

Defusing the Unabomber

Greg Swann

I've been trying for a week to write something about the Unabomber and his pesky manifesto, and I can't seem to get the job done. In this voice, the studious essayist voice, I can't take him seriously. In the Ramblin' Gamblin' Willie voice, the only other style I'm working in right now, I can't make light of the murder of three innocents.

I can make fun of anything. I've been writing Willie stories for ten years, and, with few exceptions, all of those stories ridicule the ridiculous. I have 308 words of a Willie story about the Unabomber. In it, he is represented as a cowboy wino who has just sold a pint of blood and who terrorizes strangers by popping paper bags.

But I can't work with him in even so grotesque and ludicrous a shape. I think of him and in my mind's eye I see children making angels in the snow. And then I see those children blown to a bloody pulp for committing the horrid act of creating artifacts of technology.

I see William Shakespeare and I hear him denounced as a mere hobbyist. Was he brother to the Queen? A Lord of the court? A lowly actor with a potent muse? It doesn't matter. He was dithering away his life to excuse his alienation from "power process". And so he wrote dramas and historical plays and comedies and sonnets that lovers whisper in the dusk, and all of it was embroidery upon the void. What a vain and empty life led Shakespeare. I can see him perfected by a bomb's blast.

And I see Beethoven marrying his score to Schiller's libretto to craft the fourth movement of the Ninth Symphony. I can hear the choir and I can hear the music that infuses the lowest of men and raises him up to stand as the equal of any god. But what does that matter? Beethoven was just a tool of the system after all. If he elevated men, it was only to dupe them into producing more technology to reinforce the system's grip on everyone else. Beethoven was a pawn, and his talent would be much improved with a letter bomb.

I see Ada Lovelace, daughter of Lord Byron, who created the science of Software Engineering and taught the mathematicians to write poetry. I can picture her gored and charred.

I see Neil Armstrong, who didn't do much of anything at all, just taught us all that limits are only in our minds. I can imagine him torn to shreds.

I can see doctors and poets and physicists and philosophers and engineers and painters and hundreds of millions of others, all of whom lived and died in the service of a dream, that we can be *more* than animals, that we can become whatever we wish.

And I can hear a chimp screeching, screeching, screeching, calling us all back to the veldt.

I don't intend to argue with the Unabomber. I love logic too much to cheapen it by tendering it to a murderer. But I want to talk about this, because I should, and because I *must*, because I need to get it out of my system.

We are animals, but because of the cortex we are necessarily more than animals. There is no activity of human beings that is *not* technology. Every tool we use is an artifact, every square inch of real estate we occupy is improved, everything we eat had to be discovered, husbanded, prepared or manufactured. Hunter-gatherer cultures

are distinguished from our high-energy/data-processing culture not by technology, but by the *level* of technology. A non-technological human culture is not possible. What fundamentally distinguishes our culture (comprised of five billion people) from the 250 “non-Western” cultures (comprised of perhaps 5 million people, total, world-wide) is individualism. We believe that individual people have the right and power to pursue their own ends, changing everything for everyone else if it comes to that, and they do not. Their cultures are stable and static for centuries—with no growth in either technological prowess or population—while ours won’t hold still for a nanosecond. They are more than animals, but as much as possible they behave as though they are not. We are more than animals, and in our very best moments we create wonders that our gods could never imagine.

There are all kinds of fascinating implications in the preceding paragraph. For one thing, to achieve the Unabomber’s ideal of technology, five billion people are going to have to die; the Earth can support five million human faux-animals. For another, the five million survivors must somehow be forbidden any knowledge of Western technology, especially that uniquely Western technology called individualism; if any artifact of the West survives the apocalypse, we are but 5,000 years away from the next Neil Armstrong (which pre-supposes the racist tenet that non-Western cultures are incapable of discovering individualism on their own).

And here is the loveliest irony of all: the Unabomber is proposing to craft a non-Western culture *as an artifact*. He seeks as the product of his choices to forevermore forbid choice. He deploys the incomparable power of the human mind to imagine a Utopia in which the human mind is eternally stultified. He envisions as perfection the end consequence of centuries of intentional aimlessness, and he seeks to replicate this overnight by design. The Unabomber pursues his ideal of a humanity bereft of all but the most basic technology, and he pursues it by means of his manifesto, his own technological artifact. Despite his studied references to himself in the plural, the Unabomber is no less an individualist than the rest of us, and his grand manifesto is the ultimate in hubris, individualism attempting to create its antithesis!

The Unabomber tells us that the system is at war with our freedom. We are inclined to think that freedom means freedom from the armed functionaries of the state. Instead, we discover that freedom means liberty from the constraints of punctuality on the job and the license to walk on highways without the annoyance of cars whizzing by. This freedom is to be achieved by means of the tender mercies of the armed functionaries of the state. Letter bombing, mass murder, thought police—these are small prices to pay for freedom, are they not?

Some people have tried to smear the libertarians with the Unabomber. Others have referred to him as an anarchist. These characterizations are incorrect. The Unabomber is clearly a statist, an exponent of supplanting consensus with force and terror. He seeks to replace the current state, but that does not make him any less a statist.

Advocates of *true* freedom—freedom from the armed functionaries of the state—should take heart, however. What the Unabomber is *actually* telling us is that statism

is dead. Our story had its seed in Gilgamesh, the man who put friendship before his duty to the gods. It took root with Socrates, who died rather than bow to authority. It burst through to the light when the Nazarene walked from Gethsemane to Golgatha. Every story we remember, fact or fiction, is the story of an individual versus the mob, the glory of humanity singing out above the screeching of the chimp.

That chimp has been screeching, screeching, screeching for centuries. It was the Nazarene's own self-appointed minions at first, but they were done in by Galileo and Gutenberg, among others, by the technology that steadily disproved their revealed "truth". Then came the statists of various flavors, with their champion being Marx. And Marx was bested by the phone, the fax, the video-tape recorder and pirated copies of networking software running on pirated mini-computers. Philosophers and economists undermined the Marxist rhetoric, but, ultimately, it was the unblinking television camera that paralyzed the Communists and forbade them to act upon their bloodthirsty "ideals". Technology is now effecting its paralysis on the tyrannical aspects of representative government, which is why we see so many functionaries demanding censorship with toothy smiles.

And the chimps are screeching, screeching, screeching, but now they have nothing to say. Not only are their supposed concerns obviously better served by liberty than by tyranny, but our technology base permits us to subvert tyranny however it manifests itself. They can't enslave us because they can't *catch* us.

And the Unabomber hides out for 17 years. He injures 23 people and murders three. And he says that his reason for doing all of this was to get his manifesto, his magnum opus, published. And his masterpiece turns out to be banal, undefended and old news in 1952, which is when *The Nation* and *The New Republic* were fretting about "The System".

And *this* is the best they can do. This is what the heirs of Peter and Marx are reduced to, sending sweaty little letter bombs in order to coerce publication of a sweaty little manuscript that says *nothing* new, and says it in the style of discourse perfected by the blowhards down at the barbershop. Today on Oprah—are the undefended prejudices of a frustrated pseudo-intellectual made more profound by serial murder? What a bitter, horrible joke...

But they are finished and they know it, and that's why they've resorted to murder—the Unabomber, the animal rights morons, the Oklahoma City bombers, and the FBI/BATF. The battle has always been ours to win, never theirs; despite the effort of centuries, it is impossible to "create" anti-individualism. But clearly they have run out of arguments, and we will win everything if we can manage to weather the next few decades. They will kill us piecemeal, and we must expect that for a while. But so long as we can prevent them from killing us wholesale, killing us a thousand to one, we will prevail.

Technology is not our enemy. By means of technology, we have created the wealth that permits five *billion* people who use the cortex to survive on a planet that will only support five *million* people who refuse to use the cortex. Our enemy, always, is the

state. Our enemy, always, is the chimp who, by his screeching, screeching, screeching, demands that we return to the veldt.

We have minds and we can make plays that transcend the centuries. We have minds and we can make glorious symphonies that eclipse the divine. We have minds and we can make software that leverages our intelligence as Archimedes could only imagine. We have minds and we can dance on the moon.

We have minds and we can watch and remember as our children make angels in the snow...

The Ted K Archive

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<web.archive.org/.../primenet.com/~gswann/Unabomber.html>

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