Constructing a Plan for Survival: Scientology as Cold War Psychology

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In 1955, American television stations aired *Operation Cue*, the most prominent civil defense program of the decade. Produced by the U.S. Federal Civil Defense Administration (FCDA), which had been established in 1950 to prepare the nation for the possibility of a nuclear war, *Operation Cue* demonstrated to viewing audiences the impact of a nuclear attack on a makeshift suburban community constructed in the Nevada desert to resemble a typical American town. Narrated by Hollywood actress Joan Collins, *Operation Cue* represented the complicated, often contradictory, messages about civil defense issued by the Eisenhower administration. Worried that the growing nuclear arms race with the Soviet Union would lead to escalating fears within the United States about the possibility of a nuclear holocaust and therefore to weakened support for the American policy of nuclear deterrence, the Eisenhower administration sought to convince Americans that "survival under atomic attack," as a government-sponsored pamphlet explained, was possible.[1] Claiming that nationwide panic was more dangerous to survival than the bomb itself, FCDA administrator Val Peterson argued in a *Collier's* article, "Panic: The Ultimate Weapon?" that individual preparation and psychological self-control were the keys to civil defense.[2] As the unofficial motto of the FCDA, emblazoned on a billboard at the 1955 Nevada test site, explained to anxious Americans, "Survival is Your Business."[3]

This effort by the Eisenhower administration to promote emotional self-management as the proper response to the threat of nuclear annihilation marked the emergence of what historian Christopher Lasch describes as the "culture of survivalism" in postwar America.[4] In depoliticizing civil defense by making Americans believe their own emotional instability was the greatest threat to survival, the Eisenhower administration forced Americans to assume the risk of nuclear war and made civil defense a therapeutic project. Survival was linked

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to emotional disengagement, that is, a willingness to abandon any overarching faith in the future and to become emotionally armed against the threat of apocalypse. "This is the age of psychology and psychoanalysis as much as it is the age of chemistry or the atom bomb," explained *Life* magazine in 1957.[5] This Cold War culture of survivalism, however, was not limited to the threat of nuclear war; indeed, the psychic survivalism encouraged by the Eisenhower administration was more generally a response to the vast social, political, and economic changes in the 1950s associated with the advanced stages of modernity. Figures on both sides of the political spectrum—psychologists, religious leaders, journalists, and politicians—worried that the stresses of modern life generated by a world of large government and corporate bureaucracies, rapid technological advances, and destructive nuclear weapons had led to increased mental problems throughout the nation and had erased the self-control and autonomy of most Americans.

In fact, many wondered if Americans possessed the psychological strength to defend their nation and themselves from the specter of totalitarianism and other social ills. In his 1949 classic *The Vital Center*, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., expressed, in language borrowed from Søren Kierkegaard, this belief that the country's struggle against the Soviet Union was imperiled by a nation psychologically weakened by recent transformations. Schlesinger presented a bleak image of the mid-century American—traumatized by total war, stressed by the pressures of modern society, and "empty of belief."[6] His depiction of the "age of anxiety" was reflected in numerous other works, including David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd*, Vance Packard's *The Hidden Persuaders*, and William Whyte's *The Organization Man*, all of which portrayed the average American as isolated and anxious and which expressed worries that this psychological malaise would lead many to break down mentally or, even worse, seek refuge in the utopian promises offered by totalitarian groups. Solutions for the psychological regeneration of Americans came from across the political spectrum. Liberals like Schlesinger called for restored national vigor, while conservatives called for a defense of the nuclear family and a renewed sense of patriotism. But other types of psychic survivalism also emerged, less related to traditional politics and more involved in personal liberation, as many sought survival in flights to the open road, experiments with sexual liberation, and psychological explorations into the recesses of the mind.

No postwar movement reflected this personalized culture of survivalism more than Scientology, the therapeutic-spiritual movement started by L. Ron Hubbard. He established his reputation in 1950 with the publication of *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health* in which he described his new cure for mental illness. Dianetics was one of a

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plethora of new therapeutic techniques in the 1950s at the start of the "romance of American psychology" that included Carl Rogers's client-centered therapy, Robert Lindner's hypnoanalysis, and B. F. Skinner's behavior therapy.[7] Hubbard argued, however, that his goal was not merely to adjust individuals to the demands of society but to offer them tools for their psychic survival. Consequently, he soon transitioned Dianetics from a therapeutic procedure to a new spiritual practice that he called Scientology, which he saw as a defense against the threat of nuclear holocaust. "Scientology, the science of knowing," he explained, "came out of the same crucible as the atomic bomb."[8] Hubbard, however, was not advocating peaceful co-existence with the Soviet Union but was offering his spiritual practices as an antidote to the existential dread draining the nation's psychological resources. Echoing the Eisenhower administration, Hubbard argued that civil defense, properly speaking, was a therapeutic problem. "*Hysteria* is the danger," he explained, "not the particle, because this hysteria could, unless expertly handled, grow to such a peak that whole populaces could go entirely out of control of their own governments."[9] Scientology was Hubbard's form of prevention.

Civil defense was not Hubbard's sole concern, however. Hubbard argued, echoing Schlesinger and others, that the greatest threat to survival in the modern age was the dwindling autonomy of ordinary individuals. Hubbard, like other self-help gurus in the 1950s such as Norman Vincent Peale, Rabbi Joshua Liebman, and Harry Overstreet, borrowed from New Thought movements that blended religion and psychology in an effort to develop techniques to boost self-confidence and eradicate psychological hang-ups. But unlike Peale's positive thinking, Scientology was not necessarily a success-driven philosophy birthed by the consumerist ethos of a rising middle class. Hubbard was focused less on the obstacles in the path to material well-being and more on the forces of social and psychological control that were, according to him, manipulating individuals. In this sense, Scientology represented a form of what Timothy Melley has termed "agency panic," the belief that the overwhelming changes of an advanced Fordist landscape—monopoly capitalism, cultural standardization, and rapid technological changes—had erased humanist assumptions about the inviolability of the individual.[10] Hubbard argued that the mid-century American had lost all self-control in a world in which he or she was routinely bombarded by outside demands and constantly manipulated by social forces. Railing against communists, homosexuals, and feminists as well as against the decay of the family and the rise of the welfare state, Hubbard believed that Americans suffered from a waning sense of ontological security, living in a world that provided no concrete sense of place and no material support for a

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feeling of self-identity. Hubbard refused, however, to shrink from such changes and lapse into nostalgia for a pre-modern, pre-technological world; instead, he offered a way for individuals to appropriate the dynamism of modernity for themselves.

Developed in the 1950s, Scientology reflected a form of what Martin Heidegger called metaphysical humanism—the effort to replace God with human beings as the source from which all else in the world attained meaning.[11] Metaphysical humanism, according to Heidegger, represented the culmination of Western philosophy beginning with Descartes in which human beings were depicted as transcendent beings fundamentally separate from the world of objects and possessing the power to shape that world in accordance with human ends. Scientology, however, was not an armchair philosophy but a set of therapeutic techniques borrowed from Hindu and Buddhist practices to help human beings recover their hidden spiritual natures. While Hubbard echoed similar themes found in Peale's *The Power of Positive Thinking* and Overstreet's *The Mature Mind*, which sought to empower individuals overwhelmed by the vicissitudes of modern life, he dispensed with their nostalgia for simpler forms of life and their faith in some transcendental support for faith and meaning. In contrast, Hubbard recognized that modernity had begun to disembed human beings from local institutions and from the bonds of community, and he encouraged the completion of that process by liberating the self from all structural supports including even the human body. As advanced industrialization erased distances between societies, revolutionized transportation, and computerized information systems, Hubbard reimagined the self as a spiritual being possessing precisely those powers to manipulate time and space and to remake the world at large. Borrowing freely from Eastern religious ideas, cybernetic theory, and German idealism, Hubbard produced a philosophy that was staunchly libertarian, spiritual, and future-oriented, one that tapped into Cold War fears about psychological manipulation and waning personal autonomy and into dreams about the immanent power of human beings.[12]

Dianetics and the Therapeutic Culture of Postwar America

In a 1950 article, "The Life of Stress," *Time* magazine detailed the work of researchers at McGill University, including Hans Selye, on the role that stress played in the etiology of mental and physical illnesses and noted the tremendous interest in the topic.[13] Throughout the 1950s, myriad works, from self-help books to scientific studies, argued that stress was the unfortunate condition of the average American.

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Most believed, as Selye did, that the "wear and tear of life" in an age of profound pressures—from rapid technological changes to economic uncertainties, international tensions, and workplace demands—had disrupted the proper physiological and psychological functioning of men and women.[14] The roots of the modern notion of stress rest in the Second World War. Mindful of the fact that the treatment of World War I veterans with psychiatric disorders had cost nearly one billion dollars, government officials at the outbreak of World War II were determined to do a better job treating neuropsychiatric problems. To return soldiers to duty as quickly as possible, psychological personnel developed numerous time-saving methods including narcosynthesis and hypnotism to help patients release their emotional turmoil. In so doing, they were forced to revise previous theories about the impact of stress.[15] In the early twentieth century, psychologists defined stress almost exclusively as the shock caused to the human body by physical hazards. But the extent of mental breakdowns under the pressures of combat convinced many that stress was not merely the result of exposure to harmful external agents but a distinct condition generated by complex internal processes set in motion by difficult environmental conditions.

The experience of the war was sobering and supposedly revealed the fragile condition of the American psyche. In his 1948 survey, *Psychiatry in a Troubled World*, William Menninger, the Chief Consultant in Neuropsychiatry to the Surgeon General of the Army, detailed the litany of disorders suffered by combat troops and called for national investment in preventive psychiatry to treat similar disorders in civilian life. Combat stress was seen as the most severe example of the pressures placed upon individuals in a dynamically changing world. As neurologist Harold Wolff explained in *Stress and Disease*, "industrialization, urbanization, centralization through organization, social mobility, and changing values" had contributed to a "loss of anchorage" and therefore to a range of stress-related diseases.[16] National publications such as *Life* magazine similarly explained that "the human brain is simply unable to cope with the noise, speed and complexity of modern life."[17] The government responded with the passage of the National Mental Health Act of 1946, which provided federal support for research into the treatment of neuropsychiatric disorders. Soon, a litany of new therapies and psychological schools were popularized, ranging from traditional psychoanalysis to humanistic psychology and Gestalt psychology. Cold War culture, in this sense, was a therapeutic culture, one focused on mental health in a nation where, according to *Time* magazine, "about 8,000,000 U.S. citizens are neurotic or worse," and rates of stress-related illness skyrocketed.[18]

The life and career of L. Ron Hubbard was part of this shift in American life. A successful adventure and science fiction writer in the 1930s, Hubbard was one of many eager military recruits at the start of World War II.[19] His father had served in the Navy during and after World War I, rising to the level of lieutenant, and the Hubbard family moved frequently throughout the 1920s as his naval assignments changed. L. Ron Hubbard was intent upon following in his father's footsteps, but his poor eyesight led to a rejection from the Naval Academy in 1929. However, manpower needs at the start of World War II increased dramatically, and Hubbard was commissioned in the U.S. Naval Reserve in 1941 as a lieutenant. Although Hubbard embellished his service record over the years, he did act as commanding officer of the USS PC-815, a submarine chaser that briefly engaged a Japanese submarine off the West Coast in 1943. Most important, at least for his future career, was the time Hubbard spent recuperating from various ailments in several military hospitals. Hubbard presented his health problems as a result of war wounds: "Blinded with injured optic nerves, and lame with physical injuries to hip and back, at the end of World War II, I faced an almost non-existent future."[20] Soon after his encounter with the Japanese submarine, Hubbard reported to the San Diego Naval Hospital, complaining of back pains and an ulcer. In 1945, he was twice admitted to the Oak Knoll Naval Hospital in Oakland, California, for a recurrence of his ulcer problems, and after the war, he applied repeatedly to the Veterans Administration for disability benefits.

While Hubbard never actually suffered any crippling war wounds, he met other military personnel at Oak Knoll who had, and this experience furthered his fledgling interest in the psychology of the mind, an interest that had originally been piqued when Hubbard as a young man was introduced to Freud's writings by Joseph Thompson of the U.S. Navy Medical Corps.[21] At Oak Knoll, Hubbard supposedly helped naval doctors treat patients, research that led to the development of his own theory of trauma. "In view of the fact that some of my friends in World War II went a bit off their heads," explained Hubbard, "I found that there was some use for knowledge about the mind and thinkingness."[22] His early case histories often involved neuropsychiatric patients from VA hospitals, including, for instance, "a forty-three year old ex-Army officer and author" who was "processed by army as psycho-neurotic" but cured by Hubbard's techniques.[23] In *Dianetics in Limbo*, Helen O'Brien, former director of a Dianetics center in Philadelphia in the early 1950s, recounted Hubbard's efforts at relieving veterans of their wartime traumas.[24] When he volunteered at the psychiatric clinic at St. Joseph's Medical Center in Savannah, Georgia, in 1948,

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Hubbard even experimented with hypnotism and narcosynthesis, techniques used by wartime psychiatrists, when, according to his former publisher John Campbell, Hubbard treated several war veterans.[25]

Originally titled "An Introduction to Traumatic Psychology," *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health* (1950) challenged the conventional understanding of trauma. Most military clinicians analyzed their patients through the lens of Freudian psychology, arguing that the mental breakdown of soldiers was due not to the stress of war but to deep-rooted childhood problems. In their 1946 book, *Men under Stress*, Roy Grinker and John Spiegal, who served during the wartime campaign in Africa, argued, for example, that long-standing problems stemming from the psychodynamics of childhood were mobilized by the pressures of war and produced in soldiers traumatic reactions to combat. Although indebted to Freud in many ways, Hubbard, in contrast, rejected most of Freud's metapsychology, from his focus on sexuality to Freud's theory of the Oedipus complex and his concept of the death drive. Instead, Hubbard presented a more straightforward understanding of the mind that borrowed from earlier conceptions of stress. Trauma, according to Hubbard, had nothing to do with the psychological disposition of an individual but stemmed from an external event pressing upon a passive victim. "Somehow the exterior world gets interior," Hubbard argued. "The individual becomes possessed of some unknowns which set up circuits against his consent."[26] The goal of Dianetics was to explain how traumatic events, wartime or otherwise, impinged upon consciousness.

With an unstated nod to Freud's early work, Hubbard argued that the human mind was composed of two parts—the analytical mind and the reactive mind—both of which aided survival. When "in excellent working order," the analytical mind, which Hubbard described as normal waking consciousness, had rational control over memories, feelings, and even bodily functions and was entirely self-determined in its performance.[27] However, in moments of unconsciousness or severe pain, the analytical mind ceased to function, and the reactive mind assumed control. Possessing a "low order of computing ability," the reactive mind aided in survival in only brute ways, "recording down to the last accurate detail, of every perception present in a moment of partial or full 'unconsciousness.'"[28] Unlike memories stored by the analytical mind, these recordings were what Hubbard termed *engrams*, a term he borrowed from psychologists such as Richard Semon who believed that outside stimuli left permanent memory traces in the brain. Hubbard tapped into the long-standing debate about the biological basis of memory to argue that there was a fundamental difference between normal memories and engrams. The former were recorded by the analytical

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mind without altering the mind's biological structure, similar to files in a cabinet. Engrams, however, were stored directly in human cells, "permanently fused into any and all body circuits."[29] According to Hubbard, engrams operated as hypnotic commands, switched on by current stimuli that mirrored the traumatic event and causing a return of the original pain and all the verbal associations attached to it. The chronic re-stimulation of these engrams was, for Hubbard, the source of all mental problems and most physical ailments.

To justify his theory, Hubbard turned to cybernetics, an interdisciplinary paradigm focused on problems of communication that reshaped numerous academic fields in the postwar years. Cybernetics emerged from the wartime collaboration of mathematicians and engineers searching for scientific solutions to military problems, including efforts by MIT mathematician Norbert Wiener to help anti-aircraft defenses predict the future movements of enemy planes. Wiener argued that any successful anti-aircraft device operated through a feedback loop in which information on changes in the environment, including the motion of an enemy plane, flowed through the defense system. Accordingly, Wiener argued that each living organism operated as a similar cybernetic system, receiving sensory inputs from its surroundings, comparing them to its desired state, and adapting its behavior based upon this flow of information. Each organism, in this sense, was a complex control system trying to survive in an ever-changing environment. In *Cybernetics: or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine* (1948), Wiener compared this feedback system to the operations of the digital computer, developed during the war by mathematician John von Neumann and other researchers. As an information-processing unit, the computer was, according to Wiener, an example of a servomechanism that received information from the environment, processed it according to the logical operations of a stored program, and produced a corresponding output.

In a moment of speculation, Wiener also compared the operations of these computers to the operations of the human mind. For Wiener and others, the human brain operated on the same principle as a computer—signals passing through a neural network or series of circuits according to a binary sequence. This mind-as-computer analogy served an important function in the early Cold War, explaining why Hubbard founded Dianetics on its principles.[30] This analogy challenged the Freudian mind-as-hydraulic-system comparison, which portrayed humans as irrational beings controlled by unconscioius thoughts that could only be tamed by complicated therapeutic procedures. In contrast, cybernetic theory defended human rationality, arguing that the reasoning power of the individual was comparable to the symbolic

processing methods of the computer. Mental aberrations were therefore not the result of repressed desires, as Freud argued, but of malfunctions in the system. Described by *Time* magazine as "the poor man's psychoanalysis," Dianetics became a fad due to Hubbard's use of cybernetics to reimagine autonomy in an age in which the psychological borders of the individual appeared porous.[31] Expressing his debt to Wiener and other cyberneticians, Hubbard defined the mind as an "optimum computing machine" equipped with memory banks of "nearly infinite capacity."[32] Problems only arose when physical trauma threatened the survival of the analytical mind, which in turn shut down and activated the reactive mind. As Hubbard explained, "the analyzer blows its fuses as any good machine would when its delicate mechanism is about to be destroyed by overload."[33] In so arguing, Hubbard abandoned all the psychological classifications of mental illnesses that littered textbooks and claimed that proper mental functioning could be restored simply by clearing the mental circuits of any engrams. Dispensing with Freudian therapy, Hubbard developed a process called auditing in which a patient mentally returned to a moment of trauma and re-experienced all of the sights, sounds, and feelings until the affective energy attached to that event was eliminated, restoring the "perfect computer" that was the human mind.[34]

Communism and Mental Manipulation in the Early Cold War

The rise of cybernetic theory was part of a larger paradigm shift within American psychology. Since the early twentieth century, psychology in the United States had been dominated by behaviorism, a broad school that argued all behavior, animal and human alike, was accounted for by environmental pressures.[35] Behaviorists like John Watson dispensed with mentalistic conceptions of human action and argued instead that behavior as such was learned, as particular stimuli over time became linked to particular responses. But by the 1950s, behaviorism was under attack by a plethora of psychological schools. Not willing to envision humans as dominated by their environment, psychologists as diverse as Abraham Maslow and Jerome Bruner challenged the overtly engineering approach of behaviorism and argued that the values of democracy ran counter to a paradigm that described all human behavior through stimulus-response chains. Similarly, researchers such as Karl Lashley and George Miller, who led the so-called cognitive revolution of the 1950s, presented humans as creative organisms with complex internal processes that enabled them to achieve planned goals. Hubbard too developed Dianetics as a rejection of behaviorism. "But

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right here it is necessary to indicate that [man] is not driven on this wonderful stimulus-response basis which looks so neat in certain text books, and works so completely unworkably in the world of Man," he argued.[36] In contrast to behaviorists, who portrayed humans as stimulus-response machines, and Freudian psychologists, who saw humans as slaves to irrational desires, Hubbard, like other cyberneticians, argued that human actions were self-directed behaviors derived from feedback mechanisms.

But there were more pointed political concerns in the early Cold War that paved the way for the cognitive turn in American psychology of which Dianetics was a part. In a 1951 *Saturday Evening Post* article, "They Tried to Make Our Marines Love Stalin," journalist Harold Martin recounted the harrowing story of nineteen American troops captured by Chinese forces during the early fighting of the Korean War and subjected to intense political indoctrination.[37] Soon, a stream of wartime reports appeared in the American press that detailed the efforts by Chinese psychologists to "brainwash" captured U.S. soldiers. Numerous books such as William Sargant's *Battle for the Mind* and Joost Meerloo's *Rape of the Mind* described the use of Pavlovian conditioning techniques on American POWs to convert them to communism, and countless newspaper articles reported on the growing prominence of behavioral psychology in Soviet research laboratories. As Sovietologist Robert Tucker explained at the time, this "Pavlovian revolution in the Soviet behavioral sciences" was prompted by political authorities trying to produce a "new Soviet concept of man," one in which all mental processes could be retrained.[38] When twenty-three captured U.S. pilots confessed to using germ warfare in Korea, the American public, believing that Soviet and Chinese psychologists had perfected techniques of mental manipulation, went into a panic about brainwashing. The "war for the POW's mind" made almost as many headlines as the war itself.[39]

Psychology had become a weapon in the early Cold War, and Hubbard was one of many frightened by the prospect of mental manipulation behind the Iron Curtain. As an example of Soviet Bloc treachery, Hubbard pointed to the experience of Cardinal Joseph Mindszenty, the leader of the Catholic church in Hungary, who had been arrested in 1948 and forced to confess that he was working to topple communism. But Mindszenty's confession, according to Hubbard, was disingenuous, resulting from pressures placed upon him. Consequently, Hubbard argued that "the mind is not in its entirety a stimulus response mechanism as old Marxist psychology, as once taught in universities, would have one believe."[40] In so doing, Hubbard condemned almost all of twentieth-century psychology and argued that too much of the discipline was guided by ideas derived from Marx.

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In particular, he claimed that Wilhelm Wundt, who established the first experimental psychology laboratory in 1879, was responsible for distorting the discipline. Although Wundt was a voluntarist, who analyzed how the mind actively organized sensations into conscious experience, Hubbard argued that the roots of behaviorism in its Soviet variant rest with the German psychologist. According to Hubbard, "more acceptable and normal psychology such as that begun by St. Thomas Aquinas and extended by many later authors was, in 1879, interrupted severely by one Professor Wundt, a Marxist at Leipzig University in Germany."[41] Hubbard misattributed Wundt's politics and, in so doing, was able to dismiss the various schools of psychology that derived from Wundt's groundbreaking research.

In *Science of Survival*, his 1951 sequel to *Dianetics*, which he wrote in Cuba where he sought "protection from communists," Hubbard offered a diagnostic tool to aid the auditing process, what he referred to as a tone scale.[42] Once again, Hubbard leaned on the work of Norbert Wiener who argued that an increase in an individual's affective tone, defined on a scale from pain to pleasure, aided in survival by "[favoring] all processes in the nervous system" but was impeded by the emotional disruptions triggered by stimulus-response mechanisms.[43] Following Wiener, Hubbard claimed that the measurement of an individual's emotional tone (which ran on a scale from 4.0, the highest level, to 0.0, representing death) provided insight into the whole personality—from an individual's attitude toward others to his or her ability to communicate or experience pleasure. Arguing that his scale had been validated by standard psychological tests such as the Minnesota Multiphasic Test and the Wechsler-Bellevue Intelligence Scale, Hubbard, who had earlier railed against any psychological classification system, offered a systematic chart to measure personality. According to Hubbard, "a fully reasonable human displays the emotion called for, rationally, by the circumstances with which he is confronted in present time," while those suffering from mental aberrations did not.[44] For instance, those with speech problems were burdened by engrams that induced such behavior, which, as Hubbard's scale delineated, aligned them tonally with neurotic or psychotic personalities.

Throughout, Hubbard linked such personality traits to specific political beliefs. Those low on the tone scale in regards to speech, particularly those who avoided honest communication, were "the slime of society, the sex criminals, the political subversives, the people whose apparent rational activities are yet but the devious writhings of secret hate."[45] Similarly, those with low tone in regards to their ability to command their environment were generally political subversives, especially communists who possessed "an endless patience in tearing

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down by subtle propaganda a society or an idea."[46] Psychological health in this regard was a political problem because, as Hubbard argued, those at the bottom of the tone scale were susceptible to political indoctrination and even brainwashing. In linking psychological disorders with radical political beliefs, Hubbard echoed the claims made by many academic social scientists. Beginning with Harold Lasswell's *Psychopathology and Politics* (1930), which argued that political beliefs were merely the projection of personal turmoil onto the public sphere, numerous social scientific studies such as Theodor Adorno's *The Authoritarian Personality* (1950), Gabriel Almond's *The Appeals of Communism* (1954), and Hadley Cantril's *Politics of Despair* (1958) linked faith in communism and fascism to individual psychological weakness.

In his early work, Hubbard tried to assuage readers that Dianetics provided a proper defense against mental manipulation. "How does one undo brainwashing?" Hubbard openly asked; "One simply brings the person up to present time. He is stuck in time—the time he was 'brainwashed.'"[47] But Hubbard seemed almost paranoid about this threat. In the early 1950s, he began a correspondence with the FBI, alerting them to possible Communist party members in his organization. More important, he told FBI officials that he had "found out a method the Russians use on such people as Vogeler, Mindzenty [sic] and others to obtain confessions" and that he was working on a book that "was to have shown how the Communists used narcosynthesis and physical torture and why it worked as it did."[48] In subsequent letters, he warned the FBI that he had received several invitations from the Soviet Union to establish a laboratory in Russia to convert Dianetics into a psychological weapon. Hubbard also forwarded a copy of *Brain-Washing: A Synthesis of the Russian Textbook on Psychopolitics*, which summarized recent Soviet research. Although the FBI questioned the authenticity of the pamphlet, Hubbard told his employees in an internal memo that the document revealed the techniques used by communists to make "vast progress across the face of the world."[49] Consequently, in December 1953, soon after the last American POWs were sent to a "de-brainwashing" facility at the Valley Forge Army Hospital and *Newsweek* openly wondered, "Washed Brains of POW's: Can They Be Rewashed?" Hubbard incorporated the first Church of Scientology, hoping that spirituality might provide an antidote to the dangers of Marxist materialism.[50]

Scientology and the Dream of Disembodiment

Historians of Scientology have offered various reasons for Hubbard's turn to religion, arguing that his new movement was merely

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a cynical ploy to make money or a legal move against the American Medical Association and the Food and Drug Administration, both of which challenged the medical claims Hubbard made about Dianetics.[51] Others have argued that Scientology was an effort to save his new mental health program from the legal challenge issued by his once-benefactor Don Purcell, who had created a foundation in Wichita, Kansas, to help Hubbard continue his research but who soon bristled over the more esoteric claims Hubbard began to make.[52] While Hubbard did develop Scientology in part to escape these difficulties, he was also motivated to chart a new path for survival in a world he saw turned upside down by vast social, economic, and political changes and a world therefore threatened by the communist menace. In this sense, Scientology fit into the larger turn to individualistic forms of spirituality promoted in the 1950s by self-help gurus such as Norman Vincent Peale and Harry Overstreet. But in contrast to Peale and others who merely sought therapeutic cures for the psychological obstacles in the path to material well-being, Hubbard painted a much more bleak picture of postwar America, one in which the very survival of humankind was at stake. Hubbard argued that the struggle for survival took place along four "dynamics," which embraced all activities and which were exceedingly difficult to maintain in the modern world. As he explained, "a homo novis is limited in his self-determination by all the economic and social restrictions of an aberrated society."[53] These four dynamics included the struggle by the individual to maintain his or her own survival as well as to maintain the survival of the family, the group, and humanity overall, all which were now threatened by the dislocations produced by the advanced stages of modernity.

In works such as *Science of Survival* (1951) and *Self Analysis* (1951), Hubbard presented a much darker vision of modern America than he did in *Dianetics*, a critique that echoed widespread rebukes of contemporary society. On the level of the individual, survival was threatened by countless traumas experienced throughout a person's life from modern scientific practices including surgical and dental procedures and sadistic psychological treatments such as lobotomies and brain surgery. On the level of the family, survival was threatened by disruptions to traditional gender roles, caused by women's demands for employment outside the home. "A society in which women are taught *anything but* the management of a family, the care of men, and the creation of the future generation," argued Hubbard, "is a society on its way out."[54] As the family structure deteriorated, Hubbard believed that more mentally aberrated "sex perverts," including homosexuals and child molesters, would appear.[55] On the level of the group, survival was threatened by the transition to a post-industrial society in which advanced automation erased

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meaningful work. Hubbard believed that "as the amount of automatic, machinery increases in our society, so increases the percentile of our people who are insane," and therefore he worried that the decline of work would produce dependency which in turn would lead to increased government control and to "that last of all graveyards, a welfare state."[56] At the level of humankind, survival was threatened by the rise of "Godless totalitarian governments," which served to weaken the stability of the first three dynamics even more.[57]

Hubbard came to believe that his therapy was not an adequate defense against the vicissitudes of modernity that had left weakened Americans vulnerable to the manipulative tricks of psychologists behind the Iron Curtain. "If one knew another's main restimulator," he argued, "one could turn another's analytical power almost completely off, actually render him unconscious."[58] In part, Hubbard recognized the contradictions within cybernetics upon which he had based Dianetics. In depicting voluntary, goal-directed behavior as guided by informational flows from the environment, cyberneticians had subsumed traditional learning theory under the mind-as-computer analogy, allowing them to defend human rationality. But, as Norbert Wiener recognized, this redefinition of behavior as a search for homeostatic stability erased, however slightly, the physical boundaries of the human body. The flow of information upon which self-regulation was guided might end up overloading the mind's circuitry and serve as another form of control. "It seems," explained Wiener, "almost as if progress itself and our fight against the increase of entropy intrinsically must end in the downhill path from which we are trying to escape."[59] Two solutions emerged. The first, which Wiener pursued, was to shore up the boundaries of the self by decentralizing society into smaller groups where the flow of information was manageable. The second, which Hubbard promoted, was to pursue a form of disembodiment that abandoned the mind as an overloaded, reprogrammable machine and the body as a simplistic stimulus-response organism, both of which were extremely vulnerable to outside control.

Hubbard realized, as did other cyberneticians, that reducing the mind to the status of a computational machine had ironically erased any real notion of human agency. In arguing that human actions were guided by a negative feedback process, cyberneticians reduced the mind to a functioning machine and were thereby forced to jettison any reference to human will or meaning. Therefore, in order to reassert those terms, cyberneticians also had to reassert the ability of the mind to understand and direct the mechanization of the mind, something demonstrated by the ability of the mind to manufacture machines that mimicked its workings. The mind had to be seen as both

part of the natural world and fundamentally removed from it. Consequently, Hubbard was forced to argue that the analytical mind, once seen as the seat of rationality, was in fact controlled by a more autonomous, outside force, what he came to refer to as an "awareness of awareness unit."[60] While later cyberneticians like Gregory Bateson and Heinz von Foerster rejected the philosophical separation of subject and object upon which cybernetics was grounded, Hubbard held onto the image of a self-controlled, self-transparent subject capable of shaping the world for human ends. In this sense, Scientology represented a form of metaphysical humanism, offering a vision of a completely self-made person, described in spiritual language, whose agency was absolutely originary.

In the early 1950s, Hubbard outlined his new religion in a series of books including *Scientology 8-8008* and *The Creation of Human Ability*. In many ways, Hubbard's movement was part of the larger religious revival of the 1950s, as church membership soared among an American population worried about nuclear annihilation. But alongside this upswing in congregational attendance, more eclectic forms of spirituality emerged that remade America's religious landscape. The postwar decades witnessed a gradual shift from more organized forms of religious practice to more personalized forms, from a spirituality of dwelling centered on a prescribed set of religious traditions and a belief in the sacred nature of the home and church to a spirituality of seeking centered on a lifelong, often individual journey to find the sacred in the fleeting experiences of a rapidly changing world.[61] Scientology was one of the more prominent forms of this new spirituality. While Hubbard, like more traditional religious figures in the 1950s, believed that faith was an antidote to "the entire cult of Communism," he offered a gnostic vision, arguing that his experiments in Dianetics had uncovered humankind's true spiritual nature.[62] "Accomplished in July 1951, in Phoenix, Arizona," explained Hubbard, "I established along scientific rather than religious or humanitarian lines that that thing which is the person, the personality, is separable from the body and the mind at will and without causing bodily death or mental derangement."[63] Dianetics soon became an appendage of his new religious movement.

Like other spiritual leaders in the 1950s such as Norman Vincent Peale and Harry Overstreet, who borrowed freely from nineteenth-century New Thought movement in their effort to blend religion and psychology, Hubbard too questioned religious orthodoxy and focused instead on a personalized form of spirituality, a religious individualism that reflected the post-Protestant shift in America's "spiritual marketplace" in the postwar decades.[64] Hubbard, like Peale

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and other New Thought followers, challenged mainstream religious thinkers who, in light of the atrocities of World War II and the threat posed by totalitarian movements, stressed humankind's innate depravity and sinfulness and who leaned heavily on God's grace for redemption. In contrast, Scientology, much like Peale's self-help movement, was a religion of immanence, one that dispensed with any notion of a righteous paternal authority and stressed the saving power within the individual instead. Hubbard, however, distinguished his form of spirituality from the restorative power that Peale promoted, which was still seen, following from Peale's Protestant faith, as a transcendental gift, channeled through prayer and positive thinking. As Hubbard explained, "Christianity succeeded by making people into victims," serving as another form of control that posited an external authority as the seat of strength and fortitude.[65] Hubbard bristled against the conservative implications of most self-help psychologies in the 1950s and promoted a more libertarian, individualistic form of spirituality to confront what he saw as a crisis of modernity. As rapid social and technological changes unearthed the foundations of home and community that Peale and others continued to sacralize, Hubbard abandoned any nostalgia for traditional forms of stability and refused to define religion in moralistic terms, offering in contrast tools for liberating the individual spirit from any conditioned state.

Hubbard based Scientology on two philosophical sources—nineteenth-century German idealism, in particular, the work Immanuel Kant and Arthur Schopenhauer, and Eastern religious thought, especially Hindu and Buddhist teachings. In *Scientology 0-8*, Hubbard noted the sources he had consulted, which included "the *Veda*," "the *Tao*," and "the *Dharma*" as well as "Kant" and "Schopenhauer."[66] Like Schopenhauer, who supposedly read from the Upanishads every night, Hubbard turned to Eastern religious thought to clarify his vision. As he explained, "we find Scientology's earliest known ancestor in the Veda," a reference to the ancient religious texts that formed the basis for the Vedic religion and modern-day Hinduism.[67] While Hubbard had little interest in basic Upanishadic teachings, he found several aspects of Hinduism useful. Hubbard claimed that he had unearthed in his patients not only memories from the prenatal period but from their past lives as well. In this sense, Scientology was part of a larger interest in the 1950s in reincarnation, reflected in the so-called Bridey Murphy craze that erupted when the *Denver Post* published a story about a Colorado housewife who, under hypnosis, claimed to be a long-deceased Irish woman. The strange case of Bridey Murphy, which placed the nation into a "hypnotizzy," reflected the growing interest in Hindu ideas by Americans hoping to restore a sense of depth to the self in an age of

sometimes radical change.[68] According to Hindu beliefs, the human self was not a material being but a permanent essence or *atman* that survived the death of the body and transmigrated to a new one in a process of reincarnation or *samsara*. Hubbard translated this idea of *atman* into the more Western notion of spirit, a luminous being that Hubbard called the thetan. "Past lives come up too often in auditing to be ignored," argued Hubbard, believing thetans would survive a world on the brink of nuclear holocaust.[69]

In many ways, the psychological underpinnings of Hindu spirituality bore a resemblance to Dianetics. *Samsara* as the endless wandering from life to life was, according to Hindu tradition, directed by *karma* or the actions taken by an individual over the course of a lifetime. According to this doctrine, all mental and physical acts done by the individual left memory traces or karmic traces in the so-called storehouse of the unconscious, which were reactivated under similar circumstances and which compelled the repetition of those thoughts or actions. These karmic traces were accumulated over the course of an endless number of lifetimes, heaped up in the unconscious and operating as psychological restraints. Although Hubbard rejected the Hindu belief that *karma* in the form of morally good and bad actions influenced reincarnation, he recognized that this notion of karmic traces influencing behavior mirrored his theory of engrams. Consequently, he followed Hindu teachings in arguing that *moksa* or liberation was dependent upon purging the karmic traces that obscured the divine atman. "There is beingness," Hubbard came to argue, "but Man believes there is only becomingness."[70] In this sense, Hinduism helped Hubbard overcome the stumbling block of cybernetic theory—the uncertain relationship between the human body and its environment. Recognizing that the ongoing search for homeostasis left both the mind and body vulnerable to manipulation, Hubbard found solace in the idea of a spirit fundamentally separate from any embodiment. As he explained, "the individual is not his analytical mind, he is not his reactive mind, he is not his body any more than he is his house or car."[71]

Hubbard, however, did not follow the Hindu belief that *atman* was part of a larger cosmic oneness or *brahman*, which the Vedic tradition claimed was both absolute reality and the spiritual self. Thus, Hubbard differed in his appropriation of Eastern philosophies from earlier New Thought thinkers and from contemporaneous writers such as Alan Watts and Aldous Huxley who turned to Buddhism, for instance, in their search for some transcendental grounding for meaning, truth, and being. In contrast, Hubbard held fast to a dualist vision, depicting the thetan as an ontologically distinct entity. "Thetans are

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individuals," argued Hubbard, "They do not as they rise up the scale, merge with other individualities . . . . There is evidently no Nirvana."[72]

To justify his dualism, Hubbard turned to German idealism, including the work of Kant and Schopenhauer. In *The World as Will and Representation*, for instance, Schopenhauer, like other idealists, challenged the dominance of empiricism in Western thought, arguing that the empirical world was not an independently existing realm separate from an experiencing subject but was fundamentally constituted by the subject. Unlike empiricists who believed that all knowledge was based on sense experience, Schopenhauer argued that the world was comprehensible only through the cognitive faculties of the subject. According to him, space, time, and causality, which he saw as the means through which objects were experienced, were not independent things but a priori forms of understanding brought to bear by the subject. Spatio-temporal objects and the causal connections between them did not exist without a subject to bring them into appearance. As Schopenhauer explained, "everything in the world exists only as an object for a subject, exists only in relation to consciousness."[73] Accordingly, the subject was not a passive victim of external stimuli but a positive agent who shaped experience. Equally important, the experiencing subject was not an object in the world subject to the categories of space, time, and causality, that is, merely another representation, but was fundamentally distinct from the experienced world.

While Hubbard had no use for Schopenhauer's "pessimism," he did find useful the German philosopher's separation of the noumenal self that was outside space, time, and causality, and the empirical self that resided in the phenomenal world.[74] "Now on a careful review of this," explained Hubbard, "we see that the analytical mind and the reactive mind, alike, are by-product mechanical minds. Alike, they depend upon energy, spaces, storage, and other quantitative things. The awareness of awareness unit [the thetan], however, is itself decision, is itself knowingness."[75] Following Schopenhauer, Hubbard argued, in a direct rebuke of behavioral psychology and the empirical tradition upon which it was based, that the noumenal self as pure knowingness utilized the transcendent categories of matter, energy, space, and time (what Hubbard termed MEST) to construct the universe. As he explained, "the origin of MEST lies with theta itself, and that MEST, as we know the physical universe, is a product of theta."[76] While the body and the mind were, in cybernetic terms, vulnerable to stimulus-response commands from the surrounding environment, that environment, according to Hubbard, was an imaginative creation of thetans. Hubbard argued that too many individuals, however, had forsaken their noumenal selves and mistakenly attributed authorship

of the world to someone else. "The physical universe as we look at it right around us there is an Is-ness for one reason only," explained Hubbard, "We all agree that somebody else created it, whether that is God or Mugjun or Bill."[77] True knowledge existed in recognizing that those surroundings persisted simply because the thetan accepted them as such. To restore the freedom to control the MEST universe, Hubbard developed elaborate new therapeutic techniques.

Hubbard based the therapeutic procedures of Scientology on traditional Hindu yogic practices and Buddhist insight meditation, both of which sought to free the individual from the control exerted by the material world.[78] Hubbard, for instance, pointed to the Surangama Sutra, one of the key teachings of the Buddha, as "more delineative, more exact, more comprehensive and more comprehensible than any and all psychological doctrine known to us in this Twentieth Century."[79] In this sutra, the Buddha converses with Ananda, a young monk who struggles to achieve *samadhi* or the deep concentration associated with the highest level of meditation. Ananda fails because he believes that the activities of the mind are guided by sensory perception. Instead, the Buddha teaches Ananda the opposite: "After all the delusions of sense conceptions have been thus overcome, only the true Essence of mind will remain."[80] To achieve spiritual calm, the Buddha promoted insight meditation, which helped the individual to silence the constant flow of desires and memories by understanding their impermanence. Although Hubbard had little use for the other parts of the Noble Eightfold Path, he was attracted to the psychological relief found in insight meditation, which he also found in Hindu yogic practices. Developed most clearly by the sage Patanjali in his *Yoga Sutras*, Hindu yoga promoted a similar form of psychological discipline as Buddhist meditation.[81] The goal was to learn control of the mind, the body, and the senses and, in a literal sense, to "yoke" the atman from the body and from the phenomenal world. Yoga, in other words, cleansed the self of all karmic traces and generated a pure consciousness. In the practice of *dhyana*, for instance, an individual meditated upon an object until any feeling of separation was eliminated, which, according to Patanjali, interrupted the chain of stimulus-response patterns and allowed the self to become focused on the present.

Scientology, as Hubbard outlined in the 1950s, borrowed freely from these practices, offering what Hubbard called "theta clearing techniques" to release the self from the constraints of memory and from the impact of external stimuli and to move beyond the biological limitations of the body. In this sense, Hubbard's techniques, much like that offered by Norman Vincent Peale, echoed the practices of earlier New Thought movements that promoted "concentration, meditation, and

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prayer" in their new "cosmopolitan spirituality" to liberate the individual spirit from any earthly prison.[82] Scientology continued the long-standing Platonic, Christian, and Cartesian separation of the immortal soul from the mortal body, seeing the latter as merely a vessel occupied by an animating spirit and as a tool to be used and discarded. "The thetan *is* the person," Hubbard claimed, "You are *you in* a body."[83] Hubbard, moreover, argued that the separation of spirit and body was achievable prior to the death of the body. Consequently, Scientology as a spiritual practice had three specific goals: to end all forms of psychological conditioning that controlled an individual's actions, to liberate the thetan from the constraints of the body, and to restore the thetan's creative control over the MEST universe. For Hubbard, "the attainment of the state of I AM depends upon one's ability to again be able to create space, energy, and objects in and for his own universe, by himself or in co-operation with other thetans."[84] Spirituality, in this sense, helped Hubbard to overcome his initial panic about human agency in a domineering world, a personalized form of liberation that sought to provide ontological stability in a postwar world in chaotic flux.

While Hubbard introduced numerous therapeutic procedures over the years, many of which he outlined in *The Creation of Human Ability* (1954), he offered Standard Operating Procedure-8-C as the foundation of Scientology practices. According to Hubbard, SOP-8-C produced "a condition known as 'theta clear,'" which referred to a state in which "the person, this thought unit, is clear of his body, his engrams, his facsimiles, but can handle and safely control a body."[85] Scientology auditing, as described by Hubbard, involved an auditor or trained specialist guiding a patient or "pre-clear" through a series of procedures, run again and again until they had been mastered. The opening procedure of SOP-8-C aimed to reestablish the pre-clear's control of his or her body. Hubbard believed that the first step for individuals to regain their own self-determination was paradoxically to cease resisting commands from others, which only served to validate their control, and instead focus on controlling their own actions. Accordingly, the auditor gave the pre-clear specific commands to follow, which included walking to various objects in the auditing room and touching them. While the pre-clear would originally bristle at these commands, over time he or she would recognize that the auditor posed no threat and focus instead on the objects in the room. As the procedure continued, the commands of the auditor became more general, allowing the pre-clear to determine which objects he or she wanted to touch. This opening procedure was built on basic cybernetic principles, in which the auditor acted as an input or outside stimulus, and the pre-clear learned to mitigate the impact of those commands

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and translate them into freely chosen actions. As Hubbard explained, the pre-clear "ceases to resist incoming direction, and by ceasing to resist it, no longer validates it as a barrier, and so is not concentrating attention on resisting direction but is able to use it freely in his own self-determination."[86]

While this opening procedure was intended to restore the pre-clear's control over his or her body, SOP-8-C was designed overall to establish the pre-clear's control over his or her environment and ultimately to liberate the pre-clear from his or her body. Hubbard, like other postwar spiritual gurus, promoted a spirituality of seeking that paid no heed to any notion of the sacred in any material form, especially the body. Each step of the opening procedure involved mental exercises, similar to yogic practices, in which the pre-clear came to recognize the constructed nature of the material world. In step one, for instance, the pre-clear was instructed to list objects, people, ideas, and goals that were separate from him or her and which therefore had no controlling influence. Repeated again and again for items located in the past, present, and future, this procedure helped the pre-clear, according to Hubbard, "to orient objects in space and time" and thereby orient himself or herself in space.[87] Similarly in step seven, the pre-clear was instructed to reach out mentally and touch all the barriers ("spaces, walls, objects, times") in his or her life in order to validate them, and then in turn told to penetrate, eliminate, and then recreate those barriers mentally, all in an effort to eliminate their influence.[88] Likewise, in step three, the pre-clear strove to reestablish his or her control over space itself by trying to "hold two back corners of [the] room and not think."[89] This process, like many others, was designed to aid the pre-clear in learning once again how to manipulate space in the MEST universe instead of believing that such space controlled him or her.

Other steps, including steps two, four, and six, involved the use of mock-ups. According to Hubbard, the pre-clear contributed to his or her own entrapment by failing to recognize that reality as such was merely an agreed-upon construct fabricated and refabricated by thetans over the ages. By merely accepting the world as is, the pre-clear made what Hubbard termed facsimiles or involuntary images of the world that were accepted as the true nature of reality, which was then seen as beyond the control of the pre-clear. Instead, the pre-clear needed to learn that these facsimiles were merely copies of the MEST universe that could be altered. Thus, the auditor instructed the pre-clear to make mock-ups (or "a full-perceptic energy picture in three dimensions") of various things, which helped the pre-clear to control reactions to them.[90] In step two, for instance, the pre-clear was told to

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mock up bodies of other people and then to un-mock them as a way to curb their force. In step six, similarly, the pre-clear made mock-ups of ideas or symbols "which have formerly moved him" and in so doing learn to manipulate them instead.[91] More directly, many mock-ups rehabilitated the pre-clear's power to construct the MEST universe. In step four, for instance, the pre-clear was instructed to mock up a set of eight anchor points in the auditing room and to create a space or mass that the pre-clear was free to manipulate. For Hubbard, "the freedom of an individual depends upon that individual's freedom to alter his considerations of space, energy, time, and forms of life and his roles in it."[92] In a world in which the objectivity of reality had been undermined by modern advertising, technological advances, and manipulative political movements, Hubbard developed techniques to help individuals engineer the material world in their own fashion.

Like Hindu yogic practices and Buddhist insight meditation, SOC-8-C was designed to reduce the emotional and physical impact of the outside environment on the individual and thereby establish control over the fluctuations of the human body. Hubbard believed, however, that Scientology procedures would also allow individuals literally to move out of their bodies (or exteriorize, as he called it) and to recognize their true nature. "The possession of a MEST body," he explained, "is a liability, for through that body the being can be given pain, can be regimented by the routine demands of eating and care from harm until at the very, very highest he can be put a puppet dancing to the spin of some unthinking planet."[93] In particular, Hubbard blamed behavioral psychologists throughout the communist world for perfecting techniques to reduce humankind to servitude, techniques that he believed were the foundation of much of American psychology too. The techniques of SOP-8-C, along with the other auditing procedures he developed in the 1960s and 1970s, were designed to reestablish the thetan's identity as a spiritual being. Hubbard warned that without these techniques to liberate individuals from their bodies the forces of totalitarianism would triumph. As he argued, "the processes of Scientology could be described as methods of 'unhypnotizing' men to their own freer choice and better life."[94]

Scientology as Cold War Psychology

In 1964, the *Saturday Evening Post* featured an article on Scientology based upon an interview that Hubbard granted at Saint Hill Manor, his estate in England. Hubbard had hoped that this interview would mitigate the negative press about Scientology that ensued after the U.S.

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Food and Drug Administration raided his Scientology offices in Washington, D.C., in 1963 and confiscated his organization's therapeutic equipment. However, the *Saturday Evening Post* depicted Hubbard as an "old-time snake-oil peddler" and mocked his organization.[95] Crushed by the article, Hubbard retreated from public life, spending his time developing new therapeutic procedures and safeguarding his movement from those he believed were out to destroy it. In 1965, Hubbard systematized his therapeutic techniques with the publication of *The Bridge to Freedom*, which outlined the procedures for becoming an operating thetan (or a thetan freed from bodily existence). He also constructed an elaborate cosmology or "space opera" about the nature of the universe, outlining the supposed sixty-trillion-year history of thetans within the MEST universe.[96] This cosmology, which included the history of countless civilizations spread throughout space and engaged for endless years in battle with one another for control, became more elaborate as Hubbard drew upon his previous career as a science fiction writer. To protect his new work from the prying outsiders, Hubbard also increased security within his organization, instituting a series of elaborate security checks to investigate the backgrounds of Scientology members.

Consequently, critics of Scientology have dismissed the movement as a cultish fad based upon the visions of a "con man" and kept afloat by a Hollywood film community filling the coffers of its churches.[97] Such criticisms, however, ignore the appeal of a movement created during a period of profound social and technological transformations that reshaped everyday life in America and reordered American politics as a result. While interest in Eastern philosophies sprouted throughout the 1950s and influenced the birth of the counterculture in the following decade, Scientology reflected a different politics and a different social vision, one attuned to an emerging libertarian ethos.[98] In contrast to other movements, Scientology offered a form of psychic survivalism in the early Cold War that connected with several disparate trends within American culture. Unlike, for instance, Norman Vincent Peale and other popular psychologists, Hubbard developed a much more radical critique of modernity, not only pointing out the stresses of modern life affecting mental health but criticizing the institutional structures that impinged upon individual freedom. Hubbard's writings reflected the paranoia and "agency panic" of an American society coming to terms with the vast social, economic, and political institutions beginning to dominate the postwar landscape, institutions that appeared to threaten the independence and autonomy that supposedly once defined the American character. From denouncing the American welfare state to railing against medical and psychiatric practices, Hubbard tapped into a

growing libertarian strain in American political culture, echoing the work of Ayn Rand, William Burroughs, and others who saw the forces of social control everywhere.

Unlike libertarian thinkers who merely reaffirmed a hard-boiled individualism, however, Hubbard argued that mere rhetoric was not enough to defend the individual and to cure a society cracking under the pressures of militarization and an escalating arms race. Beginning as a way to treat war veterans suffering from combat trauma, Scientology evolved as a means to treat, according to Hubbard, all of the neurotic and psychotic conditions produced by the stresses of modern life, making Hubbard's movement part of the rising therapeutic culture in America. This culture was in part sponsored by the American national security state in the early Cold War, an age in which politics and psychology were seen, in the eyes of Hubbard and others, as inseparable. In this, Hubbard sounded no different from more prominent voices from across the political spectrum in the 1950s, ranging from Whittaker Chambers to Erich Fromm and Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., who linked the political and social stability of the nation to the mental health of the American populace. Worried about manipulative psychological practices such as brainwashing supposedly developed behind the Iron and Bamboo Curtains and believing that radical political beliefs such as communism derived from psychological hang-ups, Hubbard developed a movement that echoed the concerns of a country gripped by the Cold War. As he explained, only "ideas," not "arms," could counter the techniques of brainwashing.[99]

Hubbard also tried to escape the trappings of communism and other forms of mental manipulation by turning to spirituality, a move that linked Scientology to the religious culture of the 1950s. But Hubbard refused merely to echo the conventional practices of mainstream religions and presented Scientology instead as a spiritual practice that provided concrete techniques for personal salvation. Psychic liberation was Hubbard's focus. Echoing the cosmology of the quirky 1957 science fiction film *The Incredible Shrinking Man*, in which an angst-ridden suburban homeowner escapes the pressures of his life through his gradual physical disappearance and conversion to pure voice, Scientology depicted thetans as disembodied enunciators of meaning and order. Thus, it was not coincidental that Scientology emerged at the same historical moment as transhumanism, the movement coined in 1957 by Julian Huxley that shared Hubbard's dream of enhancing the mental and physical capacities of human beings. Using cybernetic language and driven by the hope of moving beyond the purely human, transhumanists like Huxley envisioned forms of

mind-machine interfacing and biological enhancement that would extend human control over the material world.[100] As postmodern thinkers in the 1960s began to argue that the self was a product of cultural, social, and historical forces, transhumanists, much like Hubbard, offered a vision of transcendence, of escaping biological limitations by transporting the contents of the mind into something more durable and achieving a freedom unrestrained by the corporeal body.

In this sense, Scientology represented the height of metaphysical humanism, not only positing thetans as rational, disembodied beings and divine makers of the universe but as immortal spirits living in a world on the brink of catastrophe. Scientology offered a form of psychic survivalism to help individuals mitigate the impact of past conditioning on their behavior in favor of a type of emotional disengagement focused on survival in the present. In so doing, Hubbard redefined the self as a pure will purged of all determinants, a spirit capable of remaking the universe according to personal wishes. Consequently, Scientology easily fit into the counterculture of the 1960s, offering a libertarian philosophy based on Eastern religious practices that mirrored much of the Age of Aquarius but that sidestepped the more libertine elements. By the 1970s, Hubbard presented Scientology as a cure for the excesses of the previous decade and as the only therapeutic solution for the rising culture of addiction in America. Since then, Scientology has been marketed as both a science and a religion that addresses the ills of modern society. But the roots of the movement extend back to the paranoid culture of the 1950s, one rife with fears of communist infiltration, nuclear war, and psychological manipulation and therefore with calls for psychic survival. "The true danger," as Hubbard explained, "is man's uncivilized state. Unless something can come along and cure him of his barbarism he is not going to survive."[101]

Notes

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5. "The Age of Psychology in the U.S.," *Life* 42, (1957): 68.

6. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., *The Vital Center: The Politics of Freedom* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1949), 244.

7. Ellen Herman, *The Romance of American Psychology: Political Culture in the Age of Experts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

8. L. Ron Hubbard, *All about Radiation* (Los Angeles: Scientology Publications Organization, 1957), 46.

9. Ibid., 50.

10. Timothy Melley, *Empire of Conspiracy: The Culture of Paranoia in Postwar America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 7.

11. Martin Heidegger, "Letter on 'Humanism,'" in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 245.

12. In this sense, I am following the lead of Hugh Urban, Lawrence Wright, and others who have located the origins of Scientology in the social and cultural history of the 1950s. In contrast to Urban, however, who sees Hubbard as a "*bricoleur*" who, following the zeitgeist of the decade, combined "religion and secular culture" in an effort to update religion in a scientific age, I argue that Scientology operated in the 1950s more as a form of survivalism in a world that Hubbard believed was on the brink of catastrophe. In other words, Lawrence Wright is a bit closer to the mark in stressing the "immense trauma" of World War II that opened the door for a litany of self-help philosophies. But Scientology's staunchly individualistic and libertarian bent distinguished it from other movements and accounts for its appeal both during and after the rise of the counterculture the next decade. See Hugh Urban, *The Church of Scientology: A History of a New Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 59–60; and Lawrence Wright, *Going Clear: Scientology, Hollywood, and the Prison of Belief* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013), 63.

13. "The Life of Stress," *Time* 56, (October 9, 1950): 93–94.

14. Hans Selye, *The Stress of Life* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1956), 3.

15. On the history of the concept of stress, see Mark Jackson, *The Age of Stress: Science and the Search for Stability* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

16. Harold Wolff, *Stress and Disease* (Springfield, Ill.: Charles C. Thomas, 1953), 19.

17. Ernest Havemann, "The Age of Psychology in the U.S.," *Life* 42, (January 7, 1957): 77.

18. "For the Psyche," *Time* 48, (September 2, 1946): 73.

19. On Hubbard's life, see Russell Miller, *Bare-Faced Messiah: The True Story of L. Ron Hubbard* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1987), Janet Reitman, *Inside Scientology: The Story of America's Most Secretive Religion* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2011), and Wright, *Going Clear*.

20. Quoted in John Atack, *A Piece of Blue Sky: Scientology, Dianetics, and L. Ron Hubbard Exposed* (New York: Carol Publishing Group, 1990), 83.

21. Wright, *Going Clear*, 22.

22. Hubbard, *All about Radiation*, 56.

23. L. Ron Hubbard, *Dianetics: The Original Thesis* (Los Angeles: Church of Scientology of California, Publications Organization, 1976), 141.

24. Helen O'Brien, *Dianetics in Limbo* (Philadelphia: Whitmore Publishing Co., 1966), 30.

25. Wright, *Going Clear*, 57.

26. L. Ron Hubbard, *Dianetics: The Evolution of a Science* (Commerce, Calif.: Bridge Publications, 2007), 35.

27. L. Ron Hubbard, *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health* (Los Angeles: Bridge Publications, 2007), 38.

28. Ibid, 74.

29. Ibid.

30. Paul N. Edwards, *The Closed World: Computers and the Politics of Discourse in Cold War America* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), 163–64.

31. "Of Two Minds," *Time* 56, (July 24, 1950): 64.

32. Hubbard, *Dianetics: The Evolution of a Science*, 3–5.

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98. In this sense, I disagree with Leigh Schmidt who argues that spirituality in America, originating as a radical form of Protestantism in the early nineteenth century, has always been tied to "liberal progressivism and a religious left." Political categories, however, are not so clear cut, and Scientology is one example of how certain spiritual movements, while anti-government and anti-institutional, have little connection to left-wing social reform. In part, this explains why Scientology weathered the currents of the Age of Aquarius and reemerged just as popular in the 1970s during the Age of Watergate. See Schmidt, *Restless Souls*, xii.

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100. See Gregory R. Hansell and William Grassie, eds., *H+/-: Transhumanism and Its Critics* (Philadelphia: Metanexus Institute, 2011).

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ABSTRACT Developed in the early 1950s by science fiction writer L. Ron Hubbard, Scientology was part of the larger postwar therapeutic culture that blended religion and psychology in a search for mental well-being. Unlike contemporaneous self-help gurus such as Norman Vincent Peale and Harry Overstreet, however, Hubbard painted a much bleaker portrait of modern life, one rife with forces of psychological and social control. Railing against communists, homosexuals, and feminists as well as against the decay of the family and the rise of the welfare state, Hubbard argued that Americans suffered from a waning sense of ontological security, living in a world that provided no support for self-identity. Hubbard refused, however, to shrink from such changes and lapse into nostalgia for a premodern, pre-technological world like Peale and others did; instead, he offered a way for individuals to appropriate the dynamism of modernity for themselves. As advanced industrialization erased distances between societies, revolutionized transportation, and computerized information systems, Hubbard reimagined the self as spiritual being possessing precisely those powers to manipulate time and space and to remake the world at large. Borrowing freely from Eastern religious ideas, cybernetic theory, and German idealism, Hubbard produced a philosophy that was staunchly libertarian, spiritual, and future-oriented, one that tapped into Cold War fears about psychological manipulation and waning personal autonomy and into dreams about the immanent power of human beings.

Keywords: Scientology, Cold War, cybernetics, psychology