An Open Letter on Technology and Mediation

Various Authors

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In March of 1999, I received an open letter from zine publisher Ron Leighton regarding the common question of whether propagating views which question technology through technological means — radio, television, the Internet — involved some type of contradiction. I liked the way he phrased the question, and I especially liked the idea of an open letter to get a variety of views on the topic.

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Open Letter — Ron Leighton

A number of anti-tech writers have expressed the idea, variously stated, that supporting or using government in any way towards anarchist/anti-authoritarian ends is contradictory and invariably indicative of authoritarian/non-anarchist impulses and attitudes, despite any insistent claims to the contrary. Around the time of the publication in mainstream papers of the Unabomber's views, John Zerzan went on radio to have a dialogue with callers about anarchism/anti-techism. He has said on at least two occasions that he was willing to go on radio (a form of technology) but drew the line at television (another form of technology). Why? The decision seems entirely arbitrary. However, even if it wasn't an arbitrary drawing of the line, does not going on the radio belie Zerzan's anti-tech declarations? Maybe he's more conservative than he lets on? Or would that be a unfair take on the matter? John Filiss on the other hand uses a (rather interesting as well as aesthetically-pleasing) website to promote anti-tech views. Now, my point isn't that Zerzan or Filiss or anyone else should refrain from propagating anti-tech views, nor that I necessarily disagree with such views, but only that it seems like a belying contradiction that they would in any way use technology to propagate anti-tech views. After all, they both, along with many others, bristle at the very notion of anarchists using, say, the state to accomplish their goals in any way or to any degree. And if anarchists/anti-authoritarians happen to suggest using the government or some degree or form of government towards their goals, they are dismissed as liberals or leftists, or, if the name-caller is feeling charitable, anarcho-liberals/leftists. Meanwhile, the reality of anti-techies using technology is rationalized away ("I drew the line at television", or, on owning a television, "I have to be narcotized too" — Zerzan both times). Or left unaddressed. Why the double-standard?

This, to me, is a serious question, and I don't ask it just to annoy, nit-pick or to take cheapshots.

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Response — John Connor

A Reply To Ron Leighton

Technology's a form of social organisation based on the division of labour, not its artefacts *per se*. Granting this, the State is a form of technology, a specialisation in administration, coercion, &c.. By definition, all anarchists therefore oppose technology, at least in this form. I can't think of any that oppose technology but not the State — given the terms of this debate, it just doesn't

work that way round. Those that don't oppose the State aren't anarchists at all, of course, though I'll concede some opposed to the State who aren't anarchists either.

You deny saying that "Zerzan or Filiss or anyone else should refrain from propagating antitech views". However, by implying they should only do so using means unmediated by technology, this is effectively what you do say inasmuch as technology is all-pervasive, the substance of complex society. Extending this "means and ends" argument, you're also condemning them to death as all means of survival in this society are also mediated by technology. It is for precisely this reason that a critique of technology is so vitally needed, because it is so basic to our oppression, the impossibility of leading truly authentic, self-determining lives. Anarcho-primitivists have gone a lot further in elucidating this sort of critique than anarcho-orthodoxy, even though it's implicit in all anarchism. It's disappointing that the orthodox try to preserve their partial critique by asking the impossible of anti-tech critics, demanding they *personally* live free of technology when technological society exercises control over them by denying them the means to do so. Most anti-tech critics appreciate the diversionary nature of 'lifestylism' and so argue for a social revolution, much as orthodox anti-capitalists do rather than expecting its individual adherents to somehow eke out an existence boycotting money and all forms of commodity relationships. Making social revolution inevitably means being *in society,* making a concerted attempt to articulate society's discontents to itself, something not likely achievable by retreating to a hermit life in the middle of the wilderness (satisfying though that might be for the individual concerned — a retirement option, perhaps). I appreciate this is a dangerous course, constantly leaving the way open to recuperation through compromise and reformism, but note this is less likely the more comprehensive the critique of society the revolutionary has.

I'm sure the Johns can argue for themselves why the use the Internet or radio instead of TV, &c. Specifics aside, I agree these distinctions are largely arbitrary, though they do help to focus attention on the perniciousness of particular technological artefacts and our resistance to dependence on technology as a whole, perhaps in the same way that food taboos help focus the attention of the religious on their faith. It is a question of where to draw the line *practically* until technology can be done away with entirely by revolutionary means. I don't think this is particularity hard and fast, more a matter of doing — and thinking — what you can. Through a process of small refusals and developing critique, the possibilities of further refusals, deepened critique and ultimately revolution *may* be increased — I'm talking *praxis* here, though restate my reservations about 'lifestylism'. I'm willing to accept that an anarchist may be so feeble, spineless or compromised that *practically* they can't even refuse participation in the State as well as the broader oppressive architecture of technology, but it's understandable this halfheartedness earns them the derision of their fellows. After all, they all manage the little that the object of their derision finds impossible. Granting their inability to accept or act on more revolutionary critiques than their own, I can't really see why — beyond, perhaps, the matter of good manners — you object to such individuals being called "anarcho-liberals/leftists" and why you should argue so keenly for them and not the revolutionaries.

Response — John Filiss

Dear Ron,

This is a great question, and you bring it up in an intelligent and friendly way. I think I can sum up my position briefly, though I feel the issues you raise deserve much more than this.

My approach to ideas is not one of self-abnegation; that is, I am not interested in following up on theories as a way to imprison myself in some new moralism that will in any way limit what I want and what I want to achieve. I think everybody's approach to ideas should be in regards to what we can derive from them, not how we can serve them.

It doesn't bother me in the least to use technology to propagate views which question technology. My perspective is that I'm trying to open up a dialogue regarding a way of life which might, hopefully, be more fulfilling than what we have now. I don't in any way want to lay a trip on anyone regarding how they should or should not interact with technology. I *would* like to be able to provide answers on how to make the lives of all human beings better. Answers are the thing which, sadly, we are quite deficient in, a plight we share with the whole of our culture. Much of what we (primitivists, neo-Luddites, etc.) have done so far is point to societies outside of our civilization and presented evidence that their lives might be more satisfying, in many respects, than life in our own society. To a perhaps lesser extent we have tried to draw inferences from our own experiences with nature and technology, and tried to show the connection between so much of what is undesirable in our society and varying degrees of technology. Some pretty significant theoretical backdrops have been developed (not always agreeing with one another) to further deepen our understanding of some of the issues. We all probably have our own opinions regarding this debate, but I think it should be noted that the real, ultimate value of our ideas will be in leading us to a better way of life. Not what we think is a better way of life, or what we want to think is a better way of life, but what people everywhere can embrace as an existence which is happier, freer and simply more fulfilling.

I think it is really, really important to think in terms of solutions. We see an existence, whether it be among the San or memories of childhood in the woods and rivers, in meadows and on the beach, that seems to offer so much more than what we have now. Now it is up to us to prove it and make it accessible both to ourselves and humanity.

Sincerely,

John Filiss

P.S. Thanks for the compliment on the site!

Response — Leif Fredrickson

Dear Ron,

It is important to be quite clear about what goals we are talking about. Anarchists have goals ranging from the singular to the totalistic, and the spectrum is not always clear cut. But there are a few distinctions to be made that your question does not seem to distinguish between, for example: the use of the state/technology in one's personal life, in the promotion of one's views, and in the broader goal of actually changing society. Obviously, these are interconnected and there is a large amount of gray area. Changing one's personal life, "everyday life", is ultimately the motivation for changing society, and changing society is ultimately the goal of propaganda. And one's personal life and attempts at changing society can serve as propaganda themselves — propaganda of the deed. With this in mind, I'll turn to some specific examples.

You bring up a few examples of primitivists using technology: John Filiss using the internet and John Zerzan using talking on radio and watching television. These you place in comparison to unspecified, or hypothetical, uses of the state by anarchists who are subsequentally dubbed leftists or liberals. But the comparison is imperfect. Filiss and Zerzan use technology to spread propaganda about primitivism. A comparative use of the state would be using the postal system. No one, to my knowledge, has been called a leftist for their using the state in this way or in any other way to spread information. (Incidentally, Zerzan's decision to use radio and not TV is not arbitrary: see *Anarchy* #43, "Zerzan and the Media".)

In the everyday sense, there is no getting around mediating ones actions through the state or technology. That, indeed, is the problem. On the other hand, there are opportunities to avoid using the state or technology. When these opportunities are ignored, I don't think it is unreasonable to question the motive. John Zerzan has to eat technologically produced food, but he doesn't have to watch TV. Bob Black has to obey the legal system, but he doesn't have to use it against his enemies. Does this make them hypocrites? I don't think Black's use of the state is evidence that he is *de facto* in favor of the state. Just as one can use the post or public library without implicitly condoning the state, one can manipulate the legal system to their own ends. Personally I would find it suspect to use the state against another anarchist, but that was certainly not the case with Jim Hogshire. Zerzan watches TV, and I am sure he is not alone among primitivists that use technology for their leisure. Like you, I find this slightly puzzling. I myself am not a primitivist, but I do not own a television and watch very little TV. (I find it palliative when I'm severely hungover is that what Zerzan means by being narcotized?) I do not, however, discount Zerzan or his writing because of this. Again, I cannot think of an example where an anarchist has been called a liberal or leftist for using the state in their personal life. Bob Black, of course, was denounced as a statist *by* many anarcho-leftists.

Finally, there is the question of using technology and the state to actually change society. This is in contrast to using it for personal purposes or for the dissemination of ideas about the possibility or desirability of changing society. Again, one needs to be specific about what we are talking about. In my opinion, I cannot imagine how the state can be used to accomplish the goal of anarchy. This does not at all mean that I am indifferent to state policy. I am, for example, generally in favor of laws protecting the environment and against those for gun control. But the passage or prohibition of these laws doesn't brings us closer to anarchy one way or another. When you say "goals" I presume that one of the things you are talking about is anarchy, so I guess I would like to know in what way you think using the state can accomplish this goal. I think many anarchists eschew using the state not because they are totally indifferent to what it does, but because as a practical matter they see it as a waste of time vis a vis their broader goal. I for one am not absolutely opposed to pressuring the state on certain issues. But the success of this pressuring does not get us any closer to anarchy. It may make conditions more conducive to the type of social change that *would* be a move towards anarchy (or it may be more personal), but in and of itself it is not a move towards anarchy. I think that the source of some the leftist/liberal name calling is when people misunderstand this, be it explicitly or implicitly as evidenced by their actions, i.e., single issue activism. (And, of course, name calling is always abused). Part of the problem in comparing primitivists here is that technology has several definitions, and it isn't always used consistently by primitivists themselves. If you could provide some specifics here that would be helpful. If, for example, primitivists critique some leftists because the mechanism of social change that they advocate, e.g. a revolutionary vanguard, reproduces within the

revolutionary movement what it seeks to abolish, then this critique is perfectly valid for any primitivist revolutionary movement that employs technology. (I use revolutionary movement in a broad sense simply to mean a "milieu" or "tendency" of like-minded individuals who seek revolution). One can argue that there is a level at which employing a certain method is harmless enough as to not be counter-productive. Which is fine, but of course it begs the question.

Leif Fredrickson

Response — Lawrence Jarach

Ron,

There is no such thing as "anti-techism" and there is no such discourse called "anti-tech." This is a made-up term that is used to dismiss anyone who has a critique of technological society. The reasons that there's not such thing as being "anti-tech" is that people have a difficult time agreeing on what "tech" is. Does being "anti-tech" mean that the anti-techist will never use a plastic toothbrush? Must s/he rely on a chewing stick for dental hygiene? But getting and preparing the stick requires "technology," so I guess the chewing stick is out, just like the plastic toothbrush. This is transparently absurd. I have a critique of automobiles, which includes a critique of the petrochemical industry as well as that needed for the construction and maintenance of roads/ highways. I dislike the impact these technologies have on the natural world in terms of toxic waste, air pollution, and all the other things that are involved in maintaining the infrastructure of automobile technology. Does this mean that I am no longer allowed to drive a car or ride in a bus? Must I only use bicycles? Bicycles require the same roads that cars do, and the same metal and rubber that are used in the manufacture of automobiles, so bikes are out too. What about riding horses? Must I rely only on my feet for transportation? Can you see how stupid this argument can get? And what does any of this have to do with anarchist theory and practice? There's nothing inherently anarchist in being "anti-tech": you don't have to be one to be the other.

Pointing out the contradictions inherent in the life of a person who has a discourse critical of technology is facile; we live in a technological — and technologically advanced — society, and every time we use the phone or flush the toilet we are using "technology," thereby reinforcing the need for that technology. Most "anti-tech" people know this already. This statement is faulty: "...it seems like a belying contradiction that they would in any way use technology to propagate anti-tech views — that is by their logic." This is *your* logic at work, not theirs.

I have had a regular correspondence with Zerzan for a number of years, and when the media started getting interested in him in relation to the "Unabomber" spectacle, he and I shared many thoughts on the use of the media to get an anarchist/anti-civilization message across. He had invitations for interviews in papers, TV, and radio. Since any medium whose owners are anti-anarchist will try to portray us in the most unfavorable light possible, my suggestion was that radio talk-shows would probably be the best choice because of them being live — that way the editor/owner can't as easily distort your position and make you look like an idiot. The only way they can make you stop talking is to cut you off, proving that they are not the bastions of free speech that they pretend to be. I think this actually happened to John once. Radio also provides the possibility of dialog, which is impossible on TV. When Free Radio Berkeley existed, I hosted two shows. Much of the time there were no callers to the station who wanted their comments or questions discussed, but occasionally there was the chance to have a real exchange of ideas on

the air. This was one of the best parts for me. Your insistence on TV and radio being equivalent technologies, the distinction between them being "entirely arbitrary," is simplistic and ignores their distinct environmental and physiological impacts.

A distinction between tools and technology needs to be recognized in any discourse about "technology." Much of the time technophiles (those who see technology as inherently progressive or neutral) deliberately confuse the distinction between tools and technology in order to undermine the impact of the critique of technology. Very few (if any) of the "anti-tech" crowd advocate a return to the Stone Age, yet technophiles — from Bookchin to LaRouche — constantly portray "primitivists" as wanting exactly that.

A few working definitions:

A *tool* is any object that can be utilized for a specific function.

Technology is the ideological framework that creates the need for the tool; the mode(s) of production needed to manufacture the tool, and the justifications for using that tool as opposed to a different one.

Let's return to the plastic toothbrush. The northern California Indians (as well as many others no doubt) used oak twigs. The tannins in the bark of oaks are astringent, tightening the gums around the teeth. (Having a diet free of processed sugars and overcooked food is also helpful for maintaining dental health.) Modern Euro-Americans have an obsession with physical beauty that centers on the teeth — the whiter the better. The astringent tannins in oak twigs also stain the teeth. So there are now toothpastes that have bleaching agents and varying degrees of abrasiveness. We use toothbrushes to scour out teeth, often removing the outer protective layer. Dentists tell us that this is a good thing, and they get lots of samples from companies that manufacture dental hygiene products. Plus these same companies fund dental schools, reinforcing the need for these products by influencing the kind of education these budding professionals get. So the tool is the toothbrush; the technology involves medical dentistry (which includes dental schools, the educational infrastructure that gets funding from the manufacturers of dental hygiene products, the ideology of pharmaceuticals and surgery as the only legitimate healing strategies, etc.), the cult of beauty that demands white choppers, the petrochemical industry (which produces the hard plastic for the body of the toothbrush, the synthetic fibers for the bristles, the chemical compounds for the toothpaste), the factory system that mass-produces the toothbrushes, the transportation industry that distributes these tools to all parts of the world where the dominant ideological system exists that created the need for the tool in the first place. My critique of this technology is independent of my choice to clean my teeth with toothpaste or a twig. The technology of the chewing stick is dependent on different things than the toothbrush: an ecosystem that sustains oak trees, some form of cutting tool (which requires its own technology — unless you just want to snap the twigs off the tree), and the perspective that justifies the existence of strong teeth. It is a simpler technology, but a technology nonetheless.

If I didn't have this critique would I somehow be off the hook when it comes to reinforcing the mechanisms of my own (and others') oppression? Does not examining these things mean that I am no longer responsible for reinforcing the ideological justifications for them?

The absurdity of equating "a form of technology" with "another form of technology" should now be clear. The uselessness of using the term "anti-tech" should also be clear, since there is no one thing called "technology." One can have a critique of particular technologies, or the way a particular tool is used in industrial capitalism, or the ideological justifications for the creation and use of a particular tool. Although the critique of industrial capitalism and an anarchist analysis

can be mutually reinforcing, there is nothing inherently anarchist about having a critique of technological society. Just because there are some anarchists who like large-scale industry and complex technologies doesn't mean that they aren't anarchists anymore — just that they are committed to an outdated and discredited worldview.

I hope that this rant has been helpful.

All the best,

Lawrence Jarach

Response — Jason McQuinn

Whose contradictions?

Off-hand, I would consider this type of search for such supposed "contradictions" as a rather silly and illogical attempt to impugn criticisms of technology without having to deal with any of their actual content.

However, I have begun to realize that this type of confusion is much more widespread than I had initially thought — especially after similar questions and attacks have come up repeatedly from a wide variety of sources, some sincere, many not. So I'll take a few minutes to explicitly point out what would at first seem to me to be the obvious problems with such "contradiction" accusations.

To begin we need to recognize that there are huge differences between the three basic types of arguments often being made: moral, logical and practical.

Arguments from morality demand that when someone makes a commitment to a radical social position, the position becomes a moral imperative. An example would be the moralistic take on pacifism in which any resort to violence (whether in self-defense or not) is considered evil and pacifists are expected to allow themselves and their comrades to be killed rather than be condemned as "self-contradictory." Similarly, anarchists who resort to governmental intervention on any level are condemned as violators of a moral law, and those with critiques of technology as a system are similarly censured. Of course, under this type of moral imperative those who oppose capitalism are also expected to forego any immoral contact with money! Obviously this type of argument from morality has little relevance to anarchy except as a device to sow a bit of conceptual confusion based upon guilt. And it has zero relevance for those who explicitly criticize all forms of compulsory morality as implicitly repressive and ideological in function.

Arguments against self-contradiction that are based on a simplistic view of logic fare little better. The biggest problem here is that actually existing, complex social situations are not the same as simple, abstract concepts. Thus, to be anti-capitalist might seem to logically entail immediately and irrevocably refusing all commodity relations and market mediations. However, in practice capitalism can't be seamlessly cut out of one's life when one is immersed in a social system which reaches into every area of that life. Similarly, just because one declares oneself an anarchist does not mean that the state gets out of one's light and avoids interfering with one's life. It's there regardless and requires negotiation and compromise to avoid imprisonment or death. Avoiding a technological system which penetrates most aspects of everyday life is little different in this respect.

Which leaves us with practical arguments that actions significantly contradicting overall values or principles simply don't work because one isn't practicing here and now what one wants

to accomplish as an end. Here we've finally entered a terrain where we can start gauging the **relative** importance of different types of contradictions, recognizing that in social life most contradictions are not absolute, but partial. Thus, any one particular (yet inevitably complex) social activity may include aspects which are both contradictory and non-contradictory with any given value, principle or theory. Once we've reached this point, we need to recognize the relative strength of contradictions. Some will be stronger than others.

For an anarchist, a vanguard party forming a revolutionary state to force anarchy on a substantially unwilling populace represents an overwhelmingly strong contradiction. Forming an electoral political party dedicated to promoting anarchy from within the state if elected involves another pretty strong contradiction. While encouraging people to vote for a party or candidate opposing a war that another party credibly threatens is still a strong, though lesser, contradiction. While personally voting in a referendum that — if successful — will repeal a harsh anti-drug law brings us into a still murkier realm of weaker contradiction. In other words there is inevitably a gradation of contradiction involved in any practical social activity. The less contradiction involved in any given social action, the more likely most people will expect that the outcome will be predictable and welcome.

Thus most anarchists are correctly suspicious of Noam Chomsky's explicit defense of some state institutions as a counterbalance to increasing levels multinational corporate power, arguing that this type of defense of state institutions, even in the service of a reasonable goal, abandons some critically important anarchist principles of action in favor of a programmatically authoritarian response to the problem. On the other hand, if an anarchist calls the local police department to report that her car was stolen, less contradiction is involved, especially since she isn't programmatically calling for police to exist now and forever to deal with stolen property and its repercussions.

Similarly, when it comes to opposing technology as an alienating, repressive system, we need to distinguish the actual levels of potential contradiction involved. Obviously, programmatic calls to embrace advanced technologies would be strongly contradictory with anarchist positions critical of technology. Whereas attempts to use particular technologies to oppose other forms of technology (or to oppose the current overall system of capital/state/technology) will be a murky, changing area always requiring evaluation. While individual anarchist's uses of particular technologies in an overwhelmingly technological social world will be relatively unproblematic, with a much lower level of contradiction involved. (Driving or flying, as opposed to walking, across the continent to protest the WTO, capital and state in Seattle, for example.)

With a little common sense and concern for the actual weight of the different factors involved, most people will come up with similar evaluations of the level of contradiction in different possibilities of radical social action. Where we end up with absurdities spouted about the contradictions in anarchists ever employing violence, or anti-capitalists ever using money, or "anti-tech" revolutionaries ever doing just about anything conceivably connected with any form of technology, you can bet that there are also some fundamental disagreements over principles and values which are obscuring what's really at issue.

Currently, there is an extreme level of insincerity and hostility (and as a direct result, simple stupidity) involved in most of the more bizarre accusations that those critical of technology as a system are implicitly advocating genocide, mass starvation or worse. Accusations that anarchists who are critical of the interpenetration of technology, capital and state are being contradictory

if they watch a television would be completely laughable were they not so widespread. I hope most people will agree that we can all do better than this!

Response — John Moore

On the Contrary

This is indeed a serious question and deserves serious consideration.

In a sense, however, the question of using or not using technology to propagate anti-tech views is a false question. Like everyone else, anarchists are to some degree complicit with the system which oppresses, coerces and exploits them. In part, this is why anarchists want to abolish this system: in order to overcome this enforced complicity. Now, perhaps with the exception of some US libertarians, I would guess that all anarchists are against money and the money economy. And yet all of them are forced to make use of money. Indeed, anarcho-bandits such as the Bonnot gang risked and lost their lives trying to steal it! And while anarchists might bemoan the fact that they, like everyone else, are constrained to make use of money, even to further their ends, they do so. And that remains the case, regardless of whether they work for that money, steal it, or filch it from the State in the form of benefits.

Actually, a similar situation appertains with reference to the State. It's true that anarchists do not participate in electoral rituals or rely on assistance from the State, for to do so would be to affirm, and affirm over and against one's self, one of the major institutions which manages social oppression. On the contrary, due to the State's coercive power, anarchists work for its abolition through revolutionary insurgency. But in doing so, they make use of some of its resources and its apparatuses. And, *mutatis mutandis*, the same can be said for Capital. Let's face it, in the world that we currently inhabit, most resources are owned, controlled and managed by State and Capital. Our lives are organised by these forces, whether we like it or not — and we don't, which is one reason why we're anarchists! But is that any reason why we shouldn't make use of those resources? We would be in an even worse situation if we didn't. So, for example, if you make use of a library, you're using a resource created, maintained and funded by the State (through local government, maybe) or Capital (through grants and foundations, for example). Does this mean that anarchists shouldn't use libraries? Or that anarchists are hypocrites because they advocate the abolition of State and Capital and yet use the resources of State and Capital to attain that goal? I don't think so. It's just that in the current social situation, they are to some extent *forced* to make use of institutions of which they disapprove in order to further their projects. And in an integrated system such as post-industrial society, the web of power is cast very wide and deep, and thus all kind of complicities are unavoidable.

This brings me on to the question of technology. On the surface, there appears to be a contradiction in the anarchist use of technology to propagate anti-tech views, and therefore an unacknowledged hypocrisy. But is this any more of a contradiction than the anarchist use of money or selective usage of State and Capital institutions? The questions that need to be asked of those who raise the question of anti-tech perspectives and technological media are: Why are *you* so obsessed with this particular instance of enforced anarchist complicity with the system anarchists seek to abolish? Why do *you* fetishisise and prioritise just this one instance of complicity? The answer to such questions might point to the apparent discrepancy between means and ends: anti-tech anarchists propose a world free of technological domination and alienation and thus

one that will be based on the immediacy of face-to-face communication, and yet use technological media — the very acme of pseudo-communication — to disseminate their perspectives! My response to such a line of argument would be to say: But isn't that just the point? In a world of separation and non-communication, in the mass society of alienation and division, isn't the use of such technological media to contact others and disseminate information appalling but inevitable — *at least at this stage in the struggle?* The fact that anarchists have to resort to these means — "resort" in the sense of having to *demean* themselves to this level — is in itself a profound indictment of the mass society in which we live. And not, I stress, an indictment of anarchists' failure of imagination.

We live in a world of contradictions. That's the nature of a society based on power and power relations. If we're to come to grips with transforming this world in a revolutionary anarchist fashion, then we'd better get used, not to living with those contradictions, but to striving with and against them, and make sure that we make the optimal use of our creative capacities to overcome them. The anarchist condition, in the world of power, is one of living out lives of creative contradiction. And, uncomfortable as it may feel, that creative contradiction — that tension — remains the source for all our insurgency.

Response — J.S.

Hi Ron,
Here is the slightly revised version of my response to your question. Please use this one, and feel free to post or publish it wherever you wish.

J.S. replies,

Ron L.'s question is a common one. Judging by its main thrust though, it seems Ron L. has a particular bone to pick with John Zerzan, so I will not pretend to speak for him, nor for John Filiss. I will also accept that the question is motivated by a genuine desire to understand what appears to be a "double standard."

Contrary to popular belief — but not to popular experience — technology is not neutral. Ideological values and motivations are inherent in its very design (for profit via efficiency, productivity, etc.), manufacture (for social control via work, obedience, discipline, etc.), and end use (combination of preceding). Authority is thus both explicit and implicit in technology, if by technology we mean machinery used in production and organized through division of labour, and not "tools" which can be crafted by hand from scratch by anyone.

However, like anything else, technology can never be completely kept within control by authority. There are side-effects such as pollution and unintended consequences like economic instability, or technology could simply fall into the "wrong" hands, of, say, anarchists. Technology may be inherently authoritarian, but once it is launched into the world there are often (but not always) opportunities to modify its end use. There is a saying that "whatever technology can be used for it will be used for." The Pentagon knows this all too well. But so do people who have resisted authority throughout history; guns have been turned against cops, bombs have been used against governments, and machines have been used to break machines (e.g. sabatoge). I disagree, for example, with Kirkpatrick Sale who feels you "cannot use the whip and chain of the masters to free the slaves." We must use whatever means at our disposal, for if we deliberately handicap

ourselves, we are not long for this planet; the situation grows more serious each day. History doesn't give brownie points for being "morally pure," it only records who survives.

So the question then becomes: How far do we go in living according to our principles? The problem is that techno-industrial capital now dominates almost everything, everywhere. Even Ted Kaczynski — who probably more than anyone else I can think of lived in a manner consistent with his writing — could not escape the "double standard" of trying to live in this world without being a part of it. He used the government post office to send his (technological) bombs, had the manifesto published in the corporate news media, and "owned" co-jointly with his brother the "property" he lived on. Yet who among us wishing to dismantle totalitarian capitalism doesn't pay rent to a landlord, buy groceries from a business, or use money itself? If we are opposed to the state, should we refrain from using stamps for sending out our message? How far must one go or pure must one be to avoid being a hypocrite? In theory, I could become homeless (I have been), shed my clothing (likely made in sweatshops anyway), and live ferally in the woods with no money. But since this misses the whole point, how effective could I be struggling against authority? The point is not to run away from technology and civilization — but to destroy it.

Unfortunately, we do not live in a free world and therefore cannot simply act or live-out our beliefs as if we did. Living in this nightmare involves compromises and contradictions, and there are some things we don't have much say over presently. We don't, for example, have much choice with regard to indoor heating, plumbing, and electricity. To be at all participatory in resistance, one needs to be alive and reasonably healthy — nearly impossible when one is cold, hungry, and naked. The mere fact that anti-tech advocates use technology does not automatically signal hypocrisy or lack of credibility (though it can), but rather, should point to how completely and utterly dependent we have all become, and how interwoven it is throughout society to the point where the choice to live without technology has been all but deleted. The fight to have that choice restored (indeed to have it flourish) is fraught with paradox and inconsistency, and most of us wrestle with these dilemmas everyday in our own minds for each technology we decide to use. On the other hand, we can choose not to use government to achieve our aims fairly easily; however, by not voting, joining/forming political parties, or giving support to any government policy or agenda. Since there is no compelling reason to do so, one can suspect motivations other than pragmatism on the part of so-called "anarchists" who do. For what it's worth, I don't own a car because that's a choice I can make. I do sometimes use a computer because it offers ease of communication with others (when it's working). I don't harbor any illusions about this, and just as with using money, I am aware of the contradictions. But I would welcome the loss of my computer in a world where all forms of authority have been vanquished and where we are no longer made to be (to use the prison slang) technology's "bitch".

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