Eberhardt Press Review

Issue Two

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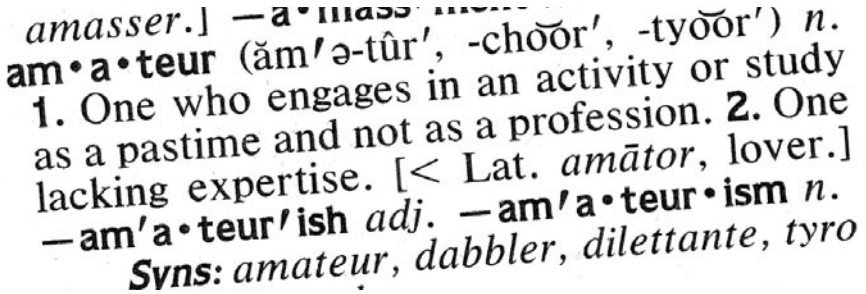
Introduction

Welcome to the second edition of *Eberhardt Press Review*. What you hold in your hands is the work of amateurs. The root of the word amateur is *amātor* (lover) and as amateurs we produce this as a work of love. Not for profit, but for joy.

We hope *Eberhardt Press Review* can be a place to discuss ourselves and each other's explorations of the world of books. Contributions are encouraged, and letters welcome.

We would like to thank Eli especially for use of his photographs and are happy to again present some works of Naomi Vanderkindren.

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


amasser.] —a•mass' ... -tyo͝or') *n.*
am•a•teur (ăm'ə-tûr', -cho͝or', -tyo͝or') *n.*
1. One who engages in an activity or study as a pastime and not as a profession. **2.** One lacking expertise. [< Lat. *amātor*, lover.]
—**am'a•teur'ish** *adj.* —**am'a•teur•ism** *n.*
Syns: *amateur, dabbler, dilettante, tyro*

On *On Bullshit

Christopher Blake Ruth

Once in a while, and for reasons that are usually rather mysterious, a piece of academic writing captures the eye of the public. The latest of these is Harry Frankfurt's philosophical essay *On Bullshit*, which was originally written in 1986 but has recently been released as a small book. In this case, the book's popularity is perhaps not entirely mysterious; the essay is short, easy to read, and the title contains a word which is generally considered to be one of the three or four most egregious obscenities in the English language. In other words, it has all the earmarks of a best seller.

However, once we open the cover and plunge into the thing itself, what we find is a text that hardly reads like a potboiler or a page-turner. Furthermore, the social relevance of the essay may not be immediately apparent. Frankfurt is mostly just concerned with identifying the phenomenon of bullshit, clarifying what it is and what it is not. Questions as to the wider social implications of the phenomenon, how to detect it, what to do when confronted with it, how to do it more effectively, and so forth, are left for the reader to struggle with unaided.

Nevertheless, although *On Bullshit* is a modest essay in both size and scope, it is a useful contribution to contemporary thinking on language and society. "Bullshit", as identified by Frankfurt, is an enormously pervasive and significant phenomenon. While not entirely original and by no means extensive, Frankfurt's essay, when approached critically, does serve to promote clarity; one could even say it helps us to cut through the bullshit.

Few previous works of philosophy are mentioned in Frankfurt's essay. Perhaps the most surprising omission is J.L. Austin's *How to do Things with Words*, which covers some of the same territory Frankfurt is treading. Austin gives an account of language as consisting of "speech acts"—actions that are carried out in order to produce a desired effect. Language may fulfill a function that is mostly "constative", i.e. the purpose of a speech act may be to transmit certain information, which can either be true or false. On the other hand, language may also have a "performative" function—we say things in order to produce certain effects. Most (if not all) statements, for Austin, can be understood as performative. A constative statement such as "the sky is clear", while seemingly a pure transfer of information, may of course fulfill some additional purpose; perhaps I address it to someone who can't see the sky in order to cheer them up, or utter it to impress someone with my knowledge of meteorology, and so on. On the other hand, a statement such as Austin's own example, "I now pronounce you man and wife," is perhaps an example of a pure performative; it isn't really intended to convey any information, but to perform an action.

According to Austin, it is the mistake of most philosophers of language to look at language as primarily constative, or as a means for transmitting information:

> *…many traditional philosophical perplexities have arisen through a mistake — the mistake of taking as straightforward statements of fact utterances which are either (in interesting non-grammatical ways) nonsensical or else intended as something quite different. (3)*

The case of nonsense will not concern us here. The second case—a speech act that is not intended as a straightforward statement of fact, but is not nonsense either—is pretty close to Frankfurt's notion of what bullshit is.

Bullshit is speech, intended to produce a certain effect, that is indifferent to its own truth or falsity. Frankfurt's bullshitter makes a statement that is "grounded neither in a belief that it is true nor, as a lie must be, in a belief that it is not true. It is just this lack of connection to a concern with truth — this indifference to how things really are — that I regard as the essence of bullshit" (33-34). If Frankfurt's analysis of bullshit isn't reducible to Austin's notion of a performative speech act, however, it is because Frankfurt still privileges the constative, information-conveying function of speech. It is hard to imagine a case where "I now pronounce you man and wife," duly uttered by a justice of the peace in a legally sanctioned marriage ceremony, is bullshit. On the other hand, in just that instance the statement must be utterly indifferent to truth and falsity.

Therefore, Frankfurt's essay would have benefited from an engagement with *How to do Things with Words*. In light of Austin's constative/performative distinction, bullshit would then necessarily be defined as a performative statement that has a definite constative function, but nevertheless remains indifferent to that function. In other words, a statement has to masquerade as being involved with its own truth or falsity in order to be bullshit; "I dub this ship the 'Kumquat'", spoken in a public ceremony while cracking a bottle of Wild Irish Rose over the bow, is not only indifferent to how things really are, it is indifferent to its own indifference — that is to say, it cannot be bullshit.

Another instance of speech that is not intended to be true or false, yet may not necessarily be bullshit, is a statement of feelings or intention. Frankfurt addresses this rather sweepingly at the end of his essay. Referring to "various forms of skepticism" that seek to replace the ideal of correctness with that of sincerity, he concludes that

> *there is nothing in theory, and certainly nothing in experience, to support the extraordinary judgment that it is the truth about himself that is the easiest for a person to know. Facts about ourselves are not peculiarly solid and resistant to skeptical dissolution. Our natures are, indeed, elusively insubstantial — notoriously less stable and less inherent than the natures of other things. And insofar as this is the case, sincerity itself is bullshit. (66-67)*

Again, the reference to "facts" reveals Frankfurt's bias for the informational side of language. If I say "I love you" to someone, have I referred to a fact about myself? This is a narrow view of language that always refers back to its constative function, the very philosophical perplexity that we have seen Austin point out.

Certainly, I can say "I love you" to someone sincerely and wholeheartedly, and yet that statement can still be bullshit. "I love you" implies, depending on the context, certain actions, certain modes of future conduct, and a certain consistency in feeling. I may not be on familiar enough terms with myself to make such a statement truly, however sincere I am. But this is not to say that there are certain unascertainable, but no less real, "facts" that I am trying unsuccessfully to convey. And just because a statement of this type, made sincerely, *may be* bullshit, that is not to say that it necessarily *is* bullshit. Only if truth is certainty about ascertainable facts does it follow that sincerity simply equals bullshit; it is only through a fundamental blindness to the multiplicity of language that Frankfurt can simply say "sincerity itself is bullshit."

Despite these qualms, Frankfurt has started us on the track of an important question. If "what is bullshit?" is an important question to consider, that is because it helps us to ask the even more important question, "what is not bullshit?" Indeed, this is perhaps the central question of our bullshit-saturated times. In a widely quoted statement that first appeared in the *New York Times Magazine* in October, 2004, an anonymous advisor to George W. Bush gloated that reporters (and presumably a lot of other people) were ineffectual because they live in the "reality-based community," whereas it is the business of an empire like the United States to "create our own reality." Reality, on this account, is a sort of side effect of bullshit.

Of course, the other reality — the real one, so to speak — may yet have a word or two for the Bush administration, despite the magnificent effectiveness of the latter. But although there is something resistant, and irresistible, about what we may call reality, how are we supposed to understand our relationship to it? It's easy to say that facts are facts, but that doesn't stop us from constantly, unavoidably disagreeing about what those facts are and what they mean. Facts can only appear in a meaningful context that renders them intelligible. What meaningful context can be sufficient to render our speech acts bullshit-proof?

In an age where facts begin to appear in increasingly disjointed, misarticulated, and obscure contexts, what is not bullshit? Religions, codes of conduct, political ideologies, philosophical systems, social norms, rituals of behavior, codes of honor, oaths sworn by moonlight at sword-point, secret societies, Marxism, veganism, realpolitik, science, Catholicism, historical dialectics, Freemasonry, Mormonism, straight-edge, aestheticism, asceticism, the categorical imperative, "Bob" — My God! What else? — all begin to seem, to those of us unlucky enough to lead a questioning life, a heaping smorgasbord of options, at times internally coherent but ultimately undecidable — preferences, viewpoints, an option between different world-views. What is not bullshit?

This question is not precisely the same as the traditional question, "what is truth?" Truth is opposed to untruth, whereas bullshit gingerly steps aside from truth and untruth, staking its ground elsewhere. But perhaps in spite of its indifference to

photo by Eli Forbyn

truth and untruth — indeed, because of this very indifference — the question of bullshit can tell us something about our relationship to truth and untruth. When we ask what truth and untruth may be, by our very questioning we are affirming that truth has made a prior claim upon us, even before we can venture an answer. To seek an answer to this question, even if the answer is the most dark and negative imaginable — the final cry, "it's all bullshit!" — we betray the fact that we are still seeking an answer, that we are not indifferent — we are not bullshitting.

To ask about truth is necessarily to ask about untruth. Because this question continually challenges us, because it never brooks a final answer, we are made to see that we are always in errancy toward truth. We remain occluded, and truth never becomes simple certainty. But if questioning leads us into the darkness of errancy, the errancy of questioning is never simply indifferent to its own position in relation to truth. Only when we sneer at the very question, willfully leaving the reality-based community behind and pitching our tents elsewhere, do we finally and inescapably enter the demesne of bullshit.

To ask about truth and untruth is to refuse the very indifference that is the hallmark of bullshit. To question in such a way is to stand in a dark, frightening place, waging a deadly earnest struggle. To be fully, finally claimed by bullshit is to leave questioning and move over to that other territory, to finally become indifferent to anything but the effectiveness of language for one's own perceived ends. In doing so, we renounce the ancient struggle between light and darkness and step into the fluorescent pallor of an artificial but none the less certain death. And that's bullshit.

Only twice in twelve long years
Has the self in me transformed
To weighing less than a cent
And blended with the evening
Or heard ringing in my ears
Or seen a star do its thing
Umbrellaed aloft on air
Swooping into a huge swarm
Of mosquitoes and gnats, there,
On velvety wings, I went
Gliding and eating until
Chilled to my bouyant marrow,
Convinced not to eat my fill,
To leave some for tomorrow.

—Stephen Todd Booker

From Death Row

Mujeres Libres

Leah

Free Women of Spain:
Anarchism and the Struggle for the
Emancipation of Women
by Martha Ackelsberg
2nd edition
AK Press, 2005

The Mujeres Libres have always been interesting to me. Not only were they part of the Spanish Civil War, they were women! Finding the history of women radicals is no easy task, it's possible to name most of most historical anarchist women on a couple of hands: Louise Michel, Emma Goldman, Volatrine de Cleyre, Marie Equi, Marie-Louise Berneri to name a few. Radical history has a tendency to be as male dominated as the traditional historical cannon, so finding the story of women is often rare, unless it's Goldman or de Cleyre, which are the token women of anarchist traditions. Much of the history that is available has been created by academic historians. Following in the tradition of revisionist history, Martha Ackelsberg, a professor at Smith College, wrote *Free Women of Spain*, chronicling the women involved in Mujeres Libres.

In its second edition, *Free Women* has a new preface, in which, Ackelsberg relentlessly encourages the reader to appreciate Mujeres Libres, pointing out that she's really writing this book for feminists to provide women's history. As she puts it, at a time "when many progressives are struggling against feelings of despair, the achievements of Mujeres Libres may provide sparks of hope, and perhaps even new directions, for ours."(19) I'm not sure how the progressives are responding to her writing, but when I find one I'll surely ask. For me this book provided interesting history of women who were far more radical than many of the feminists that I encounter today. The Mujeres Libres also had an impressive education campaign and did immense amounts of outreach with working class women, since they were all working class women, it was possible.

Ackelsberg doesn't go in-depth about the history of the Spanish Civil War, instead she focuses on the inter-workings of the anarchist organizations and the creation of the Mujeres Libres. Which is concerning in some aspects, because it's easy to take things out of context and idealize history when you only have a shard of the story. If you want to read the complete history of the anarchist involvement of 1936, you can easily find a number of books to elucidate this history.

The Spanish Civil War, in abbreviated format, started in July 1936 and roughly lasted three years. Spain had become quite polarized between the right and the left in the years leading up to the military coup that roughly marks the beginning of the Civil War. From 1923-1929 Spain was under the dictatorship of Prim Rivera, followed by the creation of a republic in the years form 1931-1935: this period was marked by a weak coalition of centrist and leftist-centrist republicans that did very little, followed by a center-right government that created more state repression for leftist groups. In February 1936 the Popular Front government was elected, a coalition of communist, social democrats, and liberals; while in office the party passed a number of minor reforms, releasing political prisoners, introducing agrarian reforms, and giving autonomy to Catalonia. The Nationalist party, the right wing party, was not pleased with these reforms, as it interfered with the agenda of the Spanish ruling class.

By July 1936, a military coup was in the works, lead by a number of generals of the Spanish Military, they were successful. The most recognized leader of the coup was General Francisco Franco. Franco over the course of the next couple of years became recognized as the dictator of Spain. He maintained a brutal dictatorship until his death in 1975.

Back to Spain 1936. The civil war has broken out. There were several leftist groups in Spain and two main anarchist organizations, the Federatión Anarquista Ibérica (Iberian Anarchist Federation) (FAI) and Confederatión Nacional del Trabajo (National Confederation of Labor) (CNT). These two groups had somewhat different organizing techniques. The CNT was primarily an anarcho-syndicalist organization that focused on labor organizing in the cities. The FAI was an anarcho-communist organization that focused on communalism and more rural organizing. One thing that is commonly mistaken is that the CNT and FAI were the same organization, not true. They had very different ideas of organizing, while they did work together, they were not the same.

Mujeres Libres was formed by a group of women that were members of the CNT. The CNT's tagline was that men and women were equals. Women within the anarchist movement found reality to be quite different, women were laughed at and dismissed in meetings, and paid less in the factories, where much of the CNT organizing was occurring. In theory this type of behavior wasn't supposed to be happening and women began organizing themselves on the side, trying to deal with the issues that directly affect their lives. Barcelona had a women's organization called the Grupo Cultural Femenino, part of the CNT, which formed to confront behaviors in the unions. In Madrid, two women, Lucíca Sánchez Saornil and Mercedes Comaposada, were working to create an organization that provided education for working women. In 1936, the two groups found each other, and with the efforts of Saornil and Comaposada in Madrid and Amparo Pocy y Gascón in Barcelona, Mujeres Libres was formed. These three women were also the original editors of the publication *Mujeres Libres*.

From the start there was contention toward the women's groups. Part of the initial criticisms of Mujeres Libres was that they may just become another arm of feminism. But they thought that feminism was not applicable to their lives and lacked a class analysis, not to mention the fact that many of the women had never even heard of "feminism." Soledad Estorach explains, in an interview with Ackelsberg, some of the resistance to the label feminism and resistance to Mujeres Libres forming in general:

> *"Others framed their objections in the form of a claim that the women were in danger of falling into 'feminism,' by which they meant a focus on access to education and professional jobs. These types of issues, of course, had long been the concerns of middle-class feminists, in Spain as elsewhere, but they had been rejected by anarchists as irrelevant to the concerns of working-class people, women as well as men, and as reinforcing structures they were committed to overthrowing." (124)*

The other resistance to the formation of Mujeres Libres was the creation of a "separatist" group. The problem? Women, in theory, were equal to male members of the CNT and FAI. In praxis the situation was quite different, with rampant sexism found at meetings and work, it seemed like a logical conclusion for Mujeres Libres to form. Most of the men and many women involved in anarchist organizing did not recognize the need for such an organization and saw Mujeres Libres as divisive. They were all anarchists, why did they need to create separate organizations catering only to the needs of women? Mujeres Libres spent a tremendous amount of time defending themselves against theses criticism, which haunted them throughout the group's existence.

Mujeres Libres has a two pronged program, of *capacitación*, roughly translated (there is no English equivalent) as consciousness-raising and empowerment, and *capatación*, incorporating women into the libertarian movement. Part of *capacitación* was the creation of educational programs, which focused on literacy, languages, professional skills, and "social formation," like union organization and political awareness. This was an attempt, as the Instituto Mujeres Libres (an educational group) stated in their mission statement, to free women from their "triple enslavement: her enslavement to ignorance, her enslavement as a producer, and her enslavement as a woman." To do this, the members of Mujeres Libres organized in urban and rural areas. They offered night classes in basic literacy and other courses on a variety of topics like, child care, nursing, and mechanical skills. In addition they had a number of women that would travel around the country side, stopping in rural areas and other cities to talk to women about anarchist ideas and see how organizing was going.

When the war broke out, there were several militant women that fought on the front lines, but this didn't seem to last long. Instead women were supposed to work in place of the absent men and take care of the children and old folks. Mujeres Libres took on many of the traditional roles women in wartime, they provided solidarity for those on the front lines, helping to care for the wounded and refugees. They weren't alone in these efforts, as women from the Workers' Party of Marxist Unity, Spanish Socialist Workers' Party and the Spanish Communist Party. Mujeres Libres somewhat competed with the women's groups from these other organizations, to keep those newly radicalized by war on the anarchists side. They had some difficulties keeping up with the propaganda of the other organizations due to a lack of funding and the fact they weren't actually recognized as an organization by the CNT or FAI, even though most women in the Mujeres Libres were members of the latter.

Most of this book emphasizes the inequalities in the Spanish anarchist movement and the response of Mujeres Libres, trying to have a voice within a

movement that largely ignored them. The relevance of this book is many folded. First, it's always good to brush up on history. This was the first book I've read about the Spanish Civil War in several years and it was mildly inspiring — and, no, not because of the way they organized themselves. It was inspiring to hear the words of working class women that rejected contemporary feminism, wrote newspapers, had ongoing educational services, and spent time talking to other women who were in similar situations. Granted, I'm not the largest fan of some of the "woman" essentialism that Mujeres Libres purported, I'm more than willing to understand the struggle of these women within the context of Spain in the early twentieth century. I can't say how sexism continues to affect the women of Spain, but it's possible to see correlations between the anarchists of the CNT and FAI and many of the actions found in anarchist subcultures in the States.

Some things definitely haven't changed over the years, anarchists are still predominately male. Separatist groups still exist and the response is often the same: people are being divisive. Sexism frequently isn't dealt with in a productive way, much less, racism, heterosexism, ablism, sexual assault, etc. Anarchists had problems with equality then and they do now.

Ackelsberg wrote one of a handful of books tracing the history of anarchist women. Her insistence on feminism is somewhat irritating and leads to a book which spends most of its time highlighting sexism within the Spanish anarchist movement, which is useful, only in the sense that not much has changed. It would have been nice to see more context of the actual war in this book, but again there are several books written about this topic. She did an excellent job doing research, as an academic should, and did a lot of interviews with surviving member of Mujeres Libres, contributing to the almost nonexistent archives of anarchist women outside of Emma Goldman and Voltarine de Cleyre.

Wither Postmodernism?

Samuel Grey

Ecology and the End of Postmodernity
by George Myerson
Totem Books, 2001

Postmodernism for Beginners
by Jim Powell
ill. Joe Lee
Writers and Readers, 1998

Listeners of certain radio stations will notice that alternative rock from the '90s, which most would agree never died, has already been resurrected. Donning the mantel of retro kitsch, the '90s music is back after going nowhere. Judging from the airplay and ad sales, it's probably more profitable than ever. Alternative '90s rock n roll – defined against it's preceding binary opposite (pure rock 'n roll) – which was itself a hegemonic (mis)representation of a post-colonial subject – position discourse (the blues) – recycled before it is used up, made hyper real before it ceased to exist, revisited with irony before it had a chance to go away. What could be more postmodern than that?

The time has come to revisit postmodernism, which like '90s music, never ceased to be an important part of the cultural zeitgeist. It's not surprising that a philosophical trend that proclaimed the "death of" just about everything would itself die in a proclamation, but so far postmodernism has proven more resilient than expected. September 11th was to be a bookend of postmodernism, with the horrors of Auschwitz as the other. Critics loudly denounced the failures of the academy and of pomo in the wake of the World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks, presumably for failure to recognize and jump on board the new Grand Narrative, USA: good vs. evil, civilization v. barbarism. However, the spectacle of red, white and blue, war without end, abuse and torture of anonymous detainees, and more mindless media made the death pronouncement seem hasty. Incidentally, "administration" speechwriters must be keeping the post structuralist busy – those texts don't require much deconstruction to be proven totally meaningless.

Another death knell for pomo is, according to George Myerson's *Ecology and the End of Postmodernity*, is a new awareness of ecology and a new metanarrative – restore the earth and make sane the human relation to it. This argument will be examined later. First, pomo needs to be introduced and, to the extent possible, defined. Jim Powell's illustrated *Postmodernism for Beginners* is a good starting point, although an

updated edition would be much better as this one is almost a decade old. Nevertheless, the basic principles (or anti-principles) remain intact so they will be related here.

The most literal reading of the word "postmodernism" is "after modernism". So what then is modernism? Modernism was an explosion of new styles and trends in the first half of the twentieth century that embodied the enlightenment principles of progress through science and reason. Thus, modern architects built pure forms, functional spaces devoid of ornamentation. Modern painters ought a pure aesthetic, which became pure abstraction. Modern writers sought an inner, eternal truth through various means – Yates and Joyce used myths as templates. All the while, science and industry advanced and the Neitschean supermen of the age – Hitler, Stalin, Oppenheimer – yoked it in such a way, with such horrifying consequences, that the narrative of progress could no longer be seen as justifying itself. After all, the Nazi trains did run on time – to the gas chambers. Myerson explains it this way:

> *People had felt they were living through the turmoil of progress and that their lives were investments in the future. The "postmodern condition" begins when that justification fails. (p. 10)*

So what then in the place of the all-encompassing narrative of progress? Many small competing or coexisting stories. No universal standard of judgment. Delegitimation of authority, particularly centralized state actors. Delegitimation of science. Emphasis on chance and play or purpose and design. Pastiche – the free choice and combination of a multitude of styles. Fragmented cultures, none privileged above the other. Multiple meetings, or no meeting at all. Absence.

Jean Francois Lyotard was an early postmodernist and veteran of May '68 in Paris whose paraphrased definition bears repeating here: Pomo is "incredulity toward metanarratives." Baudrillard followed by charting the evolution of simulacrum – reproductions – in place of meaningful relations in the postmodern condition. He saw the layers of simulacrum as bona fide reality. In his later work he championed media technologies and advocated, his critics would say, surrendering to the "ecstacy of communication" (that is, with machines). The real behind the hyper reality of images and reproductions ceases to exist.

Michel Foucault took the grand narrative away from power and examined it in various local situations – the prison, the factory, the bedroom. Jacques Derrida deconstructed text and, unearthed the binary opposites – the marginalized other inherent in all principle meanings or actors. Unfortunately, Derrida wrote in such an obtuse, academic language that only a trained specialist could decode him.

As you can see, postmodernism is not a unified theory. Postmodernists – some even refusing to call themselves such – took off from the negated center in different, often contradictory directions. *Postmodernism for Beginners* goes into detail on some of the notable theories and thinkers. The final section of the book explores some pop culture "artifacts" that embody the postmodern condition which helps clarify the concepts with an easy frame of reference.

So, does a new understanding of ecology make postmodernism irrelevant? Does the "threat" (Myerson's word) or reality of ecological meltdown restore a grand narrative, a sense of purpose, to our collective consciousness? Perhaps, but not a la *Ecology and the End of Postmodernity*. Myerson argues for a restored modernity with the urgent task of saving itself from itself. Which is specious reasoning for starters, but when you read tidbits like,

> *We need to upgrade our society – and the best chance of doing so remains the 20th century alliance of science and democracy.*

the argument falls apart. So, call Germany a dictatorship. Science and totalitarianism got us Auschwitz and Chernobyl. But have science and democracy gotten us anything better? Hiroshima? Napalm? Three mile Island? We don't need to "upgrade" our society, we need to destroy it. If that's a postmodern approach, then so be it. The only science that could be continued is one that stops dead in its tracks and figures out how to unravel this tangle with minimal tears to the fabric of life. Even then, it can't be trusted. If there is any progress, that is it. Modernism and postmodernism, seen as binary opposites, then read as symptoms of the same ailment. Perhaps one day both will be equally irrelevant.

photos by Eli Forbyn

The I and Thou of Martin Buber

Anthony

I and Thou
Martin Buber
Translated by Ronald Gregor Smith
Scribner Classics, 2000

Ever since I was a young child I had an intuitive sense that something was terribly wrong with the world I was born into. For the life of me I couldn't understand why grown adults acted the way they did. I was also perplexed by how competitive my peers were. The neat little categories every young boy and every young girl was supposed to fit into baffled me. They baffled me because I sensed that it was phony; that it was based on conforming to a neurotic social norm. Perhaps it wasn't that conscious of a rejection. All the same, I couldn't conform to that norm because I was a creative, sensitive and precocious child.

Then I got a bit older. My body started to grow along with my already curiously expanding mind. As my peers began to "grow up" and think about more practical matters such as future careers and teen romance, my head remained lost in the clouds. I am not trying to suggest that these were glory days and I was better than other children or teens. Far from it. It was my alienation from the way I was supposed to relate to my peers, parents, teachers and the rest of creation that led me to imagine and fantasize about lost worlds and different time periods. In fact, it was quite unpleasant to be so ill at ease among other humans. Nonetheless, the more I read the more I realized my alienation was not the cry of a lone man. I soon discovered the Russian revolution and was amazed by the fact that people had given *active* voice to their own gnawing pains of alienation and disempowerment. I gazed at the photographs from the 1905 and 1917 revolutions and thought the faces in the pictures were speaking directly to me. The earthiness of the photographs made me earnestly believe that their revolution was an extension of my own humanity. Even though I eventually became a Trotskyist in my mid-teens, I always firmly thought the economic programs and political edicts put forth by the Trotskyist groups I was a part paled in comparison to the change in social relationships that needed to occur. I brought this up with my fellow party members and they tended to scoff at the idea of changing how we relate while simultaneously inventing new ways to organize society. They suggested I was a snob and argued that I was expecting too much from people. I concluded that they wanted to merely take over and remanage the same world. Disturbed, I said bye-bye to such groups and discovered left communism and anarchism.

After having read all of the material I could get my hands on, the artist in me realized that my experience confirmed what I had been reading. Great poets and novelists as diverse as Blake, Basho and Twain helped to provide a framework for looking at the world poetically. As rare as the moments were in my life when I experienced a transcendence of self and other, there were times when it seemed like it did indeed occur. I am not talking about a cloudy mystical union. Quite to the contrary. The experience I am referring to is more concrete. Who hasn't felt at peace and fulfilled during a spring day when all of the elements seem to be in perfect order and harmony? Only the entirely desensitized person would fail to see the beauty on such a day. The air smells of budding flowers while the sun hangs brightly from the sky – and life itself starts to flower. Nothing seems absent. A sense of fulfillment is there. And you want to extend that beauty by smiling at those around you who are downcast and sullen.

In comes Martin Buber. His piercingly compassionate eyes and beautifully gracious white beard are an expression of that openness and sensitivity of spirit I am trying to illustrate. Too often radicals get caught up in their anger and frustration. Heck, there is a lot to be angry about. But when the primary emphasis is anger and misery, angry and miserable is what you become. Joy and laughter and love then come to be lacking. Not when I looked at those photographs of Martin Buber. I saw a willingness to listen to what others had to say. I saw what could be called a patient wisdom. At the time I had only haphazardly read his writings. Even so, the photographs of him I stumbled across always tended to move me.

Who was Martin Buber? Briefly, he was a German intellectual who studied philosophy from the vantage point of his Jewish heritage. He was what I would call a cultural Zionist. He believed that Jews could tap

photo by Naomi Vanderkindren

into their culture not necessarily by moving to a distant piece of land in the Middle East but by strengthening their faith and studying diligently. This was in contrast to Theodore Herzl – the founder of political Zionism – who believed that Jews must move to Palestine in order to be in touch with their heritage. In 1923, Buber wrote his renowned book *I and Thou*. In it he expounds on his philosophy. Buber never got rid of his queasy religious mysticism. However, his philosophy is probably even more appealing to the secular humanist than it is to the religious *believer*. Most of all Buber's philosophy is one of *action*, not one of belief. Ever since certain Greek thinkers like Aristotle and Plato contributed to the detachment of thought from action in the West, ideas have steadily been viewed as separate from taking action in the world. We can see this with the decline of primitive Christianity and the rise of Rome. When Rome rose to the fore, belief and adherence to those beliefs started to take precedence over how human beings related to themselves, others and the broader world. The idea was (and still is) that adhering to edicts set forth by the church was (and is) more important than doing – like extending a hand to a neighbor or being a part of a communal meal.

In this regard, Buber is part of a noble tradition which acted on the margins of theological dogma. From Jacob Boehme to Giordano Bruno to Baruch Spinoza, we can trace a development that shocked the religious piety of a Europe which placed faith over works. All three thinkers thought, in their own heretical and unique way, that it was more important to act rationally and compassionately towards oneself, others and

the rest of the universe. In *Theologico-Political Treatise* Spinoza argues that the supposed "miracles" presented in passages of the Bible can all be understood rationally. He also suggests that an atheist who acts rationally in the world is a lot more admirable than a religious zealot who merely has a set of beliefs. For these insights he was banished from the Jewish community of seventeenth century Amsterdam. As for the seventeenth century shoemaker, Jacob Boehme, he noted, "And we would urge all children, who are thus gnawing in this tree, friendly to ponder that each branch and twig helps to shelter the other from the storm, and we commend ourselves unto their love and growth." Here it is obvious Boehme is saying we should help nourish and take care of one another. And Giordano Bruno was burnt at the stake by church inquisitors for believing that God, man and nature are not separate entities but parts of an infinite universe.

Martin Buber traces his own development to that of Hasidic Judaism. There are similarities between the Hasidim and the other traditions I just traced. Hasidic Judaism emerged out of eighteenth century Eastern Europe. At its head was a rabbi by the name of Baal Shem Tov. Baal Shem Tov thought Judaism had tired itself of the formalities of Talmudic law. Furthermore, he thought it made little sense to focus on tiresome recitation of the Talmud when most of the Jews of Eastern Europe were unable to read. He helped to bring together poor Jews in a movement which was a combination of reform and orthodox Judaism. This movement came to be known as Hasidic Judaism. The shift from excessive book learning to doing led to acting, it was believed, in ways that would put one in direct, ecstatic communion with God and the universe. Dancing, frequently with the aid of alcohol as a lubricant, was a common activity. Food was consumed communally and parables were told. All of this had a profound influence on Martin Buber.

But Buber, in a significant sense, modernized the teachings of Hasidism. He took out many of the arcane elements and formulated a philosophy of ethical doing.

What then, exactly, is Buber's philosophy of I-Thou? His philosophy is quite simple. It can be summarized in five words taken from the book: "All real living is meeting." In a world of commodity relationships and impersonal devotion to the internet as a form of relating, Buber posits that the I-Thou combination holds the key to living through dialoging and meeting. We live in a world of the I-It combination which takes living beings and the universe and turns them into things to be had. If we *have* a sexual partner it is often times merely to satisfy our own immediate lusts and desires. Buber tells us that in order to be fulfilled we too must give a part of ourselves to the other. It cannot be all take and no give.

This sounds rather odd and abstract given that we live in the twenty-first century where alienation has probably reached its highest stage of development in world history. But maybe this is precisely why a book like Buber's stands out so strongly: it is like a shout in a barren wilderness. This is one of the weaknesses of Buber's philosophy as well: that it is merely a *philosophy*. Unlike Marx who held that the world of capitalism is one that needs to be overturned by conscious action against its institutions and centers of production, Buber's discussion centers a round how a mystical spirit-of-will lying dormant within every man will burst forth and transform social relationships. This is disagreeable – if not factually flawed when placed against the historical record. Revolts and revolutions, as a general rule, tend to occur based upon objective social, economic or political conditions. This is as true of Russia in 1905 as it is of Spain in the 1930s. It also can't be forgotten that these revolutions were nourished in no small part by a rich revolutionary tradition which embedded itself on the collective imagination.

If we return back to Buber we can see that his philosophy stands far above other philosophers and their philosophies. Why is this? Quite simply because he attempted to live the life of dialogue he wrote about. This was no small feat given that he was born into an alienating and alienated world. Oddly enough, even though he wrote hundreds of books and articles, he was not an alienated intellectual. Consider these words:

> *"I knew nothing of books when I came forth from the womb of my mother, and I shall die without books, with another human hand in my own. I do, indeed, close my door at times and surrender myself to a book, but only because I can open the door again and see a human being looking at me."*

After looking at photographs of Buber in the latter years of his life, you can easily get the impression that this was a man who valued interaction with all sorts of human beings. In *I and Thou* he makes it a point to suggest that what he was describing had nothing to do with an abstraction called community. His understanding of community was far more concrete. What was it to him? A relation – a gathering together of the I and Thou. In Buber's idea true human partnerships can be formed when there is an

active interaction between self and other. When we respond to others and they respond to us, a potential for meeting and dialoging is formed. Similarly when the self enters into a communal relationship, the community can potentially benefit. Buber's discussion cuts through the bourgeois division of the world into isolated human atoms, while also laying to rest the myth that the individual must subordinate his or her every whim to the collective. This idea of communism has more in common with that presented by Marx in his more lucid moments than it does with the practice of the Soviet Union and other eastern bloc countries. What is more it is part of a tradition which encompasses the likes of Charles Fourier, Robert Owen and medieval heretical sects.

In terms of abstract philosophies, Buber's is the most interesting and agreeable. Of course there are many highly questionable aspects of the ideas he espoused. In *I and Thou* he seems to suggest that the I-Thou combination can only come full circle when God intervenes and mediates the relation. I have absolutely no interest in theological speculation. If anything, the ritualistic and ceremonial aspects of religion are the only aspects I find even mildly appealing. It should also be noted that Buber believed the Kibbutzim movement was the vanguard of the regeneration of the I-Thou combination. In his book, *Paths in Utopia*, he gives it an almost messianic mission. In reality, the Kibbutzim movement was little more than a violent arm of the Israeli state. Time and again he also makes reference to the Jews as chosen to redeem the world. The idea of a chosen people can be used to justify anything. Whether it be fundamentalist Christians fulminating at the mouth over how they have the correct interpretation of scripture or Muslim clerics preaching death to all infidels, it is clear that such irrational beliefs can be used to destroy those who don't conform to your belief system or "ethnic" heritage. And despite Buber's sincere efforts at trying to reconcile the rift between Arabs and Jews, he never let go of the idea that the state of Israel has a right to exist. It was central to his religious faith.

Even with these problems, there is something ennobling about Buber's notion of the I and Thou. In our age of relativism and confusion, there are plenty of people who put forth their non-sense pet theories and philosophies. None of them come even close to the essence of Buber's philosophy of living through dialoging and meeting. But the problem with it is this: it is, for the most part, a philosophy of interpersonal psychology. Maybe the other man with the big white beard was correct when he said, "The philosophers have merely interpreted the world, the point is to change it."

A Mild Spring Breeze

The petals blew
mildly in the spring
breeze.

And the day
lifted its mournful
face from the
clutches of sun.

The sun – it clenched
the sky;
holding its rays
deep within its pores.

Fruits and nuts
flowered –
shooting their life
into the mysterious scent of
heaven's gate.

The great tides
cascaded quietly
across the shore
of the day's prayer.

Evening set in…
and the breeze
gave way to
the lustful tremor
of shadows.

The fiddle
let loose its
enchanted melody.

Wistfully,
it dragged
the day and night
into its intoxicating fold.

And the breeze whispered
its infinite melody to
the hidden moon.

—Anthony

Al Zarqawi: the Man Behind the Myth

Jai Soutine

Insurgent Iraq:
Al Zarqawi and the New Generation
Loretta Napoleoni
Seven Stories Press, 2005

Abu Mos'ab al Zarqawi has all the characteristic physical traits of his tribe, the Khalaylah clan. He's short and slim with dark eyes. The Khalaylah clan are an East Bank Bedouin tribe that includes 200,000 people across Jordan and its neighboring regions, including Iraq. His birth name is Ahmed Fadel, but the name he is now know by, al Zarqawi, means "the man from Zarqa."

Al Zarqawi was born in Zarqa, Jordan, in 1966. His home town is referred to as the Chicago of the Middle East due to heavy industrialism, high crime and extreme poverty. Al Zarqawi grew up in a working class neighborhood that Napoleoni describes as a "miserable neighborhood where traditional and tribal values mix badly with the culture of Western consumerism and rapid modernization." It is a place where young boys sport new Nikes, and their mothers wear veils. New electronic goods shine in shop windows, while the streets are filled with graffiti celebrating suicide bombers.

Al Zarqawi was very close to his father, a retired army officer and veteran of the Battle of Jerusalem, who fought to keep the Old City and eastern Jerusalem within Jordanian territory. Zarqawi's father later worked as a neighborhood mediator and witnessed the arrival of thousands of Palestinian refugees. Jordan has a huge Palestinian refugee population; currently more than 50 percent of the population of Zarqa are refugees from Palestine. King Hussein originally welcomed to Jordan the refugees who arrived after Israel invaded the West Bank and supported their cause. However, he underestimated the Palestinian Liberation Organization, and within a decade the PLO had become, as Napleoni asserts, "a state within a state." Hussein saw this as a threat to his authority, and in September, 1970, his regime attempted to expel the PLO from the refugee camps. This campaign became known as Black September. Jordanians watched in confusion as an endless stream of Palestinians were forced out of the country.

When al Zarqawi's father died in 1984, his mother was left only a small pension to provide for her ten children. There were times when the family did not have enough to eat. Al Zarqawi dropped

photo by Naomi Vanderkindren

out of secondary school and joined a local gang. He became a young street criminal in a town teeming with Palestinians and Islamic intellectuals who condemned Arab nations for their unwillingness to denounce the West for backing Israel. Many rejected the reformist agendas of organizations like the Muslim Brotherhood. Criminality became a way to attack what they perceived as the illegitimate Jordanian state and to express dissent. Zarqawi, who is believed to have been largely apolitical at the time, was arrested for possession of drugs and sexual assault and thrown in prison. "It is likely that this first encounter with Jordanian prisons triggered the long process of radicalization which transfomed Ahmed Fadel, decades later, into Abu Mos'ab al Zarqawi, the new leader of al Qaeda in Iraq," according to author Lorretta Napoleoni.

In her book *Insurgent Iraq: Al Zarqawi and the New Generation*, Napoleoni chronicles this long process in intricate detail. Her scholarly research is exhaustive and insightful. She details al Zarqawi's background from his boyhood through his experiences as a Mujahed in Afganistan and to his becoming, as Osama bin Laden titled him, "the Prince of the new al Qaeda in Iraq." Her most interesting investigations explore the ideology of militant, revolutionary Islam and the myth of al Zarqawi created by the Bush administration as the link between Osama and Iraq and the way this myth ultimately played out.

In order to understand the ideology of the Islamic revolutionary movement of the twentieth century I have struggled to grasp frameworks I am not entirely familiar with as a non-Muslim american. Napoleoni helpfully elucidates nuanced spiritual and political concepts that are thrown around in the insanity of western media with an air of condemnation, yet are never clearly explained. The term "jihad" is as vague and nebulous as "terrorist", if you depend on Western news outlets. In this context her research is quite relevant:

> *Jihad: This term has often been translated as "Holy War," a concept coined in Europe in the eleventh century which refers to the Crusades and which has no equivalent in Islam. Jihad derives from the Arabic root of "striving"; therefore, a better translation would be "striving in the cause of God." There are two aspects of jihad: the greater jihad, fighting to overcome carnal desires and evil inclinations; and the lesser jihad, the armed defense if Islam against aggressors. The term has been used by different armed groups in their violent confrontations with the West; famously, Osama bin Laden called for a jihad in his fatwa against Americans, using the term as a "just war" against the oppressor.*

The debate over the true meaning of lesser jihad has, since the late 1950s, revolved around three major concepts: counter-Crusade, anti-colonial struggle, and revolution. Napoleoni asks these questions:

> *Is the insurgency in Iraq a national resistance against a foreign occupying power or a revolution led by a small and violent vanguard of foreign Arab forces, masterminded by Abu Mos'ab al Zarqawi? Is it a counter-Crusade, a national liberation movement, or a civil war? Above all, are the motivations of the modern jihad a manifestation of a global anti-imperialist ideology, of al Qaedism in the West as well as the East?*

These queries prove the necessity for a deeper understanding of the multifaceted thing that the insurgency in Iraq is.

Napoleoni asserts that the roots of "terrorism" are economic, and not political or even religious. Napoleoni is capable of tracing the cash flow from Saudi Arabia to Iraqi insurgents, but she fails significantly at addressing class in a broad context and its influence on the conflict in Iraq.

Napoleoni follows al Zarqawi through his religious and political developments and describes his journey to Afghanistan to become a Mujahed. Al Zarqawi was eager to escape the mundane frustrations of poverty and prison in Jordan, fleeing to distant mountains of Afghanistan where he could gain respect through defending fellow Muslims against the Soviet Union. He did not get a chance to prove himself on the battlefield, arriving in Afghanistan at the end of the conflict.

While in Afghanistan, Al Zarqawi's politics continued to evolve. He moved from Khost to the city of Peshawar, located in Pakistan near the Afghan border, it was an incredibly stimulating environment for al Zarqawi with its intersections of young and old warriors, and layers of ideological undercurrents. Few where aware that it had been for some time the center of a fierce ideological war for the control of al Qaeda. Al Zarqawi was not involved in this debate, but a man who later appears in al Zarqawi's life was: an inspired young Saudi named Osama bin Laden.

Napoleoni skillfully details the relationship between al Zarqawi and Osama bin Laden over the preceding years. Her story of al Zarqawi diverges

radically from that of the US government. For anyone interested in an articulate deconstruction of this campaign of misinformation, *Insurgent Iraq* is your read.

The US was able to present al Zarqawi to the world as the link between Saddam Hussein and al Qaeda as justification to invade Iraq and create a regime change, a goal that had been unsuccessfully sought for more than a decade. At the time of the allegations, al Zarqawi was not involved with al Qaeda, and was not in Iraq. The irony is that this mythic fame lent him a certain legitimacy in the degenerated, post-(official)-war Iraq. Ultimately, he gained recognition from Osama bin Laden as the head of al Qaeda in Iraq.

The US continues to focus attention on al Zarqawi, who is now represented as the leadership of all Iraqi resistance. This serves to paint the resistance in a very specific light: "For the average American, the Iraqi resistance is not represented by citizens rebelling against the yoke of occupation, but by al Zarqawi, an evil man, and his bunch of religious fanatics," concludes Napoleoni. Iraqis know that the al Zarqawi myth was created as a tool for the US military and continues to be used as such. Lorretta Napoleoni's *Insurgent Iraqi* is a useful starting point for dispelling the myths of the US propaganda machine and moving towards a deeper understanding of the actual forces at work in Iraq today.

Violence, Anarchy, and Alexander Berkman

John William Ward

Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist:
Studies in the Libertarian and Utopian Tradition
by Alexander Berkman
Frontier Press

Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist:
Studies in the Libertarian and Utopian Tradition
by Alexander Berkman
Schocken

On July 23, 1892, Alexander Berkman, an immigrant Russian Jew, idealist, and anarchist, forced his way into the Pittsburgh office of Henry Clay Frick in order to kill him. The assassination was, in the anarchist tradition, to be an *attentat*, a political deed of violence to awaken the consciousness of the people against their oppressors. Frick, manager of the Carnegie steel works while Andrew Carnegie was on vacation in Scotland, had crushed the Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers in the infamous Homestead strike, which ended in a fatal battle between Pinkertons and strikers. Berkman was there to continue the struggle between the workers and their capitalist oppressors. He failed. He failed to kill Frick. He failed to arouse the workers. The outcome, instead, was a book, a classic in the literature of autobiography, *Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist*.

Prison Memoirs is one of those great works which somehow get lost and wait for time to find again. First published in 1912 by Emma Goldman's Mother Earth Press, the book has had an underground reputation, but not many people know it. Why it may now find an audience is obvious enough. From *Newsweek* to I. F. Stone's newsletter, one finds references to Narodniks and Nihilists and Anarchists in editorials on the arson and bombing and terrorism which afflict our daily lives. Inevitably, we have the customary American reflex, a plenitude of panels and commissions.

Violence is nothing new to American culture but, as Hugh Davis Graham has said, there has been a curious historical amnesia about the subject. The historical volume of the National Commission on Violence, of which Professor Graham was one of the editors, is the first major attempt to redress the balance and provoke our collective memory. At such a moment, one may guess that Berkman will find readers. He should. *Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist* allows us to experience violence from the inside, to identify with a man who idealistically accepts terrorism as a political instrument.

But more important, in his exploration of the human ambiguity and political complexity of the violence to which he commits himself, Berkman forces a question on us. Does the terrible violence which has characterized American culture throughout its history, along with our inability to understand it, derive from our best and noblest ideals about the meaning and the promise of American life? Is violence, rather than some mad aberration, an intrinsic and understandable part of America?

I

Berkman's style is that of the naïve, direct, simple, and seemingly artless. He writes in the first person, in a continuing present tense, generally in simple declarative sentences, perhaps because he writes in English and not in his native language. He apostrophizes often in an embarrassing way. Some of the set pieces in *Prison Memoirs* seem to come straight from a sentimental novel. But the sometimes mawkish manner cannot conceal a remarkable self-scrutiny and a sure juxtaposition of scene and image which express a supple imagination and a penetrating psychology.

On the first page, Berkman plunges directly into the news of Homestead, the bloody battle between the workers and th Pinkertons, the crushing of the Amalgamated Association, the single largest and most powerful union of the time, and starts o his train trip to Pittsburgh to assassinate Henry Clay Frick. The journey starts him also on the trail of his own memories, back to his student days in Russia, to his own youthful rebellion and groping attempts to understand, to his violent estrangement from his mother and her death in his arms before they are reconciled before he can tell her that he is full of compassion and love for her. As he bows his head over his dead mother, the doctor puts his hand on his shoulder; at that instant, a coarse and swarthy laborer in the seat behind in the train reaches forward to speak to him, and we are back with Berkman on his fateful trip.

A collage of news, visual impressions, youthful memories, and idealistic aspirations overlay and run one into another. The effect, however, is single: to define the abyss between Berkman's ideal hopes for mankind and the grim reality of man's condition. He came to America, hounded from Russia as a "wolf," he says, because "there, beyond the ocean, was the land of noble achievement, a glorious free country, where men walked erect in the full stature of manhood — the very realization of my youthful dreams." Like many native American writers, he renders the contrast between the dream and the reality through images of the landscape. Against the infernal present of Homestead with its stink and soot and cinders, Berkman places a vision of arcadian bliss, sunshine, "green woods and yellow fields."

This is not to say that Alexander Berkman, Russian Jew, immigrant and anarchist, had somehow attached himself to a native American pastoral tradition. Quite the contrary. As Paul Avrich, in his fine book *The Russian Anarchists*, has pointed out, the anarchist tradition in Russia stretches back to the seventeenth-century peasant revolts of Stenka Razin (whom Berkman explicitly invokes), and the myth of a world of free, uncoerced mutuality derives from the dream of a lost Golden Age located in the "primitive bliss of Medieval Russia, when, supposedly, there was 'neither Tsar nor state' but only 'land and liberty.'" One may find the same figurative pattern, with its theme made explicit and programmatic, in Kropotkin's *Fields, Factories and Workshops* (1898). But if Berkman carried his dream of idyllic freedom with him from Russia, the American myth of an Eden of natural harmony where men walked erect in freedom twisted that dream into nightmarish shape.

II

Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist is divided into three unequal parts. The first short section gives us quickly the *attentat*, the attempted political assassination of Henry Clay Frick, the "Caesar" of American capitalism, a tyrant to be killed in order to awaken the oppressed, the glorious and beloved People. The last short section gives us Berkman's return to life, his deep despondency which brings him to the verge of suicide, before he finds "work" to do and achieves his resurrection from the living death of fourteen years in a Pennsylvania state penitentiary. Most of the book deals with the experience of prison. The continuous present tense gives *Prison Memoirs* the air of a continuing diary of Berkman's efforts to survive physically and mentally the brutal and degrading conditions of those long years. But we know, especially from Emma Goldman's account in *Living My Life*, that Berkman wrote his story after prison, looking back over the terrible years.

As bizarre as the circumstances of Berkman's life may be, *Prison Memoirs* belongs to the genre, if one cares to classify it, of the *Bildungsroman*, the story

of the formation of a young man, his coming to maturity. The "I" of the story undergoes change and development; as he writes, Berkman leads us toward his altered conception of himself as he re-creates the experience which led to change. That change involves two major themes in the book: first, a change in Berkman's relation to other human beings, a change in his assumptions about human nature; second, a change in his understanding of the political meaning of the deed of violence.

At the outset, Berkman draws the conventional anarchist distinction between murder and political assassination

> *Human life is, indeed, sacred and inviolate. But the killing of a tyrant, of an enemy of the People, is in no way to be considered as the taking of a life.… True, the Cause often calls upon the revolutionist to commit an unpleasant act; but it is the test of the true revolutionist—nay, more, his pride—to sacrifice all merely human feeling at the call of the People's cause.*

Could anything be nobler than to die for a grand, a sublime Cause? Why, the very life of a true revolutionist has no other purpose, no significance whatever, save to sacrifice it on the altar of the beloved People. And what could be higher in life than to be a true revolutionist? It is to be a *man*, a complete MAN. A being who has neither personal interests nor desires above the necessities of the Cause; one who has emancipated himself from being merely human, and has risen above that, even to the height of conviction which excludes all doubt, all regret; in short, one who in the very inmost of his soul feels himself revolutionist first, human afterwards.

In Pittsburgh, Berkman adopts a pseudonym, Rakhmetov, taking the name from the arch-revolutionist in Chernyshevsky's novel, *What Is To Be Done?* But he rejects the need to prepare himself, as did his namesake, to withstand pain. He finds it a "sign of weakness. Does a real revolutionist need to prepare himself, to steel his nerves and harden his body? I feel it almost a personal insult, this suggestion of the revolutionist's mere human clay."

Berkman's celebration of the ideal revolutionary hero glorifies the man who, through commitment to a noble cause, transcends the limitations of being "merely human." Devoted to the cause of humanity, one transcends the human condition, is beyond good and evil, beyond the fear of death and the claims of mortality. The ideal is put to the test when Berkman shoots Frick. Fearful that Frick may be wearing an armored vest, Berkman shoots at Frick's head, hits him but fails to kill. Struggling free of the grasp of another man in Frick's office, he fires and hits the wounded Frick again. He is overpowered for a moment, but shakes himself free; his pistol misfires, and he crawls toward Frick and stabs him with a homemade dagger in the leg and thigh. Finally, clubbed with a hammer by a carpenter, Berkman is overcome:

> *An officer pulls my head back by the hair, and my eyes meet Frick's. He stands in front of me, supported by several men. His face is ashen gray; the black beard is streaked with red, and blood is oozing from his neck. For an instant a strange feeling, as of shame, comes over me; but the next moment I am filled with anger at the sentiment, so unworthy of a revolutionist.*

That fleeting moment when Berkman sees Frick's bloodied face before him and hesitates, almost surrenders to the feeling of shame, that fleeting moment is intensely important because it illuminates the special kind of violence possible only to man, the human animal. The object of attack, in this instance, Frick, is deprived of his individuality and his humanity because Berkman has turned him into an object, a symbol of the repressive forces of capitalism. It is not Frick, the man, but Frick, the symbol, there before Berkman. Berkman must do the same to himself. He must deny his own humanity, his own feeling, and turn himself into an instrument of a cause, a symbol of a revolutionary ideology.

Berkman carries the same attitude with him into prison. His sentimental glorification of the People and Humanity (always in upper case) provides no room in his affections for ordinary, flawed human beings. He shrinks from familiarity with other prisoners. "They are not of *my* world," he writes, sealed off from them by his idealized conception of himself as more than human. "I would aid them," he says, "as in duty bound to the victims of social injustice. But I cannot be friends with them…. By virtue of my principles, rather than their deserts, I must give them my intellectual sympathy; they touch no chord in my heart." The chaplain who is kind to Berkman is still just a "cog" in the prison machinery. He feels disdain for the petty pickpockets, the "dips," and revulsion for the entertaining homosexual who thinks Berkman might become his "kid."

Gradually, though, Berkman comes to realize that humanity in no grand abstraction. It is made up of pitiful, stunted, hurt human beings. The organized violence of the prison, the sadism of the

guards, the self-degradation of compulsive masturbation and forced buggery, the horrors of the creeping insanity of "crank row, the economic and human corruption of unchecked power, all thes make the prison a microcosm of the wretched civilization Berkman wishes to destroy; but they also make him realize that to d violence to a human being means simply that, to do violence to human being. Berkman comes finally to recognize what he calls hi "coldly impersonal" way. Of an aged, but still flippant, burglar, he thinks

> *With the severe intellectuality of revolutionary tradition, I thought of him and his kind as inevitable fungus growths, the rotten fruit of a decaying society. Unfortunate derelicts, indeed, yet parasites, almost devoid of humanity. But the threads of comradeship have slowly been woven by common misery…. Not entirely in vain are the years of suffering that have wakened my kinship with the humanity of* les misérables.

Again, when he hears of the assassination of the King of Italy by the anarchist, Bresci, Berkman approves, thinks Bresci did well, but then goes on: "Yet, I feel that the individual, in certain cases, is of more direct and immediate consequence than humanity. What is [humanity] but the aggregate of individual existences — and shall these, the best of them, forever be sacrificed for the metaphysical collectivity?"

The climax of Berkman's emotional and intellectual journey comes when he receives the news in prison of the assassination of President McKinley by Leon Czolgosz. When first taken by the police, Czolgosz said he was an anarchist. Although he later repudiated the statement, the hunt was on for all known anarchists, and Czolgosz's slender acquaintance with Emma Goldman led to her quick arrest in Chicago. While McKinley was dying, Emma said to a reporter that, although she was sympathetic to Czolgosz, she would gladly, as a nurse, care for McKinley. Berkman wrote Emma (the "girl" in *Prison Memoirs*) a clandestine letter:

> *You were splendid, dear; and I was especially moved by your remark that you would faithfully nurse the wounded man, if he required your services…. That remark discovered to me the great change wrought in us by the ripening years. Yes, in us, in both, for my heart echoed your beautiful sentiment. How impossible such a thought would have been to us in the days of a decade ago! We should have considered it treason to the spirit of revolution; it would have outraged all our traditions even to admit the humanity of an official representative of capitalism.*

And Berkman draws the conclusion: "the stupendous task of human regeneration will be accomplished only by the purified vision of hearts that grow not cold."

Berkman never ceased to be an anarchist. As in Brund Bettelheim's account in *The Informed Heart* of how one stays alive under conditions of total power and nearly total degradation, Berkman survives because the prison is always more than a prison to him. It is a testing ground for his theory. The remarkable thing is that he learns what it means to be human, that to love humanity means to love the least of men. As he moves from a cold and abstract idealism to a warm and sympathetic identification, even to an unembarrassed and untroubled acceptance of the reality of homosexual love, Berkman discovers what it means to be a man.

Closely related to the change in Berkman's attitude toward human nature is the change in his understanding of the political complexity of the violent deed. The second theme as well as the first finds its formal conclusion in the same long letter to Emma Goldman. After the fine phrase, "human regeneration will be accomplished only by the purified vision of hearts that grow not cold," Berkman goes on: "I share your view entirely; for that very reason, it is the more distressing to disagree with you in one very important particular: the value of Leon's act." Berkman then draws a distinction between an individual act and a social act, between the impulse of a tortured and demented individual like Czolgosz and the probable social effect.

"To prove of value," Berkman argues, acts of violence "must be motivated by social rather than individual necessity, and be directed against a real and immediate enemy of the people." He rejects the educational effect of the assassination of President McKinley because, he says, "the social necessity for its performance was not manifest." And he pursues the point: "That you may not misunderstand, I repeat: as an expression of personal revolt it was inevitable, and in itself an indictment of existing conditions. But the background of social necessity was lacking, and therefore the value of the act was to a great extent nullified."

Why Berkman thought the "background of social necessity wa lacking" is crucial, but, first, it is necessary to point out the drastic qualification Berkman has made to the rationale for the anarchist deed of

violence. We can measure how drastic by Emma Goldman's response. After the first emotional shock, Emma thought, "Why Sasha [Berkman] is using the same argument against Leon [Czolgosz] that Johann Most had urged against Sasha Most had proclaimed the futility of individual acts of violence in a country devoid of proletarian consciousness and he had pointed out that the American worker did not understand the motives of such deeds.

Emma's recollection here deals with one of the more colorful moments in the sectarian history of anarchism. When Emma and Berkman first met, Johann Most was the acknowledged leader and inspiration of the tiny foreign anarchist movement in the United States. For a while, both Most and Berkman were Emma's lovers, which complicated matters beyond potential theoretical differences. When Berkman tried to assassinate Frick, Most repudiated the deed for precisely the reason that Emma names here: the American worker was not sufficiently advanced to understand the meaning of the deed. When Most spoke in New York City, and Emma heard he might repeat his attack on Berkman, she went to the meeting with a long bull-whip wrapped around her body beneath her coat, and when Most began his attack on her beloved Sasha, Emma leaped to the stage and whipped him out of the hall.

Now Emma found Berkman in the same position Most had taken ten years before. Berkman has introduced an element of pragmatic political calculation into his assessment of the wisdom of violence. In his idealistic youth, Berkman dreamed that to assassinate Frick would awaken the consciousness of the working class, would startle the worker out of his lethargic and repressed condition, and identify for him his enemy. The deed of violence would create the revolution.

But Johann Most was right. When Berkman went to prison, he discovered that no one could understand why he had tried to kill Frick, not even the Homestead workers there in prison themselves. Other prisoners thought there must have been some personal quarrel between Berkman and Frick, or some "business misunderstanding." Or they thought Berkman was simply crazy. Not only those in prison. The union in Homestead immediately dissociated itself from Berkman's act, and sent condolences to Frick with the message that they prayed for his speedy recovery.

But Berkman, in his letter to Emma, did not simply resign himself to misunderstanding. He understood with remarkable precision why conditions in America made all the difference.

In Russia, where political oppression is popularly felt, such a deed would be of great value. But the scheme of political subjection is more subtle in America. And though McKinley was the chief representative of our modern slavery, he could not be considered in the light of a direct and immediate enemy of the people; while in an absolutism, the autocrat is visible and tangible. The real despotism of republican institutions is far deeper, more insidious, because it rests on the popular delusion of self-government and independence. That is the subtle source of democratic tryanny, and, as such, it cannot be reached with a bullet.

By comparing Russia and the United States Berkman does not, of course, say that there is no oppression in the United States and that there is no need for conflict, but that the real repression in American society, what Berkman names "despotism," derives from the generally shared belief that one *is* independent, one *is* self-governing. Berkman points, in other words, to the ideology which is immune to revolution and violent action, which cannot be "reached with a bullet." He goes on to make a distinction between political and economic repression in order to insist upon the worth of his own deed of violence, perhaps because of the need to believe that his years in jail were not in vain, but then comes back to the act of political assassination: do these "rockets of iron," he asks, does this "lightning really illumine the social horizon, or merely confuse minds with the succeeding darkness?"

Along with his awareness that the revolutionist's dream may only sacrifice people to the myth of the "People," the collectivity which has no room for actual, concrete, living individuals, Berkman came to realize that violence, the decision to kill, finds no sanction in some transcendent ideal, but is finally to be justified only in relation to historical necessity which, in turn, demands political calculation and a pragmatic estimate of the consequences.

III

At this point, an unwary reader may breathe a sigh of relief, glad that Berkman has come to recognize the inhumanity of his revolutionary ideal and the political inconsequence of direct violence, especially in the United States. But that is a false moral and a sentimental conclusion to draw from *Prison Memoirs*. Berkman is not saying that violence has no place in American life. He is saying that violence cannot be understood by Americans because of the ideology which holds captive even those who

are the oppressed. The American creed of an open, egalitarian society means that there can be no violent protest against the conditions of American society because there can be no real cause for it. The act of violence cannot be understood. It must be the act of a deranged and mad individual. It escapes historical understanding.

To say that because of our ideals violence should not happen here is not to say that it does not happen here. Statistically, both in individual and collective acts of violence, the United States far surpasses any other Western society. In the straightforward language of the final report of the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence, "The United States is the clear leader among modern stable democratic nations in its rates of homicide, assault, rape, robbery, and it is at least among the highest in the incidence of group violence and assassination." In that context, the use of the word "stable" may seem rather heavy-handed irony, but it points to a curious aspect of the phenomenon of violence in America: the violence which has marked our history has rarely been directed against the state. Our political institutions have been little affected by it. Which is what Berkman pointed out: violence has had no political meaning in American consciousness. Berkman hints at why this is so: Americans believe deeply that they enjoy self-government and personal independence.

When Americans insist that American society is free, the generally mean that American society is a society in which each individual, irrespective of extrinsic associations of family — neighborhood, class, race, or ethnic origin, is free to make o himself what he can. More is involved than classical liberalism of laissez-faire capitalism. As Emerson put it, "Government will be adamantine without any governor." That was the millennial promise of America, a benign anarchism in which each individual was to be the bearer of his own destiny and society no more than collection of individual wills. It was that very dream which drew Berkman to America: "There, beyond the ocean, was the land o noble achievement, a glorious free country, where men walked erect in the full stature of manhood.

A society which believes that it is the result of the actions of free and equal and self-reliant individuals has, logically, no reason to suppose that the state and the institutions of society are important. To the degree one believes that America is a uniquely free society, that each person is unencumbered by forces beyond the determination of his own personality, to the degree such an ideal has power over one's mind and imagination, there is no way to understand violence except as irrational and aberrant. Our difficulty in understanding violence in America is, in part at least, a consequence of our insistence that ours is a society of equality and opportunity and individual freedom. To ask questions about the reality of violence would force us to ask questions about the reality of our ideals.

Furthermore, our ideology, to the degree it is believed in and acted upon, leads to intense frustration which easily spills over into violent behavior when the social situation, the daily, lived experience of actual people, blocks and prevents them from acting out what they are told is ideally possible. After the ghetto riots in Watts and Newark and Detroit, a study was made of those who could be identified as participants. In the Detroit study, blacks who were actors in the riot, that is, those who were apprehended in overt acts from breaking a window to sniping, were asked whether they believed that if one had sufficient will and desire he could make of himself what he wanted in American society. A majority of those ghetto blacks said yes. There is a fact. What is one to make of it?

Not too much, perhaps, without knowing more. Was it a white man or a black man who asked the question? The blacks who answered were in the hands of the police and might well have wanted to assure everyone of their benign disposition toward American society. But to accept the fact on its face, one conclusion is that the most aggressive blacks were precisely those who believed they were free to seize the advantages of American life and, when blocked from doing so, reacted with rage and violence. One sociologist put it, as sociologists like to put it, that violence varies inversely with the presence of avenues to status and power, and avenues of legitimate modes of protest.

At yet a lower level, as Herman Melville put it, our ideals and values are even more deeply involved in the high incidence of violence in America. The traditional American emphasis on individualism and self-determination entails a weakening of institutional forms of restraint with the consequence of a relatively high statistical incidence of aberrant behavior. To put it paradoxically, a liberal, free society must be a repressive society: Freedom from external restraint means that the individual must internalize the values of the culture, and restrain himself. He must be, as we say, self-governing; he

must repress his antisocial impulses in order to remain free.

A society such as ours, which increasingly rejects the sanctions of tradition, the family, the church, and the power of the state necessarily must create the kind of personality who is self-governing, self-restraining, self-repressive. The founding fathers following the Roman model, defined the essential quality as virtue. Emerson called it character; the Protestant evangelical tradition named it benevolence. The tradition is a long one, and we may respond warmly to some of its phrases, but we should not in ou self-congratulation ignore the enormous psychic burden such an ideal places upon the individual. Until we reach the millennium of American democratic hopes, we must accept the probabl instability of our society, especially when it denies the opportunity and self-respect which its ideology constantly celebrates.

Most interestingly, the rejection of violence as somehow un-American blinds us to the forms of violence, both official and private, which have in fact dominated American history. Consider the occasion of Berkman's deed: the Carnegie Steel Company imported a private army of 300 Pinkertons, the *condottiere* of industrial warfare in the late nineteenth century. The company held back its ultimatum to labor until it completed an order for steel plate for the United States Navy, whose power was needed to shield American commercial expansion. A lynch mob, after Berkman's assassination attempt, pillaged and destroyed a utopian anarchist community outside Pittsburgh. Finally, the state militia, welcomed by the Homestead workers who believed that the state was a neutral umpire, broke the strike and escorted scabs back to work. Such particulars support an important generalization: violence has been used again and again to support the structure of authority in American society. We are only puzzled when violence is used to attack that structure.

Our ideals are involved even here. The insistence that all men are free and equal leads to the curious consequence of a mass conformity and a mood of intolerance for dissent in any form. Tocqueville provided the classic statement, which still holds, that the energetic individualism and the tyranny of the majority in America both derived from the ideal of equality. The necessary obverse of the belief that "I'm as good as you are" is acceptance of the fact that "You are as good as I am." The basis of one's own self-trust and self-sufficiency must be extended to all the equal other in society. So, if one is in a minority, one has no claim against tyrannous majority. The very ideal of the equal worth of ever man, which promises a world of manly, independent, and free men, perversely leads to the mind and mood of the mass man who is intolerant of any deviation from what he thinks. That majority may be silent, but it has throughout American history been ready always to wreak its own repressive violence on the rash individual who dares to challenge it or call into question the ideology which creates and sustains it.

The fault, as Berkman would have it, lies in American consciousness: "that is the subtle source of democratic tyranny, and, as such, it cannot be reached with a bullet." If that is so, the keepers of that consciousness, American intellectuals, have dismally failed in their responsibility to American society. One of the functions of the intellectual is to raise to consciousness the ambiguities inherent in the professed ideals of society, and to make clear the meaning of the social forces implicit in the actions of society which contradict those ideals. We have failed to see that the ugly violence of our society is not an aberration of an otherwise sound and healthy society, but the unintended and unforeseen consequence of our most cherished ideals. We must act on our ideals, or change our minds.

"The struggle," to use Barrington Moore's words, "concerns contemporary capitalist democracy's capacity to live up to its noble professions, something no society has ever done.... As one peers ever deeper to resolve the ambiguities of history, the seeker eventually finds them in himself and his fellow men as well as in the supposedly dead facts of history. We are inevitably in the midst of the ebb and flow of those events and play a part, no matter how small and insignificant as individuals, in what the past will come to mean for the future."

There is, in the alien experience of Alexander Berkman, as in all great books, much to discover about ourselves. We affect history in the attempt to understand it. In this sense, simply to read is inevitably a political act. As we attempt to understand the meaning of violence in the American experience, Berkman is not a bad prophet for the condition in which we find ourselves. He may at last have found the moment when we can hear what he is saying.

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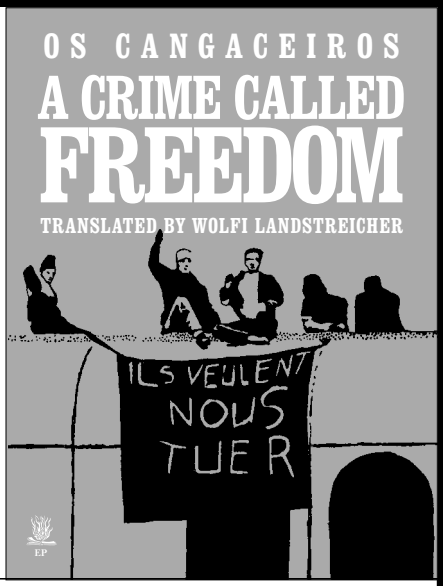

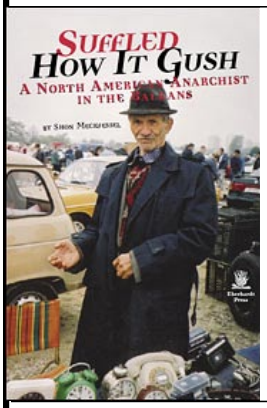

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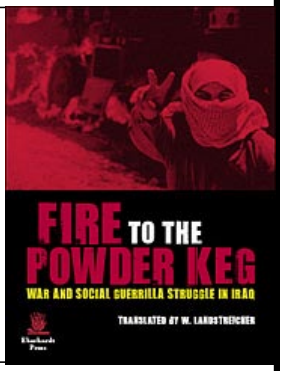

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