

Jean-Marie Apostolidès on the Unabomber

Robert Harrison and Jean-Marie Apostolidès

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Synopsis

Stanford Professor of French Jean-Marie Apostolidès discusses the ideas and the case of Ted Kaczynski, the so-called Unabomber.

About the Guest

Professor Apostolidès was educated in France, where he received a doctorate in literature and the social sciences. He taught psychology in Canada for seven years and sociology in France for three years. In 1980 he came to the United States, teaching at Harvard and then Stanford, primarily French classical literature (the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries) and drama. He is interested in avant-garde artistic movements such as dada, surrealism, and situationist international; as well as the theory of image, literary theory, and Francophone literature. He is also a playwright, whose work has been staged in Paris, Montreal, and New York.

Professor Apostolidès has served as chair of the Department of French and Italian and as executive editor of the *Stanford French Review* and the *Stanford Literature Review*.

His literary criticism focuses on the place of artistic production in the French classical age and in modern society. Whether it be the place of court pageantry during the reign of King Louis XIV (*Le Roi-Machine*, 1981), or the role of theater under the ancien régime (*Le Prince Sacrificié*, 1985), or even the importance of mass culture in the 1950s (*Les Métamorphoses de Tintin*, 1984), in each case Professor Apostolidès analyzes a specific cultural product both in its original context and in the context of the contemporary world. Some of his most recent books include *L'affaire Unabomber* (1996), *Les Tombeaux de Guy Debord* (1999), *L'Audience* (2001), *Traces, Revers, Ecart*s (2002), *Sade in The Abyss* (2003), *Héroïsme et victimisation* (2003), *Hergé et le mythe du Surenfant* (2004). The tools required for such analysis are borrowed from literary criticism and from the social sciences, particularly psychoanalysis, anthropology, and sociology.

In his books, Professor Apostolidès interprets the works of the past as witnesses of our intellectual and emotional life. His examination of the distant or near past seeks to make us more sensitive to the social changes that are taking place now, in order to improve our understanding of the direction in which contemporary society is moving.

Transcript

Robert: His name is Jean-Marie Apostolides, professor of French literature here at Stanford. Many of you out there will remember him from a show we did a few years back on Albert Camus, which remains one of my all time favorite shows. Jean-Marie devoted some significant time to Ted. Ted Kaczynski in 1996, he published a French translation of Kaczynski's Manifesto Industrial Society and its future with a 60 page introduction. Later on, in July 1996, after Kaczynski had been arrested, he published a book about him called *La Faire Unabombers* that how you would say it in French Jean-Marie . Yes, *la fere*. This next month, I think in October he'll be coming out with a new book, including his French translation. Of industrial society and its future, as well as an anti industrial manifesto. That doesn't have a title that Kaczynski wrote it back in 1971. Geometry is also finishing a steady, tentatively called Theodore Kaczynski equivalent E terrorist, which considers him above all as a writer, chalmette welcome to the program.

Jean-Marie: Thank you, Robert, for inviting me to your program.

Robert: I think it's fair to say that you would not be spending so much time translating and writing about the Unabomber. Were you not in some sense fascinated by him? What exactly is it that fascinates you about Ted Kaczynski, if anything?

Jean-Marie: I don't know if the term 'fascinates' is the most appropriate one. However, there is certainly something which at the beginning. Was very amazing for me. In our academic profession. One of the. Most aspects of our work is to publish. Each of us has encounter difficulties to publish. But nobody. As far as I know, has ever killed in order to have his or her book published, and I think at the beginning it was the fact that. Kaczynski would kill in order to have his book published, and that it was written in his manifesto that he had purposely killed people in order to have his ideas known by many people, which probably quote unquote fascinated me.

Robert: That gives a new twist to the term 'publish or perish'. Also on our previous show on Albert Camus, you said that the Gallimard, the son of Gallimard, who was in the car with Albert Camus fulfilled the secret subconscious fantasy of every publisher which is to kill the author, no? This is a different kind of Publishing and killing.

Jean-Marie: Yes, this is yes... But beyond your joke, which I like a lot, it means that there is probably somewhere a link between writing and death and the problem of death. I don't know what it is exactly, but I suspect there is a link between the two.

Robert: I remember when the Industrial Society and its future was first published in the New York Times and Washington Post. In '96, I believe it was...

Jean-Marie: Yes.

Robert: You and I were both...

Jean-Marie: No, '95.

Robert: '95, right. He was arrested in '96 a few months later. But he... you were quite fascinated... We were both very taken with the content of this manifesto and it's strident critique of technology.

And of course, while it probably never would have met the kind of academic standards for publication, because of the stylistic idiosyncrasies. He was expressing ideas about our technological society that seemed to have a freshness insofar as they were completely direct. They were not qualified and they seemed to go to the heart of a certain malaise in our civilization. And, you certainly had found some resonance in that manifesto with some of your own sociological critiques of our technological civilization. Is that correct?

Jean-Marie: Yes, I have been always interested in extremist and avant-garde ideas, which does not mean that I share these ideas, but I admit that I find interest in extremist ideas such as, for example, the ideas expressed by the situationist during the 60s. And the 70s, when Ted Kaczynski's manifesto appeared in The Washington Post, it had many connection with the way of writing that the situationist had used for years and years. And it has no direct link between the two because I doubt that Kaczynski has ever heard of the situationist movement, but the reciprocal is not true, because now the pro situation is people have a lot of knowledge. Of Kaczynski's work and they have retranslated his manifesto well to make a Long story short, the connection between these two extremist group. I found it very. Except that the situation is even if they proclaim themselves to be revolutionary, stayed within the dominant society where whereas Kaczynski put himself outside the dominant society and in a certain way. Was more faithful to his own ideas and kept them or maintains them at a level of consistency which is almost unbelievable in our society.

Robert: Would you agree that? Had Kaczynski not revealed himself to have been someone who was in in body and incarnated in his own existential choices of living in the wilderness, in a little shack, and who had not adopted a lifestyle consistent with its ideas, that these ideas would not have nearly the same sort of suasion that they have. As a result of his choice for in favor of of living, this kind of quasi wildlife, in other words, many theorists have had ideas similar and more sophisticated than Kaczynski's. But perhaps don't have the same sort of immediate a claim to authenticity because they are not lived out. That if a university professor, for example, will have a very hard time getting similar ideas as Kaczynski read and disseminate. Created because of the existential choice.

Jean-Marie: I totally agree with you. If we can take an example, for example, Jacques Ellul, whose work an enormous influence on Kaczynski remained within our society. So he wrote several books against. Technocracy and technology in our society. But his book never had the same impact that Kaczynski is book Industrial Society and its future. And that is definitely due to the fact that Kaczynski lived in in wild environment for so many years and. Has basically what he has done. He has. He has. Created the link between his writing and his social practice.

Robert: Right.

Jean-Marie: Whether we like it or not, it is a fact that we have to discuss probably.

Robert: Yes, certainly. And I would imagine that the writings we can talk about this later about the writings that he might deliver in prison will be of less interest just.

Because of the fact that he is not any longer in this wild environment as an outlaw, he doesn't speak with the authority of an outlaw. If I can use an oxymoron.

Jean-Marie: No, exactly. Not now. He's more he. He writes a lot. He exchanged a lot with many correspondent and what I can say about his current writing is that it's more likely something more academically discuss academic books and academics ideas.

Robert: Well, certainly when he was arrested, there were those dramatic. Photos of him being taken away by policemen, all in their uniforms, and he looked with his long hair, his long beard and his bandana. He had the look of a hermit. He had the look of a St. He had the look of a almost holy. Man visa vie these other people who representing the law. And there was a certain charisma in the persona that I think lent a shade of of authority to that manifesto that we that we read, but nevertheless, let me just state some of the facts of what he was accused of, and then later indicted of. In all, 16 bombs that he sent, which injured 23 people and killed three people, they were at least attributed to Kaczynski and. He ended up pleading guilty in order to spare himself the death sentence, and I know that maybe he wants to revisit that plea bargain, but we don't want to get into the legal issues, at least not now. What we would like to do is. Probe what are the central ideas, particularly of the industrial future and its? And his future so. It's as we mentioned, it's a critique of technology, but. Very important frame for his critique of technology is his critique of the over social socialization that people in our society are subjected to and he interprets. Contemporary, especially academic leftism. As a symptom of this over socialization. What does he mean by that?

Jean-Marie: Probably the intellectual background of Kaczynski's ideas. Is a conception of human beings going back to 18 and 19th century? European thinking. For him, the ideal is the individual who is in control of his or her own fate. And who is capable of surviving in a state of nature which is hostile to human beings? And he has been himself living like that for more than 18 years. Whereas he consider that contemporary society, a society in which we are connected to everyone through technology. Has weakened our capacity to survive and to achieve what he calls the power process. That means a human accomplishment of our different potentialities, both physical and intellectual. And it targets the left or the so-called left in academic milieu to show. That instead of developing a sort of nietzschean conception of humanity, they are more attracted by the victimization side of our life. They are always on the side of the victim because they. Project themselves on the victim. So his accusations are twofold. On one side, he argues that far from being rebel, these people are obedient citizen of dominant society and 2nd far from creating liberation for human beings. Their discourse, their way of behaving, forced people to be even more dependent of the big technological mesh. And on this aspect, at least, his ideas deserve to be discussed.

Robert: Well, would you say that his criticism that leftists are always taking the side of victims is part of the fact that they, as leftists, are trying to, as he argues, compensate for their lack of personal power, of their disempowerment by the technological society through over socialization and therefore? They themselves feel victimized, but

are not expressing it directly. And if I can quote from the manifesto there he when he he's talking about leftism as a movement of people who are over socialized. He says the moral code of our society is so demanding that no one can think, feel and act in a completely moral way. Some people are so highly socialized that the attempt to think, feel, and act morally imposes a severe burden on them. In order to avoid feelings of guilt, they continually have to deceive themselves about their own motives and find moral explanation for feelings and actions that in reality have a non moral origin. We use the term over socialized to describe such people. I think that when people like you and I read that we think of Frederick Nietzsche, we think of Freud. We think of all the great tradition of the hermeneutics of suspicion. That is suspicious of peoples avowed motives and goals and tries to penetrate to a different unconfessed unavowed source of motif. And he seems to fall into this genealogy of suspicious thinkers.

Jean-Marie: No, absolutely, absolutely. I agree with you. he has certainly point the finger on something very important in the unconscious of our. Own civilization, if I may use the term unconscious. But at the same time, it seems to me that this particular point is something which concerned him also, because given the education he has received, given the moral values which have been transmitted by. His family to him and to his younger brother David. It was probably what he described in the paragraph you have just read is probably the sort of model that he was induced to follow by his millions, and he rebelled violently against this same million and in order to distance himself. From this model, but he would not. Makes such a generalization. If this model of other socialized people would not be somewhere something he has been induced himself.

Robert: To follow right, I agree with that. So do you think he is or was ultimately a creature or something more?

Jean-Marie: Yeah, in in the in, in the meaning you are using the term, yes, yes.

Robert: So let me ask you this question about his victims, because one thing I've never understood. About Kaczynski's motivation is the choice and selection of his victims. When you look at who at who he sent bombs to, it doesn't seem to me like he targeted the great villains of our society and the people that some some of us might actually secretly cheer if they were to. Get a hand blown off because they're not the they're not the disallow. They're people like a campus police officer, a graduate student at Northwestern University. Some passengers on an American Airlines there's a secretary at University Secretary, a professor, another graduate student. There's there's a store, a computer store owner 2 computer store owners, actually. And then there's geneticists and so forth. The victims seem not to be. You know these great villains that we would automatically suspect? Why did he choose? Bizarre set of characters to send bombs to.

Jean-Marie: Before I answer your question, permit me to say something on the microphone. The fact that I neither share the ideas of the Kaczynski nor his method, and I. Totally disagree with his method and that has to be said from the beginning, otherwise our listener runs the risk of associating me as an individual to this guy, and

I don't want it to be the case. It seemed to me that I I agree with you. These were not the target. One true revolutionary should have chosen, but bear in mind that he was alone. He had more access to these people because he knew their address. He knew how to read them and for them, for him they were a sort of target, but he's very intelligent. I am sure he thought that they were not real target. That, and they would not change anything. It seems to me that in this respect he had more in mind to be notified as a criminal and maybe to prove himself that he was capable of becoming a criminal. Rather than being someone really useful in the revolutionary dimension, in other words, I am sure he probably knew that his crimes would not change anything dramatically in our society. But that they would permit his ideas to be known by many people.

Robert: He obviously believed that the dissemination of his ideas would make a difference.

Jean-Marie: No, that yes, and this is what he wanted.

Robert: And this is where he's profoundly self deceived. I I would argue, because his ideas. Have made very little difference in the political realm of things.

Jean-Marie: While definitely since he wrote his manifesto. The power of technology has totally increased to the point where it is so embedded in human life now that we can speak of ourselves as a new generation of human beings in which the technological aspect is inscribed in our own.

Robert: and for years on this show, I've been decrying the fact that we're becoming the Borg and a prosthetic species, a kind of between the synthetic and the and the organic. And this is where Kaczynski I have. If I have sympathy with some of his ideas, I have sympathy when he says, and I quote him, where he predicts that if the system succeeds in acquiring sufficient control over human behavior quickly enough, it will probably survive. Otherwise it will break down. Now he thought that by publishing his ideas, he was going to contribute to the breakdown of the system. But the reality I think I agree with you, is that since his arrest, the system has succeeded in in acquiring such control over human behavior that not only will it survive, it is actually thriving. And that we are no longer even barely conscious of the fact that technology is. Are or master in that it's insinuated itself into our human relations, into our relations with our bodies, with the Earth, with other species, with knowledge in every possible sphere of human activity and reflection. Technology has already colonized the frame. Or has given the frame within which we're allowed to operate. I think Kaczynski is right about that. I don't see any danger of that system collapsing anytime soon.

Jean-Marie: Me neither. I think that when he wrote in 1995 and publish his manifesto, it was already too late. But what this manifesto has done in the intellectual milieu. Is to make us aware of the sense where our civilization is going. And for us, who are in a certain way, the children of Marx, we thought that economy was the driving force in our society. It seems to me that with people like Jacqueline or Ted Kaczynski. We understand now that economy is not any longer the driving force in the development of our society, but this is definitely technology and as such the existence

of Kaczynski. His crimes on one side, but his reflection and analysis on the other side are very important for us to understand where we are going and to foresee the kind of future that we already have, which is already here and that we did not want lucidly. In that respect, his manifesto helped us to be more aware of the direction our society is taking currently.

Robert: The difference I have of opinion if you want to call it opinion or analysis with Kaczynski is that for him it was either the survival and complete hegemony of the system. Or its collapse, and therefore one had to be a revolutionary in order to precipitate the total collapse of the system. Whereas I don't think that that. Either likely, or do I consider it desirable? A total collapse, namely a kind of return to a state of nature, of the war, of all against all, but rather finding ways to keep open alternatives within the reality of modern technology. And to create little spaces that I continue to refer to as little gardens in the midst of the wasteland because they can go a long way in, in terms of a different kind of survival, psychological survival rather than material survival, that he was so.

Jean-Marie: I for 1:00 AM also very suspicious about any extreme solution such as revolution, so I did not think either it was something desirable. Let's say that if you permit me to speak a little bit about my own ideas. I understand that technology to a certain extent is governing more and more aspect in our life, but it seems also to me that each new civilization, and definitely we are in a new city. Creates on one side its own negativity, but also its own condition of freedom. That means in a totally technological society such as the one we are creating currently, we have to invent to create. Our new condition of freedom, which are very different from the 18 or 19th century situation of our founding Father living in the frontier, and so. One, but that does not mean we are totally the slave of this technological situation. We are not totally passive in front of technology, which is a human creation, and we have to be aware of the danger in order to create new condition for liberty and freedom. Except that it won't be the same freedom situation as it was even at the time of my birth in 1945.

Robert: Yeah, well, that's where I think that your ideas are much more interesting than Kaczynski's on this issue, because for Kaczynski, it was dichotomously black or white. It was either total enslavement in the system or it was this wilderness child outside of society living in a shack and learning material survival skills in a in a complete wilderness. Trying to invent the new spheres of freedom within the context of a given historical reality is a much more difficult challenge than to try to bring about impossible and feckless revolutions that are can only happen in someone's mind and not actually translate into reality so. Thank you for saying that. I I would like to raise this issue of of his division of human. Well, what interests me about Kaczynski is also his notion that. Human beings, that there's certain formula for human happiness and that most people do not formulate or do they, they do not actually take full cognizance of what will make them happy, and that oftentimes the technology we're creating, as you said, the society we're making or the scientific scientific research that we're pursuing. We're not in control of the goals that they're heading towards. And so,

for example, he divides human drives into three groups. You remember that where? He says that there are those drives that can be satisfied with minimal effort. I'm hungry. I go to the supermarket, I buy my food, minimal effort to satisfy that. Then there are those that can be satisfied, but only at the cost of serious effort. Becoming a professor, getting your PhD, whatever kind of truly earned. And then there are those drives that cannot be adequately satisfied, no matter how much effort one makes. And he says that the power process, what gives people a sense of freedom and empowerment is the process of satisfying the drives of the second group. And I believe he's correct in that. But then he goes on to claim that in our modern industrial society, natural human drives tend to be pushed into the first and third groups, and the second group tends to consist increasingly of artificially created drives. And he says that among those are surrogate activities directed towards an artificial goal that people set up for themselves merely in order to have some goal to work towards. And I believe that this is a very intelligent analysis of what maybe Jean Paul sat would call the movies foil of. You know, projecting goals which are not coming from myself, which even if I were to attain, would not bring me happiness, but they just keep the illusion that I have purpose in my life, whereas my life might not have any purpose whatsoever. It's just a veneer of purpose.

Jean-Marie: But it is his own vision because, for example, he defined as surrogate activities the desire for knowledge. It is probably his scarce this is an academic he got a PhD in mathematics as we know he has been an assistant professor in one of the best American University Berkeley, and he did not like this sort of life. He did not want to have. This sort of academic life, but. I for one, do not consider that our drive for understanding the universe in which we Live Today is a surrogate activity. For me it is linked to our body. We need to understand the sort of universe in which we are. Our ancestors tried to understand. Our universe, starting with the Earth, our relationship to the sun today with technology we have a totally different view of what the universe is. In my view, it is not a surrogate activity. It is a strong inscribed in human body design. Drive to understand the life we have. So in a certain way, Kaczynski is not always aware of the impact of his own education on his ideas. Project on to everybody. His own personal view so that everything which appears to him to be a surrogate activity, we are not forced to share this perspective and I don't.

Robert: I agree with you that a lot of activities in the realm of knowledge are not surrogate activities in the way he understands them. For example, our desire to know the origins of the cosmos or our desire to know ourselves through probe. However, I have claimed several times on the show that there is a great deal of scientific research which does not fall under the category of this wonder and natural curiosity to know the world we live in, and to know ourselves better. But that when he says, and I quote, that science marches on blindly, without regard to the real welfare of the human race. Or to any other standard standard, obedient only to the psychological needs of the scientists and of the government officials and corporate executives who provide the

funds for their research. A great deal of scientific research that takes place right here in our own academic home and in universities around the world is of this sort.

Jean-Marie: I think I agree with you, but it's very difficult within the academic environment to seem to criticize most of our colleagues and to place oneself. Outside the circle. So this is why I am hesitating publicly to agree with you. But basically you know that I share your opinions.

Robert: Well it reminds me of what Hegel said in the phenomenology. Of spirit, which is. That the one of the deepest drives or motivations of human behavior and human achievement is a desire for recognition. And he said that men of knowledge, philosopher, scientists above all that they are not motivated by disinterested search for knowledge. They are motivated primarily for the desire for recognition. You know how many of our colleagues here at Stanford just wait for that phone call from the Nobel Prize? This committee that is going to crown their, their work of of years and years, I mean it's probably a noble goal, but the desire for recognition is a very different motivation than maximizing the welfare of the human race. And oftentimes scientific research is conducted for the former, not the latter.

Jean-Marie: OK there, but this desire for recognition belongs to the human nature or even animal nature. Animals do need to recognize one another, and it's the same for us. We need a sort of recognition.

Robert: Again, well, that's fine as long as animals can remain animals.

Jean-Marie: I don't see that.

Robert: But when scientists now are starting to change a mouse into a rat or a cat into a dog, through genetic manipulation of the of of their of their genome, then then I I I figure that one has to tell the scientists. Are you doing this because you really want to save the life of that innocent? Maybe that one's always invoking, or are you doing this because it's? It's that thing which will get you the next piece of recognition.

Jean-Marie: No, this is true. This is a negative aspect of the of science, and this is the price to pay to have also a knowledge of what the genome is.

Robert: Right. Well, in any case, that's that.

Jean-Marie: You you cannot have there the negative the positive side without having at the same time the negative side so.

Robert: I agree with that, but if I accept that as a as a foregone conclusion, then I say I have to accept the technological society with all its virtues and all its vices, and therefore I have to get out of the business of trying to point out what are its vices. As opposed to its virtues and to address the question of its vices people sometimes misunderstand on the show that that I'm anti scientific. Not at all. I mean, science is one of the most noble. But that doesn't mean that one has to just be on either you're with us or against us. You're either for science or you're against science. No, there are certain things in scientific activity. In research. One can also look at with a certain suspicion, I think to Kaczynski can help.

Jean-Marie: Solutely absolutely, absolutely.

Robert: Show us this.

Jean-Marie: And on that respect, whatever we may think of the man, we need to read and to pass to our students his manifesto, because it's an important text.

Robert: So what other ideas for usual media are the most important in his corpus? That we should address.

Jean-Marie: Beyond the ideas on technology and is sociological description of contemporary society, a society where the role of victimization ultimately weakens not only the victim, but all human beings. The other aspect of Kazinski's work which interested me was the personal aspect, the psychological aspects, the education that he has received, his frustration during his life and above all. This conception of writing you mentioned in your introduction that currently I am working on him as a writer and it seems to me after I. Many text, many interview he has given. I even read his autobiography, which has not been published. I think that from the beginning. He should be considered as a writer, a very special writer, but a writer. Bear in mind that over the years. He has written a diary which is almost 20,000 pages, a diary which is basically written in English, but some parts are written in Spanish and some other parts are coded in such a secret code that it was extremely difficult for the FBI. To understand what he had written and they found the key in his shack. Otherwise they probably would not have understood what he. And he has written even literary text. He has written one important philosophical book, which is industrial society and his future. He has written at least two, if not three different autobiographies. So basically his real vocation. Is to be a writer. And one of our problem in our society is that when we write, we want our book, for which we have worked so many years to have a certain impact, and basically in most of the cases except few people. Or words have no meaning. They bear no power, they will change nothing. They will be seen at best as divertissement, as a pleasure, even a pleasure of intelligence, but nothing more than that. Our words do not have any longer. The power to change. Kaczynski was obsessed by this form of almost religious writing by which a book can change human life, and in my view, this is probably the main reason why he killed someone. Because he wanted his word or his pen to be associated not with ink, like your pen or my pen, but with blood. In order to have words which were sourced. Powerful that they would change the real. So I said. It's almost a religious attitude because bear in mind that even if he is an A taste and has been raised in an atheist family, his family was from a Catholic. Origin and is still maintain even if he does not know it. A certain Catholic conception of the words when the priest takes the oath and says pronounce the sacred words ocast and in corpus. These words have the power to transform the host into the body of Christ, so it is an extremely powerful capacity with some special words to transform the universe into something different. And this is what he wanted to have. And this is the revolution he wanted. He knew he was alone. He knew basically, that nobody would follow him. But he expected that associating words. With blood, these words would be strong enough to transform reality to change the course of our society in order to make something different. Of course, it's totally crazy and it is totally. Irrelevant if you think about it, but at the same time, my question to you and to me

also is this one. This secret dream of Kaczynski is it not a part of our own dream as a writer, don't we want to have the greatest intellectual figure in the 20th century? Think of Jean Paul Sarte, for example. Jack's menu is.

Robert: Also, some that aren't French.

Jean-Marie: Yes, exactly. I'm sorry for this, for this nationalism, these people who listen to me. Excuse me for being so French, but I mean the great intellectuals. Have always wanted their words to create something new. The founding father in America. This is what they've done and. It is in this dimension that we have to evaluate kazinski's crazy enterprise.

Robert: I have two questions for you. Then one is if his true vocation was not to be a murderer, not to be a wild man in the 4th, but to. Be a writer. First question, do you think he was a good writer? Second question. With this radical proto or post Catholic desire to transubstantiate the word into action. Or into history. Do you think that that is the you know, the belief of a sane man? So is he a good rider? Was he? Saying from a clinical point of view, I use them in the. I am using the past tense I.

Jean-Marie: Should use the present tense. But yeah, in both cases. And of course this is my personal judgement. The answer is no. He is not a good writer because today we are not anymore in a society where we have an impact through a religious method, but rather through aesthetic. And as far as aesthetics is concerned, no it does not write very well. He is writing. He's very often schematical and by no means he could be compared to Mark Twain, for example with the master. Of the American language second. It's extremely difficult to have a final judgment, but in my view, no. In my view, no. He had many problems from the beginning, an extremely difficult relationship to his parents, particularly to his mother. Very bizarre relationship to his brother David, difficulty to be in touch and in contact with other human beings with male on one side having difficulty to be friends, his colleagues and with female. This is a man who is who was and still is today, very handsome. Very intelligent. He has been unable to find a girlfriend for himself. When he had everything he could a good job at Berkeley, a very handsome and attractive body, and a guy who was well read and very intelligent. And yet he was alone. One of his great failure, and he knows it is the fact that he has been incapable of sharing his life with a sweet girlfriend, having a family and having babies, which was one of his dream. So all that refers to an extremely complex, difficult. Psychological relationship with other people. It's very difficult to draw a line between someone with sane and totally insane, but I would lean in the case of Theodore Kaczynski on the side of the unseen, if not in sane and in my view. If he had been more sane, he probably would not have killed and he would have spent his time improving his right.

Robert: And hanging out with girls.

Jean-Marie: Probably yes.

Robert: So this loneliness is profound loneliness and estrangement from others that characterizes his entire adult life. Even as at Berkeley professor, apparently he was pathologically shy even in front of students. He got terrible student evaluations.

Maybe it was a question of compensation, but he was very, very close with his brother David for a while in his life and his younger brother idolized him and loved him and looked up to. And this intimacy that he had with David was one that then he became estranged from his brother. He cut off all relations with his family. But I'm very intrigued by the figure of David, the brother, because it was finally David who recognized after the manifesto was published in the Washington Post, who recognized that this was the work of his brother. He recognized the style and the ideas from previous things, letters that he had written to David and so forth. And from everything we know, David agonized over what to do. But of course he. he tried before turning in his brother to make sure that he would get the FBI not to pursue a death penalty, that he himself would remain anonymous as this source, and so forth. While everyone was talking about Ted Kaczynski as the Saint figure in this whole drama, for me there's something saintly about David Kaczynski and his behavior, not only in the question of the arrest, but afterwards. How he's still going around with some of the victims of Ted Kaczynski talking about reconciliation, giving all the money he makes to the families of the victims and so forth. he seems like a truly. Decent, if not profoundly moral individual. But do you have any? View on that.

Jean-Marie: Yes, it is true that it was probably an agonizing decision for David to denounce his brother. He recognized the ideas that was expressed in the manifesto, written in 1971. And under the guidance of David's wife Linda, David went to the indirectly to the FBI and to say that he suspected his brother to be the Unabomber. That is true, but David certainly does. Incarnate our own moral values today at the origin, David was totally in admiration with his brother and wanted to be like his brother. And he went out in the solitude for years and years like his brother. At the moment, or immediately after he denounced his brother to the police, that permitted him to reinstate himself. In the dominant society, so we change. He moved from loneliness to civilization. He married his girlfriend to day. He is very much involved in Community work. He gives lecture on his brother or on different topics. And in a certain way, he has taken the place of Theodore Theodore. Now is in the shadow, whereas at the origin, Theodore was constantly in the light. He was the bright guy. He was the guy who had succeeded in his studies. He was a very intelligent guy. And David was nothing. Today, curiously enough, David is something he becomes important for us. He is seen as generous, as someone who has done something exceptional, whereas Theodore is the villain. He is in jail, in the shadow and. I would like to add something. As I said in 1998, Kaczynski Theodor Kavinsky wrote his own autobiography. And he speaks a lot about his relationship to his brother in this autobiography. And he said that he will never forgive his brother David for betraying him when he thought that his brother was always on his side. But he also says I will. Forgive him, under one condition that he divorces his spouse. He leaves civilization. He goes back to the shack in Texas where he lived, and he lives in loneliness for the rest of his life. So in a certain. Anyway, Theodore Kaczynski describes his brother as a Judas who has betrayed the Christ and he sees himself as a Christ figure that says a lot about his unconscious

cultural conception of his work. I know what I may say here is shocking because for us, Theodore Kaczynski is a criminal, if not a serial killer. But I wanted to report what I read in his autobiography and that also should be taken into consideration.

Robert: For me, that's another confirmation that he had all the instincts of a tyrant. As I mentioned in my introduction, because this idea that he would only forgive his brother on this one condition that he go and be the duplicate. The inferior duplicate of himself is an act of arrogance and of presumption, and of a lack of generosity in terms of the relation to his brother, and this inability to forgive shows that he's not a true Catholic yet right heart he might have been obsessed with transubstantiation, but.

Jean-Marie: But not with Christ. Christ, last word, Father, forgive them because they don't know what they're doing.

Robert: they they, yeah.

Jean-Marie: I don't know what is the term. In English but.

Robert: Forgive them for they know not what they do.

Jean-Marie: OK. Yeah. Thank you.

Robert: And how, and of course, David asked for forgiveness for his. Ted not only legally, but probably also morally and from the public, because the spirit of forgiveness, he knew that his brother was probably not responsible for his actions and that he should be spared the death penalty and so forth. I mean, talking about forgiveness. It's on the side, I think of David. Not on Ted. One last question. Before we close the program, Jean-Marie, we've been speaking here, by the way, with Professor Jean-Marie Posley. This on KSU, Stanford about Ted Kaczynski, the so-called unabomb. All the work you've done and most of the work you've done on the Unabomber has been in French, and translating him into French French there seems to be a huge interest in this figure in France. Why is that?

Jean-Marie: Four different French translation appeared. In France. It seems to me that he has been a role model for the extreme left. Is in a certain way a role model for this revolutionary left who has no more figure and ideal to present. Although Ted Kaczynski is much closer to the anarchist of the end of 19th century in Chicago or in Paris. Yet the post 68 revolutionary movement in France, which is at the same time so important and so weak because it has no realistic program found in Kaczynski its role model. And This is why very likely he's someone extremely popular in France.

Robert: Well, that's good. I'm sure your new book that's going to come out shortly, we'll do very well in France. Thanks for coming on again, Jean-Marie. It's been a pleasure as usual, and there are plenty of other topics that we're going to get you back on to discuss.

Jean-Marie: Thank you, Robert, for having me once more.

Robert: And thank you all for listening to entitled opinions. We'll be with you shortly.

Unabomber's writings raise uneasy ethical questions

Source

February 1st, 2010

Robert Harrison and Jean-Marie Apostolidès at the KZSU studio.

Apostolidès' interview about the Unabomber on "Entitled Opinions" will be rebroadcast at 4 p.m. Tuesday, Feb. 2, on Stanford's KZSU 90.1 FM. Robert Harrison, the Rosina Pierotti Professor in Italian Literature and chair of the Department of French and Italian, will lead a blog discussion on the topic here tomorrow. (Be patient: Jean-Marie was late to KZSU; interview starts a few minutes in.) Stay tuned!

Meanwhile, my own story about Apostolidès and Theodore Kaczynski, the "Unabomber":

Great crimes don't end neatly with a trial. Uneasy questions linger: Should we disqualify ideas when they come from a killer's lips? Is it right to disseminate the killer's ideas – even while denouncing them – if the criminal killed precisely to give them weight and force?

For French Professor Jean-Marie Apostolidès, briefly a penpal of the notorious Unabomber and a translator of his writings, these very questions are a scholar's *terroir*.

He was intrigued by the killer's anti-technology stance, and says that on that score, Theodore Kaczynski may have been right. "Technology transformed humanity into something different than it was before, into a new creation – flesh and *technè*," he said.

"We are mutants now. What will come out of it nobody knows. It's something unprecedented – and scary," he said. Science fiction, in many cases, is simply "presenting the fears of the metamorphosis."

Apostolidès recently published in book form a French translation of the Unabomber's manifesto, *Industrial Society and Its Future*. He is currently working on a philosophical and psychological study, *Of Ink and Blood: The Writings of Theodore Kaczynski*. The author of 1999's *L'Affaire Unabomber* also has written the recently published *The Metamorphoses of Tintin: Or, Tintin for Adults*.

French Professor Jean-Marie Apostolidès briefly corresponded with the notorious Unabomber.

For Apostolidès, Kaczynski has been a 15-year interest. For most of us, the Unabomber is frozen in the image that gripped America on April 3, 1996: an unkempt, bearded recluse from the Montana wilderness, a man who by all appearances could have

been a backwoods yokel or a hermit-saint, arrested following a 17-year spree of deadly bombings (many targeted at universities) that had earned him the tag “Unabomber.”

Apostolidès, who has a background as a psychologist as well as a playwright and scholar of French classical literature and drama, was not surprised by the profile of the killer – a brilliant, Harvard-educated mathematician who had been a professor at the University of California-Berkeley.

Apostolidès had become intrigued with the Unabomber’s screed, which critiques the pervasive effect of technology on our world and humanity’s increasing dependence on it. He had already translated Kaczynski’s “audacious” manifesto for the Parisian press a few weeks before the killer’s arrest. (Kaczynski said he would halt the killings if his *Industrial Society and Its Future* was published; the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* obliged in 1995.)

Despite some sympathy for Kaczynski’s views on industrial society, Apostolidès embraces technology – “because I think there is no other way. It brings positive and negative things. They cannot be separated.

“Our global history as animals is to go beyond our animality in order to create something we don’t know. It has been the case since the caveman,” he said.

“There is a great leap leading God knows where,” he said.

Inevitably, technology’s takeover has its casualties. Kaczynski created them, and became one of them – a former professor now an inmate of a maximum-security prison. Kaczynski was haunted by the notion of the noble savage, a myth that has echoed through Western thought from Rousseau to today’s blockbuster *Avatar*. The Unabomber, said Apostolidès, is a direct heir of the anarchists of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

However, the way back to the wilderness is a fantasy: “There’s no way we can return. No way to go back to the frontier man. Ted Kaczynski is a hundred years too late,” he said.

A secret that has expired

The translation of Kaczynski’s 1995 manifesto, which Apostolidès began the day after he read it in the *Washington Post*, was the first step in a longer journey. The next began with a secret.

“In the past, I was in a certain way tied to a secret that I think has no more value,” he explained. Shortly after the arrest, Apostolidès was approached by Kaczynski’s team of lawyers, who said they were concerned for the prisoner’s sanity and well-being in prison.

“They thought I would be a perfect penpal,” he said. Apostolidès was told to keep the correspondence secret even from his family. Thus began a brief, lopsided correspondence screened by Kaczynski’s lawyers and the FBI.

The brief correspondence did not go smoothly: “He did not want to talk to me; he wanted to preach. I detest that,” he said. “On one side he was scolding me, on the other side complimenting me.”

In retrospect, Apostolidès thinks the lawyers wanted him to help certify Kaczynski was insane. Yet, he said, “I’m convinced he has neurotic problems – but no more than anyone else. He has to be judged on his ideas and his deeds.” Our insistence on his insanity may be a way to avoid grappling with that, he said.

In an interview, Apostolidès leaned forward across the desk in his campus office and his voice dropped: “This will shock you. He’s a very nice guy, sweet, open-minded. And I know he has blood on his hands. You cannot be all bad – even if you kill, even Hitler.”

We would like our villains to be 100 percent evil, psychotic Snidely Whiplashes counting money in the backroom. (Look at the outcry at the portrayal of Hitler in the 2004 film *Downfall*.) We are uncomfortable when they look even a little bit like us, but such ambiguity is the stuff of life, said Apostolidès.

The most obvious ambiguity may be centered within Apostolidès himself. He admits he has a longstanding interest in avant-garde ideas – but he writes about radical thoughts from the safe perch of a university professorship and his comfortable home on the Stanford campus. In short, as a part of the petite bourgeoisie Kaczynski despises.

Kaczynski’s manifesto argues that the leftist liberals who present themselves as rebels are, in fact, obedient servants of the dominant society – a symptom of “oversocialization.” He singles out “university intellectuals” as prime examples.

Apostolidès, who says he wouldn’t kill a fly, finds the criticism “absolutely appropriate.”

‘Our words have no power’

“It’s the problem of scholars, even artists: Our words have no power. We think we are changing the world – particularly on the left,” he said, and paused. “You accept your symbolic castration – that your writing will take time to have a modest influence on your contemporaries.” In other words, he accepts the compromises necessary to live a normal life, with an income, collegial support, home and family.

Yet Kaczynski’s writings and life have intrigued Apostolidès by emphasizing “the relationship between writing and killing, ink and blood.”

“From a cynical perspective, I write books without killing anyone – my writing will have no impact. The only way I can be listened to is to associate my writing to something.” That is, “either your own blood or someone else’s.”

For instance, he cited Japanese writer Yukio Mishima, whose meticulously planned seppuku in 1970 triggered an avalanche of interest in his works.

Kaczynski is following in these footsteps, rejecting the petit bourgeois alternative that Apostolidès has knowingly embraced and instead “linking blood and ink.”

If Apostolidès’ contention seems eggheaded, consider a Jan. 8 *New York Times* article on the Jordanian doctor who killed nine people, including himself and seven CIA officers, in a suicide bombing in Afghanistan: “My words will die if I do not save them with my blood,” he posted pseudonymously on a blog before his death.

“My articles will be against me if I don’t prove to them that I am not a hypocrite,” the posting read. “One has to die to make the other live. I wish I could be the one to die.”

That said, aren’t there moral reservations in advancing Kaczynski’s writings? After all, he killed to get an audience.

“I do not agree with his ideas, let alone his means to spread them,” Apostolidès said. Nevertheless, “The role of a scholar is to go beyond my own emotions and analyze everything.

“It does not mean we are unaware of the ethical dimension. But we have to go beyond. It is a necessity.”

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“Dangerous ideas”: Harrison discusses the Unabomber

Source

Monday, February 1st, 2010

Robert Harrison with Jean-Marie Apostolidès

“The Entitled Opinions show on the Unabomber with Professor Apostolidès received quite a lot of feedback from listeners, not only because of the provocative content of the program but also because it was the first show to be podcast after a three-month summer hiatus, so listeners were eager to welcome us back. In general the reactions had two main aspects. On the one hand, there were plenty of comments about our decision – considered gutsy by many — to do a show about the ideas of a convicted criminal. On the other, there were comments on the ideas discussed on the show.

The first kind of reaction is best summarized by a remark that one listener sent in by email: ‘Daring show. That will shake the jelly in administrative heads.’ Most of the listeners who communicated their reactions applauded us for our boldness. A minority expressed consternation and felt that Ted Kaczynski may be a brilliant man but that his criminal actions disqualify his ideas from being taken seriously in a public forum of debate. Why? Because he used crime as a tactic to draw attention to his ideas, and that by doing a show on him we were ‘allowing him to get away with murder,’ as it were. While Kaczynski did not get away with murder, there is something valid in this viewpoint. Professor Apostolidès and I were aware that we were in some sense rendering Kaczynski’s tactics successful, yet it must also be pointed out that few people would want to proscribe, or condemn an academic discussion of, *Mein Kampf*, even though it was authored by one of the greatest criminals in history.

Harrison at KZSU (Photo by L.A. Cicero)

Many listeners felt that the way we discussed Kaczynski’s ideas was refreshingly fearless. To quote from one communication we received from a professor of philosophy who teaches at Emory: ‘The content is provocative as all hell, if not disturbing, and delivered without compromise. You were seriously discussing dangerous ideas and it was powerful, if not breath taking. And then to hear this heavy French accent talking about Kaczynski (the unabom-bear) as a writer who achieved the dream of every writer — to have his or her words change the world – was magnificent radio. Incredible show! Singular! Bravo!’ That’s not the last word on it, to be sure, but it’s good enough for now.”

— Robert Harrison, “Entitled Opinions”

What do you think? Robert Harrison invites comments on the KZSU radio interview, or the article and video. Leave a reply below.

The Ted K Archive

Robert Harrison and Jean-Marie Apostolidès
Jean-Marie Apostolidès on the Unabomber
September 29, 2009

Entitled Opinions (about Life and Literature) & The Book Haven
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