Guerrilla Strategy and Cybernetic Theory

To fight a hundred times and win a hundred times is not the blessing of blessings.
The blessing of blessings is to beat the other man's army without getting into the fight yourself.

—Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*

Traditional guerrilla activity such as bombings, snipings, and kidnappings complete with printed manifestos seems like so many ecologically risky short-change feedback devices compared with the real possibilities of portable video, maverick data banks, acid meta-programming, cable TV, satellites, cybernetic craft industries, and alternate life-styles. Yet the guerrilla tradition is highly relevant in the current information environment. Guerrilla warfare is by nature irregular and non-repetitive. Like information theory, it recognizes that redundancy can easily become reactionary and result in entropy and defeat. The juxtaposition of cybernetics and guerrilla strategy suggests a way of moving that is a genuine alternative to the film scenario of New York City urban guerrilla warfare, *Ice*. Using machine guns to round up people in an apartment house for a revolutionary teach-in is not what the information environment is about. All power does not proceed from the end of a gun.

We suffer the violence of the entropy of old forms—nuclear family, educational institutions, supermarketing, cities, the oil slick complex, etc. They are running us down, running down on us and with us. How do we get out of the way? How do we develop new ways? This ship of state continues to run away from its

people and its planetary responsibilities, while efforts continue to seduce us into boarding this sinking ship—educational loans, fellowships, lowering the voting age. Where did Nixon come from anyway? How did that leftover from the days of Elvis get to be captain of our ship, master of our fate?

How many Americans, once horrified by thermonuclear war, are now thinking the unthinkable in ecological terms with a certain spiteful glee of relief at the prospect of a white hell for all?

> *Psychedelic my ass: Children of A-Bomb*
> — Bob Lenox

Nobody with any wisdom is looking for a straight-out fight. We have come to understand that in fighting you too easily become what you behold. Yet there is no way on this planet to get out of the way. Strategy and tactics need be developed so the establishment in its entropy does not use up our budgets of flexibility. The efforts to enlist the young in the traditional political parties for 1976 will be gross. Relative to the establishment and its cultural automatons, we need to move from pure Weiner wise Augustinian cybernetics into the realm of war game theory and practice in the information environment.

The most elegant piece of earth technology remains the human biocomputer; the most important data banks are in our brain cells. Inherent in cybernetic guerrilla warfare is the absolute necessity of having the people participate as fully as possible. This can be done in an information environment by insisting on ways of feeding back for human enhancement rather than feeding off people for the sake of concentration of power through capital, pseudo-mythologies, or withheld information. The information economy that begins in a guerrilla mode accepts, cultivates, and depends on living, thinking flesh for its success. People are not information coolies rickshawing around the perceptions of the

privileged, the well-paid, or the past. People can and do process information according to the uniqueness of their perceptual systems. Uniqueness is premium in a noospheric culture that thrives on high variety. Information is here understood as a difference that makes a difference. The difficulties of a negentropic or information culture are in the transformations: how do we manage transformation of differences without exploitation, jam, or corruption that sucks power from people?

I am not talking about cultivation of perceptual systems at the expense of emotional cadences. Faster is not always better. Doing it all ways sometimes means slowing down. Internal syncing of all facets is critical to the maintenance of a flexibility and avoidance of non-cybernetic "hang-up" and "drag."

The bulk of the work done on cybernetics, from Wiener's guided missiles through the work at IBM and Bell Labs along with the various academic spin-offs, has been big-budget, establishment-supported, and conditioned by the relation of those intellectuals to the powers that be distinctly non-cybernetic and unresponsive to people. The concept of entropy itself may be so conditioned. Witness the parallel between Wiener's theoretical statements about enclaves and the enclave theory of withdrawal from Vietnam. One of the grossest results of this situation is the preoccupation of the phone company and others with making "foolproof terminals" since many potential users are assumed to be fools who can only give the most dumb-dumb responses. So fools are created.

The Japanese, the people we dropped the A-bomb on in 1945, introduced the portable video system to this country in 1967, at a price low enough so that independent and semi-independent users could get their hands on it and begin

to experiment. This experimentation, this experience, carries within it the logic of cybernetic guerrilla warfare.

Warfare…because having total control over the processing of video puts you in direct conflict with that system of perceptual imperialism called broadcast television that puts a terminal in your home and thereby controls your access to information. This situation of conflict also exists as a matter of fact between people using portable video for feedback and in situations such as schools that operate through withholding and controlling the flow of information.

Guerrilla warfare…because the portable video tool only enables you to fight on a small scale in an irregular way at this time. Running to the networks with portable video material seems rear-view mirror at best, reactionary at worst. What is critical is to develop an infrastructure to cable in situations where feedback and relevant access routes can be set up as part of the process.

Cybernetic guerrilla warfare…because the tool of portable video is a cybernetic extension of man and because cybernetics is the only language of intelligence and power that is ecologically viable. Guerrilla warfare as the Weathermen have been engaging in up to now, and revolution as they have articulated it, is simply play-acting on the stage of history in an ahistoric context. Guerrilla theater, doing it for the hell of it on their stage, doesn't make it either. We need to develop biologically viable information structures on a planetary scale. Nothing short of that will work. We move now in this present information environment in a phase that finds its best analogue in those stages of human struggle called guerrilla warfare.

Yet this is not China in the 1930's. Though there is much to learn from Mao and traditional guerrilla warfare, this is not the same. Critically, for instance, in an

economy that operates on the transformation of differences, a hundred flowers must bloom from the beginning. In order to "win" in cybernetic guerrilla warfare, differences must be cherished, not temporarily suppressed for the sake of "victory." *A la* McLuhan, war is education. Conflict defines differences. We need to know what *not* to be enough to internally calculate our own process of becoming earth-alive noosphere. The more we are able to internally process differences among us, the more we will be able to process "spoils" of conflict with the entropic establishment—i.e., understanding the significant differences between us and them in such a way as to avoid processing what is dangerous and death-producing. Learn what you can from the Egyptians; the exodus is cybernetic.

Traditional guerrilla warfare is concerned with climate and weather. We must concern ourselves with decoding the information contours of the culture. How does power function here? How is this system of communications and control maintained? What information is habitually withheld and how? Ought it to be jammed? How do we jam it? How do we keep the action small enough so it is relevant to real people? How do we build up an indigenous data base? Where do we rove and strike next?

Traditional guerrilla warfare is concerned with knowing the terrain. We must expand this to a full understanding of the ecological thresholds within which we move. We must know ourselves in a cybernetic way, and know the ecology so that we can take and take care of the planet intact.

The traditional concern is for good generals. What's desirable for us is ad hoc heterarchies of power which have their logistics down. Cybernetics understands that power is distributed throughout the system. Relevant pathways shift and change with the conditions. The navy has developed war plans where the

command in a fleet moves from ship to ship every fifteen minutes. It is near impossible to knock out the command vessel.

The traditional tricks of guerrilla warfare are remarkably suited for cybernetic action in an information environment. To scan briefly:

- Mixing "straight" moves with "freak" moves. Using straight moves to engage the enemy, freak moves to beat him and not let the enemy know which is which.
- Running away when it's too heavy. Leave the enemy's strong places and seek the weak. Go where you can make a difference.
- Shaping the enemy's forces and keeping our own unshaped, thereby beating the many with the few.
- Faking the enemy out. Surprise attacks.
- Count the cost. We need to develop an information accounting system, a cultural calculus.
- Use the enemy's supply. With portable video one can take the American mythology right off the air and use it as part of a new perceptual collage.
- Be flexible. In cybernetics, flexibility, the maintenance of a good guessing way, is critical.
- Patience. Cybernetics is inherently concerned with timing and time design. It is a protracted war.

We retreat in space, but we advance in time.

Q. Who are the enemy?
A. All conspiring with entropy. Ourselves insofar as we make trash of consciousness.

Q.   Who are allies?

A.   All who are developing self-referencing modes of sharing life on
       planet earth.

*Do not repeat a tactic which has gained you victory, but shape your
actions to an infinite variety. Water sets its flow according to the
ground below; set your victories according to the enemy against you.
War has no constant aspect as water has no constant shape.*

—Sun Tzu