



IN THE
KINGDOM
OF THE
UNABOMBER.

IN 1998, THE AUTHOR, A PSYCHOTHERAPIST AND OCCASIONAL
COLLEGE PROFESSOR, BEGAN A CORRESPONDENCE WITH THEODORE J. KACZYNSKI.
HEREWITH, THE RESULTS SO FAR.

by GARY GREENBERG

I
PLEASE FORGIVE MY INTRUSION
INTO YOUR LIFE.

THE FIRST TIME I got a letter from the Unabomber, I had my wife open it.

I was at work, the letter had come to my house, and neither of us wanted to wait to see what Ted Kaczynski, whose outgoing mail was by then inspected by the United States Bureau of Prisons, had to say. Sealed in a #10 envelope, the letter was addressed in the careful block capitals that the post office says will guarantee maximum efficiency. He even put his return address, in the same frank print, in just the right spot. No fool, Kaczynski knows that the mails will only work for you if you work with them.

The first letter, which arrived in mid-June of last year, had not come unbidden. Six months earlier, just after he'd pleaded guilty to the Unabom crimes, I'd written Kaczynski a letter. Although I had paid close attention to his case for nearly three years, from his emergence as a composite sketch demanding space for

his manuscript in a national publication to his arrest, incarceration, and abortive trial, my letter wasn't fan mail. Instead, it was a pitch.

Here's how it went:

January 24, 1998

Dear Mr. Kaczynski:

Please forgive my intrusion into your life. I am not sure if this letter will gain a sympathetic reading, or any reading for that matter. But after thinking long and hard about writing it, I'm taking the chance.

I would like you to consider allowing me to write a biography of you. I am sure you have had many requests from other people to do this, and for all I know you are already working with someone. Or, for that matter, you may be opposed in principle to the very idea. In the event, however, that neither of these are the case, I hope you'll read on and think about my request.

I know nothing of you, of course, except what the news media have decided to tell me, so what I am about to say is no doubt presumptuous — it's just my reading between the lines. It seems to me that you are one of the notable antimodernists of our age. At least since saboteurs hurled their sandals into machines and Luddites rioted in factories, people have deeply (and sometimes violently) objected to the fundamental tenets of the modern world. This protest is not against one or the other work of technology — against, say, nuclear weapons or automobiles — but rather against the world view that underlies and makes possible the creation of any particular machine or device. And, as many antimodernists have discovered, this world view does not tolerate radical protest. It must either co-opt it or eradicate its opposition, the latter through outright killing or mere discrediting. I believe this is one of the reasons that there has been so much interest in finding a psychiatric diagnosis for you: not, as the various lawyers have claimed, to ensure that you are competent or sane to stand trial, but rather to dismiss your protest as the ravings of a lunatic.

I should acknowledge here that I have firsthand knowledge of this misuse of the mental health profession, as I am a psychologist. My research and writing, however, have always been deeply critical of many of the practices of my profession, particularly insofar as it tends to pathologize what it does not understand or cannot tolerate. I have no wish to understand you as "schizophrenic" or "paranoid" or any of the other labels that have been thrown at you. To the contrary, I wish to tell your story partly in order to show how limiting and harmful those labels can be, both for the person who is labeled and for the society which might otherwise benefit from listening to him or her.

I should also mention that I know something of what it is like to try to live by anti-technological principles. Like many of our generation, I spent a number of years in a cabin in the woods with no plumbing or electricity, trying to live off the land. Circumstances forced me out of my refuge, but I will always remember both the difficulty and the joy of life off the grid. I will always remember the suspicion and outright dislike I aroused in people who could not understand what I was doing, and how precious the few who did understand were to me. Without wishing to seem presumptuous, I think I recognize in your story some of my own, and I think I see in your decision to live as you have an integrity that I deeply respect.

I believe your story deserves to be told with a sympathetic voice in a manner that does justice to the deep truth of your principles. I feel certain that I can tell it this

way. I am an experienced writer and interviewer, and I would greatly appreciate the chance to use my skills and talents on your behalf.

If you are interested in pursuing this any further, you are welcome to use the enclosed envelope to write me or to call collect if you can arrange for that. Or, if you like, I can come to see you. Whatever you decide, I wish you well, and I hope to hear from you soon.

Regards,
Gary Greenberg

My prospective subject was interested enough in the project to ask, through his lawyer, for more information about me. So, during the spring, I wrote Kaczynski a short autobiography. I told him about my therapy practice and my teaching, even a little about my personal life, and I sent him some of my academic writings — two articles and a book. I heard nothing directly, and in mid-May, 1998, after he'd been sent to the Supermax prison in Florence, Colorado, I sent him a gentle reminder of my existence. His first letter came in response.

Kaczynski couldn't know that he had written this letter on my 41st birthday, but despite myself, I allowed the coincidence to take on some meaning. Midlife had left me wondering about my professional craft, hard-pressed to fulfill therapy's promised miracle — not the offer of quick cures for psychic suffering, but the extension of a hope as American as Plymouth Rock: that with honest hard work, some weeping here and some soul-searching there, anyone can pursue and find happiness. The miracle embedded in this promise is that it keeps alive the possibility of a good life amid the execrable social order that Ted Kaczynski wanted to destroy.

The first letter itself wasn't much: a four-page, single-spaced document, handwritten with pencil. There were no signs of erasures or corrections. The prose didn't so much flow as march steadily from the beginning of an idea to its end, with nary a false logical step in the parade. Above all else, the letter conveyed a calm rationality, a sharp intellect, and a distinct courtliness. Kaczynski had detected my impatience to hear from him and explained, without complaint or self-pity, the restrictions under which he labored, the difficulty in getting money for stamps, the necessity of submitting letters to prison officials, the fact that he did not get my book because, according to some inscrutable prison regulations, he was not allowed hardcover editions. He informed me, out of fairness he said, that he was probably going to write an autobiography, but he allowed that a book by someone else would still be a worthwhile addition to the knowledge about him. He seemed accustomed to thinking of himself as a historic figure.

And then he asked me a question, based on the articles I had sent him: Did I really believe, he wondered, that there was no such thing as objective truth? After all, he said, a nuclear bomb's effects are predictable and deadly regardless of the culture in whose midst it explodes. He wanted to know how my relativism, which

he'd detected in my critique of psychiatric practice, could encompass this fact.

I wanted to know why he chose that particular example.

Even more, I wanted to know how the person who had fashioned this note, with its politeness and sensitivity, its levelheaded clarity, its measured expression of frustration — how this person had spent 17 years of his life perfecting a technique for building bombs and delivering them to people he didn't know.

But most of all, I was taken with the queer quiddity of it, the fact that I was holding in my hands a letter from the Unabomber. I don't have much sense of the allure of the artifact. I've stood in Monticello's preserved rooms, passed in front of the Liberty Bell, trod the ground at Gettysburg, paid due respect to the cause or the person or the event without hearing history speak or feeling the moment. But holding this letter, I glimpsed the engine that drives the history buff, the collector of autographs, the high bidder at auctions of John F. Kennedy's clothing. I wasn't finding my place in the flow of history, in the great unfolding of human events. None of that matters anymore anyway. All that's left is spectacle, and I had something spectacular in my hands: a letter from a man whose name everyone knew. Ted Kaczynski had written me a letter — by hand, no less. He wanted to know what I thought about heady philosophical matters. I felt hooked up, plugged in, reached out and touched. I went out and rented a safe deposit box.

II.

A LETTER WITH FIVE FOOTNOTES.

THE SECOND LETTER I got from Kaczynski came in early July; it was 20 pages long. It was addressed, "Dear Gary," and signed, "Best regards, Ted Kaczynski." From then on, we were on a first-name basis.

Some of the letter was personal: Kaczynski agreed with me that living in the woods was alienating, but that hadn't bothered him as it had me. Some of it was revealing: he told me that he had long had a recurring nightmare in which he and his cabin were transplanted to an island in the midst of a huge shopping mall. He paid me a compliment, telling me that he thought I was someone with whom it was possible to have a rational conversation. He insulted me, using one of my papers as an example of the way that philosophical writing buried its insights in "bullshit." Most of the letter was as dry as a math textbook. It had five footnotes, which ranged from simple amplifications of what he was saying to quibbles with me about my interpretation of early Christian martyrdom. The Unabomber had written me a treatise.

I should explain the occasion for this outpouring. The paper he criticized had nonetheless hit close to home for Kaczynski; it had an indirect but significant bearing on his case. The article was about a curious development in my profession. On a day in 1973, the psychiatric industry had eradicated a disease that had

theretofore resisted all attempts at treatment and ruined many lives. After two years of contentious meetings, disrupted conventions, and what one psychiatrist called “fevered polemical discussion,” the American Psychiatric Association officially deleted homosexuality from its Diagnostic and Statistical Manual. The love that dared not speak its name was now safe to discuss with the doctor. Not only was homosexuality no longer an illness, it had never been. It was all just a misunderstanding, and the doctors were very, very sorry.

This change was both good and bad news for the industry. The good news was that it explained why those millions of couch hours had failed to make desire flow in its proper channels. The psychiatrists hadn’t lacked skill; they had just tried to use it to fix something that wasn’t really broken.

This good news led to better: a new disease called “ego-dystonic homosexuality.” To the relief of therapists everywhere, gay people still needed professional help — no longer to try to reorient their sexual compass, but now to combat the effects of living in an intolerant society. Homosexuals were suffering not from homosexuality but from *internalized oppression*. The very doctors who had legitimized the stigma now stood at the ready to help its victims reclaim their dignity and accept what they once sought to eliminate. Of course, no one was going to get their money back, or even credit toward treatment of the new disease. This wasn’t penance or community service, but capitalism at its most exuberantly irrational.

The bad news, though, was grim. As one psychiatrist said, “If groups of people march and raise enough hell, they can change anything in time.... Will schizophrenia be next?” You can see the problem: all the hellraising in the world won’t stop cancer from eating up your insides, but enough marching might relieve psychiatrists of the power to make pathology out of deviant behavior. This would be a disaster for the industry. And even if it didn’t materialize, its very possibility was troublesome. The unmistakable hustle of therapists to keep up with the times, to avoid eating the dust of the sexual revolution, revealed psychiatry’s darkest secret: that most diagnoses are moral judgments wrapped in medicine’s cloak, and that therapists are really clerics disguised as scientists.

My paper was about the industry’s response to this bad news, how it had been caught with its pants down but still managed to maintain its professional dignity and protect its franchise on the scientific understanding and treatment of human behavior. It’s one of the great public relations coups of the 20th century, and it was of vital interest to Kaczynski because, in his view, if psychiatry had lost its franchise, he might not be in his current position: left to rot in Supermax, where his bed and table are made out of molded concrete and exercise takes place in a kennel.

Instead, he’d be dead, or at least under a death sentence.

To understand why my paper got a 20-page rise out of Kaczynski, you have to know a little Unabomber history.

Kaczynski’s lawyers knew a hopeless case when they saw one. There was a

warehouse of evidence against him: bomb-related hardware, journal entries lamenting his failures and applauding his triumphs, various eyewitnesses to his whereabouts. Even Hamilton Burger couldn't have booted this one. Worse, the federal government had a new death penalty, and the Unabomber seemed a fitting early target: he'd committed heinous crimes, embarrassed the FBI by eluding them for almost two decades, and seemed entirely unrepentant. To his lawyers, this meant that there was only one possible plan: to find a defense that would minimize their client's chances of getting executed. But to Kaczynski, this was an end that served the lawyers more than their client. And this wasn't fair, as he wrote to attorneys whose support he sought after he had been convicted:

The principle that risk of the death penalty is to be minimized by any means possible... is very convenient for attorneys because it relieves them of the obligation to make difficult decisions about values or to think seriously about the situation and the character of the particular client.

The problem, in Kaczynski's view, was that the single course that would save his life was to turn to the psychiatrists and make him out to be a crazed killer. After all, if you're going to kill in cold blood, which is what a juror is asked to order, your victim had better be a villain and not someone to whom you can, as we therapists say, relate. Fortunately for defendants with good lawyers, there is no end to my profession's ability to commonly denominate the most heinous act or the most loathsome personality: Charles Manson had a mother too. Thus is revulsion turned to empathy, and all transgression's horror reduced to the banal recitation of trauma everyone might share.

So the defense rounded up its investigators and psychiatrists to prove that this hermit, with his poor hygiene and inscrutable mailing list, was a nut. They even arranged, in a strange fulfillment of Kaczynski's bad dream, to bring his cabin to Sacramento for the jury to examine.

"You've got to see this cabin to understand the way this man lived," said Quin Denvir, his lead defense lawyer. What you would see, Denvir explained to the press, is the external manifestation of a demented mind. "The cabin," he said, "symbolizes what had happened to this Ph.D. Berkeley professor and how he came to live. When people think about this case, they think about the cabin."

Back in the early 80's, when I lived in my little cabin, I knew people who thought I was nuts simply by virtue of my chosen lifestyle. If I had had legal trouble, I don't think I would have wanted my lawyer to be among these doubters. But that was Kaczynski's situation. His lawyers wanted to save him from, execution, and to do so they were willing to turn the better part of his adult life into a case study. Kaczynski didn't want his life saved that badly.

He did manage to make the psychiatrists and psychologists they sent his way aware of his opposition. The doctors went in under various covers: to help him with his sleeplessness in the noisy jail, a condition that one doctor called

Kaczynski's "oversensitivity to sound"; to give him tests that might prove that he was neurologically intact; to assist in the preparation of his defense. And they all came back empty-handed: no raving lunacy or other florid symptom to report. Kaczynski refused to talk about his feelings, terminated interviews when clinicians started to talk about his mental illness, and told his lawyers repeatedly that he would not cooperate with their defense.

Kaczynski had opted out of American culture in the late 60's, at just the time that everyone was learning to speak the language of therapy, but it wasn't ignorance that kept him from a crying confession of psychic pain. He knew just what the shrinks were up to — not only in terms of his trial, but in the larger sense: they were trying to tell his story in their language, which was unacceptable to him.

Many clients refuse to accept the therapist's authority, but most are reduced to the squirming prevarication we call "resistance": missing appointments, changing the subject, disavows of feeling. But Kaczynski just up and said it. Dr. David Foster, who met with him five times in 1997, wrote, "Early on in our sessions, he looked me in the face and said, 'You are the enemy.'" For an academic paper I wrote about his psychiatric diagnoses, Kaczynski elaborated on this comment:

[What I was doing at the time] was simply laying on the table in a civil, or even friendly way, as a matter that needed to be taken into account in our discussions, the fact that Foster and I were on opposite sides of the ideological fence, that he as a psychiatrist was an important part of the system I abhorred, and that he was in that sense an enemy.

Now, there's only one thing to do with a person who won't behave like a client: throw the book at him. In Foster's version, Kaczynski's candor reflected "his paranoia about psychiatrists," itself part of his "symptom-based failure to cooperate fully with psychiatric evaluation." Thus, there are no principles in this world, only symptoms; no politics, only pathology. Of course, Foster, like all the others, knew what everyone else knew: that this man was the Unabomber, so he must be crazy. The fix was in from the beginning. Even his defense lawyers were in on the game, ultimately arguing that Kaczynski's disagreement with them about the mental-defect defense was more evidence of his mental defect. No wonder they all thought he was paranoid — they were out to get him.

Finally, after months of trying to resolve this conflict, after endless motions and counter motions and chambers conferences, even after some highly unusual letters from Kaczynski to Judge Garland Burrell — virtually begging him to relieve him of his lawyers — on January 5, 1998, the day his trial was to begin, Kaczynski stood up and said, "Your honor, before these proceedings begin, I would like to revisit the issue of my relations with my attorneys. It's very important." Kaczynski and the lawyers filed back into the judge's chambers, where he once again explained that he could not endure the daily injustice of a portrayal

that could not be refuted. And now, he said, he was done with these lawyers. He wanted a new one: Tony Serra, a San Francisco lawyer who had lurked on the margins of the case for 21 months, and who had promised to not use a mental-defect defense.

Serra proved to be unavailable. On January 7, Burrell ruled that Kaczynski's lawyers could introduce mental-status evidence, even against their client's wishes. Later that day, Serra finally surfaced, offering to take over the case, but not for nine more months, a delay that Burrell was unwilling to grant. Here is Kaczynski's account of what happened next, taken from his appeal. It's in the third person; Kaczynski the lawyer referring to Kaczynski the client:

During the night of January 7-8, Kaczynski attempted suicide by strangulation. When he applied the arrangement he had devised for strangling himself, he felt that his sight was growing dark and that he was losing consciousness; but too slowly, so that he feared he might become unconscious yet not die, and might perhaps be left with disabling brain damage. Hence he released the strangulation device, intending to try again with a better arrangement.... On the morning of January 8, before court opened, Denvir and Clarke [his lawyers] came to see Kaczynski at the holding cell outside the courtroom. Kaczynski said to them in agitated tones, "Look, I can't take this.... Isn't there any chance that the judge might still let me represent myself?" Denvir and Clarke were shaken by Kaczynski's obvious desperation, and they agreed to help him secure his right to self-representation.

But Kaczynski was crazy, or so the psychiatrists said, and a crazy man cannot represent himself. Now, at long last, the Unabomber was going to have to submit to the mental health experts: Judge Burrell refused to rule on the request for self-representation until Kaczynski cooperated with a psychiatric evaluation. Sally Johnson, a psychiatrist who had come to prominence when she determined that John Hinckley was insane, was flown in.

Johnson worked at amphetamine speed. In five days, by her own report, she read the full Unabomber archive, which by now took a single-spaced page simply to list and included "the complete set of writings obtained from Mr. Kaczynski's cabin in Montana," reportedly some 20,000 pages long. She interviewed all the lawyers on both sides, his mother, his brother, all but one of the seven experts who had weighed in on his mental status, and the town librarian in Lincoln, Montana. She made a pilgrimage to Kaczynski's cabin in its new home in an airplane-hangar-turned-warehouse in Sacramento. And she met with the defendant himself for 22 hours. Then she wrote a 47-page, single-spaced report that concluded, provisionally, that Kaczynski was a paranoid schizophrenia.

This in itself was nothing new; it had been the conclusion of all the other doctors, but they had had to coax the diagnosis either out of Kaczynski's known history or his current orneriness. They had, for instance, taken the fact that he used his own composted shit to fertilize his garden (a practice not quite so unusual as it sounds; there's even a name for it: humanure) as evidence that he suffered from "coprophilia," an unhealthy interest in feces. His hardscrabble,

third-world life showed a lack of self-care. And his failure to accept that he was truly deranged was “anosognosia,” the condition of being too sick to agree with the psychiatrist, a hallmark feature of schizophrenia, and a word to bear in mind the next time you disagree with a psychiatrist. But Johnson needed to do no diagnostic conjuring. In 22 hours, she had taken the measure of the man, gotten a full frontal view of the Unabomber, and she’d concluded that he was really and truly crazy, at least provisionally.

The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of the American Psychiatric Association*, which is a sort of *Audubon Field Guide* to human foibles, is very clear that paranoid schizophrenia is not just one of those diagnoses you send in to the insurance company to ensure reimbursement. It’s really not enough simply to think psychiatrists are the enemy, at least not in the current edition. You also have to have delusions, and Johnson thought she had found them, as she wrote toward the end of her report:

In Mr. Kaczynski’s case, the symptom presentation involves preoccupation with two principle [sic] delusional beliefs. A delusion is defined as a false belief based on incorrect inference about external reality that is firmly sustained despite what all most [sic] everyone else believes, and despite what constitutes incontrovertible evidence to the contrary.... [I]t appears that in the middle to late 1960s he experienced the onset of delusional thinking involving being controlled by modern technology. He subsequently developed another strong belief that his dysfunction in life, particularly his inability to establish a relationship with a female, was directly the result of extreme psychological verbal abuse by his parents. These ideas were embraced and embellished, and day-to-day behaviors and observations became incorporated into these ideas, which served to further strengthen Mr. Kaczynski’s investment in these beliefs.

So here was the final proof that Kaczynski was crazy: he thought technology controlled his life, and he believed that his parents had made mistakes that had made his life miserable.

As delusions go, these are problematic. Technology surely mediates our lives, even if it does not control them outright. And the question of parental abuse is an epistemological black hole. Rarely, if ever, does a therapist get corroboration (or incontrovertible contradiction) of a client’s claim that he or she was subjected to bad parenting. Indeed, it is often the case that therapists “help” their skeptical clients to see that they were abused.

Dr. Johnson would have had a partial answer to these objections: it wasn’t what Kaczynski believed so much as the tenacity of his belief that was troublesome. Try as she might, she couldn’t persuade him of the folly of either of his “delusions.” “When challenged on the initial premise [of either belief],” she wrote, “he appeared perplexed and it was evident that he did not challenge the belief system on his own regardless of existing evidence.” Even worse, “he does not challenge [his beliefs] in response to new information.”

Johnson promised to give Kaczynski her notes from their interviews but never did. That’s too bad, because it would be interesting to see just how this

conversation between two people who disagreed on basic premises went. One thing is clear, though: there was no way for Kaczynski to respond (other than agreeing with Dr. Johnson that technology wasn't such a bad thing and that his family was functional) that would not reinforce his diagnosis. What the psychiatrist overlooked, however, was that by her logic — in which their disagreement was about not politics, but reality itself — one of them had to be crazy. But it might not have been Kaczynski.

So Kaczynski was found guilty of schizophrenia, but still competent to stand trial, which meant that he was competent to defend himself. But Judge Burrell, whose knickers had been twisted by this mathematician's unassailable logic and dogged insistence on obtaining the protections of the system he hated, played his last card. When he denied Kaczynski's motion to represent himself, Burrell made no use of Johnson's report; he simply ruled that the motion had come too late, even if Kaczynski had repeatedly indicated that he was ready to proceed immediately. He had to go through with his lawyers' defense.

Kaczynski had been bamboozled. Now he had the worst of both worlds: the psychiatric exam he had never wanted, and the certain prospect of hearing its findings reiterated in open court. He felt he had no choice but to plead guilty. Again, from his appeal:

After Judge Burrell's ruling, Kaczynski had to choose one of two alternatives. He had to either accept the plea bargain, or allow Denvir and Clarke to begin immediately their portrayal of him as a grotesque and repellent lunatic. With extreme reluctance, Kaczynski chose the plea bargain.

Five months after he made this choice, when Kaczynski got my paper on the bankruptcy of psychiatric diagnosis, he must have thought that even if I didn't already know all that had happened to him, I would probably understand and believe him when he said he'd been bushwhacked. That might be why he wrote me a 20-page letter in response. There was someone inside the industry who wouldn't think he was crazy simply because he didn't like psychiatry. He must have figured he could use such a person, and he turned out to be right.

III.

THE FRANCHISER.

SO WHAT'S A NICE GUY like me doing with the Unabomber for a pen pal? If, as Kaczynski himself once asked me, I objected to his diagnosis, why not just write a paper for some professional journal and be done with it? Why cultivate a relationship with him? These questions should come up with any journalistic foray into another person's life, but because Kaczynski is a killer, they require answers.

One answer is that we had some common interests: we'd both lived in cabins without modern conveniences, shaken our fists at airplanes, and read Jacques Ellul. That's what I explained in my first letter to Kaczynski. But there was

something else we had in common, something I'd left unsaid: Both of us wanted to get published.

Is this too glib? Perhaps, but surely there's no author or aspiring author who didn't recognize Kaczynski's wish to be heard and resonate with its desperation. No over-the-transom prayers or letters to agents or walls plastered with terse rejections. He got what hardly anyone gets, let alone someone who lives in the woods: a virtual power lunch with Katharine Graham and Arthur Sulzberger. It's a comment on many things other than Ted Kaczynski's character that a person goes to such great lengths to achieve such ends.

But more was at work here than a grudging respect, something more personal: he'd run some serious interference for me, clearing an opening at exactly the time I was figuring out how the game was played. Just before his trial began, and before I sent my first letter to Kaczynski, my own book proposal, submitted in the normal way, had been rejected. The book was going to be called either *Is Your Bathroom Breeding Drug Users?* or *Oxygen Was My Gateway Drug*. My plan was to report on the cultural side of the drug war, all those Just Say No posters, D.A.R.E. classrooms, and drug-free workplace initiatives deployed in the battle to convince the citizenry that it's in their best interests to stay off drugs other than nicotine, caffeine, alcohol, and Prozac. I was going to go behind enemy lines, as it were, talk about how this war machine looked to one of its targets. A major publishing house agreed to consider it.

My agent delivered the news. "They think it's a really good idea. But the first thing someone is going to do in a bookstore is look at the cover and say, 'Who is this guy? Why should I listen to him?' Gary, You just don't have a name."

"But that's the point," I said. "The book is about what happens when a guy no one knows starts to poke around in big things. It's an Everyman thing. Think," I said, imagining how a real writer would pitch it, "Michael Moore on drugs." I winced at the inadvertent (and unappealing) double entendre, and decided to tack.

"Well, what do I do to get a name?"

"Just get an article published in *Rolling Stone* or somewhere like that. *The Wall Street Journal*, *Playboy* — anywhere really. Except *High Times*. Don't get published in *High Times*."

The funny thing is that she was serious. I hung up. And I swear this really happened: the words came to my mouth. "You want a name?" I said to the phone. "How about Ted Kaczynski?"

Stanley Elkin, who never quite got himself a name, wrote a novel called *The Franchiser* about a man who gains a strange inheritance from his wealthy godfather. He is given the right to borrow money at the prime rate in perpetuity. This lucky legatee, Ben Flesh by name, uses the leverage to buy franchises: Burger Kings, Travel Inns, Texaco service stations, all the roadside's hideous familiarity. He spends his days driving from one franchise to another, a man with nothing

but names, none of which is his own and all of which he owns. It's a Great American Novel.

Elkin recognized the peculiar genius of franchising: you don't buy anything but a name, and then you are simultaneously made someone and freed from the burdens of actually being anyone. So when Michael Jordan, announcing his retirement, referred to himself as "Michael Jordan," or when Bob Dole, running for President, referred to himself as "Bob Dole," it wasn't some kind of identity problem or rhetorical affectation; it was the exercise of the franchisee's greatest privilege: to trumpet a name that means so much to so many.

So I was going to try to get a name like Elkin's franchiser did: by going out into the marketplace and procuring one, which in this case meant convincing the owner to sell it.

As names go, Ted Kaczynski was not without its burdens. This man had, after all, killed people in a most terrifying way, people who were doing nothing more than sitting down to open their mail. Surely, I could find a name with less opprobrium attached.

But I recognized something familiar in Kaczynski's antimodern, anti-technology politics. In his pamphleteer style, he had written about things I'd studied and written about in my academic career: notably, that technology wasn't simply an assemblage of tools that awaited our use, wise or foolish. Rather, technology was a way of being in the world, one with some very peculiar psychological characteristics and social consequences. For, as various philosophers and novelists had been pointing out for some 200 years, it seemed to leave us fully aware of, but unable to do anything about, the way our devices alienated us from each other and the natural world, and, more to the point, threatened great peril.

The problem, in Kaczynski's view, was that technology had a life of its own, because technical progress had trumped all other possible ends to which humanity might be put. He made the point this way in "Industrial Society and its Future," better known as the Unabomber Manifesto.

The system does not and cannot exist to satisfy human needs. Instead, it is human behavior that has to be modified to fit the needs of the system. This has nothing to do with the political or social ideology that may pretend to guide the technological system. It is the fault of technology, because the system is guided not by ideology but by technical necessity. Of course the system does satisfy many human needs, but generally speaking it does this only to the extent that it is to the advantage of the system to do it. It is the needs of the system that are paramount, not those of the human being.

The worst of it, according to the Manifesto, was that technology didn't take away our freedom forcibly, in a manner that would have us up in arms like the villagers in *Frankenstein*. Rather, enchanted by its near-magic powers, we had become collaborators in our own enslavement:

When skilled workers are put out of a job by technical advances and have to undergo "retraining," no one asks whether it is humiliating for them to be pushed around in

this way. It is simply taken for granted that everyone must bow to technical necessity and for good reason: If human needs were put before technical necessity there would be economic problems, unemployment, shortages or worse. The concept of “mental health” in our society is defined largely by the extent to which an individual behaves in accord with the needs of the system and does so without showing signs of stress.

None of this was original to Kaczynski, although it had probably never appeared in *The Washington Post* before. The Industrial Revolution has always had its naysayers, artists and philosophers and social theorists who question what it is doing to us. Crucial among these questions, at least for a psychologist, is how we manage to be shaped by technology without either knowing it or being able to do anything about it. William Blake, an early antimodernist, captured this process with his image of “mind-forg’d manacles,” shackles that are so compelling and comfortable that they become undetectable, and show up only obliquely, as symptom. That’s the job of the therapist: to come along and reveal to a person the way they are, without knowing it, imprisoned by their own unacknowledged history. But some cases of self-imprisonment are harder to understand and point out than others. And the one that Kaczynski noted is perhaps the hardest of all. Technology not only helps us to accomplish things, with the occasional failure or accident or frustration; it also constructs us as the kind of people who are hard-pressed to be sufficiently critical of technology.

Perhaps the mental health industry, as Kaczynski implied, is inescapably another of the sorcerer’s apprentices. That’s one way to explain the difficulty of understanding, at least in psychological terms, this central mystery of technology, the way it seems to keep us blind to itself. But the fact is that no one really understands how we can listen to another report about the greenhouse effect even as we drive our cars, festooned with “Save The Earth” bumper stickers, to fetch a loaf of bread. No one really knows how we sustain this level of what psychologists call cognitive dissonance or why we barely perceive it. Neither can anyone explain why we are not wracked by guilt and anxiety or at least repelled by our own bad faith. And because we (psychologists, that is) don’t really understand these things, we can’t do anything about them, even if we want to. Such has always been the problem with thoroughgoing indictments of modernity: they’re long on critique and short on solution.

The Manifesto’s proposed therapy parted ways with this aspect of anti-modernism:

The only way out is to dispense with the industrial-technological system altogether. This implies revolution, not necessarily an armed uprising, but certainly a radical and fundamental change in the nature of society.

And it offered a very loose treatment plan.

It would be better to dump the whole stinking system and take the consequences.

My philosophical kinship with Kaczynski — in which I don't think I was by any means alone; as Robert Wright wrote in *Time*, "There's a little bit of the Unabomber in most of us" — stopped short of this let-the-chips-fall confidence. I like the fact that I don't have to worry about getting smallpox, and I'm not quite willing to say that the whole system ought to be jettisoned, or the citizenry rallied to arms by random violence, as Kaczynski evidently wanted.

But the fact that he was a killer perhaps only increased my interest. Was it possible that Kaczynski's moral depravity was understandable as the snapping of a weak link in a chain pulled too tight? Was it possible that his terrorism was only the leading edge of a series of even more desperate acts to come as that cognitive dissonance came to be less and less tolerable? That his very character seemed to bear the imprint of large social and historical forces, that he seemed to know what those forces were, and that he was very, very famous — all this made the franchise irresistible, despite my squeamishness.

But there was a problem even beyond the obvious ethical one: in the public eye, Kaczynski had only been a political figure for a blink. Quickly, as William Glaberson of *The New York Times* reported, he'd been transformed into a pathetic lunatic.

It seems hard to believe now, but it wasn't very long ago that the Unabomber seemed like a serious person. To read about him in many newspaper and magazine accounts was to hear of a mysterious philosopher: dangerous yet compelling, brilliant, intriguing. Yes, he was troubled, even evil — but he was a man of ideas. Now he's just a nut. Or, perhaps worse, a fraud.

Glaberson reviewed "scores" of articles and TV news accounts to chronicle this shift, singling out *The Washington Post* and *The Los Angeles Times* (and leaving out his own paper, which had undoubtedly known all along that the guy was a sandwich short of the whole picnic) for their about-faces. He got professional counterculturist Todd Gitlin to explain the Kaczynski jokes:

In many of the jokes, the Unabomber seems "pathetic more than evil," said Professor Gitlin.

It may be that the humor comes from a deep fear of the harm that a disturbed criminal can do. "There is something that is very difficult for society to confront, and that is that crazy people have the means to do damage," Professor Gitlin said. "If you think of him as a joke, then you don't have to confront that: He has become shtick."

Environmental terrorist to madman-bomber to punchline: the metamorphosis is so complete that Gitlin forgot that Kaczynski started out as something even more scary than a disturbed criminal.

Celebrity culture doesn't just hand out names for free. Kaczynski, having gotten famous (and published) by unsanctioned means, had to pay the price. He couldn't be forgotten, and he certainly couldn't be bought out of his beliefs. So he had to be turned into kitsch. And, to make things worse, his fashioning as a pop-culture trinket was largely brought about by his own lawyers, at least

according to Glaberson:

The shift in public image which began with Mr. Kaczynski's arrest for carrying out an 18-year campaign of bombings that killed 3 and injured 28, accelerated after his lawyers said he was a delusional paranoid schizophrenic who believes people have electrodes implanted in their brains.

To keep Kaczynski safe for democracy, his license to seriousness had to be revoked. If he's crazy, after all, then he can be famous without being meaningful, his unsettling denunciation of modern technology reduced to the entertainment of a lunatic's raving.

And who, besides the lawyers, was responsible for this outcome, this down-the-rabbit-hole reversal of logic whereby a rational, if contentious, belief — that there's something wrong with the way technology has colonized our landscapes, both interior and exterior — becomes the mark of insanity? Therapists, of course, the people trusted, for no particularly good reason, with the authority to decide who is a genuine apostate and who is just plain nuts, whom we should listen to and whom we can dismiss. The first person who might have predicted this outcome was Kaczynski himself, who worried a lot more about therapists' inability to distinguish pathology from dissent than about their implanting electrodes in his brain. The culture indulged his anxiety, and its agents were my own colleagues.

In the end, I'd just as soon forgo franchising and stick with my own name. But Ted Kaczynski — the antimodernist, cabin-dwelling, diagnostically labeled, famous murderer/writer with a cause — that name was the next best thing, a name I could use without too much misgiving at the fact that I was a user.

Does this mean that I am guilty of exploitation with intent? In trying to explain how his identity was constructed by the mass media, Kaczynski and I corresponded about Janet Malcolm's famous passage in *The Journalist and the Murderer*: "Every journalist who is not too stupid or too full of himself to notice what is going on knows that what he does is morally indefensible." Malcolm, who has turned self-reflection into a writing style that defies Zeno's paradox, is getting at the way that all journalists must be franchise-seekers and thus must use others for their own gain. Some writers, like Malcolm, manage to franchise themselves; others get their name recognition from the journals they write for; but the rest of us don't have these luxuries. The writer must be determined in his attempt to get the other to give him a name, particularly when his subject is not for sale.

I never hid my ambition from Kaczynski, never claimed that I was in it solely for the intellectual stimulation or to make the world a better place. As our correspondence unfolded in August and September, he often asked me why I was so interested in him and his case. So I wrote to him about my ambition and my misgivings about my ambition:

My wanting to write about you... is, after all, an act of appropriation; I am seeking to take something from you and weave it into something of mine.... Much as I might not

want to, I must admit to being among those who want to get in on the ground floor with you. I have certain aspirations as a writer and a commentator on modern mental health practice, and getting to know you serves them. I don't know how this makes you feel (although I'd be glad to hear), but it would be disingenuous of me to claim this was not the case. All I can do is try very hard to make sure that my aspirations do not lead me to exploit or otherwise hurt you....

I don't know if I would have been so honest had I not figured Kaczynski for someone exquisitely sensitive to being manipulated. Here is the truth of what Malcolm says. It is impossible even for me — the agent of these words and acts — to say if my honesty was in service of the Right and the Good, or if it was just another sales pitch. In fact, it's hard to say if this kind of confession without absolution is cheap or noble or just superstitious: if I'm only frank enough about my sins, then I can continue to get away with them.

That's why later on, when another of Kaczynski's associates called me a fibber, I didn't object. Somehow, I thought he had a point.

But I'm not sure that honesty, even for the best reasons, is a good moral defense. I mean, there I was worrying about how it made the Unabomber feel that I might be exploiting him, confessing my wish to appropriate his story to a man who had appropriated the very lives of other people. Either I'm casting scruples before swine or turning the truth into a shill.

In the end, it's hard to know if the wish to be heard is about the message more than being the famous messenger. We know ourselves too well to parse motive. Honesty just isn't up to the job.

IV.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE U.S. POSTAL SERVICE.

OR MAYBE MOTIVE is simple to understand, as simple as an explosion.

Terrorism, after all, is about finding the fulcrum. The terrorist takes a little powder and salt and places it in the best possible proximity to the place where things pivot, thus turning his marginality to Archimedean advantage. Leverage is a form of laziness, really.

The postal service was Kaczynski's ultimate and best fulcrum. It wasn't enough to leave bombs in parking lots and university labs, as he had in the early stages of his terror campaign. Even when a Sacramento businessman, apparently clearing away a bomb disguised as a road hazard to spare someone else a flat tire, was killed, it didn't, perhaps, attract a concerted enough focus. This may be because altruism is not a critical pivot point of our society. That someone got killed when he stopped minding his own business might inspire as much contempt for him as fear for ourselves.

But the postal service, that's something else entirely. It's the most primitive

and venerable of the ligatures that hold us together. The engineers of our republic were so convinced of the importance of a trustworthy post to a functioning and cohesive society that they made its establishment an early order of business. The Continental Congress, in a symbolic shot across Britain's bow, appointed Benjamin Franklin to wrest the delivery of mail from the Redcoats in 1775. The Articles of Confederation put aside their fear of central government long enough to establish a national post office as a power superseding state control. And the Marshall Court's famous implied powers doctrine determined that a post office was essential to Congress's ability to execute its Constitutional duties. Some people even think the post office was what made it possible to keep such far-flung territories as California on board with the rest of the Republic.

No doubt this history, like most history, is far from the mind of millions of Americans opening their day's mail. And that's the point. No one wants to wonder if the next package is a bomb. All the protections implied in those ominous signs about tampering with the mail, in the inviolability of the envelope's seal, is evidence that Kaczynski indeed had found a pivot close to the heart of things.

The postal service was, in any event, a fitting way to communicate with a man who eschewed and hated modern technology, and who wrote very good letters to boot. I could communicate with all the other important people in my life face-to-face, or with the quick ease of email or telephone. But it took us 18 days, at a minimum, to accomplish one exchange of letters. An Express Mail letter could take as many as seven days to get from my post office to his cell. Much of the delay was easy to account for: letters had to be read going in and out, presumably to be certain that he and I weren't conspiring to commit mayhem. (Indeed, I often wondered what the readers made of our letters, which discussed everything; I think of them as the silent witnesses to our relationship.) But I always thought it was possible that the deliberate pace of our exchanges was the post office's means of revenge.

If that's true, then it's just more evidence that Kaczynski found the right fulcrum. This discovery, of course, is the terrorist's best hope. But, you may rightly wonder, what did he want to do with his leverage? David Gelernter, whom the Unabomber maimed, has written of his belief that Kaczynski was just trying to find a way to get his name in lights the easy way. I think Gelernter's at least half right. I don't believe that Kaczynski really wanted to get famous or rich. But I do think he wanted badly to be heard, not only because he wanted to point out the disaster of what he called industrial society but because he knew that it was in the nature of that society to drown out a voice like his own. He knew he had no chance of having a voice through the conventional means, so he set out to cheat.

So there's your motive. Kaczynski had found a fulcrum. And he was going to be my lever.

V.
THE MARK OF ZORRO.

BUT WHAT ABOUT the rest of the letters? a reader must be asking at this point. My answer is, I'm getting there.

I'm not trying to be coy. It's just that the letters tell a story, but without their context, they are only pure commodity. I never said it straight out, but I'm sure I implied to Kaczynski that I wouldn't be so baldly exploitative, just as I'm sure I implied that I wouldn't quote from them without his permission. That's why, even though lawyers tell me I could make a case to do so, I've refrained; not only because, as one magazine editor put it to me, "He doesn't have much better to do than file lawsuits from prison," but because I have to live with myself.

Fairness, though, demands and allows at least some description. There are 27 letters, a stack one inch thick. They date from June 9, 1998, to June 1, 1999. Twenty of them came between August 11 and December 11 of last year. They're on lined, usually white but occasionally yellow paper, mostly written in pen. Kaczynski's evenly spaced block letters are neat and unadorned. His left margin is ruler-straight, his right taken to the edge of the page unless that would disrupt the orderly rhythm of his print. Perhaps Kaczynski's penmanship is his attempt to mimic his impounded typewriter, the one on which he wrote the Manifesto. Maybe he misses it.

Kaczynski's grammar and syntax are as precise as his handwriting. His carefully unbroken infinitives and faithfully maintained parallel structures read like examples from Strunk and White. I imagine sometimes a schoolboy's pride in following the rules, his relish of a job well done, lurking in all this compliance; Kaczynski's rebelliousness, his love of the wild, stops here.

In his letters, Kaczynski is sometimes pedantic and other times argumentative. But leavening them throughout, in addition to his unfailing politeness and moderation of tone, is a sense of humor that stops just short of wisecrass. In this, he reminds me of a very smart adolescent boy whose sharp intellect and way with words can, if only momentarily, put his insecurity out of mind. In a word, Kaczynski's letters are jaunty, a quality that I don't have to quote in order to show. I just have to tell you that when he signs his name, he often underlines it with a scrawled "Z" that looks, for all the world, like the mark of Zorro.

VI.
"HE PROBABLY NEVER FELT A THING."

ONE LAST WORD on motive. The problem that grabbed my attention went way beyond Kaczynski's image. The real opportunity here, the one that made the franchise seem valuable to me, was to write about the way all things Unabomber had been fashioned. Kaczynski hadn't thrown a wrench into the machinery of

mass culture so much as he had kicked it into high gear.

Take, for instance, the story of Hugh Scrutton, the man killed by a bomb Kaczynski left in a parking lot in Sacramento in December 1985. Here's how the Government Sentencing Memorandum describes the victim:

Friends recall Hugh as a man who embraced life, a gentle man with a sense of humor who had traveled around the world, climbed mountains, and studied languages. He cared about politics, was "fair and kind" in business, and was remembered as "straightforward, honest, and sincere." He left behind his mother, sister, family members, a girlfriend who loved him dearly, and a circle of friends and colleagues who respected and cared for him.

And here's Kaczynski's account of the killing, decoded by the Government and presented in the same memorandum.

Experiment 97. Dec. 11, 1985. I planted a bomb disguised to look like a scrap of lumber behind Rentech Computer Store in Sacramento. According to the San Francisco Examiner, Dec. 20, the "operator" (owner? manager?) of the store was killed, "blown to bits, on Dec. 12. Excellent. Humane way to eliminate somebody. He probably never felt a thing. 25,000 reward offered. Rather flattering.

The contrast couldn't be clearer. One man — chortling to himself in his ramshackle cabin — exults over having obliterated another — an honest, hardworking man who was performing what the sentencing memorandum called a "simple act of courtesy, trying to remove what looked like a potential hazard to others." It's effective rhetoric: no one can read this account and not be moved or think that the killer deserves to lose the same rights he stole from the victim.

But here's an interesting thing, one that tells us that more is at stake here than simple justice: The "act of courtesy" by which the Government said Scrutton was killed seems to be a fiction, one of those tales that gains its truth by some combination of plausibility and repetition, that takes hold because the cultural climate is just right for it. It's a little piece of mythic filigree that was added to the story slowly and imperceptibly over the 13 years between the murder and Kaczynski's sentencing.

Scrutton's violent and untimely end is awful enough, so awful, one might say, that it doesn't matter if the Good Samaritan story isn't precisely true. But, by the same token, one might also reasonably wonder why and how the embellishment came about in the first place.

At first, the simple horror of the death could be conveyed in a workmanlike account like *The Sacramento Bee's*:

A Sacramento businessman was killed Wednesday when a bomb that had been left behind his store blew up in his face, authorities said.

The blast shortly after noon mortally wounded Hugh Campbell Scrutton, 38, owner of RenTech Computer Rentals in the Century Plaza shopping center...

The device exploded just moments after Scrutton left his store through the back door and headed for the parking lot, according to reports. The blast blew Scrutton

about 10 feet.

The first person to arrive at the scene said Scrutton cried out, "Oh my God! Help me!"

Scrutton, of Carmichael, was pronounced dead at 12:34 p.m. at University Medical Center. He reportedly took the full force of the blast in his chest. There were no known witnesses.

Investigators placed the time of the blast at 12:04 p.m. They said Scrutton was on his way to the parking lot when, they believe, he spotted an object, which may not have been identifiable as a bomb.

[Sgt. Roger] Dickson said it appeared that Scrutton, who had only keys in one hand and a book in the other, may have leaned over to examine or move the object when it exploded. "The injuries were consistent with that kind of movement."

Eight days later, the *Bee* put a little more face on Scrutton.

"Mr. Scrutton was an exemplary citizen with an unblemished character. I am certain that he was not a specific victim of the bomber," said Lt. Ray Biondi, head of the Sacramento County Sheriff's Department homicide bureau. "Anyone who happened by the business could well have been the victim."

Three months later, Scrutton was still on Sacramento's mind — now as the victim of an unsolved crime. And, the *Bee* reported, he was still an exemplar.

"Hugh was the best boss I ever had," said a RenTech employee, who asked that his name not be printed. "He was an honest, kind person. And that really makes it harder, because it's such a shame when someone that nice is taken from you."

So far, the mythmaking is gentle and slow and almost invisible: a good and law-abiding man had gotten blown to pieces in a parking lot. Even unadorned, it shows us that the terrorist had found his pivot: The dead man could have been you or me.

By 1994, however, it began to seem that Scrutton's death was one in a series of bombings carried out by someone *Playboy* called "The Scariest Criminal in America." And suddenly, Scrutton had a motive:

It is five minutes before noon on December 11, 1985. Hugh Scrutton, 38 years old and single, opens the back door of his computer rental store in Sacramento and steps out into a bright day, where his death waits just a few feet away in a crumpled paper bag. Sunlight glints off the chrome of cars and pickups parked in the big asphalt lot that opens to the west. A 15-mile-per hour wind blows south off the eastern hip of California's Coastal Range and rattles the bag. Scrutton steps past it, then turns. There are two Dumpsters right by the door, he thinks. Why do people do this? Jesus, just drop the damn thing in.

Scrutton bends down and reaches for the bag with his right hand. There is no time to consider what happens next.

It's hard to understand how a *Playboy* fact checker could fail to question a reporter's claim to know Scrutton's thoughts at the moment of his death. But the flourish of altruism, first spotted here, fits in, certainly better than if *Playboy* had had Scrutton seized by a need to keep his parking lot clean or a hope that the bag

contained cash. Scrutton isn't quite yet the Good Samaritan, but he is good enough to hate litter. He may be better than you or me.

The embellishment was soon an integral part of Scrutton's story. The month after the *Playboy* article appeared, Thomas Mosser, a New Jersey advertising executive was killed by a bomb in his home. Mosser's death was almost immediately identified as another in the series, and *Newsday* reviewed the earlier victims, including Scrutton.

Hugh Campbell Scrutton walked out the back door of his RenTech computer rental store. He bent down to clear what looked like clutter, about two feet from the door.

Sgt. Dickson's 1985 speculation has now become a fact, even for the paper that initially reported it as a theory: "Scrutton ... bent to pick up what appeared to be a pile of litter," the *Bee* reported in November, 1997. He didn't just trip on or idly kick the bomb. He had a motive, one that, six months later, became part of the United States Government's official story about Hugh Scrutton.

Robert Graysmith's true-crime book, *Unabomber: A Desire to Kill*, gives us this version of the Good Samaritan story:

On December 11, 1985, only two weeks before Christmas, Scrutton got up from his desk and made ready for a lunchtime appointment.... He opened the rear door of his store and looked out upon a windswept parking lot in the strip mall and pulled up his collar. Near a Dumpster he saw a block of wood about four inches high and a foot long. There were sharp nails protruding from the block, a road hazard or, even worse, a real danger to the trash men or the transient who occasionally came by to pick through the Dumpsters. He bent over to move it. It was heavy. Lead weights had been inserted in the lower two inches of the block.

Graysmith's rhetorical economy here is remarkable, each image used for all it is worth and then some. Bums and trash men in need of the protection of a hard-working businessman, an inhospitable parking lot, a lead-heavy road hazard (not just trash, but dangerous and inconvenient trash), the now-famous wind, and, serendipity for the storyteller, Christmas. Graysmith hardly needs to take up residence in Scrutton's blasted life to venture this explanation. He just needs to know his audience.

Decorated as a Good Samaritan, the innocent but hapless bystander takes on the glow of decent people's highest aspirations. It's not enough to vilify the bomber simply for murdering someone or to appeal to the usual explanations — passion or dementia, revenge or hatred — to account for Scrutton's death. Because these are political crimes. The Unabomber was a subversive, in the most elemental sense of the word. He wanted to turn things upside down. What kept Industrial Society going, in his view, was a belief in technology that amounted to a dangerous delusion. And he wanted to disabuse the rest of us of our illusion by blowing up whichever you or me kicked or tripped on or tried to steal or safely discard the parking-lot bomb. Not because he was crazy or randomly depraved, but because he believed something that was at least coherent.

And that's why Scrutton's story had to be adorned, why he couldn't be left as the victim of random cruelty. At stake, after all, is this central problem of modern life: that we pursue and sometimes achieve happiness with such blithe disregard for consequence. The filigree tells us just what terrible kind of monster Kaczynski is: the kind that would kill an altruist.

VII. THE PLEA BARGAIN.

BUT IF KACZYNSKI was so bad, then why was his plea bargain — which, after all, ensured that he would not be put to death — met with such relief? Why was George Will left to weigh in virtually alone with his thin-lipped outrage at a society too namby-pamby to strap a convicted murderer to a gurney and shoot him up with lethal drugs?

The editorial pages, which from coast-to-coast declared justice the victor, had their own explanation, perhaps best summed up by *The Los Angeles Times*.

With Kaczynski's guilty plea, the victims, the nation and federal prosecutors should gain some satisfaction. His admission that he committed these horrific crimes should bring a measure of solace to the Unabomber's surviving victims and the families of victims. His incarceration ... will keep him safely locked away for life. Moreover, federal prosecutors and taxpayers save the millions of dollars a Sacramento trial and, later, a federal trial ... would have cost.

In management-consultant parlance, it was a win-win deal. The defense lawyers had saved their client's life, despite overwhelming evidence that he had murdered with malicious intent. The prosecution had avoided uncomfortable questions about the FBI crime lab's work in the case and the legality of the search of Kaczynski's cabin. David Kaczynski, the Unabomber's brother, who had turned him in only after the Government assured him they would not seek the death penalty, had been spared the mark of Cain.

But, as with Scrutton's altruism, there's more to this story, something first made clear by William Finnegan, reporter for *The New Yorker* and author of the most perspicuous account of the trial's abrupt end. Behind the Kaczynski trial, he said, lurked the O.J. trial. In his view, the most relieved party was the presiding judge, Garland Burrell, who had sidestepped the shit that his colleague Lance Ito was still scraping off his shoes. The ill-fitting glove, the lying detective with an interest in screenplays, the race card, the strange coincidence of a dog and a houseboy both named Kato — these icons of humiliated justice would be denied their Unabomber equivalents.

The Sacramento Bee, the hometown paper, recognized this motive. *The Bee*, presumably read by people close to the victims (not to mention the disappointed restaurateurs and hoteliers, the street vendors and cab drivers who had watched the O.J. trials and anticipated the arrival of the medicine show to their Main Street), had to explain the whimpering ending with something less abstract than

justice. After reciting all the winners and remarking that closure had been achieved, the *Bee* drew a bead on another thought.

In addition, this result avoids the spectacle of having the government prosecute an obviously deranged defendant or — worse yet — watching him meander through reality attempting to defend himself.

Although judged competent to stand trial, it has become increasingly evident that Kaczynski is greatly disturbed. His behavior, the contentions of his lawyers and the diagnosis of a respected government psychiatrist have made that clear. No good would be served by the circus that his trial could so easily have become, that could only have brought disrepute on the process.

The New York Times also noted that “Mr. Kaczynski’s mental illness threatened to disrupt the progress of any trial,” turning it into what *The New York Post* worried could only be a “distasteful spectacle.” Even Butch Gehring, described by *The San Francisco Chronicle* as “the closest thing Kaczynski had to a friend in Lincoln, Montana,” had “worried that [Kaczynski] was going to turn this into a weird sideshow, and that wouldn’t have been good for anyone.” The Unabomber trial had packed its tents and gone, and the citizenry was safe from its freaks and barkers, and, most of all, its deranged ringmaster.

Listening to these protests over the degradation of public discourse and of the otherwise reputable justice system, you have to wonder whose satellite dishes those were outside Ito’s courtroom, who wrote all those front-page headlines, who dispatched an army of America’s reporters to broadcast each evening’s lead live from Los Angeles in the first place. Did the unanimous consent to the Kaczynski verdict signal the newsies’ own shame at what had just unfolded? Or were they simply relieved that temptation too great to pass up — a cold-blooded murderer meandering his way through reality just can’t be bad for ratings — had been removed from their reach?

Of course, it’s also possible that the production values of this spectacle were all wrong. The O.J. trial had so many things going for it: a well-dressed celebrity defendant, colorful lawyers, a media-friendly judge, the Hollywood backdrop. All the players seemed to know their parts. And the “deep cultural issues” reiterated as the excuse for carpet-bombing America with O.J. news — domestic violence, the cost of a good legal defense, racism — were perfect for a viewership desperately in need of reassurance that all these hours of watching and talking and reading about it were something more than shallow self-indulgence. These themes could be endlessly indulged without anything important ever getting said or anyone important ever changing anything.

But Kaczynski took control of his own spectacle, made life impossible for the scriptwriters. Even after he was put in jail, he eluded capture by headline and soundbite. Every time the posse caught up with him, he beat it cross-country and left a cold trail. Was he the pedantic pamphleteer? The Last Honest Man, holding out for a world safe for spotted owls and self-reliance? The supremely confi-

dent terrorist? The brilliant but troubled recluse? The paranoid schizophrenic who had judges and lawyers (and reporters) chasing their own tails? One-and-a-half years after his arrest, they still didn't have him figured out.

Kaczynski's ability to keep everyone guessing should not have come as a surprise. He was, after all, an expert at finding the fulcrum, measuring the exact length of the lever necessary to get the job done. He'd gotten America's newspapers of record — papers that are generally very clear about what and whom they publish — to print, at their own expense, a 35,000-word manuscript that systematically denounced everything they stood for. And if the events leading up to the plea bargain were any indication, this prank was small potatoes compared with the havoc this man could wreak if he got the whole apparatus of spectacle under his control. No wonder they were relieved.

VIII.

IN WHICH THE AUTHOR DISCOVERS THAT THE UNABOMBER IS A COMPLICATED MAN.

JULY AND EARLY AUGUST brought more letters. They took a surprising and unsettling turn toward the personal, at least insofar as we seemed to be searching for common ground.

This wasn't all that hard to find. Partly that was because certain subjects were off-limits, notably anything to do with the Unabomber crimes. Kaczynski had made it clear from the beginning that he wasn't going to put anything in writing that affirmed his guilt, as all he had really done at his plea bargain was to concede that the Government was probably going to win its case. He needed to keep his options open for a possible appeal.

So we discussed our mutual interests — back-to-the-land living, the politics of psychiatry, books. Kaczynski asked me to send him a book, *Ecoterror*, by Ron Arnold, free marketeer. The book linked the Unabomber and Earth First! terrorism to Al Gore's wonky environmentalism, arguing that all this concern with spotted owls and old-growth redwoods was just cover for people too faithless to place their fate (and that of the earth) in the care of the "invisible hand." I thought the book might make Kaczynski angry, and I told him so (wondering what an angry Kaczynski would be like in writing), but he surprised me by saying that he liked it quite a bit, because it polarized issues, and without polarization, revolutionary change just can't happen. This had been one of the Unabomber Manifesto's first points: that liberal politics were bound to fail to reform anything because Leftists were too busy being nice. Kaczynski liked the trenchant tone of Arnold's argument: he recognized him as a fellow polemicist.

Kaczynski's letters were dense, carefully argued, and full of promise. He stopped short of saying he'd cooperate with me in writing his biography, but he

was clearly willing to discuss the matter. Even more promising, he had told me I could come to visit him, although, as I found out in early August, he was currently unable to get his visitor's list approved by the prison.

I spent a good part of the summer getting to know the Unabomber. I was trying to convince him that I was a worthy writer and interlocutor, someone he'd be wise to trust his life story to. But I was also interested in a way I had not anticipated: Kaczynski's thinking was careful and calm and deep, and his material ranged from Russian history to Hobbes' *Leviathan* to Desmond Morris. He pulled out obscure facts from his mental archive — telling me once, for instance, that he didn't bathe very often when he lived in Montana, but that bathing wasn't all it was cracked up to be, and in fact there was a law on the books in Indiana (he thought) that made it a crime to bathe in the winter, which Kaczynski thought meant that pneumonia was more of a problem than body odor. (He often apologized if he couldn't cite sources, but I never thought he was making this stuff up.)

Although I resisted treating Kaczynski as a case study, I couldn't help but make some clinical observations about him. I was discovering that he was just as complicated and full of self-contradiction as the rest of us. While he tried to live a life of complete consistency between his beliefs and his actions, in some ways he embodied the biggest opposition of all. He was at once a mathematician, a man of science, entirely convinced of reason's superordinance as a means of negotiating the world, and at the same time a savage critic of rationality's greatest achievement: technology. It's impossible to divorce Descartes's ego cogitating its way to certainty from Henry Ford's Model T slipping down the conveyor belt — both grow from the desire to hold the world firmly in our grasp, to make it yield to us. Most of us see the resulting, nest-fouling problem. Kaczynski saw it too, but he seemed unable to turn this infinite loop of alienation into the wry irony the rest of us are so good at. It just pissed him off.

A differently constituted man might find the tension of being stretched across this great rift of modernity unbearable. Perhaps this is why the psychiatrists who evaluated him found him to be schizophrenic even though, at least in their presence, he never behaved like a schizophrenic. Maybe they divined the desperate, irreconcilable conflict in his politics, and concluded that a man unable to gloss over this problem like the rest of us *ought* to be crazy.

That's as far as my clinical speculation went. And though I'd known going in that I wasn't courting Kaczynski as fodder for some pet theory of mine, I wasn't prepared when I discovered that, instead, I was beginning to like him.

That didn't mean, however, that he couldn't be difficult.

I wasn't the only person who wanted to get to know the Unabomber. Kaczynski complained throughout the summer about all his correspondents and the inefficiencies they caused him. So in August, he decided to do something about it: he introduced us to one another. His idea was that we would cooperate,

stop asking him the same questions separately and help him to cut down on his workload. We were to share his letters among ourselves, garnering more information than we would individually. He wanted to hold a slow-motion press conference.

I did wonder what else a man kept in a prison cell 23 hours a day had to do. But the letters were clearly labor-intensive — long, interesting, and handwritten with no sign of revision. Either thoughts sprang fully formed from his head to the page or he was drafting multiple attempts. I wouldn't have minded a scratch-out here, a logical slip there, but this would have been intolerable for him. He was, after all, the man who complained to his journal about all the time and trouble he had to go to in order to perfect his bomb-building techniques. Human frailty, at least the variety revealed in failed bomb experiments or poorly turned phrases, was an abomination to him. Better to wrangle us than his own perfectionism.

His method for winnowing his workload was, well, methodical. He divided his correspondents into groups and wrote a letter to each group introducing its members to one another and urging them to work together. (He cc'd the letters and was perhaps the last man in the industrialized world who used actual carbon paper to do so.) Kaczynski divided us into three phyla. First, the authors: Vermont Law School professor Michael Mello, and Montana-based writer Alston Chase, and me. Next, the social theorists, the people who wanted to talk about the Unabomber's ideas: Russell Errett, Derrick Jensen, and me. And finally, the shrinks who wanted to explain the Unabomber to the world: a forensic psychiatrist and me. I didn't know exactly what to make of my inclusion in three groups, but I took it as a good sign.

What I did know was that, like much of what Kaczynski did, this act was at once strange and reasonable, obnoxious and considerate, obtuse and clever, naïve and subversive. It was, at one level, all pure and equal exchange: we would get more bang for our 32 cents and he would get relief from his writer's cramp and crowded calendar. Didn't that make sense? At another level, it was revolutionary, detesting competition itself and maybe building anti industrial cadres in the bargain.

But what kind of self-respecting writer lets others ask his questions? What kind of entrepreneur cooperates with others? We all wanted to tap the Unabomber's well, and he wanted us to share. More to the point, he thought one of us was just as good as the next. His was a kingdom of equals in which no one had a unique claim on his attention. It's a stunning appraisal: that a group of people full enough of themselves to think they could consort with this icon of monstrosity could cooperate in this fashion simply because Kaczynski had determined that it made sense to do so. Even more stunning, though, was that no one appeared to object to the terms.

Because what are you going to do when you want something badly from

someone? There's only one Unabomber, and he knew it. His move may have reflected his own commitment to reason above all else and his tone deafness to the subtle music of human interaction. But it also was born of the sheer imperiousness enabled by his emergence into the public eye. He seemed to have an innate knowledge of how to handle his new situation: he responded to our clamor by telling us to work it out among ourselves and get back to him with the results. Maybe he couldn't send out bombs anymore, but he could still use the mails to treat people as pure abstraction. I imagined him reveling in his new found popularity, this man who had been described over and over as the consummate nerd. Terrorism in the age of celebrity had suddenly given him friends and influence.

IX. THE SIX STAGES OF MORAL DEVELOPMENT.

KACZYNSKI'S TAXONOMY of correspondents provided more than insight into his character. It was also a passport to other parts of the Unabomber kingdom. It's a great conversational entrée: "Hi, this is Gary Greenberg calling. I got a letter today from Ted Kaczynski suggesting I get in touch with you." So all the Unabomber's men were willing to interrupt their breakfasts, to talk about Kaczynski with an understated delight.

Some of this was merely checking out the competition. But perhaps the others felt what I did: the relief of finding someone else who spoke the secret language, for whom Kaczynski had become a household fixture — not as notorious criminal but as a point of obsession, not to mention a source of vexation. Perhaps he occupied an empty seat at the dinner table in their homes too.

I had already been in contact with one of the men on the list: Michael Mello, who had written an article for a legal journal comparing Kaczynski's trial to that of the abolitionist John Brown. At the time I discovered Mello's article, I was reading *Cloudsplitter*, Russell Banks's historical novel about John Brown. It was hard to miss the parallels between these two terrorists: both were quixotic figures who insisted that the stench of corruption washed over all and left no one (except themselves) to see, let alone to decry, the original sin. Both hovered around the margins both of society and of the groups that were ostensibly on their sides, honing their solitary anger to a fine point, finally unleashing it upon victims who seemed largely innocent. But when it came time for their day in court, guaranteed by the Constitution, Brown got a real trial that discussed real issues; Kaczynski only got a psychiatric evaluation and the judge's dry recitation of his crimes. Mello's article (and a book he was writing) dealt with what he saw as the injustice to Kaczynski of this outcome.

I called Mello because I wanted a copy of his article, which I had then only read about. I wanted to talk to someone else who might be thinking that

Kaczynski had gotten a raw deal, legally speaking. We discussed Kaczynski's diagnosis. Mello had come to conclusions similar to mine about the politics of his "schizophrenia," and was pleased to hear them confirmed by someone with a Ph.D. in psychology. Perhaps he recognized in my willingness to take on my profession his own apostasy: he had left capital-defense practice because he believed that he and his cohorts had been turned into collaborators with the executioner; due process had been turned into window dressing. In Mello's view, to continue to play a fixed game was to give it a legitimacy that it didn't deserve. By helping to maintain a pretense of fairness, his colleagues were also helping to keep the real horror of state-sponsored murder at bay. Neither was Mello content to retreat quietly to the clapboarded law school on the White River's banks. He published *Dead Wrong*, an urgent indictment of the capital-defense bar that alienated many of his former colleagues.

But the first thing Mello told me about himself was that he'd been a law clerk for Judge Robert S. Vance, a federal judge killed by a letter bomb (not one of Kaczynski's) in 1989, that he'd loved Vance as a father and harbored a special hatred for mail bombers. I think Mello told me this not only to reassure me that he was no tree-hugging Unabomber groupie, but also to make his interests clear. Michael Mello is dedicated, above all else, to the rule of law; he may hate what you do, but he believes in your inalienable right to be fairly tried for it.

Mello wasn't just writing about Kaczynski's case. In the interests of justice, he was helping Kaczynski prepare an appeal of his guilty plea, on the grounds that he should have been allowed to represent himself. A new trial's primary effect would be to expose Kaczynski to the death penalty before a jury disabused of the notion that he was a pathetic madman. Lawyer-assisted suicide, Mello called it.

Lawrence Kohlberg was a psychologist who got famous by claiming the moral-development franchise. He theorized that our sense of the good develops like other faculties and functions: some combination of time and experience leads us through predictable stages on the journey toward moral maturity. Some people, he said, stopped their moral development earlier than others; indeed, he found six stages along this path and even devised a quick way to assess the pilgrims' progress: he wrote a series of short short stories whose characters found themselves in moral dilemmas and solved them in various ways. Kohlberg's subjects simply said what they thought of the solution and why, and scorers then assigned them a place along the moral continuum. It was a vast improvement over religion.

One of Kohlberg's vignettes is the story of Heinz, a man whose wife will die without a medication that is too expensive. Having exhausted all other avenues, Heinz burglarizes the pharmacy. Should he have done this? Subjects who think he should have and who reason that principle trumps law every time earn Kohlberg's highest honor: they have achieved Stage 6 and become moral

paragons, because they use their autonomy to stick to universal moral axiom rather than submit to a law. They're pioneers clearing the ethical frontier with reason's scythe. No wonder that Kohlberg cornered this market: his hero stepped out of a Western.

It's also no wonder that Mello found both Kaczynski and John Brown so compelling, and that Kaczynski trusted him. All three were Kohlbergian exemplars. Each had his own trump suit — abolition, the preservation of wild nature, equal protection under the law. Each was ready to cover the same ace — the proscription of murder — and damn the consequences. By the time our conversation had ended, Mello had invited me into the game. He wanted me to write a foreword to his book on the subject of Kaczynski's psychiatric diagnoses. I was no longer a spectator; I was to be a participant in weighty events.

X.

"LET'S ROLL."

AUGUST BROUGHT one more thing. I started to think about how to develop my franchise.

In some ways, this was a purely practical consideration. I was by now in hip-deep. I was getting a crash course from Michael Mello in laws relevant to Kaczynski's case, capital-defense strategy, and the technicalities of appeal, not to mention a library of material to read: Mello's book, transcripts of Kaczynski's pretrial hearings, all the motions and countermotions that told the story in starched legal language. I was renewing my acquaintance with those antimodernists I'd told Kaczynski he reminded me of, dusting off Thoreau and Jacques Ellul and opening Kirkpatrick Sale for the first time. I was preparing to write about Kaczynski's diagnosis for Mello's book, which meant digging into the long and dismal history of psychiatry's attempts to come to terms with its inescapably political nature. Although my practice was already only part-time, and I had but one course to teach in the fall, I found myself looking for ways to minimize these commitments as well without placing undue economic burdens on my family. My new obsession wanted as much time as it could get.

So I decided to see if I could interest someone in paying me to write about the Unabomber. I thought that if I dropped his name into a query letter, I might actually get a response. I pitched an article to *Harper's*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Rolling Stone*, and another national magazine that I'll call *Glossy*. I told them that I was a psychologist in contact with Ted Kaczynski and that I had certain provocative things to say about him: that his diagnosis was founded on fallacy; that he was best understood as another anti-modernist; that in both his reign of terror and his treatment by the courts, the media, and the psychiatrists we could see some of the deep fissures of American society and culture. I added that he had indicated that I might come see him, reminded them that he had heretofore

avoided all media contact, and suggested that my visit might make a good peg for the article, which I described as a “long and thoughtful memoir.” And, I told them, I looked forward to their quick response.

The Atlantic asked me to send the article when I’d written it. *Harper’s* sent me their form rejection six weeks later. *Rolling Stone* didn’t reply at all. But *Glossy* bit hard, just two days after I mailed them the letter. A senior editor there was very interested in the interview, and I reminded him that a visit was still tentative, that many things remained to be worked out. But, I told him, “no matter what happens, this is going to be a very interesting story.”

Without an interview, however, it seemed that I was just another guy floating his fantasies over a barely open transom. “Maybe the thing you should do,” he said, “is let us know when you’ve got the interview. And we’ll go from there.”

“Do you want to see some of my writing in the meantime?”

“Yeah. Sure. Send it along.”

So it wasn’t going to be as easy as I had hoped. Knowing the Unabomber, getting 20-page letters from him, being on a first-name basis with him wasn’t going to make up entirely for my lack of a name. It also seemed that it might not even matter what Kaczynski said in the prospective interview — whether we talked about books or cabin design or his hit list or what he watched on television — or how thoughtfully I wrote about it. All that counted was bringing the public a sensation they hadn’t yet experienced: face time with Kaczynski. But before I could even begin to get discouraged, the phone rang.

“Let’s roll,” said the editor, his circumspection gone, along with any memory of the phone call we’d ended five minutes before.

I said, “Okay, where to?”

He told me that he had just spoken with the editor-in-chief, who had said that no matter what happens, this was going to be a very interesting story. So he wanted to fax me a contract, get it signed and returned today. Up to 5,000 words at \$1.50 a word, plus travel expenses. With foreign rights, which the editor said were a near certainty in this case, it came to around \$10,000. That would buy me a lot of time to work on this project.

I signed the contract.

But I didn’t tell Kaczynski about any of this, at least not quite yet. I’d never promised to tell him exactly what I was up to, or to refrain from this kind of thing. He knew I was a writer and he was accordingly cautious. Still, I caught the whiff of my own dishonesty. But, I assured myself, I’d find a way to tell him. When the time came.

The time came the next week.

Kaczynski had also been thinking about how he to make use of our contact. A letter that Mello gave me, in which he’d written to Kaczynski about me, made it clear that he and Kaczynski were already talking about ways that a writer who would put his Ph.D. in psychology behind a claim that the Unabomber’s diagno-

sis was a travesty could give them aid and comfort. And Kaczynski had a very specific idea about how I should do this. He wanted me to read the book he'd just finished writing, comment on it to him, and then consider the possibility of interviewing him and his family to come up with a fairer assessment of the Kaczynskis.

Truth Versus Lies arrived in early September, a 548-page typescript. It was Kaczynski's point-by-point, fully documented refutation of all the unflattering things the media had said about him. [I signed an agreement not to divulge the contents of this book until they had otherwise been made public. At press time, it had not been released by its publisher, Context Books. So my discussion will refer only to what has already been reported about *Truth Versus Lies*.] His thesis was that his brother David and his mother Wanda, rather than acknowledging the Kaczynski family dysfunction, had portrayed Kaczynski to the national press as mentally ill. A willing and gullible media had then amplified this account until Theodore Kaczynski had become, in the public eye, just another lunatic.

Kaczynski's reaction is understandable. Surely there isn't a public figure alive who hasn't at one time or another imagined taking on the media as Kaczynski does in *Truth Versus Lies*. It must be hard to watch your image get conjured out of whatever little tropes are in demand at the moment. This loss of control over personal identity — which is just about all any of us has left — must temper some of the delights of fame. It might even unleash a desire for revenge even beyond a lawsuit.

Still, most people would simply settle for bad publicity and tough it out. And even the most headstrong person would pale at the prospect of countering a tale with as much resonance as the one that emerged about Kaczynski in the months after his arrest. The loving but helpless mother and brother choking up as they describe Kaczynski's descent into madness to a public that has little patience for political diatribe but infinite hunger for therapeutic confession — most people would hold their breath as this tsunami washed over them, hope it left them something in its wake, and turn their attention to important matters, like their upcoming capital murder trial. But most people aren't the Unabomber.

Another thing most people would do, if they had the chance, is burnish their image. Who could resist, in the telling of one's own story, the autobiographer's license to vanity? Well, aside from quibbling over details like whether or not he really panicked when he was spotted while leaving off a bomb (as was once reported), Ted Kaczynski could. He is unrepentant in the book, addressing the Unabomber crimes only obliquely and often providing details that can only make people like him less — as, for instance, his dispute of a news account about a dirty limerick regarding a co-worker that he'd scrawled on the workplace wall: Kaczynski's rebuttal was that he'd scrawled the limerick on a machine.

I suppose the all-trees-and-no-forest approach of *Truth Versus Lies* could be read as evidence that Kaczynski is mentally ill. But surely it is not evidence of

neurochemical explosions of schizophrenia and the resulting disorganization of mind. Quite the contrary. The book is remarkable for its controlled tone, the steady focus it brings to bear on a sprawling archive of personal and public history. And underlying it is a method that is both coherent and quaint. It conjures a world, part nostalgia, part desperate hope, in which great issues are discussed in measured tones and brought to incontrovertible resolution by reasonable men in dark-paneled rooms. In that imagined world, people will look at the facts and soberly reconsider their conclusion that a man who lives in the woods and sends bombs through the mail to people he doesn't know, who renounces the bounty of industrial civilization and fertilizes his garden with his own shit must be crazy.

So it's not entirely true that *Truth Versus Lies* is devoid of self-flattery. It's just that one of the qualities most worth having, in Kaczynski's view, is rationality, which he has by the bucket. I think the only hero he ever wanted to be was Rudyard Kipling's hero of *If*, the one who kept his head while all about him were doing otherwise.

He wasn't even blaming others for what he had done. Even if he was claiming that he was just another abused child, he offered no excuses. An author who would tell the truth must withstand its reflection upon him and settle for the cerebral satisfaction of possessing the facts.

After reading the manuscript, I told Kaczynski that his approach to the problem wasn't likely to change any minds, that his chosen method was like using Euclidean geometry to argue with a hurricane. I added that I thought the manuscript could backfire and give new currency to the image he was trying to discredit. And then I seized my opportunity: I told Kaczynski that if he really wanted to redeem his public image, he might consider allowing me to interview him for a national magazine, and that I happened to know of a magazine that was interested.

XI.

DR. A. TUMBLES DOWN THE OUBLIETTE.

Glossy may have given me a contract on the basis that something interesting would likely happen, but my editor continued to make it clear that they weren't going to let me fill up space between cologne ads with mere ideas. The interview was still essential, the contract merely a no-cost option they had taken out on my relationship with Kaczynski in the event that it blossomed into an on-the-record meeting. And, despite the serendipitous timing of Kaczynski's request for my comments on his book and his family, I still wasn't sure a meeting would ever take place.

And there was another problem. A version of the letter in which Kaczynski suggested an interview as part of an evaluation of him and his family had gone to the forensic psychiatrist he had listed in his taxonomy of Unabomber correspondents. Michael Mello had given me a copy of this psychiatrist's pitch to

Kaczynski, and it was clear that Dr. A. knew his business. The letter, originally sent to Kaczynski's lawyers, enumerated the eight reasons Kaczynski ought to allow him to become "the vehicle through which your thoughts and feelings are communicated." Among these were his skill at "putting my own thoughts and feelings aside and honing in on the communication of others," his license "as a psychiatrist [to] attest to your views as real and well thought out, rather than being dismissed as simply based on factors such as revenge or paranoia," and his "access to a wide spectrum of media contacts. However, I am not the media!" Indeed, Dr. A. was not many things: "I am not a celebrity, nor do I seek notoriety.... I carry no agenda of selling newspapers or advertising space. I do not operate in sound bites and do not need to editorialize." He was even willing to give Kaczynski editorial control. And Dr. A. worked to a rousing conclusion:

In summary, Mr. Kaczynski, I believe that I would be the perfect instrument to achieve the goal of telling your story to the world. You have a message and I have the means and expertise to assure that message is heard in a credible, unbiased, and complete manner. I will defer to your judgment as to the medium used for our interview, audio, video, film, or whatever.

In his letter to us, Kaczynski said that he wanted Dr. A. and me to work out how we would split up our duties. If we couldn't do that, then he might have to choose between us. Dr. A. had started where I had: with Kaczynski's caricatured lunacy, his thwarted wish to be taken seriously. He'd also started with similar ambitions, but he'd given a very different chase. He'd sent his pitch, with its shameless recitation of credential, on proper bond through proper channels. He'd offered Kaczynski editorial control, denied self-interest, promised a happy ending. All of this was the opposite of my ragtag approach and my clear insistence on bringing my own ideas to bear on Kaczynski's story. I worried that Dr. A. — who, after all, had great references and good media contacts — knew something that I didn't: that Kaczynski would respond well to naked ambition, so long as it seemed like good bedside manner.

I called Dr. A. and we sized each other up. We spoke vaguely of getting together. Then I searched the Internet and found out that Dr. A. had been on a national news show, for about ten seconds; he'd had a bit part in the O.J. trial. I wrote to Kaczynski:

[Dr. A.] is a prominent forensic psychiatrist. He participated in the O.J. Simpson [trial] and appeared on [a national news show] as a result. I think he and I are sufficiently different that our work would be complementary rather than redundant; and I think we are similar enough that we can work together.

I knew that this one-two punch — the mass media and O.J. — would very likely knock Dr. A. out of the ring, and that I had delivered it perfectly: from a neutral corner, a sharp jab disguised as a pat on the back. That I had told nothing

but the truth was bad enough, but the real chill in my spine was the simplicity of this assassination. I just wrote it.

By mid-September, Kaczynski had decided that Dr. A was not a promising candidate, due in part to his role in the O.J. circus. Maybe Dr. A deserved his fate, for his bad faith and worse writing. Maybe Kaczynski needed to be protected. That's not why I did it, though. I did it because he was in the way.

XII.

THE UNABOMBER PLAYS SHRINK.

KACZYNSKI DID SAY interview. But even with Dr. A. out of contention, difficulties remained. Kaczynski had something far more clinical in mind than I did, not to mention something far more useful to him than to me. I wasn't ready to take on the Kaczynskis, to get down in the epistemological tar pit of a family squabble and emerge with the authoritative version of who dragged whom into the muck. I didn't want the franchise that badly.

It's not that it wouldn't have been interesting to talk with Wanda and David about their notorious kin. Especially David. The story of these brothers — with all its love and betrayal, the intimacy that allowed David to recognize the Manifesto as Ted's work, the bitter disappointment of two men too close to forgive each other's differences — seemed of Biblical proportion. No doubt that I'd come back from an expedition into this primordial ooze with a story to tell.

But Kaczynski didn't want a travelogue. He wanted an evaluation. He wanted to use my expertise to debunk theirs. And even if he expressed his commitment to the truth rather than a particular outcome, I didn't want to be his house shrink.

I just wanted to give *Glossy* what it wanted so it would give me a name so that I could write a book about the thing that interested me so much that I'd almost forgotten about my drug book: the deep historical and cultural resonances of the Unabomber story and the complex, disturbing, and (so far) obscure character at its center.

Market forces made me do it — made me spend the next couple of months in hot pursuit of an audience with the Unabomber. An alternating current of come-hithers and get-losts ran from his cell to my mailbox, sometimes twice a week. The man of perfect logic was clearly confused about what to do. In one letter, he gave me an unequivocal no, followed by a request for more information about me and a suggestion that I write an article about him, at which point he would reconsider. Kaczynski knitted and unraveled promises like Penelope.

Milan Kundera has said that love is constant interrogation, which may help to explain why my colloquy with this serial killer kindled intimacy: we were questioning each other. For his part, Kaczynski asked all about me: my household income, my practice, my pet psychological theories, the cars I drove, my

wife, how I planned to raise my son, my hobbies. At the end of that long litany, he asked how often I masturbated — then quickly explained that he was joking. It was his chance to play shrink, he said, to let me know what it felt like. I didn't answer the question, but I did tell him about a time that I found myself on the wrong end of a therapist's questions, when she tried to interpret my critical view of psychotherapy as so much adolescent acting-out.

Kaczynski's questioning was unfailingly polite, and he often apologized for his ambivalence. It wasn't anything about me personally; in fact, he said, he liked me and thought I wrote well. He pointed out, however, that I'd already gotten some things wrong: in my response to his book, I'd written, "You... seem (and I'm not certain if you mean this, or if I have read your book accurately) to have been unhappy for much of your life," but Kaczynski responded that since his decision to leave academia for the woods, that had not been the case. He also said that I'd misunderstood his motivation for challenging his conviction: he didn't so much want to clear his name as to avoid a long time in prison.

But beyond mistakes that could be corrected, there was a perhaps insurmountable problem. He was afraid that even if I got all the facts right, I would still get him wrong. He understood that I wanted to be more than the Unabomber's amanuensis, that I had ideas of my own. And he was concerned those ideas might make me misrepresent him. Of course, he allowed, it was possible that I might see things about him that he himself could not, that the error might be his and not mine. But it was also possible that I would be mistaken, see things that weren't there and turn him into someone he was not. And this, he told me repeatedly, would horrify him.

For Kaczynski, it was impossible that more than one story could be true. Like any good empiricist, he was sure that the world and the people in it could be divided into the really there and the not. My credentials only deepened his worry that I would get his story wrong and then accuse him of bad faith for his disagreement. But the real issue was deeper: it was the inevitability that my values would seep into my account of him. His personality would then be no more than a platform for my own ideas, and he would be stuck with yet another story about him that wasn't true, only this time with his own consent.

Kaczynski hadn't gone into that cabin just to avoid an electric bill. He'd gone there to keep himself intact, away from the institutions — corporations, universities, psychology — that would make him into their own versions of him. He thought that he had the best command of the facts of his life.

It was impossible to argue with any of this. Of course I wanted to use Kaczynski's stories to tell my own. So I agreed with him:

While I am disappointed with your turning me down, I am neither surprised nor mystified.... I know I am a pig in a poke from your perspective, and I am pleased to have gotten so far with you as to even be talking about these things. While I remain hopeful that you might change your mind (and grateful that you hold that possibility

open), I respect your decision and the reasoning on which it is based. As I have said many times, I don't know how I would act, were I in your situation.

I reassured him about my scholarly intentions:

I think that the best reassurance I can give you is to remind you that I have no interest in offering you a "better" evaluation and/or diagnosis than the other shrinks have. I'm not interested in diagnosing you; I would be hard-pressed to think of a less interesting way to write about you than trying to fit you into one of the categories in the DSM. Even if I could find one, then what would I have said? The way that my expertise as a psychologist enters into this picture (besides giving me a credential that will make it possible that people will actually listen to me; I know that's cynical, but it's true) is that I know from the inside the inadequacies of diagnosis, and in general the problems related to power embedded in the mental health industry. In my last letter to you, I tried to outline how I can use my credentials and knowledge to this end.

And my personal intentions:

I don't think you are doing me an injustice, nor is there any reason (from my end) that your decision should strain our relations. I only hope that I have not strained our relations by asking in the first place. I think I have already told you that there is no quid pro quo in my request for a meeting. We can continue, I hope, to correspond, and as circumstances change perhaps your decision will change as well. In the meantime, this process (wherever it leads) can only help us to get to know one another better.

I pushed:

Here is an idea. If what I have written here inclines you to further contact with me, then consider my proposal [for an interview] to you in the last letter. Think of it as a trial run, an audition.... You can let me interview and write about you and then see if you like what I do in a relatively low-risk setting. This will give you a crucial piece of information about me: whether or not I can be trusted with your words, and whether or not I am true to my own. It will also give you the chance to meet me face-to-face and fill in your picture of me. Again, I think the bird-to-stone ratio is favorably high.

I backed off:

I know it remains possible that all my reassurances and attempts to address your concerns might not be enough. Thus far, that is the case, and so I have no choice but to give up on [the interview] for now and seek other ways to enlist your aid.

And it almost worked.

XIII.

A SUCCESSFUL AUDITION.

BY OCTOBER, Kaczynski's doubts began to give way to concerns about the technical difficulties of the interview: who else would be present, what documents I'd have access to, how I could get press credentials. He proposed a topic for the interview — a discussion of the exact ways in which his defense team had deceived him about the mental-defect defense. He put me on the list of people

he'd be allowed to call on the telephone (in the event we had to make arrangements quickly) and suggested I call his defense lawyers about the possibility of their monitoring the interview. He never mentioned the interview without hedging, but at least his flat objection had given way to if-only logistics.

Then I had my audition. I sent Kaczynski my foreword to Mello's book. It was the 13,000-word version of my argument that his diagnoses were more political than psychiatric. The doctors said that Kaczynski's insistence on living his low-tech life, his hatred of the incursions of the modern world into the Montana woods, not to mention his aversion to psychiatrists, were the evidence of his illness, but, I argued, these things could only be symptoms if one already assumed he was delusional, which was, of course, what the evaluators were supposed to be proving. Without this assumption, his attitudes and actions, which were undoubtedly deviant, were no more inherently pathological than, say, the claims of certain women that they are married to God and that they must wear strange clothing and live in convents to uphold their marriage vows. The psychiatric reports reasoned in a circle; their authors had all committed the basic logical fallacy of assuming their conclusions. None of which was to say, I hastened to add, that Ted Kaczynski was not mentally ill; one can't, after all, prove a negation. But it was clear that the diagnosis was ill founded and thus deeply suspect.

Kaczynski liked my paper so much that, he said, he would be willing to have me come to interview him as soon as I wanted. But there was a catch: he'd recently been in touch with a lawyer who was considering taking his case. In lawyerly fashion, this man had advised Kaczynski to curtail all contact with the outside world. So the final decision would have to await a discussion between the two of them.

What Kaczynski didn't know was that, courtesy of Michael Mello, I knew this lawyer, Richard Bonnie. Bonnie had read the foreword and liked it. It had figured into his willingness to consider taking on the case, helping to convince him that, at least insofar as the psychiatric evaluations were concerned, it was indeed possible that Kaczynski had been unfairly pressured into his plea bargain. Bonnie, through Mello, knew of my contract with *Glossy* and my negotiations with Kaczynski about an interview. He saw the value of such an interview, under properly controlled circumstances, to an appeal based in part on the injustice of Kaczynski's diagnosis. So, he told me, he would tell Kaczynski that he ought to go ahead with it, and that we would be coming out to see him in January.

It looked like I'd gotten my name.

XIV.

PIMPING FOR KACZYNSKI.

IF THERE WAS A MOMENT when I understood just what that meant, it was when I spoke with Serena.

Serena wasn't the first agent I'd had truck with. A young agent from a large New York agency had called me in September, having caught wind, through a mutual friend, of my bid for the Unabomber franchise. We'd gone to lunch at a swank Midtown place. He was a smart man who was interested in Kaczynski as a cultural phenomenon as well as a business opportunity. He didn't glaze over when I talked about antimodernism and the Luddites and Thoreau, even countered with some thoughts of his own about the relationship between art and violence. Business only came up as the hovering waiter removed our empty plates. A book would be great. And, having heard the story of Kaczynski's planned appeal, he suggested that an article for an outlet like *The New York Times Magazine*, about the problems of the plea bargain, with a focus on Mello's guerrilla lawyering, would be an easy sell around the time the appeal was filed. He had only two caveats: this story had legs, but they wouldn't run forever; and without face time, I didn't really have anything an agent could sell.

He paid for lunch, 75 bucks or so. So far, that is the entire remuneration my Unabomber franchise has yielded. The food was delicious.

It turned out he couldn't be my agent. His agency had a conflict. It represented a real reporter with an interest in the Unabomber story. Since it seemed that I had no need of an agent until I had secured an audience with Kaczynski, I decided to search no further. But just after I got my invitation, *Glossy* started to play its hand in a way that made me rethink this decision. My editor emailed me, using our shorthand for Kaczynski's name.

As I've continued to think about this piece, I think I've hit upon a strategy that may work best for all parties involved: a straight, lengthy Q&A, bracketed by an intro and conclusion by you. I like this because it gives the reader what he/she really wants, which is to hear TK himself speak, and also because it will allow you to focus more of your attention on the conversation itself, drawing him out, letting him speak, and less on trying to come up with a narrative strategy. Of course, quite a bit depends on what TK says in the interview. But as we get closer to the event, let's discuss this.

He may well have thought this strategy would truly serve all of us, or at least that his touch was deft. He may have thought I would be relieved not to have to trouble my pretty little head with narrative strategies, or at least that I wouldn't detect the condescension of his email. But his meaning could not have been more clear: I was useful to *Glossy* only to the extent that I could get to see Ted Kaczynski on their nickel, and once I'd done that, my job was to stay out of the way.

I was in high dudgeon, not yet smart enough to realize that I had merely discovered gambling in Casablanca. Hadn't I told them what I wanted to do? What about my long and thoughtful memoir? A Q&A indeed! They wanted me to pimp for the Unabomber!

Of course, this wasn't entirely a surprise. From the beginning, my editor had made his concerns clear. "I think we ought to start talking about the article," he

had said to me a month or so before he hit upon his strategy. "You know, get some sense of where you're going to take this thing."

So I gave him that day's riff on the Unabomber, which was all the strange symmetry in his life. Kaczynski's worst nightmare wasn't getting caught; it was getting caught and then called a nutcase, which is exactly what happened. And then the fact that he'd predicted it, through some fairly sophisticated analysis of the psychiatric profession, became more evidence that he was crazy. He hated technology, and the prison he ended up in is the most technologically advanced prison ever built, not to mention that his cell is about the same size as his shack in the woods. There's something vicious about all this self-fulfilling prophecy, I told the editor, vicious like Blake's Tyger.

He was silent for a moment. But he wasn't mulling over Blake. "You know, I've been thinking about this piece too. And I keep remembering Tom Snyder's interview of Charles Manson. All I really wanted to see was Manson, you know, what was he like and all that. And this asshole with a good haircut kept getting in the way. It was like he thought he was more important than Manson. We really want to avoid that kind of a situation."

So I guess I should have known they weren't terribly interested in what I had to say. More to the point, and speaking of fearful symmetries, I suppose shouldn't have expected to reap anything other than what I sowed. They hadn't, after all, responded to my query because it was well-written.

But still.

I took out my contract. What really worried me was the part about how they had "the right to adapt, crop, enhance, change, and edit the Work." Did this mean they could reassemble my words as they saw fit, to make sure the article gave the readers what they really wanted?

I called a lawyer, a New York lawyer. "You signed a contract?" he said, graciously leaving off his suffix: "You fucking moron." I read him the clause in question. He told me he'd have to see the whole thing to be sure, but that they probably had more latitude than I wanted them to have. His advice was either to give *Glossy* what they wanted or something they couldn't use at all, and then go on to write the article I was interested in for someone else.

That seemed like good counsel, but it also worried me. What if *Glossy* did such a hatchet job that they destroyed my connection with Kaczynski? What would happen to my franchise then? \$10,000 was a lot of money to me, but it was chump change to anyone else. And it would be a shame if all the fruit of my labor were a Q&A with my byline squeezed into the corner of Kaczynski's beard.

Enter Serena. She was the agent of a friend of mine. She spared me the lawyer's tact. "Look," she said. "If you let *Glossy* publish this, it's just going to hurt you. They're not even a top-tier magazine, and they're trying to squeeze you out. Anyone can see that. Fuck *Glossy*."

"But the contract."

"Fuck the contract, too. You've got something here. So this is what you do. Put together a book proposal. Doesn't matter who writes the thing — you can, or I can find someone else to. Then a month before the book comes out you put an excerpt in *Vanity Fair*. \$20,000. Then when the book comes out, you've got a bestseller. You can't let some second- or third-tier magazine — and they're not even at the top of their tier — blow this for you."

Oh, Serena! Sweet co-conspirator, blowing bestseller kisses into my ears and spanking me at the very same time. Fucking *Glossy* with me, a menage-a-trois. Concupiscence made me weak in the knees. I mean that literally — the part about my knees going weak. When Serena unveiled her plans for me, I swooned for a moment. This was my big chance. Serena was going to show me how it was done, New York style.

In the movie version of this story, I say to Serena, "But, darling, how do we know this is a bestseller when it isn't even written yet? And what happens when I decide I don't like my contract with you?" and ride off into the sunset with principle between my knees. Real life being what it is, however, I told Serena I'd have to think about all this. "Well, if you like," she said, obviously exasperated with my dithering at such a critical time.

It wasn't so much the prospect of dishonoring my contract with *Glossy* that worried me. I could probably have justified that. The more disturbing thing was the prospect of becoming the person Serena thought I should be: the kind who lets someone else write his book proposals, who types his book with one eye on his bank account and the other on *The New York Times* bestseller list, who writes in disregard of all the assurances he's given his subject (and himself) about exploitation and pandering.

Which doesn't mean I wouldn't have liked to see my name on the Bestseller List. There were just things I couldn't do to get there, or so I thought. But I'll never know how much of a scoundrel I really am. Because not long after I decided that I really couldn't be the kind of person Serena wanted me to be, and before I could reconsider that decision, matters were taken out of my hands.

XV.

"IF I WERE A TATTLETALE..." (THE GREENBERG EMBARGO.)

THROUGH NO FAULT of his own, Beau Friedlander's entry into the picture marked the beginning of my end.

Friedlander, a 29-year-old publishing entrepreneur, had an idea for Context Books, his new company. It would produce books that might otherwise go unpublished — not for their lack of literary merit, but for their failure to fit into the bottom-line calculus of mainstream publishing. His planned debut nonfiction book fit the bill perfectly: Theodore John Kaczynski's "Truth Versus Lies."

(Friedlander might have had a little of the franchiser in him: he was also publishing Michael Mello's book about Kaczynski — the one with my foreword in it.)

I first called Friedlander at the end of November. Up to that time, Michael Mello was the only person I was in regular contact with about Kaczynski. Our frequent conversations were long and rambling and remarkably free of competitive undertone; we seemed to have an understanding from the beginning that there was plenty of room for both of us in the Unabomber world. When I read him Kaczynski's letter approving the interview and he said, "Well, I guess you're going to be the first of us to get in there," he seemed far more pleased for me than envious. Mello was generous with time and documents and connections. In return, he asked for very little: mostly, I thought, just the company, the opportunity to talk with someone who could understand his sympathy and loyalty toward Kaczynski, and appreciate the difficulties they brought him.

So when I called Friedlander, partly to check him out, partly to tell him that I wanted to retain copyright to my foreword, I was expecting to find more of this camaraderie. At first, it seemed that I was right. Friedlander praised my foreword, told me he was glad I was going to see Kaczynski (Mello had told him), and then asked if I had thought about publishing more articles. I told him I had my hands full with this one, recounted my recent dust-up with *Glossy* over their wish for a Q&A.

"Oh, fuck *Glossy*," said Friedlander. "*Playboy* or *Penthouse* is the place for a Q&A. I think I can give you a name at *Playboy*. And the place for your article is *Vanity Fair* or *The New Yorker*. We really ought to try to get something placed there." We were a "we." Friedlander was going to help us. He was particularly concerned that we were only getting published in *Glossy* and asked me to send him my query letters so he could figure out what I had done wrong.

But then I asked Friedlander a question that Mello and I had been discussing since we'd heard he was going to be Kaczynski's publisher. Had he considered, I wondered, that publishing "Truth Versus Lies" might make things worse for Kaczynski? I wasn't only worried about Kaczynski's well-being. I also wanted to know what made Friedlander tick. If he was in some way sympathetic to Kaczynski or his politics, then why would he publish a compendium of complaint about Unabomber family dysfunction that was likely to further discredit him even as it sensationalized the story? And if he was only in it for the name brand, all cynicism and no heart, then did I want to be part of his "us?"

Friedlander answered by defending the book on both literary and historical grounds, and added, "If I were a tattletale, which I'm not, I'd have to tell Ted what you're saying here."

The threat itself wasn't a problem: I'd already told Kaczynski what I thought. But the *fact* of the threat, its redolence of schoolyard brutality, unnerved me. Mello and I had the freedom with each other to grouse about Kaczynski behind his back, each safe in the knowledge that the other's complaints weren't

going to hurt our mutual friend. But here Friedlander was telling me that his loyalty ran deeper: he would report to Kaczynski anything he heard related to him. It was the first time I thought I might go the way of Dr. A.

One of Freud's best ideas was repetition compulsion, the notion that our secret histories — trauma and loss and plain disappointment — set the course and direction of desire before we even know it. Following the trail of my pursuit of Kaczynski, I could find the wish not only to be heard saying something worth saying, but to be part of something, a member of a club I'd want to join. From there, it's a short couch trip to boyhood disappointment, regret at playground ineptitude. I'd fancied myself, with Mello and (I'd hoped) Friedlander, one of the boys at last. We would all be pals. We would do swell things together. But Friedlander's threat made it clear that I was living in the wrong neurosis: it was a father thing, and we were vying for favorite-son status. As Freud pointed out, that struggle was bloody and relentless.

But it wasn't Friedlander who got me in trouble with Kaczynski. It was Mello. In early December, I got a letter from Kaczynski. A glance at the salutation would have revealed that there was a problem: no "Best regards" or jaunty "Z", just a cold "Sincerely yours" and a formal "Ted J. Kaczynski." In a measured but sharp tone, he told me that he had received information that raised questions about my motives and honesty. The list of charges, compiled mostly from what Mello had told him about me, was long, comprehensive, and fully documented, even containing a footnote. It was also damning enough to make Kaczynski reconsider his contact with me.

I stood accused by the Unabomber of any number of transgressions, all of which pointed to my being a double-dealing, self-serving person no better, in his view, than your average journalist. Mello, according to Kaczynski, had written that I'd obtained a big-time literary agent who had arranged for me to publish a story about Kaczynski's appeal (and Mello's role in it) in *The New York Times Magazine*, and that the article was due to appear the week of April 19, the week after the *Glossy* article would hit the newsstands. Mello had also made it clear that I thought the interview was more of a certainty than Kaczynski did, and he implied that I had been trying to pry information out of him, so much so that he had had to remind me of our information-sharing agreement.

Kaczynski's distress was understandable. From his obscured view, solid information was hard to come by. All he'd had to go on about me was what I had told him, and the fact that Mello was telling him a story about me that was at odds with my own meant that his worst fear might be true: the Unabomber was worried that I was a loose cannon. And he wanted an explanation.

Here was a difficulty. Almost everything Kaczynski was concerned with was not true. But there was no way to prove that without casting doubt on Mello, whom I thought of as a friend and who was probably Kaczynski's most trusted ally. Mello, along with Friedlander and Richard Bonnie, had been cc'd on

Kaczynski's letter. In fact, the day before I got my copy, he'd left a baleful message on my answering machine: "We're in a terrible mess here," he'd said. At the time, I thought he was worried for both of us.

I called him after I got the letter, told him I hoped he could help me out. Mostly, I wanted to avoid conducting a suit of claims and counterclaims through the mail and with the Unabomber as the arbiter, so I asked Mello to tell Kaczynski that he had been inaccurate.

"I have trouble with the word 'inaccurate,'" he said.

I was on my own.

So I wrote a long letter, explaining myself. I had had lunch with an agent, but had not signed on with him. I had discussed with the agent and Mello the possibility of a "*New York Times Magazine* article," had drafted a query for the article but never sent it out. I hadn't intended to deceive Kaczynski by not telling him of these things. Indeed, I wrote, some proof of this had no doubt already arrived at his cell: a letter I'd mailed a week ago asking what he thought of the prospective article. I had discussed publication dates with Mello in order to understand how the dates of Kaczynski's appeal would best dovetail with *Glossy's* schedule, but I had no dates, and no other contract. I had not intended to pry information out of Mello, I said; to the contrary, we frequently had long and rambling conversations in which information freely flowed. I added that I knew Kaczynski had not given final approval for the interview, but my conversation with Bonnie had seemed quite decisive to me. I also allowed that I was angry with Mello, that I didn't understand how this had happened.

What I didn't say was that Mello had gone out of his way to get around what he and I were calling "the Greenberg embargo," Kaczynski's request that Mello not give me any documents or information without prior approval. Or that Mello had asked me to put in a good word for him with the big-time literary agent. Or that I thought Mello had had no business in writing Kaczynski about the interview before either Bonnie or I had had a chance to do so. Whining self-justification was bad enough; whining denunciation seemed even worse.

Besides, Kaczynski had me dead to rights about one thing: I was ambitious. Of course, he'd known that all along, but he had perhaps been lulled by my apparent honesty. So I wrote a second letter. This time, I just took the bullet. It didn't matter, I said, whether or not Mello had reported accurately on me. The fact was that I had talked with him about things that I hadn't told Kaczynski, half-baked ideas and possibilities of plans. And that wasn't fair to any of us. I couldn't stop thinking or talking about this business, but I would hereafter refrain from doing so with anyone in touch with Kaczynski unless and until I was ready to discuss the matter with Kaczynski himself. And, I concluded, I would try to keep my ambition in better check from here on out.

I sent the letters express mail and waited. It's hard to imagine that important affairs of both the heart and state used to be carried out through the mail: the

indirectness, the delay — these seemed almost unbearable under the circumstances.

And I'd overestimated the loyalty of my new pals.

I faxed a copy of my letters to Friedlander and called him a little later. In our conversation the day the letter came, he had made it clear which side of the triangle he was on: "Well, I guess you really stepped in it," he had said. My response, he now said, seemed effective, if a bit long-winded. Except for one thing: "You're still fibbing." I hadn't, he said, told the whole story about the agent. And I hadn't sent Kaczynski the early query letters, the ones I'd sent Friedlander just the last week. It would be unfortunate, he continued, if he had to send them to Kaczynski, but he'd do it if I didn't. In the meantime, Kaczynski had told him not to talk to me, so our further contact depended on Kaczynski's response.

At least Friedlander told me that much. Mello didn't call me when I faxed him my letters. When we finally spoke, he only growled, "I'll talk to you tomorrow." Which he never did. Two days later, I got a faxed copy of his letter to Kaczynski. Whatever inaccuracies he'd conveyed, he wrote, were only my distortions and exaggerations accurately reported. Thus, he was forced to conclude that I was untrustworthy. So he was removing my foreword from his book. (This fax, as it turned out, was his way of informing me that I'd been fired.) Mello never said it straight out, but the advice implicit in his vitriol was that Kaczynski follow his lead and put as much distance between me and him as possible.

So when, the following week, I got a letter from Kaczynski apologizing for jumping to conclusions about me, expressing relief that my explanation was so satisfactory (as I had come to be one of his favorite correspondents), and wishing me season's greetings, I wasn't exactly packing my bags for the interview. As I explained to Friedlander when he called to welcome me back to the fold, I just figured my letters had gotten to Kaczynski before Mello's.

XVI.

THERAPISTS CALL IT CLOSURE.

KACZYNSKI SOON RETRACTED his apology. Letters from Mello and Friedlander, he wrote, had made it clear that I had been underhanded. I was still useful to him, at least to the extent that I was willing to say that my industry had done him wrong, so he would proceed with me, but only with the protection of a cooperation agreement that would give him substantial control over me. I'd be hearing from his lawyers.

I told him that I'd be willing to give up some of my autonomy, but not without something substantial from him — like exclusive biography rights or access to his legal team during his appeal. I never got his counterproposal.

Kaczynski wrote me two letters during the winter, apologizing for being too busy preparing his appeal to stay in close touch. He asked me to keep writing

him, as he enjoyed hearing from me. But the feel of a slack line in my hand was dispiriting, and, after a few notes, I let my end drop.

Until the end of April, when Kaczynski finally filed his appeal. Richard Bonnie had decided not to take the case, leaving Kaczynski to handwrite a 124-page brief for himself. He appended a draft of my ex-foreword as an appendix, in support of his claim that he wasn't crazy and thus should never have been forced to choose between a mental defect defense and a guilty plea. You could look it up. It's Exhibit 9 of Theodore John Kaczynski's Pro Se Motion Under 28 U.S.C. §2255 to Vacate Guilty Pleas and Sentences and Set Aside Convictions. This is how Kaczynski introduces me to the world:

In respect to the ideological bias of the experts' reports on Kaczynski, see the essay by psychologist Dr. Gary Greenberg, attached as Exhibit 9.

Kaczynski... emphasizes that Dr. Greenberg's essay contains certain errors of fact and erroneous conclusions. In attaching this essay to his petition, Kaczynski does not mean to express agreement with everything that the essay states or implies.

I guess he was still mad at me.

Kaczynski didn't ask for permission, or even inform me of his plans to use the ex-foreword: I found out from Richard Bonnie. Neither was his disclaimer enough to temper his perfectionism. He corrected one of my errors of fact: I had written, "his portrayal as a paranoid schizophrenic was, in his view, the result of lies told to the reporters, attorneys, and investigators by his family." Kaczynski inserted "partly" between "view" and "the," perhaps feeling the license to do so because I was talking about his view. And so he got what he wanted: he made sure any public comment of mine about him would be to his maximum advantage, and that either I would get him just exactly right or he would get to point out my errors.

So the Unabomber used me before I could use him. But that doesn't mean I came up empty-handed. Even if I didn't get the franchise that Mello and Friedlander did, the one that had Mello interviewed on "Good Morning, America," talking about his correspondence with Kaczynski, and Friedlander holding forth in *Time* about Kaczynski's TV-viewing habits, I still got to take a trip to the pulsing, bloody heart of things, where raw human desire is transformed into power and money and sent coursing through the veins of the body politic. I came back without my \$10,000 or even a souvenir t-shirt, but I got something better: I'm writing this article, after all. You don't know me from Adam, but you got this far, and you might not even have started if it weren't for his name in the title. I do hope I won't be taking undue advantage of my celebrity connection if I tell you what I think some of morals of this story are.

I'll start with a confession: the reach of my ambition exceeds my grasp. The reason I gave up so easily when Mello and Friedlander brought me down, that I didn't retaliate or plead my case against theirs and let the Unabomber judge the merits, is that I didn't have the heart to do what had to be done to close the deal

I had sought in the first place. It was one thing to set Dr. A. up for a fall, quite another to do in someone I actually knew. But let me be clear: I restrained myself for no one's sake but my own; faced with a glimpse of my naked ambition and its rapacity, I faltered. I reached the limits of irony, its ability to distance me from my own actions, and at the moment when ruthlessness, pure and single-minded, was required, I turned tail.

Because I am a fibber. Oh, I'm telling you the truth, and I told Kaczynski most of the truth. But I told myself that what I was doing was morally defensible, that good intentions would somehow outweigh or make up for the way ambition transforms people into commodities in a marketplace. And I was wrong. Moral purity of the kind that would redeem a franchiser is impossible. The system, as Kaczynski referred to it, knows where you live. Even if you move to a cabin in the woods.

It isn't just would-be writers who have to worry about their scruples. Therapists, too, must turn other people, or at least their suffering, into business opportunities. The moral defense for this is that it's really nothing personal; we're scientists, after all, treating medical conditions, not people selling love by the hour. And to maintain this defense, we must speak the language of pathology, the same language that gives us a name for the sickness that we are certain Ted Kaczynski must have.

But this intuition — that a person who perpetrates horrific crimes must be ill — needs some examination. My experience of Kaczynski, in which he was reasonable, polite, coherent, fair, and respectful, even when he was being difficult, only comes as a surprise against the backdrop of his violence. Certainly, a killer may be insane. But a person who is sane, sober, and rational, may do terrible things. As in the case, I think, of the Unabomber.

This statement is only vexing if we have already decided that behaving immorally is a criterion of mental illness. I believe this decision has already been made. It's implicit in the psychiatric case against Kaczynski: such specious reasoning can only bear scrutiny if it's what we already expect to hear. But a case like the Unabomber's forces us to look at this decision, and particularly at the way it puts my profession in charge of public morality.

Take my word for it; this is not a good idea. Not because my colleagues and I are scoundrels, although some of us may be, but because the mental health industry will reduce the political to the personal every time. It is our business to do so. Then we are stuck talking about health and illness instead of about right and wrong. Right and wrong, with their reach toward central questions of what it is to be human, are words worth discussing when it comes to serial killers, not to mention other important concerns, like what technology is doing to us and our world. Health and illness, aspiring only to scientific certainty, are, in comparison, hopelessly impoverished.

A society unaccustomed to understanding individuals' behavior as anything

other than the result of their psychological states — their childhood traumas and neurochemical imbalances, say — cannot account for the political dimensions of everyday life. It cannot, for instance, raise the question of exactly what is wrong with what Kaczynski did. We perhaps could stand to be reminded of the public agreements that stipulate why we aren't supposed to kill, no matter the cause, and then perhaps we could decide what other people and practices are falling short of the standard that he violated. But the Unabomber case can't force this much-needed conversation if Kaczynski is merely a madman. Then it's enough to know that he is not one of us.

But he is. Indeed, *Time's* assertion that "there's a little bit of the unabomber in most of us" may not be all hyperbole. And it's not just the resentment inspired by the maddening little daily encounters — the questions that go unanswered because the computer is down or the thought interrupted by the cell phone or the privacy lost to the demographically precise database — that links us with Kaczynski. It's the knowledge of what lies behind these petty outrages. That's why, when we tell these stories to our friends, we cast ourselves as the heroes battling a wickedly impersonal world, struggling on the side of humanity against the machines and their feckless operators.

Because we know that something is not quite right out there. And it may be too much to assert, as the Unabomber did, that we are the trustees of modernity's prisons; it is certainly too much to kill random people for being collaborators. But it is not too much to say that the problems posed by technology are vast and complex and crucial, far outpacing the engineer's ability to repair a glitch or rethink a poor design. For it's not just the dangers and difficulties — the greenhouse effect and the nuclear waste and the extinction of various species — that ought to give us pause. Technology is etched deeply on our characters, perhaps as deep as our souls. In many ways, it gives us who we are: the kind of people who can flick a switch, hear the furnace rumble faintly in the basement, and take reassurance from its promised warmth without a moment's hesitation over where the oil came from or how it got here or what will become of its smoke. The kind of people who know the answers to all these questions, but what are you going to do, freeze? Move to a cabin in the woods?

We must wink at ourselves to get by. The little bit of the Unabomber in all of us may be an animosity toward an identity so thoroughly in the debt of bad faith.

The manufacture of the Unabomber as a crazed killer is highly efficient. It applies the balm of explanation to terrible events. It maintains a comfortable distance between him and us. It erases the nagging but crucial public questions raised by the story of a man unable to withstand the dissonance with which all of us must live. And in their place it gives another nugget to be consumed on the way to the next, a story in a glossy or not-so-glossy magazine, written by someone who knows an opportunity when he sees one.

KACZYNSKI GETS THE LAST WORD.

LEAVE IT TO THE UNABOMBER to ruin a perfect ending, the one in which neither terrorist nor the writer gets to seize the high moral ground, and each is caught using the other.

In early May, I wrote Kaczynski to register my protest at his unauthorized use of my paper. By then, a version of the ex-foreword, called "Diagnosis and Dissent," was out for peer review, and I didn't think that its use in his brief was going to be helpful to my cause, particularly since I hadn't disclosed it to the editor. It might seem like I was trying to use an academic journal as a platform for a Unabomber apologia, so I asked Kaczynski to help me clarify the situation for the peer reviewers. And, I told him, it rankled me that he was the one who spoke out of church; I wanted an explanation.

Kaczynski apologized. Completely and unconditionally. In two separate letters. The first, signed, "With apologies," was about the logistical reasons that he had used my essay without permission. The personal part came in a second letter, signed with our familiar "Best regards," acknowledging that his betrayal was in response to mine, and adding that he liked my essay about Hugh Scrutton, a version of which I had sent him some months before. I got a third letter the next day. In it, he told me that he'd had some time for leisure reading, and he'd come across something in *The New York Review of Books* that he thought I'd be interested in. It was a passage from an article by Edmund S. Morgan about slavery.

Running away [from slavery] could be treated as abnormal, deviant behavior. One New Orleans physician diagnosed it as "drapetomania, or the disease causing Negroes to run away." It was, he insisted, "as much a disease of the mind as any other species of mental alienation." The norm was happy childlike Negroes who loved their masters and deserved punishment if they failed to do what they were told.

One last thing: to set the record straight, Kaczynski gave me permission to publish the apology letter. So here, on the next five pages, it is.

TED KACZYNSKI
to
GARY GREENBERG

May 31, 1999

Dear Gary,

I've just read your letter of May 8. I'm so far behind with everything that I've taken to putting many of my letters aside unread — even letters that may be important. I've been ~~doing this~~ because I'm afraid that if I read the letters they will inform me of some matter that requires my immediate attention — and I already have more than I can handle of matters that require my immediate attention.

Just to give you an idea, Professor Bonnie informed me on April 3 that he had decided not to prepare the §2255 motion for me. The motion had to reach the clerk of court by May 3, and since my mail occasionally takes up to a couple of weeks to be delivered, that left me little more than two weeks to prepare the motion on my own. To get it done I had to skip all my exercise periods and spend all my time on the motion. After I got the motion into the mail I began trying to catch up on other work that I had neglected for the preceding 2½ weeks, but I soon received a letter from Professor Mello advising me to file a motion for reconsideration of the motion for recusal, which Judge Burrell had denied. This had

to be done without delay. Meanwhile, Beau Friedlander needed my responses to important questions he had raised in connection with the publication of my book; I had not yet even read, let alone written my comments on, a proposed contract dealing with the disposal of my personal papers; I had obligations to a person who has been carrying out a certain investigation for me; a lady friend was writing me letters of distress over the fact that she hadn't heard from me for a long time; I had and still have a backlog of letters that courtesy or practical considerations or both obliged me to answer; etc., etc., etc.

Currently the prison authorities are pressing me to participate in "adult education courses," not because they think I need the education but for red-tape reasons; and now that Judge Burrell has denied my \$2255 motion I have until June 25 to file a notice of appeal and application for a certificate of appealability. I should be writing this right now, but before setting to work on it today I decided I'd better take a glance at that backlog of unread letters. That's how I discovered your letter of May 8.

Ideally I should have contacted you for permission to use your essay soon after April 3, when I began work on the motion.

But at that date I was in desperate haste to get the motion prepared in time to meet the deadline and I had no idea whether I would succeed in doing so; hence I had no time to spare for a matter of secondary importance like your essay. Only when the motion was nearly finished did I begin to think about whether to include your essay as an attachment. It was clear that the essay would make a very useful appendix, but I had to get the motion into the mail as soon as possible and there was no time to get your permission. In a letter of November 23, 1998, in response to my suggestion that your essay might be useful as part of a §2255 motion, Professor Mello had written me: "Copyright ought not be a problem; I think his piece would just need to note that it is copyrighted by Greenberg." Professor Mello in no way suggested that I should use your essay without your permission; but no one had ever told me that you had expressed reservations or made any other comments on this subject, so I decided to take a chance and attach the essay to the §2255 motion without your permission.

Obviously, I should at least have notified you immediately of what I was doing, but, among the many urgent tasks that I had weighing on me, that was one of those that was put off and forgotten.

I was dead wrong, you are completely right, your annoyance is entirely justified, and I owe you an apology. So, to set the record straight:

I attached your essay to my §2255 motion without your permission. Moreover, I failed to notify you that I was attaching your essay to the motion. You had no way of knowing that I was using your essay in this way until the motion was made public. The version of the essay that I attached to the motion was a preliminary draft, and therefore no errors that appear in it are evidence of sloppy scholarship on your part. I think that most if not all of the errors that appeared were the result of the incompleteness of the information available to you. In my dealings with you I've never encountered any evidence that you would be likely to be guilty of sloppy scholarship. On the contrary, it is my impression that you turn out high-quality work. I am quite confident that you would not submit an article to a journal for the purpose of bolstering any claim I might make in court, or of promoting any personal agenda of mine.

Regarding the correction that appears on page 1 of the copy of your essay that I attached to the §2255 motion: At a time when I had no idea of using my copy

of your essay with the motion, I made many pencil marks on it for my own use. Before having photocopies made for attachment to the motion, I erased all of these marks — except the one that you noted on page 1, which, in my haste, I overlooked.

So, once again, your complaint is entirely justified, and I apologize for my unauthorized use of your essay. Please feel free to send copies of this letter to anyone, or to publish it in whole or in part, in order to set the record straight in regard to this matter. If there is anything else I can do to help repair the damage I've done by using your essay, please let me know. (But don't expect me to do anything promptly. I have legal deadlines to meet, and if one misses a legal deadline by even one day, one doesn't get a second chance.)

With apologies,

Ted Kaczynski

cc: Michael Mello
Beau Friedlander