

THE AQUARIAN CONSPIRACY: PERSONAL AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION IN THE 1980s, by Marilyn Ferguson. J. P. Tarcher, Inc., Los Angeles, 1980. 448 pp.

Comments by Jeffrey A. Mordkowitz

Soon after beginning Marilyn Ferguson's The Aquarian Conspiracy we encounter an overview and statement of the aims of her work:

This book is about that master context. It is a book of evidence (circumstantial in some cases, overwhelming in others), pointing unmistakably to deep personal and cultural change. It is a guide to seeing paradigms, asking new questions, understanding the shifts, great and small, behind this immense transformation. It is about the technologies, conspirators, networks -- the perils, ambitions, promises -- of change. (p. 40)

Quite lofty indeed. Although Ms. Ferguson failed to convince me that "unmistakably . . . deep personal and cultural change[s]" have taken place, (as a result of these transformations), I enjoyed her book anyway as a rather good socio-historical survey of the 'state-of-the-California-art' in the 1970s.

After some introductory chapters and definitions, we are introduced, in Chapter Four, to "the new psychotechnologies: sensory isolation, biofeedback, music, hypnosis, meditation, est," etc. These 'psychotechnologies' (or "systems for a deliberate change in consciousness," p. 81) are necessary, according to Ms. Ferguson, for ". . . The intellectual brain can only dominate awareness by affixing itself to something definite and bounded. If it is captured by a diffuse, monotonous focus, the signals from the

other side of the mind can be heard" (p. 85). Hmmm. Unfortunately, here and elsewhere, Ms. Ferguson leaves the impression that we have 'arrived' when we reach this state of 'diffuse illumination': we have no need to use our critical faculties (our "intellectual brain") in order to evaluate our experiences, thus leaving the 'illuminati' subject to the premises and underlying structural assumptions of these various psychotechnologies. As an aside, the leaders and/or creators of these 'psychotechnologies' sometimes know all too well the underlying assumptions of their systems (cf. Werner Erhard of est, for one).

In the next chapter, "The American Matrix for Transformation," Ms. Ferguson discusses America in general and California in particular as a basis for change:

The Aquarian Conspiracy, needless to say, is nurtured in California. Its "agents" from the Boston-Cambridge area, from New York and Washington, London, Denver, Minneapolis, Houston, Chicago, and hundreds of smaller cities rally in California for sustenance and courage. (p. 41)

In Chapter Six, Ms. Ferguson leans quite heavily on the 'spiritual' and/or 'mystical' interpretations of physical data, such as Fritjof Capra's The Tao of Physics* and Gary Zukav's The Dancing Wu Li Masters* in order to support her thesis. In one case, her interpretation of "Bell's theorem" to support a quote, "We are all one" (p. 172), no longer stands up in light of recent scientific evidence. (See Science, 7 January 1983, pp. 40-41,

*Dr. Stuart Mayper's essay-review of these will appear in the next issue. Ed.

and Physical Review Letters, 20 December 1982, pp. 1804-1807). A little less 'acceptance' and a little more rigor seem in order here.

Later chapters cover a wide range of activities, including politics ("Right Power"), medicine ("Healing Ourselves"), education, vocation, religion ("Spiritual Adventure: Connection to the Source"), and social relationships.

Ms. Ferguson also makes mention of Alfred Korzybski (and general semantics). On one occasion, she started out innocently enough but ended up somewhat mistaken. ". . . We fail to see process, changes, movement. If we are to experience reality, Korzybski and his followers said, we must acknowledge the limits of language" (p. 51). While Korzybski did speak about the limits of language ("you cannot say 'all'") he did not say or imply that our awareness of this would allow us to directly "experience reality." Further, Ms. Ferguson makes no mention of orders of abstractions, multi-ordinality, non-elementalism, etc. Perhaps one need look no further than the references for Chapter Six for an explanation of her lacunae. Here, for further explication of general semantics, she lists none other than Stuart Chase's Power of Words! -- the only other named source besides Science and Sanity.

In conclusion, Ms. Ferguson does a creditable job of discussing and summarizing many new emerging forms of human behavior. Had she maintained a critical attitude, and evaluated what she presented, I would have found her book of even more value.

AN EARLY 1984 NOTE

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WHO HAVE SO STRONGLY
SUPPORTED OUR RENEWAL PROCESS
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THANK YOU!

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