

Hysterics of the World Unite!
Blake Stimson
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"170. 'Oh!' say the technophiles, 'Science is going to fix all that!'"
--Theodore Kaczynski, "Industrial Society And Its Future"

There is something not just a little crazy about this exhibition. Its perverse premise is that earthquakes and other natural disasters are not strictly asocial phenomena, that they can be connected to the globalization of the political economy; that we as viewers are somehow implicated in the forces driving these natural disasters when we participate as consumers, producers and financiers of transnational goods and services.

The best definition of globalization is still that of the Communist Manifesto: "The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connections everywhere The bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country. To the great chagrin of reactionists, it has drawn from under the feet of industry the national ground on which it stood. All old-established national industries have been destroyed or are daily being destroyed. They are dislodged by new industries, whose introduction becomes a life and death question for all civilized nations, by industries that no longer work up indigenous raw material, but raw material drawn from the remotest zones; industries whose products are consumed, not only at home, but in every quarter of the globe. In place of the old wants, satisfied by the productions of the country, we find new wants, requiring for their satisfaction the products of distant lands and climes. In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal interdependence of nations. And as in material, so also in intellectual production. The intellectual creations of individual nations become common property."

This exhibition broadens the Marxian analysis, luring it into an extreme ecological radicalism, by suggesting that it is not only "national ground" that is made to tremor more and more under the feet of industrial and intellectual creations, but nature's ground itself. Struggling against the constraints of a skin evermore wired together by networks of commerce, we are to understand, the earth, pukes and quakes from within, flattening buildings, fragmenting bodies and fusing together the ephemera that, extorted from its amorphous, organic mass, had fueled the profit-making driving its pillage and exploitation.

At the center of this mindset, of course, is a neo-Luddite "rage against the machine" or an urge to revenge aimed at the technology and technocracy that arms the forces of exploitation. However, the foremost cultural icon of this view--positioned at the extreme that it is--is not an image of machine operators smashing their machines in organized protest or of a party band gone political. It is far less demonstratively counter-cultural and far more antisocial; or, rather, its sociality is far more complex, more pathos-ridden, far more pathological. Its urge, its governing political imperative, is to fall back not on the promise of early modern forms of social organization or on modern political principles and practices but, instead, on something far more abstract and intangible, something ahistorical and universal.

This positive but abstract principle is what Unabomber Theodore Kaczynski calls "wild nature" deep in his manifesto: "183. But an ideology, in order to gain enthusiastic support, must have a positive ideals well as [sic] a negative one; it must be FOR something as well as AGAINST something. The positive ideal that we propose is Nature. That is , WILD nature; those aspects of the functioning of the Earth and its living things that are independent of human management and free of human interference and control. And with wild nature we include human nature, by which we mean those aspects of the functioning of the human individual that are not subject to regulation by organized society but are products of chance, or free will, or God (depending on your religious or philosophical opinions)."

A perfectly legitimate question a sane person might ask Kaczynski or the artists represented here who call on his influence is what it would mean, were it possible, to have an ideology "not subject to regulation by organized society"? Were it possible, what would it mean to "gain enthusiastic support" for an idea which exists outside of society, outside of history? Were it possible, what would it mean to collectively experience being of and for only one's truest self, only one's unfettered, unsocialized "wild" nature? Once we ask this

question, however, we know pretty well where we will have to go with it: off and running to that miserable little shack in the outback of Montana with no plumbing, no electricity, no cable TV, no internet connection.

Throughout the history of modernism, there have always been two sides or two categories of responses to the industrial world. On the one side, there have been those who embrace the power of technology and technocratic analysis and organization to penetrate the veil of myth. Think, for example, of Courbet's vaunted challenge, "Show me an angel and I will paint you one" or Rodchenko's anti-art manifesto, "Photograph and be photographed!" On the other side, there have been those who have sought alternatives to the threats of progress by rejecting technology and retreating to the studio, cutting off their work as best as possible from the cultural-industrial infrastructure and looking to update the old myths.

The situation now, it might be argued, is different. Technophobes and technophiles, entrepreneurs and activists alike share in what Slavoj Žižek calls "today's 'postmodern' political thought" or the idea that fundamental political change is no longer a goal or a threat; that political activity can amount to no more than battles for cultural recognition, for airtime and webspace; that the analysis of political economy, of what used to be called "the social totality" has been increasingly reduced on all sides to cultural studies. The effect of this is a pervasive localism, a political imagination that is increasingly restricted to identity politics and demographics.

By the evidence, it seems clear that the pathology of the Unabomber is really a form of hysteria. That is, despite his best effort, there is really no coherent positive ideal to his program, no pragmatic political agenda, no coherent object for his powerful desire. "Wild nature," after all, is really only another name for that desire in its pure, unfettered sense, not an object to direct it towards. Without a concrete object, psychoanalysis tells us, desire expands outward searching for an object to address. If it cannot find one it continues onward and outward toward the universal and the transcendent, that is outward toward what is eventually a psychotic investment in Nature itself.

It may well be exactly this universalizing, transcendentalizing moment, this becoming-psychotic moment, that appeals to these two artists and, even, draws us into the perverse world they imagine. Kaczynski, it seems, supposed his bombs would blast openings in the increasingly intricate, increasingly technological, increasingly comprehensive web of commerce spanning the globe. His bombs were aimed at specialists, technicians and experts, however, not at machines; they were aimed at the most tightly defined bits of instrumental identity within the larger gear works of industrial modernity. They were intended to threaten not only the progress of technology but also the model of identity that enabled it.

It is precisely that very modern, very 19th-century ideal--the specialist or technocrat--that has now expanded in our postmodern political understanding beyond its old workplace dominion and usurped the space of identity per se. In so doing, we are given evermore intricate, technological and comprehensive methods for identity marketing and identity politics, methods that depend on increasingly variegated and interchangeable identity-units in order to expand "intercourse in every direction" toward a "universal interdependence of nations". The craziness of this exhibition, its laboratory production of "natural disasters," thus, might be best understood as a properly hysterical response to our time. Unable to find or develop a positive ideal of its own, the exhibition can express its desire only by working to unbind the tightly-wired, postmodern ideology of identity and allowing its political affect to spew outward toward the horizon of legibility without direction or aim. Or, it might be said more simply, the only way this exhibition can imagine being political is by bombing its lone available object-ideal, identity as such, with the ecstatic promise of wild nature or death itself.