

Letters to the Fifth Estate

Various Authors

1982

Multi- vs. Universe

Dear T. Fulano (and the FE)

I read your response to the defenders of technology with great trepidation ["Uncovering a Corpse: A Reply to the Defenders of Technology," FE #307, November 19, 1981]. At every turn I expected you to say: "This is what we need to do: let's dismantle everything and turn the clocks back to 700 A.D. or 500 B.C." I thought you might announce a program that would alienate the people who oppose only parts of technology and oppose it for a variety of reasons; e.g., because they love old, vanishing crafts, because they are Christians, because they are nostalgists, or simply because they are technological incompetents.

But I needn't have been afraid. You affirmed what seems so obvious to me, namely that a critique of technology must not be equipped with a blueprint or program. The very idea of such a thing is a technological idea. The quest for such a blueprint is the quest for a technique for subjecting nature, which is alive and kicking, to our wills guided by dead images of nature. To reject technology is to allow the multiverse we're part of to live out its destiny without the oppression by human beings of themselves and all the other beings on this planet, and to reject the thought that this multiverse must be beaten into a universe we can understand and control.

Michael Losonsky
Rochester, NY

FE Banksist?

Dear FE.

I have had an interesting conversation with a local anarchist group on the Berkeley campus recently. Their literature table contained *Open Road* and *Strike* but no *FE*. When I inquired about this oversight, I was informed that they only displayed certain issues of the *FE*, i.e. those they agreed with. Thus Vol. 15 No. 5 was verboten since they felt that technology is neutral, etc. The *FE* was also charged with being Banksist, i.e. followers of the line laid down by Dennis Banks and thus pushing a utopian society which would only exist after most of society has been eliminated. My, my.

Best wishes,
John Walden
Sacramento, CA

Or Pessimist?

Dear FE,

The reactions of “T. Fulano” to my letter to the Editor [“Uncovering a Corpse: A Reply to the Defenders of Technology,” FE #307, November 19, 1981] elicit two general responses from me.

His characterization of pro- and anti-technology positions as “our critics” and “those who agree with us”, gave me a very disagreeable sensation of a proprietary attitude toward ideas on his part. Making certain ideas one’s private property is an indication of ideology formation.

There just may be individuals who are critical of technology who do not even live in Detroit (!) For example, at the risk of a most uncharacteristic immodesty, I would mention to Fulano that my “Who Killed Ned Ludd?” (early ’76) contained perhaps the first inklings of a critique of industrial technology in FE. As we all know, the dialog belongs to everyone and no one.

Secondly, it is at least consistent that one who would announce that “The human spirit is moribund,” would also proclaim himself (herself?) a certifiable pessimist (n. 1. one who takes the gloomiest view of a situation.) Nonetheless, I find this outlook not only dispiriting but somewhat uninformed. Its “note of despair” is sounded because there isn’t much good news” as the “crisis looms greater every day.”

But in this crisis should we ignore such developments as the unprecedented disrespect for property (growing tax refusal, shoplifting, vandalism, universal employee theft, etc.), the chaos and insubordination in the military, the new refusal of high school, the anti-work/falling productivity “crisis”, the non-voting trend? My own efforts in this direction have usually had FE introductions that are little more than disavowals (see preface to “The Promise of the ‘80s” essay) while the rare staff piece like “Draft Foes Growing” greets the fact of massive non-registration with complete bewilderment. The negative reaction to the general topic in the first place would seem to be the best guarantee that ignorance and surprise is shown in, say, the case of draft refusal.

I do not believe that all contemporary behavior and the apparent shift of values involved represents some purely radical process—endless comments of leftist nitwits notwithstanding—but does a stalwart pessimism allow one to see the real state of society and the movement of opposition within it?

In short, I would-be saddened to see any of the extremely capable Detroiters become ideologues/specialists of technology and exclude an awareness of the gathering disarray colliding with technological civilization.

John Zerzan
Eugene, OR

Fulano and Brubaker respond: Let us take this opportunity to emphasize that we in no way wanted to give anyone the impression that we consider the anti-technological perspective our “ideological property.” The problem of pronouns is a common one in a journalistic project such as this. The use of phrases such as “our critics” and “those who agree with us” was not meant to signify that we own a “position,” only to distinguish those who attacked the FE and who defended technology (though it is clear that there is no more a single pro-technology view than there is a single anti-technological perspective), from those like yourself with whom we share a general critique. We (again the pronouns: we are a small group of friends who generally discuss all of the articles that we publish and share many points of agreement but who are far from having a homogeneous outlook) don’t think we’ve come up with anything new (though much of it is new to us). Many others have said these things in many different ways already—you, writers at Akwesasne Notes, Elul, Marcus Graham, in fact, a whole tradition of poets and rebels back through William Blake and beyond, for example. One can even find a thread of anti-technology in pre-libertarian FE articles. We (not just us two) prefer to keep the dialogue open, see it go through its own transformations, rather than solidifying into a dead, unchanging political position.

Despite your perceptions of Fulano’s pessimism as dispiriting and uninformed, we will have to defend it against what seems to be a desperate optimism on your part (notable in your article, “The Promise of the ‘80s” [FE #302, June 1, 1980]. His pessimism about conditions makes no conclusions about their outcome, though it always admits the possibility of real radical transformation. In spite of your dismissal of your critics as “leftist nitwits,” we think that it takes a tremendous act of faith on your part to

assume that the statistics that you have compiled on increasing alcoholism and drug abuse, acts of gratuitous violence, arson and vandalism, low test scores, work place opposition, etc., signify that a qualitative break with capital is approaching. You show that capitalism is miserable and that resistance—sporadic, isolated, unconscious, even self-destructive—continues to take place against it. Perhaps you could draw “decline of the empire” conclusions from your investigation. But we don’t see how you could conclude from such a barrage of statistics that a qualitative break is necessarily forthcoming. After all, some of the statistics you cite as indicative of a “Promise” of a radical thrust (e.g. workplace sabotage), are contradicted by other statistics (e.g. rising alcoholism and drug abuse, suicide, etc.) which point only to despair and defeat. Yet you never attempt to draw any conclusions from this contrary “evidence,” except to misleadingly imply that this, too, is rebellion, and is joined to more “positive” acts forming an unstoppable wave of radicality. We think this is misleading because while they provide a devastating moral indictment of this society, your statistics cannot be used in a theoretical analysis which would presume to read from “material conditions” a predictive conclusion. The events you cite point to a crisis, perhaps, but they do not indicate what lies beyond it. We must continue to agree with the writer to the introduction to your “Promise” article who expressed “less confidence in the potential results of this decomposition” than you exhibited, stating that ‘unless rebellious behavior is infused with a conscious desire for revolution, all of the rage, ennui, and disaffection so aptly described will be regrouped in an authoritarian manner...

The debate on technology appears in the July 1981 and the Nov. 19, 1981 *Fifth Estate* and are available for 75 cents each.

Or Sexist?

Dear Folks,

Isn't it sexist of the Columbia Anarchist to ask for a female Anarchist? Would you print an ad saying we are looking for white anarchists, or we are looking for black anarchists? Wasn't there even any discussion of this?

Mildly disturbed.

Youth International Party San Francisco, CA

Or Optimist?

Dear FE,

Thoughts: Lately I find myself entertaining the idea that the human race's march toward extinction is fine. That despite our potential, the species has developed into a very nasty rigid civilization. I see no signs of it really changing. And perhaps our impact on the earth and other species is so awful that we'd be better off dead. To be able to transcend or get out of all the horrible shit we've created seems daily more insurmountable. The number of people who are seriously attempting to get to the root of the problem is tiny, just plain infinitesimal when compared to the energy (human and mechanical) contained in the mega-machine. The megamachine shows no signs of slowing down, short of annihilation,

Yet I still hear some of you and others who write, speak of “revolution” and a future. Revolution? What can this mean anymore? This word seems the property of leftists to me. Revolution has been the unending march of progress—representing the political arm of the struggle. The uprising of masses of humans to throw off the old leaders and kill one another for the new ones. Humans have been doing this for quite awhile: Why should it change now, in our twilight? In our beautiful crashing suicide jump we are going to suddenly what—fly? I see no future for humans. Revolution is a word with no hope.

If I just consider consciousness—nothing else. Not nukes or oil spills. Not starvation or totalitarianism. Just the weight of consciousness that must change. I can't imagine all that consciousness shifting fast enough and deep enough to transform our trajectory. The internalized authority is thousands of years old by now. It's in our cells. It

may be because I've never been inside a revolution and felt how fast things change. But as for most revolutionaries, they make my blood run as cold or actually colder, than regular old rigidified passive fellow beings.

Don't misunderstand. I like humans. I feel sad about us. I try anyway despite my deeper feelings. I plug away looking for connections and communications. I keep my eye on potentials and possibilities. I wait, listen and act. I remind myself of you.

I say "well, there is no logic or reason to a way out. If we get out of this shit, it will be by means beyond the little consciousness I have. It will not make sense, reason dictates a steady march to death." So I'll go outside, it's sunny today and I'll mulch the garden.

Best to all.

Citizen G

Citizens for a Non-Linear Future

Seattle, WA .

Dear C.G.: Your sentiments are certainly ones that all of us feel at different times, but why elevate them to the level of prediction or a personal philosophy? Just as possible a future could be contained in these words from a leaflet we recently received from Be Free, P.O. Box 1131, Eugene OR 97440: "The shock of freedom works miracles. Nothing can resist it, neither mental illness, remorse, guilt, the feeling of powerlessness, nor the brutalization created by the environment of power. When a water pipe burst in Pavlov's laboratory, not one of the dogs that survived the flood retained the slightest trace of his long conditioning. Could the tidal wave of great social upheavals have less effect on individuals than a burst water pipe on dogs?"

Or Psychic?

Dear People,

Once again, I am impressed with the consistency of thought in your periodical.

I could qualify the "thought", as considered and stripped of "radical" cant. How, in ——'s name did you quote Walesa from 12-8-81 *Newsweek* in your Nov. 19, 1981 issue, though? ["Poland at the Crossroad," FE #307, November 19, 1981].

Mike Cluff

Berkeley, CA

FE Reply: Thanks for your nice words and your keen eye. Actually, it was a typographical error which caused the confusion; the quote was uttered by Walesa in 1980.

On Poland

To the Fifth Estate:

Firstly, let me agree with the overall view that you have of the events in Poland ["Poland at the Crossroad," FE #307, November 19, 1981]—I have no illusions about the drift there and I'm hardly kind to the "outside" forces pushing events there—that is, to be specific the Pope, the W. German banks and the Comecon network and the "inside" forces, the food shortages (which you fail to mention), the Catholic intellectuals—both nationalist and KOR, and the ministerial mismanagement on all levels.

Having said that let me take vocal exception to your perspective—it almost duplicates the perspective of power that you otherwise criticize in the Sparts, but in fact seems nothing more than the rebound point of view of the spectacle—in other words, for those of us who don't watch TV news your comments are irrelevant.

For example, you touch upon the "grassroots" organizing going on throughout Poland, but then take the view that the Polish workers are being duped by Walesa and his coterie of intellectuals—completely ignoring the strictures placed on him for example by the Solidarity National Commission (this was reported on NPR at least) when

he conferred in Warsaw in October and more importantly, the slap on the wrist he got at the Congress as well as the resignations from the Commission.

To refer to Walesa as the Reuther of Poland exhibits your ignorance of the Polish workers and their combativity. A combativity which, we must note, has several sides to it—there is a popular (and maybe increasingly popular) nationalist element that does want to extend the revolution throughout Eastern Europe by simply expelling the party and the Soviet troops (and re-establishing the Church to some faint former glory).

Let me stop rambling and try to be concise here—when reviewing events like the Polish one what is the critical perspective? Of course one element is the critique of co-determination in management, but in Poland this critique takes shape and because it does it must be given voice. Another element that must be noted is the effect of the changes so far on the populace—which again is completely absent in your political overview—it is these subjective elements that speak to the response people have toward power—and knowing how the people of Poland have changed their attitudes, damn it, their behavior on every level, in every area would give you a little more optimism regarding the “pawns” in the tripartite power play. You seem to forget that a real revolution in daily life has occurred in Poland.

BM

San Francisco

E. B. Maple replies: Naturally, the content of this debate has been altered dramatically by the imposition of martial law in Poland (see our article elsewhere in this issue), but still let me comment on several criticisms you raise.

I know writers always say this in response to critics, but I almost feel like you didn't read our article thoroughly. We emphasized strongly that “an autonomous workers' movement still exists in Poland, and is active everywhere.” And this point was repeated several times elsewhere in the article. We tried to illustrate that there was a distinction between the official union organization which was involved in trying to put a brake on independent activity outside of its control and the militant actions of the workers themselves.

We obviously also believe that it is (or was) the unconfined, undisciplined activity of the workers which held the real potential in Poland, but it is foolish to underestimate the role of Walesa and the union structure's ability to thwart it. The Reuther analogy was not used as a glib insult, but rather to provide a short phrase which attempted to sum up another situation where militant workers who had similarly altered their relationship to conventional authority found themselves shackled to a new set of chains.

If Walesa didn't become the Reuther of Poland (and don't count him out yet!), it certainly wasn't through a lack of trying. However, the article never asserted that the workers were pawns,” only that there were forces trying to employ them as such.

George Jackson's Life

Dear. F. E. Folks:

We recently read a book published in 1976 entitled *Who Killed George Jackson?* by Jo Durden Smith, Alfred Knopf, which we would recommend to anyone interested either in Jackson specifically or more generally to the issues we tried to raise (See FE #307, Nov. 19, 1981, “A Challenge to the Prison Movement”). It was written by an English radical journalist who arrived in the States the day after Jackson died. When he heard the news, it seemed to him as though it was a clear-cut case of the state mowing down a heroic symbol of the revolutionary struggle. The task he set for himself was to prove how they did it.

The author went out, therefore, to build his case. He interviewed in proper, “objective journalist” style, virtually everyone having anything to do with the Jackson case. He talked to most of the top Panther leadership; Jackson's prison comrades; lawyers and legal workers on his case; prison movement white radicals; cops; snitches, including

the infamous Louis Tackwood; guards; in short, everyone who had anything to tell about the politics and the events of George Jackson's life.

But the more he found out, the more his own assumptions crumpled, the more elusive the "truth" became. Eventually, he left the Bay Area in terror after several of his left sources informed him that the Panthers had a contract out on his life. And in the end, he raises in much more detailed and eloquent form, many of the doubts we tried to express in our article, with far better documentation than we had available. And like us, he never in the course of his investigation renounced his belief that prisons are a worthless and evil institution.

Anyway, I recommend that you all read it, in the hope that perhaps it will in some way mitigate the judgments you have made against us. But you should also know that this thoroughly responsible, comradely piece of work is without question the real source for the charges made in the *New West* article, contrary to your uninformed "vicious smear campaign" against us and the authors of the *New West* story. So I would appreciate it if you would let readers know about this book, so they can make up their own minds.

Authors of the Prison Article

The FE replies: We are certainly glad to pass on the information about the book you mentioned, but it was at no time mentioned as source material for your article prior to this letter. All of us still feel the *New West* article is a scurrilous and cynical piece filled with police versions of events and unworthy of citing as a source for serious consideration, regarding the question of prisons and inmates.

Another reason we edited out your charges against Jackson and Carl Harp is that they seemed to be diversionary from the larger point under examination and that is exactly what has happened—the responses we have seen to your piece seem to increasingly center on a defense of Harp rather than treating the entire subject. Your letter seems to fit that as well—was Jackson an admirable character or not? What if he was; what if he wasn't? How does that deal with the current libertarian prison support groups and the prisoners they and we relate to? Actually, we don't think it does.

Also, one other point should be stressed: whatever the character and activity of Jackson and Harp, neither was killed (or driven to suicide, as some prefer in the latter case) by the prison guards because they perceived him as a pimp and prison gangster in the case of Jackson, or an unrepentant rapist and sniper in the case of Harp, but rather because both were viewed as revolutionaries and troublemakers by the authorities. An unresolvable debate centering on two men dead at the hands of the state seems at best pointless and at worst forestalling discussion on the relationship of those of us on the outside to those on the inside.

Origin of a Sign

Dear Folks,

Can anyone remember the origin of the Circle A symbol?

I remember suggesting it in a letter to Stuart Christie in 1974. I thought it was an original idea; but can't be sure it didn't exist earlier. I felt uncomfortable with a black flag, as all flags represent states or government, and recommended using an A with a circle around it.

Does anyone remember seeing the symbol previous to 1974? Does anyone remember the first usage of it in the anarchist press?

Love & Anarchy,

Billy Mick

San Francisco, CA

Open Road Broke

Dear Friends,

Open Road is on the verge of bankruptcy. We are running out of money to keep up our monthly loan payments. *Open Road* No. 13 is ready for publication, but we don't have the funds to publish it. Not only are we in danger of losing our 2nd class mailing permit, but postal rates in Canada are going up 20 to 50% this spring.

We need financial help desperately.

We are well aware that other anarchist groups are facing similar difficulties. We believe that anarchist publications such as *Open Road* are needed now more than ever. We hope you can help us keep *Open Road* on the road. Please spread the word that we need help. We'd appreciate any help that you can give.

Love & anarchy,

Open Road

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