

# Das Netz: Blotters, Bombers, and Cybernetic Trauma

Edmund Berger

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# (In)Stability

*Das Netz* is a German documentary directed by Lutz Dammbeck, a strange mosaic of the collision of covert history, scientific development, and popular culture. Ostensibly it's about the case of the Ted Kaczynski, the brilliant mathematician-turned-“Unabomber” who between the years of 1978 and 1995 engaged in a bombing campaign against industrial civilization. Holed up in remote cabin in the woods near Lincoln, Montana he fashioned weapons that he then mailed to his victims, many culled from the ranks of the “Digerati” – the top-elites of the then-emergent fields of computing and information technology development. While many would be satisfied creating a linear narrative, a documentary snaking through Kaczynski's life as a mathematical prodigy who lost his mind, Dammbeck choses instead to ask the question of why? Not satisfied with the charge of insanity, the filmmaker strikes out to navigate a twisty terrain in search of causation, something that would explain why an individual who was expected to become one of the leading mathematicians of our time would flee civilization to wage a protracted war against technology – the very force that trajectory of his mathematical fields was propelling forward. In the end, this question becomes a guiding compass in the loosest sense of the word, holding together an unwieldy array of facts and tangents that span decades.

Dammbeck's journey takes him to the offices of John Brockmann, a notable of the Digerati who cut his teeth in New York City's avant-garde scene of the early 1960s before becoming the literary agent for many of the top thinkers and leaders in the fields of technoscience. The trail then leads him to Brockman's close friend Stewart Brand, where we're treated to an interview with the guru on a cramped houseboat on the California coast. Like Brockman, Brand is one of the Digerati, renowned as the founder of the early online community known as the WELL. He was present at the launch of *Wired* magazine, the official organ of the delirious Silicon Valley-style capitalism defined by Richard Barbrook and Andy Cameron as the “Californian Ideology.” And like Brockman, Brand emerged from the New York avant-garde, and after filling his mind with the writings of Buckminster Fuller, Norbert Wiener, and Marshall McLuhan, struck out for the West Coast. He joined up then with the author Ken Kesey, who, having recently encountered LSD through the CIA's notorious MK-ULTRA program, banded together the Merry Pranksters. Brand recounts for the camera his role in setting-up the Prankster's Acid Tests, where participants were introduced to the drug while immersing themselves in complex, multi-media environments with a psychedelic soundtrack provided by a band called the Warlocks – later to find fame as the Grateful Dead. From this foundation, the archetypal image of the 1960s was born: the hippy

counterculture, in full revolt against the Puritan society that their parents hoped to pass down.

*Das Netz* draws our attention to the fact that Kaczynski was teaching mathematics at the University of California at Berkley in 1967, not far from the ground zero of this counterculture at its height. It also draws our attention to Kaczynski's self-made cabin in the forests of Montana, which was fashioned from plans advertised in the *Whole Earth Catalog*. The *Catalog*, in turn, was a publication devised by Stewart Brand as a means to provide tools for the communalist movement – those in the counterculture who sought a 'back-to-the-land' lifestyle far removed from despotic urbanism and the overreaching arms of the state. Years later, the communes that so motivated the *Whole Earth Catalog* would be resurrected online as the WELL, itself an abbreviation for *Whole Earth 'Lectronic Link*. For Dammbeck, lurking behind this shifting kaleidoscope of history lurks LSD – first in the hands of CIA, which then seemed to have passed the reigns on to Kesey and the Merry Pranksters.

All this sounds like the making of a great conspiracy theory, which in many respects *Das Netz* can easily be read as. And indeed, many of these same facts have become fodder a vast multitude of them. But I don't think that's the ultimate point of Dammbeck's documentary. As we watch, the narrative splits fractures and spins, becomes increasingly incoherent in regards to its initial goal. Here's the Esalen Institute. Here's the brains behind ARPA, the early creators of the internet. Here's a play-by-play of the Unabomber's arrest by FBI agents. Here's some reflections on Kurt Gödel and his incompleteness theorems, which posits that there will always be true, yet unprovable statements. Like Kaczynski, Gödel suffered from increasingly debilitating paranoia that would, in the end, claim his life. This what *Das Netz* is really about: paranoia, and the impossibility of avoiding it in our age of complex systems and dizzying array of machines that govern every action in our waking lives. It speaks to the ontological instability that we are all subjected to, in the prefabricated, yet modular, environments crafted for us by the stipulations of non-stop, 24/7 neoliberal capitalism. It foregrounds, without speaking it, that inevitability of solipsism that Baudrillard spent a lifetime probing and diagnosing.

Readers of this blog will have noted the ongoing fascination with cybernetics, in particular its role as the defining governmentality of the neoliberal ideology. This is one of the reasons I find *Das Netz* so appealing: it's all there, from Norbert Wiener's attempts to build anti-aircraft batteries through collapsing man and machine together in the pseudo-metaphor of the servomechanism, to the movement of Wiener and his theories into biology, to the Josiah Macy Jr. Foundation's Macy Conferences. It was there that cybernetics became articulated as the ideal instrument of liberal governance: a self-steering machine, a literal *governor* for maintain homeostatic social systems in a state of equilibrium. While Dammbeck doesn't mention it, it was after these conferences that the CIA begin subsidizing social science seminars around the Western world to promote cybernetics as a unified science, their experts speaking urgently of the need

to win out the “cybernetics gap” allegedly forming with the Soviet Union.<sup>1</sup> Maybe we can feel that familiar paranoia creeping in when we consider that the Josiah Macy Jr. Foundation was soon receiving money from the CIA to host a series of seminars, modeled on the Macy Conferences with many of the same participants in tow, to begin studies in LSD.

One of the great novels to bring together cybernetics, the 60s, and the encroachment of paranoia is Thomas Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot 49*, which may be very well the model for what Dammbeck attempts to carry out in *Das Netz*. Pynchon’s protagonist, Oedipa Maas, finds herself ensnared in a worldwide conspiracy between two different mail distribution companies, which the novel articulates in terms of cybernetic systems on two levels: the literal level (it’s dealing with communication systems) and the metaphorical level (language drawn from cybernetics and information theory abound). To make matters worse for Maas, however, is that the conspiracy itself might not even exist. Uncertainty lurks at the center of Pynchon’s novel, which like an unstable cybernetic system veers off on a positive feedback loop, far from any sense of linearity. Like the exploding counterculture, she “moves from a uniform, univocal, suburban America to an America characterized by infinite multiplicity, an America where anything can happen and where events can have any number of meanings.”<sup>2</sup> But is this freedom or control? Maas reflects that she finds herself feeling “trapped between the zeros and ones of an enormous computer.”

Pynchon carries the themes of cybernetics and paranoia over to his next novel, *Gravity’s Rainbow*, which foregrounds many of Norbert Wiener’s primary concerns by focusing much of the plot on missile trajectories and the blurring of flesh with weapons systems in the context of the Second World War. Conspiracies again abound in text, snaking their way through the heart of the conflict as competing interests rush to lay claim to the mysterious “Rocket 00000”. Along the way, readers are treated to scenes of wealthy industrials participating in occult rituals (with dubious outcomes), the dipping of characters into shared hallucinations, and the breakdown of linear perspective in the collapse of Calvinistic deterministic universals in the face of quantum indeterminacy. At one point the character of Edward Pointsman (a Pavlovian psychologist with a penchant for determinism and control) pauses to ask “Suppose we consider the war itself as a laboratory?” Andrew Pickering, in his brilliant analysis of emergence of the *cyborg sciences* (cybernetics, game theory, systems analysis and the like) in the halls of World War 2’s military-industrial-academic complex, uses this quote as his launching

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<sup>1</sup> On the CIA, the “cybernetics gap”, and the role it played in the early stages of the ARPAnet, see Richard Barbook *Imaginary Futures: From Thinking Machines to the Global Village* Pluto Press, 2007, pgs. 150-154, 164-168

<sup>2</sup> Lois Tyson *Psychological Politics of the American Dream: The Commodification of Subjectivity in Twentieth-Century American Literature* Ohio State University, 1994 pg. 102

pad. For Pickering, this complex itself is a cyborg system that begins at the intersection of these three dimensions, before spilling out into the social arena.<sup>3</sup>

*Das Netz*, too, looks at the war as a laboratory, but engages not so much in the careful analysis through STS (science and technology studies) techniques that Pickering privileges, opting instead to probe the hard to discern feedback loops between self and society that cybernetic principles were soon applied to. If the war is a laboratory, it is a laboratory for studying what is inside the human, what makes it tick and move, desire, fall in line or move far from order. Pickering, in later analyses, would unveil that the foundations of wartime cybernetics can be found in attempts to study the brain, particularly when it is in abnormal states: experiencing trauma, hallucination, mystical experience, so on and so forth.<sup>4</sup> For Dambeck, cybernetics emerges as a direct heir to behavioralism, a conclusion shared by the historian of science of Peter Galison.<sup>5</sup> If a human is like a computer, it is capable of being reprogrammed – or so the postwar cyberneticians believed. The brain is an error-correction mechanism that assesses the environment, calculates statistical probability paths for action in that environment, and chooses what appears to be the proper action. Change the environment, shift the nature of the feedback system linking brain to environment, and the human effectively becomes changed.

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<sup>3</sup> Andrew Pickering “Cyborg History and the World War 2 Regime” *Perspectives on Science*, vol. 3, no. 1, 1995

<sup>4</sup> Andrew Pickering *The Cybernetic Brain: Sketches of Another Future* University of Chicago Press, 2010. For a continued dialogue on the relationship between cybernetics and trauma, see Matteo Pasquinelli (ed.) *Alleys of Your Mind: Augmented Intelligence and Its Traumas* Centre for Digital Cultures, 2015

<sup>5</sup> Peter Galison “The Ontology of the Enemy: Norbert Wiener and the Cybernetic Vision” *Critical Inquiry* Vol. 21, No. 1, 1994

# (Re)Construction

Dammbeck insists that the Macy Conference participants were motivated by *The Authoritarian Personality*, a sociological study published in 1950 that carried out statistical measurements of individual outlooks and personality traits in search of the ‘fascist personality’. The work utilized a unit of measure described as the “F Scale” (F for fascist), the application of which the authors of the study hoped to reveal what elements in American society could be altered to avoid a slippery slope into fascism. Buried deep in *The Authoritarian Personality* are Marxist roots: the study’s key author was Theodore Adorno, the exiled philosopher from the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory, and much the work that informed the development of it was undertaken by the School in Germany years prior. But to suit the conditions of the Cold War and the American values that were to be instilled, these Marxist roots were in fact obfuscated – something most evidenced by the removal of any overt reference to class relations and its impact on individual psychology (the key aspect, perhaps, of Frankfurt School analysis as a whole).

While there seems to be little evidence suggesting a direct relationship between Macy Conferences and *The Authoritarian Personality*, one of Adorno’s colleagues from the Frankfurt School, psychologist Kurt Lewin, was an avid participant in the Macy Conferences. He was long acquainted with many of its key organizers, having years earlier been a member of the Committee for National Morale (a wartime social science organization/propaganda outfit) with Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson. The overarching focus of the CNM (which I discuss in my earlier essay *Into the Mystic*) was to analyze the conditions that led to the rise of fascism in Germany, which was quickly diagnosed as something intrinsic to one-way communication media platforms. The singularity of unilateral communication left the German people fragmented; by extension, multi-directional media would create what they called the “whole person”, one capable of rejecting fascism for an embrace of the “Democratic Personality”. The CNM doesn’t feature in Dammbeck’s narrative, but is the subject of a recent book by Fred Turner titled *The Democratic Surround: Multimedia and American Liberalism from World War II to the Psychedelic Sixties*.<sup>1</sup>

Turner traces the ambitions of Mead, Bateson, Lewin, and psychologist Gordon Allport, among other CNM participants, to the creation of what he calls “surrounds” – modular architectural spaces infused with multimedia systems that would allow spec-

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<sup>1</sup> Fred Turner *The Democratic Surround: Multimedia & American Liberalism from World War 2 to the Psychedelic Sixties* University of Chicago Press, 2013

tators to play an active role in shaping the experience. This, they felt, would educate the individual on his or her relationship to the greater social totality, something necessary for building an *open society*. As Turner shows, the concept of the surround came to inform the multimedia aesthetics of the New York City avant-garde, from John Cage to his students at Black Mountain College to Andy Warhol and his Exploding Plastic Inevitable. It also became the inadvertent prototype for the “happening” and the “be-in”, the outbreaks of mass spontaneity that defined the 60s countercultural experience. In one illuminating section of the book, he shows how the concept of the surround was deployed by the art troupe USCO to illustrate life inside systems that did not differentiate between machine and man. A young Stewart Brand was a participant in USCO’s mystically-tinged, technological happenings; when he moved to the West Coast and joined Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters, he imported the concept straight into the infrastructures of the Acid Tests. The counterculture, the mass exodus from the Fordist disciplinary society, seems to be for Turner the inevitable accident of the social scientist’s attempt to remake the world in the image of American liberalism – just as the turning on of their children’s minds through LSD was the accident of the CIA’s own forays into the world of psychedelic drugs.

“Our humanism is scientific,” wrote communication specialist Lyman Bryson in 1947, “because we believe in the control of social change by intelligence and experience... we shall use social engineering to solve the problem of setting up the conditions of freedom, but not to determine what men shall do with freedom when they get it.”<sup>2</sup> This concept, of defining the parameters of freedom in the service of liberal corporatism, was the over-arching desire of a vast network of social science and communication studies institutions, think-tanks, and study groups bound together by interlocking members and funding bodies. In the early days of the Second World War, this funding was carried out primarily by the Rockefeller Foundation – also the philanthropy behind earlier behavioral psychological research and later cybernetic studies. This funding would continue, with the philanthropy being joined by the Ford Foundation and the CIA. One key institution, for example, was the joint Harvard-MIT Center for International Studies (CENIS), which with Ford Foundation and CIA money and direction would become the hotbed of *modernization theory*, an approach to foreign policy that saw American liberalism as the highest stage in historical evolution (this perspective would go on to provide the intellectual and policy frameworks for the American excursion into Vietnam).<sup>3</sup> “We later became convinced,” one CENIS member later recounted, “that our strongest psychological weapon was our potential ability to help the nations of the free world achieve political stability by helping them expand their productivity

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid, pg. 59

<sup>3</sup> For an excellent history of modernization theory, see Michael E. Latham *Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science and Nation Building in the Kennedy Era* University of North Carolina Press, 2000. On modernization theory, computer simulation, and the Vietnam War, see Barbrook *Imaginary Futures* pgs. 221-252



and their standards of living.”<sup>4</sup> This particular perspective became known described as the promotion of *People’s Capitalism*, an inversion of Soviet propaganda stylings to describe the Fordist affluent society, the world of washing machines and coca-colas, happy factory workers and family values.

By looking at the swirling menagerie of individuals, institutions, policy papers and academic articles from this time, we glimpse into the heart of the liberal postwar state itself. It is the rhetoric of inclusiveness, stability, harmony and trust – the balancing of interests between states, between races, between the self and society, to achieve an idealized homeostasis (assuming, of course, that this homeostasis took place in the context of Keynesian state capitalism). And yet a dark underbelly laid beneath the surface. American People’s Capitalism was to be everything that fascism was not; almost the entirety of the social scientists’ concerns were motivated by finding a fix-it for the massive error that had created Nazism. While the vast majority singled in on the relationship between media and the structures of society, others went further. Notable here was Dr. Ewen Cameron, a president of the American Psychopathological Association and the World Psychiatric Association, who attributed the Third Reich to cultural, social, biological and racial factor intrinsic to the German people. They were, he argued, naturally aggressive; going further, he soon applied these notions to society as a whole. The conclusion he came to was similar to the mainstream of liberal social scientists – that society had to be properly managed to navigate society – but he differed by asserting the ‘weak’ of society had to phased out by the rigorous application of the behavioral sciences.

In 1943, Cameron received a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation to set up Allen Memorial Institute for Psychiatry at McGill University in Montreal; he became the first director of the institution and went to work establishing a global psychiatric network. By the 1950s his primary focus was schizophrenia; a cure for the ailment, he wagered, could be found by deconstructing the patient’s psyche and reprogramming it from the ground-up. To pursue these ends he subjected unwitting patients to bizarre and increasingly violent experimentations. Subjects were placed in sensory deprivation tanks up to sixteen hours a day, followed by multiple rounds of electroshock therapy. Sometimes they were kept sedated for nearly two months at a time, while at other points their psyches were bombarded with heavy doses of hallucinogenic c drugs – including LSD. This process was called *depatterning*, described by Cameron as the bringing of the patient to the “desired level of disorganization” capable of disturbing his or her “space-time”. This will ensure, he continues, that the patient will live “in a very narrow segment of space time. All aspects of his memorial function are severely disturbed. He cannot well record what is going on around him. He cannot retrieve data from the past.”<sup>5</sup> At this point, the process of *psychic driving* was to start. The patients became

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<sup>4</sup> Turner, *The Democratic Surround*, pg. 232

<sup>5</sup> Ewen Cameron “The Depatterning Treatment of Schizophrenia” *Comprehensive Psychiatry* Vol 3, No. 2, April, 1962 <http://www.naomiklein.org/files/resources/pdfs/depatterning.pdf> pg. 3

subjected to endless audio loops whilst under the influence of muscular paralytic drugs and hallucinogens. With their inability to resist exposure to the messages, Cameron believed that he could construct new personalities from the ground up. Through psychic driving a “reorganization of the personality might be brought about without the necessity of resolving conflicts or abreaction or the reliving of past experiments.”<sup>6</sup>

Cameron’s work was subsidized by the Rockefeller Foundation, but most of the funds flowed from the Human Ecology Fund; one board member of this organization was Adolf Berle, a Wall Street lawyer who had announced the advent of corporate liberalism with his 1932 book *The Modern Corporation and Private Property*. Margaret Mead, meanwhile, was another recipient of research grants, as were a host of anthropologists and social scientists, the majority of which were intimately related to wartime and post-war research institutions.<sup>7</sup> The founder of the Human Ecology Fund was a neurologist by the name of Harold Wolff, later to have been recruited in the endeavor by CIA director Allen Dulles as part of the MK-ULTRA program. The Human Ecology Fund as a whole as a well-crafted front organization for the agency, bestowing grants to established researchers such as B.F. Skinner to maintain an air of authenticity.<sup>8</sup> Quite frequently, the recipients of the funding did not know that their research grants were ultimately traceable to the CIA’s coffers, or that their research into psychology was to be instrumentalized to “to develop new techniques of offensive/defensive intelligence use” (to quote Wolff).<sup>9</sup>

Describing the activities of the Human Ecology Fund, Adolf Berle wrote in his personal journal “I am frightened of this one. If the scientists do what they have laid out for themselves, men will become manageable ants.”<sup>10</sup> His words recall directly Norbert Wiener’s great fear for the cybernetic project he helped inaugurate – that it would assist to “organize the fascist ant-state with human material.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Quoted in Mary D. Young *Encyclopedia of Asylum Therapeutics, 1750s-1950s* McFarland, 2015, pg. 276

<sup>7</sup> David H. Price “Buying a Piece of Anthropology” *Anthropology Today* Vol. 23, No. 3, 2007 <https://wikileaks.org/w/images/AT-june07-Price-PT1.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Michael Otterman *American Torture: From the Cold War to Abu Ghraib and Beyond* Pluto Press, 2007, pg. 24

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in Gerard Colby and Charlotte Dennett *Thy Will Be Done: The Conquest of the Amazon: Nelson Rockefeller and Evangelism in the Age of Oil*, HarperCollins, 1995, pg. 265

<sup>11</sup> Norbert Wiener *The Human Use of Human Beings: Cybernetics and Society* Houghton Mifflin, 1950

# (Un)Certainty

Henry A. Murray was many things: a leading Harvard psychologist, an authority on the works of Herman Melville, and a staunch advocate of World Federalism. He was a student of Alfred North Whitehead, and was close to later countercultural icons like Timothy Leary and Lewis Mumford. His early reflections for measuring personalities would lay the foundation of the methodology used in Adorno's *The Authoritarian Personality*. He designed psychological aptitude tests for the OSS during World War 2, and served on the advisory board of the Committee for National Hygiene alongside fellow OSS officer Frank Fremont-Smith – an executive at the Josiah Macy Jr. Foundation and a key organizer of the Macy Conferences. Murray was also close friends with the Committee on National Morale's Gordon Allport, with whom he founded Harvard's Department of Social Relations in 1946. There is much evidence to suggest that Murray was also entangled in the CIA's MK-ULTRA network, and that the Department of Social Relations was its key institution on the Harvard campus.

Between 1959 and 1962, Murray carried out a series of strange tests designed to measure the functioning of an individual under extreme stress. While the details remain hazy, the test subjects – exceptionally bright undergraduates – were faced with techniques that Murray had developed in the OSS, and later perfected for the Navy (with the aid of a Rockefeller Foundation grant). “In one part of the experiment, subjects were pressured to respond to questions asked under extreme duress, with bright lights and cameras pointed at them and electrodes attached to their bodies.”<sup>1</sup> At other points, the students were forced to endure “vehement, sweeping and personally abusive” attacks, including having their most cherished ideals rigorously and forcefully deconstructed. While the majority of the participants in Murray's study have remained anonymous, others have come forward to report PTSD-like symptoms that persisted long after the events. One such test subject was Ted Kaczynski.

Was this the event that drove Kaczynski away from the world of mathematics and science, and into a process of becoming that ended in a small shack in the woods of Montana? It is near impossible to say, but it is the question that lurks at the heart of *Das Netz*, the small fragile piece that holds the whole historical narrative together. In his interview with Dammbeck, Stewart Brand describes Kaczynski as something of a “countercultural hero” – and indeed, his flight away from industrial civilization in search

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<sup>1</sup> Kirsten G. Studlien “Murray Center Seals Kaczynski Data” *The Harvard Crimson* July 14<sup>th</sup>, 2000 <http://www.thecrimson.com/article/2000/7/14/murray-center-seals-kaczynski-data-plondon-buried/?page=2>

of pristine nature resembles that of the communalist of the 1960s. Like Kaczynski, they too were all the offspring of an experiment whose outcome seemed certain, but was moored in uncertainty. Perhaps it is that proximity to uncertainty and unknowability that drove Kaczynski to the lengths he went to, to become the Unabomber.

Dammbeck certainly thinks so. In the most fascinating segment in *Das Netz*, he arrives at the house of Heinz von Foerster, another cybernetician (and editor of the Macy Conference's official papers, a task he was recruited for by Margaret Mead) who became a countercultural icon. Von Foerster describes to Dammbeck the philosophies of radical constructivism, taking the logical positivism of early Vienna scientific philosophers to their relativistic extreme. When it comes to physics, he says, the theoretical construct of the "particle" does not exist, and only serves to hide holes in theories. At the end of all things, it is only theories that exist, and each is nothing more than a story told to explain the "origin of the universe." "And yet, he tells Dammbeck, "All theories are correct because they can all be deduced from other theories. It goes on deducing indefinitely. That's the good thing about it. You can go on forever." Dammbeck, in his fascination with Godel's conclusion of fundamental unknowability, is obviously enticed with von Foerster's constructivism, which seems to embody the most exciting aspect of the counterculture's appropriation of cybernetics: the possibility of endless multiplicity. Unlike Pynchon's Oedipa Maas (and Kaczynski, for that matter), von Foerster does not find himself lodged in the probability space dictated by the functions of the computer. Dammbeck, in a series of letters, attempts to get Kaczynski to comment on Godel, only to receive a philosophy much akin to von Foerster's own, but moored deeper in that unavoidable sense of paranoia:

*In your last letter you asked me about the mathematician's imagination. You probably assume that mathematicians always imagine something mathematical. But that's not true. Experienced mathematicians seldom think of mathematics. Usually they imagine flowers, sunshine, and birds singing in spring. Perhaps now and then they think about women, but they don't do that very often for they are pure in heart. How is it, you will ask, that mathematicians don't think of mathematics constantly? I must tell you that mathematicians are not scientists, they are artists... Apart from the most elementary mathematics, like arithmetic or high school algebra, the symbols, formulas, and words of mathematics are have no meaning at all. The entire structure of pure mathematics is a monstrous swindle, simply a game, a reckless prank. You may well ask: 'Are there no renegades to reveal the truth?' Yes, of course. But the facts are so incredible that no one takes them seriously. So the secret is in no danger.*

How can one speak truth to power if power is but an abstraction, the oscillation moving through simulation and simulacrum? For Stewart Brand, it was the communalists, and perhaps for Dammbeck, it is Kaczynski. Early in *Das Netz* he browses an anarchist bookstore in Seattle and finds the published copies of the Unabomber's Manifesto, sitting alongside Murray Bookchin and Noam Chomsky. The film refracts and images and clips of the famous Battle of Seattle, where thousands of protestors pushed back against the neoliberal system in the form of the World Trade Organiza-

tion, slips across the screen. We know the usual story: the radical anarchist enclaves full of people like John Zerzan and their role in those protests in 1999, and their interesting primitivist defense of Kaczynski. Beyond this, one might see a reflection of the Unabomber's cabin being fashioned from suggestions in Brand's *Whole Earth Catalog* in the anarchist's interest in the Manifesto, as if non-linear feedback loops trace themselves out down through the decades. The counterculture had rejected the liberal world system designed by their parents in their laboratories, and these protestors were rejecting the neoliberal world system designed by their own parents – that is, the generation of the counterculture itself.

Throughout *Das Netz*, we hear news clips playing in the background describing the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, and the hunt for Osama Bin Laden. While we're drawn to make a comparison between Kaczynski and the fighters in the streets of Seattle, we're to draw yet another to the attacks of al-Qaeda. By the time this had happened, the cybernetic system of governance drawn up in the postwar years had mutated far beyond the expectations of the social scientists. Cybernetics, communication platforms, and social engineering had been a grand bid for *rational management*, a methodology that allowed states and their citizenry to make decisions in an increasingly complex world. And yet by the end of the 1960s, it was clear that social management could not work in such a linear format. At Ford Foundation-funded spaces like the RAND Corporation and the Center for the Advanced Study of the Behavioral Sciences, these systems became internalized in an idealized form of the individual. Instead of having these systems guide policy, policy was transformed by these theorists of *rational choice* to create the environmental frameworks where these systems became the individual's reality. The state's goal became one of establishing the artificial environment in which self-modulation, in accordance with the flows of the market, would serve as a vast order of self-regulation. By the 1990s, this was the crushing order that the Zapatistas, the Seattle protestors, and the alter-globalization movement tried to push back. By 2000, with the return of the conservatives to office, this world order seemed to be all but absolute – only to fall messily to ground in the collapse of the World Trade Centers – felled by the unexpected offspring of yet another failed experiment.

Here, in 2015, I'm also reminded of ISIS, crawling out of the rubble of Iraq and seizing upon opportunities provided by a failed democratic revolution in Syria. We can see all the social media platforms – these postmodern descendants of the multi-media systems longed for the postwar social scientists – being reverted against the West, the subversion of popular memes and iconography used to shatter the linearity of our consumer society. I'm also reminded, however, of the usage of media in this country to obscure reality for what it is, be it the attacks on immigrants and Muslims by Donald Trumps, or the ongoing climate change denial by a well-greased PR campaign. I'm reminded that a government agency is recorded data from every phone call, text message, email, website visit, and Gmail chat conversation being carried out not only by myself, but possible every person, everywhere. That computer-geek whistleblowers can be chased across the world by a sovereign government bent on keeping its secrets,

aided by hacker organizations, is reflection of much our world resembles the world less and resembles more a science-fiction novel. That few seem to honestly care makes it all more perplexing. Looking at this strange, contorted and fragmented whole, the overwhelming weirdness of our times cannot help but trigger that creeping paranoia, that unavoidable solipsism. How could such chaos come from such ambitious design? And how could it possibly be real?

The Ted K Archive

A critique of his ideas & actions



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