

Useful Art as a Cybernetic Tool of Social Change

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Project idea:

Useful Art as a Cybernetic Tool of Social Change is a project between LJMU's School of Art and Creative Industries, LJMU Archives and ZKM | Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe, Germany.

How do AI tools support societal change? And what part do archives and cybernetics play? This project uses LJMU's Stafford Beer Archive as a starting point, from which we will create and develop new forms of collaborative AI archival search and activation tools. These aim to enable individuals, communities, and groups to share and reuse methods for bottom-up change. In doing so, the project will build a mobile, nimble and curious resource that will make archived knowledge accessible and usable to a wide range of people.

Ultimately, this will lead to the development of a shared online and open-access archive, assisted by AI. It will allow individual users and community groups to search for archival information, generating a 'Playbook' of Useful Art and activist alternatives to assist their ideas and projects.

What is useful art?

This project is connected to the idea of *Arte Útil*. *Arte Útil* is Spanish and can be translated literally as "useful art," but it also refers to the concept of "art as a tool." This concept is linked to the idea that art should question established systems and point out new possibilities for societal action. *Arte Útil* utilizes artistic thinking to create, develop, and implement tactics which enable us to reimagine and reshape the way we act in society. Based on an initiative of Cuban artist Tania Bruguera, the Asociación de Arte Útil was founded in 2013 – is a continuously growing network of committed individuals and cultural institutions promoting the development of *Arte Útil* around the world. ZKM | Karlsruhe with its director Alistair Hudson is a partner of the *Arte Útil* idea and archive, aiming to further research how art can be a tool of societal change.

Who was Stafford Beer?

Professor Anthony Stafford Beer was born on 25 September 1926 in London. He was a theorist and professor of the Manchester Business School, and founder of Management Cybernetics for which he is best known. Beer was employed by governments in over 20 countries and by a number of international agencies, held numerous academic posts and managerial positions and authored over 200 publications by the time of his death on 23 August 2002. He was also a published poet and exhibited painter. Projects he is particularly well known for include the proto-internet *Project Cybersyn* in Chile, and *Team Syntegrity*. He was appointed Honorary Professor of Organisational Transformation at Liverpool Polytechnic, now Liverpool John Moores University, in 1989. The [Stafford Beer Collection](#) is held at LJMU Special Collections & Archives.

Key steps of the project:

- a) Cataloguing, digitising and archiving the LJMU Stafford Beer archive as a source code for online archiving as activist exchange.
- b) Utilising the knowledge and skills base of ZKM | Karlsruhe to develop online and offline AI tools. These will enable the accessibility of a growing archive of information to users as bespoke toolkits and playbooks for change.
- c) Enabling the growing network artistic research, in collaboration with the Association of Arte Útil, to develop a growing and open-source repository of research, knowledge-production and activist strategies for community change.
- d) Enabling the development and research of Latin American based digital and cybernetic initiatives as a basis for a growing international research dialogue around decolonisation and the Decentralisation of Political Economies.

About ZKM | Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe

Founded in 1989, the [ZKM | Karlsruhe](#) stands worldwide for an open concept of art in the digital age. At the ZKM, scientific collection and archive research is intertwined with artistic research on the electronic arts. Through these interdisciplinary connections, the ZKM presents and produces the evolution of art and media of the 20th and 21st centuries. Whether exhibitions, symposia, publications, concert programs or digital formats, the ZKM is the platform for the discourse of art and technology with society, science, business and politics in order to examine and better understand the effects of our media and digital world on us humans.

About LJMU School of Art and Creative Industries

Liverpool School of Art and Creative Industries is a new School at Liverpool John Moores University. Opening in 2025, it amalgamates both Liverpool School of Art and Design and Liverpool Screen School into an exciting, forward thinking multidisciplinary environment which is dedicated to cultivating innovative thinkers and industry-ready graduates who are equipped to succeed in the creative industries.

About LJMU Special Collections & Archives

→ [LJMU Special Collections and Archives](#) (SCA) manage the University's collections of historical, rare, and unique archival and print materials, including photographs, manuscripts, books, video and audio resources. We collect, document and safeguard material in accordance with professional standards and legislation to make our holdings accessible to students, staff, and the wider public to encourage and support learning, teaching, research, enjoyment, and inspiration.

→ The [Stafford Beer Collection](#) includes Stafford Beer's personal papers and his library of almost 2000 books, documenting his cybernetics career, projects, and wide-ranging intellectual pursuits within. The collection includes available to view by appointment, and is open to all.

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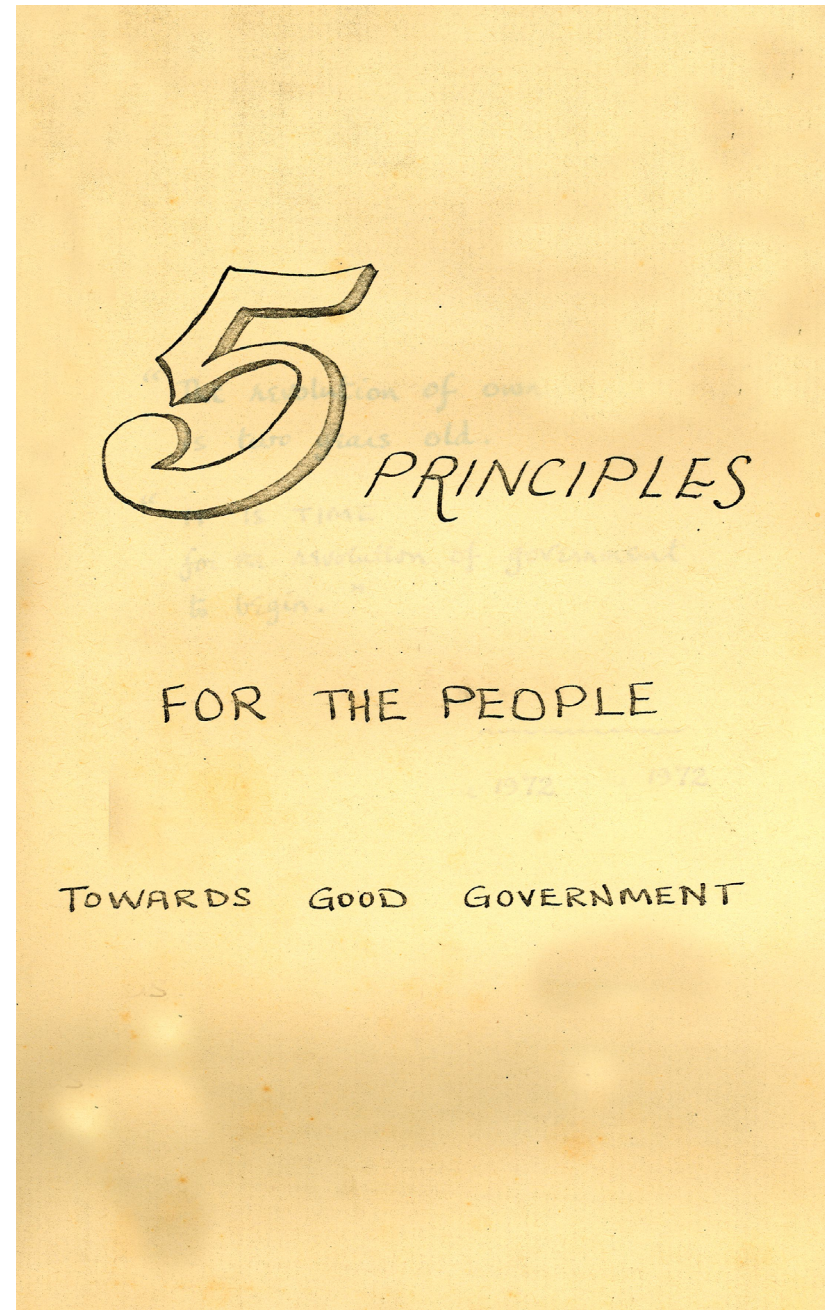
Mira Hirtz
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Stafford Beer: 5 Principles for the People

Stafford Beer, 1972

Courtesy of the Stafford Beer Collection
at Liverpool John Moores University.



2

"The revolution of ownership
is two years old.

"IT IS TIME
for the revolution of government
to begin."

20th October 1972

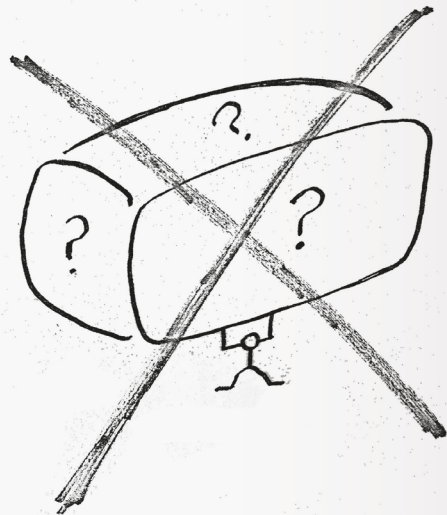
3 First Principle : GOVERNMENT IS THE PEOPLE'S HELP

4

FINISHED

The view of government

- as incomprehensible
- as the people's burden

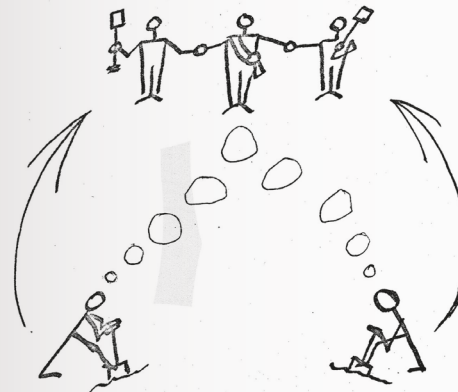


STOP THIS ↑ WHENEVER YOU CAN
Never despair
CHANGE is a state of mind
that everyone shares

STARTED

The view of government

- as the people thinking what to do
- as acting together to do it

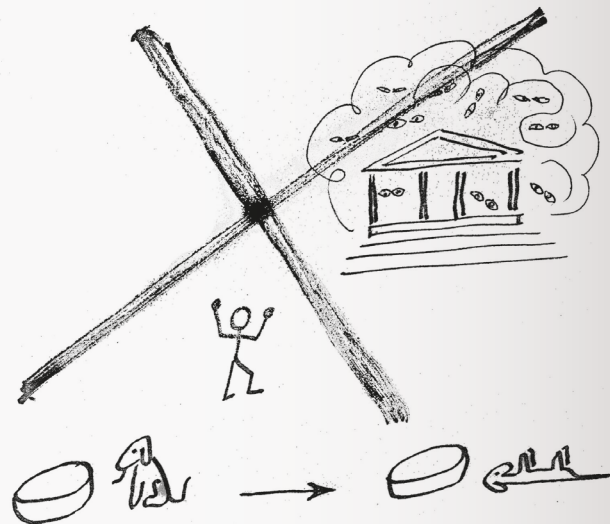


The Compañero Presidente says : "Government is the people".
The wishes of the people will be made known to the Government at all times.
We shall use TECHNOLOGY, which belongs to the people, to do it.

5 Second Principle: TO HELP MEANS HELPING NOW

FINISHED

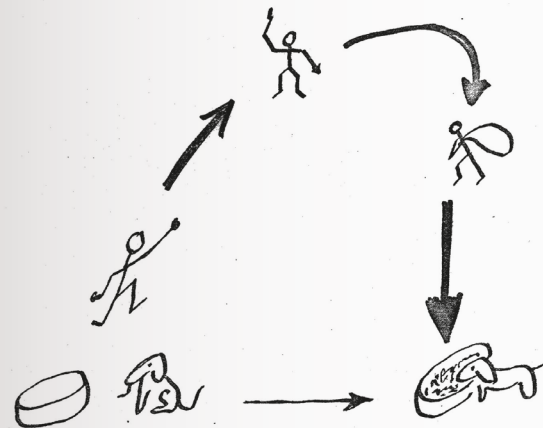
Red tape + muddle
= endless delay



STOP THIS ↑ WHENEVER YOU CAN
New despair
CHANGE is a state of mind
that everyone shares

STARTED

Immediate contact + immediate response
= fastest possible action



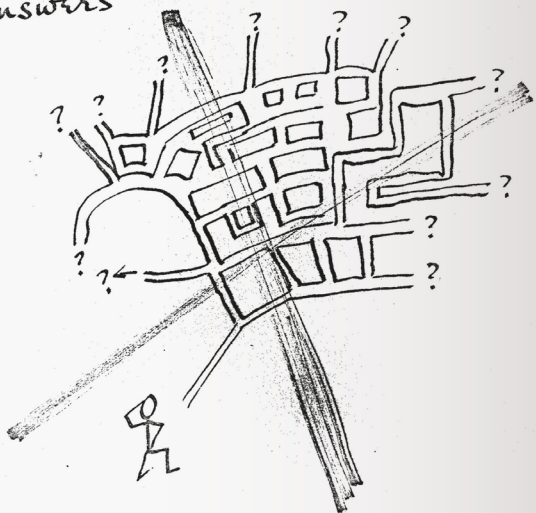
We have already used TECHNOLOGY to link 60% of the social sector directly to computers in the nation's capital, which send back immediate advice to the enterprises.

We shall extend this kind of service to all of the people by some means.

7 Third Principle : THE ROAD TO HELPHAS SIGNPOSTS

FINISHED

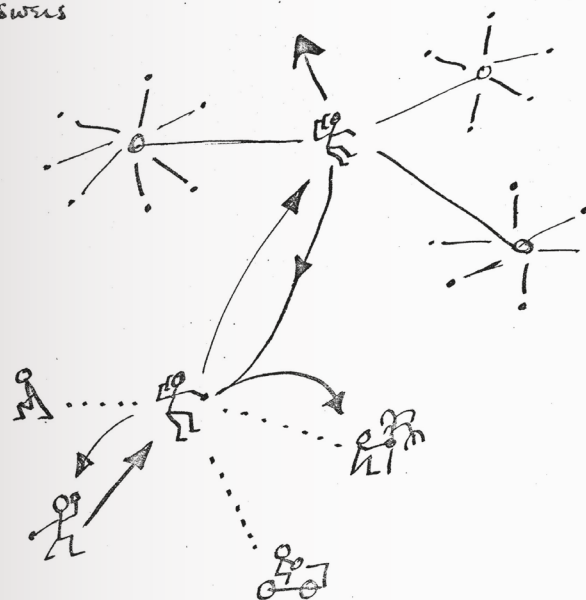
Bureaucracy
Pitiful officialdom
Despair
No answers



STOP THIS ↑ WHENEVER YOU CAN
New Despair
CHANGE is a state of mind
that everyone shares

STARTED

One official deals with a few problems
One straight link goes higher up
The links can reach the President himself
Answers



We shall replace bureaucracy with a precise
and clear network of officials, whose only
job is to help - to give answers.

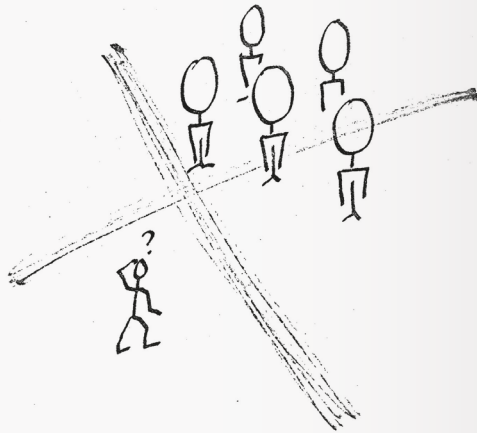
We shall keep paperwork to a minimum
- essential records. The people cannot eat
paper.

9

Fourth principle : HELP IS A NAME & FACE

FINISHED

Blaming faceless people
"It cannot be done"
(and bad luck)



STOP THIS ↑ WHENEVER YOU CAN

Now despair

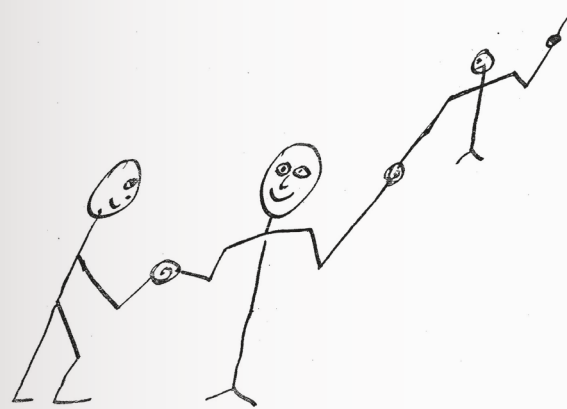
CHANGE is a state of mind
that everyone shares

STARTED

Direct personal responsibility

"I will do it

..... or I know **WHO** can"



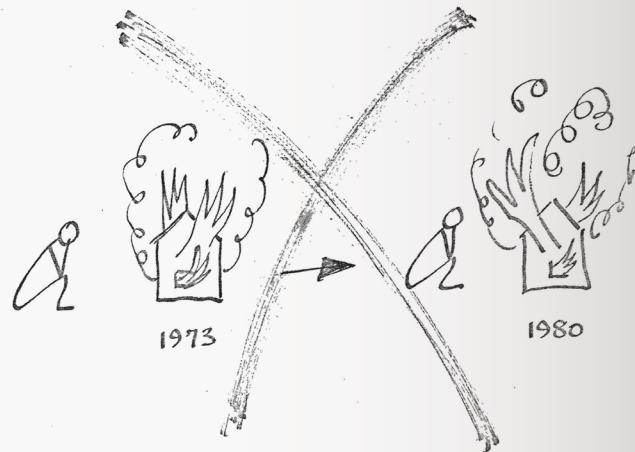
Of course officials really want to help.
After the Third principle is obeyed, they
will have the opportunity and the time
to know the people they are proud to
help.

11 Fifth principle: THE FUTURE STARTS TODAY

12

FINISHED

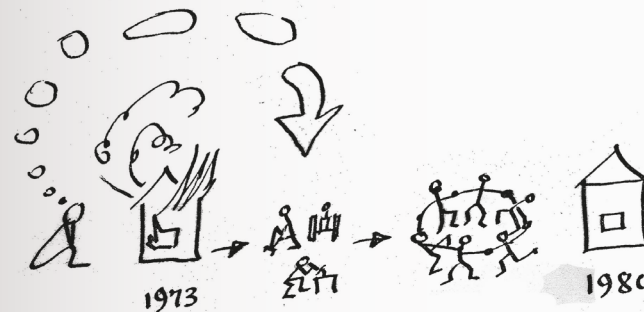
Managing a perpetual crisis
 Everyone busy grabbing what they can
 → the same old problems later on.



STOP THIS ↑ WHENEVER YOU CAN
 Never despair
 CHANGE is an attitude of mind
 that everyone shares

STARTED

Thinking for the future, which is just beginning
 Planning for our children's children
 → a better society



The future is not a blank, nor is it inescapably worsening. For the first time in history, MAN knows enough to provide the kind of society that HE wants.
 We shall help the people to understand the options.
 Then the people must decide.

14

IF THE GOVERNMENT **IS** THE PEOPLE
THE REVOLUTION OF GOVERNMENT
STARTS WITH **YOU**.

S8
Santiago
7.9.72