Prophets of the New World

Noam Chomsky, Murray Bookchin, and Fredy Perlman

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How well they flew together side by side
the Stars and Stripes my red and white and blue
and my Black Flag the sovereignty of no
man or law!

—Paul Goodman[1]

Any approach to contemporary anarchism initially encounters the two major problems of definition and terminology. In "Notes on Anarchism," Noam Chomsky avers: "There have been many styles of thought and action that have been referred to as 'anarchist.' It would be hopeless to try to encompass all of these conflicting tendencies in some general theory or ideology. And even if we proceed to extract from the history of libertarian thought a living, evolving tradition..it remains difficult to formulate its doctrines as a specific and determinate theory of society, pertinent to the American context, especially given the diversification characteristic of the contemporary period. But if Chomsky denies the possibility of formulating a comprehensive anarchist theory or tradition, he elsewhere offers a definition which clearly implies why such a formulation remains inconceivable. Anarchism, he asserts, "does not limit its aims to democratic control by producers over production, but seeks to abolish all forms of domination and hierarchy in every aspect of social and personal life, an unending struggle, since progress in achieving a more just society will lead to new insight and understanding of forms of oppression that may be concealed in traditional practice and consciousness."[2]

The unceasing process of exponential discovery prevents a stable and definitive formulation. But it is precisely this process which constitutes the uniqueness of anarchism. Regardless of the content of its praxis during any period, the distinctive character of anarchism remains its continual capacity to redefine and reconfigure itself. Rather than being determined by a set of fixed theoretical and organizational concepts, anarchism develops within an ideological framework susceptible to dynamic and extensive transformations. Hence, while certain conceptual tendencies and continuities are perceptible, these are rarely permitted to ossify into dogmatic or proscriptive determinism. This open, transformative capacity, apart from precluding a static definition, differentiates anarchism from all other ideologies, particularly Marxism. This is not a fortuitous comparison. The contemporary American theorists who form the focus of this essay, despite their divergent trajectories, all broadly share a common ideological departure point in the most seminal strand of anarchism: anarchocommunism, which Kropotkin identified as left-wing socialism. And one of the most productive ways of patterning the historical development of American anarchocommunism is to trace its changing

[1] Noam Chomsky, *For Reasons of State* (London: Fontana, 1973), p.151.

[2] Idem, "The Soviet Union versus Socialism," in *The Radical Papers,* ed. Dimitros I. Roussopoulos (Montreal: Black Rose, 1987), p. 60.

responses to Marxism. Such a comparison reveals three broad phases within American anarchist thought.[3]

In the first phase, from 1858 (when the first indigenous anarchocommunist publication appeared) until the mid-1920s, Marxism was largely regarded as a competitor. The most representative figures of this phase are immigrants, such as Johann Most, Alexander Berkman and Emma Goldman, all of whom actively participated in the mass industrial movements of the time. Marxism, or authoritarian socialism, competed with anarchism, or libertarian socialism, for the allegiance of the masses within the shared terrain of the Left. This occasionally acrimonious competition assumed a far more serious complexion during the second phase, which lasted roughly from the mid-1920s to the mid-1960s. The experience of Bolshevism—Marxism in practice—in the Russian and Spanish revolutions catapulted anarchists into an adversarial position. And this, given the prestige accorded the Soviet system by the American Left, transformed them into a very unfashionable and unpopular group. For this reason, and others, including some fiercely repressive anti-anarchist legislative measures, the movement declined and virtually disappeared in the United States. But this forced abandonment of the traditional civil arena had many beneficial effects in the long term. In particular, it allowed anarchism to broaden enormously the scope of its interests, and "politicize" an entire range of issues and practices that remained outside the purview of Marxism. The representative figure of this transitional phase must be Paul Goodman, with his incredibly ecumenical concerns. The significance of this reparative, "convalescent" period cannot be overestimated. For, with the onset of the Second World War, the era of mass proletarian movements effectively ended in the West. The workers were no longer the central revolutionary force. Marxism, with its inflexible dogmas and its involvement in labor movements, did not possess sufficient distance to apprehend this development for several decades. But American anarchists, in particular, because of their apparent marginality and the transformative capacity inherent in their ideology, were able to make the necessary shifts to remain equal to the challenge of historical trends. Consequently, this phase came to an end during the mid-1960s with a fresh wave of insurgency and a renewed sense of anarchism's relevance. And one of the most striking aspects of this resurgence remains the emphasis with which it asserts anarchism's absolute difference from Marxism. It is not accidental that the three contemporary thinkers considered in this essay have all in their distinctive ways denounced the Marxist legacy: Noam Chomsky in his pungent "The Soviet Union versus Socialism," Murray Bookchin in many essays including his notorious "Listen, Marxist!," and Fredy Perlman in his wickedly mordant *Manual for Revolutionary Leaders*. Perhaps more importantly, however, many contemporary anarchists have rejected not only Marxist ideology, but all

[3] This broad tripartite schema can be readily deduced from the best detailed account of American anarchist history: William O. Reichert, *Partisans of Freedom: A Study in American Anarchism* (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1976). For the sake of convenience, subsequent references in the text to "anarchism" should be taken to denote anarchocommunism, unless otherwise specified.

forms of ideology—including anarchism. In a position paper, the group focused around the Detroit publication *Fifth Estate* have indicated: "We are not anarchists per se, but pro-anarchy, which is for us a living integral experience incommensurate with Power and refusing all ideology."[4] These individuals no longer consider themselves on the Left. Rather, pointing to "an emerging synthesis of post-modern anarchy and the primitive (in the sense of original), Earth-based ecstatic vision, " they align themselves with the forces of life and nature against the entire megamachine of Western civilization.[5]

The *Fifth Estate* formulation allows the development of American anarchism to be placed in perspective. In the three phases of its development, anarchism has related to Marxism as a competitor, an adversary, and as a negation. While Marxist communism retains many ideological values in common with the capitalist order (for example, agreement on the progressive historic role of industrialization, and on the necessity of hierarchical order and labor), anarchism has gradually broadened its critique, and so has severed these connections. Inevitably, as its trajectory diverges further and further from current ideological norms, Marxism and capitalism will be seen to share common features and indeed become almost structurally indistinguishable, until the point at which Fredy Perlman can characterize the former as a method of capital accumulation in those Third World nations overlooked by the latter.

Nothing could be more incorrect than to characterize anarchism as merely an antistatist ideology. Certainly, this repudiation remains one of its bases. But its subsequent trajectory is far more complex. The tripartite developmental trajectory adumbrated above could be regarded from a different perspective. Successive phases can be identified as gradations in an incremental critique of all forms of authority. In the first phase, anarchism remained nonpolitical because it advocated abstention from, and opposition to, electoral and State processes. In the second phase, it focused on issues that were apolitical in the sense that they remained outside the traditional civil sphere. But in the third phase, it becomes antipolitical by shifting toward a total critique of a civilization structured around governance.

The remainder of this essay seeks to examine the nature of this contemporary shift. But in addition to terminological problems, this task contains many difficulties. The scope of the shift, combined with anarchism's transformative capacity, ensures that the resulting theoretical constructs are exceedingly diverse, even contradictory. (As a term, coherence often acquires pejorative connotations in anarchist discourse.) In order to limit this diversity for present purposes, attention will be focused upon only three theorists. The trio have been selected partly because they illustrate the variety of positions available within the contemporary spectrum, and partly because of the cogency and comprehensiveness of their thought. But even this delimitation involves additional obstacles. Given anarchism's radical egalitarianism, certain individuals within

[4] Anon, "Renew the Earthly Paradise," *Fifth Estate,* Winter/Spring 1986, p.10.

[5] Ibid. On the emerging difference between contemporary anarchism and the Left, see E.B. Maple, "Anarchy and the Left," Fifth Estate, Spring 1987, pp. 4–5, 19, and Paul Buhle, *Marxism in the United States: Remapping the History of the American Left* (London: Verso, 1987), pp. 258–261.

the North American movement have indicated the incongruity of reconstructing its history around great individuals.[6] While acknowledging the pertinence of this point, it can be said in partial mitigation that this essay merely constitutes an analytical survey of certain contemporary tendencies, and maintains no pretense to anything else. It does not, for example, attempt to appraise the significance of contemporary activism, nor assess the importance of anarchafeminism. But, given these provisos, it can perhaps serve to delineate some of the primary patterns in contemporary American anarchist thought.

Given the contemporary obsolescence—particularly in the present context— of political designations such as "right" and "left," it remains necessary to discover alternative ways of classifying the thought of the three theorists under consideration. One way of situating each within an appropriate spectrum consists of determining the degree of their traditionalism in terms of anarchist doctrine itself. This form of categorization—which designates Noam Chomsky as the most traditional on a sliding scale through Murray Bookchin to Fredy Perlman—remains the most convenient; although, as will become apparent, it paradoxically results in the characterization of the thinker with the most time-honored emphases as the most innovative of the trio. Nevertheless, there is a perverse pertinence in attributing this circular (indeed cyclical) structure to contemporary anarchism, which is simultaneously an ultra-revolutionary and an ultra-conservative movement. For it is this apparent contradiction—the propensity to integrate a rejuvenated anarchy, an ancient social form, in a postmodern context: that is, simultaneously to return to the far past and proceed to an advanced future—which provides anarchism with its unique dynamics.

Noam Chomsky is undoubtedly the most traditional of the three theoreticians, a fact which may be partly due to the fact that he has refused the theorist designation, suggesting in an interview: "Let me just say I don't really regard myself as an anar-

[6] See, for example, Kandace Kerr, review of *Emma Goldman: An Intimate Life* by Alice Wexler, in *Open Road*, Spring 1986, pp. 8–9. As in this case, however, focusing on individuals can reveal otherwise neglected features. The three theorists profiled in this essay all share a common Jewish ethnicity and this may not be a coincidental factor. Rightly or wrongly, contemporary anarchism (unlike its Marxist counterpart) tends to deemphasize—some would say neglect—the issue of ethnicity. And interestingly enough, this omission is also apparent in the political theory of the three Jewish-American anarchists examined here. (The partial exception is Perlman, who in "Anti-Semitism and the Beirut Pogrom" (1983) and "The Continuing Appeal of Nationalism" (1984) sketched the beginnings of an anarchist theory of race.

The reasons for Jewish involvement in radical politics (if not anarchism in particular) have been widely documented and analyzed, but there is no room in the present context to rehearse them. See, for example, Thorstein Veblen, "The Intellectual Pre-eminence of Jews in Modern Europe" in *The Portable Veblen* ed. Max Lerner (New York: Viking, 1970); Hannah Arendt, "The Jew as Pariah: A Hidden Tradition" in *The Jew as Pariah: Jewish Identity and Politics in the Modern Age*, ed., Ron H. Feldman (New York: Grove Press, 1978); Jean-Paul Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, trans., George J. Becker (New York: Schocken, 1970); Percy S. Cohen, *Jewish Radicals and Radical Jews* (London: Academic Press, 1980); Stanley Rothman and S. Robert Lichter, *Roots of Radicalism: Jews, Christians and the New Left* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982).

chist thinker. I'm a derivative fellow traveller, let's say."[7] This may seem to disqualify him from consideration in the present context, but his inclusion remains significant basically because in a sense he represents the public face of anarchism in America. Due to his eminence in the field of linguistics and his exposures of the ideological and academic apologists for American imperialism, he probably constitutes the individual most readily identified as an anarchist thinker. It is thus ironic to discover that his brand of anarchism is extremely traditional, and in fact harks back to previous phases in the doctrine's development.

Perhaps the most sustained critique of Chomsky's anarchism, and particularly of his introduction to Daniel Guerin's *Anarchism*, has been undertaken by George Woodcock . The latter bluntly states: "I am doing neither Chomsky nor Guerin an injustice in stating that neither is an anarchist by any known criterion; they are both left-wing Marxists."[8] He substantiates his contentions by showing that the components of Chomsky's ideas are derived from only one strand of anarchism: anarchosyndicalism, the strand which most closely approximates to Marxism. Woodcock's criticisms provide a useful departure point for an examination of Chomsky's libertarianism, but they in turn are written from a rather orthodox anarchocommunist position. The extent of Chomsky's traditionalism only really becomes apparent through a comparison of his ideas with those of his peers. And although the full connotations of their perspectives will not become available until the close of the essay, this contrast provides a context in which they are more readily apprehensible.

In an interview editorially entitled "The Relevance of Anarcho-Syndicalism," Chomsky expounds his theory of anarchism at some length. The principal omission concerns the methods through which anarchy could be achieved, but these remain implicit in his statements. When he distinguishes between two strands in anarchist praxis, the accuracy of Woodcock's critique becomes evident. On the one hand, he characterizes anarchocommunism—with its emphasis on decentralization, nonindustrialization and direct, neighborhood democracy—as relevant only to pre-industrial contexts. But, "on the other hand there's another anarchist tradition that develops into anarcho-syndicalism which simply regarded anarchist ideas as the proper mode of organization for a highly complex advanced industrial society. And that tendency in anarchism merges, or at least inter-relates very closely with a variety of left-wing Marxism."[9] Rhetorically enquiring which strand remains relevant, he continues:

Well, I myself believe the latter, that is, I think that industrialization and the advance of technology raise possibilities for self-management over a broad scale that simply didn't exist in an earlier period. And that in fact this is precisely the rational mode for an advanced and complex industrial society, one in which workers will become masters of their own immediate affairs, that is in direction and control of the shop,

[7] Noam Chomsky, *Radical Priorities*, ed., Carlos P. Otero (Montreal: Black Rose, 1981), p. 247. Interview conducted 1976.

[8] George Woodcock, "Chomsky's Anarchism," *Freedom*, 16 November 1974, p. 4.

[9] Chomsky, *Radical Priorities*, p. 248.

but also can be in a position to make the major substantive decisions concerning the structure of the economy, concerning social institutions, concerning planning regionally and beyond .. A good deal could be automated. Much of the necessary work that is required to keep a decent level of social life going can be consigned to machines—at least in principle—which means humans can be free to undertake the kind of creative work which may not have been possible, objectively, in the early stages of the industrial revolution.[10]

In order to establish the viability of these ideas, he cites the example of the Spanish anarchists during the late 1930s, suggesting that their "large-scale anarchist revolution" was temporarily "successful": "That is, production continued effectively; workers in farms and factories proved quite capable of managing their affairs without coercion from above"[11].

In the present context, these traditional formulations are significant because between them Bookchin and Perlman controvert practically every point Chomsky makes. But more importantly, in various unexpected ways they transcend and enrich his rather limited conception of anarchy. And it is in their theoretical developments that a major source of the vigorousness of American anarchist praxis should be sought. Hence, rather than merely examine their critiques of anarchosyndicalism, this essay will explore their perspectives in ways which clearly highlight the divergent emphases of all three thinkers.

Despite that fact that they stand on opposite sides of the bifurcation between anarchosyndicalism and anarchocommunism, Chomsky and Bookchin initially appear to share certain emphases. Both, for example, appeal to a common heritage derived from the Enlightenment, and in particular to American libertarianism as represented by individuals such as Paine and Jefferson (Bookchin refers to "the universal ideas of the Reformation and the Enlightenment"[12]). Similarly, Chomsky's praise for the Spanish anarchists finds a complement in Bookchin's sympathetic book-length study of the Iberian movement. But the uses made of these shared emphases are completely dissimilar. For where Chomsky discerns continuity, Bookchin perceives dislocation and rupture. Both agree that modern technology contains the potentials for liberation, but whereas Chomsky regards collective worker control as a sufficient basis for anarchy, Bookchin requires a more thorough transformation. For the latter, contemporary technics reveal the prospect of a post-scarcity society of abundance. This vista remained unavailable to most pre-war radicals (including anarchists): hence the asceticism and narrowness in their notions of a libertarian future. But if modern technology contains the promise of liberation, its immense capacity for domination also indicates its uses as a weapon of totalitarianism. And as it is widely constituted, it remains an instrument not only for widespread human oppression, but for ecological devastation which in-

[10] Ibid., pp. 248–9.

[11] Ibid., pp. 246, 247.

[12] Murray Bookchin, *The Modern Crisis* (Montreal: Black Rose, 1987), p. 129.

creasingly threatens the entire biosphere, and potentially for global destruction. Hence, rather than the workers appropriating the industrial apparatus and converting it to their own uses, Bookchin envisions a comprehensive technological transformation. Giant industrial technologies are to be replaced by ecotechnologies, small-scale technics (including limited automation) which enhance rather than harm the ecosphere and remain amenable to local control due to their size. Such technologies could be operated by direct, face-to-face village or urban neighborhood assemblies.

These ensembles constitute the basic structural units in Bookchin's vision of anarchy. But his projections of a post-scarcity society promoted further investigation of the notion of scarcity. According to Marxist and much classical anarchist theory, scarcity remains an inevitable fact. A hostile, competitive and stingy nature instigates a cruel and relentless struggle between humans and between species for scarce resources. The necessity to dominate nature through developing technologies results in the creation of mutually antagonistic socioeconomic forces, which remain locked in internecine struggle until productive forces have attained the requisite level of development, at which time the oppressed class possesses sufficient resources to dispense with their superannuated oppressors. The domination of humanity is thus historically justified by, and based in, the need to subjugate nature. But Bookchin's examination of the history of scarcity in *The Ecology of Freedom* totally refutes this account.

Following Kropotkin, Bookchin demonstrates that nature is neither parsimonious nor competitive, and hence that scarcity is not inherent. On the contrary, nature is frequently superabundant, and many communities have lived amidst conditions of plenty with only minimal labor. Scarcity is not innate in nature; rather, there exists a social organization of scarcity, which entered human experience with the creation of the first hierarchy. The latter, based on the male subjugation of the female (and ultimately on the gerontocracy's subjugation of the young), has developed and proliferated enormously throughout human history until the present day. Hierarchy predates capitalism, the class structure and the state, and can easily survive their demise. This occurs because it infiltrates every recess of human life, and fosters a hierarchical sensibility, a propensity to regard everything in terms of domination and submission. But this sensibility remains grounded in a basic misconception, a specific (mis)interpretation of the relationship between humanity and nature. For Bookchin, the human domination of nature provides an elementary paradigm for all other hierarchical relations. All the deleterious divisions within human history and the fatal dualisms of Western philosophy derive from the fundamental separation between humanity and nature, the social and the natural.

In order to heal these divisions, Bookchin proposes the praxis of social ecology. To counteract the pathology of domination, the latter seeks to nourish an ecological sensibility—a sensitivity to the interactions between the social and the natural which allows a re-creation of "existing sensibilities, technics, and communities along ecolog-

ical lines."[13] Changing humanity's vision of the natural world comprises an essential preliminary phase in developing this sensibility:

> Social ecology is, first of all, a sensibility that includes not only a critique of hierarchy and domination but a reconstructive outlook that advances a participatory concept of 'otherness' and a new appreciation of differentiation as a social and biological desideratum. Formalized into certain basic principles, it is also guided by an ethics that emphasizes variety without structuring differences into a hierarchical order. If I were obliged to single out the precepts for such an ethics, I would be obliged to use two words that give it meaning: participation and differentiation.[14]

Participation here remains synonymous with symbiosis, in the widest sense of the term—a mutualistic interaction between vital elements within the natural world, humans in the social world, and between the two worlds themselves. In the process, divisions are healed without recourse to reductivism: rather than two irreconcilable antagonists, the social world becomes a mediated gradation of the natural world. Symbiosis as a central principal replaces the Darwinian, marketplace notion of a cutthroat nature. Similarly, differentiation remains synonymous with increasing complexity, a crucial factor in opening evolutionary pathways and allowing a life-form more active participation in its own evolution. And this nascent freedom, the potential for choice and self-determination, provides an objective basis for incremental participation in conjunction with the ongoing realization of evolutionary possibilities. Such aspirations, achievable only within the enriching context of an ecocommunity, are of course incompatible with the limitations imposed by hierarchy.

Social ecology "provides the patterning forms to compare and alter the ensembles of hierarchy and domination that afflict us."[15] It challenges the notion that hierarchy exists between species, and hence implies that such relations are not natural and should not appertain between humans. But what could motivate individuals to replace the ingrained habits of the hierarchical sensibility with the liberatory elements of its ecological counterpart? Given that hierarchy transcends and permeates class—itself a hierarchical form—Marxist categories are clearly no longer relevant. Any contemporary social project "must also be a project that rehabilitates the prevailing image of human motivation."[16] But this task cannot be undertaken unless it jettisons the tendency to anchor all relations in self-interest and economic motivation—a tendency found in classical liberalism, anarchism and Marxism. These ideologies, by appealing to such motivations, reveal the depth of their rootedness in the mentality of the market

[13] Idem, *The Ecology of Freedom: The Emergence and Dissolution of Hierarchy* (Palo Alto: Cheshire Books, 1982), p. 277.

[14] Idem, *The Modern Crisis*, p. 25.

[15] Ibid., p. 23.

[16] Ibid., p.4.

economy. Through their excessive preoccupation with exploitation, they miss the more important issue of domination, with its multiple ramifications and insidious forms:

> This again raises the need to go beyond the traditional 'isms' structured around self-interest and economic motivations into the deepest recesses of the self: its formation in a cauldron of competition and conflicting interests whereby individuality is identified with domination, self-development with a mentality formed by rivalry, maturity with adaptation to things as they exist, success with acquisition and the sanctity of the bargain.[17]

As a consequence, Bookchin demands that ethical considerations are reinserted into the social agenda: "the reinstatement of an ethical stance becomes central to the recovery of a meaningful society and a sense of selfhood."[18] The contemporary anarchist self can be defined and motivated only through a rethought and reconstituted set of ethical principles derived from the praxis of social ecology. But the crisis in human subjectivity can only be ultimately overcome through reconstructive activity of an appropriate type.

This activity Bookchin designates as libertarian municipalism. Brushing aside traditional anarchist antipathies to accommodatory electoralism, he asserts:

> The anarchic ideal of decentralized, stateless, collectively managed, and directly democratic communities—of confederated municipalities or 'communes'— speaks almost intuitively, and in the best works of Proudhon and Kropotkin, consciously, to the transforming role of libertarian municipalism as the framework of a liberatory society, rooted in the nonhierarchical ethics of a unity of diversity, self-formation and self-management, complementarity, and mutual aid.[19]

To justify his elaboration of this strand in the anarchist tradition, Bookchin focuses on Periclean Athens in order to distinguish three levels for political intervention in a hierarchical society. At the apex there was the State. Its proponents practiced statecraft, which in modern times has been erroneously identified with politics. At the base there was the social arena, the site of everyday activity. But Bookchin proceeds to discern an intermediate, political space, a public or municipal sphere "characterized by the agora, or civic center."[20] This institutional sphere, the polis, was the place where citizens undertook informal discussions in preparation for the weekly meetings of the popular assembly. Bookchin suggests that this crucial site of political intervention

[17] Ibid., p. 23.

[18] Ibid., p. 7.

[19] Idem, "Theses on Libertarian Municipalism," in *The Anarchist Papers*, ed. Dimitros I. Roussopoulos (Montreal: Black Rose, 1986), p. 10.

[20] Idem, *The Modern Crisis*, p. 156.

has been continually reconstituted during and immediately after periods of revolutionary insurgency, and insists that contemporary anarchist activity should occur in this reconstructed sphere.

Of all the cited precedents of the sphere's reappearance, perhaps the most important is the New England town meeting. Libertarian municipalism remains particularly relevant to American conditions because of "our traditional emphasis on local government and our uniquely libertarian revolution."[21] Due to its propinquity to American traditions—he even sketches a scenario which indicates how easily the United States could have been propelled toward anarchy in the immediate post-revolutionary years—he suggests that in America there exist the potentials to create at least exemplary forms of public assembly whose moral authority slowly can be turned into political authority at the base of society. It may not be given that such a sequence of steps is practical in every region of America. But where it is practical our even remotely possible, it must become the most important endeavor of a new radical populism—a new libertarian populism.[22]

From this initial phase, Bookchin projects a confederation of popular assemblies, a nationwide Green network, until the point at which America becomes a dual-power nation, with some kind of inevitable conflict (which he does not care to prophesy) between the federation of decentralized municipalities and the centralized State. In the process, a democratic, ethical and ecologically aware public will be created: individuals will be reempowered, the social environment will be brought within the purview of the individual, decision-making will be decentralized, and an active citizenry will be educated through participation in a face-to-face democracy.

The beneficiaries of this process will be a rejuvenated people, a collectivity united by compatible ideological emphases rather than socioeconomic class: "the old social pool called the 'people' is being restored in the tension between past and future, a classless 'class' like the sans culottes composed of economically, culturally and technologically displaced persons."[23] In one sense, Chomsky and Bookchin are mirror images. While the former emphasizes the workplace as a site for social change at the expense of the community, stressing the economic sphere rather than the political, Bookchin does the exact opposite. The socialization of the economy remains curiously "hidden in the mists of a logic that can only be established concretely" through the development

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[21] Ibid., p. 146.

[22] Ibid. "Slowly" might be the key term in this passage. Bookchin refers to this process of social change as "the revolutionary project," yet leaves himself open to charges of gradualism and reformism. "The move from 'here to there' will not be a sudden explosion of change without a long period of intellectual and ethical preparation"—despite the perceived urgency of the ecological situation. "Power must be steadily shifted [not eroded or abolished] to neighborhoods and municipalities in the form of community centers, cooperatives, occupational centres, and ultimately, citizens' assemblies" (Idem, *Remaking Society: Pathways to a Green Future* (Boston: South End Press, 1990), pp. 197, 189, 190). The best critique of libertarian municipalism occurs in John Zerzan, review of The Rise of Urbanization and the Decline of Citizenship by Murray Bookchin, in *Demolition Derby ,* No. 1, p. 16.

[23] Idem., *The Modern Crisis*, p. 190.

of confederated popular assemblies[24]. Instead, he emphasizes the power of ideology to work in a socially progressive direction—notably ecological, feminist, ethnic, moral, and countercultural ideologies within which one encounters pacifist and utopistic anarchist components that await integration into a coherent outlook. In any case, new social movements are developing around us which cross traditional class lines. From this ferment, a general interest may yet be formed which is larger in its scope, novelty, and creativity than the economically oriented particular interests of the past. And it is from the ferment that a 'people' can emerge and sort itself out into assemblies and like forms, a 'people' that transcends particularistic interests and gives a heightened relevance to a libertarian municipal orientation.[25]

However, despite the references to populism and a *declassé;* people who can "sort itself out," this new movement is not conceived as arising spontaneously, nor as developing its own forms and types of autonomously directed activity. Recommending the formation of activist affinity groups and study circles, Bookchin insists that

> It would be naive to believe that forms like neighborhood, town, and popular communal assemblies could rise to the level of a libertarian public life or give rise to a libertarian body politic without a highly conscious, well-organized, and programmatically coherent libertarian movement. It would be equally naive to believe that a libertarian movement could emerge without that indispensable radical intelligentsia whose medium is its own intensely vibrant community life.. Unless anarchists develop this waning stratum of thinkers who live a vital public life in a searching communication with their social environment, they will be faced with the very real danger of turning ideas into dogmas and becoming the self- righteous surrogates of once-living movements and people who belong to another historical era.[26]

Among many others, this vanguardism remains one of the central contentions Fredy Perlman forcefully disputes.

Whatever their differences and similarities, Chomsky and Bookchin are clearly linked through their common participation in the terrain of political discourse. The same cannot be said of Perlman. Both Chomsky's traditional formulations and Bookchin's innovations are expressed in standard forms and styles which are readily recognizable as types of political discourse. In contrast, Perlman—particularly in his later works—employs a range of textual strategies to convey his anarchic vision. His 1972 volume, *Manual for Revolutionary Leaders*, published under the wickedly allusive

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[24] Ibid., p. 153. Perhaps socialization remains unemphasized because, unlike political libertarianism, economic collectivization does not constitute part of the American tradition, as Bookchin defines it.

[25] Idem, "Theses on Libertarian Municipalism," p. 18.

[26] Ibid., p. 16. On affinity and study groups, see Idem, *Post-Scarcity Anarchism*, 2nd ed. (Montreal: Black Rose, 1986). p. 41.

pseudonym Michael Velli, combines a variety of discursive formations. The entire text is written as a devil's advocacy of revolutionary authoritarianism. But interspersed among pages of closely written polemical argument can be found material organized in discrete epigrammatic paragraphs, narratives designed to illustrate ideological points, and vivid graphics. A footnote in the second, 1974 edition explains that "M. Velli's thought is a synthesis of the ideas of the major revolutionary leaders of the age .. Velli has taken all of these ideas out of the context in which they first appeared and placed them into the single Thought of which each of these ideas is a mere fragment."[27] This edition also lists the source of each idea quoted. But the first edition lacks both the explanatory note and the list of sources, thus rendering the text's intention even more equivocal and its effect even more disorientating.

Letters of Insurgents, a huge epistolary novel published in 1976 under the pseudonyms Sophia Nachalo and Yarostan Vochek, imaginatively explores the evolution of radical praxis in the West and the Eastern bloc from the second World War. Purporting to comprise a series of authentic letters between actual correspondents, it allows Perlman to develop and illustrate his vision of contemporary anarchic praxis in the form of fictional discourse. Similarly, his magnum opus, *Against His-story, Against Leviathan!,* published in 1983, "with Illustrations borrowed from William Blake," develops a poetic style appropriate to his visionary account of human life from prehistory to the present day. And, finally, his huge epic novel, *The Strait,* unfinished at the time of his death in 1985, provides a panoramic view of Amerindian resistance to invasion and genocide from mythical times to the present day.[28]

Perlman's radical diversity in form and style finds a complement in the equally innovative content of his work. His central concerns can be illuminated by focusing on two key issues: the problem of representation, and the problem of alienation, or why the oppressed daily reproduce their own domination. The ways in which Perlman deals with these problems reveal the contours of his intellectual evolution from New Left Marxism to becoming, along with John Zerzan, one of the founders and leading theorists of antitechnological anarchoprimitivism.

As indicated above, Bookchin believes that anarchism can only develop through an organized libertarian movement, which in turn remains dependent upon the emergence of a radical intelligentsia, whose function is presumably to lead and coordinate activi-

[27] Michael Velli, *Manual for Revolutionary Leaders*, comp. and ed. Lorraine and Fredy Perlman, 2nd ed. (Detroit: Black and Red, 1974), p. 263.

[28] The complexity of the textual strategies employed in this as yet only partly published novel unfortunately render it impossible to deal with this work in the present context. *The Strait* merits sustained critical attention, not the bare overview that could be provided here. For further information, see Lorraine Perlman, review of *The Strait* in *Fifth Estate*, Fall 1986, p. 8; Allen Foster, review of *The Strait* in Fifth Estate, Summer 1990, pp. 10–11; John Moore, review of *The Strait* in *Bulletin of Anarchist Research* 17 (May 1989), pp.22–23; Lorraine Perlman, *Having Little, Being Much: A Chronicle of Fredy Perlman's Fifty Years* (Detroit: Black and Red, 1989, pp. 128–138).

ties, or at least to "try to speak for dominated people as a whole."[29] The issue of the intellectual as an agency for social change was raised, and dismissed, by Perlman in his critique of C. Wright Mills, *The Incoherence of the Intellectual* (1970). And the associated issue of the intellectual as a revolutionary leader was mordantly savaged in Velli's Manual. But his most comprehensive formulations in this area appear in *Letters of Insurgent*s. In the latter, leadership, organization and the entire ideological baggage which accompanies a movement for social change are characterized as repressive because they set priorities which serve the interests of the impersonal sodality, rather than the diverse desires of its individual constituents. Because ideology claims to represent the interests of many, it does not truly represent any single individual. And when it is able to persuade individuals of its representative legitimacy, it enforces a submission which remains indistinguishable from the routine coercions of everyday life. Representation constitutes an insidious form of repression, and each time ideological factors become operative in the novel, individuals are obliged to resist or renounce their desires. The text's "heroes" and "heroines" are not the "politically aware"—they are part of the problem. Rather, the positive characters are either instinctive rebels without a formulated political ideology, but who maintain the capacity to respond and develop in emancipatory situations, or former ideologists who manage to expel their political impedimenta. Such people evolve their own projects without the direction of intellectuals and organizations. The narrative's dynamic derives from the way in which the two correspondents reinterpret their past and present experiences in the light of each other's insights. This provokes them to root out the repressive elements which have lodged in various facets of their lives, from their daily "political" praxes through to the deepest recesses of their psyches. This in turn promotes the realization that liberation begins when individuals open themselves to every conceivable experience and begin to do what they please.

From this basis, Perlman's conception of freedom becomes more expansive and anarchic than those of his peers, and conditions his perspective on issues like technology and the social patterns of a functioning anarchy. Chomsky's proud declaration that during the Spanish Revolution "production continued effectively" becomes a profound indictment, and an indication that liberation has not been achieved. In an authentic anarchy, factories would be closed or totally reconstituted, technological production would be abandoned or radically transformed. What truly liberated worker would consent to return to the factory and resume the same routine as before the revolution, even if the premises are now under "workers' control"? Perlman's penetrating vision cuts across and reveals the essential orderliness and limitedness of his peers' conceptions of anarchy. By inscribing individual desire, particularly sexual desire, and the notion that all is possible at the center of his praxis, he makes other visions of anarchy seem pale by comparison.

[29] Bookchin, T*he Modern Crisis*, p. 155. This view of the intellectual's role also remains implicit in Chomsky's anarchosyndicalist formulations.

But his repudiation of representation remains only half the story. *Letters of Insurgents* examines the way in which individuals are induced to renounce their desires, which then turn against them to cause self-repression and the perverse urge to repress others. But it does not satisfactorily account for the phenomenon of complicity in continued daily repression. Despite the depth of the cleansing operation undertaken by the novel's putative authors, it does not reach deep enough to extirpate the most profound layers of allegiance to repression. The repudiation is not thorough enough. Hence, the composition of *Against His-story, Against Leviathan!*, which goes "beyond Marxist theory and anarchist historiography, beyond technology, beyond modernity to a rediscovery of the primitive and of primitive community, and to the understanding that capital is not the inevitable outcome of some "material" historical development, but a monstrous aberration."[30]

The text recounts human history from the state of nature —an organic autarky for Bookchin, an ecstatic earthly paradise for Perlman—through the centuries of domination and revolt, and projects a renewed anarchic future. The villain of the narrative is Leviathan, the monster of power and domination, the megamachine of Western civi-

[30] Anon, "Fredy Perlman: An Appreciation," *Fifth Estate*, Summer 1985, p. 14. Perlman's rejection of technology and the ideology of progress can be usefully contrasted with Bookchin's position on these issues. Bookchin insists that "The course of human development has no more moved in clearly defined and necessarily 'progressive' stages than has the history of human ideas." Nevertheless, progressivist notions inform his ideas, for example in his assertion that "Every social evolution.. is virtually an extension of natural evolution into a distinctly human realm." As a result, although claiming to provide a critique of hierarchy, Bookchin's synthesis of (Western-centered) secular humanism and a modified Darwinist schema permits a reactivation of hierarchical categories. This becomes particularly evident in Bookchin's notion of human guardianship or stewardship of the natural world—"Humanity, in effect, becomes the potential voice of a nature rendered self-conscious and self-formative" —a notion which implies that humanity (or at least Euro-Americans?) constitute the apex of evolution, and ignores the problematic issue of representation (Bookchin, *Remaking Society*, pp. 116, 25, 201). This ideational framework remains worryingly close to the Marxist anthropology of higher stages critiqued by Perlman in *Against His-story, Against Leviathan!* (Detroit: Black and Red, 1983), pp. 14–15.

In contrast to Perlman's rejection of technology as an alienating and dominating force, Bookchin foresees the necessity for "ecotechnologies" in his vision of an ecoanarchist future. Referring to the use of "industrial installations, based on small, multipurpose machines, the latest innovations in humanly scaled technologies, the production of quality goods, and a minimal expenditure of energy," he categorically iterates "Let me state flatly that a high premium would be placed on labor-saving devices—be they computers or authentic machinery." Bookchin, unlike Perlman and other figures on the contemporary American anarchist scene, such as Bob Black, clearly does not plump for the zero-work option: "Politics and concrete decisions that deal with agriculture and industrial production would be made by citizens in face-to-face assemblies—as citizens, not simply as workers, farmers, or professionals who, in any case would themselves be involved in rotating productive activities, irrespective of their professional expertise" (Ibid., pp. 189, 196, 194).

A comparison of the ideas of Perlman and Bookchin makes one realize how relatively little things would in fact change in a future structured by social ecology. The main changes, focused on political structure and technology, would render such a society immediately recognizable to a citizen of a Western capitalist democracy. Bookchin's envisaged future lacks the radical otherness characteristic of anarchoprimitivist visions of a transformed world.

lization. The State, the ruling class, capitalism, technology—these are all attributes of the Earth's central antagonist, not the enemy itself. Leviathans are giant machines—sometimes metaphorically, sometimes liter- ally—which convert free communities of individuals into zeks, forced laborers who form the cogs and wheels that make the Behemoth operate. Such people are wrenched out of mythic or cyclical time into the linearity of history, or His (that is, Leviathan's) story.

But this process is not accepted passively. The human side of His-story remains a tale of endless revolt, of repeated attempts to destroy or abandon Leviathan in order to reconstitute or return to primal anarchy, a period of total immersion in beatific dreams, visions and vocations. The "heroes" and "heroines" of this narrative are again of two types. They are either the Possessed—in contrast to the zeks, the dispossessed—who have never left the state of nature, or the renegades, those who rebel against Leviathan from within, or withdraw from its entrails to create their own utopias or live among extant communities of the Possessed. These individuals and communities do not possess ideologies, intellectuals or organizations. Where any of the latter elements intrude, they spell the end of a community or the cooptation of revolt.

Although the experiential loss caused by the eradication of free communities remains inestimable, and their numinous lifeways could not in any case be conveyed in written form, Perlman attempts to imitate the cyclical motion of mythic experience even while recounting the linear His-story of Leviathan. Certain events continually recur throughout the narrative, notably the way in which the Behemoth's organized opponents repeatedly develop Leviathanic traits until they become indistinguishable from their adversary.

As with Bookchin, America remains the terminus of Perlman's narrative, but there the similarity ends. The colonization of the New World destroys the last free communities on Earth. The Enlightenment and the American revolution, with its libertarian tradition, are a cruel and gigantic hoax, mere rhetoric which conceals and justifies genocide aimed at communities of the Possessed, unprecedented ecological denudation and wholesale plunder which converts the entire planet into a huge forced labor camp. The text, however, ends on a note of hope. Leviathans are in a continual state of decomposition. They can only survive by constantly consuming other societies, whether free or Leviathanized. But now, for the first time in His-story, a single Leviathan embraces the whole world. And with no external sources of nutrition, it is beginning to consume itself. Perlman points to the appearance of "the new outsiders" who, like Bookchin's People, are displaced and superannuated by automation: "the new outsiders are not radicals. They are people who happened to animate springs and gears which can now be automated, namely artificialized."[31] As with Bookchin, class composition remains irrelevant: Perlman looks to these "displaced zeks," not a class-conscious proletariat, for manifestations of the "inner light, namely an ability to reconstitute lost rhythms,

[31] Perlman, *Against His-story, Against Leviathan!,* p. 301.

to recover music, to regenerate human culture."[32] But unlike Bookchin, he deliberately fails to formulate any recommendations, and certainly does not advocate the formation of an organized anarchist movement. Nevertheless, he does sense the American millennium's increasing imminence. But its forms and contents can only be spontaneously determined and generated by individuals and collectivities in the process of liberating themselves. The closing passage of the text announces:

> In ancient Anatolia people danced on the earth-covered ruins of the Hittite Leviathan and built their lodges with stones which contained the records of the vanished empire's great deeds.
>
> The cycle has come round again. America is where Anatolia was. It is a place where human beings, just to stay alive, have to jump, to dance, and by dancing revive the rhythms, recover cyclical time. Anarchic and pantheistic dancers no longer sense the artifice and its linear His-story as All, but as merely one cycle, one long night, a stormy night that left Earth wounded, but a night that ends, as all nights end, when the sun rises.[33]

[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid., pp. 301–2

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