

The Message and the Messenger

FC, Ted Kaczynski, and the Resisting the Technological
System

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It's been a decade since 'FC' sent what would be the last bomb of a seventeen year bombing campaign. These bombs, aimed at airlines, technocrats and computer engineers, were all part of a larger message: the technological system is killing the earth and we will no longer allow this. That message was driven home when two national American papers were forced into printing 'Industrial Society and Its Future'. This is what would be called the Unabomber Manifesto.

A year later in 1996, Harvard graduate and mathematician turned hermit Theodore Kaczynski was turned in by his brother as a Unabom suspect to be later convicted and given two life sentences. In every aspect of his life, Ted was demonized by the media as a deranged and meticulous serial killer. His life was torn apart and recreated by his brother and mother to fit the media profile.

Every step was taken to shoot the messenger.

But the message would inevitably slip through the cracks. It found solace among anti-civilization anarchists, neo-Luddites, ecologists, and those chewed up and left behind by the dehumanizing technological system. For some it was a confirmation that something was very wrong about our way of living. Even more so, it was a message that something drastic needed to happen to change that.

It was a message that something drastic could happen.

For those within the technological system, that is a frightening message. That is why it is buried far beneath an obsession with the messenger. Buried to a place where most are not interested or willing to dig. Buried to a place where many would-be sympathizers have little interest in digging.

The technocrats and its media sympathizers know this. They know that the public loves a good spectacle. They love a face, even if it's a face that they love to hate. In the case of FC, that face is Ted Kaczynski. The mad mathematician turned hermit-bomber. They say he molested his bombs. They say that he bombed because of his mental instabilities and his failure to connect with other people. They say anything that will sell their story. And that is the story that sells. But it is not just their story: the corporate media has and needs no monopoly. Many would-be sympathizers are just as eager to push FC aside.

Of course that's understandable, it's easier to play along and stay on the safe side. FC was, in fact, a terrorist group. Bombing is a violent act. For those eager to sell their own ideology and prove their moral purity, these are tough issues. They think that only lunatics kill, that violence is never justified while they ignore the violence that is inseparable from everyday life within the technological system, within civilization. They stick to the drama surrounding Ted, who still has never willingly claimed to be FC. As they see it, FC remains the product of a warped mind and we can move along.

And the reverse happens as well: Ted becomes romanticized. He becomes an icon of resistance to the technological system. A Ned Ludd for the Twentieth Century. Like any other icon, martyr or media star, the messenger becomes the message. They can do no wrong.

I know this from experience. I was drawn to Ted for apparent reasons: both of us wish to destroy the technological system and are open to any method for achieving that goal. I know I was never searching for a martyr, but even as a friend, Ted remained something of a media star. When I began writing Ted in early 2001, it was with a combination of eagerness and curiosity about who this person was and what they were trying to say. Our correspondence grew heavily, ending rather abruptly in 2004.

Through that period, my idea of who Ted is changed greatly, but took with it my whole understanding of what it means to be critical and the limits of solidarity. I've come to a greater understanding of the significance of the Unabom campaign, the subsequent trial, Ted Kaczynski and resisting civilization. The entire Unabomber ordeal is extremely important. Far too important to not give it a more critical and complex approach than the simple characterized look at the Unabomber as Ted Kaczynski: demon or saint.

The message and the messenger need to be understood in their own right and the link between the two needs to be contextualized. Whether we agree or not with the tactics, we have to recognize that FC raised the bar for the momentum against the technological system. This is what I'm interested in looking at. I'm not interested in the ridiculous debate over violence and non-violence. To me it is just another philosophical abstraction to keep us mediated from action and bound to rigid moralistic thinking: another barrier to action. This is a critical evaluation for those who are open to 'all the tools in the toolbox' to beat a cliché senseless.

The Significance of FC

To me, the most important issue raised by FC is a tactical question: how effective is terrorism as a tactic. Since the September 11, 2001 attacks, even the word terrorism can be terrorizing. Due to a worsened political climate, it's become the norm to step as far away from the term and what it stands for. To a degree, this is understandable. But let's not blur facts. The Unabom campaign was terrorism: certain individuals were targeted because of their positions. They weren't necessarily targeted because their deaths would have ended the technological system, but because they were replaceable technocrats.

I want to emphasize this point. In terms of directly ending or threatening the technological system, FC would be a complete failure. 3 deaths and 29 injuries will not break the system, no matter who those targets are. The individuals were chosen carefully (though not always the victims), but what they represented to the system was a huge part of the message: engineers of the technological system will be held personally accountable for their contributions.

FC was, of course, not doing anything new or original. Campaigns of political assassinations, another form of terrorism, do the same thing. A technocrat is no different from a politician: though symbolic they are easily replaceable. It is the position, not

the individual, which is targeted. Terrorism of this sort is as old as dissent. And it can be very effective. History shows us as much. It is a tactic of guerrillas and of empires. Revolutionaries and counterrevolutionaries alike have always used it. What usually determines the effect is the scale. During revolutionary periods throughout Latin America, it would be a norm to see hundreds or even thousands of bureaucrats assassinated between regimes. The US government uses it as much throughout the world as it has on radical groups like the American Indian Movement and the Black Panthers.

But it doesn't always have to be about murder. It is a tactical approach. One example a little closer to home is the animal liberation campaign Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty (SHAC). Over the past few years, SHAC has grown to an international campaign with one goal: shut down Huntingdon Life Sciences (HLS), one of the largest vivisectioners in the world. The idea is simple: you start with the largest operation and shut them down, shaking the whole field up in the process and then picking off the others. In concrete terms, this means raiding and torching HLS labs, protesting and otherwise disrupting financial backers, and holding the individual vivisectioners and corporate bureaucrats accountable by holding protests outside their homes.

A large portion of the animal liberation contingency has distanced themselves from those involved with SHAC. They are constrained by moralistic blinders and a fear of losing their mass appeal. In doing so, they overlook that this tactic is effective. HLS is being cut off and is well on the way to shutting down. Those involved are learning a lesson about accountability. And they are learning this without direct violence.

I'm not saying that the SHAC campaign is perfect or such tactics will end vivisection. Neither is true, but this is the same tactic at work on another level. A level that Industrial Society and its Future reminds us will not end animal exploitation any more than the FC campaign would have ended the technological system. HLS can be shut down, but vivisection will not be stopped. This kind of tactic is only applicable on a small enough scale or with a massive momentum. Unfortunately, the anti-civilization and anti-technological momentums lack the latter.

But what FC lacked in quantity was compensated for in quality. Revolutionary violence is largely a thing of the past in the US. While there is an excess of surveillance and security technology, there's not a whole lot of violence directed at technocrats and politicians to really justify it. Their security is preemptive and it gives the impression of being untouchable. In the US climate, this comfort level becomes pathological: the ultra specialized bureaucracy becomes anonymous. Had the reason for the targets been given more attention, the FC campaign could have been far more effective in shaking things up. The engineers of the technological system could have been exposed as the Eichmann's of the late Twentieth Century. FC offered a mail-order Nuremberg.

Because of the media, this didn't happen. Accountability may have found its way into the larger psychological landscape, but coming right at the beginning of a massive growth in technocratic positions, the message was saturated.

And it's doubtful that this could have happened. The technological system is strong enough to have endured the loss of 3 technocrats and could take the loss of many more. While I have no real sympathy for technocrats and politicians, I have serious doubts about how effective this approach really is or could be. Fortunately, I think the weaknesses of the technological system are far easier to attack. And those targets are not human, which we'll return to.

But no matter what we think about these kinds of attacks, we have to realize that this has happened. FC has taken lives and the idea is out there.

Like it or not, the bar is raised.

The primary contribution of FC remains the essay *Industrial Society and its Future*. I think the essay really speaks for itself, so I won't give it as much attention here. But I do want to emphasize a few points.

From my reading, the manifesto really drives home two major points: the technological system must be destroyed and that any anti-technological movement must sharply break from the left. Tactically I agree completely with the first and I agree as much with the second point, but what that means for me differs greatly from what Ted has in mind and likely FC had intended. Perhaps this is the area where Ted has become inseparable from FC because of his steadfast grasp on the idea of a movement dedicated solely to the destruction of the technological system.

And this is the area where I split from Ted the most. That is because of two primary differences: 1) I don't see a revolution against technology or civilization as being any more likely than preferable and 2) that stems from a distrust of mass movements and the kind of organizations that revolutions require. A revolution, especially the kind that Ted and FC envision, needs a mass ideology and program. A revolution against the technological system will not look like a couple hundred FC's mailing bombs, but like any other revolution. That is a certain structure and pattern that has always failed.

Perhaps it is because I'm interested in destroying civilization in a totalistic sense rather than just the concrete technological infrastructure that I have such sharp differences with Ted and FC. It is in terms of tactics and targets that we are largely on the same level, but where I'm interested in going, revolution cannot go.

This all comes back to what Ted has written since his arrest. I see what Ted has written as extremely important, but at the same time, somewhat distinguishable from what FC put on the table. Perhaps this is where words and action split. But I see those actions made by FC alone as something worthy in their own right. Though they are within the greater context of Ted Kaczynski and the media, I hope that guilt by association will never result in such a significant campaign being tossed entirely aside.

We have FC to thank for not only reminding us that reform is worthless, but that the system is vulnerable. FC reminds us that behind the machine are human names and faces. FC reminds them that they are not untouchable.

Most importantly, FC reminds us that we can do something about the destruction of life.

The Significance of Ted Kaczynski

Over the years that I wrote Ted, I got a much clearer idea of who Ted is and what he wants. I don't think that anyone can question his absolute conviction and devotion to the cause of destroying the technological system. He has certainly gained my respect, but he has not earned my trust.

Ted is a revolutionary. If he indeed is FC, then that campaign, like his post-arrest writings, are a contribution to that movement. A movement which Ted seems to see himself as at least partial engineer: he's somewhat of a self-appointed vanguard. Like any vanguard, they must recruit followers for their ultimate cause. Though not necessarily lying, they aren't afraid to bend the truth to suit their needs, use things like flattery and deceit to brew their following and create like-minded engineers. I was always conscious of this and could see it in action. Ted no doubt has his agenda and will do what it takes to push it. This much is expected of a revolutionary.

He has said the same about me. But a central part of our break was his inability to sell me on his agenda.

I do want to be fair to Ted. I'm not interested in trashing him and certainly not in discounting what he has done. I raise these issues because I think Ted has put something significant on the table, even if he is not FC, and that it deserves respectful attention, but must be approached critically. Far too many folks involved in the momentum against civilization would too easily toss aside the work of anyone they found questionable.

There are a few major points that I found most significant in our letters and in Ted's writing in general. All of those points and discussions ultimately surrounded what it will take to destroy the technological system. Here Ted and I were largely in agreement, but there are differences.

As far as central agreements go, Ted does claim to be "anti-civilization":

"I fully agree that civilization is an evil to be eliminated if possible. But the problem of civilization is part of the technology problem. Civilization, in fact, resulted from a technological advance, namely, the development of agricultural techniques that made large-scale, sedentary, intensive agriculture possible. ... So the problem of getting rid of civilization is essentially identical with the problem of getting rid of a certain body of agricultural technology."

However, that certain body of agricultural technology, Ted claims, is not a feasible target. And in concrete terms he's right. You can't blow up cultural knowledge unless you destroy the people carrying it. Neither Ted nor I is really interested in that. I argue that the possibility for the survival of a large-scale agricultural society is highly unlikely after the collapse of our global civilization because of a severe loss in both knowledge and craft required and the erosion of lands that would have otherwise been

farmed. If we can barely survive on a global system of monocropping, I have doubts about that system being resurrected on a large scale. I'm sure that it will happen on a micro-scale, but that's far beyond any reach I would or should have.

But there's something more here.

Ted and I share the same target: the modern technological infrastructure. It's a practical target. As Ted puts it, "I concentrate on industrial-age technology simply from considerations of feasibility. Once the System has broken down people will have to give up most industrial-age technology, because that technology can't be used without the aid of the System."

But for me, that target is a feasible concrete aspect of civilization, but it is not the only one. I'm interested in taking on the totality of civilization which surpasses that infrastructure. That is why I talk about rewilding and resisting as two parts of the same thing. I think resistance against civilization must reach into all the places that civilization does. That goes deeper than the technological system to the domestication process itself. That is a significant difference between Ted and I. Though we both agree on the face of things about this, it turns out to be different in practice.

I am interested in talking about tearing apart civilized concepts of community, but also looking at what anarchistic, post-civilization societies may look like. I'm interested in talking about how people have lived and how we can live. Not to form a blue print for the consolidation of the anti-civilization revolution, but as something to put out there, to get people thinking: to unleash the primal war of body and soul.

That means having a deeper understanding of the origins of civilization. A deeper understanding of how the domestication process works. It entails discussion, action and unmediated connection. But the room for this kind of thing in Ted's revolution is minimal. There is one target, one focus: destroy the technological infrastructure.

Ted's conviction and devotion to this point has been a major point of contention between Ted and other anti-civilization anarchists. In 'Ship of Fools', one of Ted's most infamous and perhaps his best essay, Ted was offering a glimpse of this, but I'm not sure the extent of what he envisioned really came out. That message, like the message of ISAIF, is the need "to build a movement that will be intensively and exclusively focused on the goal of eliminating technology and civilization." "But" he continues,

"we can't build such a movement unless we steer clear of the people (let's call them "victimization activists") who are obsessed with victimization issues. (That is, racism, sexism, homophobia, animal abuse, etc., etc.) These people are extremely numerous in our society, and they come swarming to any rebel movement that is halfway congenial to them."

To a large degree, he's right. Any battle against racism, sexism, homophobia, animal abuse, and, he mentions in another letter, colonialism and imperialism, in and of itself will not destroy civilization. Even more so, the vast majority of folks involved in any of those battles are not interested in destroying civilization. Those fighting for 'right's

issues' are indeed fighting for civilization, as Ted rightly puts it: "The concept of 'rights' presupposes an organized social structure that has the power to tell people what they have a right to and what they do not have a right to. In other words, the concepts of 'rights' presupposes civilization." Furthermore, we "need a movement that will be completely independent of the leftists, the reformers, the pacifists, the 'rights' people, and that whole bucket of shit."

Though I'm not interested in a revolutionary movement, I completely agree with Ted about the need for anti-civilization folks to make a clear break with the left, reformists, and that "whole bucket of shit". But what that entails for Ted is different than how I see it. Considering that Ted has put friends of mine and fellow unabashedly anti-civilization anarchists such as John Zerzan, John Connor, and Derrick Jensen in that category, I had to ask if our definitions of leftism and reformists was really the same. To which Ted replied:

"Actually we may not be too far apart in our understanding of what leftists and reformists are. Our disagreements may revolve more around a point that I have not yet clearly expressed: that certain viewpoints that are not in themselves leftist may attract large numbers of leftists to movements that hold those viewpoints."

So by merely raising issues like racism, sexism, homophobia, animal enslavement, colonialism, imperialism, and all the other 'isms', we are guilty by association. These are deviations from our focus: destroying the technological system or civilization as the case may be. For those of us who have fallen under severe criticism from Ted for being leftist by association to certain causes see this as a significant difference.

All of these 'isms' are products of civilization and clearly are worth bringing up. Ted is wary of attracting leftists and their baggage, which certainly does happen, but this is no reason to shy away from the issues. Actually it works to the opposite: it contextualizes these struggles. Leftists and reformists will take note and most will prove that they are in fact the enemies that Ted considers them. But I can never understand why that's a reason for not bringing up what I see as completely relevant issues. I don't think there is any hierarchy of causes, but I know that all 'isms' are an intrinsic part of civilization: they cannot and will not go away until civilization does. But if our resistance is going to be as totalistic as civilization, then these are issues that we need to be aware of.

But the revolutionary movement Ted sees has no room for this. Perhaps the greatest reason why is that he does not see all of these 'isms' as part of civilization, but as a part of humanity. Ted and I have argued these points to the ground, but at base, Ted views homophobia, sexism, and the like as being something nearly all human societies have tendencies towards. Some societies, he claims, are far more egalitarian, and definitely emphasizes that he would prefer societies would be, but insists that no societies are egalitarian despite what many of us see as mounds of evidence to the contrary.

His naturalization of homophobia and sexism have rightfully put some pressure on him. I don't intend on really laboring the point here any further. But with this in mind, it becomes a bit more understandable why Ted would see these issues as intrinsically reformist/leftist leaning. And, even more so, it becomes a bit more understandable why Ted's revolution isn't picking up a lot of constituents among anti-civilization anarchists.

It is important to understand that part of the reason that Ted seems hell bent on pointing out the lack of 'true' egalitarianism among other human societies is to avoid over idealizing them. In this sense, he puts the problem of over idealization in the same context of his concerns about talking of the inevitability of collapse. He fears, and rather rightfully, that if someone believed what was said, but later found a counterpoint, they would reject everything they've realized through anti-technological or anti-civilization viewpoints. Or if they think the collapse is inevitable people will "be tempted to relax, sit on our hands, and just wait for the collapse."

His concerns are valid. But what I draw from this is not what Ted draws. I see it as reason to not only be honest in our critique, action and motivations, but to not fear complexity. Too often revolutionaries are afraid that their audience understands critique better as rhetoric than those who could draw on something much larger and not always the most accessible. In this case, people will drop revolutionary thinking as quickly as they picked it up: because it was never internalized, their interactions and opinions are never given room. There's a difference between presenting your critique and opinions and presenting the right party line. Revolutionaries stick to party lines, but that's no reason why any one else should.

There's a difference between understanding how other societies work and making them into utopias. Just as there's a difference between the conviction that civilization will collapse and the understanding that we are active agents in that process, one way or another, and that role is extremely important which Ted argues as well. What Ted is saying is far from new: his framework is the framework is revolutionary thinking.

As far as I can see it, revolution will never be able to overcome civilization. We need something different. We need something that can handle more complexity and move beyond rhetoric and party lines. For me, that is primal war: a physical, spiritual and psychological war waged against civilization and the domestication process itself. It is about the world we live in and the world we want to live in.

This is something Ted knows about, but would never have made a part of his manifesto. In the interview with Theresa Kintz and through our letters, Ted talked about the relationships that he developed with the region where he lived, the animals he hunted and watched. He talked about how he was pushed over the edge when the place he had come to love was being threatened by developers. When he realized that you cannot escape the technological system. That is what drove him to action.

It is that spiritual connection that inspires me and demands some respect. It was that spiritual connection that threw aside any philosophical quibbles about what would be the best action was needed and what morality limits certain types of action. Ted knew that something needed to be done and did something. Was it the most efficient

or best action? Hardly, but it was significant (assuming again that Ted and FC are the same). But hindsight is always best. And with that hindsight, Ted offered one of his most important and controversial essays, ‘Hit Where it Hurts’.

The article has its setbacks, but too often those have stood in the way of seeing what Ted put on the table: an open discussion about what the most efficient targets might be for any group seeking to destroy the technological infrastructure. And again, his rather hard-line stance on a strictly anti-technological movement comes through. He mentions that acts like smashing up chain stores and liberating animals are not revolutionary activities since they aren’t threatening to the existence of the system. That much is true. Smashing chain stores and liberating animals won’t bring about the collapse of civilization, but I would hardly consider them “pointless”. I elaborated on this in another essay , but these are valid acts of rage and resistance. I don’t think anyone would say that they would destroy civilization in and of themselves, but they do undermine the grasp of the domesticators and the order that they have imposed upon us. They are significant.

And, of anyone, Ted should be aware of this. If we only consider actions that seriously threaten the technological system to be revolutionary then FC’s bombs and manifesto wouldn’t be considered revolutionary either. I don’t know if FC thought that the technological system would have come to its knees through that bombing campaign from the start but clearly ‘they’ realized that wouldn’t happen in 1995 when the manifesto was sent out as an end to the bombing. The action was more powerful in what it represented than what it accomplished. It brought the message that something can be done.

And ‘Hit Where it Hurts’ carries that message further. Five primary targets are proposed: the electric-power grid, the communications industry, the computer industry, the propaganda industry, and the biotechnology industry. Without these, we are told, the system will collapse. For the first three, that is absolutely correct. The system cannot survive without electricity, and with disruptions in the communications and computer industry, it can be assured that the system will not be able to get back online in the relatively short time span between civilization and a post-civilized world.

The propaganda industry and biotechnology industry need a bit more attention. I can understand the grudge Ted would hold towards the propaganda industry, but fighting it has always been an excessively uphill battle. As its own target, it is far too large. Granted, I wish it would be destroyed, but I don’t see it as a more viable target than the other ones mentioned in the article. Without electricity, the propaganda industry will be done, but I see little reason to believe it will happen before hand.

The biotechnology industry makes much more sense. Biotechnology and nanotechnology are both vital frontiers to the advancement and continued existence of civilization. That makes them rather clear targets. But it makes sense as a frontier of civilization. In the same article, Ted considers the timber industry to be a “side issue”, and logically not a primary target. No doubt, most anti-civilization leaning folks in-

volved one way or another with the timber industry are well aware that they are not gaining ground.

But gaining ground is not necessarily the point. Maintaining ground is. The timber industry and a number of animal enslavers, like the biotechnology industry, all stand at the frontier between civilization and remaining wildness. If one is a viable target, why is action directed towards the others not part of that revolution? It comes back to the single track attack and the difference between what an anti-technological movement and an anti-civilization momentum may look like. Desires will always determine action.

I think that is the essential difference between Ted and I, which is why I keep pointing it out. He wants a strictly anti-technological revolution and I want to see the destruction of civilization coming through an aware and active momentum. More to the point, I'd like to see a revolt against domestication in the sense of a primal war.

That is definitely reflected in our different views and critiques. But that doesn't mean there aren't major points of agreement and solidarity. In his personal views, the world Ted wants to live in isn't all that different from the world I envision. But I can't see his revolution, or any revolution for that matter, taking us there.

I wouldn't question for a second that Ted's revolution is an anarchist revolution. He is wary of all the issues I've mentioned because he's rightly concerned that attempts to completely eliminate them would lead to another system where equality is the only enforceable law. He is ultimately concerned with the elimination of overarching systems of domination. But, again, I don't think a strictly destructive front is necessarily the only one available. Critique and action can coexist.

We do have much in common. As I see it, what Ted and FC have put on the table is extremely important and far too important to lose it to differences with Ted's perspectives. Taking on civilization is a tremendous task. Along the way we're going to have to learn what it means to be critical and we're going to have to look everywhere for something to help us along the way.

And for raising the bar and bringing important tactical issues up, we owe FC and Ted enough credit to take what is most relevant from their contributions seriously and act on it.

The Ted K Archive

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