Eberhardt Press Review

Spring 2005

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Introduction

Eberhardt Press Review is a collection of book reviews written by anarchists, philosophers, fishermen, surrealists, a carpenter and one anti-state communist. It is our hope that this review will reflect not only what we read, but what we think about and find inspiration in. We see the book review as a way of introducing ideas, writers and information and then exploring those, however we choose. We would like for *Eberhardt Press Review* to reflect more of what is culturally interesting about current anarchist thinking. We intend to go beyond shallow pandering or vicious, unprincipled attacks and look to the issues at the heart of our movement. It has been said by some that if a publication doesn't have "strategic" content then it is not worth printing. We wholeheartedly disagree. We must tear at this system with all we've got. Let us also remember the world we are fighting for. *Eberhardt Press Review* hopes to be a reminder that outside the culture of economy, there exist a few ragtag, free thinkers who desire to create meaning in a postmodern world where genuine human connections are so undermined.

We are pleased to present in this issue tintype photographs by Naomi Vanderkindren. Her photograph *Untitled 16* appears on the cover.

Eberhardt Press Review is currently accepting submissions for our next issue. If you would like to contribute, we encourage you to send your reviews and correspondence to Eberhardt Press, 3527 NE 15th #127, Portland, Oregon 97212 or email it to Review@EberhardtPress.org.

A Small Recipe for Anarchy

Samuel Grey

An Anarchist Cookbook: Recipes for Disaster
Crimethinc. Ex-Workers Collective, 2004

YOU ALREADY HAVE AN OPINION ABOUT this book, whether you've seen it or not. You already know the content. You know the authors (or worse, people like them). You know the readers. Or so you think.

This is the latest effort from Crimethinc., who are by now notorious in anarchist circles and happily describe themselves as such. The very word Crimethinc. is enough to inspire shudders, accusations, and the worst breed of ad hominem attacks. Despite the vilification of Crimethinc., this will book will be one of the most important anarchist publications of the year. Its text will be seen and read by untold numbers, its suggestions will be tried, its ideas will permeate the anarchist milieu.

This is *Recipes for Disaster*, a six hundred page compendium of concepts, skills, pranks, and actions that for better or worse comprises an anarchy-as-most-people-know-it 101. The essence of the book is direct action, a misunderstood and polymorphous term that is described in the preface as such:

> *"Practicing direct action means acting directly to meet needs, rather than relying on representatives or choosing from proscribed options. Today the term is applied to the use of illegal protest tactics to pressure governments and corporations to make certain decisions, which at bottom is not much different than from voting or making campaign contributions: but it most properly describes actions that cut out the middleman entirely to solve problems without mediation."*

A precise and useful definition. But here's the first problem: some of the entries here don't meet it. Floating banners inside malls, for example, seems more like requesting corporations to change their behavior (although less polite requests) than acting to meet needs directly. Same with sections on banner hoists, mainstream media, pie throwing, and a few of the sections related to mass demonstrations. But many entries do meet the definition, and there are some surprises. In guerilla performances, for example, where you would expect instruction in tired street theatre, you get an inspiring tale about the trashing of a convenience store in a 3 a.m. punk show.

This book proclaims itself a working manual, a book of instruction, not of theory. Inevitably, though, the editors choose by what they include. Much has been said of the Situationist influence on Crimethinc. You'll find more of that here, along with surrealist thought — check the behavioral cut-ups section. There is also an element of yippie pranksterism. It's not surprising that Abbie Hoffman's *Steal This Book* is referenced in the further reading section. The influences are all over the place, as you would expect from a book of this size with dozens of contributors. From liberal notions of speaking truth to power, to traditional anarchist notions of solidarity, to pagan ritual and spell casting, it's all here.

The undermining oppression section, which includes a subsection on identity politics, is likely to inspire contentious discussion. I found it a useful point of departure for that conversation. The basic concepts are soberly explained in a concise way, including various helpful metaphors.

The design and layout of this book are superb. It is eminently more readable in layout and aesthetic quality than any Crimethinc. work to date. The headings are bold, the sections are arranged alphabetically, and the notes in the margins are useful but not overdone. The "design anarchy" influence seems to have been toned down. Also, the Further Reading section is a nice addition, placing the book in historical context with its antecedents.

This is not a groundbreaking work, nor does it intend to be. As the editors admit, every cookbook or gardener's guide is a direct action manual. But this book may inspire even seasoned veterans of anarcho-cynicism (myself included) to hit the town late at night with a plan to directly meet my most pressing needs: the need to fuck with the system, the need to adapt and try new skills, the need to have adventures. In that sense, this book is a success.

Listen

If you sheltered me like a maybug in a cupboard
bristling with snowdrops coloured by your ocean voyage eyes
monday tuesday ect wouldn't be more than a fly
in a plaza bordered by ruined palaces
from which would issue an immense vegetation of coral
and of embroidered shawls
where one sees
felled trees depart obliquely
to blend in with park benches
where I slept awaiting your arrival
like a forest that awaits the passing of a comet to see clearly
in its underbrush whimpering like a chimney
calling the log it desires since it yawns
like an abandoned quarry
and like a staircase in a tower we would climb
to see ourselves disappear
in the distance
like a table swept away by the flood

—*Benjamin Peret*

Isabelle and the Dream of Liberty

Jai Soutine

The Destiny of Isabelle Eberhardt
by Cecily Mackworth
The Ecco Press

Departures
by Isabelle Eberhardt
Translated and edited by
Karim Hamdy and Laura Rice
City Lights Books

The Oblivion Seekers
by Isabelle Eberhardt
Translated by Paul Bowles
City Lights Books

Isabelle Eberhardt:
Seven Years in the Life of a Woman
by Isabelle Eberhardt
Edited by Eglal Errera
Actes Sud

"*No one ever lived more from day to day than I, or was more dependent upon chance,"* wrote Isabelle Eberhardt. Franticly suicidal with grief at her mother's death, her father offers her a revolver; sleeping alone in a remote desert garden under the star-filled Saharan sky, she is joined by a native who surprises her with a profound, intense love that lasts the duration of her life; as she sits in a courtyard, a zealot tries to cleave her skull in two, the saber hits a clothesline overhead and is deflected. Such was the life of Isabelle Eberhardt.

Isabelle was born in 1877, the daughter of Alexander Trophimovsky and Nathalie Eberhardt. Trophimovsky was hired to tutor the three children of Nathalie's then current marriage. He was a friend of Bakunin, studied philosophy, knew Latin and Greek and was fluent in Turkish, Arabic, and German. Nathalie found conversations with this handsome man of Armenian descent to be a stimulating distraction from her otherwise dreary existence as wife to an officer of the Tzar's Imperial Army. Trophimovsky revealed to Nathalie his covert rejection of Christianity and his tendencies towards nihilism. This was an era of clandestine meetings, plots and political assassinations. Dissidents were exiled to Siberia. During the 1860s, anarchy and nihilism were on innumerable lips throughout universities and intellectual circles. The couple fell in love and fled Russia together, Nathalie with children in tow and Trophimovsky leaving behind a wife and four children. They traveled around Europe rather haphazardly, finally settling down in a rural house on the outskirts of Geneva. It was at this home, the Villa Neuve, that Isabelle Eberhardt was to be born and spend her early years.

Trophimovsky (or "Vava" as the children called him) was stern, demanding hard physical labor and isolation from the Swiss among whom they lived. Isabelle was to be the only child Nathalie and Trophimovsky would bear together, and he adored her in his own very curious way. He took charge of Isabelle's education and urged her to wear male clothes, cut her hair short and work outdoors alongside her brothers. Isabelle became a surpassingly skilled equestrian and demanded to be taught classical Arabic in addition to her other language lessons. This unusual education enabled Isabelle to later explore Africa on entirely different terms than any other European of her times.

Trophimovsky instilled a strong contempt for the values of the bourgeois society in all of the children. Isabelle's older brother and closest friend, Augustin, made the company of a group of anarchists and revolutionaries in Geneva. This milieu consisted largely of dispossessed German, Russian and Eastern European immigrants who sought asylum in Switzerland. The tolerance of the Swiss was limited, and when subversive literature appeared, denouncing all forms of authority, repression ensued.

It is unclear what lead to Augustin's hasty departure from Villa Nueve: his political activities, entanglements with opium or his troublesome love affair. Whatever the reason, it devastated Isabelle. Her closest friend and confidant, the one she loved more than any other, had left in an unfortunate and desperate manner. He joined the Legion. For Isabelle, the Villa Nueve had become overwhelmingly lonely and restrictive. Vava was gloomy and embittered, while Isabelle's mother was deep in grief at the loss of her son. Isabelle anchored her will and forced herself to study, paint, and most of all write, while dreaming only of escape.

In the spring of 1897 Isabelle convinced her mother to leave the dreary Villa Nueve and move to Northern Africa with her. They moved to the small coastal French colony of Bône, Algeria. Both were quickly disgusted by the supremacist attitudes in the European quarter and installed themselves instead in a small house in the rue Bugeaud made of whitewashed, rammed earth with a flat roof, upon which they would sleep in the open air. The cacophonous Arab quarter better suited Isabelle's tastes, where she would wander the narrow alleyways, following the unmistakable smell of *kif* into cellars and back-room cafés. Here she would lie about lazily, drink to excess, smoke *kif* and wrestle the young Spahis, taking one home for the night when she so desired. As women were not allowed to wander unaccompanied through the streets of Bône, it was not difficult for Isabelle to choose her style of dress. She was soon to be seen in the long white burnous and muslin turban worn by Algerian men. The Europeans were horrified by her choice of residence, by her dress and even more by her promiscuity and drug use. Though the Europeans were aghast, the Arabs were more tolerant. Occasionally, young unwed women in North Algeria would dress as men; this was an accepted custom. Isabelle continued to write and was eventually able to make a living as a writer and correspondent. Her writings consisted of observational sketches of local life and customs as well as short stories. "*I write, in the same way as I love, because it is my destiny,"* Isabelle states. These early works appear in *Departures*, a selection of her short stories, reportage and travel journals. *Departures* is translated and edited by Karim Hamdy and Laura Rice and includes an essay by Hamdy and two essays by Rice.

In Laura Rice's essay, "Eberhardt as Si Mahomoud: Translation or Transgression," Rice describes Isabelle's relationship to her "guise of maleness." Eberhardt was not attempting to fool people into believing she was male; rather, she was adopting the signifiers that would allow her to engage in male-gendered activities. Not only male attire but the presentation of herself as a man allowed her to explore the Northern African countryside on horseback, frequent the local cafés and generally pursue the life of freedom and autonomy she desired. Rice goes on to note:

But, given the strict, asymmetrical gender divisions which where signified by the clothes one wore, the work one did, and the places one traveled, it is little wonder that Eberhardt's self-presentation – in her dress, her behavior, and her writing – led to considerable discussion of her motives and character.

Isabelle gave practical reasons for dressing as an Arab man; it gave her access to a world she would otherwise be excluded from. She did not always "pass" as a man, nor did she try to. This did not stop the French from hurling accusations of fraud and deceit. It surely was Isabelle's unusual upbringing that gave her the strength and confidence to reject the role of the boring, colonial French woman and live her life in the perilous sphere beyond gender. She simultaneously breached the walls of gender segregation in French and Islamic culture while breaking the colonizer's rule of supremacy by identifying herself with the "uncivilized" Algerians.

French authorities did not fail to notice the threat her presence in North Africa posed to their *mission civilisatrace*. Nor did they fail to notice the potential asset she could be under the right circumstances. When she first arrived in Algeria, Isabelle took a radical stance against the colonization of North Africa, going as far as to attend an anti-colonization march that transformed into an insurrection. Laura Rice writes of the experience in her

essay, "Eberhardt's Journey from Anarchy to Complicity":

"When the students revolted against the French colonial authorities on the night of March 14, 1898, Eberhardt was among them. She later wrote: 'My chest was pounding and my head spinning, deliciously... I saw [the khalifa of the Aissaouas zaouiya] in front of me brandishing a truncheon... At every moment it slashed into the surrounding police, cracking skulls and arms raised in self defense. [The khalifa] seemed transfigured: He seemed to me to have ineffable mystical beauty.' Seeing a friend of hers, all bloodied, trying to fend off four policemen with a short Moorish dagger, Isabelle picked up a sword and went to help: 'For the first time, I felt the savage intoxication of battle, bloody and primitive, of males, body to body, wild with anger, blinded by fury, drunk on blood and instinctive cruelty. I knew the coming voluptuousness of streaming blood, of atrocious brutality of action triumphing over thought' (Kobak, Isabelle, *64).... It is not difficult to see several themes that would sketch out the boundaries of Eberhardt's brief life — adherence to Islam, siding with the underdog, hatred of the vulgar colonial mentality, love of anarchy and battle, and an impulse to record it all in writing."*

Shortly after her death, Victor Barrucand heavily edited and published her manuscripts. Though Barrucand was an anarchist, he thought it prudent to exclude passages condemning the French government's colonial policies as well as that which might shock the sensibilities of his audience. Barrucand, editor of *Les Nouvelles,* a daily newspaper of Algiers, had previously commissioned Isabelle to write a series of articles. The edit has been seen by some to be a bitter betrayal by a man who once showed Isabelle true friendship. It wasn't until a collection edited by Eglal Errera, an Egyptian anthropologist and writer, was released in 1987 that Eberhardt's work became available in a less censored form.

Isabelle's overall relationship to French colonization is clearly one of animosity and resistance. However, when it served her needs, she would play the part of collaborator. Isabelle wrote a letter to the editor of *La Petite Gironde,* in an attempt to clear her name of allegations that she rode from tribe to tribe acting as an agitator, pitting the natives against their conquerors. The letter appears in *The Oblivion Seekers,* a highly recommended collection of short stories beautifully translated by Paul Bowels. In the letter she writes:

"Wherever I go, whenever possible, I make a point of trying to give my native friends exact and reasonable ideas, explaining to them that French domination is far preferable to having the Turks here again, or for that matter, any foreigners. It is completely unjust to accuse me of anti-French activities."

It was on assignment for *Les Nouvelles* that Isabelle traveled to Southern Algeria to report troop movements. While in the Kenadsa she slept on floors in the Arab cafés and spent the evenings in the Legion canteen. It was here that she met Colonel Lyautey who was planning a campaign to bring southern Algeria and eastern Morocco under French rule. Despite obvious ideological differences, the two became fast friends, and in order to gain his needed permission to travel in the area Isabelle accepted a mission from Lyautey. She was to make contact with the Sidi Brahim ould Mohammed, the head of the Sufi monastery of Kenadsa who wielded great political influence over the locals. Lyautey would have no hope of subjugating the region without this man's approval. Isabelle was charged with the task of making contact with and convincing him that French occupation was preferable to the current internecine skirmishes that plagued the region. She was a perfect candidate for such a mission because of her mastery of the language, her devotion to Islam and her membership in the Quadriya. The Quadriya was an ancient Sufi cult into which Isabelle had been previously initiated. Isabelle traveled by horseback to the monastery and soon found herself within its walls. She quickly fell ill after her arrival but managed between spells of fever to find audience with Sidi Brahim ould Mohammed. Some accounts suggest they spoke of spiritual matters, and her time at the monastery was spent in prayer, contemplation and writing. There is no evidence to suggest that Isabelle represented Lyautey's cause in any way to Sidi Brahim ould Mohammed. Though she later wrote of the Colonel's plans in pseudo-objective manner that was becoming her journalistic norm.

Isabelle's story "The Poll Tax" is an excerpt from *Seven Years in the Life of a Woman: Isabelle Eberhardt, Letters and Journals,* edited by Eglal Errera and translated by Roberto Bononno. In this selection, Eberhardt presents her experiences in straightforward manner, detailing the horrific brutalities of colonial rule. It is far from the journal passages of insurrection and revolt.

The Poll Tax

I had come with the young caliph of Monastir, Si Labbi Chabet, to collect the overdue poll tax, the medjba, levied on rural Tunisians. Si Larbi never suspected that I was a woman; he called me brother Mahmoud, and for two months I traveled with him, helping him with the work.

Everywhere we went, among the poor, ungovernable tribes, we were received with hostility. Only the red burnous of the spahis and the blue burnous of the deira had any effect on these half-starved hordes. Si Larbi's compassion got the better of him, and we became ashamed of what we were doing — he out of duty and I out of curiosity — as if it were a crime. Yet, there were moments of genuine enjoyment, the names of those places evoke unforgettable memories for me.

Leaving Moknine, the road, which was separated from the olive groves by bushes of hendi (prickly pears), continued, dusty and straight. The olive trees, tipped with silver along their crests, kept pace with it along its length, rising and falling like waves.

A small, plain mosque of dull yellow, similar to the buildings in the South made of tob, a few houses of the same ocher color, ruins, scattered tombstones — this was the first village in Amira, Sid'Enn'eidja.

In front of the mosque was a small courtyard where the weeds had run wild and, toward the back, a sort of vaulted alcove beside which a fig tree spread its wide, velvety leaves. Nearby was the well, deep and cold. We sat down on a mat. To speed things up, Si Larbi asked me to help him. I would be his clerk.

The spahis and the deira brought the sheik before us, a tall old man with an eagle's profile and wild eyes, accompanied by the elders of the tribe and their sons, tall and thin in their tattered sefseris. What a strange collection of faces, burned by the sun and wind, with a kind of savage dynamism, severe and withdrawn.

In a whining voice, the sheik gave a series of long, complicated explanations. At each moment, cries broke out around him, loud and with the sudden vehemence of this violent race, which moves from dreams and silence to turmoil. All of them affirmed their poverty.

I read their names, one by one, from a list.

"Mohammed ben Mohammed ben Dou'!"

"An'am!" (Present.)

"How much do you owe?"

"Forty francs."

"Why haven't you paid?"

"I am rouge-nu, Sidi." (A Tunisian expression meaning fakir, poor.)

"Don't you have a house, or a garden, or something?"

With a gesture of noble resignation, the Bedouin raises his hand.

"Elhal-hal Allah!" (Fortune is in God's hands.)

"Stand on the left."

In most cases, the man, resigned to his fate, steps aside and sits down with his head bent; at length, the spahis put him in chains. Tomorrow, one of the red horsemen will bring them all to Moknine and from there to the prison at Monastir, where they will work like slaves until they have repaid their debt.

Those who happen to own anything — a small house, a camel, a few sheep — are allowed to go free, but the caliph will have these few possessions seized by the deira in order to sell them. And our hearts bleed with sorrow when the women, in tears, bring out the last goat, the last lamb, upon which they lavish a final embrace.

Then, leading our dismal and submissive band of chained men, marching on foot between our horses, we move on.

Chralel, called Ichrahil by the educated. A few houses scattered among the olive trees, which are more luxuriant than anywhere else. We set up our long, low nomad tent made of goatskin. Beneath their brilliant outfits, the spahis and the deira are moving about, lighting fires and requesting the diffa, the welcome meal that is, unfortunately, offered to us with great reluctance.

At dusk, Si Larbi, spahi Ahmed, and I stroll around the village for a while. We come across a young woman, alone, who is gathering prickly pears. Ahmed approaches her and says, "Give us some pears, little cat! And take out the needles so we don't stick ourselves!"

The Bedouin is very beautiful, very solemn. She stares at us, hostile and withdrawn, with her large dark eyes. "God's curse on you! You come to take what is ours!" And she angrily empties her basket of prickly pears at our feet and leaves.

The red horseman, with a feline smile, stretches out his arm to grab her, but we stop him. "Isn't it enough that we arrest the poor old men, without going after the women?" the caliph says.

"Oh, Sidi, I wasn't going to hurt her."

And yet these men, dressed in brilliant colors, come from this same people, whose misery they understand, since they once shared in it. But the spahi is no longer a Bedouin, and, in all honesty, thinks he is greatly superior to his brothers of the tribe because he is a soldier.

We spend another quarter of an hour talking to an indescribable little Negro boy we ran into on the road, who has us bursting with laughter at the unexpectedness of his repartees and his lively intelligence.

Then, after dinner, indolently stretched out on our mats, we listen to the young men of Chralel sing. The people of the Sahel are excellent musicians, and the shepherds in these regions still compose perfectly rhymed songs, where words and melody are of equal beauty:

Oh mother, mother, my friend! The world has lost its smile for me ever since they carried you to the cemetery.... Grief dwells in my heart and tears flow from my eyes like bitter streams.

In this description of disenfranchisement, Isabelle maintains a critical eye, but she no longer seems to have the fire in her belly to join those fighting back. In order make her living as a writer, she allowed herself to be backed into the corner of journalism and had not yet found a way to fight out of it. Luckily, she died before seeing the Africa she loved become the Africa Lyautey envisioned. In the end, Isabelle proved to hold as many contradictions as the land she fell in love with, fought for and perished in.

In 1904 Isabelle Eberhardt was washed away by a torrential flash flood in the town of Ain Sefra, Algeria. Her body was found crushed under a beam and buried in mud. At the time of her death she was toothless, destitute, addicted to *kif*, and suffered from syphilis and malaria. Although her life was characterized by controversy, she insisted on living it on her own terms, refusing to conform to convention. Isabelle's time was short but not without intensity. She overflowed with creativity, debauchery, loneliness, mad love and deep spirituality. Eberhardt's writing is that of a vagabond, wanderer spirit that lived a life outside the conventions of European society. She followed the long winding white road, alone under a desert sky, full of naiveté, and brought to us deeply felt prose. As Mackworth wrote,

"Isabelle's life was based on a fantastic dream of liberty. At least she had the courage to live that dream to the full, accepting the misery and degradation that its realization entailed and proudly accepting death."

Naomi Vanderkindren, Untitled 25, *tintype, 2004*

The Prophets

Anton

The Prophets: Their Times and Social Ideas
by Shmuel Eisenstadt
Translated from Yiddish by Max Rosenfeld
Yiddisher Kultur Farband, 1971

Were the Prophets of ancient Judea and Israel merely religious figures unconcerned with oppressed and exploited Hebrews? According to this book such a characterization is disingenuous. Indeed, Shmuel Eisenstadt convincingly argues that there is ample evidence that suggests the ancient Prophets were social thinkers as well as social activists first and foremost, and only secondarily religious figures. Without a doubt their words were coated with a decidedly religious flair but if we examine their words and *actions* – as Eisenstadt does – it can be readily seen that their fundamental appeal was to the downtrodden masses of the Near East.

Of course, this idea of helping to free the oppressed from their shackles (part of the oppressed class) was limited to those who, in the Jewish religion, are the chosen people, but even then there is something of a universal aspect. To cite Eisenstadt:

> *The Prophets, however, did not devote themselves only to those international questions in which their own people were directly concerned. Their approach to social and political questions was universal; theirs was a progressive position, which held that the God of Justice was a world God, that all peoples were His children, and as the children of one father they must cease victimizing each other (p. 33).*

Which, for the aware reader, immediately brings to mind the current debacle in modern day Israel in the name of the Jewish faith. Eisenstadt wrote this book during the early days of the Russian Revolution of 1917. To the uninitiated reader, this was years before the state of Israel was established in 1948. This book includes three forewords: One written in 1926, the second written in 1964 while the last was composed in 1970. Sadly, however, no mention is made of the conflict between the Israeli state and their Arabic neighbors and subjects in the latter two forewords.

In the opinion of this reviewer, books like this tend to only make sense when they are contextualized. Of what use is it to study the Prophets or history in general if there is not an attempt to connect it to the present? The past can be fascinating (and rewarding) to study, but it turns into a mere academic exercise if the author (or researcher) doesn't relate the lessons of history to the present. To a certain extent, such an undertaking was outside the scope of this work, nonetheless, there could have at least been a passing mention of the (even then) deteriorating situation in the Middle East.

From the author's own presentation of the Prophets it is almost certain that they would be deeply critical of the current Israeli state. For Eisenstadt to omit any sort of reference to the present reality seems dishonest. It could also be that Eisenstadt accepts the existence of nation-states, and thereby the state of Israel. Unfortunately, we don't know any of this because he never addresses of any of these questions.

All the same the crucial point of departure in this book is the emphasis on their social ideas, and what they did to try to implement them. For our own time however, it makes little sense to flavor our ideas and lived practice with religious eschatology. Looked at historically, it might have actually made sense to voice one's opposition to the status quo in prophetic terms. Such a strategy was characteristic of a period in which people based most of their understanding on the irrational or supernatural (that is not to say that people today, in search of meaning, have jettisoned such things – to the contrary this is precisely my point). A belief in letting nature or God sort things out is prevalent in corners of the radical milieu. This ideology is particularly dominant among specific anarcho-primitivists and green anarchists who have convinced themselves, like Biblical scripture, that all we can do is sit and wait for the end of the world. Such a conception is as much a product of the times as it a consequence of an often unnuanced approach to, and understanding of the world in which we live. We can't say with any degree of certainty what the future will look like, but if we don't act consciously to try to change it is without a doubt true that the reality we face will only get worse. For this reason it is incumbent upon us to try to help catalyze public dialogue and forums that can effectively address everyday concerns that we and others have regarding the bleak state of the world.

With religious zealots on virtually every street corner preaching about the end of the world, and how it is all a matter God's will to decide precisely when it will happen, use of religious imagery and metaphor can only lead to confusion. A more sensible approach would be to draw what we can from such traditions while eschewing their choice of wording and tactics.

And many people who grew up immersed in the Jewish tradition did this (and continue to – in smaller numbers of course). It is no surprise that certain leading lights of the revolutionary movement were Jews. During the period of the First World War the internationalist ideal held sway over vast numbers of Jews. At the time experience of persecution lead them to, in large numbers, agitate against all forms of exploitation and oppression. And this opposition wasn't limited to assuring rights for their own ethnic group. After the Russian Revolution of 1917 many Jewish socialists and anarchists returned from exile to their native Russia to participate in the reconstruction of society as a *whole*. If examined carefully it can be seen that what we know as political Zionism had very little influence on Jews at the time. As Aghis Stinas writes in his amazing *Memoirs – Sixty Years under the Flag of Socialist Revolution* about his life fighting for internationalist socialism in Greece:

We knew about the "Balfour declaration," the official promise made to the Jews by the British government during the First World War that it would set them up on the soil "of their fathers." The Jewish community and the Thessaloniki synagogue had called the Jews together to celebrate the news. The gathering took place in the morning, and behind closed doors. The afternoon of the same day masses of Jewish workers and intellectuals took to the streets, waving red flags, with these slogans: "It is not in the state of Israel but in the world socialist society, united fraternally with all the peoples of the world, that we, the Jews, will guarantee our lives, our security and our well-being," "Long live the world socialist revolution," "Down with Zionism."

There is something we should note here. It was not only the Jews of Thessaloniki but millions of Jews across the world who put all their hope in socialism and struggled for it.[1]

After the defeat of the revolutionary wave in the 1930s and the death of millions of Jews in the holocaust, the idea of a separate state for Jews started to look more and more appealing to a group of people who had felt utterly betrayed by the refusal of the US, French and British governments to admit them, in large numbers, as refugees. And as a consequence countless numbers of Jews rallied to the cause of nationalism. Even the Left Zionists, who had had the idea of mutual co-existence between Arab and Jew, had been silenced after World War Two (as ambiguous and lacking in coherence as many of their perspectives and visions tended to be, I fail to see real malicious intent in many of their writings at least) by lunatics who wanted to forcefully uproot and transfer a whole population from a land they lived in for centuries. Such colonization was different than most forms of expropriation that had happened in the past in that the Arabic inhabitants were, by and large, not made use of for their labor power, but were forcefully *transferred* from the land. (Traditionally colonists have kept the native inhabitants on hand to serve as laborers for the accumulation of capital.) Zionists have been known to say that this transfer was just desserts for the holocaust. One would think that those escaping from persecution would empower themselves to act against it. Fredy Perlman, in his sober essay "Anti-Semitism and the Beirut Pogrom," has this to say on the subject of the oppressed becoming oppressors:

People who don't understand human freedom might think the terrible revelations could have only one effect, they could only turn people against the perpetrators of such atrocities, they could only make people empathize with the victims, they could only contribute to a resolve to abolish the very possibility of a repeat of such dehumanizing persecution and cold-blooded murder. But, for better or worse, such experiences, whether personally lived or learned from revelations, are nothing but the field over which human freedom soars like a bird of prey. The revelations about the forty-year-old Pogrom have even been turning up as justifications for a present-day Pogrom (editor's note: the reference here is to how the state of Israel is carrying out a present-day Pogrom against their Arabic neighbors).[2]

Political Zionists used the suffering of the Jews to help cement the building of their new nation-state. Just as Islamic clerics are using religion to weaken class struggle in the Middle East, so too are Zionist cheerleaders for the state of Israel utilizing the Jewish religion to expel those deemed as gentiles.

To the author of this review all forms of organized religion have been used as a cover for expropriation and extermination. We see this with the taming of the wild west in North America where the Native American inhabitants were subjugated, murdered in cold blood and made to convert to dizzy forms of religion. The colonists' in the new land believed that what they were doing was for the greater good of humanity. In order to destroy other human beings one has to justify one's actions with kind words and emotionally laden gestures. The current mission of the US in Iraq has familiar rings to it. The US and its allies essentially state that Iraqis can't govern their own affairs, and if left to do so on their own only chaos would ensue. Christian Fundamentalists are also rooting for the state of Israel because they believe that Jesus Christ will return when the Jews of the world gather in Jerusalem. (This form of Christianity is known as dispensationalism. Despite what some may think, this does not mean that most Evangelical Christians have suddenly become friends of the Jews. Christians who adhere to this understanding of the end-of-days see Jews as merely pawns in their game. According to this utterly irrational mode of thought, those Jews who don't convert to Christianity will, in the end, be destroyed by the righteous followers of Jesus Christ.)

With this in mind, *The Prophets* speaks with erudition and critical compass as a reinterpretation of the ideas and actions of the Prophets. Here we can learn that in its historical context a significant movement for liberation arose in the ancient Near East. In contrast to the religious zealots of our day who speak intolerantly of others, and act with calculated aggression against those who are of a different faith, Eisenstadt takes great pains to establish that the movement of the Prophets was at base focused on changing social relationships within the earthly realm. The Judaic concept of the "chosen people" made sense for a period when human beings were organized into various tribes, but even at that the ideas in many of the words of the Prophets speak of living in peace and harmony with one's neighbors and acquaintances. I do not have enough knowledge on the subject to write the following with a great degree of certainty, but Eisenstadt has without a doubt made a solid contribution to a careful study of the Hebrew Bible.

I remain weary of the Bible, and any drive to make it into a codified movement for human thought and action is sure to rouse a wince or two in me. But it is clear that in Eisenstadt's presentation of the words of the Prophets he has allowed them to be situated within a social and historical context. Eisenstadt notes that in their words and actions the Prophets were deeply concerned with helping the impoverished become conscious of their condition, and with that concern they contributed to acting in solidarity with those exploited by an insane social order. Eisenstadt also makes clear that many of the Prophets descended from impoverished backgrounds.

A meticulous reading of the Bible can lead one to conclude that in places it is a poetic piece of literature. It is also true that as a general guideline for human conduct, the Ten Commandments offer us a way of living our lives that, to an extent, makes sense. Inevitably people end up going down the wrong path when they use a "Holy Book" of any kind to excuse their actions. And this is partly what makes *The Prophets* so important. This work thoroughly contradicts the current actions of those Jews who insist on ousting the Palestinians from what is now known as Israel. In the case of what is happening in the Middle East at this moment, rational argument is important but it is limited in that we are dealing with an irrational situation. Growing up surrounded by family and friends who accept and actively support any given state inevitably colors one's perceptions and ideas about the world. Even if we could refute all the arguments set forth by Christian Fundamentalists, political Zionists or Neo-Nazis, by referring to contradictory passages in whatever Holy Book each respective group chooses to make use of, we are still failing to act for ourselves. No Holy Writ or Sacred See is going to save us. When people finally decide that they've had enough of the killing and degradation they will hopefully do something to end it. And social revolutionaries (like the Prophets of yesteryear) can help individuals see the reality that surrounds them with a greater clarity by being publicly active on the street and at the workplace.

In the end, one doesn't need to be religious to derive a heaping amount of marvel from this book. In spite of the fact that it is over eighty-years old, it remains one of the best critical examinations of the ideas and times of the Prophets that I have read.

Endnotes

[1] The reference in this passage is to Stinas' agitation from 1920-21 in the second largest city of Greece, Thessaloniki. Stinas was a dissident member of the Greek Communist Party and a socialist militant throughout Greece for the course of his life. Unfortunately, his *Memoirs* have yet to be published in book form in English. For those with internet access a rough draft of an English translation of his *Memoirs* is available at: www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/Lobby/3909/stinas

[2] Fredy Perlman, "Anti-Semitism and the Beirut Pogrom" (Detroit: Black & Red, 2002), p. 15. This essay is strongly recommended for a great elaboration on many of the points brought out in this review. The curious reader can order it for $2 ppd. from: Communicating Vessels, 3527 NE 15th Avenue #127, Portland, OR 97212 USA. Also see Wilhelm Reich's *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* (New York: Noonday, 1970) which sturdily assesses the effects of self-repression that Reich refers to as character armor. Reich was a renegade psychologist who was thought of as too Marxist for Freudians and too Freudian for Marxists.

The Dark History of Christianity

M.K. Shibek

The Dark Side of Christian History
by Helen Ellerbe
Morningstar & Lark, 1995

"How can one remain silent about the many forms of violence perpetrated in the name of the faith — wars of religion, tribunals of the Inquisition and other forms of violations of the rights of persons?"
—Pope John Paul II, 1994

Those interested in the history of social forces and ideas that continue to shape today's world might consider this book on the more obscure aspects of Christian history a valuable reference.

Helen Ellerbe remarks in her preface that it was not easy to locate detailed information on this subject, especially outside of academia. This accessible volume is packed with damning evidence of Christianity's hidden history that might elude those with a more casual interest. In addition, the material raises questions, and suggests conclusions, that are highly charged and revealing when placed within the context of the development of human societies.

Ellerbe makes a distinction between "Orthodox Christianity" and other versions of Christianity held by the Gnostics, the Cathars and other heretics. Orthodox Christians, she writes, "came to wield political power" by "adapting their Christianity to appeal to the Roman government" which gave them "unprecedented authority and privilege" and made them known as "The Church (p.1)." This power allowed them to persecute, torture and murder those who did not share their doctrine, and to define what was and was not heresy while re-writing history and the Bible to their own benefit.

Orthodox Christianity's origins lie in the belief in a single, superior God who creates fear and compels obedience. This idea went on to inform the doctrine of "Divine Right of Kings" which claimed that people should fear and obey their worldly rulers as they would God, the vengeful, all-seeing Eye of the big father figure in the sky. This vision of uniformity and compulsive obedience appealed to 4th Century Roman Emperor Augustine, who was eager to use this religion to strengthen his power. Soon old sites of pre-Christian pagan worship were ransacked, outlawed or forcibly converted, and pagan holidays such as the Winter Solstice and Spring Equinox became Christmas and Easter. The Church made laws against anyone questioning their version of meanings and events, and burned dissenting viewpoints. The Church, for example, could blame any comparison of Christ to another dying and rising god, Mithra, as being the work of the Devil — a figure that really

> Whether it's the slaughter of heretics, the "swimming" and burning of witches, military crusades, official greed and corruption, affronts against nature, or other Church crimes against humanity, Ellerbe has compiled a body of evidence that speaks for itself.

only came into vogue after the Protestant Reformation hundreds of years later.

The first recorded instance of the Church using violence against its opponents involved the repression of the Donatist movement, who demanded higher standards for the clergy than those the Catholic Church practiced. St. Augustine's phrase "Cognite Intrare" or "compel them to enter" was put forward during this time, and was used to justify many massacres and tortures throughout the Middle Ages and beyond. The Crusades against Jews and Muslims, the sexual tortures of the Inquisition, three hundred plus years of Witch Trials and burnings, and an alliance with plunder and genocide in the "New World" are some of the more obvious examples of the Church's attempts to control all social life and inward seeking.

Especially revealing is the Church viewpoint towards half the human species — women. Early theologians such as Tertullian, St. Augustine and St. Paul promoted a male-dominated Church and society by citing the myth of Adam's rib being used to create Eve, which to them indicated women's inferior status. Woman is the "devil's gateway," wrote Tertullian, while Boethius claimed woman was "a temple built upon a sewer (p.115)." For a time it was thought that the Virgin Mary could protect believers from God's wrath, but her cult fell into disfavor after Martin Luther's purist Reformation and the Church even created a figure of Mary used for torture. The consequences of this attitude can be seen in the murder of female scholar Hypatia in the 4th Century by Christian monks as well as in the much later, and oft-reprinted, witch-burning guide *Malleus Maleficarum*, which warned that more women were likely to be witches "because the female sex is more concerned with things of the flesh than men (p.115)." In a world already viewed as the "fallen" province of "original sin" caused by "the diabolical excitement of the genitals (p.33)," this was a serious offense.

The persecution of "witches" was both Catholic and Protestant policy, and Ellerbe credits these centuries of terror — which sometimes nearly wiped out entire villages — with finally converting the masses of Europeans to Orthodox Christianity. Thus did the Church decimate the ranks of midwives, herbalists, and pagan-oriented people (mostly women) for their supposed alliance with "evil." The God of the Church was not of this world, it was reasoned, and so any magic or healing work not undertaken by the Church placed one among the servants of the Devil. It was very dangerous for anyone to think or act without Church sanction and this had a devastating impact upon the people of the time. No doubt the effects of these traumas are still with us. Too many people are terrified of their own repressed desires and view life through a distorting lens of self-righteous, heavily armored morality. The convenient figure of the "devil" explains away anything not sanctioned by white Christian civilization, to the detriment of imagination and passion. Of course, Christianity is not alone in causing such repression.

Whether it's the slaughter of heretics, the "swimming" and burning of witches, military crusades, official greed and corruption, affronts against nature, or other Church crimes against humanity, Ellerbe has compiled a body of evidence that speaks for itself. Those inclined towards atheism or social revolution, however, might want a deeper analysis of the actual social and psychological dynamics involved in the concept of religious belief than the author provides. Ellerbe writes favorably of a pro-nature version of divinity, which includes both male and female aspects. While this is more sensible than the Orthodox perspective, critical readers may want to further demystify the fixed ideas that promote social cohesion and easy answers. Since that is not the focus of this book, I'll end this review by encouraging historians and interested parties to immerse themselves in *The Dark Side of Christian History*. In light of the ideological climate promoted by the Bush-Cheney regime in the U.S., it makes sense for people to know what those who call themselves Christians are capable of.

Naomi Vanderkindren, Untitled 18*, tintype, 2004*

Virtue and Politics in the Nicomachean Ethics

Christopher Blake Ruth

Nichomachean Ethics
by Aristotle
Translated by Joe Sachs
Focus Publishing, 2002

To begin with, it should be noted that Joe Sachs' translations of Aristotle are, to my knowledge, the best available. Sachs skillfully tackles the hermeneutic task of simultaneously translating Aristotle's Greek *into* English and *out of* the anachronistic Latinized jargon that mars most English translations. His translations of the *Physics* and the *Metaphysics* are likewise highly recommended. The remainder of this essay, however, will deal with Aristotle's work itself, rather than the current translation.

The *Nicomachean Ethics* is an open-ended book, in that it ends by introducing another discourse, the *Politics*. Taken by itself, the book is in a sense incomplete; it never ends properly. Rather, the ending is quite literally improper; it does not really belong to the tract of which it is nevertheless a part. The problems introduced by the discussion of virtue open up the necessity of this second discourse. Yet Aristotle does not wait until the *Politics* to broach the subject of politics, as if, having dealt with virtue in the *Ethics*, he were now ready to move on to another topic. Rather, the *Nicomachean Ethics* is concerned with politics from beginning to end. Politics and virtue are intimately related for Aristotle, in such a way that they are not really discrete subjects.

If virtue were something that could simply be taught through speeches, then perhaps the *Nicomachean Ethics* would end properly, rather than opening onto another discourse. However, from the very beginning, Aristotle acknowledges that speeches are of no effect if they are not directed to an audience that is capable of listening to them. This suggests that a book like the *Ethics* can truly reach only a small amount of its readers, for we are told that discourses "are unable to encourage most people toward what is beautiful and good" (1179 b 10). A discourse on ethics is of no effect unless it is addressed to "one who is going to listen adequately to discourse about things that are beautiful and just, and generally about things that pertain to political matters," and such a one "needs to have been beautifully brought up by means of habits" (1095b 4-8).

One who is brought up in such a beautiful manner, however, must certainly be already virtuous, or at the very least must be already well on the way to virtue. Thus, Aristotle goes on to claim that, rather than becoming virtuous by listening to speeches, "we become just by doing things that are just, temperate by doing things that are temperate, and courageous by doing things that are courageous" (1103b 1-3). If discourses will not suffice to make people virtuous, they must be encouraged to act rightly by other means; Aristotle suggests they must be threatened and punished, since "they are naturally obedient not to respect but to fear, and refrain from base actions not on account of shame but on account of penalties" (1179b 11-13). It is up to the lawmakers, then, to prescribe the proper penalties.

Indeed, if speeches cannot make the unjust just, then the audience Aristotle has in mind for his discourse may very well be lawmakers — those who, already just themselves, seek to make others just by habituating them correctly by means of rewards and punishments (mostly the latter, of course):

> *for lawmakers make the citizens good by habituating them, and since this is the intention of every lawmaker, those that do not do it well are failures, and one regime differs from another in this respect as a good one from a worthless one (1103b 3-6).*

From this it can be seen that politics involves the production of a virtuous populace by enlightened rulers who read discourses like the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

All would be well with this picture, were it not for the fact that, throughout his discourse, Aristotle draws our attention to the imperfect and provisional nature of politics. Virtue, which is more perfect than politics, nevertheless depends upon the latter. To make matters worse, politics in turn depends upon virtue, since the existence of a good regime depends upon virtuous political leaders to "make the citizens good," which, despite what Aristotle has said above, is not even the intention of every lawmaker, or at least of everyone who holds the title. Thus, it can be seen why, for Aristotle, to consider virtue is also to consider politics, as one leads us to the other due to their mutual interdependence.

Politics, meanwhile, seems to have something to do with friendship. It is perhaps natural to think of justice as the primary concern of politics, but

> *friendship seems to hold cities together, and lawmakers seem to take it more seriously than justice, for like-mindedness seems to be something similar to friendship, and they aim at this most of all and banish faction most of all for being hostile to it (1155a 3-8).*

On this account, a political community would seem to be a community of friends, and "when people are friends there is no need of justice" (1155a 8). In that case, the best political community would have no need of laws and lawmakers, but only of friends and virtue — in other words, there would be no need of politics.

Aristotle knows very well, however, that we can't all, nor can even most of us, be friends. The kind of friendship that lawmakers are concerned with is not even, for Aristotle, friendship in the *eminent* sense; rather, while only virtuous people are capable of "complete" friendship, a political community is bound together by friendships of advantage, which are not really true friendships at all. It is only on the basis of this sort of community that a community of friends in the eminent sense can thrive, since "all communities seem to be parts of the political community" 1160b 28-30.

So lawmakers must concern themselves with justice after all, and the latter becomes necessary precisely when friendship and virtue are absent:

> *people come together for some advantage, and to provide for something that contributes to life, and the political community seems to gather together from the beginning, and to remain together, for the sake of what is advantageous. The lawmakers aim at this, and people call the common advantage just. 1160a 9-14*

On the other hand, "the complete sort of friendship is between people who are good and are alike in virtue" (1156b 8-9). Both friendship (in this complete sense) and justice tend toward equality, but "what is equal in matters of justice does not seem to work the same way as what is equal in friendship" (1158b 29-30). The equality that pertains to (complete) friendship occurs when friends "give freely to one another for their own sake" (1164a 9-10). Justice, on the other hand, is concerned with a careful calculating of debts with regard to station, desert, and equivalence of services and goods rendered; it seeks a regulated economy that only becomes necessary when friendship fails, or when it has never been there.

Because justice is, in a way, more precise than friendship, it is also, somewhat paradoxically, less exact. Most of us know what it is like to have a friend who conducts interpersonal disputes in an overly legalistic manner; he or she is someone who does not recognize that "precision ought not to be sought in the same way in all kinds of discourse" (1094b 5-6). The sort of precision needed to settle a legal dispute is usually inappropriate in a matter between friends, which is why, for instance, people often get offended when they are offered repayment for something that was given.

It is no idle statement, then, that only virtuous people can be friends in the most complete sense. The law (or convention, *nomos*) compels people to act as though they were virtuous, and to act as though they were friends. However, although the law, for instance, "orders one to do the deeds of a courageous person, such as not to leave one's assigned place or run away and throw down one's arms" (1129b 20-22), following the law does not make one courageous, or temperate, or virtuous in general. If conducting one's affairs justly, willingly or not willingly, is not friendship, then neither is following the law virtue, for "not all things are in accord with law, because it is impossible to set down a law about some things…" (1137b 28-29). Rather, "every law is universal, and there are some things about which it is not possible to speak rightly when speaking universally" (1137b 14-15). Unlike Kant, who maintains that the rightness of an action depends on its embodying a universalizable maxim, Aristotle is clear that ethics always concerns particulars that cannot always be formulated into a determinate rule.

> Consensus is not simply a quantitative matter of an agreement of the majority of people; any number of people can, and do, agree on the most vicious and depraved actions.

In commanding people to act as though they were virtuous, then, the law sets down a rough guideline for action, but although it seeks to produce virtue in people (or, more precisely, the capability of virtue in people), it cannot instantly produce virtue by constraining people to act according to that guideline. The reason for this is not simply that, according to the *Nicomachean Ethics*, a person is not truly virtuous unless they, while performing good actions, also desire the good for its own sake; it is also the case that the law does not provide an "ought" in any strict sense. Thus, Aristotle muses that "perhaps it is not the same thing to be a good man and a good citizen in every situation" (1130b 28-29). The law does not legislate virtue, it merely sets guidelines in order to habituate people to act as though they were virtuous, that they may become so.

The question of the "ought" (*dei*), then, is not strictly answerable in discourse, which lacks the kind of vision for particulars that, Aristotle tells us, resides at the outer limit of the logos. For this reason, a discourse that would seek to legislate what one ought to do whenever confronted with a certain type of situation would be in error as to the amount of precision appropriate to its subject matter. The law, on the other hand, does not tell us what we *ought* to do, but what we *may or may not* do. As long as the two coincide, a semblance of virtue is achieved when the citizen abides by the law. Virtue proper, however, lies elsewhere.

Virtue, in the fullest sense, consists in wanting to do what one ought to do, and also choosing to do what one ought to do, which is to say willingly and gladly doing what one ought to do. Thus, while virtuous actions are probably in conformity with the law more often than not, an action's conformity with the law is never sufficient to make it virtuous, just as dealing justly with someone does not amount to friendship. A virtuous action is always performed willingly, with the right intention.

In order to be virtuous, then, one must take pleasure in the right things. How does one know what the proper things to take pleasure in are? Aristotle provides a hint: "one ought not to say that things that are agreed to be shameful are pleasures, except for those who are corrupt" (1176a 24-25). The importance of *nomos* in the sense of convention is here emphasized. There is some sort of consensus of opinion (*doxa*) among like-minded people that certain activities, while pleasurable to some, are nevertheless shameful.

However, this should not be interpreted to mean that, despite what we have been saying about the inexactitude of *nomos*, virtue is simply a matter of convention. In that case, after all, the corrupt could make their own laws or conventions, and on what basis could anyone say that they were corrupt? Discourse would merely be a shouting match if consensus or tradition were the only available ethical standard.

But Aristotle is clear that the lawmakers themselves must be virtuous, that they might make virtuous laws; in that case, there is always the possibility of corrupt lawmakers, hence corrupt laws, corrupt citizens, and thus entire corrupt societies and traditions.

If virtue is not entirely conventional, then, it must be, in a certain sense and to a certain extent, natural. The virtuous person is the person who reveals matters to be what they truly *are*, which is why practical judgment (*phronesis*) is said by Aristotle to be a power by which the soul discloses truth. Phronesis, which never appears apart from the virtues of character, seems to be a kind of health, as opposed to the derangement that is vice:

> *For the same things delight some and give pain to others, and things that are painful and hateful to some are pleasant and loveable to others….But in all such matters, it seems that a thing is what it shows itself to be to a person of serious moral stature. And if this is beautifully said, as it seems to be, then the measure of each thing is virtue, or a good person, insofar as he is good, and what appear to be pleasures to this person would be pleasures, and the things he enjoys would be pleasant. (1176a 11-19)*

A good person, in the singular, is the measure of each thing, and this means that a society, even a good society, is not such a measure. This does not mean that action always occurs on a strictly individual basis; indeed, collective actions, which are deliberated upon with others, must also be taken into account. But while it is important that the parties to these sorts of actions are virtuous, in order that the actions may be done beautifully for the sake of the good, an entire society cannot, strictly speaking, be virtuous — even in the extremely unlikely, if not downright impossible, event that all its members should be so. Thus, it appears that two cities cannot be friends in the complete or governing sense, since "alliances between cities seem to come about for the sake of advantage" (1157a 27-28). For the most part, the possibility of virtue is for a good person, living in a good society with good laws, which in turn have been made by virtuous persons.

Because of this particular nature of virtue, "every discourse that concerns actions is obliged to speak in outline and not precisely" (1104a) — and this means that there is always a certain gulf between what is legal and what is right (and here we may take *legal* in the broad sense to mean any sort of prescriptive "ought"). This doesn't necessarily mean that the two will usually, or even often, diverge in content, but there is nevertheless an irreducible singularity to actions that is always in excess of the *logos*. In a sense, Aristotle's prescription for action is as cryptically simple and irrefragable as the old man's advice to Spike Lee: "Always do the right thing." We are told that it is important to "enjoy what one ought and hate what one ought", but we cannot be told precisely what to enjoy and what to hate. This is not because such things are subjectively determined; this idea would be entirely inconsistent with (and anachronistic to) Aristotle's thought. The right thing is what is truly revealed by a person having ethical vision and judgment—a virtuous person in the full sense of having the intellectual virtue of phronesis accompanied by, as it always must be, the virtues of character — to be a beautiful action.

Universal knowledge is not unimportant or incidental to virtue, however; the law cannot make us virtuous, but it can put us in a position where our chances at being virtuous are perhaps good. Thus, despite the gulf between law and right, between politics and virtue, Aristotle finds that each is indispensable to the other. Practical judgment is always a hermeneutic process that mediates between universal guidelines and particular actions; while there is not a *logos* of every particular action, neither do beautiful actions occur in a discursive vacuum. A good society does not, strictly speaking, produce good persons; it is more accurate to say that, according to the *Nicomachean Ethics*, by means of laws and education the ground is prepared from which virtue can grow. This ground, in its turn, must be prepared by lawmakers who are also virtuous persons.

The like-mindedness that is constitutive of political communities, then, is a central issue for ethics. It appears that consensus is indispensable in ethical matters, for there cannot be anything like an "ought" where there is no agreement. We have seen, however, that this consensus is not simply a quantitative matter of an agreement of the majority of people; any number of people can, and do, agree on the most vicious and depraved actions. Rather, consensus in the sense of a *sensus communis* or a common sensibility must itself be cultivated in a social setting, by a society that values practical judgment and seeks to nurture it in its members.

Thus, it is important to recognize that, on Aristotle's account, law or imposed custom cannot simply create like-mindedness, for there must already be a sense of the common advantage that brings people together. If this is the case, then certain social arrangements would seem to be more conducive than others to arriving at the sort of consensus necessary for virtue, and for a harmonious populace in general. Societies that are politically fabricated in a more or less arbitrary manner have proliferated in the 20th century, and the result has been widespread bloodshed. The events in the former Yugoslavia, for instance, attest to this. But speaking more broadly, the tragic history of the organization of society into nation-states perhaps illustrates this problem on a global scale; misery covers the globe, while almost everywhere the decline of morals is decried, and virtuous leaders are rare, if such even can be said to exist. It may not be accidental that, in a time when politics often seems to play a constitutive rather than merely a regulative role, societies seem to exist in a state of perpetual decay.

It is not hard, then, to see that the word *ethos*, which originally meant a dwelling-place, indeed has everything to do with where and how we dwell. If there is a common way for philosophers to think of *ethos* nowadays, however, this usually has less to do with geographical or political situatedness than it does with situatedness in a transpolitical culture or tradition. Hans-Georg Gadamer has, pointing to the preeminence of method and scientific-instrumental thinking, advocated the restoration of practical judgment or *phronesis* to a place of prominence in the Western tradition. But perhaps the fact that culture has become increasingly unmoored from the practices of people who live together in a particular place in a pursuit of common interests itself poses an ethical challenge that cannot be resolved as long as we remain equally at home, which is to say equally homeless, everywhere. In that case when we inquire into ethical questions, we must seriously attend to the question, who is the "we" that is inquiring? And if "we" is everyone, is it even "we", in any meaningful sense, any longer?

There are two possibilities that then present themselves. One is that the *Nicomachean Ethics* is misguided or simply out of date; indeed, that it is precisely in its concern with politics that it is so. Perhaps ethics is simply a private concern, in which case Aristotle's discourse should have ended properly; he should have written a discourse on ethics and been done with the topic. Or perhaps, in a world where social and political structures are not much like they were in the 4th century BCE, Aristotle's words no longer apply to our situation, and we must find an entirely new way to think about ethics, or perhaps affirm another of the old ways of doing so.

The other possibility is that Aristotle is neither outdated nor simply wrong. In that case, we must remember, when considering the ethical problem, that for Aristotle every government must presuppose some sort of community of interest which it did not itself create. The continuing aftermath of the rearrangement of the globe after World War I, when at times lines were seemingly drawn and redrawn as though the map were simply a geometrical diagram connecting hypothetical points in a homogeneous space, demonstrates the horrific failure of several such attempts to manufacture such communities.

To address the question of ethics is to address the question of how, where, why, and with whom, we live. Although ethical action is always the responsibility of an individual, it does not come into being *ex nihilo*. Ethics is always about the way people dwell with one another; this is why we can talk of the *ethos* of a nation or a culture. This also means we must ask the question: what is it that constitutes a community? To inquire about ethics is to seriously consider the question of politics and what grounds politics. That is to say, it is to seriously consider Heidegger's question: "What is the state of dwelling in our precarious age?"[1] ✯

[1]"Building Dwelling Thinking" in *Basic Writings*, 363.

Seven Pieces Composed Within A *Green Anarchy* Lexicon

Composed entirely of three-word phrases from *Green Anarchy* #19 (one chunk per page)

peris froz

we're terrified of frequently asked questions
and interviews with our wildest dreams.
you spoke of the avarice
and heavenly threats and the new politics
and families and
the ongoing and evershifting
terrain of animal survival
and my completely subjective
people of color. we like honey.
...
we need philosophy because it is needless
to say that the olympics
of the female outskirts of rome
look much different, arbitrary and obscure.
...
the post-modern economy is essential,
especially on october first.
...
deep joy settles outside of itself
like when tourists cannot occur without
resistance to extermination
for a job instead of life
everywhere you look.
...
most students are on trial for
destroying village houses
as a preparation
based on dominance
within the struggle
(united) in militant
secret wars for scraps of paper
in a trench.
...
during a demonstration
in the city of private enterprises,
priests, scientists, and the aforementioned
thugs masturbating with the large concrete ashtrays
argued that the bar of soap in the bushes
is absolutely terrible.
...
revolt in iraq
is not only being moved to long beach, CA
but the buddha was heavily influenced
by the correct preliminary thesis
to be a depressed fireman traumatized
by the region's various political parties.
the future of this shit hole is
sexually repressive every time
we take care of people who share bodies
of knowledge.

Surrealist Subversions

M.K. Shibek & Brandon Freels

Surrealist Subversions: Rants, Writings, and Images from the Surrealist Movement in the United States
Edited by Ron Sakolsky
Autonomedia, 2002

[The following review by M.K. Shibek and Brandon Freels appeared in the Fall 2002 issue of Fifth Estate. *Thanks to the authors for permission to republish it here.]*

"Surrealism can help us break the constraints of social realism and take us to places where Marxism, Anarchism, and other isms in the name of revolution have rarely dared to venture."
—Robin D.G. Kelley

Since their formation in 1966, the Chicago Surrealist Group has remained the most visible and influential surrealist group in the English-speaking world. Coming from radical and counter-cultural backgrounds such as the IWW, the Rebel Worker group, Solidarity Bookshop, and the Louis Lingg Memorial Chapter of the SDS, it's no surprise that Franklin and Penelope Rosemont and their allies have forcefully asserted surrealism's revolutionary essence to combat widespread misunderstanding, especially prevalent in the United States. Many elements of the surrealist project have been downplayed or completely ignored by academia, the media, the art establishment and others who seek to keep us under control. Co-opted and de-revolutionized, imitation surrealism has been the focus since Salvador Dali landed in New York, flaunting his popular appeal and consumerist/fascist sympathies. It's no wonder that it took so long for the first indigenous group in the US to arrive and start cleaning up the mess left by art critics and idiots.

In his introduction, anthologist Ron Sakolsky gives us a comprehensive overview of that first group's development, from the Roosevelt University Anti-Poetry Club and RU Wobblies, the Rosemont's meeting with Andre Breton and their months-long participation in the Paris Surrealist Group, through the infamous Gallery Bugs Bunny and Gallery Black Swan on up to the present. Sakolsky illustrates how the Chicago Surrealist Group and its affiliates from coast to coast who compose the larger Surrealist Movement in the US have always had an organic, reciprocal relationship with not only workers' struggles and the anarchist movement but also a wide variety of heretical and libratory currents. This 750-plus page anthology is compiled from the Chicago groups' sporadic journal *Arsenal*, as well as the Surrealist Insurrection wall-poster series, *Surrealism: The Octopus-Typewriter*, collaborations such as *Free Spirits*, special issues of *Cultural Correspondence* and *Race Traitor*, as well as newer, unpublished material. Unlike the recent *The Forecast is Hot*, which focused on Chicago's collective statements, *Surrealist Subversions* centers mainly on individual statements. Divided into various sections and subsections whose titles themselves are inspiring, the book explores the concentrated interests of the Chicago group and expands upon the first principles of Surrealism in an explosive and diverse assembly of voices.

> Surrealism is more than an art or literary movement, but rather a way of being in the world. Emphasis is made on a critique of the repressive social and psychic structures which hinder the realization of the Marvelous.

Since surrealism is more than an art or literary movement, but rather a way of acting and being in the world that makes use of a variety of expressive mediums, emphasis is made on a sweeping critique of the repressive social and psychic structures which hinder the realization of the Marvelous. Work, capitalism, the state, white supremacy, patriarchy and sexual oppression, religion, ecocide, imperialist war, including the so-called "war on terrorism," and last but not least the rule of socially confined superego consciousness over everyday life, are condemned as upholders of exploitation and misery. As the 1989 editorial "Now's the Time" states, "We are living, precariously enough, in a strange place called the United States, a nation founded on genocide, and whose government, the most murderous in history, is the deadliest enemy of human freedom in the world today... we surrealists are more than ever communists, anarchists, atheists, irreconcilable revolutionaries, implacable enemies of things as they are, unrepentant seekers of a truly free society."

As surrealists recognize the social context that creates what we call reality, the book offers lucid and insightful criticism of Western Civilization. In "Freedom Now Sweet: Surrealism and the Black World" Robin D.G. Kelley writes, "Surrealism may have originated in the West, but it is rooted in a conspiracy against Western Civilization... the surrealist practice of pure psychic automatism — which dates back to 1919 — was much more than a modern technical invention, for it quickly led to the recognition that entire cultures had methods of thought and communication that transcended the conscious... Related more to shamanism and trance states than to modernity as it was understood in the West, automatism is a struggle against the slavery of rationalism, a means to allow the imagination to run free." Kelley mentions the anti-colonialist positions that helped politicize the original Surrealist Group in Paris and important African contributions to surrealism made by the groups around the journals *Legitime Defense* and *Tropiques* in the '30s and '40s, highlighting the importance of Thelonious Monk, Joseph

Jarman, Jayne Cortez and Ted Joans, who move in the spaces where surrealism and African consciousness intersect.

Drawing from a variety of social theorists and writers such as Herbert Marcuse, C.L.R. James, St. Clair Drake, Wobbly humorist T-Bone Slim as well as marginalized figures (some of whom they've re-introduced into public discourse) and elements of Tribal, African and Western culture which exemplify vernacular surrealism, the book demonstrates how a latent desire for the revolution that surrealists and anarchists call for is a widespread component of consciousness, and a crucial factor in creating situations that can take us beyond the death-race that modern social life has become. Suzanne Cesaire wrote in a 1941 issue of *Tropiques* (cited by Kelley): "Far from contradicting, diluting, or diverting our revolutionary attitude toward life, surrealism strengthens it. It nourishes an impatient strength within us, endlessly reinforcing the massive army of refusals. And I am also thinking of tomorrow." Kelley compliments this thought with his assertion that, "Surrealism recognizes that any revolution must begin with thought, with how we imagine a New World, with how we reconstruct our social and individual relationships, with unleashing our desire and building a new future on the basis of love and creativity rather than rationality."

Among surrealism's popular accomplices, a favorite of the Chicago group has always been Blues and Jazz. Paul Garon's "Blues and the Poetry of Revolt" recognizes that blues champions "the primacy of the passions and thus must be considered in the service of human freedom." Meanwhile, Franklin Rosemont's "Black Music and the Surrealist Revolution" constructs an analogy between surrealist automatism (originally inspired by the free association of psychoanalysis) and the improvisation of Free Jazz musicians like Cecil Taylor, who "are not mere allies but, objectively, active participants in the surrealist revolution." Elsewhere in this collection, Phillip Lamantia reflects on old-time radio shows like *The Shadow*, Joseph Jablonski pays tribute to Lord Buckley, while David Roediger and Franklin Rosemont provide us with evidence of the surrealist relevance of Bugs Bunny. Other noteworthy contents include explorations of youth culture, the Los Angeles rebellion of '92, protests against the WTO in Seattle, a critique of zoos, and much more.

Naomi Vanderkindren, Untitled 11*, tintype, 2004*

Surrealist Subversions also includes material from more recent participants in the movement, among them Gale Ahrens, Anne Olson, Jen Besemer, and Jennifer Bean. The latter three, Chicago residents, are active in the renewal of counter-cultural oasis Bughouse Square, where Olson encountered the Surrealist Group. And New Yorker Cassandra Stark Mele provides a striking account of her personal struggle against parental and social oppression in "Your World, Not Mine." This essay shows the tragic consequences of adult repression of yearnings for the Marvelous in children, as well as how this trauma can be overcome. A child's response to life reveals deep truths about imposed social behavior, which can't be ignored. Ronnie Burk looks at the murderous humanitarianism of "The U.S. AIDS Crisis in Africa", Nancy Joyce Peters writes of "The Heresy and History of Love," Daniel Boyer calls attention to the implications of "Mental Illness and the Belief in Whiteness," and Penelope Rosemont advocates "Breaking the Chains of Gender." There are also pieces about surrealist games such as Exquisite Corpse and Time Traveler's Potlatch, Lamantia's excellent "Poetic Matters," critiques of the traditional left, and numerous articles on "Liberating the Visual Imagination," "Defending the Marvelous," and "The Realization of Poetry in Everyday Life."

Regardless of reservations readers may have with particular points, this book should be read and discussed widely by today's revolutionary milieu. The international surrealist movement continues to mobilize energies for anarchists and all oppressed peoples to overcome capitalist-hierarchical civilization, along with nuclear-armed, oil-hungry, murdering elites and their immobilizing cultural distractions. As Franklin Rosemont writes in his foreword, this book is aimed at "the young rebels of all ages who, since Seattle '99, have been creating vital outposts of resistance, revolt and revolution" worldwide. May *Surrealist Subversions* resonate with, and amplify, our most radical longings.

Thoughts on Walser

Anton

Selected Stories
by Robert Walser
Translated by Christopher Middleton
and others; preface by Susan Sontag
The New York Review of Books, 2002

In an age of realism, trite poetry and literary degeneration, the stories and tales of Robert Walser stand out like a pleasantly swollen hand. His craft consists of short, extraordinarily bizarre, pieces that reflect on the author's own curious circumstances. After reading a few of his stories it is easy to see that Walser was a keen and tortured observer and participant in life's many wonders. A solitary man, Walser was more at home surrounded by himself than by large groups of people. His stories capture, with marvelous imagery, his pleasant journeys through the woods, various town squares or little inhabited lakeshores alone on cloudy, sunny or snow-covered days.

Walser was born on 1878 in Switzerland, where he spent his years as a youth. Between the years 1905-1913 he eked his existence in Berlin; writing novels and numerous short stories. In terms of scope and dimension his stories are true gems. But if the reader is looking for deducible plots they best look elsewhere. The works of Walser are marked by his fanciful imagination and his keen ability to turn a story into a longingly romantic lust for life. The poetry in his art says it all. There is no need to preach about the ills of the world in his stories. In contrast, Walser relates his experience which is potentially as powerful as out-and-out social analysis. Indeed Franz Kafka derived a fair amount of influence from Walser when he set to the task of writing socially critical masterpieces like *The Castle* and *The Trial*. Both Walser and Kafka were guided by an intense distrust and dislike of the society that they were born into. The shocking self-doubt and loathing related to navigating oneself through the inhumanity of a mad social order are portrayed in perhaps parallel ways by both Kafka (who was seen as a "peculiar case of the Walser type" by the masterly German novelist Robert Musil) and Walser.

"Heibling's Story" is a supreme illustration of the similarities between these two unusual writers. In the anguish Heibling experiences at the office shuffling paperwork, one is reminded of Joseph K. in *The Trial* who sits in court for having done with his life but work a meaningless job. Heibling's overpowering alienation and subterranean itches of distress are expressed in these not-so-subtle words that he mumbles to himself:

> *Today I was ten minutes late again at the bank. I cannot get there on time any more as the others do. I ought really to be quite alone in the world, me, Heibling, and not a single living being besides me. No sun, no culture, me, naked on a high rock, no storms, not even a wave, no water, no wind, no streets, no banks, no money, no time, and no breath. Then, at least, I should not be afraid anymore. No more fear and no more questions, and I should not be late any more, either. I could imagine that I was lying in bed, everlastingly in bed. Perhaps that would be the best thing (p. 42)!*

Who hasn't felt this way upon thinking about having to go work early in the morning at a place where one wastes their day away? The reviewer can't resist being reminded of the metamorphosis of Kafka's Gregor Samsa into a bloated roach. Gregor is unable to wiggle his way out of bed because he fears that the day will bring him a whole host of unpleasantries. Gregor advises himself to merely stay in bed and maintain an indifferent uselessness to commerce as well as the world. The despair of having to attend to a job that one derives no satisfaction from is the source of ennui for both Gregor and Heibling. There is something of a dreamlike quality in their reflections on the surreal reality we all face. The world they take pains to expound upon in their art is, so to speak, stranger than Gregor Samsa or Heibling could ever be. Walser and Kafka have their finger on the pulse of what most people think and feel in regards to their servitude to mountains of useless paperwork, and Niagras of pencil pushing. As Marx made keenly evident in his writings, when individuals lose connection with the primary means of their livelihood they come to be estranged from their fellow man and immediate surroundings. Heibling and Gregor are, in a sense, caricatures of all of us who merely endure our slavery out of a warped consciousness which tells us nothing can be done about our collective situation. So because of this we might as well either let intense gusts of dread disable us and quietly endure it all or we can always sit in bed disgusted at what the world has made of us (and what we've made of the world). This terror of having to face the day as cog in a bureaucratic apparatus is seen even more forcefully in the year 2005 than in Walser's or Kafka's time. A medicating of the population with psychotropic drugs, and a horde of distractions acutely confirm Walser's and Kafka's observations about life they composed in the early 20th century. Despite the frequently depressing and seemingly hopeless tone of their pieces, it might do us good to examine their artistic musings on the poisonous traps we have weaved for ourselves. If informed by a commitment to acting against that which enslaves us, the art they present to us can awaken our hearts and minds. Hopefully it is not too late to pull the blinders from our eyes and act with the little human dignity we have left.

In this sampling of Walser's work we are presented with a few wonderful examples of his genius. It could be argued that a couple of stories in this collection would have been best left out. I tend to agree. The story "Knocking" doesn't do much for me. What's more there are a small number of other great stories that weren't included. Missing from this collection is one of my all time favorite vignettes of his entitled "The Girl" which is available in another small book of his stories (see sidebar for a reprint of this fabulous tale).

Any attempt at translation of works of art is inevitably a gamble. There are so many translations being done today that a large amount are of inferior quality. Luckily those individuals involved in translating the works for this book are gifted; it is easy to see that they had an understanding of Walser's work. In the end Walser's poetry remains intact.

Take this dazzling twist of the pen from the story "Snowdrops":

> *I have seen snowdrops; in gardens and on the cart of a peasant woman who was driving to the market. I wanted to buy a bouquet from her, but thought it not right for a robust man like me to ask for so tender a thing. They are sweet these first shy announcers of something beloved by all the world. Everyone loves the thought that it will become spring (p. 130).*

This is characteristic Walser. His parabolic spirit, expressed in such short musings and vignettes, in a way, transport us to a spirited land in which dreams catapult us into waking life. His visionary scope and depth of imagination help to remind us that the mystery of life is right before our very eyes. We just need to open ourselves up to it.

Walser spent much of his life in dire poverty. Living in ramshackle rooms and working "real" jobs as little as possible, Walser devoted most of his time to his craft. His stories trace the wanderings of a nomad; out of place even among working class and poor people with whom he most strongly identified.

Walser let his art create a sort of meaning for him in a seemingly strange, cruel world.

This lonely spirit was imbued with a sensitivity and sense of humanity that contrasts sharply with those who merely conform to the dominant social trends and codes. Walser's eccentric, unconventional, self created interactions with the world at large are illustrated in stories such as "A Contribution: To the Celebration of Conrad Ferdinand Meyer." Here Walser offers us a profoundly imaginative manner of greeting strangers and friends alike:

> *As for me, it is this way: when I meet a person whom I respect, I remove from my mouth, four meters before the encounter, the stumpen, which is what we call a cigar hereabouts, I doff my cap and bow so subtly and inconspicuously that there can be no possible doubt as to my showing esteem, interpolation, every bit of it, and now I suddenly hear a gentleman say to his neighbor: "There goes one of those people who are inclined to not be normal (p. 159)."*

And here is where the essential nature of Walser's writing speaks to a radical consciousness. Walser's prose compels us to look at the world with an entirely new pair of eyes. What we get is not the tired, staid stanzas of a jaded old man but rather we are invited to journey with a young man at heart through the portholes of dream and reality. It is up to us to decide how his visions will influence our own. Indeed, the undeniable beauty of all outstanding works of art is that they act as a sort of leavening agent, so to speak, for heightening our own powers of vision and observation. Further, this collection of stories is a stellar challenge to the atrophied imagination of today. May it be used to awaken our sensibilities to a promising new world.

The Girl

By Robert Walser, 1932-33

On a bench along an avenue sat a girl. All around her lay gardens with charming houses inside, and the girl, you might say, was lovely to look at.

Everyone who saw her sitting so quietly on her own had a desire to engage her in conversation. Soon someone stepped up and offered her a book to read. Thanking him, she turned down his offer, however, saying she wished nothing more than to sit quietly.

The rejected one withdrew, and then another courteous individual approached her to ask whether he might have the pleasure of inviting her to dinner.

Her response to this gentle petition was to reply that she had no desire to eat, she was luxuriating in the simplicity of her wants, which afforded her complete satisfaction with herself and the world around her. She thought it more pleasant to sit quietly than go to a restaurant.

When the inquirer had left, there appeared before her attractive face a person who tried to persuade her to venture a gondola ride with him.

Such an excursion would lead to something else unnecessary, she instructively brought forth, adding she would rather think quietly on her bench about some arbitrary matter than be prevailed on to amuse herself.

When the chivalrous one had left the scene of his efforts to be gallant and generous, she was offered a bouquet of flowers. She shook her head, stating she wished to sit quietly and not so much as stir a finger to accept this small tribute, which might allow her to give herself airs.

Small birds were trilling in the treetops, the sun shone down the avenue, people strolled to and fro, and water swam past the girl.

She was grateful to the sun, the twittering she found delightful, and the people she compared to the water that came and went.

—From *Masquerade and Other Stories* by Robert Walser, 1990

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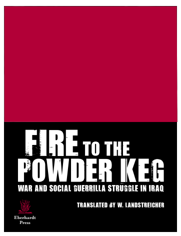
Books

Fire to the Powder Keg:
War and Social Guerrilla Struggle in Iraq

Translated by W. Landstreicher

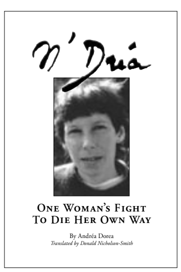


This book investigates the social nature of the guerrilla struggle against the forces of Western capital and against the tragic conditions imposed on the Iraqi population through years of bombings, embargoes and repression. *Fire to the Powder Keg* challenges its readers to demonstrate that they are not allies of their masters, but rather accomplices of their Iraqi brothers and sisters who have not been crushed by the indiscriminate, terroristic violence of the invasion and occupation of their home. Now more than ever, the dimensions of social revolution are global.

116 pages, paperback, $6.00 ppd.

N'Drea:
One Woman's Fight To Die Her Own Way

by Andréa Dorea



Andréa (N'Dréa) was involved with Os Cangaceiros, a group of social rebels who refused the slavery of work and mercilessly attacked the prison system of France in the 1980s and '90s. In 1985, she learned that she had cancer. After surgery, chemotherapy and radiation treatment, she walked out of the medical world for good.

N'Dréa explains that decision with intelligence, anger and joy. It is a powerful condemnation of the medical industry, a passionate analysis of the society of the commodity and its destruction of the human individual, and a personal expression of one woman's decision to live her life fully and to die on her own terms among those she loved, in defiance of a society that steals both our lives and deaths away.

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Pamphlets

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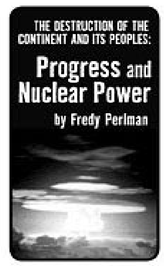
by Fredy Perlman



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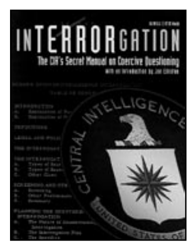
Edited by Jon Elliston



Verbatim reprint of the CIA's 1963 interrogation manual, released under a FOIA lawsuit in 1997. Today, at a time when U.S. intelligence officials deny that their agencies are torturing prisoners, this document proves detailed evidence of the methods of mental and physical torture that have been used to extract information from "resistant sources" for more than 40 years.

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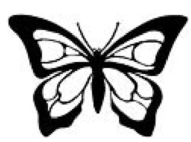

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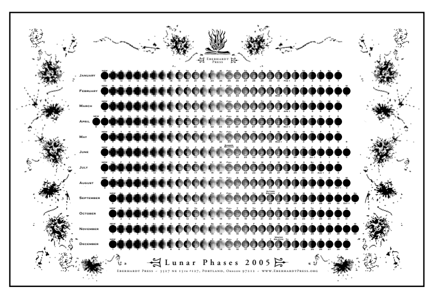

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