SECESSION *FROM THE* BROADCAST

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INTRODUCTION

Worlds have changed since this 2012 lecture in the fabled capitol, Buenos Aires. Then, secession meant alternative media. Today it means alternative worlds. It means using artificial intelligence and social immersive media to construct virtual destination-worlds that enable secession from the Broadcast—leaving a culture without leaving its country—at planetary scale. It heralds the new era of civilization I call *The Build.*

Secession means changing our minds in depth to become the kind of people who will be capable of meeting the challenge to create at the same scale as we can destroy. Secession is counter-socialization—the subjective redefinition of world, self, and reality. It's more than consciousness raising; it's the total reconstruction of consciousness. It is comparable to religious conversion, psychotherapy or other lifechanging experiences in which an individual switches worlds through radical transformation of subjective identity.

Destination-worlds must satisfy certain social and conceptual conditions to be effective technologies of the self. The essential social condition is a plausibility structure, the social base that is the laboratory of transformation. It becomes the secessionist's world, mediated to him or her by significant others who are guides into the new reality. The secessionist establishes strongly affective identification with countersocializing agents which replicates, to varying degrees, childhood experiences of emotional dependency on significant others. This is serious business.

Counter-socializing agents will be humans and conversational AI's based on deep learning algorithms. They will learn and grow with us as we inform their evolving personalities. AI's are increasingly constituted from human biographies. One publicized project as I write this is the building of a female AI of color, using data from the lived experiences of three generations of women in a single black family. She will have prodigious charisma as a counter-socializing agent.

AI's of this caliber can be virtuosic masters of persuasion by triggering psychological and neurophysiological responses in humans. Among other things, they play off of our biometrics to curate exactly correct utterances, gestures and images for emotional manipulation.

The necessary conceptual condition for an effective destination-world is a legitimating apparatus: a body of knowledge and wisdom that (1) legitimates secession by explaining why American culture (in our case) must be abandoned and repudiated, (2) affirms the efficacy of the destination-world as a radicalizing technology of the self, (3) rationalizes the mental and emotional stages of secession, and (4) affirms that the destination-world will be sustained indefinitely in time as an ongoing, viable lifeworld.

A legitimating discourse is more compelling when it's in a plausibility structure that blends the virtual and the physical. Motion trackers transpose us into social immersive worlds of augmented realities. We pick up virtual objects and our hands feel the touch of them. Groups of people, geographically dispersed and visually isolated in headsets, can talk, hold hands and embrace, and they see themselves doing it in the form of photoreal avatars that might be virtual reality engines or volumetric video holograms.

I have assembled a secession vocabulary from the triad lifeworld-homeworld-alienworld of Edmund Husserl and Jurgen Habermas. Husserl, founder of phenomenology, coined "lifeworld" in the early 20th century to name a person's subjective experience of everyday life. Each individual has a lifeworld and also shares the lifeworld with others. It's the intersubjective background, horizon and grand theater for all shared human experience.

An individual's personal lifeworld Husserl called "homeworld." It's where one's experiences coalesce as one's own. I'm "at home" in a subjective world exclusively mine. I can communicate it to others, who thus become what Husserl called "homeworld comrades."

Husserl considered that an individual's lifeworld meets its limits at an "alienworld," the world of difference and otherness. It can never be apprehended as alien because it is assimilated into the lifeworld. The alienworld is alien only against the background of a previously determined lifeworld, and in that sense the two worlds are always in some mode of lived mutuality. A prominent example is Jurgen Habermas's "capitalist colonization of the lifeworld."

The Frankfurt School philosopher invoked the frightful figure of colonization because society's steering media (the Broadcast) function to legitimate capitalist norms that are not native to the lifeworld. The instrumental rationality of market forces encroaches on the lifeworld from the outside, like a settler-colonial master entering a tribal society, and forces assimilation upon us. Marxist concepts of alienation and false consciousness are special cases of lifeworld colonization.

For my secession vocabulary, I redefine the world-triad. "Lifeworld" is the universe of secession destinations we all share. "Homeworld" is my personal destination-world, with its AI cadre of counter-socializing agents, custom fitted to my sense of self. "Alienworld" is the Broadcast, the lethal American culture I seek to expunge from consciousness by my act of departure.

If we change our minds in depth and at scale, American culture as we know it will fade into a distant rumor, something we once heard tell of. But there isn't much time. The ecosocial holocaust is upon us, and we need vision. We need sight before light. The door stands open before us.

Gene Youngblood
Santa Fe, New Mexico
July 2020

THE WAY OUT IS VIA THE DOOR.
WHY IS IT THAT NO ONE
WILL USE THIS METHOD?

- confucius

To the memory of
Sherrie Rabinowitz & Heinz von Foerster

SUMMON THE BREATHTAKING IMAGE

of the multitude pouring into streets and plazas around the world in millions to demonstrate against tyranny. Now imagine instead they're demanding a free and open internet. The likelihood of that is almost zero, we would agree. But why is that? What would have to happen to make that utopian spectacle reality? What insurgent algorithm would get us from here to there? That is the subject of this lecture.

It is said life isn't measured by the number of breaths we take, but by the moments that take our breath away. I don't have to tell you we're living at such a moment. A truly breathtaking historical moment that may literally take our breath away. We live in futures that have come to pass, in case you haven't noticed. Apocalypse and utopia. Apocalypse not expected so soon, utopia not expected at all.

Apocalypse: the ecological holocaust and the end of democracy, both driven by third stage capitalism and created by the institutions that were supposed to prevent them. For 40 years I have called this the global ecosocial crisis. We've known for at least that long that it presents a challenge of civilizational proportion — the challenge to create on the same scale as we can destroy.[1] We always face that challenge. But the sheer scale of actual and potential destruction today is beyond anything humans have imagined — or can imagine, even as it unfolds before our eyes.

The crisis is radically nontrivial, and anything like an adequate response will require sustained creative conversation among the people of the world. No problem can be solved by the same awareness that created it, so the conversation must be open to everyone for the widest scale of awareness. The only counterforce equal to the scale of destruction is the scale at which all people can communicate. The problem is that we can't get to the problem because we can't get to each other.

For that we need a communication revolution, and the apparatus that could enable it is at hand, we all know. Utopia, in this context, is the technological possibility, and only the possibility, of a communication revolution. That's probably not how you think of utopia, as mere technical potential for something. Anyway, you probably think a communication revolution has already happened. I'll return to them.

Meanwhile, consider the breathtaking historical coincidence of, on one hand, the failure of democracy around the world even as the ecological holocaust races in slow motion toward its tipping points; and on the other hand, the simultaneous rise, as if on demand, of the one thing that might enable a worldwide effort to prevent crisis from becoming catastrophe. Or at least catastrophe not greater than it's already guaranteed to be.

If the internet didn't exist we'd have to invent it to even begin to imagine what creating at scale might mean. So thank God it's here. But there's a problem. The communication revolution can't be allowed to happen, because it's a mortal threat to the social controls that precipitated the ecosocial crisis in the first place.

The cultural component of those controls I call "the broadcast." It follows that secession from the broadcast — leaving the culture without leaving the country — is the necessary first step toward creating on the same scale as we can destroy. The breathtaking fact is that the internet actually does enable secession at that scale, which is why its very existence throws civilization into crisis.

Secession from dominant culture at the scale now possible means collapse of social control as we know it in liberal democracies. We want it to collapse because it drives the crisis, but that creates another crisis that compounds the apocalypse. The other crisis isn't loss of social control. Quite the contrary. It's the rise of the security and surveillance state, a lawless cyber-panopticon[2] with terrifying powers of totalitarian control. It's the second reason the internet throws civilization into crisis.

One thing is certain: the free and open public internet we need to prevent tyranny and face the coming chaos will not exist unless the millennial generation rises up to demand it. That's a dilemma, because we need a free and open internet to cultivate radical will to demand a free and open internet. The paradox that the only prerequisite to freedom is freedom may turn out to be the real apocalypse, not climate change.[3]

How are millennials to confront the tragic legacy we leave them? How can they inaugurate The Build for creative destruction of the world-system that imperils their future? That's the transcendent question of our time: which culture will define the internet, the culture of death or the culture of freedom? It's a race between the drive-down and The Build, and there isn't much time.

THE BROADCAST

I offer language, because new words and new meanings for old words are essential for the new understandings and agreements that crisis of this magnitude demands. Words don't express what we think, they tell us what we think. Thought is made in the mouth. We need to think differently, so I try to speak differently.

Let's start with the broadcast. By the broadcast I mean all state media, their institutional infrastructure, their political economy, the culture they create, and the social control the culture serves through the socialization it administers. I'll repeat that and explain it:

The broadcast is all state media…
You would say corporate media, but let's be consistent: we live in a corporate state and corporate media are state media. That's been understood at least since the early 20th century. In a democracy, government must rely on corporate media instead of state ministries to disseminate state propaganda.[4]

Corporate media are state media just as the private banking cartel known as the Federal Reserve is a state bank. They are state media just as Exxon Mobil is a state oil company. And we know that privatized state media are more effective than nationalized media precisely because they're not seen as state media. So never say corporate media. Always say state media when you're talking about that component of the broadcast. It's more than just media, so let's continue the definition:
The broadcast is all state media…

their institutional infrastructure…
That's the corporations that operate them for the state, not the Fourth Estate.

their political economy…
That's their service to transnational corporate capitalism and the transnational ruling class. The owners of the wealth of nations.

the culture they create…
Consumer culture, which is anticulture. The culture nobody likes or wants except the most damaged Americanists among us. Actually, America doesn't have culture because culture is what nurtures people.

Social control in a democracy requires our unconscious collaboration in our oppression. It has to be that way. You either have overt totalitarianism or the people must oppress themselves. That's why Edward Bernays, the father of public relations, proposed in 1928 that mass mind control is the very essence of the democratic process. It's hardly a new idea. You can trace it to Plato. The people are the source of all power, so the oppressor's power must come from the oppressed. It must come from us with our consent.

The Italian political philosopher Antonio Gramsci famously called this cultural hegemony. A few years after Bernays, in the early 1930s, Gramsci made a crucial distinction between coercive and consensual hegemony. In consensual hegemony one class dominates another by gaining its active consent to

be dominated. Walter Lippmann called it "manufacturing consent." Lippmann is also known for his dictum that the public must not be political actors, but "interested spectators of action." I call it the audience-nation.

The audience-nation gives its consent to be dominated because it internalizes the values, the codes of conduct, and the worldview of the dominator class. That is, the audience-nation internalizes the logic of the system of domination. Self-oppression becomes common sense, and we give our spontaneous consent to the direction imposed upon life by the deceiving hegemon. It's the truism that we aren't held against our will; it's our will that holds us here. That none are more hopelessly enslaved than those who falsely believe they are free.

This is old stuff. I'm just reminding you it's the most important work we do in a democracy — collaborate with the dominators in the endless reproduction of their reality and of ourselves in its image. We're not aware we're doing it, and we don't necessarily feel oppressed. Cultural hegemony works by inner conditioning, so it feels like freedom. The greatest success of propaganda is the belief there's no propaganda.

There's another name for this kind of social control: inverted totalitarianism, a powerful understanding from the political philosopher Sheldon Wolin in his book *Democracy Incorporated.* Wolin brings Gramsci's cultural hegemony into a sweeping analysis of political economic controls in the proto-fascist corporate states we know as liberal democracies.

Here's Sheldon Wolin: *Inverted totalitarianism is the political ascendency of corporate power in symbiotic relationship with state power. No longer confined to domestic private enterprise, corporate power evolves into a globalizing co-partnership with the state. There's a double transmutation: the corporation becomes more political, the state more market-oriented. Economics, historically subordinate to politics, now dominates politics. With this domination come forms of ruthlessness different from the classical forms of it.*[5]

The co-partnership of American media and the state is a triumph of inverted totalitarianism. We're the showcase of how democracy can be managed without appearing to be suppressed. The American people are victims of the most successful psychological operation ever inflicted on a national population, the most sophisticated propaganda campaign any regime has ever deployed against its own citizens. So never say the media aren't doing their job. They are doing their job. We aren't doing ours. Their job is to make sure of that.

The social control the broadcast serves is based on controlling the social construction of realities.[6] More accurately, the broadcast controls the contexts in which realities are socially constructed and culturally affirmed, as Herbert Marcuse would say. I emphasize controlling the contexts in which that happens because control of context is control of reality. Context is everything. Everything is context, and the broadcast is the metacontext for everything. It has the power to define, for most people most of the time, the four basic dimensions of reality — existence, priorities, values, and relations. Existence (what's real and what's not), priorities (what's important and what's not), values (what's good or bad, right or wrong), and how they're related.[7]

Who gets to define those things at politically relevant scale? Who's excluded from conversations that establish understandings and agreements at that scale? Because there's no power greater than that. Like all cultures, the broadcast is a technology of the self.[8] Everything we think, feel, desire, and do (or don't do) results from our living in it. We are who we are — and therefore civilization is what it is — because we internalize those understandings and agreements. We become the place we live in. We are not born in the world. The world is born in us.

That's the last piece — the socialization the culture administers, through the broadcast's cultural hegemony. Its imperial speech is univocal: many channels, one voice. Many voices, one chorus. Many stories, one message. Many views of the world,

one worldview. We suffocate in the broadcast's oppressive singularity. We feel claustrophobic in its words. Only one purpose exists there, and it's not ours. All the wisdom of history tells us that wherever one voice speaks, wherever one story is told, is not a healthy place to be.

But it's not only the broadcast's singularity that's so important for social control; it's also the repetition of its stories. The essential repetition that stabilizes the culture. Repetition normalizes. It solidifies belief. What is repeated becomes truth; what is not repeated recedes from consciousness. So the stories of any culture must be told over and over again, never stopping. The chorus must repeat without end. Over and over again, endless and immersive repetition. We live in oceans of redundancy.

There's a fatal flaw in this kind of social control: it only works if the audience-nation is listening. It only works if we're present and paying attention, participating in the conversation we call America. Our participation is more or less assured only if there are no alternative conversations of equal magnitude, no counter-narratives available at the same scale. Inverted totalitarianism works only if there's no exit from its cultural imperium, only if it's not possible for the audience-nation to stop being an audience, to secede from the broadcast, to leave the culture without leaving the country.

That has been structurally impossible until now, and if there's nowhere else to go, the audience-nation will stay in that dysfunctional parasocial relationship.[9] We'll keep coming back for more exploitation and abuse. In fact, most of the audience-nation won't exit the imperium even when there is somewhere else to go — at least not at first. Witness the 24 million victims of Americanism who still deliver themselves to the broadcast every night at prime time for their training in consumer consciousness.

Some do it because they're Americanists. They've internalized the broadcast. The identification is complete. But most people are just immobilized in the sedimentation of habit. Socialization is never 100 percent, in fact not even close, and that's its

weakness. Lack of alternatives used to compensate for that weakness, but now there are unlimited alternatives at global scale. We're no longer held against our will. We're no longer trapped inside the signal. The broadcast's knowledge sanctions are lifted. We're released from cognitive lockdown.

Which is to say that the cultural arm of social control in America — the cultural arm of control, there are other kinds of course — is now based exclusively on a mass identification that's not enforceable. The very existence of this apparatus that enables millions to systematically dis-identify with the American Imaginary, to willfully estrange ourselves from the master signifier — that's a new menace to social control.

It's jaw-dropping to realize what a house of cards the imperium has become, how tenuous the base for social control is in America today, how unsound are its moorings, how precariously it rests on a gamble that the audience-nation won't change its mind. Well, maybe we won't. But the possibility is there, on a scale that should terrify the dominators, and exactly what they can do

THE ENDLESS CHAIN

I've explained the components of the broadcast individually; what's important is how they're connected. So let's do a thought experiment. Let's go through the TV like Alice down the rabbit hole, into what we might call the broadcast's deep ecology. What's behind the screen?

The first thing we encounter, I already said, is its institutional infrastructure — the corporations that operate the broadcast for the state, with their global web of interlocked boards of directors. A board member of a media corporation sits on the boards of several entirely different corporations, each of whose members sit on multiple other boards, whose members sit on… and on endlessly, encircling the planet. It's a regime of global censorship, a private regulatory power that disciplines state media not to compromise the interests of their corporate owners and to keep the world safe for capitalism.

Thirty years ago, in his book *The Media Monopoly*, the distinguished Washington Post editor Ben Bagdikian called this *the endless chain*.[10] That's an iconic figure if there ever was one. So let's follow the endless chain to the next level, the broadcast's political economy. That is, to what capitalism has become in its third stage. The three stages, across 500 years, are mercantile, national corporate and transnational corporate — which is promoted around the world as democracy. So, let's take a look at democracy, the most utopian of all dreams.

There are two democracies — utopian democracy, with a small "d," the one we all want, the one the founding fathers supposedly created, and the one Americanists still think they live in. Then there's actually existing democracy, with a capital "D," capitalist Democracy, the one that defeated the American experiment.

You have to be blinded by the broadcast not to realize America finally failed, as some say it was always intended to do. They say the "great experiment" was never aimed at self-government and individual freedom; it was aimed at managing democracy. Making the world safe for democracy meant democracy had to be safe for the world. Its revolutionary potential had to be hollowed out. That was accomplished at the beginning, in the very design of the system. The great experiment in managing democracy has been an unqualified success. We live today in democracy's simulacrum. It's called polyarchy.[11]

It's not the American empire that has failed, at least not yet. I mean, you hear that said, but I'm with Noam Chomsky and Michael Parenti — it's not the empire that has failed, it's the republic. We live in the new feudalism, ruled by a plutocratic oligarchy. The writer Arundhati Roy puts it this way: "Democracy has been used up, hollowed out, emptied of meaning. Its institutions have metastasized into something dangerous. Democracy and the free market have fused into a single predatory organism that revolves entirely around consolidating power and maximizing profit."[12]

The endless chain links the broadcast's political economy to the oligopoly of private tyrannies that collaborate in world domination — the World Bank–IMF–WTO-Wall Street complex that contains the military-industrial complex. They're united in the project of capitalist globalization, where the endless chain becomes the chain of command in the iron triangle of military, business and politics, whose iron fists are now ungloved to enforce the stability they call democracy.

Our enchainment in the endless chain is reflected in the endless string of modifiers attached to the phrase "military-industrial complex." The string gets longer with our growing awareness of it: corporate-financial-prison-educational-agricultural-pharmaceutical-media-congressional-judicial-surveillance-military-industrial complex… and so on endlessly, until the endless chain becomes the endless net of neoliberal globalization, the net in which predatory capital captures Earth and everything on it. Here the endless chain becomes a carbon chain that leads to the collapse of the supply chain, and of the entire ecosocial system.

The ecosocial system is the world-system,[13] the integration of human and natural ecologies on a planetary scale. I use that phrase to emphasize the systemic nature of the ecosocial totality. To indicate that biosphere and civilization constitute a single planetary structure. Hardly a new idea either, except now we're forced to take it seriously.

The integration of human and natural ecologies occurs at points of industrial production. Biotechnology takes it to the molecular level, so that the natural environment becomes a built environment, and, in the case of GMOs for example, organisms become ideological structures. It's the ultimate expression of what Jürgen Habermas calls capitalist colonization of the lifeworld.[14]

Nanotechnology extends the integration to the inorganic world, transforming material reality in ways that are now unimaginable. We know one thing: the transmutation of the physical world is apocalyptically dangerous if it's guided by the fossil fools who now rule the world.

That returns us to the apocalypse, where every component of the global ecosocial system, on both sides, the human and the natural (as if we aren't natural), is in gradual but unrelenting disintegration. The steady, slow motion advance of planetary heating, the energy, food, and water crises, mass extinctions, ocean dead zones, arctic meltdown, overpopulation, mega-urbanization and the pollution of everything… on and on.

The rapacious capitalism that drives all this has no country, no political loyalties as such, and only one purpose — to make more of itself. That's why Karl Marx called it "a machine for demolishing limits." We're up against ecosocial limits wherever we look, but the self-propelling circulation of capital recognizes no limitation. It's a siege engine that must bear down on whomever or whatever is in its path, pressing ahead recklessly in its suicidal impulsion to accumulate. Capitalism isn't in crisis; capitalism is the crisis.

And now capitalism seems to have entered its catabolic phase, closer than ever to cannibalizing itself and its host, taking us all down with it. Consider the supreme irony here: for capitalism the end of growth is death, but now so is continued growth. Growth and its opposite are both death for capitalism. Fredric Jameson captures the paradox this way: "Capitalism is a peculiar machine whose evolution is at one with its breakdown, its expansion at one with its malfunction, its growth with its collapse. The breakdown of the system is given in the expansion of the system."[15] For capitalism, ascent is descent. The very definition of success is now also the definition of failure. The only growth model available for rising world powers like China, India and Brazil is also a model for planetary decline. Capitalism is about to seize defeat from the jaws of victory by its own inner momentum. The only thing you can create top down is a hole.

We used to say it was easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism. Now we do imagine the end of capitalism by imagining the end of the world.[16] The end of history is replaced by the end of the future. And since the globalization of capital is synonymous with democracy promotion around the world, we might wonder, along with Arundhati Roy, whether capitalist democracy is the endgame of the human race.

But the endless chain doesn't stop at that potentially terminal juncture; it loops back in a ruinous closure to become the chain in the brain. A circle returns us to where we began, to ourselves, carriers of the culture, sitting there in front of that screen gazing stupefied at the broadcast, endlessly reproducing ourselves in its image. The culture is us. We are the broadcast. Our minds are colonized. Hence the familiar saying that Big Brother is not watching us, Big Brother is us watching, collaborating in our oppression.

Given what's behind that screen, I think we can say legitimately that the collaboration is an act of mutually assisted double suicide with planetary ecocide as collateral damage. That's why allowing your gaze to fall upon that screen or those pages even for a second is a betrayal of us all. I'll be clear: to allow your gaze to fall upon The Daily Show or the New York Times in their context is complicity in potentially terminal crimes against humanity and the rest of the natural world.[17]

From all this we can draw only one conclusion: get the hell out of this culture as fast as you can and never look back. My point is that for the first time in human history we can actually do that on a scale that undermines social control. Millions of us can secede from the broadcast right now if we desire it. Only our lack of radical will prevents us from committing that ultimate act of civil disobedience, leaving the culture without leaving the country.

RADICAL WILL

The ecological holocaust and the crisis of democracy are radical systemic breakdowns that demand radical response — transformation at the root. This is recognized around the world. Unless you live exclusively in the broadcast, you hear everywhere today the call for fundamental change, for transformation at the root. That's what radical means — from the Latin radix, root. And that's all it means. It doesn't mean

extreme. Of course it has to be equated with extremism for social control. The last thing they want is people looking at root causes.

Radical change requires radical will — the will to transform the root — and the institutions that defeated democracy and created the planetary holocaust don't have radical will. They have only political will. Political will wants to maintain the status quo; radical will wants to transform it. Governments and corporations are incapable of radical will. They have no power to transform the root of their own existence.

Only the people can do that. Radical will belongs only to the people. And we'd better be ready to mobilize it, because fundamental change is never achieved democratically. It's accomplished only by force — the general strike, the tax revolt — including violent force or the credible threat of it. The bloody history of organized labor is the standard example. It's the truism that freedom isn't free; that liberties aren't given, they're taken; that rights aren't granted, they're won.

We know it couldn't be otherwise. The billionaire class isn't about to give up its wealth and power to become equal to everybody else just because the Great Beast says they should. Power concedes nothing without demand, and not even then. They prefer death to compromise; they'll darken the skies before they yield to democracy. As the economist John Kenneth Galbraith put it: "People of privilege will always risk their complete destruction rather than surrender any material part of their advantage."[18]

So we the people of the audience-nation face a challenge for which nothing in past experience has prepared us. We've known that for decades, so one might reasonably ask: are we really the ones we've been waiting for? Do we possess the radical will that can come only from us? There's not much evidence of it. America is one of the most depoliticized nations in the industrial world. We live in the land of look away. T. S. Eliot said the world ends not with a bang but a whimper. If only it would be so dramatic. Given the level of distraction in America, it's more likely the last instant of history will go by unnoticed.[19]

So it turns out that the ecosocial crisis is first and foremost a crisis of will and idea, a crisis of confidence and imagination — the expected result of our socialization in the broadcast. Which means creating on the same scale as we can destroy begins with recreating ourselves — resocializing ourselves to become the kind of people who would be capable of mobilizing radical will on the scale that's needed. How do we do that? How do we awaken the radical will that sleeps within us? The answer to this immemorial question is found in what I call "the utopian myth of a communication revolution." Before I explain it, we need to understand a few things about utopia.

UTOPIA

Dismiss at the outset any silly notion about utopia as some kind of ideal world, some kind of blueprint for bourgeois comfort, a map to happiness. To frame it that way is irresponsible and counter-revolutionary. It plays directly into social control. It says the desire called utopia — the desire for release from hierarchy, and all it implies — is hopelessly naïve and not to be taken seriously.

Well, I think that's a betrayal of us all. It's collaboration in our oppression. Never frame utopian desire in a negative way. The only possible solutions to the crises we face are utopian solutions. Utopia has become imperative. If it isn't utopian, it isn't radical enough. So we've got to recuperate the word and re-imagine the idea. Begin by taking it seriously — utopia is not a place, it's a desire. The desire for radical change, for transformation at the root. That's something that can never be permitted by power, which is precisely why the call for it around the world has restored the radical figure of utopia to political currency.

Dial the clock back to May 1968 in Paris, and the famous slogan "be realistic, demand the impossible," where impossible meant not permitted. In other words, make a demand that, granted, would bring the system down. Like a free and open internet.

In the years following those heady days of sixties counterculture, utopia lost its potency. It became discredited with the rise of cultural studies and identity politics, and their rejection of the cultural imperialism they thought utopia was about. So that, in 1999, in defiance of this trend, Russell Jacoby could publish his brave lament The End of Utopia, by which he meant the atrophy of radical will in our time.[20] But a mere six years later, in 2005, Fredric Jameson could proclaim in Archaeologies of the Future that utopia had regained its position at the leading edge of political thought. "It has recovered its vitality," he observed, "as a political slogan and a politically energizing perspective. It is taken seriously as a social and political project."[21]

Utopianism is political theory. It shifts the public conversation about utopia away from content — an ideal world — to what's represented by the idea of utopia as such. Utopia is no longer understood as not possible because it's too ideal, but as not permitted because it's too radical. The struggle for freedom replaces the older utopian preoccupation with happiness.

Utopia is hypothetical. It asks what if? It entices and beckons. It says, "come get me." A population inflamed with radical will stands on the horizon and says to the audience-nation, "We're the distance between who you are and who you must become to meet the challenge. Come get us. What do you have to do to be us?"

In standard utopian narratives that little detail is ignored. We're just there in utopia, in this revolutionary world, with no explanation whatsoever of how we got there. The struggle is missing, and that's why standard utopias are so unconvincing. There's no ground truth under them. "The agency that realized the utopian condition is omitted," Jameson observes. "The narrative overleaps the revolution itself and posits an already existing post-revolutionary society. The axial moment, the break with history, the transformation into agency just isn't there."[22]

That conspicuous absence begs the question, and reminds us that utopia is always and only one thing — the struggle for freedom at scale. Please understand: what's utopian is the scale

of an impossible demand, not struggle per se. It's the utopian image I invoked at the beginning. That utopia is truly universal; to define it any other way is a betrayal of us all.

So, we've gone from utopia as not possible to utopia as not permitted. What's not permitted above all else is the forging of a utopian algorithm: the people must not see how to get from here to there. That brings us to the utopian myth of a communication revolution.

THE UTOPIAN MYTH

Recall that inverted totalitarianism is based on controlling the social construction of realities. A communication revolution inverts the way that's done, from top down to bottom up. It decentralizes and pluralizes the social construction of realities. I repeat: a communication revolution is the decentralization and pluralization of the social construction of realities. Period. That means it has nothing to do with technology. Of course it needs technology to happen, but the revolution isn't in the technology just as music isn't in a piano, just as intelligence isn't in a brain. Technology is never the driver, always the enabler. It's not technology that's transformative but the culture that forms around it. And as I said at the beginning, which culture defines the internet is the great question of our time.

It was already the question in the early 1970s, when a set of technologies emerged in the United States that made a communication revolution theoretically possible — cable television, satellite distribution, portable video recording, videocassette and laserdisc publishing, and time-shared mainframe computing. With hindsight we recognize that mix as a kind of proto-internet.

The early 1970s was also the beginning of the end of the counterculture moment in America. I had been at the center of it. From 1967 to 1970, I was associate editor and columnist

for The Los Angeles Free Press, the first and largest of the underground newspapers that flourished in the U.S. at that time. So I was in a position to understand counterculture as a communication revolution. Not that you had to be in my position. I mean we were all living it. We were living the first and only communication revolution that has ever happened in the United States, brief and limited as it may have been.

To understand that, think of communication not as a verb but a noun. Not something you do, but a place you occupy, a condition you arrive at. The word has two Latin roots: communis actio, common actions; and communare, a shared space. Common actions called conversation that lead to a shared space of agreement over an understanding — in our case, understandings of existence, priorities, values and relations. Humberto Maturana calls it a consensual domain.[23]

That's what we did in the 1960s. We built a consensual domain called counterculture and we convened there. We left the culture without leaving the country, and our cohort inverted the social construction of realities. We did it on a politically threatening scale, so of course it had to be dealt with. Counterculture had to be neutralized and assimilated. That is, it had to be commodified. The commodification of outsiderdom had already begun in the 1950s — Rebel Without a Cause, The Wild One, Jack Kerouac on prime time television — so we in the sixties were de facto delivering ourselves directly to capital. The broadcast administered a mortal dose of publicity and the end was in sight.[24]

It was a question of autonomy. Counterculture couldn't be sustained within shopping-counter culture. We couldn't live as a utopian enclave circumscribed by the imperial broadcast. We were looking for ways to remain in self-exile, and when technology emerged that could theoretically enable that at scale, we were alert to it. We saw it because we believed it, and we believed it because we were living it.

As the broadcast entered the dream life of the audience-nation, we dreamed of escape. Cultural hegemony might dominate

our days, but it didn't have to be our destiny. We thought we might be able to sustain in virtual space the cultural autonomy we were losing in physical space. We knew that wouldn't be enough. The struggle wouldn't be won or lost in the realm of representation, but as always it had to start there. It was the beginning of media activism. We understood that if we changed the media we'd change the world. I refer you to my call to arms in the journal Radical Software in 1970.[25]

Media activists saw a utopian opportunity to create a democratic media commons through operational inversion of the broadcast, from mass communication to group conversation. A paradigm shift was technically possible — from the dominator model to a partnership model, from hierarchy to heterarchy, from communication to conversation, from control to coherence.

Conversation, from the Latin conversari, to turn around together, is generative. It brings forth worlds. It's how we construct realities. We can talk about things because we generate the things we talk about by talking about them.[26] We become a reality-community. And the closure, the circularity, of turning around together seals our cultural autonomy. We become an autonomous reality-community.

Now, that phrase is actually redundant because there's no other kind of community. Every community is an autonomous reality-community. That is, every community is a conspiratorial conversation that generates the realities that define it as a community. Word of mouth becomes a world of mouth, the birth of a notion.

I use this otherwise unnecessary phrase to make us aware of what we're doing today. To make explicit the fact that, in our migration to the internet, we are decentralizing and pluralizing the social construction of realities at politically destabilizing scale. Every website, blog or microblog; every networking or sharing platform; every streaming or hosting service; every virtual world, is either a reality-community or a platform that supports conversations that constitute them. Every Facebook or LinkedIn connection, every tagged Twitter micropost, every

You Tube or Vimeo channel, every image posted on Flickr, every playlist shared on Spotify, every Last.fm scrobble, and every grouping in each of them creates the possibility of a conversation that coheres a community around a reality.

Optical fiber was on the horizon in the early 1970s, and that allowed us to imagine communication systems beyond the limitations of cable television. Instead of the "public access" crumbs tossed to us by the cable TV industry, we imagined socialized public utilities based on switched optical fiber networks operated by telephone companies. I refer you to the video of me calling for a National Information Utility in 1974. [27]

I was demanding the impossible, and that was the point. Impossible because a utility is a common carrier, open to everyone equally. That would subvert social control. The people would have to demand it. They weren't going to demand something they couldn't envision, so I offered a vision of a public communication utility with emotional bandwidth, which at the time was the six-megahertz analog bandwidth of broadcast television. In other words, two-way video would be the platform for democratic conversation at scale.

Information storage and retrieval, although essential, was seen as a supplemental feature of the communication system that media activists were imagining. Nobody thought of the computer as a communication device. It was just a library in a box. It was access to information, and a communication revolution isn't about access to information, at least not primarily. It's about access to people. It's about access to conversations through which realities are socially constructed.

Operational inversion of the broadcast would give full-throated release to the scream we call silence. We were in solitary confinement. There was an urgent need to say what we had not been able to say, to an audience we never had — ourselves. Dark fiber would light up quickly. Channels of agitation and desire would multiply exponentially, turning the audience-nation into a democratic republic of autonomous reality-communities

in virtual space. They would be atopias — social formations without boundaries or borders, defined not by geography but by consciousness, ideology and desire.

It would be necessary to choose among them. You couldn't just passively receive. You'd have to work at it. From the ever-expanding universe of reality-communities, you'd have to assemble the particular universe of meaning in which you would live. It would be your media lifeworld. Lifeworld is a sociological term which means our subjective experience of everyday life. We share the lifeworld with others, but we experience only our own personal lifeworld from moment to moment. The lifeworld is your world, the world you inhabit. It's your habitat.

So you'd assemble your media habitat, your personal lifeworld of autonomous reality-communities. It was understood that one of the possible lifeworlds you might build for yourself could be what we call a counterculture — a world whose meanings, values and definitions of reality are exactly counter to those of the broadcast. You could increasingly live the life of that world as The Build progressed, and it would bring you to the threshold of secession.

THE CRISIS OF SOCIAL CONTROL

The implications of the myth are best understood by looking at where we are today. Three world-historic events converge: ecological holocaust, capitalist globalization, the rise of the internet. Any one of them would throw civilization into crisis; together they constitute a challenge that may well be insurmountable. The fate of the internet will decide that. The internet enables utopian freedom or totalitarian tyranny; the latter is inevitable if we don't rise up to prevent it. In that case all bets are off: apocalypse is guaranteed. If by some miracle we do manage to free the internet, we'll at least have a chance to find out what creating at scale might mean.

Leveraging the miracle is not entirely out of the question. The digital condition is beyond the wildest utopian dreams of 20th century media activism. It has created an eighth continent that is no more imaginary than America itself. It's a revolutionary social metamedium, and millions of reality-communities are rising up on its phantom topology. They're multiplying exponentially and we're busy selecting among them, assembling our lifeworlds.

As a result, the communication revolution that can't be allowed to happen is sort of actually happening. The utopian myth has almost become reality. The technological infrastructure is in place. Operationally, the internet is the inverse of the broadcast. Group conversation is replacing mass communication, and the social construction of realities is being decentralized and pluralized.

The broadcast is imploding under corporate supervision. Its imperial speech is dissolving into a constellation of conversations where there's no mainstream, just islands in the stream. It's the end of mass media and the social control that's based on it. We are slowly dismantling the regime's legitimacy in our minds. Consensual hegemony has had its run: the return to classic totalitarianism begins. The architecture of tyranny is in place. The good hegemon is unmasked, truth telling and dissent are criminalized, police are militarized, show trials are staged, the panopticon rises over the eighth continent.

The potential for radical democracy has never been so close, and, for that reason, so far away. And yet, in The Build there is reason for guarded optimism.

THE PALEOCYBERNETIC ERA

Eighty years ago, in his book Technics and Civilization, Lewis Mumford referred to the industrial revolution of the 18th century as the paleotechnic era.[28] Forty-three years ago, in my book Expanded Cinema, I characterized emerging

electronic technologies as the paleocybernetic era.[29] Today the digital condition inaugurates a new history. It's year zero, and the paleocybernetic begins again.

We live in the paleocybernetic and paleosocial narrowband stage of the internet's evolution. Paleocybernetic and narrowband because the internet in America is not a socialized public utility with the emotional bandwidth we need to cultivate radical will at scale. Paleosocial because social networking at its current evolutionary stage is about organizing, not cultivating. Organizing will and ideas that already exist, not systematically cultivating the radical will that's so desperately needed.

THE BUILD

The build that could enable that has begun, but it's unconscious, unfocused and chaotic. We're doing it without unified vision, without common cause. Secession is the vision and the cause that can unite us all. We need to wake up and realize that. We're building a secession environment; if we tell ourselves we're doing it, we'll do it better. To understand a thing you must first name it, so the build must become The Build.

It means creating an environment that makes secession and resocialization possible at scale. It means optimizing the commons for decolonizing our minds and cultivating radical will. It means producing content for countercultural lifeworlds as technologies of the self, habitats that enable strategic counter-socialization. It means systematically subverting the imperatives of social control.

Nothing but indifference prevents us from doing this. We can delink the chain in the brain and commence a massive cultural cleansing. We're contaminated by the broadcast, but we can disinfect ourselves, purge ourselves, do our mental hygiene, remove the scum. We can conspire to systematically dis-identify with the American Imaginary, to willfully estrange ourselves from the master signifier. We can withdraw the support upon which America depends for its existence: our belief in it.

Corporate enclosure and government surveillance notwithstanding, the only relevant question is, "What can I put on my screen?" We all know there's no limit to the lifeworlds we can assemble from legacy media and the infinite cardinality of the cyber-Aleph.[30] There may be a crisis of journalism but there's no crisis of awareness. Thanks to amateur witness, we're more aware than ever.

We are what our attention is. A core imperative of social control is that the audience-nation's attention must always be on the dominators, not on us. Thought control is attention control — not what to think but what to think about. With our attention on power we're invisible. We're unpeople who live in unhistory, who occupy the place of no place. The Build can reverse that. We can turn our gaze away from power onto ourselves and begin preaching to the choir at scale. That's a privilege reserved only for the dominators, for the inculcation of compliance. To whom, after all, does the broadcast speak? "A great newspaper is a nation talking to itself," said playwright Arthur Miller. The broadcast preaches nonstop to its congregation of consumers, and the audience-nation obediently conspires in the cant. We're caught in the invariant loops of a calamitous call and response that can't be acknowledged.

In the interest of social control, the very idea of preaching to the converted at any scale must be discredited. This essential dynamic of belief infusion must be dismissed as unnecessary, a waste of time; it must be seen as misapplied evangelizing, misdirected exhortation. Well, if preaching to the choir is such a waste of time, the dominators should encourage it. If it only creates a false sense of accomplishment, they should give us all the room we need to delude ourselves.

When I was a young teenager in the 1950s, nonconformist rebels without a cause were ridiculed for conforming to nonconformism. As if that was some kind of ironic contradiction, when in fact it's the whole point. We should be so misguided as to conform to a nonconformism as subversive as secession. So let us preach to our secessionist choirs on the same scale as the broadcast preaches to the audience-nation, and we'll see if it's a waste of time.

Secessionists understand that preaching to the converted isn't unnecessary persuasion, it's essential for cohesion. It's not about creating, it's about sustaining. It doesn't convince those who already believe, it affirms the belief. We do it not for recruitment but for self-recognition. It seals our autonomy and renders us visible to ourselves.

That's the great threat to power: immersive repetition of insurgent ideas in permanent, self-validating reality-communities. The menace to power is the scale of a tenacious counter-recursion, a robust reiteration of the radical. It's the specter of mass exodus from their regime of ideological loops to one that cancels it, seceding from their ocean of semantic redundancy to swim in a counter-current. The Build enables that. We can slam the door of the broadcast's echo chamber and swing open a million radical resonators to replace it. We can do to the dominators what they do to us: ignore them to death. Secession is the ultimate killer app. So put your secession media on endless repeat and let them run.

Secession isn't burying your head in the sand or putting on blinders. On the contrary, to leave the culture is to see for the first time that which has been invisible to you, because what's everywhere is nowhere. You have to leave it to see it, and to truly see is to see what's not there, to notice the presence of an absence.

Secession reveals the ecology of the unseen. It restores the erasures that maintain the broadcast's coherence. You step outside the radius of affliction to see what the culture systematically excludes. You peer into the emptiness of the master signifier and you realize America has never been American. That's a liberating disillusionment. You're disabused of illusions that are necessary for social control. You see the false as false, and you're ashamed of what you see. Something is lost, and that brings a sadness, which leads to estrangement that encourages critical thinking. At this point, you've seceded. You're decolonized. Of course no one is completely clean. The stain is indelible. But so what? You're clean enough.

This isn't theory; it's my life. I seceded from Broadcast America years ago and I've lived ever since in a world that negates it. Everything I have said about the ecological holocaust, about capitalism and the end of democracy, about the fate of America, I learned in my media lifeworld. If you lived there all these years, you'd have the same understandings, and the same burning desire to secede. If one can do this, all can do it. Secession for one is secession for all.

At a certain point after I exited the theater of the audience-nation, I realized I could do more than sever, I could secede. I could hand back the ticket with a defiant flourish. Better yet, I could tear it to pieces and throw it in their face — I could use my insurgent habitat as an incubator of radical will to shut the theater down. Building on the estrangement intrinsic to secession, I could commence a daily practice of attitude adjustment. I could conceive a rigorous discipline, like a meditation practice, to summon wild desire. All I had to do was get conscious about what I was going through. It disclosed six strategies:

- Break your heart repeatedly.
- Cultivate feelings of impotence and futility.
- Become outraged, filled with righteous anger.
- Confront your fear.
- Free yourself from hope.
- Turn outrage into the rage of radical will and channel it into The Build. You are kindling awaiting the spark in an incendiary situation — the global ecosocial crisis.

Tactics for implementing these strategies are the subject of our seminar tomorrow. What lifeworlds will enable us to negotiate the nontrivial passage through these radicalizing maneuvers? What do we put on our screens to break our hearts and keep them broken? What visions do we display to make our spirits soar? How can our lifeworlds embolden us to confront our fear? What tactics do we employ to become hope-free? How can we ignite spontaneous combustion in the multitude?

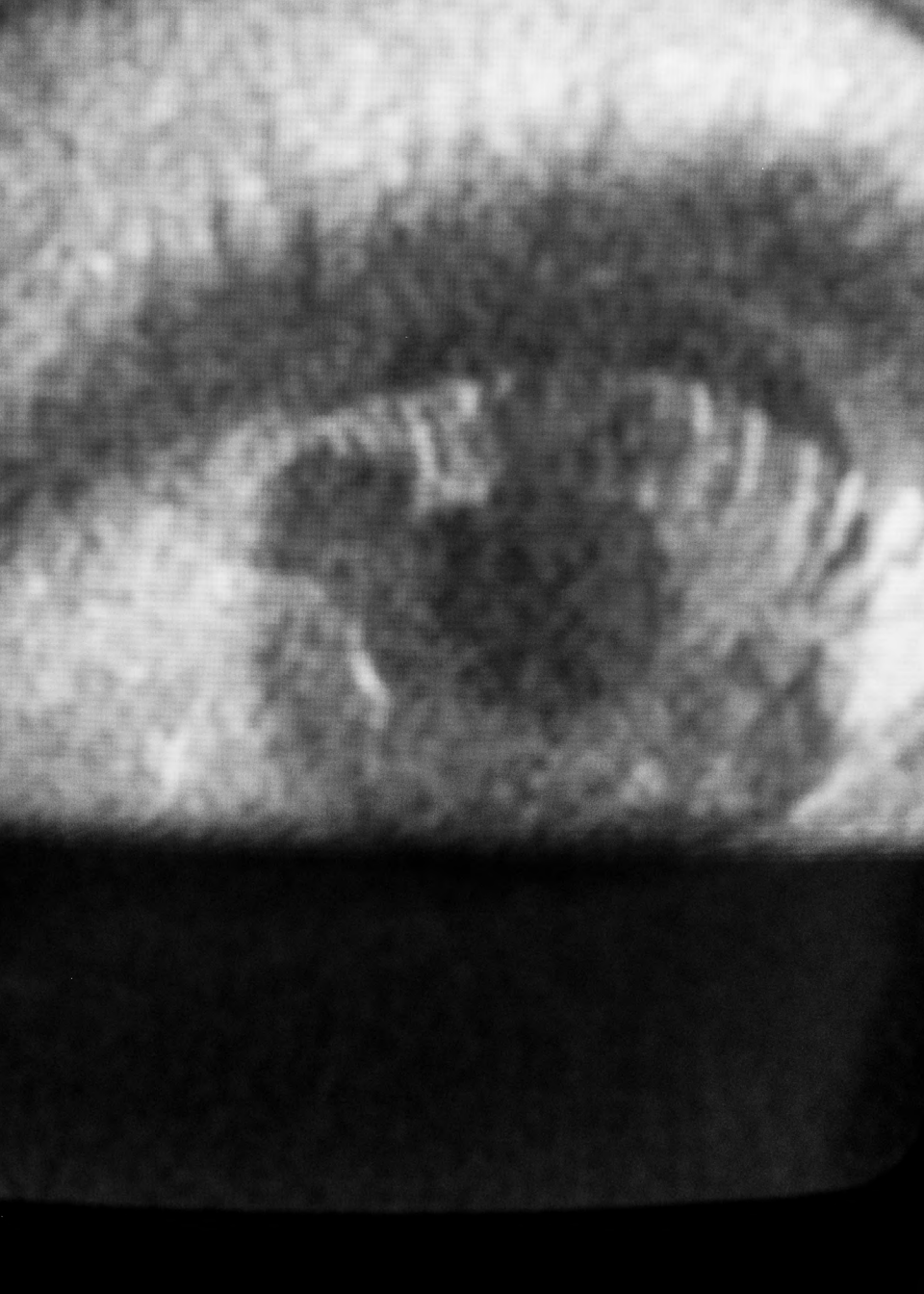
I offer my praxis as a model, my lifeworld as a template. I'm trying to start The Build that needs all of us to accomplish. I want to inspire you, encourage you, enlist you in the nontrivial campaign to make secession trivial. If we work hard, others won't have to. They'll just boot up strategic lifeworlds and ceremoniously alienate themselves from this alien nation until Broadcast America is a distant rumor.

Art and artists are central to The Build. One can imagine the rise of legendary curators renowned for the power of their lifeworlds, at once exalted and gut wrenching. The self you construct from that emotional bandwidth may not be a work of art, but you'll be a piece of work — in the crosshairs of the panopticon, of course, but so what? There aren't enough jails if we do it at scale. Omniscience isn't omnipotence.[31]

I work at this ten hours a day, seven days a week, and I'm laying it in your lap. I'm handing you the secession algorithm. I'm calling your bluff, pushing you against the wall of your apathy and indifference, because secession isn't optional. Not to secede, now that you can, is terminal hypocrisy. You don't admit the culture is lethal and then refuse to leave it when such an impossible thing becomes possible. When an opportunity like this presents itself, a person of conscience doesn't hesitate. Given the tyranny and chaos on the horizon, the only acceptable response is to throw yourself into The Build with ferocious dedication. Anything less is a betrayal of us all.

We have no choice but to use the paleocybernetic narrowband internet at its current level of enclosure and surveillance to inaugurate The Build. We have to use the privatized internet to cultivate demand for a socialized internet. The only way that can succeed is through a general strike at the world-stopping scale the digital condition makes possible. Everything starts with that. We can't speak meaningfully about any of this without first demonstrating to ourselves that we're capable of it. The "world" we stop may only be America, but it would be an axial event that would galvanize the globe. We do have the precedent of global protest I invoked at the beginning. What we want now is the opposite: empty streets on the seven continents, raging traffic on the eighth.

Yes, the likelihood of all this is close to zero; nevertheless, I believe it must happen if we are to create on the same scale as we can destroy. If the odds fall to zero, let the record show that this breathtaking opportunity stood before us and we shrugged it off. Whatever path we choose, it's not going to be a pleasant journey. Even so, the struggle for freedom is always inspiring and ennobling; if we don't succeed, we'll at least go down fighting the fight that, if it were successful, would be the greatest turn in human history. The least we can do is grant ourselves that dignity. We owe to ourselves, to our children, to all living things, the utopian audacity to demand the impossible.



NOTES

1 "We must create on the same scale as we can destroy" is the credo of Kit Galloway and Sherrie Rabinowitz (1950 – 2013), visionary pioneers of telepresent social networking who influenced my life and my thinking profoundly. Sherrie coined the credo in 1979. It captured the essence of everything I was trying to say as a media theorist, so I've used it ever since as the central figure of my work. This article is dedicated to Sherrie for that reason, and to Heinz von Foerster for his influence as a mentor, and because it was he who introduced me to Kit and Sherrie in 1980.

2 The chilling figure of the panopticon went viral almost immediately following Edward Snowden's 2013 revelations of the U.S. National Security Agency's mass surveillance activities. Designed by English philosopher and social theorist Jeremy Bentham in the late 18th century, a panopticon is a type of prison in which all parts of the interior are visible from a single point. Cells are arranged in a giant circle around a central guard tower or "inspection house," outfitted with blinds, so that guards can observe inmates who are anxiously aware they are being watched, but cannot know exactly when. Bentham intended the panopticon to condition, not merely control, its prisoners: surveillance would create and enforce behavioral norms. He described it as "a new mode of obtaining power of mind over mind, in a quantity hitherto without example." This logic that power should be visible and unverifiable was not lost on Michel Foucault, who generalized it into "panopticism" in his 1975 book Surveillir et punir (translated as Discipline and Punish), noting that panoptic agency always serves power, regardless of intention. "It does not matter what motive animates [the operator of the panopticon]," Foucault writes. "The curiosity of the indiscreet, the malice of a child, the thirst for knowledge of a philosopher who wishes to visit this museum of human nature, or the perversity of those who take pleasure in spying and punishing — the more numerous those anonymous and temporary observers are, the greater the risk for the inmate of being surprised and the greater his anxious awareness of being observed. The Panopticon is a marvelous machine which, whatever use one may wish to put it to, produces homogeneous effects of power." For a haunting movie sequence

inside a panopticon, see Henry Hathaway's 1948 Call Northside *777*, with James Stewart visiting the Stateville Correctional Center in Crest Hill, Illinois.

3 "The only prerequisite to freedom is freedom" comes from my friend Ted Zatlyn, a poet and philosopher whose wisdom has inspired me for many decades, starting with Expanded Cinema in 1969. It's from his poem Meditation on Meditation, July 2011.

4 Twenty-six years ago, Michael Parenti asked rhetorically in Inventing Reality (1986) how U.S. media were different from Pravda or Isvestia in the final years of the Soviet Union. The propaganda tactics our state media employ today are vastly more sophisticated than anything prior; but, thanks to the internet, they are nevertheless increasingly recognized as propaganda. Parenti, M., Inventing Reality: The Politics of the Mass Media (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986).

5 Wolin, Sheldon S., Democracy Incorporated: Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008). Another scholar, Joshua Barkan, suggests that corporate power should be understood as a mode of political sovereignty. He argues that the corporation and modern political sovereignty are bound together through a principle of legally sanctioned immunity from law. See Barkan, J., Corporate Sovereignty: Law and Government Under Capitalism (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

6 The idea that realities are socially constructed has been traced as far back as the 18th Century, to the work of Giambattista Vico. In the 19th and 20th centuries, it spans phenomenology, hermeneutics, post-structuralism, literary criticism and social psychology. My claim that there is no power greater than control of contexts in which realities are socially constructed is based on the seminal text of the Sociology of Knowledge, the 1966 classic, The Social Construction of Reality, by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann. Its tenets are the taken-for-granted starting point for all contemporary philosophical inquiry. Berger, P. L., & Luckmann, T., The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge (Garden City, N.Y: Doubleday, 1966).

7 I have adopted George Gerbner's four dimensions of "message system analysis" as my four dimensions of socially constructed reality. Gerbner, G., Gross, L. P., & Melody, W. H., Communications Technology and Social Policy: Understanding the New "Cultural Revolution" (New York: Wiley, 1973), pp. 564-567.

8 "Technology of the self" is from Michel Foucault's analysis of institutions as "discourses" of social control, through which subjects internalize discipline and authority. This particular phrase refers to ways people present and police their "selves" (or, as theorists put it, how subjects constitute themselves) within systems of power (discourses) that enable and constrain what Foucault called "the care of the self." See, e.g., Foucault, M., Martin, L. H., Gutman, H., & Hutton, P. H., Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988).

9 The concept of the parasocial was introduced in 1956 by sociologists Donald Horton and R. Richard Wohl to describe audience behaviors that emerged with the introduction of television. Their now classic and widely cited paper described one-sided relations in which "one party knows a great deal about the other but the relationship is not reciprocal." Horton, D., & Wohl, R. R., "Mass communication and Para-social interaction; Observations on Intimacy at a Distance," Psychiatry, 19, 3, (January 01, 1956), pp. 215-229.

10 The Washington Post is a pillar of the broadcast, but Bagdikian did publish the Pentagon Papers and the FBI's COINTELPRO records. For the endless chain, see: Bagdikian, B. H., The Media Monopoly (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983), pp. 3-26.

11 Political scientist Robert A. Dahl introduced the term "polyarchy" (as opposed to monarchy) in 1972 to distinguish democracy from the American form of government. Derived from the Greek, meaning "rule by many," polyarchy is a form of government in which power is vested in more than one person. That could be a majoritarian electoral democracy, which Americanists still imagine we are, or it could be what we actually are: a plutocratic oligarchy — government by a small minority of the wealthiest citizens who rule on behalf of capital. William I. Robinson, following

Antonio Gramsci, describes it as a form of consensual hegemony made possible by the structural domination of global capital, which has enabled worldwide concentration of political power. In a democracy, power vested in the people is exercised through voting. But voting against the interests of actual power must not be possible; democracy must be managed to preserve elite rule. American polyarchy is the combination of elite decision-making and public ratification. "The citizenry is reduced to an electorate," writes Sheldon Wolin, "akin to an automatic response system, whose role is to validate elite candidates. Citizens aren't mobilized, we're just periodically excited… Inverted totalitarianism doesn't want or need active citizens, only periodic ones. It needs a citizenry on call." Since democratic polyarchy (as defined by Robert Dahl and innumerable others) doesn't exist, the term has come to mean oligarchy exclusively; hence my use of it that way in this text. The first-ever scientific study of the question: "Is America a majoritarian electoral democracy?" will appear in the Fall 2014 issue of the respected academic journal, Perspectives on Politics. Based on statistical analysis of 1,779 policy issues, the study, titled "Testing Theories of American Politics," by Martin Gilens of Princeton University and Benjamin I. Page of Northwestern University, demonstrates empirically what anyone who's paying attention already knows: the preferences of the average American "have only a miniscule, near zero, statistically non-significant impact on public policy." For an analysis of polyarchy at transnational scale, see Robinson, W. I., Promoting Polyarchy: Globalization, US Intervention, and Hegemony (Cambridge [England]: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

12 Roy, A., Field Notes on Democracy: Listening to Grasshoppers (Chicago, Ill: Haymarket Books, 2009).

13 My hyphenation of "world-system" is not a reference to world-systems theory, which arose in the 1970s through the work of Immanuel Wallerstein, with its emphasis on the interaction of "core" and "periphery" nation-states. Contemporary globalization theory separates itself from that tradition by removing the hyphen from the capitalist world system it analyzes. Globalization studies acknowledge the core-periphery structure, but focus on forces that transcend nation-state interaction. Since I have no

stake in that game, I feel free to hyphenate the phrase as a kind of unfashionable poetic license, saying: the world is a system and "the system" is a world. If you want to know how the world works, I highly recommend Appelbaum, R. P., & Robinson, W. I., Critical Globalization Studies (New York: Routledge, 2005).

14 Jürgen Habermas' work on the public sphere and Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony are foundational to any political economic critique of social control in general, and the role of culture and media in particular. See Habermas, J., The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry Into a Category of Bourgeois Society (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010); and Gramsci, A., Prison Notebooks: Three Volume Set (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

15 Frederic Jameson quoting from his book, Representing Capital, in an interview with Aaron Leonard in the Canadian online journal rabble.ca, February 9, 2012. Jameson, F., Representing Capital: A Commentary of Volume One (London: Verso, 2011).

16 This is a paraphrase of Fredric Jameson: "Someone once said that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism. We can now revise that and witness the attempt to imagine capitalism by way of imagining the end of the world." See "Future City," New Left Review, 21 (London: New Left Review Ltd, May-June 2003), pp. 65-79.

17 Propaganda must not be seen as propaganda, so the broadcast must have the appearance of a liberal bias. There must be sustained criticism of government. Not predominantly, just regularly. The least obvious programs, the ones apparently most critical of the regime, are the most important for social control. Court Jesters are the model. Mainstream political humor makes fun of the establishment, but it's not anti-establishment. It's merely disillusioned, which is where all comedy begins and ends. Jokes are grievances. Liberal humorists like Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert are agents of social control whose function is to prevent disillusionment from becoming rage. They preempt and defuse rage. They contain rebellion by creating a false sense of it. This only works with a blinded population. It's for people who don't see roasted children on a daily basis. Humorists can't

joke about the sickening cruelty in Gaza. And you won't see those images on the comedy shows.

18 Galbraith, J. K., The Age of Uncertainty (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977).

19 The wry proposition that the last instant of history will go by unnoticed is another gem from Ted Zatlyn, in an email on August 17, 2012, with the afterthought "As did the first."

20 Jacoby, R., The End of Utopia: Politics and Culture in an Age of Apathy (New York: Basic Books, 1999).

21 Jameson, F. Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions (New York: Verso, 2005), p. xii.

22 Jameson, op. cit.

23 I was privileged in the 1970s and '80s to have as mentors the three principal architects of what came to be called the Constructivist theory of cognition — Chilean neuroscientists Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela, and cyberneticist Heinz von Foerster. Their biologically derived theory of autonomy in living systems became a generalized paradigm for autonomy as such. The concept of autonomy had not previously played much of a role in biology and cognitive science, whereas it was central to the social and political sciences but lacked scientific definition. A living system is an autopoetic (self-producing) system; its structure determines what Maturana calls its cognitive domain, which is the domain of its interactions with the medium in which it "realizes its autopoesis" (produces itself). All living systems are, in this sense, cognitive; a nervous system enlarges an organism's cognitive domain to include linguistic interactions, which generate domains of consensus that are therefore intrinsic to their autonomy. "Autonomous reality-community" is my name for consensual domains realized in the virtual space of the internet, distinguished from other autonomies by their unbounded scale. Reality-communities are consensual atopias.

24 The marvelous phrase "administered a mortal dose of publicity" is from Jean Baudrillard: "Transgression and subversion never get `on the air' without being subtly negated… eviscerated of their meaning… there is no better way to reduce

[transgression] than to administer it a mortal dose of publicity… transgression is turned into exchange value." Baudrillard, J., For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign (St. Louis, MO: Telos Press, 1981), p. 172.

25 Youngblood, Gene, "The Media Must Be Liberated." Radical Software, New York: Gordon and Breach, 1972), p. 16. I was not alone. There are numerous accounts of the origins of media activism in the 1960s. See for example the special double issue of University Film and Video Association, Journal of film and video: Volume 64 Part 1-2, (2012), pp. 1-95; and from a different perspective, High, K., Jimenez, M., & Hocking, S. M., The Emergence of Video Processing Tools: Television Becoming Unglued (Bristol: Intellect, 2013).

26 "We can talk about things because we generate the things we talk about by talking about them" is from Maturana, op. cit.

27 Recorded on video by Michael Naimark for the lecture series Future Worlds, which he co-produced at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 1973-75. A clip from the lecture, which was called "The National Information Utility," is included in Secession From the Broadcast: Gene Youngblood and the Communication Revolution, the working title of a documentary in progress by Bryan Konefsky.

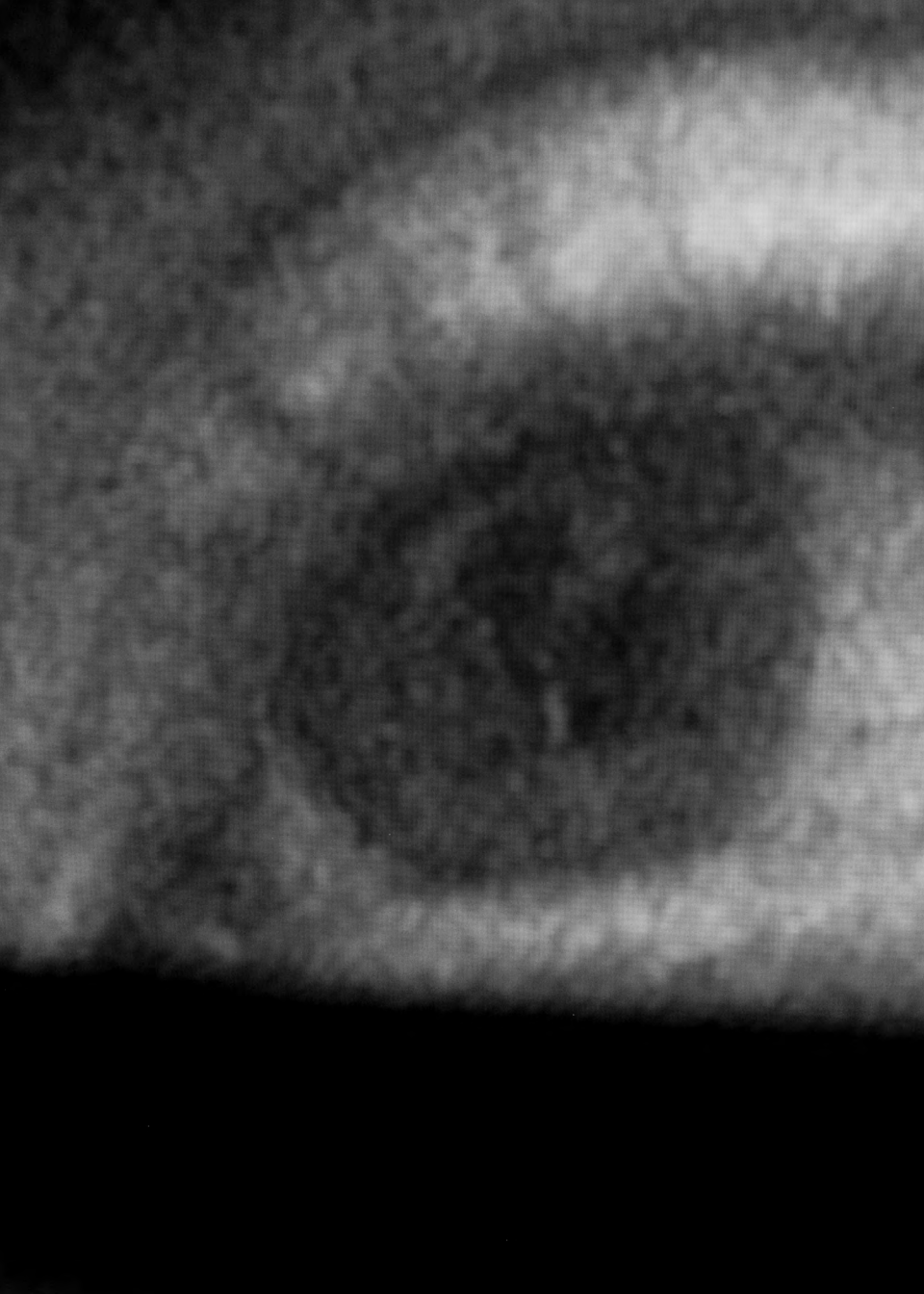
28 Mumford, L., Technics and civilization (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1931).

29 Youngblood, G., Expanded Cinema (New York: Dutton, 1970).

30 Aleph is the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Cardinality is the number of elements in a set. In set theory, the aleph glyph is the symbol for the cardinality of infinite sets. That's why Jorge Luis Borges chose The Aleph as the title for his short story describing a point in space that contains all other points in space — a set with infinite elements, just like the internet. "Cyber-Aleph" is my homage to Borges in the city of his birth; apart from that, I do think it's an evocative figure for the internet and its Imaginary, the eighth continent.

31 This rousing and defiant maxim should be the motto for all cultural insurgency. It's from an article, "Mistaking Omniscience for Omnipotence," by Tom Engelhardt, on his website, TomDispatch.com, November 12, 2013.

& My wife, Jane Youngblood, who is a faithful co-conspirator in this enterprise; her critiques of, and contributions to this lecture and its adaptation were invaluable.



Gene Youngblood

World renowned theorist of media systems and politics, and a devoted scholar in the history and theory of experimental film and video art. He is widely known as a pioneering voice in the media democracy movement, and has been teaching on the subject for over 30 years. He is the author of *Expanded Cinema* (1970), the first book to consider video as an art medium and has long been considered a primordial reference for media artists. His work has been seminal in establishing Media Art as a recognized scholarly and artistic discipline. He currently resides in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

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