

*Neal Keating*

**A Game for the Nineties:  
ASE**

1994

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## Contents

Round and Round . . . . .	3
Aboriginal Lessons . . . . .	4
How to Play . . . . .	4

It is 1993 and the general observation that the practice of people submitting to work on a daily normalized basis is the primary motor reproducing the daily phenomena of society continues to be all too accurate.

Part of these phenomena are the ideologies and thinking about the process of social reproduction — the reflecting on the doing. Controlling these reflections through the division and specialization of knowledge has had a regulating effect determining what is and what is not suitable for framing as germane questions. An example of the latter is the question of what comes after the commerce-state-class form of power; or, what comes after the rule of law? While these two questions may be on the tongues of many an anti-authoritarian, from the point of view of “maintaining order,” these questions are best rendered irrelevant. This determination of relevance — in its turn — maintains the ongoing submission to the miserable confines of rank and work, not unlike the way the blinders keep a poor horse in a dumb race.

## Round and Round

The Marxist discourse generally dismissed ideology as a peripheral, a “super-structural” aspect of social phenomena. Subsequent critiques of Marx, notably those of the Frankfurt school and the situationists, recognized a more essential function of ideology. Ideas and actions are never separate. Dreaming and thinking are also actions. Arranging dreams and thoughts into systems of ideas or visions is another form of action. They are actions that are different from the “physical” action of the deed. An interrelation nevertheless obtains between them. It is a murky yet potent juxtaposition of a binary pair of opposites. It was when Adorno tried to elucidate it, and it is even more so today.

Social life in the “first world” today is largely based on the ironic fear of the violence that its very own class structures produce. The fantasy of races continues as a central explanation of violence. The rhetoric of racial types continues as a central explanation of violence. The concept of racial types is a categorical arrangement of difference that is especially suited, if not custom-made, for the divisions necessary to class structures. The idea here is that all structures have some kind of division. Not all societies have structures mind you. Ours still does. Think of a house. What holds up the second floor? It is usually some sort of support wall, *i.e.* a division. In a class structure there are several divisions. In terms of power, there is the primary division of those that have and them that do not. The racial type is especially useful here for identification purposes.

History, such as we know it, is the special device for maintaining the current divisions, and thus helps to produce the determination of relevance. It is especially useful as examples to be cited in the present for the purposes of upholding this or that body of law. The familiar theme is as follows: “You want to know what happens when the law breaks down? Well, look at history.” It is often violent. But that is not all it is. History is also always partial, always incomplete. It tends to leave out the best parts of the human story — *those parts where people got away*.

History is directly linked to law. When law breaks down, or when law never existed, is when the writing of history — the documentation of activity — is absent or simply never was. That does not mean there is no activity. It does not

mean that it leaves no traces behind — it does. But for us flatlanders trained in obedience and conformity to the rule of law, those traces are more problematic than explanatory. Just like the brightness of a full moon blots out the stars around it, so too does the spectacular glow of our categories of thought — our epistemic machines — block the full view of the other epistemological figures: the *heteroclitites*. There are blinders on our imaginations. It is said that if we remove them, the greater blindness may wreck our eyes with wonder. Is that really so bad?

## Aboriginal Lessons

For example, there have been found at many archaeological sites in the Northeastern Woodlands of North America such traces as to indicate the presence of an extensive and quick network of exchange among indigenous people here, just prior to the contact period (ca. 1600 a.d.), and going back at least two centuries. The nature of this network continues to elude these scholars laboring under today's social scientific frameworks of inquiry. In these woodlands, with these people, there was no commodification, there were no profits, and no property. These are the forces that animate modern networks of commerce. There are entire libraries boasting of the collective understanding of these three forces. But when confronted with the question of what the motor driving woodlands exchange was, the specialists generally shrug their shoulders and quickly move along. Or if they try, they can only cast their answer in terms that make sense in their *a priori* epistemic assumptions, *e.g.* they were pre-capitalist: they were on their way to establishing statist institutions but got interrupted by their collision with Europe. Such assumptions are still widely held, and for good reason — they emphasize the class structures currently in place. The other idea — that woodlands exchange was driven by a different kind of motor that cannot be explained within first world epistemic frameworks — emphasizes reciprocity, and as such, must naturally be omitted from relevance.

## How to Play

I now propose a new form of praxis, and one that is already beginning to be engaged spontaneously and diversely. Adopting Bakunin's basic "revolutionary negation," that the urge to: destroy is always already a creative urge; along with Proudhon's dicta "property is theft" and incorporating Durkheim's idea of the conscience collective (*i.e.*, that complex of socio — cultural behavioral codes that precede and inform the human that is born into it), I will outline a game of historical/ideological disruption for anti-authoritarians, to be played in those interludes between deeds.

The object of this game, then, is to apply an emancipatory epistemology (free-frame thinking, or as Feyerabend puts it "anything goes") to the conscience collective through its venues of daily life. In particular the venue of historical reference that both legal and political systems depend on is a particularly febrile location favoring successful play. But so is a St. Patrick's Day parade (bring back the snakes), or a night of playful mischief in the streets. Alas, so too is the workplace.

Epistemology is the question about how knowledge is formed or produced. How do we know things? How do we explain that the knowledge of things changes? Virtually every statement involves a number of given assumptions. How do particular assumptions come to be accepted as given? Answering these questions involves digging into issues and forces rather primary but not readily apparent. Digging into them with Bakunin's revolutionary negation can be highly combustible, and just as satisfying.

Let's call this game Applied Systematic Entropy (ASE). Assume your lived experience is a temporary locus through which many diverse historical forces pass and collide, more or less randomly or at the behest of some strange gods, violently or non-violently. The movement of these forces constitutes the historical process. It is the active component of the conscience collective. Let's call this process a river. And into this river are innumerable other loci of experience from time immemorial that alter the flow of the river in subtle and not-so-subtle ways. Your move is to place an altered locus into the river and observe the effects it makes (Does it make enticing ripples? Does it make a huge jam, the kind that breaks bridges?). In choosing what locus to place where, you are guided by one rule — *anything goes*. That is it. Taking notes is a good idea. A robust anti-history will confound and evoke. It might not explain anything at all. Remember that the removal of the blinders, Blake's "bursting the mind-forg'd manacles," is the goal. Sometimes explanations are not necessary to achieve this.

Then the next player goes. The game continues until, as a result of the action between the placement of loci and the reaction of the river, either a general insurrection breaks out, or the ramparts of the sacred go flying into heaps of rubble, or a significant ideologic disrapture occurs. At that time, play is suspended and the game is over. A new game starts after the festivities have subsided, and the players are so inclined, comfortably situated amongst the ruins of the former epoch.

This unusual game has the architectural advantage of a framework for action that does away with the need for the kinds of unfortunate Christian appeals to morality and goodness that so many past dreamers have depended on for their zeal and mania. It accommodates devils as well as angels. All you need for this game is some basic acquaintance with your own desires and a taste for heresy.

As a result of this emancipated framework, one is freed up from the highly constrained activism typical of U.S. dissent. For example, demonstrations and marches have generally taken place under the assumption that direct confrontation will pressure the government into acting in a more ethical or moral way. When playing ASE, one can operate under different assumptions, such as that covert sabotage might trigger a series of forces that break up the government, as well as giving you an immediate kick. Or that covert sabotage might start an ongoing public autonomous discourse. Because in ASE the epistemological assumptions are just game pieces, as opposed to unquestioned moral foundations, they are much less precious and much more flexible. There is more room for spontaneous effects and mutant development. This is also what makes it dangerous. ASE rides right through that strait where the Charybdis of fascism waits on one side, while the Scylla of insipid passivity lurks on the other. Anything can happen when anything goes. The whole thing hinges on the player's egoism, not the constraint of the rule of laws.

In the modern and post-modern world we can make the observation that

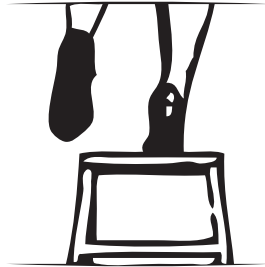
many gloomy ideological clouds of capital and Christianity regularly cover its entire surface, albeit patchy in lots of places. Removing this cloud through a total critique has proven impractical. Leviathan lingers on. One alternative strategy that presents itself today is that of locally rending a part of this cloud into strange and wondrous contours that have an effect of systemic disrupture. I have proposed Applied Systemic Entropy (ASE) as a river-game that may serve this other strategy. I contend that this game is already being played under different names and in diverse circumstances.

The gamble of ASE is this: if you lose, you will make the cloud cover so heavy you can not move; or you may yourself be reified by the gloom. You might start a war.

But if you win, you get away — to play another day.

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