

Is Your Little
Hands Just
Shriveling Up?



Peter Lamborn Wilson on Violence and Technology
Excerpts From his book Heresies: Anarchist Memoirs, Anarchist Art

ON VIOLENCE

(for the late Judith Malina & The Living Theatre)

Once you assume that "the Revolution" has been deferred-postponed-rendered invisible by the "End of History" - or in any way become unreal - there still remains (as a residue? or as a genuine alternative?) the possibility of violence of the acte gratuit as violence.

As I've already pointed out, the acte gratuit doesn't necessarily have to be theorized in terms of attentat or "terrorism" (a word now rendered almost meaningless, given the postmodern Terror of the Totality)—a spontaneity of daggers, pistols, bombs - or "dynamite the People's Friend." Propaganda of the deed could instead consist of living one's life in non-compliance with the dictates of False Reality - as a rebel drop-out - perhaps "voluntarily poor" or lovingly devoted to the despised and forgotten, like Dorothy Day or Ivan Illich - or to "poor art" like the Living Theater.

An Individualist who inherited some money might decide to live at a tangent to the Consensus, devoted to pleasure and adventure, or to art for art's sake, or the art of friendship - like J.K. Huysman's fictional character Des Esseintes in *A Rebours* (a book that influenced me in highschool). I used my own small inheritance, enough to be independently poor, to buy time for writing and travelling and anarchist activism, in order to experience both selfish and altruistic pleasures. Should I have refused the money and worked as a wage-slave all my life? I read

a book once - sadly I forget the title and author - by a woman who inherited a small farm somewhere in the South, never married but lived with her old father, never had a job, raised vegetables and animals just for their own food, hunted, did some off-the-books handiwork in order to earn a bit of cash, and lived on \$600 a year (in the 1970s, that is - now the equivalent would be about \$6000). She loved her life and wanted to share the good news with others: you don't have to WORK. (A wonderful book. Perhaps one of my readers will remember it and remind me of the title. - *Possum Living* by Dolly Freed). My comrade Mark Sullivan used to correspond with an old anarchist hermit who lived a similar life. I remember he once wrote about shooting a deer from his front porch and having meat "for the coming winter." And I've known some artists who never compromised with success, remained true bohemians all their lives, and died in poverty and squalor. that's the price you pay for a life of comparative freedom, unless you're very lucky indeed.

Over the years I've met a few professional criminals who were highly intelligent but came from poverty-stricken backgrounds, who had deliberately chosen "to steal rather than be stolen from" and run the risk of prison, considering even this fate superior to that of the immiserated and exploited subaltern. When I served as a CO (conscientious objector) in a hospital in Baltimore in 1966, my Black co-workers explained to me that there are two kinds of work in the world - the gig, which is when you get paid to do what you love, like a jazz musician - and the slave. Our hospital jobs (as "mopologists") qualified as the latter. During two years as a CO I had three such jobs - unskilled labor in hospitals - so (like Simone Weil) I learned what life is like at

this level, and I sympathize utterly with any attempt a human might make to escape such dead space.

Idiots are always asking anarchists, "After your revolution when everyone is free, who'll take the garbage out?" One of my old comrades, Claire Pentecost, got so tired of this question she always answered, "I'll take the garbage out." The real answer of course comes in two parts. First, as Fourier noted, some people like garbage, as in one of M. Tournier's novels, where the hero becomes emperor of a vast and fascinating trash heap. Second, garbage collectors will be richly rewarded, like college professors with tenure, and bankers will not. Parenthetically I'd advise anyone who has some spare cash to consider garbage futures, because the future promises to consist increasingly of a great deal of it. Follow the money - the Mob is already heavily invested in garbage, and the Mob doesn't generally bet on losing propositions.

The question obtrudes: can the revolutionary goals of a movement like OCCUPY ever be realized without revolutionary violence? Isn't this a matter of seizing back the "right" to violence from the State and its Hidden Masters and Illuminati? Will the corporatocracy volunteer to give up its stranglehold on Reality itself and just wither away? Human consciousness will perhaps undergo a paradigmatic shift to enlightened altruism. Be patient.

But seriously...the logical presumption might be that if violence was justified "then" (say, in the American Revolution), then why is it not justified now?

My anarcho-pacifist comrades like Judith Malina, or anarcho-Buddhists or anarcho-Christians, have excellent arguments against this deadly logic, arguments I respect. Moreover, violence seems such a bad tactic in a situation where total surveillance and enforcement power rests solely in the hands of the One Percent and their lackeys. And anyway, isn't it too late, even for aesthetic revenge?

Some anarchists accept violence against property as valid but not against animals, including humans. If I were to make a principled argument for tactical violence however it would not be against property per se but against technopathocracy; it would be machine-smashing, the path of the historical Luddites. I'd support this in theory, as a poet, the way Byron and Shelley supported the loom-smashing radicals of their era. I find it interesting that the mechanical loom, their chief target (using their famous the computer. I consider Stewart Brand to be a hippy class traitor for inserting the Enoch-brand sledge hammers) is now considered to have been the ancestral form of Catalogue in 1968. It's no wonder that today he defends Capitalism and nuclear virus of the idea of the personal computer into the pages of his seductive Whole Earth power, like the stooge of reaction he's always been. The computer represents a trajectory that began with Blake's Satanic Mills and culminated in infernal combustion and the false mechanical togetherness of the "Social Media."

It's the Machine that stands between us and the Reality we've lost - it mediates everything for everybody. The Situationist critique of TV must now be extended to the entire

commodityscape of cyberspace, the artificial world that has replaced mere physical time/space with the cold alien intellect of an empty universe. I agree with William Gibson that cyberspace is haunted, but I believe the entities are all malignant. The human soul can be stretched too thin to resist these psychic viruses. It's bad to be possessed by the ghost-in-the-machine. How do luddites feel today? Rather like those characters in old SciFi horror flicks who are wearing the special glasses and can see that everyone else is actually a zombie. (Of course that's a hallucination.) (Of course.) So if you want to commit a senseless and meaningless act of violence - (because machine-smashing sabotage never works-and because no one will understand or sympathize with your gesture) - you might as well consider an actual critique of technology - with a hammer, as Nietzsche put it.

I've considered ("conceptualized") a work of performance art in which machines would be smashed. In my youth I saw one of Jean Tinguely's self-destroying machines do its thing in the sculpture garden of MoMA-NY, and I'd like to pay homage to that memory. What about using a shotgun on arrays of PC screens, all programmed to show vile images of dead things in swamps behind scrolling stock market reports? Too crude? Oh well... anyway, it would only really work if the lap-tops were all stolen.

And in any case my feelings and thoughts on this subject are so mixed that I'm incapable of prescribing anything to anybody. Personally I decided for non-violence, but I think my arguments for this stance are unconvincing; they're not deeply ethical like Judith's. But also I'm not really at all avantgarde, like the

Unabomber. Instead of being revengeful I'm probably more resentful, not in control of my emotions, all too controlled in my behavior. My suburban luddism (no car no TV no cellphone no computer) is mere eccentricity, a luxury I can afford. If I had to make a living somehow I'd need all those things and I'd learn how to use them -- but thank goddess I'm decadent middleclass and free to sink into genteel poverty in a gadgetless condition.

One last point: After the End of the World, living in the Ruins, it may become necessary—as we know - to defend oneself from the zombies. That crazy old Satanist, Anton LaVey, used to say one should respect other people's spaces, and if anyone invaded you, you should ask them politely to leave, and if they don't, you should destroy them. Easy for him to say.

Here again I believe magic enters the picture. But that's a subject for a whole chapter of its own.

BLACK REACTION, etc.

In what sense could one be both anarchist and conservative - a "tory anarchist," as George Orwell and John Michell (View Over Atlantis) called themselves, one coming from the left, the other from the right?

Paul Goodman adopted the label Neolithic Conservative for his anarchism, meaning I think to express a certain kind of metaphorical luddism. For instance he called the bicycle the last neolithic invention, although obviously metallurgy is required to manufacture it (unless we think of L. Da Vinci's all - wooden bicycle, as celebrated by Guy Davenport). Goodman's concern was obviously with energy sources, but even so I think he picked a bad example. I'd say the Montgolfier hot air balloon was the last neolithic invention, since it could have been made before metallurgy, using woven silk and wickerwork, wood and perhaps ceramic technology. If a rigorous Neo-primitive position be taken on such matters then the "true" anarchist would be a Paleolithic Reactionary - not just a luddite. I appreciate this position and at times have even claimed it as my own, although I confess I harbor a tendency toward Neolithic revisionism. A bit of horticulture and herding, the discovery of beer, wine and other psychotropics, weaving and pottery - I admit my attachment to such decadent luxuries. Metal, however, drives away the Elemental Spirits (as the Celts say) and was also condemned by 18th century American Indian prophets (especially certain seers amongst the Munsees, our local original people here in the Hudson Valley).

Metal - the "bronze Age" - marks the break between the Neolithic and the Historical Era in Mesopotamia and Egypt: the death of Tiamat the goddess of Chaos (i.e., non-authoritarian society) and the rise of Marduk, god of "Civilization" - that is, separation and hegemony. Metallurgy, agriculture (as opposed to horticulture), money and writing - these are the technologies of oppression, of the State. The Neolithic wasn't "perfect"; we know the problems that arose with domestication - but the State did not emerge during the Neolithic.

A strict Neo-primitivist sees nothing worth saving in Historical Time, and thus cannot really be called a conservative. However, once you begin picking and choosing relatively acceptable technologies or social forms from periods more recent than 6000 years ago, the term might apply even to certain anarchists. For instance, William Morris (and A.K. Coomaraswamy in his youth) appreciated the Medieval era not for its feudalism but its peasant communes, its "commons," its devotion to arts and crafts, its Rabelaisian or Breughel-like sense of holiday, its almost moneyless economy and so on.

This Romantic view of the past was certainly never limited to the Right, many historians now falsely claim. There has always existed a luddite Left. From the very first appearance of hegemonic technology in "Ur of the Chaldees," there has also existed an underground resistance based on "ancient customs of freedom," as E.P. Thompson used to say (Customs in Common). Rebellion against hegemony looks "back" and entertains notions of Reversion long before it turns (in the Enlightenment era) toward ideas of Progress and technological utopia.

Nostalgia is not the same thing as sentimentality because there's a sense in which the Past was better, measurably better, than the spoiled Future we now inhabit, whereas sentimentality relates only to things that never really existed. I maintain for example that the 1960s were more interesting and more amusing than the first bit of the present century, despite all the recent crypto-neo-con revisionism based on the notion that any idea or ideal of the 60s must be delusional and obnoxious. They're just jealous because they missed all the fun.

In 2011 I decided to commemorate a group of Hudson Valley artists of the 1970s who claimed that they were living in 1911. I never had the gumption to follow their heroic path; they wore wing-tip collars, drove horse-&-buggies, and never read any book published after 1911. But I admired and envied them. I've managed to eliminate some obnoxious technology from my house, but I still have a refrigerator not an icebox, and I sometimes read contemporary literature. I confess to an air-conditioner. I don't own a car, although in 1911 I could've had a Detroit Electric, like Granma Duck - and driven it without a license. But now like the Amish I accept rides in other people's vehicles.

As a first step in Reversion to a humane and relatively ecologically benign technology we might well consider 1911 a viable goal. After all, we'd still be allowed a few cars, telephones and telegrams, electric fans and wind-up record players—as well: as public hygiene, which might be called a "benefit of civilization." (Of course, progress in public medicine enabled the population boom which has now reached epidemic proportions.

The other cause of overpopulation, aside from Capitalism itself, is artificial fertilizer, invented by the same scientist responsible for Nazi poison gas.)

In 1911 the glorious dawn of artistic modernism coincided with the golden age of anarchism—and yet it was still the "Edwardian era" of ocean-liners and formal evening wear. To rebel in those days must've felt glorious - while the world was still innocent of the three world wars yet to come, the most heinous 75 years of human history.

In a sense the 1960s represented an attempt at amnesia, a return to the Art Nouveau and Fin-de-Siècle Decadence of the world circa 1880 - 1914. Aubrey Beardsley had more influence on the 1960s than did Abstract Expressionists of the 1950s. Sixties culture was a dialectical response to the Cold War and was based on the Romantic tradition (including Surrealism) - but once that last (?) world war ended in 1989 this dialectic tension was lost or forgotten, and the whole rebel/marginal/alternative scene collapsed into Cyberspace. (We even have Neo-primitivist websites.)

In my view "the Sixties" lasted from about 1956 to 1989, although the spirit went through phases and gradually degenerated, as is usually the case with "movements." Afterwards we have what I call the death of the Historical Movement of the Social and the "End of the World" - the moment when it may well have become too late to "save the environment" or the concept of human conviviality. Think of Rabelais. Now think of "Second Life" on the Internet. Clearly a

certain real world has actually been terminated somewhere between these two moments.

If this be true - that the End of the World is to consist of a J.G. Ballard-style eternal shopping mall of the Same - then obviously there's no use talking about Reversion to 1911 or 1795 (another favorite year of mine) or 5000 BC or 40,000 BC. (I've even toyed with the idea of a Neanderthal Liberation Front, aiming at 100,000 BC.) I suppose my motive for mentioning these ideas is simply to bear witness, the usual futile leftist ploy. That is, I want to go on record here, simply for my own peace of mind, as an ideological Reversionist. I support all tribes who refuse modernity and cling to their traditions, like the S. American jungle people who shoot poison arrows and blowgun darts at helicopters and missionaries. Many anarchists I know do not support Indian traditionalists because they say tribal custom is not pure anarchism — i.e., not progressive 19th century materialist leftism. Well, so what?—It's better than the Republican Party. I'm simply not interested in purism of any sort. I support the hybrid, the ambiguous, the Vague. Do what thou wilt.

Charles Fourier said the same thing: better "barbarianism" than Civilization and its universal repression of pleasure and the life principle itself. Isn't it possible to conceive of a paradoxical anarchism somewhere between Fourier and Nietzsche?

Civilization is something to be "overcome."

Although, as Gandhi said apropos of "British Civilization," "It might have been a good idea" - compared anyway with what has come after Civilization: the totalitarian technopathocracy and

paradise of Universal Debt. I can't help thinking of Osip Mandelstam's definition of civilization as "the light that falls on an old ochre wall in Tuscany in late afternoon," or words to that effect. Surely someone who suffered and was crucified under Stalin is entitled to some nostalgia even for civilization. The definition and composition of the Kali Yuga includes its propensity to generate compensations for its own falling away from primordial "customs of freedom." Paleolithic hunters needed no coffee or tea, apparently (although in the New World they did discover chocolate - and ayahuasca). Ice-cream seems to have been invented by medieval Persian alchemists and brought back to Italy by Marco Polo. Art itself, no doubt, is a compensation for the decay of direct unmediated knowing.

But if this is true, then perhaps the problem begins already in the Paleolithic; as John Zerzan has noted, it may involve language. What's wanted, I suppose, is something like the brilliant imagining of Neanderthal society in William Golding's *The Inheritors* - a proto-version of "No Ideas But In Things," like Terrence McKenna's primordial mushroom trip as the origin of human consciousness in direct (pre-verbal) perception. It sounds somehow very "zen," like "your face before you were born" - but certainly this state of being can be sampled even today by anyone willing to try an entheogen.

Once again this brings up the question of magic - of the "witch" and the "root doctor" as nexuses of resistance to the State's version of Reality. "Reality is for those who can't handle drugs." And we used to say in the 60s, "What's so great about Reality?" In 1911 you could buy a bottle of Tincture of Hemp for 35¢,

which was a lot part considering that a bottle of laudanum cost only 10¢. And both were legal. Is this not a matter for nostalgia? By being declared illegal, these experiences have been made of the Mysteries, including both Hoodoo and Neo-paganism in general - i.e., witchcraft, in a broad sense of the term: what used to be called Satanism, back in the days - when the Church still had some teeth and made a noble opponent for anarchists and libertines and Free Spirits. Yes, one can be nostalgic even for Xtianity, considering how boring and stupid is the "secular humanism" (ideology of free-market democracy) that has succeeded it. Whatever happened to the 1960s "Death of God" theologians?

Thus as a luddite I can't help but take a Tory Anarchist position on certain aspects of the Past - like, say, "unspoilt Nature," or *communitas*. But as an Individualist Anarchist (and phenomenological or ontological existentialist) and Pantheist, I prefer to emphasize the present moment over both Past and Future. *Carpe diem*, or, to paraphrase Omar K. and Hafez, "God told me to tell Man, gather rosebuds while you can." How much of the pleasure of the Past (which "isn't even passed," as Faulkner put it) can one seize and make one's own? Ditto the pleasures of the Future, assuming there are any. As that enigmatic radical/populist Governor of Louisiana Huey P. Long put it, "Every Man a King (title of his charming autobiography) But No One Wears the Crown." Nowadays we'd say "Every person a monarch" - or Anarch. The point is not to live in 1911 - or 2020 - but to live at all.

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As Fourier noted, some people like garbage.

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