

From Politics to Metapolitics

Frederic William Atherton Lecture

Harvard University March 20, 1967

Norman O Brown

My first response to the invitation of this honorable company  
and to the wishes of Frederic William Atherton

"a topic related to ethical or social criticism"  
was that it would be a pleasure to present my kind of  
radicalism in this environment - -

Since then I have been wondering about radicalism  
and wondering about myself

These are times of great uncertainty and doubt as well as  
anxiety.

Starting out in the Thirties

✓ When to be young was to be a Marxist

I ask myself

What has happened since then?

What have I learned in my bizarre psychedelic trips  
I mean my books

What news is there that might be useful to the citizens  
the young citizens  
who are starting out now?

You have a right to ask how much, or how little.

So much has changed  
 perhaps the message is instability  
 permanent instability in the mind  
 corresponding to the permanent revolution in things  
 instability to be accepted as an eternal truth  
 like Heraclitean flux --

IS THIS BERKELEY'S  
 METAPHYSIC?

But in this Heraclitean flux, or fire,  
 there is for me also a Heraclitean Logos  
 the logos, the word, is One, or oneness  
 unity  
 unification  
 the unification of the human race.

Intellectuals: for me the word still spells a vocation -  
 intellectuals who have been entrusted with the word, the Logos,  
 are called to work for unity.

If, as Blake said, the Fall is into Division  
 the vocation of the intellectual is to overcome the consequences of the Fall.

I don't know about the proletariat, but  
 the intellectual, as such, has no fatherland -  
 or, to use another metaphor,

there is a heavenly city. "Jerusalem"

Logos seeks unification; and the fact it faces is Division

Alienation, in the old Marxist vocabulary

the rents, the splits, in the newer Freudian vocabulary  
 the schisms  
 the schizophrenia.

Now - if I may make a Great Leap Forward -

alienation. is schizophrenia

FITZGERALD  
 MAILER  
 REICH

the outcome of the collision between Marx and Freud is their  
 unification

The perception of the analogy between the two

the analogy between social and psychic  
 society and soul  
 body and ~~the~~ body politic.

LOGOS & PSYCHE

In the mythology of Marxism, the revolution is from below:

Those lower classes, lower depths, are the depths of depth psychology

an underworld repressed by the bourgeois ego

a cauldron of energy and violence with the lid on

an anonymous mass, or social id --

some more on the "revolution" - would that?

If you take the psychoanalytical idea of projection seriously  
 the proletariat (if and when we perceive one) is us projected  
 a collective projection  
 a collective dream, or nightmare  
 (the dream is in the language  
 (and the language is acted upon  
 (saying makes it so)

THE POWER OF THE WORD  
 AN UNFINISHED NOVEL

If you take the psychoanalytical idea of projection seriously  
 the ego constructs itself by projecting the other

the ego constructs itself by drawing an imaginary line  
between inside and outside

an imaginary boundary-line

And this imaginary boundary-line is the reality-principle

The reality-principle is the distinction between inner world and  
external reality

and it is a false distinction.

"The false reality-principle"

This is to take psychoanalysis more seriously than the psycho-  
 analysts do

or to pass beyond psychoanalysis

Beyond the reality-principle is poetry William S. Burroughs  
 taking metaphors seriously  
 (metaphors and analogies)  
that way madness lies.

POETRY IS MADNESS

IF THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN INNER & OUTER IS FALSE,  
 SO IS THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN EGO & ID, & ALSO  
 " " " BOURGEOIS & PROLETARIAT

✓ The disintegration of the boundary-line between inner and outer self and other

is the disintegration of the ego

the disintegration of the ego of the ego-psychologists

in Marxist terms, the disintegration of the bourgeois ego of bourgeois individualism

or, alienation overcome - -

✓ The split between inside and outside is the primal split is the origin of alienation.

Already in Marxism

The intellectual was to go to the masses  
bourgeois individualism, the separate self, was to  
be drowned in the proletarian ocean

Marxist thought substitutes for the reality of individuals the reality of classes

But classes, as external realities, mutually external, are not real either  
it all really takes place in one body.

Marx, who, like Freud, is a genius who surpasses his own  
limitations, once said:

"The head of this emancipation is philosophy, its heart the proletariat."  
He means ego and id. Of course proletariat, if you look  
at the word, must also be genital.

EX OFFERING, OR "RISE IN FRONT OF"!

At any rate, it all takes place in one body

one body that has been mysteriously dismembered  
and needs to be remembered

to knit again these broken limbs into one body.

It must be some kind of embrace  
overcoming alienation.

Whitman, GINSBERG

Emerson used to say, There is only one Man

After Emerson, what happened, on the American continent, to  
this intuition?

To perceive that it all really takes place in one body

is to transvalue the old political categories

to pass from politics to metapolitics  
or poetry.

The proletariat is dead  
but the proletariat is us  
long live the proletariat.

THE "EGO" DIES;

THE "I" IS TOTALITY

There is an inner Bastille to be captured  
to release the prisoners

or rather, the inner and the outer Bastille is the same Bastille

or rather, the distinction between inner and outer is the Bastille

PRISON SURROUNDS THOSE  
OUTSIDE IT!

the false reality-principle  
the government of the reality-principle,  
to be overthrown

And the revolution is a visionary break-through  
or poetry  
or madness.

✓ Revolution really is madness

political revolutions

The French Revolution, the Russian Revolution

Ten Days that Shook the World

The Great Cultural Revolution

All the pathology of the twentieth century  
the madness of the millenia breaking out, ~~as~~  
as Nietzsche prophesied -

The problem really is madness

There is a point where Marat and de Sade are one.

Weiss

What to do with madness

The political solution to the problem of madness is  
divide and conquer  
segregation and repression  
(like in asylums)  
perpetual conflict

former

PERMANENT REVOLUTION

the political revolution is a temporary break-down followed by the  
reinstitution of repression  
a cycle of explosion and repression  
Einer activity and passivity  
in eternal recurrence

Perpetual conflict with the rule of politics  
the reality principle  
the world as we know it

Is there any alternative?

A metapolitical solution to the problem of madness  
 would see politics as madness  
 and madness as the solution to politics.

Breaking down the boundaries is breaking down the reality-principle  
 & unification lies beyond the reality-principle.

✓ the communion is Dionysian.

Madness is even the solution to the problem of madness  
 it's sanity that needs to be saved  
 (I don't mean, save your sanity)

it was the greatness of Freud to see through, to bore through, the wall  
separating sanity and insanity

it is all a problem of communication

the poet says, Madness is oneness lost

But oneness regained is madness also. ??

Can we liberate instead of repress

✓ Can we find a way of being permanently unstable -- HERACLITUS

✓ Emerson says: "Whenever man comes, there comes revolution"  
 there is that great flame

It is the idea of permanent revolution

But permanent revolution cannot be political revolution  
permanent political revolution is fratricide, or suicide, 16. var.  
 it is the situation we are in now  
 the situation we are trying to escape from

To save the revolution it must be given a metapolitical meaning  
 as madness, or poetry  
 permanent uninterrupted poetry:  
 surrealism, to stamp out reality.



FOUCAULT

Madness and Civilization  
a very serious question

Here I differ from one of your sages

B.F. Skinner, Walden Two (202): "Nothing comes from general frothing at the mouth"  
I have done some frothing in my time

Madness is an eternal truth

and some shaking or quaking is testimony to the need for liberation  
to the uncomfortableness of culture

It is possible that the future is a contented humanity  
without neurotics like me

but I don't think so

I don't think the future is behavioral engineering  
getting rid of unhappiness, maladjustment, madness

My utopia is

an environment that works so well  
that we can run wild in it

anarchy in an environment that works IN ALL SENSES -  
"THE WHOLE WORKS"

the environment works, does all the work  
a fully automatic environment  
all public utilities  
or communication networks

Buckminster Fuller

(the engineering contribution to unification; unification is also a matter of engineering)

My teachers in utopian engineering are John Cage and Buckminster Fuller

but wasn't there a divinely absurd anticipation in Marx, or Engels, saying that the government of persons will be replaced by the administration of things --

UNIFICATION IS (INTER ALIA) FEELING YOUR MIND NOT FIGHTING ITSELF

✓ The environment can do all the work

Serious thought, thought as work, in pursuit of Wirklichkeit,  
is about over

Wirklichkeit, the German word for reality, the reality-principle

The reality-principle is about over

Thought as work can be buried in machines and computers  
The work left to be done is to bury thought; quite a job

To put thought underground

as communication-network, sewage system, power lines  
So that wildness can come above ground

Technological rationality can be put to sleep  
so that something else can awaken in the human mind  
something like the god Dionysus  
something which cannot be programmed.

The ordering of the physical environment will release unparalleled  
quantities and forms of human disorder

The future, if there is one, is machines and madness

KEATS:  
ODE TO A  
GREEK VASE

} What men or gods are these? What maidens loth?  
What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?

✓ The struggle should not be, is no longer, really, the struggle for  
existence.

But unification is not only a matter of engineering.

✓ Marshall McLuhan is taken by some to mean that technology is bringing us into a global village  
WENT 9/24 MCL BELIEVES THIS

✓ Buckminster Fuller is taken by some to mean that technology is bringing us a global network of public services

But there is some obstruction

There is some obstacle impeding the free flow of unification

political divisions, boundaries  
 but, at a deeper level, the reality-principle  
 the boundary between Self and Other  
 the logic which divides  
which most people think is reason itself, or  
rationality

i.e., THOUGHT IS CONFLICT.

Blaise Pascal: Rationality and the reality-principle are obstacles to unification.  
see Pascal's Pensees in Sartre's Galaxy.

But fortunately there is a disturbance in the house of reason

Ever since the age of reason something like a collective break-down  
 has been taking place  
 a destruction of reason  
 a destruction in which intellect must immerse

In order that the disintegration of the ego may be the birth of some  
 kind of collective consciousness  
NOT "COLLECTIVE UNCONSCIOUS"

i.e., not  
linear  
logic In order that the logic of division may give way to the  
logic of union LOGIC ↔ LOGOS - NOT LINEAR LOGIC

The logos of union whose name is, or one of whose names is, ever  
 since the time of Hegel,

dialectics.

Humboldt's view as a unifier  
work.

We are still Hegel's contemporaries  
even in America, as Emerson knew  
living in the last days, the end of history i.e. LINEAR TIME  
the age of revolution and apocalypse

And therefore in that No Man's Land between reason and madness  
which is dialectics  
MARCUSE Reason and Revolution is really Reason and Madness

Dialectics is the revolt against rationalism  
the discovery that self-contradiction is the essence of reality  
the opening to the absurd

Dialectics is intellect seeking union with energy PSYCHE/EROS  
in Marx, philosophy seeking union with the proletariat  
in Freud, ego seeking union with id

In dialectics nothing is stable, movement is all  
a logic of passion  
Mandelstam in Russia in 1921 (Mandelstam, not Lenin; a poet not a politician): "A new heroic <sup>era</sup> ~~age~~  
has opened in the life of the word. The word is flesh and bread. It shares the fate of bread and flesh: suffering."

JOHN I, 14  
LUKE 22: 17

Dialectics is a dialectic of life against death  
death is a part of life  
like Freud, Hegel says the goal of all life is death:  
"The nature of the finite lies in this, that it dissolves itself"  
it must go under W.C. WILLIAMS: "WORK PRODUCE NOT THE EARTH"  
this is self-contradiction in practice, in action --

Hegel, Phenomenology: "Not the life that shrinks from death and keeps itself  
undefiled by devastation (Vernichtung), but the life that <sup>UNDER GOES</sup> suffers death  
and preserves itself in death is the life of the Spirit. Spirit gains its truth  
by finding itself in absolute dismemberment (Zerrissenheit)."

Dismemberment; absolute dismemberment  
the Spirit is Dionysus, the god who is dismembered  
Dionysus, or schizophrenia  
schizophrenia is spirit in absolute dismemberment DEATH  
déchirement ontologique

Dionysus is also union, communion LIFE ←

Dialectics is the dissolution of all partial statements till they are  
lost on the whole  
"the truth is in the whole"

And the union or communion is madness  
dialectics is drunkenness or dancing  
the Bacchanalian revel of the categories in which not one member is sober.

Hegel nevertheless made a Hegelian system  
and Marx also made a system  
and so did Freud; at least the Freud whom the Psychoanalytical Association  
worship.

Systems, Marxist, Freudian, can be, as they say, flexible

But flexibility is not enough -- I.E., IS NOT FLUX

Mind, or spirit, or life, must learn how to die  
it must go under

All these systems have immortal longings on them  
that is why they are dead  
born dead <sub>representing</sub> from the hour of the birth the dead hand of the past

Cummings:  
"A WORLD OF MADE IS NOT A WORLD OF BORN"

The flexibility is wiggling to avoid death  
what they mean by rationality is, don't die  
be consistent --

The rule of die-in-order-to-live  
diees Stirb' und Werde DIES & BECOMES  
✓ is not flexibility but metamorphosis ODD, POUND  
is not political but poetical.

The real action in Love's Body  
(you can tell by the creaking)  
is to find an alternative to systematic form

Dialectics, in flight from the systematic, finds refuge in aphoristic form  
Stevens' Adagio

Aphorism: the word smells of literary self-consciousness

the reality is brokenness  
words in absolute dismemberment  
✓ or even, absolute self-contradiction.

We have been told that the medium is the message *Mohrman*

Aphoristic form has political or rather metapolitical implications --

Politics is systems

There is a hidden truth or secret  
that is what the Unconscious is all about

MYSTERY

But it cannot be put into systematic, reified, permanent form

✓ Systematic reified permanent form creates an elite who possess the secret

*Thoughts on Platonist cities and priests.*

(Platonic academy, occult order, political party,  
the repository of the secret)

Mass-mysticism is poetry  
an open secret --

"The truth is in the whole"

But the whole is in any part, not in the system --

infinity in a grain *OF SAND*  
and in an instant *ETERNITY IN AN HOUR*  
the whole is here or nowhere

Aphorism is instant dialectic *ZEN KOAN*  
simultaneously the instantaneous flip instead of the elaborate system

Only so do we have a form of intellect that is so easy  
that any child could do it *MAT 18:3*  
or, only a child can do it

And so perishable

✓ that it cannot be hoarded by any elite *THE "CITY" CANNOT CONTAIN IT*  
or stored in any institution

A form of dialectics, therefore, unequivocally on the side of freedom  
or madness.

And finally  
(using Hegel again as my landmark)

✓ The Hegelian dialectic is the simultaneous total affirmation of this world and its total negation

Both the right-wing Hegelians and the left-wing Hegelians are in it

Both the Marxian change the world and the Nietzschean everything always the same

(The hard thing here is the Nietzschean affirmation --

Nietzsche says "He does not negate any more"

At any rate intellectuals should watch their language !!

The critical judgement  
which separates the sheep from the goats  
We and They

critical judgement is party or sect-formation  
is scission of the one body  
and projection of part of ourselves

Intellect as protest

or great refusal

(Hawthorne - Melville's <sup>NOV-SAYER</sup> No in Thunder)

gets us nowhere

Stevens - Exhilaration

(in this mess, rectitude or righteousness is unobtainable  
and will not save us.

What kind of language might be helpful?

Instead of morality, metaphor  
to ferry us across, <sup>MAINTAINING THE SEPARATION</sup>  
the language which unifies

The language of healing, or making whole, is not  
psychoanalysis, but poetry.

FORNIA "POST"  
IS THE MAN WHO  
PUTS THINGS TOGETHER

Poetry is the visionary form, or explosion  
which overthrows the reality principle  
and transforms this world, just the way it is,  
without changing a thing  
the transformation is the unification.

Stein  
OLSON: "ODE TO INTIMACY"

These are the fragmentary moments which bring something new into the world

Fragmentary moments: there isn't anything we can count on or accumulate.

Poetry is the solvent which dissolves  
the rigorous stereotypes of political ideology  
the numb automatism of political reflexes  
the somnambulist gravity of liberal believers  
These are the obstructions to be dissolved  
to be loosened up - -

Poetry is the transforming spirit of play  
metaphorical play

Begin today  
no place needs the transforming spirit of play more than the  
University  
that Bastille of liberalism  
especially that Bastille inside the Bastille in which I live,  
the Humanities

The great revolutionary intellectual of the 20th century: James Joyce  
who reduced all that solemn nonsense to nonsense  
leading us in the path to which Wittgenstein directed us <sup>NOT TOOK</sup>  
from disguised nonsense to patent nonsense  
a transition that is accomplished not by linguistic  
analysis but by poetry.

Philosophical  
Investigations



The primal Logos is the poetic Logos  
and the Logos of unification is poetry

The intellectual, to whom <sup>by whom?</sup> was entrusted the word, was given  
the power to unify the world this way

There are also engineers, to whom is given the power to unify the  
world in another way

There are also politicians.

It is the tale of Shem and Shamen  
who turn into Shem, Ham, and Japheth  
or Tom, Dick, and Harry.

WHO CAME INTO THE  
DARKNESS FROM THE EAST  
OR THE WEST? FLUX,  
OR THE "CAME" CONCEPT

Can be integrated with Cage & Zen

PSYCHEDELIC FIREMAN

psychedelic firemen  
all over america

New York City/ Babylon

everyone high  
meat of animals  
tropical sugars  
LSD crime

america is a land of drug addicts  
ones who have blown their minds  
historically locking-up the mellow

/crime in the streets  
a slogan

walk this city by sundown  
witness  
flames upon roof tops

along the piers  
palisades crumbling spires  
organized amusement parks / fright-death  
upon roller-coasters with one end only  
passengers fallout backwards  
into mad carnival music of the streets  
sirens imported from druid regions of europe

worldwide police believe them  
the weirdest

roller coaster through manhattan by underground express  
iron cars trains of aushwitz  
jangling metal grit subway air

MAN DOES NOT BELONG UNDERGROUND