winter 1995 .

4. Michael Albert in *Z Magazine*, December 1994, andF@hrll@rv, 1995.

5. For a fuller discussion of this, see: Paul Davies, *The Mind of God* (New York, Touchstone, 1992).

6. Davies, *op. cit.*

7. Arnold J. Toynbee, *A Study of History* (New edition, Oxford, 1972).

8. Stephen Hawking, *A Brief History Of Time*, quoted at front of Davies, *op. cit.* As with McLuhan, Hawking's most lucid exposition is in his *Playboy* interview (April, 1990).

Editorial

Techno-Sceptic

The meaning of technology is more and more contested within radical movements. The archetypal positions are those of technophilia and technophobia. Technophiles emphasise the potentially liberating aspects of technology such as the labour saving possibilities (abolition of work through automation) or greater communication (providing for the first time the conditions for a world community). Anti-techno thinkers argue that not only is technology itself alienating but that it requires an economic base to support it which must be either capitalist or just as harmful. While both of these currents produce useful material, both are one-sided ideologies which cannot deal with the complexity of a radical opposition to this society. At its worst, technophilia degenerates into worship of capitalist technology as it is, of capital in its physical form. Technophobia present in deep ecology and anti-civilisation communism at worst is a moralism, putting forward a life-style that is impossible to live. Technophilia obviously helps bolster the capitalist market, but techno-fear is also used as a basis for niche products, green consumerism and for clever advertising (e.g. there is a Holsten Piss ad which is a pretty funny take on cyber-hype).

It seems that an understanding of technology must draw from the best elements of both tendencies whilst rejecting the black and white opposition they each pose. This 'zine collects together four articles which fall in the middle ground where most of us choose to live.

The current wave of techno-worship that is found in radical movements is influenced by more mainstream theories. Various journalists, writers and pundits influenced by futurologist Alain Toffler, put forward the suggestion that current info-tech such as the internet, virtual reality, satellite comms, mobile phones, faxes and so on, form the technological base for a new wave of civilisation. This new, diverse society will engender a resurgence of local community coupled with greater global cornmumcation. Old, massive structures such as monolithic multinationals and centralised states will be replaced by more open social relations. This ideology has become popular amongst rising sections of the (techno-)industrial bourgeoisie

and has been promoted by various post-modernist writers. Tomer has interesting things to say about the way society is changing, but there is no getting away from the fact that he is a capitalist ideologue. The adoption of his ideas about the liberatory nature of the whole swathe of new technology is the adoption of the thought of modern capital.

The article 'The Chiapas Uprising and the Future of Class Struggle in the New World Order' by Harry Cleaver is not aimed at destroying myths about the internet, but instead gives information about how the medium was used to build solidarity and communication around the Chiapas rising. This text details the way modern technology is used by radicals, but does not touch on any of the problems that the internet raises. Its strength and its weakness is to look at struggle as it actually is. This goes not just for its comments on technology but for its central theme, the struggle in the Chiapas. Cleaver reports much interesting information on the fight of the Chiapas Indians but (typically for an autonomist) is extremely uncritical of the weaknesses in this struggle. He is probably right in saying that the Zapatistas are not just another Marxist-Leninist nationalist movement, fore-doomed to repeat the horrors of 'national liberation'. But the EZLN's dallying with parliament, and its negotiations with the government, should surely show that it cannot lead the struggle in an effective, uncompromising way. With all their talk of justice, democracy and revitalising 'civil society', the Zapatista spokespeople are reminiscent of the citizens' movements of Eastern Europe at the end of the '80s. Perhaps Subcommandante Marcos is as much in the mould of Vaclav Havel, as of Fidel Castro? If the class struggles in the Chiapas intensify, then it is highly likely conflicts will emerge between the Zapatista leadership and the peasant and proletarian masses they have tried to represent (if such conflicts haven't happened already). If Cleaver's ideology were situationist or 'communist' (i.e. Barrotist) then he could *almost without thinking*, have categorised the EZLN as a representation of the proletariat, opposed to the proletariat as revolutionary subject. (As if there were no dialectical relationship between the two categories; as if the land seizures, liberation of prisoners, etc., would have happened anyway, without the EZLN's prior agitation.) This unthinking application of ideology is what all too often passes for revolutionary theory. It is also what makes autonomist marxism so refreshing: whereas the autonomist impulse is first and foremost solidarity and practical struggle, situ's and communists more often appear to be the quality controllers of the class struggle, checking-off which aspects of the struggle match up to

their pre-existing requirements, writing off the struggles which fail to match up. It seems imperative to find some synthesis of these different tendencies, an attitude and activity, a form of engagement, which relates directly to the class struggle as it actually is but which doesn't rely on stifling criticisms based on the hard won lessons of the previous experience of our class.

<p align="center">*   *   *</p>

The way in which technology is used has always been contested. The Coca-Cola company produces distinctive glass bottles for its product. The form the bottle takes has been carefully decided on by specialists employed by the company. The bottle is designed to withstand a certain amount of pressure without fracturing; the strength of the bottle has been weighed up against the cost to produce it. The shape of the bottle itself is a trademark of the company, and is designed as part of the product's image. Any changes to the form of the bottle must take into account the image the company tries to project. The Coca-Cola bottle is capitalist technology through-and-through. Nonetheless, if the bottle has been designed with a particular purpose, its purpose can be subverted. The bottle can be three-quarter-filled with petrol, then topped up with oil or soap. Add a petrol soaked rag and you have transformed the classically styled capitalist product into an ever popular example of proletarian technology.

There is a story about the invention of the steam engine. Steam pumps were in use in the eighteenth century which required the opening of a valve on each cycle. At one mill it was the job of a young boy to open this valve. This job would be extremely dull for the most domesticated worker, but for the boy in question it was just not on! He used a piece of wire to connect the valve to another moving part of the pump. The pump then worked continuously on its own, and the boy went off and played (but still earned his wages). Unfortunately, James Watt came by one day and saw what the boy had done. Watt nicked this idea and thereby 'invented' the steam engine.

I heard this story years ago but could not find information anywhere that supported it when I tried recently. Perhaps its not true, or only half true. No matter. What I know to be true is that it is common for workers to come up with technological fixes to make their work easier. I've seen many workmates do similar things at various jobs and did this myself when I used to work as a printer. With one of the machines I used, running certain types of job, it was necessary to stand in front

of the machine unloading each print as it came out (as they were too big to stack). But by extending the output tray with cardboard packaging, it was possible to make the prints stack. This meant instead of working intensely, it was possible to read a book or go and chat for five minutes or so between ten second bouts of work. This is typical activity seen in any workplace and amounts to developing technology in our own interests. Whereas capital develops technology to get us to produce more for less wages, we develop technology to allow us to work less intensely for the same wage.

<p style="text-align:center">★   ★   ★</p>

Revolutionary theorists have always been reluctant to specify how a post-revolutionary society (communism, anarchy, call it what you like) will be. At best there are generalities about there being a community, and an absence of: the state, money, private property, alienation, nations, sexism, racism and so on. This attitude is completely correct, it is not possible to say how a society will be when such a society will be (re-)made by people who are different from us, who have transformed themselves and their relationships with others, through massive class struggle. Even so, it can be helpful to read utopian fiction, just to get some idea, a merest glimpse of how the world might be. All the best modern utopian fiction seems to be science fiction (or is that just my prejudice?). 'Classics' in this field are *Woman on the Edge of Time* by Marge Piercy, and *The Dispossessed* by Ursula K. LeGuin. Another less often mentioned book by LeGuin is *Always Coming Home*, set long after the collapse of civilisation. The book examines a tribal society and is strikingly similar in its themes to the work of dead anti-civilisation dude Fredy Perlman. At the other extreme, are the 'Culture' series of books by Iain M. Banks. These deal with a technologically advanced communist society. (Its technophilia gets almost queasy at times.) Reading these books can't provide any blueprint, nor should they (one of the positive things about sci-fi is that few people take it seriously). But they give food for though; and can be just as inspiring as any political text.

What is communism? The horror of Russian style 'state socialism' is what is normally meant by the word. But with its wage labour, commodity relations, class differences, state (prisons, police, borders) etc., this model is nothing more than a state owned capitalism. The word 'communism' has been used by various radical currents, including some that attacked the Russian lie from that outset. Communism in this radical sense is as said above sometimes described as the negative

of all the things we most hate about this society, or it is talked of as community. It has been described as 'the free association of producers' and as a mode of production in which goods are produced for free, not as a commodity to be exchanged on the market. One of the interest groups that is organised through computer networks and bulletin boards, some end programs, which are literally given away. These are distributed throug up on the cover-disks of computer mags. Obviously these are of variable quality and usefulness, but some are genuinely impressive. Best example is the Linux operating system, and the programs that go with it. This system is an alternative to DOS/Windows used on most PCs. It is far more advanced than DOS/Windows, and in many ways more than the much hyped Windows 95. The Linux system is produced collectively by rnany people from different parts of the world, collaborating together out of their own choice in order to produce a product for free. The free association of producers, production for use not exchange, international community: is this communism? Well maybe, but if it is, then communism is no big deal. Freeware may well reduce the revenue of commercial software houses a small amount. Certainly the communist impulse of those that produce for free is exemplary and should be recognised as such. But there seems little in this activity that truly threatens the status quo. Perhaps then the definition of communism should be refined more? Maybe the list of things to be abolished should be expanded? That would be clutching at straws. If then it is not a list of changes to carry out, a programme to implement, or a set of aims and principles. What is subversive is the real movement that is always engendered by capitalism, the struggle of those without social power or social wealth against the conditions of their own existence. A future communist society is the victory of this movement over existing social conditions. And technology? What will be the technical basis of this society? There is little that can concretely be said (with the exception that a world community must have global means of communication and transport). More can be said of radical social struggles. On the one hand there exist various struggles directly against capitalist science and technology, the refusal of development (in Britain the anti-roads movement), the anti-nuclear movement, luddite strikes against new technology, animal liberationists' attacks on research establishments and individual vivisectionists. All these have at least partly a proletarian class content. On the other hand the real movement utilises technology directly, from printing machines to fax machines, molotov cocktails to electronic mail. If it's not

possible to speak clearly about the future, it can be said that communism as it exists today in the real movement that abolishes present conditions, both contests and makes use of technology as need arises.

Above it was stated that revolutionaries have been reluctant to specify exactly how the new society will be. But the fact is that many radicals still have their programmes ready for the proletariat to implement. The following quote from the Marx and Engels' cornmunist manifesto, specifically attacking utopian socialists, can equally well be applied to many of today's radicals, from those with their detailed plans, to technophiles with their map to the future, to anti-civilisation communist with their map to the past. The implication of these people's politics is this:

Historical action is to yield to their personal inventive action, historically created conditions of emancipation to fantastic ones, and the gradual, spontaneous class organisation of the proletariat to an organisation of society specially contrived by these inventors. Future history resolves itself in their eyes, into the propaganda and the practical carrying out of their plans.

Karl Young

Net Lists

Standard histories of the internet will tell you that the net was established by US government agencies as a decentralised system of communications that could not be 'decapitated' in the event of nuclear war. Without a centre, interlaced subsystems could continue to function if segments were taken out. From a user's point of view, the net would indeed appear to be the product of a group of lunatics, but lunatics of a different nature. To me it seems more like the combined efforts of The Keystone Cops, Buster Keaton, Laurel and Hardy, The Three Stooges, and the two Goldbergs (Rube and Whoopi – Rube sets things up, Whoopi demonstrates how to respond). Perhaps no single function of the internet reveals its absurd and comic aspects net as well as lists, particularly since the human component cannot be escaped nor can most failures be blamed on any sort of mechanical device or process. But if lists tend to show absurdities both of technology and human behaviour, they may also point toward some of the best possibilities of both.

The basic principal of a list is simplicity itself. Members send messages to the list's address and the messages go from there to all the members who have joined the list. This simple elegance can be confused by all sorts of factors. Some lists are moderated, and some are closed, so you can only join if invited or if you pass a test. One of the oddest set-ups is one in which everyone on the list *except* the sender gets messages s/he sends, so the sender doesn't know if the message went to the list, if a net gateway distorted the format, etc. New members on such lists tend to send their messages over and over, thinking they haven't been distributed. If there are problems such as line lengths incompatible with the host computer, neither long-time members or newcomers will know and be able to correct the problems. Some lists are set up so that only messages sent by members will go to the list, so members with multiple addresses can only send them from the one at which they're subscribed. Perhaps the supreme folly is the lists set up so that if you use a <return> function in your software, the response will only go to the member who sent the message, not to the whole list. You tend to find more of these screwy

features on lists run by despotic manipulators and anal retentive institutions. Mercifully, the fussier a list, the more likely it is to include a <digest> option. With this option, you can get everything that comes on the list in a single packet once a day. If you're not engaged in active discussion, this is probably the best way to go – it's economical and it gives the posts that come on the list more coherence and continuity.

The promise of net lists – the possibility of joining a discussion with a potentially infinite number of people spread around the world – remains one of the net's greatest potentials. Unfortunately, it seems that it has a long way to go for this promise to be fulfilled. I have now been on over eighty lists. I have un-subscribed to all but a dozen, and only remain on some because friends or colleagues want me to, not because I have any interest in them. Still, lists have a great deal of potential, and may yet become some of the net's greatest assets.

The following, 'I Don't Take Theory Divorced from Experience as Mail' was written on-line as a part of a colloquium sponsored by John Fowler's Grist BBS about two years ago. The opening passage, which I took as a point of departure is from a dull as ditch water essay on the internet that the colloquium began with.

I DON'T TAKE THEORY DIVORCED FROM EXPERIENCE AS MAIL
At this moment, the most interesting format on the internet, apart from the basic electronic mail function, is the listserve: a series of individuals join a list--any post to the list address is immediately delivered to all list subscribers. Individuals can then post replies to the entire list or to the individual that sent the post.

Most lists I've been on are full of monologues. In a sense, active lists are a bit like Elizabethan drama: lots of quick thrusts, jabs, questions, pleas, bits of information; a few sub-plots; plenty of tedious explanatory passages; and long monologues. Most lists tend to be dominated by a small number of people who talk to themselves at great length, boring many subscribers, though reinforcing the position of the oligarchy. Sometimes monologues from inside and outside the oligarchy collide and become hectoring contests: nothing as swift and as funny as the African-American arts of *signifyin* or *dozens*, just long harangues. The notion that these lists are free and open to anyone is fallacious: there are hierarchies on many active lists, and these are as strongly enforced as they are in any other medium, and by much the same method: if your status isn't sufficient, you will be frozen out of discussion and either leave the list or become one of those who post long harangues that other listers more or less automatically delete

without reading.

If I thought that this would be a permanent condition, I'd quickly un-subscribe from all, or nearly all the lists I'm on. After all, the only certain effect I'm sure the new medium will have on poetry and other forms of discourse is to eliminate a lot of it. If you spend hours reading posts, saving some, deleting some, responding to others, it doesn't leave you a lot of time to get your own work done. In addition, given the as yet unknown health problems that may be associated with long term computer use, we may be blinding ourselves and developing carpel tunnel syndrome while we're at it, making it impossible to work in the future. Maybe at a time when many writers accuse each other of suffering from logorrhea, you could argue that this is a good thing.

My feeling, though, is that these listings are rehearsal for a kind of genuine cooperation. The problem as I see it, is that we, as writers, have not learned how to work together.

Lists seem to work in cycles. I'll take the Sixties list as an example of a cycle I've seen in several lists, but which has gone into what seems like another phase of a cycle that other lists may go through.

Last winter there were several bellicose threads going on on this list. One, later referred to by listers as 'the pissing contest', centred on the statement, re Vietnam: *IF YOU WEREN'T THERE, SHUT THE FUCK UP.* Several women began raising the question *WHEN DO WE GET TO TALK ABOUT FEMINISM?* in late winter. From this, they proceeded to a spirited, though much too short, discussion of the origins of the women's movement. Then the list went silent. The silence continued for well over a month.

Okay. Something similar has happened on several lists. It could be that many people on the lists were academics and had to devote more time to prepare for the end of the semester. It could be (and I like this possibility) that all of a sudden it was spring and everybody wanted to get away from their claustrophobic work stations and get out and around a bit – go for walks, spend time with family and friends, etc. My hunch is, however, that the silence was due to the dialectic of the situation: One group had dominated things for a while. Another group had silenced them and, before the new group could really get going, felt self-consciously alone, and silenced itself.

The list has been active again during the last month. The Vietnam war continues to be forefronted in the posts to the list, but now even the most ardent hectorers have returned with a much more sober and responsible tone in their discourse. Some of the ramblers have even found greater focus in their messages, even though they continue to

be long winded. Feminism has not been a major subject of conversation during this period, though I feel confident that it will be in the future. Now there are a few people asking, not in caps, when do we get to discuss mysticism and Asian religions? Those who ask this question haven't yet started the conversation, and it won't get started if they don't start it themselves, but the way is now open to them if they wish to take it.

What seems to be happening here is that a group of people who don't know each other – don't know how other people on the list look or how their voices sound, what their interests and experiences are – are learning how to talk to each other. For the list as a whole, this may be a long and slow process. I have contacted several people on this and other lists directly and have talked to them via voice phone and corresponded by letter, and this has become more like conventional communication. But sometimes what we have talked about is how to do things on the list. I imagine that many other people have been doing the same thing, including asking each other if they think a subject is worth discussing on the list or how it should best be approached in the public forum.

As a result of a discussion of the Cuban missile crisis, I asked if there was anyone who could put us in contact with people who had experienced this crisis in the Soviet Union. I was contacted by a lister who said she might be able to get in touch with Russians and Ukrainians who might have interesting comments. As she was doing this, her doctor located a benign tumour at the base of her brain and she had to stop sending me messages. She lives in Winnipeg, and I couldn't help but feel an odd sort of panic, thinking of how my close friend and collaborator on many projects, B.P. Nichol, had died in a Toronto hospital from complication following a 'successful' operation to remove a tumour from his spine. A couple weeks later, she sent me a brief note saying the operation had been a success, but that her left hand was not functioning and she wouldn't be able to continue our project or write to me for a while. She was able, however, to get her e-mail with her right hand without strain or discomfort. I've been sending her a couple messages a week for over two months now. I hope she finds them interesting. Even if she doesn't, I'm sure she feels good about getting the e-mail, that someone out there is concerned enough to send it, even if she's stopped reading it. Perhaps we'll continue the project when she's fully recovered. Then again, maybe we won't. A curious thing about this is that we might not get along very well in person. We might not get along in cyberspace if we

weren't working on a project that interested both of us, an interest that touched the deeper strata of shared adolescent trauma, something we had both endured in silence but which had informed our political and social orientation since. But what matters in regard to lists is that we are probably not the only people on this or other lists who are doing similar things.

Once more, we are seeking a way of communicating and working with a group – we are seeking to do that in a way that will not lead to more pissing contests or to silence. Some lists may fall apart or go dormant – I have subscribed to several that don't post much of anything. But those that survive these experiments in how to communicate in cyberspace may very well serve as models of how writers can develop modes of communication and cooperation in this new medium. If this does not happen, poetry and visual art in cyberspace is probably doomed to be little more than the games and flashy gimmicks that now dominate the CD-ROM industry. Establishing this means of communication is much more important than any development in software or hardware that is likely to come along in the near future.

We still have a lot to learn ...

Learning to talk to each other

Okay, the above was written two years ago, when I felt considerably more optimistic than I do now. Generally speaking, I find the interactions that take place off lists more important than what goes on on the lists themselves. The nature of general discussion on the list mentioned above has not improved, but rather declined in the succeeding years to the point where it's become almost unreadable, and I'm finally ready to sign off. Yet I continued to make contacts with people from it, and that made it worth continuing my subscription long after the list sank into gibberish. In some instances, one-on-one e-mail exchanges lead to voice phone conversation and even to meeting. This highlights the fact that for most general discussion lists, the real advantage has not been the ability to address a group but the personal interrelations that bits of cyber-flotsam have generated.

From my experience, I would say that lists oriented towards achieving some goal, toward working together on a specific project, work much better than general discussion lists. Many discussion lists take on too large a subject, and end up as an odd sort of oligarchy in which a few people who have gained prestige elsewhere or who monopolised the conversation when the list started or who simply

have the time to out argue everyone else do all the talking while the overwhelming majority simply lurk. Lists with over a thousand members often have no more than a dozen active participants, and the active participants often have much less to say than those who remain silent.

Of anarchist lists I've been on, Spunk Editorial Collective and A-infos could serve as models for any type of goal oriented list. I haven't found better on the net. The Anarchy list, oriented toward general discussion, however, fails dismally, in some respects worse than lists in other areas. Two other anarchist lists, IWW and 1-UNION have done better, probably in part due to the closer focus in their original set-up and orientation. Although we still have a lot to learn about talking to each other, I think anarchist have done pretty well so far. I hope the following gives the reader some sense of the conversation on three lists.

Spunk Editorial Collective

This list, related to the more general Spunk Information List, manages Spunk's archive. The Spunk Archive began as a collection of anarchist texts available via older retrieval systems, such as FTP and gopher, but now places more emphasis on its world wide web site. The last time a members' directory was passed out to the list, there were about 45 members, of whom about a dozen contributed frequently, and a dozen more contributed regularly but less often. This ratio of about 50% active participants to 50% 'lurkers' is unusually high on the side of the participants, perhaps one of the highest on the net, and may bear some relation to the relatively tiny number of total members in the group. Of the roughly twenty lurkers, there's a good chance some are spooks trying to gain information on anarchist conspiracies performing deeds most fowl. I like to imagine these frustrated souls waiting to hear something like the voice of Nechayev or at least *The Anarchist Cookbook*, only to find, week after week, the conversation of a group of electronic librarians. What you'll see on the list will as often as not look something like this (">" means that something previously posted is being quoted):

```
> With <A HREF="../index.html">. Note that the "/" will work even on
> MacOS or MSDOS: "/" is the pathname separator in URLs, and the
> browsers translate it to their local convention (even when they find
> the URL in a local file).
```

That's good, anyway. I'll adjust my index.htm markup scripts to put a link to the previous index in.

The most important issues under discussion during the three years I've been a member have been what to include, how to manage and distribute material in the archive, and issues relating to copyright and author's rights.

Generally, things move slowly on the list, in part because active members tend to be active in other areas, and discussions sometimes halt when key members attend to other affairs. But a more important reason for the slowness comes from the nature of contemporary anarchism, in which there is a great diversity of thought and little consensus on anything. This slow pace frustrates everyone to a greater or lesser degree, but to me it seems essential. If the archive is truly representative, it will *have* to take numerous conflicting points of view into account and work out some sort of agreement among people with different, sometimes almost irreconcilable, ideas. So far, the archive does a good job of presenting a comprehensive selection of texts. With some 1,400 entries, the archive is large by web standards, and continues growing despite disagreements in the editorial collective. It could double within the next year. The archive has a solid foundation in anarchist classics by Kropotkin, Goldman, Bakunin, and others, as well as entries from contemporaries or near contemporaries as diverse as Guy Debord, Noam Chomsky, Raoul Vaneigem, and Hakim Bey. Sub-archives from groups such as the IWW, Food Not Bombs, the anarchist Black Cross, or the CNT, and from related groups such as the EZLN make up major contributions. The large selection of magazine reprints and excerpts may in the long run prove one of Spunk's most dynamic assets. Anarchist newspapers and 'zines have traditionally been published in small print runs, distributed sparsely and erratically, and not been carefully archived. Spunk brings many together and makes them available to anyone with internet access. Perhaps this archiving can help bring greater cooperation or at least communication between the many far flung anarchist groups. This archive could particularly help bring anarchists together at some time in the future when more are on-line.

Discussion on the list is usually friendly, and includes a fair share of kidding around and personal amenities. The list, however, is not a discussion group for anarchist issues, and people who join under the impression that it is usually sign off fairly quickly. The focused nature of the list, and the achievements of the collective give the list its character. Although there have been times when the frustrations of the list have seemed nearly insufferable to me, and I'm sure to many other members, this list is my favourite of those to which I've

belonged. I think working toward a goal has a great deal to do with this. The way that effort has tended to limit the collective to a group of people who are committed to get something accomplished also adds to its character. Despite my own occasional crankiness on the list, and the disagreements among members, I have been on friendly terms with some members, and have been able to make a couple real friends on the list, even though I've never met any members I didn't already know when I joined, and probably never will.

Anarchy

One of the things people want most in going on line is the possibility of joining discussion groups. Given industrial society's enormous capacity for the mass dislocation of just about everyone, many people, perhaps the majority, have trouble locating people with shared interests in their own communities. This is as much the case with origami enthusiasts as it is with anarchists. Hence discussion groups seem to offer a great deal – they may seem to offer everything from a way of gaining information to a cure for loneliness. If you find the right list among the many thousands available, it may live up to this promise. But it's just as likely that you will be disappointed. Having spent over twenty years in a vibrant urban community with plenty of people to talk to, followed by a couple idyllic years in the country, and then finding myself stranded in an inhospitable town, the Anarchy list was one of several that looked like a mirage in a desert, and encouraged me to go on-line. And like a mirage, the Anarchy list proved chimerical.
· During the time I was on the Anarchy list, it went through several phases, each dominated by a tiny group or a single individual. Perhaps the oddest thing I found on the list was a seemingly interminable discussion of whether or not gun ownership should be legal. This discussion seemed very little different from those I overheard and could easily take part in in the town where I lived. No one introduced anything new to the subject – a long thread even perpetuated the odd use of Switzerland as an example of a country (a) without gun control and (b) with strict gun control. Of course, the oddest thing about this discussion is that I wouldn't expect an Anarchist list to include people who favoured legal sanctions against anything. There might be plenty of people, like me, on the list who, as pacifists, saw little rightful use for guns, or wanted to find non-coercive ways of getting ride of them, or, ideally, eliminating the social problems that caused them to be used. But whether or not they should be *legal?* Hello? Is this the Anarchy list? Even the discussion of copyright on the Spunk list has

nothing to do with the *rightful* base for copyright laws, but rather the practicalities of setting up an archive that includes copyrighted material. A couple similar lines of discussion followed the gun discussion.

Then an intelligent and sometimes highly articulate, but often irresponsible, *enfant terible* among younger US anarchists, began writing long and frequent messages to the list, as often as not on such subjects as the great length of his Willie and the frequency with which he used it on the black girlfriend whom he claimed waited eagerly for him in the bed next to his computer. His messages included childish praises of violence that seemed almost as onanistic as the sexual bragging. After a couple months of this, messages came on the list saying that this fellow had been assassinated, but other people joined the list who sounded just like him, followed by reports of his continued activities. One of the voices that came on the list during this period, apparently a new one, but probably wasn't, 'spamed' (saturated) the list with conspiracy theories, stories of humans abducted by aliens, secret cures for cancer and HIV, etc. She could post as many as 120 messages to the list a day. When she was more or less kicked off the list, it seemed to be swinging back to something like the gun discussion, and after something like a year and a half of first trying to initiate discussions and then waiting to see what others had to say, I signed off. Several people have told me that at times the discussion on the list improved, but I'd had enough of flimsy arguments and tedious pranks.

Interestingly, there were a lot of good people on the list, including most of the Spunk Editorial Collective, people vitally active in other parts of the anarchist community, people who had written good articles for print, and a fair number of people who posted a few good messages, and then ceased to post. I know that many of these people could have done better, but there may be something about lists that are too large and too general that discourages that. The only real advantage of the time I spent on this list were correspondences off the list with people who were taking no or only slight part in the main discussion.

A-Infos

A-infos builds on pre-existing news distribution services, most immediately *Freedom*'s print version as a supplement to their fortnightly newspaper. The net version, in part inspired by the work of the Spunk archive, essentially consists of three parts: the A-infos mailing list, which is devoted to news; A-infos-d, a list for discussion not only of how to

run the news service but also the news itself; and the A-infos archive at Freedom's web site. News on A-infos comes from a wide variety of sources, ranging from small anarchist 'zines around the world to such small and wildly unconventional organisations as Reuters. And news comes in multiple languages: English, Spanish, and French most often, but with strong contributions in Italian, Swedish, German, Dutch, and some entries in such languages as Esperanto and Eskura. When possible, multilingual participants translate posts so that some items appear in several languages. The greatest strength of A-infos so far is that it brings news not otherwise presented in the conventional media. This is even the case with news that comes from Reuters – despite the fact that the mainstream press has access to this information, it is the sort of thing that invariably gets left out of newspapers and radio and tv broadcasts. As often as not, this is more important news than you find in the mainstream media. When it follows conventionally covered events, it covers them from positions not presented elsewhere. The lack of domineering editors and policies should ensure that A-infos will remain an important alternative and supplement to conventional news.

The distinction between A-infos and A-infos-d gets blurred on just about every level. Given the volume of messages that come on the list daily, this is a list that could really use a <digest> function, so it could be delivered to subscribers once a day, almost like an alternative electronic newspaper. This would make it easier for people to read with greater concentration and a sense of continuity. The web site doesn't altogether make up for this, since it is usually not updated daily. Although healthy now, attrition could set in faster than growth in participation. We'll just have to wait and see if that happens, and give it some extra support if it seems to be heading that way. Like Spunk, this is a dedicated list. So far the discussion section hasn't developed much of a sense of camaraderie or depth, but that may come. A-infos and Spunk should be able to form an important coalition as time goes on, with Spunk archiving past work (whether that past be the late nineteenth century or late last month) while A-infos presents breaking news.

If we still have a lot to learn about talking to each other in a group context, shared projects may be our most important teachers ...

John Pilgrim

Bulletins of Freedom

The name Steve Jackson is unlikely to ring many bells for *Raven* readers. Yet in 1993 he won a small victory for liberty, and for us all, when the US secret service was forced to pay him compensation after a raid. They had removed the electronic bulletin board system (BBS) which allows anyone to dial in and leave or receive messages. In the process the usual unnecessary damage was caused. Offered the keys, the SS used crowbars to open cabinets. Files and discs were impounded with the usual disregard for legal niceties. Eventually a Federal court held that the Privacy Protection Act had been violated by the raid and his business damaged by the confiscations. He ended up with half a million dollars compensation. Apart from the pleasure one always derives from seeing an individual win a battle against state terrorists this case had important implications for freedom in general. Steve Jackson won an important battle but the war went on.

Readers old enough to remember *Spies for Peace* will remember how an apoplectic government fumed, foamed, but ultimately stood helpless, as duplicators and Banda machines all over the country reproduced the extraordinary evidence of a government ensuring its own safety while writing off the population it was supposed to be protecting.* They were defeated by a technology. Access to duplicators was by this time so general that there was literally no way in which mass publication could be prevented in the first place or stopped once begun. The advent of the personal computer and its attached printer did not initially change this situation, it simply multiplied its possibilities. So did the fax machine. The students involved in Tiannamen Square were faxing out reports, hand-written and typed, to phone numbers round the world. Inevitably though these were to offices, where reception could be monitored, and to single individuals.

The exponential change was the advent of the bulletin board system. The BBS made it theoretically possible to reach hundreds of thousands of individuals with a single, relatively local call. Basically a computer

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* It was of course the evidence that was extraordinary, not the government's intended actions.

connected to a modem and a telephone, it was a storehouse for messages which anyone else could dial, receive, and answer with messages of their own. With its advent serious censorship became an actual impossibility. The 3.5 inch disk is a pretty anonymous distribution medium for those with computers but without a modem, while the widespread availability of cheap printers made it possible to print off quickly copies for those without computers. A far cry from the tortuous precautions that had to be taken by the authors of the Spies for Peace pamphlet thirty three years ago.*

The existence of this network with its splendidly subversive implications must have been a government nightmare. *Spies for Peace*, operating at that point in time could have distributed their revelations to millions all over the world for the cost of a phone call to their local BBS. Even at British Telecom prices that works out a pretty cheap operation in what the *New Statesman* declared to be an essentially anarchistic medium. If somebody knew something that *they* didn't want us to know the BBS was a splendid means of distributing that information. The Internet has increased this problem from a government point of view as it too is beyond the sort of regulation governments like to impose. All over the world computers are confiscated with the same sort of knee jerk reaction with which printing presses were at one time broken up, without, so far as I know, anywhere near the same concern from civil liberties groups.

Meanwhile the tabloids, concerned perhaps at the competition, were running stories about pornography, software piracy, and the perennial excuse of corruption of youth. No doubt the idea was to soften up public opinion for some kind of legislative clampdown. Meanwhile the police seized computers and bulletin boards while the authorities fantastically warned BBS owners that they were responsible in law for every message the BBS contained.

Computers and their associated bulletin boards offered us some interesting examples not only of individual freedom in the process of being exercised, but of possibilities for an alternative economics. One of the main functions of the BBS, and one which commercial software houses found it difficult to grasp, was shareware distribution. Shareware is a method of distributing programmes that ignored commercial marketing methods and worked well enough to ensure that software is produced at a third of the cost of commercial programmes. Essentially the user can download the programme from

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* See 'Spies for Peace after 25 Years' in *The Raven*, number 5, 1988.

a bulletin board, get it from a friend or a shareware library, or take from the 'free' disk attached to a computer magazine. The important aspect though is that the user only pays if s/he finds the programme useful. Some of these programmes are limited versions, some have irritating nag screens demanding you register, most, in my experience simply use the offer of a printed manual and updates to encourage the user to send in the modest amount of money demanded.

The system was and is based on trust. Although people do use unregistered software, the general user has found the system attractive enough to pay up and keep the software authors writing. The big commercial houses don't like it but it does work and it does enable a writer to get round the marketing stranglehold of the commercial houses. The user can thoroughly test a programme for a pittance. If he doesn't like it he throws it away. It is the democratisation of a technology and in a number of areas is holding back the concentration of computer power in the hands of groups like IBM and Microsoft. It is in fact restoring power to the individual craftsperson or small group, and I for one am somewhat surprised that Colin Ward does not seem to have latched on to the empowerment of the individual or local community that it represents.

Kropotkin would surely have approved of the system and the recent development of a Freedom Press Website. It would be a further step to put the bulk of *Freedom* on the Net. Anyone in possession of a modem could then read it for free and donations could be requested on the shareware principle. Certainly it could create a steady flow of funds from those who liked the paper and would never get to see it in the normal way. I can't think of any other way we could get such exposure for the cost of a telephone call.

Governments of any type hate ordinary people having unsupervised communication. The Duke of Wellington famously opposed railways on the grounds that 'they enable the lower classes to move around'. At least one member of the House of Lords opposed citizen band radio on the grounds that 'people will be able to talk without proper supervision'. Then the essentially private yet publicly available bulletin board came under threat. Now of course the problem is the Net.

The Net was originally devised for the military purpose of providing a communication system that could not be knocked out in some first strike exchange. A side effect was to make any effective censorship impossible. There is pleasing irony in the Warfare State having been the author of a system that could render its thought police helpless. There is little that legislators can do to censor the Net but that doesn't

stop them from trying. And although many of these attempts stem from the same repressive attitudes that motivated the Duke of Wellington's silliest statement there is a serious debate developing on how to deal with the more controversial contents of the Net.

Of course the discussion centers on child pornography, hate literature, neo-nazism and so on. And no sensible person would object to these things being made impossible to access. Would they? Well yes some of us would although the decision is far from easy. There is some very nasty stuff available on the Net at the moment but the argument against censoring it is the old liberal one. In the words of John Stuart Mill: *It behooves each of us to protect the liberty of others or their case may, by change of circumstance become our own.*

Raven readers will tend to accept the argument that any form of censorship is ultimately repressive and however well intentioned will be used against any form of inconvenient dissent in the long run. Under pressure from governments though attempts are being made. The latest development is a sophisticated version of the old film rating system and known as PICS. This is a self censorship system, basically a set of filters written by a programmes authors or by concerned third parties. These can be rated on different scales so that standards vary according to the local culture. Essentially though they would be either voluntary which probably most of us would accept, or government imposed in some way. Thus it is argued that a white supremacist, or anti Jewish group would want their material to be accessed by as many people as possible and would not rate their material voluntarily. An anti-racist group though could well publish a filter for this site which would block access. In the name of our own good a government might well try to impose this filter on the general population. They would find it difficult. With new Web sites appearing everyday rating everyone will be an impossible task. And even if it becomes possible then e mail and the bulletin board will not be affected.

Governments will continue to try and control the Net and the Bulletin Board and unpleasant groups will continue to try and exploit them. For once though the dice are loaded in favour of those of us who make a presumption of freedom. Of course the new freedom carries problems and anarchists should not indulge in knee jerk reactions in this debate. There are no final answers here. But the debate is now open again. This is why Steve Jacksons victory was important. The freedom of the bulletin board, the freedom of the Net may well become as important an issue as press freedom once was.

Jesse Hirsh

Fear and Loathing on the Information Highway

Racing down the highway, flying over the 401, Jackson and I are off to Ottawa.

We drive through a time of change, transformation transcending scale. As the world accelerates towards automation, I struggle to comprehend my own metamorphosis. I'm centred in the synthesis of visual, acoustic, and tactile space, clutching the remains of my literate identity, fighting for the autonomy of my collective identity, lost in a matrix of figure-ground relationships, that has been popularly called the 'Information Highway'.

The 401 is barren, an extension of Toronto, sprawling city over hundreds of miles, ensuring the private space of the motor vehicle remains in an environment of technological progress and homogeneity. Everyone on the 401 drives fast, eager to get somewhere, ready to push the speed limit, accelerating into the future.

I find myself positioned between the clashing of cultures, the convergence of hemispheric perspectives, and the formation of a global mind. I was born in the fertile backyard of western empire, entering the world in a literate culture, that worshipped the position of the figure. However my childhood quickly transcended the western tradition, as I was submersed in the electronic world of television and computers. From a linear literate culture of hiearchy, and static organisation, I was nurtured by a holistic electronic culture of holism, and dynamic organisation. Without the education to know different, I subconsciously abandoned the central tenants of western philosophy, dancing with the TAO, and the exploration of ground, found in eastern philosophy. My psyche strove for eastern balance, as my western world was thrown through the transformation of technological change.

★   ★   ★

The aboriginal nomad did not cross vast tracts of land, but rather moved land beneath their feet. The person was always the centre, and

the land moved underneath the person. Travelling was a process of moving the ground beneath one's feet. In a Japanese car on the 401, at 130 km/hr we're going nowhere fast. The land flies by, but we're in the same space, sitting in the same cushy chairs. When we go through populated areas it's still the same shitty city.

★   ★   ★

We were well equipped for our journey in early May. Two Dylan mixes, a live James Brown, and a hip-hop mix, were the staple of our music diet, in addition to a few more tapes scattered under the seats in the car.

Between my legs were two bags full of food: sandwiches, bread, buns, cheese, fruit, carrots, celery, and two large jugs of water. Resting on either side of the parking break were two quarter bags of grass, one Ontario-hydro-haze, and the other sweet-bc-skunk. In the glove compartment was an additional quarter-bag of *mushrooms*.

Our destination was a three-day conference in Ottawa on 'Community Access to The Information Highway'. We both had our motives for going: getting out of Toronto, followed by a young and hungry curiosity. I was excited and lively, Jack spoke succinctly, calm and centered. Yet when fleeing the city core, shedding the shroud of industrial concentration, we wore smiles as the sun shone upon a perceived new path of exploration.

Reaching between my legs I pulled out one of four sandwiches I made before departing, a choice mixture of lettuce, thin slices of cheese and tomato, with a hit of avocado. Facing a five hour extension, of waiting for the earth to move beneath you, I removed the mushrooms from the glove compartment and lightly garnished my sandwich with memories of my collective unconscious.

The hills of southern Ontario rolled by, whispering of lands past. The sky was covered in waves of lights and sound, transmissions that spelt the future. I carried my community within my heart and within my brain, determined to understand the impact I and I would face from the technological change. Jack meanwhile still wanted to know, 'whether it was even worth giving a shit'.

It took maybe four and half hours for our destination to arrive; flavoured with fungus the drive was the dose. While in Ottawa we were able to stay with a friend of Jack's family, Dorothy, forty minutes west of Ottawa. Arriving in darkness we had instructions leading towards an extra key located beneath a plant. We let ourselves in the suburban home, stowed our bags in her daughter's rooms, grabbed a

quick bite to eat, then returned to the road for the last dube of the day. Walking in the middle of the quiet road, we smoked under the stars, silenced by the remarkable sight. Cities aren't all that bad when there are stars to be gazed. The road was black and smooth, newly paved and soft beneath the feet. It enabled us to be part of Ottawa, while still in Toronto, never leaving the stability and order of the road.

★   ★   ★

We awoke the next morning to a dining room window that faced south, basking all in healing rays of warmth, bringing solar strength to an early breakfast. Commuters scurrying to congregate among the institutions of beauraucracy, integrating themselves into the framework of an established order, stuck in bumper-to-bumper traffic, going nowhere, amidst stagnated, stalled, steel chaos, I and I light a second spliff. Jah sings with the sun and we are oblivious to the shackle of time that causes other cars to scurry and streak among the road. Our path lies clear, although surrounded by decay, prestige, and dreams of the jet-set. Just off the highway, adjacent to the airport and a golf course, we find the hall that houses the conference. We park the car, exchange a smile, gather our note books, and proceed to the conference. We entered the main hall, just as the conference began, with maybe seventy people present. Jack and I were clearly the youngest participants, the median being somewhere in the babyboom. This didn't faze us, and gave me more of a radical streak.

As with any other formal gathering, the 'steering committee' of the conference had an agenda, and the introduction to the conference was used to implement and establish this agenda. Stoned solid, Jack and I, almost in shock, listened for the first if not large part of the morning to a general intro. and four presentations on defining the 'Information Highway' and the purpose of the conference. My pen sent sparks across the back of the room as I scribbled notes on an immediate critique of the introduction itself. The only exception was Rachel. 'The main issue is not information, I'm swamped with information. What I don't always have are the right connections. We have to get to the other part of the community that isn't well represented'. Rachel seemed to effectively balance a focus on inclusive community and decentralised power while maintaining the language of the other presenters in holding to the Information Highway metaphor. I was compelled to respond to the panel: 'I find it ironic that this conference seems to be ignoring, while implicitly accepting the idea that the medium is the message. For if the medium

of networks is to be examined, its meaning blatantly points to the empowerment of large trans-national corporations. Beware of placing the network as vanguard of change, when one definition of interactivity is when the user merges with the system, a system controlled and dominated by a shrinking yet increasingly powerful elite.' I was glowing in a stoned and righteous space of revelation and raw honesty. I was charged with energy, and as I glanced around the room I could see that my words had connected, however I said no more, content with the three days I had to elaborate on my radical ideas. I was then off-set by Rachel responding with a smile, agreeing with me, but highlighting the fact that it is no good to simply point out these things without fighting for change. 'We have to do something, that's our hope', she said, I nodded, thinking to her, 'that's why I'm here'. I sat back down, greeted by a sly smile from Jackson, returning his show of support with a quiet and nervous request for verbal feedback. 'Stay cool', Jack offered, standing up and leading me out of the hall. The sun was shining brightly in the late morning sky, we had the funk, and two minutes later, thanks to my quick and agile rolling fingers we also had a dube. We had a calming smoke underneath a basketball rim between software companies, adjacent to the conference hall.

<p align="center">*   *   *</p>

My hair was tied back, but two dreads in the front stuck out, and for the next three days I and I would be the opposition. When I made my first comment to the conference, the stone raised my awareness of the others reactions. While many exhibited discomfort when I spoke, there was a small minority who smiled and showed support. In the dining hall Jack and I scored a table near the stage, yet still in the back of the room, positioned at the end of a mass of chit-chats. Looking around the room we received our share of looks and stares, curious onlookers wondering who are the young radicals. Following the pattern of morning consumption, coffee was consumed by the pitcher. Waiters scurried from table to table serving coffee to an already wired crowd. When they came to our table we declined, Jack and I try to stay away from physically addictive drugs. We sipped on the sweetest of orange juice, liberated from the Toyota. We were at peace in our peripheral position, centred within ourselves, comfortable in a mixed environment.

The keynote speaker for the lunch was Ursula K. Franklin, who declared herself 'chronologically challenged' as she made a

presentation on 'the technology of the young'. As the ageing radical approached the podium the audience demonstrated a combination of respect and awe for a woman who had been immersed in science, technology, and activism all her life. With her immediate emphasis on the role of youth in the current technological change, more focus seemed to slip towards Jack and I, the visible age minority. However the conference really took a turn for the weird when Ursula stressed, 'If you want to change conditions, you need a certain amount of information and no more. Once the necessary facts have been gathered, the priority becomes an understanding of the structure of power, the pushes and pulls, the interests and interactions that lead to a final result. Then, and only then, is it possible to decide what we can do about this process in order to inaugurate constructive change'. With Dr Franklin's analysis, my comments inherited a weight of relevance, the backing of an official authority, and the blessing of a sweet saint. After the completion of her presentation, an even larger amount of looks, land on our out-of-the-way table. Meanwhile Jack and I sport sly smiles of collective cool.

For the afternoon we laid low, visiting basketball courts, hacking Sun SparcStations, (boxes with net connections), surfing through the rush of impending confrontation. The panel presentation that followed lunch was a mix of categorised interests, and opportunistic outlook. Three entrepreneurs gloated of their networked success and boasted of their commitments to community. The fourth presenter, a member of the public sector unions, touched a strange note by making a gesture of technological dualism. On the one hand he continued the optimistic, opportunistic theme of the conference by praising the technology, but on the other hand while looking squarely at Jack and I, now seated up front left-of-center, he alluded to an alternative path: 'The human imagination is unlimited. We are moving from an economy based on scarce resources, to one based on unlimited resources in the form of imagination as commodity, the resource of abundance. It's no wonder that the youth excel at the technology, as undoubtedly the youth often have the largest capacity for imagination. Meanwhile, however, society is being lied to about the effects of the technology.' Such a strange and perplexing thing to say, and yet we found ourselves seduced by his description of the emerging paradigm. His words embodied the narcissistic effects of the technology, seduction through a distorted perception of self-improvement and empowerment. While feeling flattered and wooed, I was bent into Jack's ear, quickly running through my language, trying to find words to express the

doubts that were racing through my chest. At the conclusion of the panel, the conference broke up into five different discussion groups. At the outset of my discussion group, one member placed their laptop computer in the middle of the makeshift circle, citing the importance of their shiny dinging toy. With this action Jack stood up and informed me he was going to go for a long walk. I remained, determined to make my contribution. I began with sharing my recent arrest for computer crime, using it as a focal point to shift the discussion to the role of power within the Information Highway. Citing the conference as 'community empowerment', I tried to argue that power was central to this technology, and central to the interest people took with this technology. Amidst laughs and flat-out rejections of my ideas, we quickly defined the following points within the issue of power:

- harnessing/directing power;
- identifying those with power and finding out how they can be influenced;
- identifying cybercolonialism
- accountability: authenticity/validity of information

As the moderator tried to downplay my influence by interrupting me and co-opting my words, the emphasis for the group was shifted to the second point, focusing on who has power, then channelling efforts to lobby this group. I kept forgetting I was in Ottawa. Everyone either wanted to get funding, keep funding, or find funding. I wasn't interested in funding I wanted to see action. The discussion group found its focus on technical standards and effective uses of the technology. Technology was not determinant, people were, the medium was ignored, and the content of application became the focus. I was alienated by the blatant self-interest and slipped out to find Action Jackson.

Outside the sun was waning in the sky, and James Brown could be heard from around the corner. Jackson was lying on the front of the car, meditating in the sun, dube slid behind his ear.

Driving back to Dorothy's, smokin the last dube of the day, we were rocked from the long day.

I was torn between the thrill of rejecting the culture we encountered at the conference, and the vanity of being seduced by what increasingly seemed like an 'activist' elite. While these were not the corporate fascists I pinned to the power institutions of our society, they were still individuals whose fates were explicitly tied with the establishment.

They visibly benefited from the maintenance of the status-quo. Most of the other participants who were not members of a visible 'elite', could certainly be grouped with a rising and ambitious techno class.

As we drove west into the setting sun, my mind was occupied with the collection of people I had encountered at the conference. I kept running through memories of reactions and comments made by upwards of what was now 100 people. While identifying the presence of an elite, I also sensed the presence of a radical minority, both of which pressed me to investigate further.

<p align="center">★   ★   ★</p>

Arriving the next morning after another sun-and-spliff ride from suburban Ottawa, Jack and I took seats in the back as the first presenter of the day, a representative of the Canadian Labour Congress, made the following point:

The issues associated with the information age symbolised by the term 'information highway' can all be reduced to one: power. Who has it and who doesn't? Who owns and controls the physical infrastructure and content and who doesn't.

In an enjoyable turn of events my words from the previous days discussion groups were ridden throughout the presentation. Again it appeared as if I was about half a day ahead of the conference in introducing issues. The presentations that followed at least began to address some of the issues I was pushing to bring to the collective conscious of the conference. One presenter, a member of the government/industry Information Highway Advisory Council made two interesting and worthwhile points. The first was stating the obvious that telecommunications corporations literally control the Information Highway, but following from this made some comments on empowerment:

Empowerment is as old as the frontier. We are a nation of self- help organisations ... And yet as we organise our public business we forget these lessons... We let the police, the doctors, the teachers, and the social workers have control, while the people they are serving have none. Beware of the dangers of 'client- hood', which describes people who wait for others to act on their behalf. In contrast, 'citizens' act on their own initiative. Good clients make bad citizens; good citizens make strong communities.

Although her words were noble, they were also in the context of an elite culture, a culture of civic activism that produces profit for the active community. It's remarkable that organisers declared the conference

a success due to the strong attendance of women, however there was no mention of the almost total absence of visible minorities. The official response to this morning's panel was given by a self-proclaimed capitalist commie, who boasted of his collective's technological and financial success, developing technology and applications worldwide. He stated that, 'good marketing is community outreach, and good community outreach is good marketing'. His smile was surrounded by a goatee, a tribute to his self-proclaimed radicalism, induced by fantasies of being the technical vanguard. The co-operative, which has now become a profitable corporation, embodies the opportunity this character has found in the technology. In his mid-twenties, talking while typing into a laptop, this guy was clearly on the top of his world. He was so oblivious to what he was standing on, so numbed by technological navel-gazing, that his Marxist dogma fuelled his capitalist ambitions, to the point that whatever substance he did have seeped down his leg and onto the conference floor.

* * *

Climbing out of the conference hall, Jack and I crossed the street and stood leaning against the fence that kept us out of the acres of rolling grass that made the lush golf course conveniently located adjacent to the airport. He passed me a dube to light, and we contemplated playing golf on this beautiful May day. 'We'll just jump the fence and borrow a few clubs off that twosome right there.'

'They'll have us arrested man.'

'No they won't, we'll smoke 'em this dube first.'

'I don't really feel like golf right now.'

Neither of us really did. Jackson had come to the conclusion that this was all shit, and I was unable to mount a counter-argument stating otherwise. Upon re-entry of the conference we were not surprised to see four white-men in suits at the front of the hall, each with flashy flow charts and bar graphs. Standing at the back of the hall, observing the comatose consumption of coffee, we are told that this is the 'Industry Visions' Panel. The white-men had come to set the record straight. Action Jackson, myself, and James Brown slid into seats up front, Brown repeatedly reciting between us: 'Power To The People – Soul Power'. Members from Canada's largest communication corporations: Stentor, fONOROLA-I*Star, and Rogers each presented their vision of the Information Highway. Each version was altered to demonstrate how their respective organisations would profit. Each demonstrated through flowcharts, bar graphs, and all-round pretty

graphics that they were going to be the center of Information Highway in Canada. With enthusiasm and trickster honesty, I was one of the first to respond to the panel's comments:

Noam Chomsky describes the mass media environment as a 'smoke and mirrors illusion of democracy'. Looking at the panel, I see white men who represent the central authorities of the Internet, I don't see any examples of decentralisation here. I want access to company and internal technical reports, that would be an example of decentralisation. These companies have clearly outlined their intents of centralisation and profit maximisation, which are paramount to any consideration of human or democratic interests.

On that note Jack and I fled the fuck out of dodge. Without saying a word we both went straight to the car, and streaked out of the parking lot. Instinctively I directed Jackson to follow a road across the highway, which seemed to lead to a sparse suburban development. Following a winding road scattered with grotesque assembly line houses, I spotted another road winding off the one we were on and nudged Jackson to take it. It was a small dirt road that at first looked a little like a driveway, but probably had some industrial application. Winding through some sparse and almost token trees, we were surprised and delighted to see the road open up onto a relatively deserted creek, stemming off the rideau river. 'Jah delivers', I gleefully pronounced. Jack and I were both in awe of our timely find in the middle of seemingly barren urban wasteland. Following the path we were able to follow it onto the end of a peninsula that extended into the creek. We parked the car, cranked the James Brown, and basked in the sun, rolling a fatty. Fuelled with funk, Jackson and I crawled out of our new hideout, slowly making our way back to the conference. At this point in the trip Jack was beginning to visibly reject the environment of the conference, but I on the other hand was still determined to play an active role. When we returned, we were just in time for the beginning of the afternoon discussion groups. Jack decided to wander the hall, maybe get lost somewhere. I was greeted at the discussion group by a number of interested people, who were intrigued with some of the more radical ideas that were surfacing at the conference. As the discussion began, many expressed concern at the previous 'Industry Visions' and the prospective of actual 'public input' into the development and construction of the Information Highway. As the discourse continued many of the radicals who had approached me began to vocalise their concerns. The line of thought gradually radicalised as each member played off the comments of another. Within three of four sentences the focus went from Canadian

corporate interests, to the role of large foreign corporations, extending to the issue of cybercolonialism. Taking my cue from the rational exchange of ideas, I pounced on the introduction of cybercolonialism and stated: 'If we're going to deal with issues such as colonialism, then we should also deal with resistance and revolution.'

At which point the group took a step back, instantly becoming conscious of where the discussion was going, and one woman interjected with: 'I'm not comfortable with such an analysis of the situation', and the discussion came to an abrupt stop. ·

The 'facilitator', staring me down, declared that the group should split into three sub-groups, each concerned with either local, national, or global perspectives. The radicals, the international development people, and myself went into the global group, the bureaucrats and lobbyists went into the national group, and the rest went into the local group. Although my tendency would have been to get involved on the local level, the people who formed that group were the people who wanted to be in a group that I was not. So I let them be local. All groups but ours concluded by stating that we needed to form more organisations. Our group concluded that we were in the midst of the largest organisation in history.

★   ★   ★

As with any conference, there was an ambitious networking mentality amongst many of the participants. The foyer was always active with clutches of people exchanging business cards, discussing developments, promoting their activities as widely as possible. At first I almost felt as if I should be doing the same, mingling with the motivated, but somehow I couldn't bring myself to approach anyone, I was content with a calm, collected, yet detached composure.

At the end of the day, Jack and I were exhausted again. We helped Dorothy make a great dinner, then went for a short walk afterwards, only to return to an early bed. The conference was a draining experience as we were both in seeming juxtaposition with most of the participants.

On the third and final day there was a strange vibe emanating throughout the conference hall. Over the course of the final day, most people could be put into three general categories:

• those who no longer cared and were eager to leave and did;

• those who no longer cared but were too bothered to leave;

• those who had an agenda from the beginning.

The steering committee had decided that the purpose of the conference would be the establishment of a centralised, national organisation that would represent the 'public interest' in the Information Highway debate. I tried to politely explain to my discussion group that I was not interested in discussing the formation of a centralised organisation, especially in light of the fradulent claim that this technology is decentralising. The group then politely explained that I had every right to leave. Which reluctantly I did.

Jack and I sat alone in an abandoned hall, drooped over chairs, debating our impending destination. As I tried to persuade Jack to stay just a little bit longer, so we could see how the conference turns out, the facilitator of the group I had just left approached.

'That was very polite of you, leaving like that', he offered.

'My mother raised me well', I responded, smiling with hints of sarcasm. He was unsure what to think or say as I calmly stared him down, allowing him to weigh the scope of his actions, well aware that I was the 20 year old he once was. He smiled looked down at his feet and walked away. Jack whispered into my ear, 'Let's leave now!' But I wouldn't budge until I saw the conference close, and the dance come to an end.

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *</p>

Without surprise the conclusion was centralisation. Less than half of the participants remained for the ending, but of those the large majority agreed that a centralised organisation must be created. I tried to present counter-arguments against continued centralised control, but to no avail, as the only interested people left at this point gave me looks of sympathetic, yet futile encouragement. One of whom was Rachel, who with sincerity and a smile described to me the struggles of changing the ground, 'It's an uphill battle, but it's our job to change the ground, gradually changing all those who live on the ground, so that before you know it the people who are up top will find that their foundations have been subverted from the bottom-up.' Jackson and I thanked her for the wise words and busted out of the bland conference hall, briefly shaking a few hands, taking no time away from our getaway. Screeching out of the parking lot, I rolled two fat dubes as I persuaded Jack to drive through Ottawa down to the Parliament buildings. 'Let's go smoke in front of the government', I cheerfully pressed. Jackson let out a sly smile, sharing a keen sense of nihilistic nerve, lighting the first of the two spliffs.

We parked a block away from the central government of Canada,

and proceeded to walk up 'Parliament Hill'. With the wind whipping across the large grass field in front of the government, I was swept up into the iconography of the architecture. The authority embedded within the brick, and the positioning of the buildings so as to enable strategic defence, intimidated my raging revolutionary desires. Jack and I sat in the shelter of a large statue of the queen on a horse, blocked from the wind and the large cameras perched on the parliament buildings. We huddled, lighting the second spliff, and inhaled in a relieved and perceived sense of democratic freedom. After half the dube the wind extinguished the fire and we decided to walk behind the government, following a trail that runs along the river. We were dwarfed by the majesty and size of the buildings, but held in context by the even larger size of the banks across the street. Here we were at the self-proclaimed centre, nexus of power, heart of the state, and our rage was quickly channelling into fear. Three days, immersed in ideas of the social and political effects of information technology, led us both to perceive a future that made the hegemonic past seem like a dress-rehearsal. The fear instilled in us by the parliament buildings paled in comparison to the rising power embedded in the Information Revolution. Standing at the edge of the cliff, overlooking Hull and Ottawa, we could see the apparatus of the state, laid bare over the city, a mechanised, yet seemingly dormant machine. At the same time I became aware of other elements traversing the environment, waves and electrons acting as bonds, nerves, and veins, linking together a new institution, moulded and merged from the mechanisations of the old. I turned to Jackson and whispered, 'We should leave before we are consumed ...'

*   *   *

When we returned to Dorothy's house she asked us if we wanted to go for a walk after we had dinner. She said she knew some nice trails that were near some friends of hers. We could walk on the trials, visit her friends who live on a large tract of undeveloped land, and then walk some more. Jack and I, visibly drained by the conference and the city, nodded quietly, both of us absorbed in our own inner reflections.

Walking over branches, moss covered stones, pine needle and leave covered ground, our spirits connect with the lush and live world of the Ontario wilderness. A creek quickly rushes into a river as rocks lay for centuries and create currents that fuel a flourishing forest of organic organisation. Jack and I are still speechless, but now we sport

sober smiles of living liberation. The air is sweet, the ground is soft, we stroll through the vegetation, supported by a community of ecology, the earth embraces us in love.

Glowing from a truly green environment, we visit friends' of Dorothy's who share our enthusiasm for the tranquillity of the rural landscape. The rush and bustle of the city is left behind as we take a second dose of the natural world, inhaling the spirits of the trees and the stars. We wade through the infinite space of a green haven of growth and fertility, absorbing the desires and dreams of all within the folds of the forest.

Driving back to Dorothy's house after a long and pleasant night, she can see our smiles, and our transcendence of the difficulties of the day. 'You guys should go check out the Gatineau Hills tomorrow before you leave. They're only about a 35 minute drive north of Hull in Quebec.' Our eyes lit up at the suggestion, and we quickly decided that we would go the next morning.

We were lucky to again rise to a brilliant sun shining through the eastern dining room window. Crawling out of bed late, we both sat silently and peacefully in the healing rays. Jack rolled a fat spliff on the floor while I stretched out my legs and arms. We knew what the day held for us, and we were eager to get on our way. After cleaning and packing our things, I went to the kitchen to make a couple of sandwiches for the road. I made two tuna-fish sandwiches, which I finished off by emptying the contents of our mushroom bag in between the slices of bread. We were looking forward to a lunch of some far-out fish.

As we entered the beginning of the provincial park that housed the hills, we began eating our sandwiches. A sign passed that said the closest hills were still a good 42 kilometres away, and then another sign passed saying that the park was closed for the season. Jack and I shared a stoned smile as we finished the last of our sandwiches and began searching for the biggest hill we could find. We drove for another half hour to forty minutes, the road was beginning to sing, so at this point we were ready to park and leave our fast moving machine. Driving along the road we were beginning to sweat and we were entering the dose. We drove through ten parking lots until we came to the last, located at the bottom of a large peak. We parked the car and stumbled out, running down to the beach in an impulsive act to gain our bearings. At the beach we collapsed into the sand and stared into the sky, large hills filling our peripheral vision. We were both speechless, overwhelmed by three days. We were gripped in post-

adolescent feelings of powerlessness and futility. Our frustrations were quickly being absorbed into the ground as the dose descended onto our collective minds. We stood up from the sand, agreed on what we perceived was the largest peak, and began heading up. Bypassing the main road, our direction was vertical. Nothing was going to stop us, we were just going to climb. Time dissolved into the thick and moist air of the rocky forest. As we ascended the large rocky hill, we felt ourselves dissolving into the wilderness. Two city boys, dressed in running shoes and t- shirts, we wound our way higher and higher. Everytime we reached a peak that offered a view we would have a toke, almost oblivious to the mushrooms, commenting that they seemed to be somewhat dormant. As we continued climbing we became aware that our peak was really a range, and the highest point would be found by following a series of climbs over a series of peaks. Without any aid except our own senses, we navigated through the forest of the Canadian Shield, gradually getting higher and higher.

We were surrounded in a holistic environment, ecological development in its purest form, the environment embracing us in maternal awareness that only fueled our passion to get to the top. With each step we began pointing out possible abodes, whether they be for animals, or for our possible use. We began recognising facets of the forest that were there to provide for the life that thrived all around us. We were energised with the love of the forest, and the stability of the rock, leading us to an oasis on ahead. We saw trees that had grown for decades, integrating themselves into their surroundings, using other facets of the forest for their protection. We saw rocks that had been arranged as to provide shelter from snow and rain, for creatures of all sizes. Jack and I experienced a strange sober sense of inclusion and belonging. After perhaps a two hour climb, that at the moment was timeless, we reached what for us would be the top. As we stood on the peak of a long range of rocky hills we were overwhelmed with a symphony of sensorium. All of a sudden the full effect of the mushrooms flooded over us as we gazed upon rolling hills that continued for as far as the eye could see. We could see the hills moving, even rolling, and as they sang to us we could see their feminine form, the curves of hips and breasts, a nurturing image of creation and birth. Submersed in the forest we had felt sober, wrapped in the love of our natural mother. We sat on the peak for what was probably 45 minutes. For the most part we were silent, humbled in the presence of cosmic forces of creation. After a long period of peace, Jack turned to me and asked, 'Do you think it's time to go?'

'Go where?' I replied.

'I don't know. I mean we can't stay up here forever? We've only got t-shirts.'

'Yeah, but I can't go back to babylon. There is no place for us there. We belong in the embrace of love, and the haven of creation.'

'True, but this park will open in a few weeks, and then our haven becomes infested with the people of progress.'

'Let's go to Bhutan!'

'What?!'

'Bhutan, a country locked in the middle of the Himalayas, where marijuana grows in abundance, and technologically speaking they're still in the sixth century.'

'Great, but how do we get there? Does the highway go to Bhutan?'

'No, and that's why we should go.'

'Yeah, but how?'

'We'll hack there.'

'What?'

'Hack the world, you know. They're laying out a new frontier, a new foundation for empire. They're going for the gold by gambling with automation. It'll be through living and life that we'll traverse reality, surf through time and space, making our way through the matrix.'

'You mean ...?'

'Journey through babylon to reach Zion.'

'Hack the planet ...'

'Out tribe transcends their order.'

'They scream chaos, we call for Anarchy.'

'In search of tao, the truth, we seek to preserve our humanity while preserving ourselves.'

'Rasta for I and I'

*   *   *

So it must begin, with a dirt road. Winding into the wilderness of our hearts, souls, and dreams. Yet we are still connected to the world struggling to end the global domination, and get off of the slave plantation.

I lit the jay and passed it to the man. His hand left the sterring wheel momentarily to put it in his mouth and return back to the wheel. He inhaled deeply, then exhaled along either side of the joint, creating two clouds of smoke. He did this a few times, getting a full haul, lifting himself out of babylon, away from the smells of the shitstem. Dust abounded behind us as the car shot up dust and sand from the dirt

road. Stones could be heard flying in all directions as they left the underside of the tyre. The road is a fine collection of stones, different sizes, different shapes, existing in a unity that is the road. The road that leads to the home.

The Raven

'On Communication: 1'

When we published our first *Raven* on the topic of communication in 1990 we had been promised a variety of contributions which never materialised, and we wrote at that time:

we feel that the contributions we have received will stimulate discussion for a second issue of *The Raven* on this much neglected subject. Optimistically (as ever) we are therefore calling this number 'On Communicating: 1'. Our intention is that some time next year with the collaboration of interested readers we shall produce Number 2.

This, then, is Number 2, six years later, during which time Freedom Press publications have been advertised on the Internet, and we have acquired the services of an International Editor who has developed contacts worldwide. 'Communication: 1' (*Raven 12*) is still available at £3.00 (post free anywhere) and includes: Dirk Spig's tips on writing news reports; Michael Duane on 'Communication'; Martyn Everett on 'Art as a Weapon: Frans Siewert and the Cologne Progressives'; Joe Kelly on 'Communication by a Tabloid Journalist'; Colin Ward's 'Notes of an Anarchist Columnist'; Donald Rooum on 'The use of cartoons in anarchist propaganda' with an illustrated history of cartoons in *Freedom*; Johnny Yen on 'Class and the Communication of Anarchism'; Andrew Hedgecock on 'Challenging the New Church', a review of *Communication for and against Democracy*; and a reprint of George Barrett's classical pamphlet *Objections to Anarchism*.

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