

A Further Report on the Barnhouse Effect

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Let me begin by saying that I don't know the secret entrusted to John Woodward by Professor Barnhouse any more than anyone else does. What's more, readers of this article will be just as disappointed as they were by reading its precursor, published over 50 years ago now, as far as learning how *they* can bring about the "Barnhouse Effect". I am neither willing nor able to give away that secret. Nor do I know the exact circumstances of either Woodward's or Barnhouse's death; I can say however that both died desolate, lonely, and insane.

What I can do is fill in the reader on certain events which transpired subsequent to the article "A Report on the Barnhouse Effect," first published in *Collier's Weekly*, 1950 (reprinted in *Welcome to the Monkey House*, The Dial Press).

For those who may have missed the above-mentioned article, a certain Professor Barnhouse discovered how to "flatten anything on earth, from Joe Louis to the Great Wall of China" simply by concentrating his thoughts. In essence, by repeating a sort of mantra, silently, and directing the energies thus collected to any point of his choosing. The energies were not his; they exist independently of all of us, flowing in and around us at all times. Barnhouse merely discovered how to channel them. The effect is undiminished by distance, and anyone, quite literally even a child, can learn to do this, by simply repeating the 'mantra'. Barnhouse discovered the mantra by chance, and, with practice, became able to direct the Effect on command. Being a man of common decency, he desired to use this discovery for the good of mankind. Being also a man of common sense, he was wary of giving the secret away to just anyone, lest it be used not for the good of mankind. He approached the United States government—which reacted, predictably, with skepticism. They wanted to see a test, a demonstration, to prove it was not superstition or smoke and mirrors. The United States government reacted in another predictable manner: the test they proposed focused on military application: they wanted Professor Barnhouse to shoot down planes, just by thinking about it. Which he did (they were drones, no pilots aboard). Then he disappeared. He was not seen again, alive.

Though Professor Barnhouse disappeared from the world, he materially affected it up until very shortly before his death. Disillusioned by his encounter with the United States government, which had in effect intended to turn him into a weapon of mass destruction, he determined to disarm the world's governments. Single-handedly. Weapons started disappearing, or ceased being operational, all over the world. At first, there was rejoicing in many quarters. Men's ability to level civilization with nuclear bombs had outstripped their wisdom not to, many believed. And so the rendering harmless of great nuclear arsenals was deemed to be a good thing. But not by everyone. The Barnhouse Effect, when applied by a single person, could be brought to bear on only a single point, not on all nuclear warheads at once wherever they might be. And so it necessarily happened that certain arsenals were deactivated before others, leaving certain antagonists on the world stage defenseless for a short time. This caused queasiness in government circles. With the predictable result that certain governments, rather than making the world safer by destroying their armaments themselves, instead accelerated their stockpiling of armaments—in secret, so that Professor Barnhouse might not find and flatten them. In short, despite, or because of, Professor Barnhouse's efforts, the arms race actually got worse.

Professor Barnhouse was unable to keep up and eventually exhausted himself trying to. He lived in seclusion, for fear of being taken into custody and perhaps being tortured into revealing the secret. At his

peak, judging by the Effects produced, he must have been sleeping only in snatches towards the end; never more than an hour at a stretch. But, at some point, he collapsed, and no further Effects were noted. His death was due to a freak self-induced accident, possibly triggered in a moment of deranged, sleep-deprived carelessness. The details do not concern us. Before his death, he caused the secret to be conveyed to his former student, John Woodward—author of the previously mentioned report.

Woodward, being a man of both common decency and sense, desired to do good and to avoid being tortured into revealing the secret. He too retired into paranoiac seclusion. Rather than attempting so grandiose a project as world disarmament, he had the good sense to try something at once more manageable in size and also more constructive. Taking his cue from an idea of Barnhouse's that one might, for example, cause rain clouds to gather over a drought-stricken zone, Woodward determined to try just that. Goodness knows there were more than enough places on earth where one might have effected a small change and done quite a lot of good. He picked a place where drought had not yet taken firm hold and entirely devastated the soil, where the situation might yet be redeemed with just a little nudge. His initial efforts were most gratifying and of such a modest nature that anyone might have taken them to have been natural occurrences, not connected to the Barnhouse Effect in any way. In the event, it was indeed so taken by the world's press.

And so the rains came and the drought-stricken land became fertile again. A horrible famine had been averted and not the slightest suspicion had been aroused, how it had actually come about. The sequel, however, utterly devastated Woodward. The now swollen rivers altered their courses and became the crux of a border dispute, which led to a border war, which led to the senseless slaughter of at least as many people as the famine, now averted, would probably have killed anyway. After the border war came famine, typhus, and cholera, which killed even more. Woodward was horrified.

A few similarly carefully chosen attempts to make small improvements in the human condition also turned out disastrously. Woodward came to realize that exercising virtually limitless power with only the standard complement of conscience was untenable. He went insane and ultimately died by his own hand.

The last person to have known the secret in full was Edith Sweeney. The circumstances under which Woodward confided the secret to her do not concern us. Suffice it to say that Edith Sweeney was the first and last person to have died, with the secret intact, both tranquilly and in full possession of her wits. Like Barnhouse and Woodward before her, Edith Sweeney was a person of entirely common decency and sense. More importantly, she was a woman who recognized her own limits, and that good intentions alone do not guarantee good results. She also recognized what a shame it would be to take the secret with her to the grave; it would certainly have been simple enough for her to have done just that. But no. It was she who hit upon the idea which forms the ruling principle of our organization; our Tripods, as we call them.

It was she who realized that the secret could be broken up into parts, that several people, each in possession of only a single part, could be trained to mentally recite the parts in cycles, much like a group of singers can be trained to sing 'row row row your boat'—and thereby produce the Barnhouse Effect, undiminished in either power or reach. She herself never mastered the technique beyond rattling ink pots on desks, just to convince doubters that the Effect was real. She devoted herself, instead, to finding out by experiment what size group was optimal for producing the Effect. Twos, threes, and fours were recruited and trained systematically. They were strictly restricted to rattling ink pots. None of the recruits had the slightest idea that they were Barnhousing, that they could, if they had set their minds to it, have diverted the moon from its orbit and sent it crashing into Jupiter.

Twos turned out to be less than satisfactory. One of them was forever pre-occupied with trying to guess or figure out the other half of the mantra, and so could not concentrate fixedly on his own half. Fours turned out to be too complicated; they couldn't keep in synch long enough. Row row row your boat doesn't sound very good with fours either, for that matter. Threes were just right. They could get in synch and stay that way long enough to rattle ink pots till they dropped from exhaustion; and, with only one piece of the

puzzle each, it was clear to all that it was utterly futile to attempt to guess the other two fragments.

‘But what was to keep them from sharing their secrets with the other two?’ Simple. They never knew who the other two were. Edith Sweeney organized it all remotely. She would visit one of them, coaching and training him, to ensure that he was concentrating properly. Then she would move on to the next member, in another town, another state, eventually another continent, and practice with *him*; and so on. Finally, she would arrange ‘seances’ by telephone with all three concentrating in rhythm and, one after the other, the ink pots would dance across their respective tables. And they would never find out who the other two were.

I guess you could say they were organized like terrorist cells; no one, apart from Edith Sweeney herself, ever knew enough to expose or incriminate much of the rest of the organization. Thus, they were able to carry on living quite ordinary lives, not in secret. Doctors, teachers, street sweepers, ordinary Jacks and Jills, with 9-to-5 jobs and families and regular car payments. Every now and then they’d get together, remotely you understand, and rattle ink pots.

That constituted the first generation of Tripods. The run-in phase, so to say. With all due respect for her admittedly modest Barnhousing abilities, her ground-breaking work was absolutely essential to our bringing the Barnhouse Effect under control. By which we mean, not under physical or psychological control—which was relatively easy—but under *moral* control. Whenever man plays God, he either becomes a devil or goes mad. Edith Sweeney saved us from that fate. Man is, as he always was—as he was meant to be—, a bit player. Nothing more.

Having determined the optimum size of a pod, Edith Sweeney next set about devising how to pass the secret on from generation to generation, without any one person ever coming to know the whole secret and thereby becoming either a devil or a nutter. For the second generation of Tripods, she divided up the secret into different triplets, so that no member of any Tripod would be exchangeable for any member of any other Tripod. Each Tripod was forthwith responsible for recruiting and training its own replacements. Atop each Tripod was set a ‘camera’, a sort of a watchman. He would know the identities of his pod, but not any part of Professor Barnhouse’s original secret or of Edith Sweeney’s now multiply-fragmented secret. Edith Sweeney, as I said, was the last person to have known the whole secret. No one else ever will, I guess.

The ‘camera’ or Watchman would also know the identities of a few other Watchmen, but the inner members of only one other pod apart from his own. Thus, if any Watchman should fail, some other Watchman could ensure the survival of the pod. Thus, the organization took on a structure independent of Edith Sweeney herself, able to carry on without her. We are not unlike a monastic order.

Secondly, Edith Sweeney started giving her pods something more worthwhile to do than shake ink pots. The choice of worthy causes and the selection of points of application (we do not like to use word ‘targets’) was completely removed from the competence of the Tripod members, who would actually apply the Effect, or their respective Watchmen, who would contact the pod members and give them the ‘go’ signal. The times and points of application would be made known, for example by coded messages in the international press, to the Watchmen whose Tripods were to carry out the plan. The members themselves would not know any more than necessary to direct the Effect to the proper place at the proper time.

No Tripod ever acts alone. In any action, at least two other Tripods are closely involved in monitoring the application of the Effect for possible unintended and undesirable side effects, such as rivers changing course, in order to inhibit or at least ameliorate them by counter-Effects. It is clear that this method has an enormous advantage over attempting such things as a one-man show, as did Professor Barnhouse and John Woodward.

The alert reader will have noticed that I have said nothing about just who it is who decides what causes are deemed worthy and which points of application are deemed efficacious, or by what criteria the decisions are arrived at, or indeed who chooses the Watchmen, and so on. This is because I neither know

nor desire to know. This belongs to a level of the organization to which I am not privy. As in a monastic order, I have faith in those above me, that they have faith in those above *them*—and *not*, I might add, without needing to know the reason why. I *do* know the reason why. It is because we are all stamped from the same cookie dough with about the same complement of common sense and decency, desirous of doing some good and of not being tortured for secrets we do not know. And because I have a life; I do not wish to have to live as a paranoid recluse simply because I happen to be part of something larger than myself.

Some philosopher once said that the perfect form of government would be one in which it did not matter whether good people or bad people got into office. The system of checks and balances would compensate, either way, for any excess or defect of character. Edith Sweeney was a genius at balancing checks.

While I do not have access to a complete list of the organization's activities—indeed, such a list does not exist; the organization's activities are catalogued in several partially overlapping partial lists, each archivist having access to only a few of them—I can state categorically that we were not responsible, either directly or indirectly, either through action or failure to act, for the following events: the collapse of the Soviet Union. The earthquake centered off the coast of Aceh and the ensuing tsunami. The stock market crash. Or the ascension of Cardinal Ratzinger to the papacy. The loss of a certain probe to the planet Mars was, I am charged to state, our responsibility. This was no accident; it was carried out as a demonstration of our reach. It had the desired effect of obviating a certain government's plan which, had it been implemented, would have been foolhardy in the extreme. I am not at liberty to reveal more at this time. We can assure those involved in the project that your calculations were entirely correct; the device would have functioned as it was designed to, had we not interfered. We apologize to all those involved in the project; we deeply regret the pain and anguish this loss has caused you and all the wasted man-hours.

I can state these things because I belong to the part of the organization responsible for documenting and archiving our forays, both our modest successes and our occasional failures, that we may learn and improve. I can also state that our forays do not, in general, have the character of interfering with the natural course of events, such as terminating droughts or changing the courses of rivers or causing Mars landers to malfunction. We tend rather to try to add momentum to good things which have already started of their own accord, to keep them rolling. Rather than trying to create good—which is really God's business [though I freely grant that the author of the previous article would not have written that]—we try to magnify good wherever we may find it. And this is surely within the provenance of every man, whether he is Barnhousing or not.

As one of the organization's archivists, I have been charged with drafting this report. It will have been reviewed by several others within the organization, of whom I have no knowledge, before landing on your desk to be approved (or not, as the case may be) for publication in the national press. It would be most indulgent of you to forgive us if further reports should issue infrequently.

[Homage to Kurt Vonnegut Jr.]
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