

Institutional Spectrum

Most utopian schemes and futuristic scenarios call for new and costly technologies, which would have to be sold to rich and poor nations alike. Herman Kahn has found pupils in Venezuela, Argentina, and Colombia. The pipe dreams of Sergio Bernardes for his Brazil of the year 2000 sparkle with more new machinery than is now possessed by the United States, which by then will be weighted down with the antiquated missile sites, jetports, and cities of the sixties and seventies. Futurists inspired by Buckminster Fuller would depend on cheaper and more exotic devices. They count on the acceptance of a new but possible technology that would apparently allow us to make more with less—lightweight monorails rather than supersonic transport; vertical living rather than horizontal sprawling. All of today's futuristic planners seek to make economically feasible what is technically possible while refusing to face the inevitable social consequence: the increased craving of all men for goods and services that will remain the privilege of a few.

I believe that a desirable future depends on our deliberately choosing a life of action over a life of consumption, on our engendering a life style which will enable us to be spontaneous, independent, yet related to each other, rather than maintaining a life style which only allows us to make and unmake, produce and consume—a style of life which is merely a way station on the road to the depletion and pollution of the environment. The future depends more upon our choice of institutions which sup-

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port a life of action than on our developing new ideologies and technologies. We need a set of criteria which will permit us to recognize those institutions which support personal growth rather than addiction, as well as the will to invest our techno-logical resources preferentially in such institutions of growth.

The choice is between two radically opposed institutional types, both of which are exemplified in certain existing institutions, although one type so characterizes the contemporary period as to almost define it. This dominant type I would propose to call the manipulative institution. The other type also exists, but only precariously. The institutions which fit it are humbler and less noticeable; yet I take them as models for a more desirable future. I call them "convivial" and suggest placing them at the left of an institutional spectrum, both to show that there are institutions which fall between the extremes and to illustrate how historical institutions can change color as they shift from facilitating activity to organizing production.

Generally, such a spectrum, moving from left to right, has been used to characterize men and their ideologies, not our social institutions and their styles. This categorization of men, whether as individuals or in groups, often generates more heat than light. Weighty objections can be raised against using an ordinary convention in an unusual fashion, but by doing so I hope to shift the terms of the discussion from a sterile to a fertile plane. It will become evident that men of the left are not always characterized by their opposition to the manipulative institutions, which I locate to the right on the spectrum.

The most influential modern institutions crowd up at the right of the spectrum. Law enforcement has moved there, as it has shifted from the hands of the sheriff to those of the FBI and the Pentagon. Modern warfare has become a highly professional enterprise whose business is killing. It has reached the point where its efficiency is measured in body counts. Its peace-keeping potential depends on its ability to convince friend and foe of the nation's unlimited death-dealing power. Modern bullets and chemicals are so effective that a few cents' worth, properly delivered to the intended "client," unfailingly kill or maim. But delivery

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costs rise vertiginously; the cost of a dead Vietnamese went from \$360,000 in 1967 to \$450,000 in 1969. Only economies on a scale approaching race suicide would render modern warfare economically efficient. The boomerang effect in war is becoming more obvious: the higher the body count of dead Vietnamese, the more enemies the United States acquires around the world; likewise, the more the United States must spend to create another manipulative institution—cynically dubbed "pacification" in a futile effort to absorb the side effects of war.

At this same extreme on the spectrum we also find social agencies which specialize in the manipulation of their clients. Like the military, they tend to develop effects contrary to their aims as the scope of their operations increases. These social institutions are equally counterproductive, but less obviously so. Many assume a therapeutic and compassionate image to mask this paradoxical effect. For example, jails, up until two centuries ago, served as a means of detaining men until they were sentenced, maimed, killed, or exiled, and were sometimes deliberately used as a form of torture. Only recently have we begun to claim that locking people up in cages will have a beneficial effect on their character and behavior. Now quite a few people are beginning to understand that jail increases both the quality and the quantity of criminals, that, in fact, it often creates them out of mere nonconformists. Far fewer people, however, seem to understand that mental hospitals, nursing homes, and orphan asylums do much the same thing. These institutions provide their clients with the destructive self-image of the psychotic, the overaged, or the waif, and provide a rationale for the existence of entire professions, just as jails produce income for wardens. Membership in the institutions found at this extreme of the spectrum is achieved in two ways, both coercive: by forced commitment or by selective service.

At the opposite extreme of the spectrum lie institutions distinguished by spontaneous use—the "convivial" institutions. Telephone link-ups, subway lines, mail routes, public markets and exchanges do not require hard or soft sells to induce their clients to use them. Sewage systems, drinking water, parks, and side-

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walks are institutions men use without having to be institutionally convinced that it is to their advantage to do so. Of course, all institutions require some regulation. But the operation of institutions which exist to be used rather than to produce something requires rules of an entirely different nature from those required by treatment-institutions, which are manipulative. The rules which govern institutions for use have mainly the purpose of avoiding abuses which would frustrate their general accessibility. Sidewalks must be kept free of obstructions, the industrial use of drinking water must be held within limits, and ball playing must be restricted to special areas within a park. At present we need legislation to limit the abuse of our telephone lines by computers, the abuse of mail service by advertisers, and the pollution of our sewage systems by industrial wastes. The regulation of convivial institutions sets limits to their use; as one moves from the convivial to the manipulative end of the spectrum, the rules progressively call for unwilling consumption or participation. The different cost of acquiring clients is just one of the characteristics which distinguish convivial from manipulative institutions.

At both extremes of the spectrum we find service institutions, but on the right the service is imposed manipulation, and the client is made the victim of advertising, aggression, indoctrination, imprisonment, or electroshock. On the left the service is amplified opportunity within formally defined limits, while the client remains a free agent. Right-wing institutions tend to be highly complex and costly production processes in which much of the elaboration and expense is concerned with convincing consumers that they cannot live without the product or the treatment offered by the institution. Left-wing institutions tend to be networks which facilitate client-initiated communication or cooperation.

The manipulative institutions of the right are either socially or psychologically "addictive." Social addiction, or escalation, consists in the tendency to prescribe increased treatment if smaller quantities have not yielded the desired results. Psychological addiction, or habituation, results when consumers become

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hooked on the need for more and more of the process or product. The self-activated institutions of the left tend to be self-limiting. Unlike production processes which identify satisfaction with the mere act of consumption, these networks serve a purpose beyond their own repeated use. An individual picks up the telephone when he wants to say something to someone else, and hangs up when the desired communication is over. He does not, teen-agers excepted, use the telephone for the sheer pleasure of talking into the receiver. If the telephone is not the best way to get in touch, people will write a letter or take a trip. Right-wing institutions, as we can see clearly in the case of schools, both invite compulsively repetitive use and frustrate alternative ways of achieving similar results.

Toward, but not at, the left on the institutional spectrum, we can locate enterprises which compete with others in their own field, but have not begun notably to engage in advertising. Here we find hand laundries, small bakeries, hairdressers, and-to speak of professionals-some lawyers and music teachers. Characteristically left of center, then, are self-employed persons who have institutionalized their services but not their publicity. They acquire clients through their personal touch and the comparative quality of their services.

Hotels and cafeterias are somewhat closer to the center. The big chains like Hilton-which spend huge amounts on selling their image-often behave as if they were running institutions of the right. Yet Hilton and Sheraton enterprises do not usually offer anything more-in fact, they often give less-than similarly priced, independently managed lodgings. Essentially, a hotel sign beckons to a traveler in the manner of a road sign. It says, "Stop, here is a bed for you," rather than, "You should prefer a hotel bed to a park bench!"

The producers of staples and most perishable consumer goods belong in the middle of our spectrum. They fill generic demands and add to the cost of production and distribution whatever the market will bear in advertising costs for publicity and special packaging. The more basic the product-be it goods or services-the more does competition tend to limit the sales cost of the item.

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Most manufacturers of consumer goods have moved much further to the right. Both directly and indirectly, they produce demands for accessories which boost real purchase price far beyond production cost. General Motors and Ford produce means of transportation, but they also, and more importantly, manipulate public taste in such a way that the need for transportation is expressed as a demand for private cars rather than public buses. They sell the desire to control a machine, to race at high speeds in luxurious comfort, while also offering the fantasy at the end of the road. What they sell, however, is not just a matter of uselessly big motors, superfluous gadgetry, or the new extras forced on the manufacturers by Ralph Nader and the clean-air lobbyists. The list price includes souped-up engines, air-conditioning, safety belts, and exhaust controls; but other costs not openly declared to the driver are also involved: the corporation's advertising and sales expenses, fuel, maintenance and parts, insurance, interest on credit, as well as less tangible costs like loss of time, temper, and breathable air in our traffic-congested cities.

An especially interesting corollary to our discussion of socially useful institutions is the system of "public" highways. This major element of the total cost of automobiles deserves lengthier treatment, since it leads directly to the rightist institution in which I am most interested, namely, the school.

False Public Utilities

The highway system is a network for locomotion across relatively large distances. As a network, it appears to belong on the left of the institutional spectrum. But here we must make a distinction which will clarify both the nature of highways and the nature of true public utilities. Genuinely all-purpose roads are true public utilities. Superhighways are private preserves, the cost of which has been partially foisted upon the public.

Telephone, postal, and highway systems are all networks, and none of them is free. Access to the telephone network is limited by time charges on each call. These rates are relatively small and

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could be reduced without changing the nature of the system. Use of the telephone system is not in the least limited by what is transmitted, although it is best used by those who can speak coherent sentences in the language of the other party—an ability universally possessed by those who wish to use the network. Postage is usually cheap. Use of the postal system is slightly limited by the price of pen and paper, and somewhat more by the ability to write. Still, when someone who does not know how to write has a relative or friend to whom he can dictate a letter, the postal system is at his service, as it is if he wants to ship a recorded tape.

The highway system does not similarly become available to someone who merely learns to drive. The telephone and postal networks exist to serve those who wish to use them, while the highway system mainly serves as an accessory to the private automobile. The former are true public utilities, whereas the latter is a public service to the owners of cars, trucks, and buses. Public utilities exist for the sake of communication among men; highways, like other institutions of the right, exist for the sake of a product. Auto manufacturers, we have already observed, *produce* simultaneously both cars and the demand for cars. They also *produce* the demand for multilane highways, bridges, and oilfields. The private car is the focus of a cluster of right-wing institutions. The high cost of each element is dictated by elaboration of the basic product, and to sell the basic product is to hook society on the entire package.

To plan a highway system as a true public utility would discriminate against those for whom velocity and individualized comfort are the primary transportation values, in favor of those who value fluidity and destination. It is the difference between a far-flung network with maximum access for travelers and one which offers only privileged access to restricted areas.

Transferring a modern institution to the developing nations provides the acid test of its quality. In very poor countries roads are usually just good enough to permit transit by special, high-axle trucks loaded with groceries, livestock, or people. This kind of country should use its limited resources to build a spiderweb

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of trails extending to every region and should restrict imports to two or three different models of highly durable vehicles which can manage all trails at low speed. This would simplify maintenance and the stocking of spare parts, permit the operation of these vehicles around the clock, and provide maximum fluidity and choice of destination to all citizens. This would require the engineering of all-purpose vehicles with the simplicity of the Model T, making use of the most modern alloys to guarantee durability, with a built-in speed limit of not more than fifteen miles per hour, and strong enough to run on the roughest terrain. Such vehicles are not on the market because there is no demand for them. As a matter of fact, such a demand would have to be cultivated, quite possibly under the protection of strict legislation. At present, whenever such a demand is even slightly felt, it is quickly snuffed out by counterpublicity aimed at universal sales of the machines which currently extract from U.S. taxpayers the money needed for building superhighways.

In order to "improve" transportation, all countries—even the poorest—now plan highway systems designed for the passenger cars and high-speed trailers which fit the velocity-conscious minority of producers and consumers in the elite classes. This approach is frequently rationalized as a saving of the most precious resource of a poor country: the time of the doctor, the school inspector, or the public administrator. These men, of course, serve almost exclusively the same people who have, or hope one day to have, a car. Local taxes and scarce international exchange are wasted on *false public utilities*.

"Modern" technology transferred to poor countries falls into three large categories: goods, factories which make them, and service institutions—principally schools—which make men into modern producers and consumers. Most countries spend by far the largest proportion of their budget on schools. The school-made graduates then create a demand for other conspicuous utilities, such as industrial power, paved highways, modern hospitals, and airports, and these in turn create a market for the goods made for rich countries and, after a while, the tendency to import obsolescent factories to produce them.

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Of all "false utilities," school is the most insidious. Highway systems produce only a demand for cars. Schools create a demand for the entire set of modern institutions which crowd the right end of the spectrum. A man who questioned the need for high ways would be written off as a romantic; the man who questions the need for school is immediately attacked as either heartless or imperialist.

Schools as False Public Utilities

Like highways, schools, at first glance, give the impression of being equally open to all comers. They are, in fact, open only to those who consistently renew their credentials. Just as highways create the impression that their present level of cost per year is necessary if people are to move, so schools are presumed essential for attaining the competence required by a society which uses modern technology. We have exposed speedways as spurious public utilities by noting their dependence on private automobiles. Schools are based upon the equally spurious hypothesis that learning is the result of curricular teaching.

Highways result from a perversion of the desire and need for mobility into the demand for a private car. Schools themselves pervert the natural inclination to grow and learn into the demand for instruction. Demand for manufactured maturity is a far greater abnegation of self-initiated activity than the demand for manufactured goods. Schools are not only to the right of highways and cars; they belong near the extreme of the institutional spectrum occupied by total asylums. Even the producers of body counts kill only bodies. By making men abdicate the responsibility for their own growth, school leads many to a kind of spiritual suicide.

Highways are paid for in part by those who use them, since tolls and gasoline taxes are extracted only from drivers. School, on the other hand, is a perfect system of regressive taxation, where the privileged graduates ride on the back of the entire

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paying public. School puts a head tax on promotion. The underconsumption of highway mileage is not nearly so costly as the underconsumption of schooling. The man who does not own a car in Los Angeles may be almost immobilized, but if he can somehow manage to reach a work place, he can get and hold a job. The school dropout has no alternative route. The suburbanite with his new Lincoln and his country cousin who drives a beat-up jalopy get essentially the same use out of the highway, even though one man's car costs thirty times more than the other's. The value of a man's schooling is a function of the number of years he has completed and of the costliness of the schools he has attended. The law compels no one to drive, whereas it obliges everyone to go to school.

The analysis of institutions according to their present placement on a left-right continuum enables me to clarify my belief that fundamental social change must begin with a change of consciousness about institutions and to explain why the dimension of a viable future turns on the rejuvenation of institutional style.

During the sixties institutions born in different decades since the French Revolution simultaneously reached old age; public school systems founded in the time of Jefferson or of Atatürk, along with others which started after World War II, all became bureaucratic, self-justifying, and manipulative. The same thing happened to systems of social security, to labor unions, major churches and diplomacies, the care of the aged, and the disposal of the dead.

Today, for instance, the school systems of Colombia, Britain, the U.S.S.R., and the U.S. resemble each other more closely than U.S. schools of the late 1890's resembled either today's or their contemporaries in Russia. Today all schools are obligatory, open-ended, and competitive. The same convergence in institutional style affects health care, merchandising, personnel administration, and political life. All these institutional processes tend to pile up at the manipulative end of the spectrum.

A merger of world bureaucracies results from this convergence of institutions. The style, the ranking systems, and the paraphernalia (from textbook to computer) are standardized on the

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planning boards of Costa Rica or Afghanistan after the model of Western Europe.

Everywhere these bureaucracies seem to focus on the same task: promoting the growth of institutions of the right. They are concerned with the making of things, the making of ritual rules, and the making-and reshaping--of "executive truth," the ideology or fiat which establishes the current value which should be attributed to their product. Technology provides these bureaucracies with increasing power on the right hand of society. The left hand of society seems to wither, not because technology is less capable of increasing the range of human action, and providing time for the play of individual imagination and personal creativity, but because such use of technology does not increase the power of an elite which administers it. The postmaster has no control over the substantive use of the mails, the switchboard operator or Bell Telephone executive has no power to stop adultery, murder, or subversion from being planned over his network.

At stake in the choice between the institutional right and left is the very nature of human life. Man must choose whether to be rich in things or in the freedom to use them. He must choose between alternate styles of life and related production schedules.

Aristotle had already discovered that "making and acting" are different, so different, in fact, that one never includes the other. "For neither is acting a way of making-nor making a way of truly acting. Architecture [*techne*] is a way of making - - - of bringing something into being whose origin is in the maker and not in the thing. Making has always an end other than itself, action not; for good action itself is its end. Perfection in making is an art, perfection in acting is a virtue."* The word which Aristotle employed for making was "*poesis*," and the word he employed for doing, "*praxis*." A move to the right implies that an institution is being restructured to increase its ability to "make," while as it moves to the left, it is being restructured to allow increased "doing" or "*praxis*." Modern technology has increased the ability of man to relinquish the "making" of things to machines, and his potential time for "acting" has increased.

- *Nichomachean Ethics*, 1 140.

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"Making" the necessities of life has ceased to take up his time. Unemployment is the result of this modernization: it is the idleness of a man for whom there is nothing to "make" and who does not know what to "do"--that is, how to "act." Unemployment is the sad idleness of a man who, contrary to Aristotle, believes that making things, or working, is virtuous and that idleness is bad. Unemployment is the experience of the man who has succumbed to the Protestant ethic. Leisure, according to Weber, is necessary for man to be able to work. For Aristotle, work is necessary for man to have leisure.

Technology provides man with discretionary time he can fill either with making or with doing. The choice between sad unemployment and joyful leisure is now open for the entire culture. It depends on the institutional style the culture chooses. This choice would have been unthinkable in an ancient culture built either on peasant agriculture or on slavery. It has become inevitable for postindustrial man.

One way to fill available time is to stimulate increased demands for the consumption of goods and, simultaneously, for the production of services. The former implies an economy which provides an ever-growing array of ever newer things which can be made, consumed, wasted, and recycled. The latter implies the futile attempt to "make" virtuous actions into the products of "service" institutions. This leads to the identification of schooling and education, of medical service and health, of program-watching and entertainment, of speed and effective locomotion. This first option now goes under the name of development.

The radically alternative way to fill available time is a limited range of more durable goods and to provide access to institutions which can increase the opportunity and desirability of human interaction.

A durable-goods economy is precisely the contrary of an economy based on planned obsolescence. A durable-goods economy means a constraint on the bill of goods. Goods would have to be such that they provided the maximum opportunity to "do" something with them: items made for self-assembly, self-help, reuse, and repair.

The complement to a durable, repairable, and reusable bill of

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goods is not an increase of institutionally produced services, but rather an institutional framework which constantly educates to action, participation, and self-help. The movement of our society from the present--in which all institutions gravitate toward post-industrial bureaucracy--to a future of postindustrial conviviality--in which the intensity of action would prevail over production--must begin with a renewal of style in the service institutions--and, first of all, with a renewal of education. A future which is desirable and feasible depends on our willingness to invest our technological know-how into the growth of convivial institutions. In the field of educational research, this amounts to the request for a reversal of present trends.