

# REALITY, RHETORIC AND DISRUPTION

By ROY KEPLER

POLICE DEPARTMENT



I have been asked for clarification of some of my ideas and proposals in relationship to the Free U's attempt to open a community center, to increase "the consciousness of the people", and to carry on a creative internal and external dialogue while carrying through the action in the community.

In a recent Coordinating Committee meeting I proposed that the Free U withdraw from the "Ad Hoc Committee to Liberate Downtown Palo Alto" in order to free itself to be better able to accomplish its purposes fruitfully, and without needless polarization of the community through belligerent confrontation which might court violence from the police.

My views were put forward openly and honestly in the knowledge that there were many who disagreed wholly or in part. Only if we express and recognize our honest disagreements can we expect that potentially creative tension of ideas and methods that will otherwise be obscured-- until some crisis reveals an unexpected lack of unity.

There are some significant philosophical and practical differences in the assumptions, styles, strategies and tactics of different people and groupings within the Free U, and within the Ad Hoc Committee. One of the reasons, presumably, for the formation of the Ad Hoc Committee and the Free U's participation in it was to create a vehicle for political action for the Free U which would not jeopardize the MFU's legal and economic basis. Another, it seems, was to create a framework within which the relatively non-political and non-radical elements in the Free U would be in contact with and involved with political activists and left radicals.

Associated with these two reasons is a third: that is, that there is a feeling emerging from a number of Free U members who have been developing a closer sense of community through working together, encountering together, and through experiments in living together, that the individual and group self-awareness and spontaneity, the sharing of strengths and weaknesses, that they have

developed have led them to a better, more honest, more satisfying way of life than that of the hypocritical, avaricious, unjust and violent society around them. Some people in this grouping have begun to sense the possibility of a wedding between the "turned-on, consciousness-aware, spiritually-liberated" people with the political and social radicals who have a more serious and examined approach to social change, and who supply both strategy and tactics for bringing about fundamental social transformation, including a hard-headed view of power relationships. Associated with this aspiration is a curiosity to see what can happen in the area of "blowing minds" and "transforming lives" through mental and physical disruption. A result of a fascination with the dynamics of psycho-drama, wherein there is a revelation and surfacing of all possible human emotions and responses, there is the suggestion both of "purging" violence and rage through release, plus an unstated assumption that "our" ultimate ends are so good that they tend to purify the means-- thus "we" are relieved of the anxiety of guilt if "our" adversaries force "us" into recognizing them as "pigs" (or, as the Nazis said: "untermenschus"). A rhetoric has developed so that our ultimate ends in "freeing turf" and getting "power" are never questioned, and thus "we" are free to indulge in fantasies of retaliation, "self-defense", and exercise of power, since it is in the service of an ultimate good so over-arching and supreme that it justifies our moving beyond nonviolent means. We are no longer "afraid" to recognize or test out our heretofore latent but "repressed" hostilities and potential for power.

Through the glorification of spontaneity, of group action together, of the existential nature of all acts, there is a tendency to accept disruption for its own sake. There is also the tendency to accept readily any alleged misdeed of our adversaries without question-- or even interest in the facts. That is, any alleged charge against "The Man" or "The Establishment" is ac-

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cepted instantly, whereas any alleged human response from the Establishment is often viewed with suspicion, and even hostility. Compassion seems a response not readily available to us. Facts and history are irrelevant at best unless they conform to our stereotypes and prejudices. Great reliance is placed upon emotions and intuitions, while rational discourse and philosophical ideas are viewed with disdain.

Among the ideas I would challenge are these:

1. The unverified assumption that released emotions in and of themselves are good and humane, and that violence and hostility are "worked out" through surfacing rage and acting it out. Actually, recent psychological experimentation suggests the opposite: that giving way to, or acting out rage tends to deepen and reinforce such behavior.
  2. That beneficial social change can be brought about in a social context which denies the shared humanity of all the parties in a conflict.
  3. The view that concentrating on "gut" issues will lead to the revolutionizing of the overarching problems of our time. Paul Goodman has observed that "to concentrate on 'gut' issues is to be finally irrelevant and, paradoxically, merely symbolic."
  4. The idea that disruption is a good in and of itself. Disruption for what? and how? and when? and why? are questions that must first be answered. And how can we be open to the possibilities for change when a community has been alerted and opened up to change in part by disruption? Are we then prepared to accept and work to effect the change-- to the benefit of all in the community including our former opponents, or do we hold the view that "power" means overcoming and putting down our opponents?
  5. The view that any and all positions are of equal validity, and therefore everybody should "do his thing" and that will forward the Movement toward some successful goal. Precisely as ideas and actions bring more people into arenas of action, it is important to be able to make distinctions between different styles, strategies and tactics. Some assume that the goals justify almost any means, whereas others have observed that the means themselves-- i.e., how we actually behave-- determine the process that flows from the actions. With every step taken toward the organization of hostility, toward the de-humanization of opponents, and toward the justification of increasingly non-nonviolent means, what is happening is that groups are taking steps toward war-- in miniature or on a large scale. And war is by definition a reactionary, not a revolutionizing, step.
  6. Finally, I reject the view that something has forced us to change tactics. Or that the unresponsiveness of "The Establishment" has made nonviolence ineffective. We haven't even begun to try the full range of nonviolent means available to us. We haven't begun to have that persistence and patience necessary in a task of social renovation. Mao developed the theory of "protracted" warfare and has spent a lifetime working for his view of the good society. Today, in his seventies, the task is still incomplete-- so much so that only last month he denounced one of his lifetime fellow leaders as a revisionist who stood in the way of accomplishing the full Revolution.
- The violent revolutionaries are ready to spend a lifetime-- and to risk their lives-- and still not to achieve their goals. Some of us march in two protest demonstrations, and won't even risk losing our jobs, and then "move beyond nonviolence" because we say it has failed.
- I say it hasn't yet been thoroughly understood, much less tried. The failure is in us who as products of a violent society can't quite give up the habit. And then we call "The Establishment" hypocrites.

## liberation

your voice  
booming along highways  
scatters birds  
bends breath  
to morning jade  
I  
love wet  
in bucket seat  
wind pulling  
flattens lashes  
to eyelid  
see  
your smile  
whitening clear  
as January

then  
never knowing  
willows hung with your song  
hand brushing  
my breast  
to thigh  
legs  
slipping open  
hold me

steel shadow  
trails  
exhaust over crew-cut hills  
rattling seeds  
larkspur and thistle  
crouched here  
ready to leap  
I  
into your lung  
to liberty

## song

I am drawn to you  
You are honey  
In my bee's mouth  
Sweet and heady  
You are August  
In the iris of your eye  
And grown aloof

I try to shake you  
Into caring  
Breathing a light wind  
Against your Himalayan mind  
The haiku of your morning  
Is unmoved

Turning away  
I carry the imprint  
Of your cheek  
Against my hand  
The taste of you stays with me  
The pomegranate blows itself with seed  
Its fruit lasts all the winter through

by  
**susan  
macdonald**