THE RADICALISM OF UNBELIEF   HenryFlynt

If we are going to talk about enlightenment and deliverance, I do not see that enlightenment and deliverance can come from anything as straightforward as an individualistic search for happiness, or a mental hygiene of happiness. To me, the life I have now, which unfolds through ongoing interaction with other people — and within this definite culture — is the arena that matters. In other words, I am located in a *shared* basis of life. To me this circumstance is of outstanding importance. While the medium of thought, the capabilities, the skills which are possible for me are interior to me, at the same time they engage me with other people in consciousness — and I must regard other people as their source in most cases. (In other words, I do not invent the English language, etc.) My consciousness and my capabilities are, by and large, a fragment of a culture. The most worthy capabilities in the culture become possible capabilities of mine. The most profound dilemmas or failures in the culture, in the interpersonal arena, become my personal dilemmas.

What I have just said is not the same as the idolatry of "society." I do not accept the sociologists' notion of reality, or conformism as a goal, or the obligation to pay homage to societal abstractions like The Nation. Indeed, one of our culture's extreme dilemmas and failures is its idolatry of society, an idolatry which aggressively underestimates and devalues both the scope of the self and also the interpersonal arena. One of the most far-reaching questions posed by our contemporary era is whether inter-subjectivity (community) will evolve beyond "society" as it is defined by sociology (a sort of statistical mechanics applied to bodies). Here is an outstanding reason why I do not see how enlightenment and deliverance can come from an individualistic hygiene of happiness. The modalities necessary for enlightenment are novel and uncommon; and they are outside the scope of the ordinary person's struggle for happiness in everyday existence. The necessary modalities have to be achieved by dealing with dilemmas which arise from the culture as a totality: enlightenment requires a "rotation" (transformation) of the entire culture. Life is worthless unless I can inject whatever personal vision I have into the ostensible, interpersonal arena, and seek to influence that arena so that it becomes conducive to my sincerity and concern.

In order to express whatever sincerity and concern I have in the ostensible, interpersonal arena, I must engage with the ostensible world; I must incur the risk of realized choices; and I must "grant other people's right to exist."

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What I seek is a transformation of the ostensible world and of the shared basis of life. This is to be accomplished on the basis of two enterprises which will eventually be fused: a theory of palpable interrelations of the entirety of immediate constituents of "my world" called "the personhood theory"; and a new instrumental modality called "meta-technology." In this introduction, I will focus on meta-technology without bringing in the dimensions added to it by the personhood theory – largely because the latter is as yet tentative. But I have another reason as well for underlining the contribution of meta-technology. *There can be no genuine transformation of the shared basis of life as long as the community's technological means is restricted to the material technology we know today. The instrumental modality must come to embody the takeover of technology by the psyche, by personhood. There is no genuine transformation of the shared basis of life unless instrumental efficacy is at stake in that transformation, unless the challenge to the prevailing basis of life is carried into the domain of material technology.*

As of now, I have assembled many meta-technological elements or procedures. These elements, however, are isolated and limited. What I have accomplished is analogous to Becquerel's discovery that uranium fogs photographic film. My procedures are effective as curiosities. But they will not be any more than curiosities until they are subjected to an entire phase of extension and interconnection – an undertaking which requires collaborative effort on a wide scale.

On the other hand, the analogy to Becquerel is misleading in that a meta-technological procedure is of an entirely different species from Becquerel's discovery. Radioactivity occurs in the exterior realm of things (objectivities): it is an effect of a thing on another thing. But generally speaking, a meta-technological procedure is based not on a relation between things, but on an interdependency between subjectivity and things.

Because I am located in a shared basis of life, a culture, that culture is of overwhelming importance both as a source of possible capabilities and as a source of dilemmas and limitations. To respond to this state of affairs, the meta-technology must accumulate information which is of more than personal significance. It must address dilemmas which are shared and which are culture-wide. That is why I investigate mathematics, "real-world" logic, etc. It is also why my interest in dreamed experience relates to a proposal to modify the shared basis of life – rather than to the familiar purposes of divination and psychiatry.

I disregard all claims of sorcery or miraculous feats which inherently come as reports by a second person about what a third person did (tall tales, fish stories, legends). I am not interested in miracles which are always performed by somebody else somewhere else. Indeed, my objections to occultism go much further than this. But the principle which I want to emphasize now is that every meta-technological procedure is required to be formulated as an instruction to be carried out first-hand.

Below I will explain that a starting-point of meta-technology is an adversary attitude towards credulity. One aspect of this phased unravelling of credulity is a critical examination of claims of meaningfulness for reportage which intrinsically precludes first-hand testing.

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What then is my attitude to the immediate, overt, ostensible world? I have little use for the doctrine that the ostensible world is a sham which conceals another, perfect world behind it – a perfect world which can only be known by hypothesis. In other words, I do not treat the ostensible world as a facade for something lying behind it, as a front for another world which is unperceivable. And I have little use for the notion of a perfect world which is hypothetical and imaginary. *This present life, which unfolds through ongoing interaction with other people, and within this definite culture, is my arena of concern. Imaginary lives and gratification in fantasy are unimportant to me. I accept the ostensible world as the arena of my concern, and as one of the raw materials of enlightenment and deliverance.*

The attitude I have just expressed does not imply that I admire whatever ostensible world we inherit. Quite the opposite. *Precisely because the ostensible world matters to me, the arrival of enlightenment or deliverance has to be demonstrated by a transformation of the ostensible world and by a transformation of the shared basis of life.* Further, while I do not view the ostensible world as an *illusion* standing between me and some perfect world which must be known by hypothesis, there is a sense in which I view the ostensible world as a *delusion*. It is a delusion in that the very perceptions which characterize it are palpably affected and sustained by emotions of anticipation, by emotional dependence on other people, by morale, by esteem, by knowing self-deception, etc. etc. *Everyday existence is the hallucination produced by the so-called socialization process. Morale, esteem, etc. are co-determinate with "perception."*

Thus, again, the arrival of enlightenment or deliverance has to be demonstrated by a transformation of the ostensible world and of the shared basis of life. But what I propose is not to strip off the ostensible world to reveal a unique perfect world behind it. Rather, I want the ability to consciously "mutate" or plasticize the ostensible world itself.

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Inasmuch as I demand that enlightenment and deliverance should be evinced by transformation of the ostensible world, I am a kind of secular revolutionary.

To me, the means of enlightenment and deliverance must begin with an adversary attitude toward credulity and toward phenomena whose existence is solely a product of credulity. In the Seventies, there was a rash of novels in the U.S. about demonic possession. The protagonists in these novels were always Catholics. The novelists knew that Catholics were protagonists who could plausibly be liable to visitations by demons. If you do not want to see demons in your living room, all you have to do to escape them is to stay outside the subculture that believes in them.

The lesson of this example, properly understood, is the starting point of enlightenment and deliverance for me. If it is obvious that a phenomenon can be abolished by unbelief, then the "reality" of that phenomenon is of a very low order. The phenomenon has only the reality of chimera or fantasy. (On the other hand, it is obvious that a lot of people enjoy their chimeras, and *do not want* to escape everything that can be abolished by unbelief.) I make it a principle to disregard phenomena whose existence depends so obviously on credulity. The attitude

which is encouraged by all kinds of superstition and propaganda is "How many lies can I (manage to) believe?" The question which I always ask is "How much of what I am expected to believe is a lie?"

On the other hand, the issue of whether the existence of a phenomenon is a product of credulity *is not necessarily straightforward*. In the first place, *we have to distinguish between getting rid of phenomena by unbelief and getting rid of them by suppression or censorship*. I often encounter situations in which scientists refuse the opportunity to experience an anomalous phenomenon. Nobody denies that the phenomenon is "real," that is, accessible at first hand. The phenomenon is disregarded or suppressed because it is a nuisance, because it conflicts with the scientist's ideology.

In the same vein, I am not asking anybody to deny his or her own experience just because it is abnormal, anomalous, or singular. But I am asking that such experiences not be misrepresented and inflated through knowing self-deception — especially in reporting them to others. I have long speculated that reports of so-called astral projection etc. might have an experiential basis in hypnagogic hallucinations etc. Unfortunately, the sort of person who relishes reporting such episodes is also prone to inflate them via culturally supplied hyperbole. Reports of abnormal experiences could have serious uses if the reportage did not surround the experiences with chimerical objectivities, and if it took a painstakingly critical attitude toward the "ontological" assumptions built into descriptive language.

Another consideration is that *a thorough and ruthless effort to repudiate all phenomena whose existence depends on credulity will begin to undermine phenomena which our culture defines as legitimate and plausible. Unbelief does not just dissolve superstitions and chimeras; it begins to affect phenomena which rational authority defines as valid.* At this point rational authority has to step in and disparage unbelief as a social blunder. Here the role of community intimidation in sustaining the ostensible world comes to the surface. But I do not shrink from this consequence of unbelief. *Indeed, the radicalism of unbelief is a basis of my ability to obtain results which are novel and astonishing relative to the established culture.*

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Let me give some examples of meta-technological investigations:

A priori neurocybernetics[1] deals most directly with interdependencies between awareness and objectivity. As one example, it uses perceptually multistable figures[2] as logical notations. The result is to establish awareness-objectivity interdependencies in language which are tangible and inescapable and can be analyzed and potentiated. The technique can be applied to break the framework of scientific objectivism in many ways. As another example, I note that our "perception of objects" is actually a mental collation of visual and tactile apparitions. There are many cases in which the normal intersensory correlations are disrupted (the per-

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1 *Neurocybernetics* is an existing branch of neurophysiology which seeks to explain thought by investigating the brain as a "bionic computer."

2. e.g. the Necker Cube.

ceptual illusions).[3] If we take the illusions as a paradigm and reinterpret "normal" phenomena in accord with that paradigm we are in a different reality, disjoined along the sight-touch frontier. Bode's Law that two material bodies cannot occupy the same position in space at the same time ceases to be usable, because the determination of what is a material body is seen to involve a vicious circle.

The evaluational processing of experience studies, as one example, the circumstance that different levels of reality are attributed to waking experience and dreamed experience even though both are equally vivid, equally palpable. What is at issue here is the fabrication of an "impersonal order of nature"; the inter-subjective character of reality; and the choice of rules for testing the objectivity of phenomena. Again, once these elements are understood consciously, they can be consciously altered.

The *logic of contradictions* is a wide-ranging, umbrella discipline. The unifying theme of the discipline is the recognition that inconsistent conceptualizations, so far from being vacuous mistakes which can be eliminated from thought, are pervasive and inescapable in thought as we know it. Conscious control of this state of affairs is an extremely powerful achievement. The investigation begins with the interdependency between traditional logic and perceptual habits in the real-world logic of consistency. It then considers perceptions or events which are faithfully described by inconsistent descriptions, such as illusions and dreams. I characterize these apparitions as contradictory because that is the characterization given them by shared language and paradigmatic real-world logic – as all the perceptual psychology textbooks agree. Then, I study contradictions which are cognitively implicit in our most authoritative or obligatory propositional thought. (Paradoxes of common sense; the meta-theoretic inconsistency of arithmetic and set theory.) Finally, I study how the communal milieu and its influence on esteem enables people to assent to openly inconsistent doctrine. (Mathematics' co-optation of its own inconsistencies; etc.) This research yields a very wide-ranging capacity to produce anomalies or uncanny world-states.

My recent investigations into personhood have shown that meta-technology can be significantly widened and deepened by studying not only linkages of perception and descriptive language, but their co-determination by morale, esteem, etc. Studying the entire "vertical" organization of self or self-image could result in the realm of perception being transformed.

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Our civilization has long been characterized by the way it molds human faculties to produce a cleavage between scientific functioning, on the one hand, and poetic, emotional "human" functioning on the other. Meta-technology is beyond this cleavage of faculties. Also, it is worth repeating that meta-technology does not

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3 An example of an intersensory discorrelation is Aristotle's tactile illusion: touch the tips of crossed forefinger and middle finger of the left hand to a projecting dowel while also looking at the dowel. You see one dowel and feel two. The perceptions of the two fingers are not only disjoined, they are inverted. The subject attributes to the index finger what is touched by the middle finger and vice versa, as can be shown by applying two distinct stimuli to the finger – a point and a ball, for example.

Even better: try the experiment first with eyes closed, and then open the eyes. Sight captures touch, and the fingers are switched without any motion taking place. (Adapted from Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, pg. 205.)

consist of the sort of magic tricks attributed to pre-scientific religious figures. What is a religious miracle like changing water into wine? It is — purportedly — an objectively consequential manipulation of the thing-world, a type of cause-and-effect technology. It takes place "out there," replacing a thing with another thing.

Meta-technology does not appear as hearsay; and it does not make any special appeal to credulity. Rather the contrary. Its primitive procedures are given as instructions to be carried out at first-hand. Presupposing a conventionally indoctrinated individual, it achieves anomalies by a decrease of the conventional level of credulity. It is not centered on thing-to-thing relationships or causation "out there." It is centered on the interdependencies between subjectivity (awareness, self-image) and things.

In addition, there is a third constituent important enough to be mentioned separately: *the communal milieu, and especially its influence on esteem* — as when intimidation by community authorities maintains the legitimacy of ridiculous beliefs. It is at the juncture I have just sketched that "the world" is synthesized, that the determination of reality occurs. *Meta-technology attacks the credulities which are elements of this juncture. It works with the linkages among "perception," descriptive language, and abstract cognition (logic, mathematics.)* Currently I am extending the research to include linkages to *personhood* — the high integrative level, the "vertical" organization of self or self-image.

There is a big gap between the primitive meta-technological procedures which I have already formulated, and the communally implemented, culturally implemented meta-technology which I envision. The primitive procedures can be carried out by an isolated individual (and yield a sort of insight of sensibility); but at that level they are, in a sense, only curiosities. *The whole point is that meta-technology acts on the cultural determination of reality as such. Unlike a miracle or magic trick, which wants to remain a one-shot event in an otherwise lawful everyday world, meta-technology must be extended through a community and a culture to realize its promise.* It is not a one-shot event but a "rotation" of an entire culture.

What is more, to reach its full potential, meta-technology will probably have to be tied into existing natural science. But meta-technology would give a shock to natural science which must not be underestimated. Natural science would be conceptually shattered, and reorganized so drastically as to become unrecognizable.

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If meta-technology were implemented at the level of an entire community, that community would have the power to consciously modulate what is now thought of as the objective world. To speak of walking through walls would not be a mere joke. Both the physical universe and mental acts as its antithesis would disappear, in the sense of becoming inapplicable concepts. It would be possible to achieve sustained, composed uncanniness, to live in a state of consciously modulated enchantment. In this regard, the impulse underlying meta-technolgy is an impulse toward an ecstatic form of life. (It must be understood, however, that the rational mentality produced by modern Western civilization might experience the enchanted community as a nightmare.)

When meta-technology shifts the focus from the thing-world to the interdependencies between subjectivity and things, it leads us to our whole humanness. It carries out a takeover of technology by the psyche or by personhood. For a community to attain a consciously modulated uncanniness would tend toward an ecstatic form of life — an achievement which the prevailing culture would classify as esthetic or spiritual, not scientific. That is what must be conveyed: acceding to one's whole humanness is neither science nor poetry because it is beyond both.

Postscript: The foregoing is not meant to promise a salvation which is blind to economics and politics. The present article is limited to giving a few rudiments of the meta-technology: my proposed extension or replacement for the physical and exact sciences. My views on the social context are at least as unusual as my views on science and form an entire line of argument in their own right. The transformation I speak of would clearly be in conflict with the capitalist formation. On the other hand, I hold that historical experience has obsolesced Marx's original timetable and game plan for the supersession of capitalism.

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