Against Civilization

Readings & Reflections

John Zerzan, editor

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Introduction

Discontent with civilization has been with us all along, but is coming on now with a new freshness and insistence, as if it were a new thing. To assail civilization itself would be scandalous, but for the conclusion, occurring to more and more people, that it may be civilization that is the fundamental scandal.

I won't dwell here on the fact of the accelerating destruction of the biosphere. And perhaps equally obvious is the mutilation of "human nature," along with outer nature. Freud decided that the fullness of civilization would bring, concomitantly, the zenith of universal neurosis. In this he was evidently a bit sanguine, too mild in his prognosis.

It is impossible to scan a newspaper and miss the malignancy of daily life. See the multiple homicides, the 600 percent increase in teen suicide over the past thirty years; count the ways to be heavily drugged against reality; ponder what is behind the movement away from literacy.

One could go on almost endlessly charting the boredom, depression, immiseration.

The concept of progress has been in trouble for a few decades, but the general crisis is deepening now at a quickening pace. From this palpable extremity it is clear that something is profoundly wrong. How far back did this virus originate? How much must change for us to turn away from the cultural death march we are on?

At the same time, there are some who cling to the ideal of civilization, as to a promise yet to be fulfilled. Norbert Elias, for example, declared that "civilization is never finished and always endangered." More persuasive is the sobering view of what civilization has already wrought, as in today's deadening and deadly convergence of technological processes and mass society. Richard Rubenstein found that the Holocaust "bears witness to the advance of civilization," a chilling point further developed by Zygmunt Bauman in his Modernity and the Holocaust. Bauman argued that history's most gruesome moment so far was made possible by the inner logic of civilization, which is, at bottom, division of labor. This division of labor, or specialization, works to dissolve moral accountability as it contributes to technical achievement in this case, to the efficient, industrialized murder of millions.

But isn't this too grim a picture to account for all of it? What of other aspects, like art, music, literature -are they not also the fruit of civilization? To return to Bauman and his point about Nazi genocide, Germany was after all the land of Goethe and Beethoven, arguably the most cultural or spiritual European country. Of course we try to draw strength from beautiful achievements, which often offer cultural criticism as well as aesthetic uplift. Does the presence of these pleasures and consolations make an indictment of the whole less unavoidable?

Speaking of unfulfilled ideals, however, it is valid to point out that civilization is indeed "never finished and always endangered." And that is because civilization has always been imposed, and necessitates continual conquest and repression. Marx and Freud, among others, agreed on the incompatibility of humans and nature, which is to say, the necessity of triumph over nature, or work.

Obviously related is Kenneth Boulding's judgment that the achievements of civilization "have been paid for at a very high cost in human degradation, suffering, inequality, and dominance."

There hasn't been unanimity as to civilization's most salient characteristic. For Morgan it was writing; for Engels, state power; for Childe, the rise of cities. Renfrew nominated insulation from nature as most fundamental. But domestication stands behind all these manifestations, and not just the taming of animals and plants, but also the taming of human instincts and freedoms. Mastery, in various forms, has defined civilization and gauged human achievement. To name, to number, to time, to represent symbolic culture is that array of masteries upon which all subsequent hierarchies and confinements rest.

Civilization is also separation from an original wholeness and grace. The poor thing we call our "human nature" was not our first nature; it is a pathological condition. All the consolations and compensations and prosthetics of an ever more technicized and barren world do not make up

for the emptiness. As Hilzheimer and others came to view domestications of animals as juvenilizations, so also are we made increasingly dependent and infantilized by the progress of civilization.

Little wonder that myths, legends, and folklore about gardens of Eden, Golden Ages, Elysian fields, lands of Cockaigne, and other primitivist paradises are a worldwide phenomenon. This universal longing for an aboriginal, unalienated state has also had its dark flip side, a remarkable continuity of apocalyptic beliefs and prophets of doom - two sides of the same coin of a deep unhappiness with civilization.

Centuries of the persistence of utopias in the literature and politics of the West have more recently been replaced by a strong dystopian current, as hope seems to be giving way to nightmare apprehensions. This shift began in earnest in the nineteenth century, when virtually every major figure., Goethe, Hegel, Kierkegaard, Melville, Thoreau, Nietzsche, Flaubert, Dostoevski expressed doubt about the vitality and future of culture. At the time that technology was becoming a worldwide unifying force, social scientists such as Durkheim and Masaryk noted that melancholy and suicide increased precisely with the forward movement of civilization.

In terms of the current intellectual domestication, postmodernism, despite a certain rhetoric of rebellion, is merely the latest extension of the modern civilizing process. For its moral cowardice as well as its zero degree of content, a horrific present is thus captured all too well. Meanwhile, Forbes magazine's seventy-fifth-anniversary cover story explored "Why We Feel So Bad When We Have It So Good," and the simple graffito "I can't breathe!" captures our contemporary reality with precision.

From every camp, voices counsel that there can be no turning back from the path of progress, the unfolding of still more high-tech consumerist desolation. How hollow they sound, as we consider what has been lost and what may yet, one desperately hopes, be recovered.

Section One: Before Civilization

Neandertals did not paint their caves with the images of animals. But perhaps they had no need to distill life into representations, because its essences were already revealed to their senses. The sight of a running herd was enough to inspire a surging sense of beauty. They had no drums or bone flutes, but they could listen to the booming rhythms of the wind, the earth, and each other's heartbeats, and be transported.

James Shreeve (1995) his collection opens with some reflections about what it was like for our species prior to civilization.

In a literary vein, the pages from Roy Walker's classic treasury of poetry, Golden Feast (1952), remind us that from Ovid to the American Big Rock Candy Mountain folk legend, the memory or vision of an uncorrupted original wholeness persists. In fact, utopian anticivilization longings reach back at least as far as the earliest Greek writings. From Hesiod's Works and Days, dating from the early seventh century B.C., came the canonical description of the Golden Age, the bitterly lamented vanished epoch of Kronos' reign, when humans "lived as if they were gods, their hearts free from sorrow, and without hard work or pain," when "the fruitful earth yielded its abundant harvest to them of its own accord, and they lived in ease and peace upon the lands with many good things."

Obviously this refers to the vast Paleolithic era, comprising more than 99 percent of our time span as a species. Current anthropology tells us that the pre-agricultural foraging life did not know organized violence, sexual oppression, work as an onerous or separate activity, private property, or symbolic culture. Reworked by Virgil and Ovid as the lost age of Saturn (the Roman Kronos), Hesiod's Golden Age reappeared as Arcadia, and the idyll has persisted in cultures everywhere. Richard Heinberg's Memories and Visions of Paradise (1995) is, by the way, an unexcelled recent exploration of this theme.

Fairchild's eminent study Noble Savage (1928) introduces the innocence of native New World peoples, soon to be lost to disease and warfare, upon the arrival of early conquerors. Rousseau, the origin of Fairchild's title, describes the felicity and freedom that once obtained.

The excerpt from Thoreau is a brief but lively one:

"the most alive is the wildest," is his heartfelt conclusion. Perlman's intensity, in his superb Against His-story, Against Leviathan (1983), leaves little doubt as to the nature-based authenticity of those not subdued by civilization, as seen in their sense of play and autonomy, for example.

DeVries summarizes features of nondomesticated robustness and vitality in sharp contrast to later degeneracy in health. Sahlins' offering is an early statement of the central point of his Stone Age Economics (1972), namely, that paleolithic peoples are truly affluent, with no artificially produced or unmet needs.

Lynn Clive objects to the sacrifice of birds to skyscrapers and jetliners, while Landau offers a personal response to all we have lost. In a marvelous meditation, Adorno describes the utopian component of children's make-believe play. He recalls the pretamed stage of humanity in which productivity as a value is clearly refused, and exchange disregarded, as such nonutilitarian activity "rehearses the right life."

Roy Walker: The Golden Feast (1952)

The fullest Roman expression of the Golden Age theme is in Ovid, a poet who completed his education at Athens. The last and greatest book of the Metamorphoses is devoted to the Pythagorean philosophy, and bears that title. In Dryden's translation this final book is the starting point of our endeavour to trace this tradition through the eighteenth century, and although the poem is a Roman achievement we may defer consideration of it. Ovid's first book deals with the grandest metamorphosis of all, the transformation from the Chaos that preceded Nature's birth to the comparative order of Caesar's time. In that great change an empire greater than Caesar's is won and lost, a Golden Age of peace and plenty, lost to be found again by those who carry a vision of it through darkness and observe its precepts of peace and harmlessness to all that lives. This is the golden legend that has haunted the imagination of Europe's prophets, regardless of their own temperaments, habits or cultural environment. In essentials it is also the story of Genesis and its history is inevitably joined with that of the first book of the Bible.

Then sprang up first the golden age, which of itself maintained
The truth and right of everything, unforced and unconstrained.
There was no fear of punishment, there was no threatening law
In brazen tables naile'd up, to keep the folk in awe.
There was no man would crouch or creep to judge with cap in hand;
They live'd safe without a judge in every realm and land.
The lofty pine-tree was not hewn from mountains where it stood,
In seeking strange and foreign lands to rove upon the flood.
Men knew none other countries yet than where themselves did keep:
There was no town enclose'd yet with walls and ditches deep.
No horn nor trumpet was in use, no sword nor helmet worn.
The world was such that soldiers' help might easily be forborne.
The fertile earth as yet was free, untouched of spade or plough,
And yet it yielded of itself of every thing enow;
And men themselves contented well with plain and simple food
That on the earth by Nature's gift without their travail stood,
Did live by raspis, hips and haws, by cornels, plums and cherries,
By sloes and apples, nuts and pears, and
loathsome bramble berries,
And by the acorns dropped on ground from Jove's broad tree in field.
The springtime lasted all the year, and Zephyr with his mild
And gentle blast did cherish things that grew of own accord.
The ground untilled all kind of fruits did plenteously afford.
No muck nor tillage was bestowed on lean and barren land
To make the corn of better head and ranker for to stand

Then streams ran milk, then streams ran wine, and yellow honey flowed
From each green tree whereon the rays of fiery Phoebus glowed.
But when that unto Limbo once Saturnus being thrust,
The rule and charge of all the world was under Jove unjust,

And that the silver age came in, more somewhat base than gold,
More precious yet than freckled brass, immediately the old
And ancient springtime Jove abridged and made thereof anon
Four seasons: winter, summer, spring, and harvest off and on.
Then first of all began the air with fervent heat to swelt;
Then icicles hung roping down; then, for the cold was felt,
Men ‘gan to shroud themselves in house; their houses were the thicks,
And bushy queaches, hollow caves, or hurdles made of sticks.
Then first of all were furrows drawn, and corn was cast in ground;
The simple ox with sorry sighs to heavy yoke was bound.
Next after this succeeded straight the third and brazen age:
More hard of nature, somewhat bent to cruel wars and rage,
But yet not wholly past all grace.
Of iron is the last
In no part good and tractable as former ages past;
For when that of this wicked age once opened was the vein
Therein all mischief rushéd forth, the faith and truth were fain
And honest shame to hide their heads; for whom stepped stoutly in,
Craft, treason, violence, envy, pride, and wicked lust to win.
The shipman hoists his sails to wind, whose names he did not know;
And ships that erst in tops of hills and mountains high did grow,
Did leap and dance on uncouth waves; and men began to bound
With dowls and ditches drawn in length the free and fertile ground,
Which was as common as the air and light of sun before.
Not only corn and other fruits, for sustenance and for store,
Were now exacted of the earth, but eft they ‘gan to dig
And in the bowels of the earth insatiably to rig
For riches couched, and hidden deep in places near to hell,
The spurs and stirrers unto vice, and foes to doing well.
Then hurtful iron came abroad, then came forth yellow gold
More hurtful than the iron far, then came forth battle bold
That fights with both, and shakes his sword in cruel bloody hand.
Men live by ravin and by stealth; the wandering guest doth stand
In danger of his host; the host in danger of his guest;
And fathers of their sons-in-law; yea, seldom time doth rest
Between born brothers such accord and love as ought to be;
The goodman seeks the goodwife’s death, and his again seeks she;
With grisly poison stepdames fell their husbands’ sons assail;
The son inquires aforehand when his father’s life shall fail;
All godliness lies under foot. And Lady Astrey, last
Of heavenly virtues, from this earth in slaughter drownéd passed.

Ovid's lines recreate the vision of the Ages of Gold, Silver, Brass and Iron, set down some seven hundred years before by Hesiod in Works and Days. Captured Greece, as the candid Horace says, had captured her rough conqueror.

In Hesiod's Golden Age, the first beatitude is the tranquil mind which, rather than a high material standard of living, is the highest good. Freedom from toil, next celebrated, expressed man's harmonious place in the natural order, in contrast to our civilization's war on soil, animal and tree. Long life, free from violence and disease, is as natural to the Golden Age as the abundance of fruits on which mankind is nourished there. All things are shared. All men are free.

We have vestigial modern doctrines for all these qualities: pacificism, vegetarianism, communitarianism, anarchism, soil conservation, organic farming, "no digging," afforestation, nature cure, the decentralised village economy. At the golden touch of Hesiod's or Ovid's lines the clumsy polysyllables crack their seed cases and flower into the variegated life and colour of single vision. The vague association that many of these ideas have retained in their attenuated modern forms is not accidental.

Finally, we may notice what seems to be the American's own version of Cockaigne, The Big Rock Candy Mountains:

One evening as the sun went down
And the jungle fire was burning
Down the track came a hobo hiking,
And he said "Boys I'm not turning.
I'm headed for a land that's far away,
Beside the crystal fountains,
So come with me, we'll all go and see
The big Rock Candy Mountains.
In the big Rock Candy Mountains,
There's a land that's fair and bright,
Where the hand-outs grow on bushes,
And you sleep out every night.
Where the box cars are all empty,
Where the sun shines every day,
On the birds and the bees,
And the cigarette trees,
And the lemonade springs
Where the blue-bird sings,
In the big Rock Candy Mountains.
In the big Rock Candy Mountains,
All the cops have wooden legs,
The bull-dogs all have rubber teeth
And the hens lay soft-boiled eggs.
The farmer's trees are full of fruit
And the barns are full of hay.
Oh I'm bound to go

Where there ain't no snow,
Where they hung the Turk
That invented work,

In the big Rock Candy Mountains.
In the big Rock Candy Mountains
You never change your socks.
And the little streams of alcohol
Come trickling down the rocks.
Where the brakemen have to tip their hats,
And the rail-road bulls are blind.
There's the lake of stew,
And of whisky too.
You can paddle all around 'em
In a big canoe
In the big Rock Candy Mountains."

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Hoxie Neale Fairchild: The Noble Savage: A Study in Romantic Naturalism (1928)

The narratives of Columbus illustrate the first step in the formation of the Noble Savage idea. The Caribs are represented as a virtuous and mild people, beautiful, and with a certain natural intelligence, living together in nakedness and innocence, sharing their property in common. But though Columbus is enthusiastic about the Indians, he does not compare them with the Europeans. For such a comparison a stimulus was soon provided by the brutality of the Spaniards. Humanitarianism is the motive back of the Breuisima Relación de la Destruyción de las Indias of Las Casas.

By 1539, when Las Casas' book appeared, Spanish goldlust had made oppressed slaves of the free and amiable beings described by Columbus.

"God," the Bishop exclaims, "made this numerous people very simple, without trickery or malice, most obedient and faithful to their natural lords, and to the Spaniards, whom they serve; most humble, most patient, very peaceful and manageable, without quarrels, strife, bitterness or hate, none desiring vengeance. They are also a very delicate and tender folk, of slender build, and cannot stand much work, and often die of whatever sicknesses they have; so that even our own princes and lords, cared for with all conveniences, luxuries and delights, are not more delicate than these people who possess little, and who do not desire many worldly goods; nor are they proud, ambitious, or covetous. They have a very clear and lively understanding, being docile and able to receive all good doctrine, quite fitted to understand our holy Catholic faith, and to be instructed in good and virtuous habits, having less hindrances in the way of doing this than any other people in the world. Certainly these people would be the happiest in the world if only they knew God."

But the Spaniards have dealt with these poor souls most monstrously. "Among these tender lambs, so highly qualified and endowed by their Lord and Creator, the Spaniards have made entrance, like wolves, lions and tigers made cruel by long fasting, and have done nothing in those parts for forty years but cut them in pieces, slaughter them, torture them, afflict them, torment them and destroy them by strange sorts of cruelty never before seen or read or heard so that of the three million and more souls who inhabited the Island of Hispaniola there are now no more than two hundred natives of that land." The pleasant impression made upon the Indians by the comparative clemency of Columbus has been completely eradicated. "The Indians began to see that these men could not have come from heaven."

The Apostle to the Indians is terribly in earnest. He knows the Indians, and loves them as a father loves his children. He does not claim perfection for them, but he recognizes them as perfectible. He does not assert their superiority to the Spaniards, but his indignation against his countrymen contains the germs of such an assertion.

English views of savage life tend to be less highly colored and enthusiastic than those of the Spanish and French. But though it seems probable that the Noble Savage is chiefly a product of Latin minds, Professor Chinard slightly underestimates the extent to which English explorers gave support to the cult of the Indian.

There are, for example, decidedly sympathetic passages in the Voyage of Sir Francis Drake from New Spain to the North-west of California. This celebrated voyage was begun in 1577. The narrator reports that the savages - here natives of Brazil - go stark naked, but he does not philosophize upon this observation. The "naturals" seem to be a civil and gentle folk: "Our general went to prayer at which exercise they were attentive and seemed greatly to be affected with it." The savages, indeed, worship the whites as gods, at first making sacrifice to them by tearing their own flesh, and when this is frowned upon by the voyagers, bringing offerings of fruit. The savage king and his people crown Drake with flowers, "with one consent and with great reverence, joyfully singing a song." They wish the English to remain with them for ever. "Our departure seemed so grievous to them, that their joy was turned into sorrow." Incidents such as these are ready-made for literary treatment.

Strenuous efforts were being made to "boom" Virginia as a field of colonization. This may partly account for the enthusiasm of Philip Amadas and Arthur Barlow in their First Voyage Made to the Coast of Virginia. These gentlemen find the natives fearless and trustful. They are "a handsome and goodly people, and in their behavior as mannerly and civil as any in Europe." Later it is reported:

“We found the people most gentle, loving and faithful, void of all guile and treason, and such as live after the manner of the golden age.” This comparison with the Golden Age is particularly interesting. When men began to think of the American Indian in terms of traditional literary formulas, they were well on the way toward the formation of the Noble Savage idea.

A very influential account was doubtless Raleigh’s Discourse of the large, rich and beautiful Empire of Guiana. The portions of this account which are of interest to us deal with various tribes along the Orinoco Rivera region which is the habitat of the Noble Savage at his noblest and most savage.

Raleigh’s opinion of the natives is consistently favorable. Of one tribe he says, “These Tivitivas are a very goodly people and very valiant, and have the most manly speech and most deliberate that ever I heard, of what nation soever.” This tribe relies for sustenance entirely on the bounty of nature. “They never eat of anything that is set or sowen: and as at home they use neither planting nor other manurance, so when they come abroad, they refuse to feed of aught, but of that which nature without labour bringeth forth.”

Raleigh agrees with many other voyagers in ascribing rare physical beauty to the savages. Of a Cacique’s wife he writes: “In all my life I have seldome seene a better favoured woman. She was of good stature, with blacke eyes, fat of body, of an excellent countenance, her hair almost as long as herself, tied up againe in prettie knots. I have seene a lady in England as like to her, as but for the colour, I would have sworne might have been the same.” Praise from Sir Hubert!

The following is a portion of an account of an interview with a venerable chief: “I asked what nations those were which inhabited on the farther side of those mountains. He answered with a great sigh (as a man which had inward feeling of the losse of his countrie and libertie, especially for that his eldest son was slain in a battell on that side of the mountains, whom he most entirely loved) that hee remembered in his father’s lifetime, etc., etc. After hee had answered thus farre he desired leave to depart, saying that he had farre to goe, that he was olde, and weake, and was every day called for by death, which was also his owne phrase. This Topiawari is helde for the prowdest and wisest of all the Orenoqueponi, and soe he behaved himselfe towards mee in all his answers at my returne, as I marvelled to find a man of that gravitie and judgement, and of soe good discourse, that had no helpe of learning nor breede.”

This sketch of the old Cacique is executed with a significant relish. Quite plainly, the savage has become literary material; his type is becoming fixed; he already begins to collect the accretions of tradition. Just as he is, Topiawari is ready to step into an exotic tale. He is the prototype of Chactas and Chingachgook.

The effect on English writers of such accounts as those we have been examining is shown in Michael Drayton’s poem, To the Virginian Voyage:

“And cheerfully at sea,

Success you still entice,

To get the pearl and gold,

And ours to hold

Virginia,

Earth’s only paradise.

“Where nature hath in store

Fowl, venison, and fish,

And the fruitful’st soil,

Without your toil,

Three harvests more,

All greater than you wish.

“To whom the Golden Age

Still nature's laws doth give,

No other cares attend,

But them to defend

From winter's rage,

That long there doth not live."

Virginia reminds the poet both of the Earthly Paradise and the Golden Age; and the second stanza quoted brings an unconsciously ironical reminder of the Land of Cockayne. Here we see that fusion of contemporary observation with old tradition on which the Noble Savage idea depends.

pp. 1015

Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Discourse on the Origins of Inequality (1754)

Man, whatever Country you may come from, whatever your opinions may be, listen: here is your history as I believed it to read, not in the Books of your Fellow-men, who are liars, but in Nature, which never lies. Everything that comes from Nature will be true; there will be nothing false except what I have involuntarily put in of my own. The times of which I am going to speak are very far off: how you have changed from what you were! It is, so to speak, the life of your species that I am going to describe to you according to the qualities you received, which your education and habits have been able to corrupt but have not been able to destroy. There is, I feel, an age at which the individual man would want to stop: you will seek the age at which you would desire your Species had stopped. Discontented with your present state for reasons that foretell even greater discontents for your unhappy Posterity, perhaps you would want to be able to go backward in time. This sentiment must be the Eulogy of your first ancestors, the criticism of your contemporaries, and the dread of those who will have the unhappiness to live after you.

Stripping this Being, so constituted, of all the supernatural gifts he could have received and of all the artificial faculties he could only have acquired by long progress considering him, in a word, as he must have come from the hands of Nature I see an animal less strong than some, less agile than others, but all things considered, the most advantageously organized of all. I see him satisfying his hunger under an oak, quenching his thirst at the first Stream, finding his bed at the foot of the same tree that furnished his meal; and therewith his needs are satisfied.

The Earth, abandoned to its natural fertility and covered by immense forests never mutilated by the Axe, offers at every step Storehouses and shelters to animals of all species. Men, dispersed among the animals, observe and imitate their industry, and thereby develop in themselves the instinct of the Beasts; with the advantage that whereas each species has only its own proper instinct, man perhaps having none that belongs to him appropriates them all to himself, feeds himself equally well with most of the diverse foods which the other animals share, and consequently finds his subsistence more easily than any of them can.

The savage man's body being the only implement he knows, he employs it for various uses of which, through lack of training, our bodies are incapable; our industry deprives us of the strength and agility that necessity obliges him to acquire. If he had an axe, would his wrist break such strong branches? If he had a sling, would he throw a stone so hard? If he had a ladder, would he climb a tree so nimbly? If he had a Horse, would he run so fast? Give Civilized man time to assemble all his machines around him and there can be no doubt that he will easily overcome Savage man. But if you want to see an even more unequal fight, put them, naked and disarmed, face to face, and you will soon recognize the advantage of constantly having all of one's strength at one's disposal, of always being ready for any event, and of always carrying oneself, so to speak, entirely with one.

Hobbes claims that man is naturally intrepid and seeks only to attack and fight. An illustrious Philosopher thinks, on the contrary, and Cumberland and Pufendorf also affirm, that nothing is so timid as man in the state of Nature, and that he is always trembling and ready to flee at the slightest noise he hears, at the slightest movement he perceives. That may be so with respect to objects he does not know; and I do not doubt that he is frightened by all the new Spectacles that present themselves to him every time he can neither discern the Physical good and evil to be expected nor compare his strength with the dangers he must run: rare circumstances in the state of Nature, where all things move in such a uniform manner, and where the face of the Earth is not subject to those brusque and continual changes caused by the passions and inconstancy of united Peoples. But Savage man, living dispersed among the animals and early finding himself in a position to measure himself against them, soon makes the comparison; and sensing that he surpasses them in skill more than they surpass him in strength, he learns not to fear them any more. Pit a bear or a wolf against a Savage who is robust, agile, courageous, as they all are, armed with stones and a good stick, and you will see that the danger will be reciprocal at the very least, and that after several similar experiences wild Beasts, which do not like to attack each other, will hardly attack man willingly, having found him to be just as wild as they. With regard to animals that actually have more strength than man has skill, he is in the position of the other weaker species, which nevertheless subsist. But man has the advantage that, no less adept at running than they and finding almost certain refuge in trees, he always has the option of accepting or leaving the encounter and the choice

of flight or combat. Let us add that it does not appear that any animal naturally makes war upon man except in case of self-defense or extreme hunger, or gives evidence of those violent antipathies toward him that seem to announce that one species is destined by Nature to serve as food for the other.

These are, without doubt, the reasons why Negroes and Savages trouble themselves so little about the wild beasts they may encounter in the woods. In this respect the Caribs of Venezuela, among others, live in the most profound security and without the slightest inconvenience. Although they go nearly naked, says Francois Corréal, they nevertheless expose themselves boldly in the woods armed only with bow and arrow, but no one has ever heard that any of them were devoured by beasts.

Other more formidable enemies, against which man does not have the same means of defense, are natural infirmities: infancy, old age, and illnesses of all kinds, sad signs of our weakness, of which the first two are common to all animals and the last belongs principally to man living in Society. I even observe on the subject of Infancy that the Mother, since she carries her child with her everywhere, can nourish it with more facility than the females of several animals, which are forced to come and go incessantly with great fatigue, in one direction to seek their food and in the other to suckle or nourish their young. It is true that if the woman should die, the child greatly risks dying with her; but this danger is common to a hundred other species, whose young are for a long time unable to go and seek their nourishment themselves. And if Infancy is longer among us, so also is life; everything remains approximately equal in this respect, although there are, concerning the duration of the first age and the number of young, other rules which are not within my Subject. Among the Aged, who act and perspire little, the need for food diminishes with the faculty of providing for it; and since Savage life keeps gout and rheumatism away from them and since old age is, of all ills, the one that human assistance can least relieve, they finally die without it being perceived that they cease to be, and almost without perceiving it themselves.

With regard to illnesses, I shall not repeat the vain and false declamations against Medicine made by most People in good health; rather, I shall ask whether there is any solid observation from which one might conclude that in Countries where this art is most neglected, the average life of man is shorter than in those where it is cultivated with the greatest care. And how could that be, if we give ourselves more ills than Medicine can furnish Remedies? The extreme inequality in our way of life: excess of idleness in some, excess of labor in others; the ease of stimulating and satisfying our appetites and our sensuality; the overly refined foods of the rich, which nourish them with binding juices and overwhelm them with indigestion; the bad food of the Poor, which they do not even have most of the time, so that their want inclines them to overburden their stomachs greedily when the occasion permits; late nights, excesses of all kinds, immoderate ecstasies of all the Passions, fatigues and exhaustion of Mind; numberless sorrows and afflictions which are felt in all conditions and by which souls are perpetually tormented: these are the fatal proofs that most of our ills are our own work, and that we would have avoided almost all of them by preserving the simple, uniform, and solitary way of life prescribed to us by Nature. If she destined us to be healthy, I almost dare affirm that the state of reflection is a state contrary to Nature and that the man who meditates is a depraved animal. When one thinks of the good constitution of Savages, at least of those whom we have not ruined with our strong liquors; when one learns that they know almost no illnesses except wounds and old age, one is strongly inclined to believe that the history of human illnesses could easily be written by following that of civil Societies. This at least is the opinion of Plato, who judges, from certain Remedies used or approved by Podalirius and Machaon at the siege of Troy, that various illnesses that should have been caused by those remedies were not yet known at that time among men; and Paracelsus reports that the diet, so necessary today, was invented only by Hippocrates.

With so few sources of illness, man in the state of Nature hardly has need of remedies, still less of Doctors. In this respect the human species is not in any worse condition than all the others; and it is easy to learn from Hunters whether in their chases they find many sick animals. They find many that have received extensive but very well healed wounds, that have had bones and even limbs broken and set again with no other Surgeon than time, no other regimen than their ordinary life, and that are no less perfectly cured for not having been tormented with incisions, poisoned with Drugs, or weakened with fasting. Finally, however useful well-administered medicine may be among us, it is still certain that if a sick Savage abandoned to himself has nothing to hope for except from Nature, in return he has nothing to fear except from his illness, which often renders his situation preferable to ours.

Let us therefore take care not to confuse Savage man with the men we have before our eyes. Nature treats all the animals abandoned to its care with a partiality that seems to show how jealous it is of this right. The Horse, the Cat, the Bull, even the Ass, are mostly taller, and all have a more robust constitution, more vigor, more strength and courage in the forest than in our houses. They lose half of these advantages in becoming Domesticated, and it might be said that all our cares to treat and feed these animals well end only in their degeneration. It is the same even for man. In becoming sociable and a Slave he becomes weak, fearful, servile; and his soft and effeminate way of life completes the enervation of both his strength and his courage. Let us add that between Savage and Domesticated conditions the difference from man to man must be still greater than that from beast to beast; for animal and man having been treated equally by Nature, all the commodities of which man gives himself more than the animals he tames are so many particular causes that make him degenerate more noticeably.

The example of Savages, who have almost all been found at this point, seems to confirm that the human Race was made to remain in it, the state of Nature, always; that this state is the veritable youth of the World; and that all subsequent progress has been in appearance so many steps toward the perfection of the individual, and in fact toward the decrepitude of the species.

As long as men were content with their rustic huts, as long as they were limited to sewing their clothing of skins with thorn or fish bones, adorning themselves with feathers and shells, painting their bodies with various colors, perfecting or embellishing their bows and arrows, carving with sharp stones a few fishing Canoes or a few crude Musical instruments; in a word, as long as they applied themselves only to tasks that a single person could do and to arts that did not require the cooperation of several hands, they lived free, healthy, good, and happy insofar as they could be according to their Nature, and they continued to enjoy among themselves the sweetness of independent intercourse. But from the moment one man needed the help of another, as soon as they observed that it was useful for a single person to have provisions for two, equality disappeared, property was introduced, labor became necessary; and vast forests were changed into smiling Fields which had to be watered with the sweat of men, and in which slavery and misery were soon seen to germinate and grow with the crops.

Metallurgy and agriculture were the two arts whose invention produced this great revolution. For the Poet it is gold and silver, but for the Philosopher it is iron and wheat which have Civilized men and ruined the human Race.

pp. 1925

Henry David Thoreau: “Excursions” (1863)

I believe in the forest, and in the meadow, and in the night in which the corn grows. We require an infusion of hemlock spruce or arbor-vitae in our tea. There is a difference between eating and drinking for strength and from mere gluttony. The Hottentots eagerly devour the marrow of the koodoo and other antelopes raw, as a matter of course. Some of our northern Indians eat raw the marrow of the Arctic reindeer, as well as various other parts, including the summits of the antlers, as long as they are soft. And herein, perchance, they have stolen a march on the cooks of Paris. They get what usually goes to feed the fire. This is probably better than stall-fed beef and slaughter-house pork to make a man of. Give me a wildness whose glance no civilization can endure, as if we lived on the marrow of koodoos devoured raw.

There are some intervals which border the strain of the wood thrush, to which I would migrate, wild lands where no settler has squatted; to which, methinks, I am already acclimated.

The African hunter Cumming tells us that the skin of the eland, as well as that of most other antelopes just killed, emits the most delicious perfume of trees and grass. I would have every man so much like a wild antelope, so much a part and parcel of nature, that his very person should thus sweetly advertise our senses of his presence, and remind us of those parts of nature which he most haunts. I feel no disposition to be satirical, when the trapper’s coat emits the odor of musquash even; it is a sweeter scent to me than that which commonly exhales from the merchant’s or the scholar’s garments. When I go into their wardrobes and handle their vestments, I am reminded of no grassy plains and flowery meads which they have frequented, but of dusty merchants’ exchanges and libraries rather.

A tanned skin is something more than respectable, and perhaps olive is a fitter color than white for a mana denizen of the woods. ‘The pale white man!’ I do not wonder that the African pitied him. Darwin the naturalist says, ‘A white man bathing by the side of a Tahitian was like a plant bleached by the gardener’s art, compared with a fine, dark green one, growing vigorously in the open fields.’

Ben Jonson exclaims,

How near to good is what is fair!

So I would say

How near to good is what is wild!

Life consists with wildness. The most alive is the wildest. Not yet subdued to man, its presence refreshes him. One who pressed forward incessantly and never rested from his labors, who grew fast and made infinite demands on life, would always find himself in a new country or wilderness, and surrounded by the raw material of life. He would be climbing over the prostrate stems of primitive forest-trees.

(in Charles R. Murphy, ed. Little Essays from the Works of Henry David Thoreau, pp. 139142)

Fredy Perlman: Against His-story, Against Leviathan! (1983)

The managers of Gulag's islands tell us that the swimmers, crawlers, walkers and fliers spent their lives working in order to eat.

These managers are broadcasting their news too soon. The varied beings haven't all been exterminated yet. You, reader, have only to mingle with them, or just watch them from a distance, to see that their waking lives are filled with dances, games and feasts. Even the hunt, the stalking and feigning and leaping, is not what we call Work, but what we call Fun. The only beings who work are the inmates of Gulag's islands, the zeks.

The zeks' ancestors did less work than a corporation owner. They didn't know what work was. They lived in a condition J.J. Rousseau called "the state of nature." Rousseau's term should be brought back into common use. It grates on the nerves of those who, in R. Vaneigem's words, carry cadavers in their mouths. It makes the armor visible. Say "the state of nature" and you'll see the cadavers peer out.

Insist that "freedom" and "the state of nature" are synonyms, and the cadavers will try to bite you. The tame, the domesticated, try to monopolize the word freedom; they'd like to apply it to their own condition. They apply the word "wild" to the free. But it is another public secret that the tame, the domesticated, occasionally become wild but are never free so long as they remain in their pens.

Even the common dictionary keeps this secret only half hidden. It begins by saying that free means citizen! But then it says, "Free: a) not determined by anything beyond its own nature or being; b) determined by the choice of the actor or by his wishes."

The secret is out. Birds are free until people cage them. The Biosphere, Mother Earth herself, is free when she moistens herself, when she sprawls in the sun and lets her skin erupt with varicolored hair teeming with crawlers and fliers. She is not determined by anything beyond her own nature or being until another sphere of equal magnitude crashes into her, or until a cadaverous beast cuts into her skin and rends her bowels.

Trees, fish and insects are free as they grow from seed to maturity, each realizing its own potential, its wish until the insect's freedom is curtailed by the bird's. The eaten insect has made a gift of its freedom to the bird's freedom. The bird, in its turn, drops and manures the seed of the insect's favorite plant, enhancing the freedom of the insect's heirs.

The state of nature is a community of freedoms.

Such was the environment of the first human communities, and such it remained for thousands of generations.

Modern anthropologists who carry Gulag in their brains reduce such human communities to the motions that look most like work, and give the name Gatherers to people who pick and sometimes store their favorite foods. A bank clerk would call such communities Savings Banks!

The zeks on a coffee plantation in Guatemala are Gatherers, and the anthropologist is a Savings Bank. Their free ancestors had more important things to do.

The !Kung people miraculously survived as a community of free human beings into our own exterminating age. R.E. Leakey observed them in their lush African forest homeland. They cultivated nothing except themselves. They made themselves what they wished to be. They were not determined by anything beyond their own being - not by alarm clocks, not by debts, not by orders from superiors. They feasted and celebrated and played, full-time, except when they slept. They shared everything with their communities: food, experiences, visions, songs. Great personal satisfaction, deep inner joy, came from the sharing.

(In today's world, wolves still experience the joys that come from sharing. Maybe that's why governments pay bounties to the killers of wolves.)

S. Diamond observed other free human beings who survived into our age, also in Africa. He could see that they did no work, but he couldn't quite bring himself to say it in English. Instead, he said they made no distinction between work and play. Does Diamond mean that the activity of the free people can be seen as work one moment, as play another, depending on how the anthropologist feels? Does he mean they didn't know if their activity was work or play?

Does he mean we, you and I, Diamond's armored contemporaries, cannot distinguish their work from their play?

If the !Kung visited our offices and factories, they might think we're playing. Why else would we be there?

I think Diamond meant to say something more profound. A time-and-motion engineer watching a bear near a berry patch would not know when to punch his clock. Does the bear start working when he walks to the berry patch, when he picks the berry, when he opens his jaws? If the engineer has half a brain he might say the bear makes no distinction between work and play. If the engineer has an imagination he might say that the bear experiences joy from the moment the berries turn deep red, and that none of the bear's motions are work.

Leakey and others suggest that the general progenitors of human beings, our earliest grandmothers, originated in lush African forests, somewhere near the homeland of the !Kung. The conservative majority, profoundly satisfied with nature's unstinting generosity, happy in their accomplishments, at peace with themselves and the world, had no reason to leave their home. They stayed.

A restless minority went wandering. Perhaps they followed their dreams. Perhaps their favorite pond dried up. Perhaps their favorite animals wandered away. These people were very fond of animals; they knew the animals as cousins.

The wanderers are said to have walked to every woodland, plain and lakeshore of Eurasia. They walked or floated to almost every island. They walked across the land bridge near the northern land of ice to the southernmost tip of the double continent which would be called America.

The wanderers went to hot lands and cold, to lands with much rain and lands with little. Perhaps some felt nostalgia for the warm home they left. If so, the presence of their favorite animals, their cousins, compensated for their loss. We can still see the homage some of them gave to these animals on cave walls of Altamira, on rocks in Abrigo del Sol in the Amazon Valley.

Some of the women learned from birds and winds to scatter seeds. Some of the men learned from wolves and eagles to hunt.

But none of them ever worked. And everyone knows it. The armored Christians who later "discovered" these communities knew that these people did no work, and this knowledge grated on Christian nerves, it rankled, it caused cadavers to peep out. The Christians spoke of women who did "lurid dances" in their fields instead of confining themselves to chores; they said hun-ters did a lot of devilish "hocus pocus" before actually drawing the bowstring.

These Christians, early time-and-motion engineers, couldn't tell when play ended and work began. Long familiar with the chores of zeks, the Christians were repelled by the lurid and devilish heathen who pretended that the Curse of Labor had not fallen on them. The Christians put a quick end to the "hocus pocus" and the dances, and saw to it that none could fail to distinguish work from play.

Our ancestors I'll borrow Turner's term and call them the Possessed had more important things to do than to struggle to survive. They loved nature and nature reciprocated their love. Wherever they were they found affluence, as Marshall Sahlins shows in his Stone Age Economics. Pierre Clastres' La société contre l'état insists that the struggle for subsistence is not verifiable among any of the Possessed; it is verifiable among the Dispossessed in the pits and on the margins of progressive industrialization. Leslie White, after a sweeping review of reports from distant places and ages, a view of "Primitive culture as a whole," concludes that "there's enough to eat for a richness of life rare among the 'civilized.'" I wouldn't use the word Primitive to refer to people with a richness of life. I would use the word Primitive to refer to myself and my contemporaries, with our progressive poverty of life.

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Arnold DeVries: Primitive Man and His Food (1952)

The defective state of modern man has had its effects upon medicine and the very study of disease. Dr. E.A. Hooton, the distinguished physical anthropologist of Harvard, has remarked that “it is a very myopic medical science which works backward from the morgue rather than forward from the cradle.” Yet this is exactly what the customary procedure of medicine has been. The reasons have been somewhat of necessity, it is to be admitted, for one can scarcely study health when the adequate controls are not present. In civilization one studies civilized people, and the frequency of the forms of degeneration which are found then determine what we consider normal and abnormal. As a result, conditions which generally form no part of undomesticated animal life are regarded as normal and necessary for the human species. So long has disease been studied that the physician often has little concept as to what health actually is. We live in a world of pathology, deformity and virtual physical monstrosity, which has so colored our thinking that we cannot visualize the nature of health and the conditions necessary for its presence.

The question should then logically arise: why not leave civilization and study physical conditions in the primitive world? If perfect physical specimens could here be found, the study could be constructive and progressive, giving suggestions, perhaps, as to the conditions which permitted or induced a state of physical excellence to exist. We might then find out what man is like, biologically speaking, when he does not need a doctor, which might also indicate what he should be like when the doctor has finished with him.

Fortunately the idea has not been entirely neglected. Primitive races were carefully observed and described by many early voyagers and explorers who found them in their most simple and natural state. Primitive life has also very carefully been observed and studied with the object of understanding social, moral or religious conditions, in which, however, incidental observations were made too with respect to the physical condition of the people, and the living habits which might affect that condition. Others, in modern life, have studied the savages with the specific object of determining their physical state of health, and the mode of living which is associated therewith.

The results of such work have been very significant, but regarding medicine and nutrition in actual practice, they have been almost entirely neglected. The common view that primitive man is generally short lived and subject to many diseases is often held by physician as well as layman, and the general lack of sanitation, modern treatment, surgery and drugs in the primitive world is thought to prevent maintenance of health at a high physical level. For the average nutritionist it is quite natural to feel that any race not having access to the wide variety of foods which modern agriculture and transportation now permit could not be in good health. These assumptions have helped to determine existing therapeutic methods, and they have largely prevented serious consideration that might be based upon factual data.

But the facts are known, and these comprise a very interesting and important story. They indicate that, when living under near-isolated conditions, apart from civilization and without access to the foods of civilization, primitive man lives in much better physical condition than does the usual member of civilized society. When his own nutrition is adequate and complete, as it often is, he maintains complete immunity to dental caries. His teeth are white and sparkling, with neither brushing nor cleansing agents used, and the dental arch is broad, with the teeth formed in perfect alignment.

The facial and body development is also good. The face is finely formed, well-set and broad. The body is free from deformity and proportioned as beauty and symmetry would indicate desirable. The respective members of the racial group reproduce in homogeneity from one generation to the next. There are few deviations from the standard anthropological prototype. One individual resembles the other in facial form, looking much like sisters or brothers, with the chief differences in appearance being in size.

Reproductive efficiency is such as to permit parturition with no difficulty and little or no pain. There are no prenatal deformities. Resistance to infectious disease is high, few individuals being sick, and these usually rapidly recovering. The degenerative diseases are rare, even in advanced life, some of them being completely unknown and unheard of by the primitive. Mental complaints are equally rare, and the state of happiness and contentment is one scarcely known by civilized man. The duration of life is long, the people being yet strong and

vigorous as they pass the proverbial three score and ten mark, and living in many cases beyond a century.

These are the characteristics of the finest and most healthful primitive races, who live under the most ideal climatic and nutritional conditions. Primitive races less favored by environment are less successful in meeting weakness and disease, but even the poorest of these have better teeth and skeletal development than civilized man, and they usually present other physical advantages as well.

The experience of primitive man has therefore been one of great importance. We note that people living today, under the culture and environment of the Stone Age, have not only equalled but far surpassed civilized man in strength, physical development and immunity to disease. The mere existence of this fact poses an important question to modern medicine and should arouse serious thought and consideration.

Of equal significance is the fact that the good health of the primitive has been possible only under conditions of relative isolation. As soon as his contact with civilization is sufficient to alter his dietary habits, he succumbs to disease very readily and loses all of the unique immunity of the past. The teeth decay; facial form ceases to be uniform; deformities become common; reproductive efficiency is lowered; mental deficiency develops; and the duration of life is sharply lowered.

It would hence appear that the nutritional habits of primitive man are responsible for his state of health. So long as the native foods remain in use, there are no important physical changes, and the bacterial scourges are absent, even though a complete lack of sanitation would indicate that pathogenic bacteria might be present. With a displacement of native foods for those of modern commerce the situation changes completely, and the finest sanitation that the white man can provide, together with the best in medical services, is of no avail in preventing the epidemics which take thousands of lives. Among scientists who have studied at first hand both the physical condition and food of many primitive races, the close relationship between the two has been clearly recognized.

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Marshall Sahlins: “The Original Affluent Society” (1968)

If economics is the dismal science, the study of hunting-gathering economies must be its most advanced branch. Almost totally committed to the argument that life was hard in the Paleolithic, our textbooks compete to convey a sense of impending doom, leaving the student to wonder not only how hunters managed to make a living, but whether, after all, this was living? The specter of starvation stalks the stalker in these pages. His technical incompetence is said to enjoin continuous work just to survive, leaving him without respite from the food quest and without the leisure to “build culture.” Even so, for his efforts he pulls the lowest grades in thermo-dynamicsless energy harnessed per capita per year than any other mode of production. And in treatises on economic development, he is condemned to play the role of bad example, the so-called “subsistence economy.”

It will be extremely difficult to correct this traditional wisdom. Perhaps then we should phrase the necessary revisions in the most shocking terms possible: that this was, when you come to think of it, the original affluent society. By common understanding an affluent society is one in which all the people’s wants are easily satisfied; and though we are pleased to consider this happy condition the unique achievement of industrial civilization, a better case can be made for hunters and gatherers, even many of the marginal ones spared to ethnography. For wants are “easily satisfied,” either by producing much or desiring little, and there are, accordingly, two possible roads to affluence. The Galbraithean course makes assumptions peculiarly appropriate to market economies, that man’s wants are great, not to say infinite, whereas his means are limited, although improvable. Thus the gap between means and ends can eventually be narrowed by industrial productivity, at least to the extent that “urgent” goods became abundant. But there is also a Zen solution to scarcity and affluence, beginning from premises opposite from our own, that human material ends are few and fi-nite and technical means unchanging but on the whole adequate. Adopting the Zen strategy, a people can enjoy an unparalleled material plenty, though perhaps only a low standard of living. That I think describes the hunters.

The traditional dismal view of the hunter’s fix is pre-anthropological. It goes back to the time Adam Smith was writing, and maybe to a time before anyone was writing. But anthropology, especially evolutionary anthropology, found it congenial, even necessary theoretically, to adopt the same tone of reproach. Archeologists and ethnologists had become Neolithic revolutionaries, and in their enthusiasm for the revolution found serious shortcomings in the Old (Stone Age) Regime. Scholars extolled a Neolithic Great Leap Forward. Some spoke of a changeover from human effort to domesticated energy sources, as if people had been liberated by a new labor-saving device, although in fact the basic power resources remained exactly the same, plants and animals, the development occurring rather in techniques of appropriation (i.e., domestication. Moreover, archeological research was beginning to suggest that the decisive gains came in stability of settlement and gross economic product, rather than productivity of labor.)

But evolutionary theory is not entirely to blame. The larger economic context in which it operates, “as if by an invisible hand,” promotes the same dim conclusions about the hunting life. Scarcity is the peculiar obsession of a business economy, the calculable condition of all who participate in it. The market makes freely available a dazzling array of products all these “good things” within a man’s reach but never his grasp, for one never has enough to buy everything. To exist in a market economy is to live out a double tragedy, beginning in inadequacy and ending in deprivation. All economic activity starts from a position of shortage: whether as producer, consumer, or seller of labor, one’s resources are insufficient to the possible uses and satisfactions. So one comes to a conclusion “you pays your money and you takes your choice.” But then, every acquisition is simultaneously a deprivation, for every purchase of something is a denial of something else that could have been had instead. (The point is that if you buy one kind of automobile, say a Plymouth fastback, you cannot also have a Ford Mustang and I judge from the TV commercials that the deprivation involved is more than material.) Inadequacy is the judgment decreed by our economy, and thus the axiom of our economics: the application of scarce means against alternate ends. We stand sentenced to life at hard labor. It is from this anxious vantage that we look back on the hunter. But if modern man, with all his technical advantages, still hasn’t got the wherewithal, what chance has this naked savage with his puny bow and arrow? Having equipped the hunter with bourgeois impulses and Paleolithic tools, we judge his situation hopeless in advance.

Scarcity is not an intrinsic property of technical means. It is a relation between means and ends. We might entertain the empirical possibility that hunters are in business for their health, a finite objective, and bow and arrow are adequate to that end. A fair case can be made that hunters often work much less than we do, and rather than a grind the food quest is intermittent, leisure is abundant, and there is more sleep in the daytime per capita than in any other conditions of society. (Perhaps certain traditional formulae are better inverted: the amount of work per capita increases with the evolution of culture and the amount of leisure per capita decreases.) Moreover, hunters seem neither harassed nor anxious. A certain confidence, at least in many cases, attends their economic attitudes and decisions. The way they dispose of food on hand, for example as if they had it made.

This is the case even among many present marginal hunters who hardly constitute a fair test of Paleolithic economy but something of a supreme test. Considering the poverty in which hunter and gatherers live in theory, it comes as a surprise that Bushmen who live in the Kalahari enjoy “a kind of material plenty” (Marshall, 1961, p. 243). Marshall is speaking of non-subsistence production; in this context her explication seems applicable beyond the Bushmen. She draws attention to the technical simplicity of the non-subsistence sector: the simple and readily available raw materials, skills, and tools. But most important, wants are restricted: a few people are happy to consider few things their good fortune. The restraint is imposed by nomadism. Of the hunter, it is truly said that this wealth is a burden (at least for his wife). Goods and mobility are therefore soon brought into contradiction, and to take liberties with a line of Lattimore’s, the pure nomad remains a poor nomad. It is only consistent with their mobility, as many accounts directly say, that among hunters needs are limited, avarice inhibited, and Warner (1937 [1958], p. 137) makes this very clear for the Murngin portability is a main value in the economic scheme of things.

A similar case of affluence without abundance can be made for the subsistence sector. McCarthy and McArthur’s time-motion study in Arnhem Land (1960) indicates the food quest is episodic and discontinuous, and per capita commitment to it averages less than four hours a day. The amount of daytime sleep and rest is unconscionable: clearly, the aborigines fail to “build culture” not from lack of time but from idle hands. McCarthy and McArthur also suggest that the people are working under capacity they might have easily procured more food; that they are able to support unproductive adults who may, however, do some craft work; and that getting food was not strenuous or exhausting. The Arnhem Land study, made under artificial conditions and based only on short-run observations, is plainly inconclusive in itself. Nevertheless, the Arnhem Land data are echoed in reports of other Australians and other hunters. Two famous explorers of the earlier nineteenth century made estimates of the same magnitude for the aborigines’ subsistence activities: two to four hours a day (Eyre, 1845, 2, pp. 252, 255; Grey, 1841, 2, pp. 26163). Slash-and-burn agriculture, incidentally, may be more labor-intensive: Conklin, for example, figures that 1,200 man hours per adult per year are given among the Hanunóo simply to agriculture (Conklin, 1957, p. 151: this figure excludes other food-connected activities, whereas the Australian data include time spent in the preparation of food as well as its acquisition). The Arnhem Landers’ punctuation of steady work with sustained idleness is also widely attested in Australia and beyond. In Lee’s paper he reported that productive members of !Kung Bushman camps spend two to three days per week in subsistence. We have heard similar comments in other papers at the symposium. Hadza women were said to work two hours per day on the average in gathering food, and one concludes from James Woodburn’s excellent film that Hadza men are much more preoccupied with games of chance than chances of game (Woodburn and Hudson, 1966).

In addition, evidence on hunter-gatherers’ economic attitudes and decisions should be brought to bear. Harassment is not implied in the descriptions of their nonchalant movements from camp to camp, nor indeed is the familiar condemnations of their laziness. A certain issue is posed by exasperated comments on the prodigality of hunters, their inclination to make a feast of everything on hand; as if, one Jesuit said of the Montagnais, “the game they were to hunt was shut up in a stable” (Le Jeune’s Relation of 1634, in Kenton, 1927, I, p. 182). “Not the slightest thought of, or care for, what the morrow may bring forth,” wrote Spencer and Gillen (1899, p. 53). Two interpretations of this supposed lack of foresight are possible: either they are fools, or they are not worried that is, as far as they are concerned, the morrow will bring more of the same. Rather than anxiety, it would seem the hunters have a confidence born of affluence, of a condition in which all the people’s wants (such as they are) are generally easily satisfied. This confidence does not desert them during hardship. It can carry them laughing through periods that would try even a Jesuit’s soul, and worry him so that as the Indians warn he could become sick:

“I saw them [the Montagnais] in their hardships and their labors, suffer with cheerfulness. I found myself, with them, threatened with great suffering; they said to me, ‘We shall be sometimes two days, sometimes three, without eating, for lack of food; take courage, Chihine, let thy soul be strong to endure suffering and hardship; keep thyself from being sad, otherwise thou will be sick; see how we do not cease to laugh, although we have little to eat’” (Le Jeune’s Relation of 1634, in Kenton, 1927, I, p. 129).

Again on another occasion Le Jeune’s host said to him: “Do not let thyself be cast down, take courage; when the snow comes, we shall eat” (Le Jeune’s Relation of 1634, in Kenton, 1927, I, p. 171). Which is something like the philosophy of the Penan of Borneo: “If there is no food today there will be tomorrow” expressing, according to Needham, “a confidence in the capacity of the environment to support them, and in their own ability to extract their livelihood from it” (1954, p. 230).

in Richard B. Lee and Irven De Vore, eds., Man the Hunter, pp. 8589

Lynn Clive: “Birds Combat Civilization” (1985)

Humankind truly was not meant to fly, and birds keep trying to tell us so. As people and their flying machines continue to overpopulate the skies, not only do plane-to-plane collisions increase, but bird to plane collisions drastically increase as well, especially since new technology has created sleeker and quieter engines which sneak up on birds and scarcely give them any warning of their approach. Needless to say, it is the birds which must attempt to change their natural flight patterns to avoid fatal collisions.

Seagulls have become a particularly confounding nuisance to airport officials in Michigan. As their natural feeding grounds along the Great Lakes become more and more polluted, they drift inland. Wet runways peppered with worms and grasshoppers provide a perfect new feeding ground for seagulls. Cherry Capital Airport near Traverse City has reported large flocks of seagulls, as many as 150 at a time.

Approximately 1,200 plane-bird collisions occur each year, causing $2030 million in damage. Such collisions prove fatal for the birds, of course; however, they have also been responsible for many aircraft crashes fatal to human beings. Sixty-two people were killed in 1960 near Boston when a propeller-driven plane sucked in several starlings and lost power.

Birds seem to be waging all-out war against the U.S. Air Force. In 1983, it reported 2,300 bird collisions; and 300 of these each caused more than $1,000 in damage. This past summer in Great Britain, a U.S. Air Force crew was forced to bail out of their F-111 jet when a 12-pound goose smashed into the protective covering on the nose of the jet. The jet, worth $30.9 million, is now quietly at rest on the bottom of the North Sea.

So what does civilized man do to combat the situation? In Traverse City, airport employees run around the airfield chasing gulls away with “cracker shells” fired from shotguns. They play tapes on loudspeakers of the cries of wounded seagulls, and they’re considering putting up hawk silhouettes to see if that might do the trick. Someone has invented something called a “chicken gun” or a “rooster booster” which hurls four-pound chicken carcasses into the windshields of aircraft at speeds over 500 mph to test their strength against bird collisions. These tests are presently taking place on Air Force jets.

BASH (Bird Air Strike Hazard Team) was organized by the U.S. Air Force in 1975 after three F-111 jets were lost due to bird collisions. This team, made up of Air Force biologists, travels to U.S. bases around the world, targeting bird troublespots and trying to come up with innovative ideas (like the rooster booster) to deal with the problem.

Modern industrial-technological civilizations are based on and geared to the destruction of the natural order. They pollute the air and feeding grounds of wildlife; they chase birds from the skies. They construct buildings like the Renaissance Center in Detroit with mirror-like reflective shells which confuse birds and cause them to crash into them.

As our buildings grow taller and as we fly higher and higher, as we overpopulate our skies with our deadly contrivances, we lose sight of our true and now former place on the earth. We myopically look only at tomorrow. We can marvel at the exquisite beauty of a single bird through a pair of binoculars and then, with the same eye, turn and marvel at a newly constructed skyscraper or a supersonic jetman’s artifices which are responsible for killing flocks of such birds.

If anyone were to suggest to the BASH team that the best way to stop bird-plane collisions would be to stop flying altogether, they would, of course, think you insane or perhaps “bird-brained.” But what is so bad about bird brains? If we acknowledge the message our bird cousins are sending us, maybe it isn’t such a bad idea after all.

in Fifth Estate, Summer 1985, p. 6

John Landau: “Wildflowers: A Bouquet of Theses” (1998)

What I desire is a return to the profundity of experience. I want a society where everyday activity, however mundane, is centered around how incredibly profound everything is. I want that profundity to become so immense that any mediations between us and it become totally unnecessary: we are in the marvel. When I am in that awe, words are so irrelevant, I don’t really care if you call my experience “God” or not. All I know is it is the greatest pleasure possible: to hug a tree, to jump up and down at a beautiful sunset, to climb a magnificent hill, to take awe in what surrounds us. I am a hedonist, and I will have these pleasures; neither the religionist nor the atheist shall lock them away from me!

Primal peoples were in touch with this profoundness, and organized their life around it. Religion is a decadent second-hand relic of this original, authentic mode of experiencing, that attempts to blackmail by linking social control and morality with profound experiencings. Primal peoples sought to avoid whatever distracted from this profundity as much as possible. Obsessiveness of any sort could distract from the wholistic goodness of the environment.

Why are we here? To experience profoundly.

Our task, therefore, is to rearrange life (society, the economy) such that profundity is immanent in everyday life. Spirituality represents the specialization and detachment of profundity from everyday life into a disembodied, disconnected, symbolic realm that becomes compensatory for an everyday life whose immanence is banality. It is obvious that we don’t regularly experience wonder, and this is a social-material problem, because the structure of everyday life discourages this. Other societies in history, however, have endeavored to discover what is truly of value in life, and then, and only then to structure everyday life upon those evident values.

We wish to make calculation and obligation islands in a sea of wonder and awe. We wish to make aloneness a positive experience within the context of profound, embodied togetherness.

Western spirituality has perpetuated a separation between the material and spiritual realms, probably because it arose out of a civilization ruled by an out-of-control materialism. The world used to be experienced profoundly; in spiritual terms, the earth used to be inhabited by spirit. Western spirituality abstracted spirit from the world, from the flesh, leaving an enlivened, disembodied spirit and a deadened, barren world. It is our job to refuse what has been artificially separated, not through a symbolical gesture, but by existentially redressing the alienations to which we have been subjected.

Human beings have developed over the past two million years various strategies for taking care of what some have called our “needs.” Various subsistence strategies have been invented, and our task would be to examine these and choose the strategies which best support an everyday experience of profundity.

We are discussing a life where one gives joy to others through the mere act of being, where exchange of gifts is a way of life, where one’s routine has inherent meaning, not because it makes reference to some symbolic system, but because it opens one out onto kairos, the profound moment, the experience of ambience, awe.

In order to do this, we must develop a pace that is conducive to this, a set of understandings whereby the experience of profundity is a value and for which rests, pauses, and meditations are in order as a part of routine, and a social reality based upon sharing of profound experiences as primary exchange rather than the exchange of money or etiquette.

Our job is to invent primal peoples! Through our imagination and what little we do know there is no evidence against such group movement. We must imagine these primeval peoples, in order to create an incredible myth in order to live it, to become it!

Silence was a great future of such times. People gestured towards the world. Experiences of awe, wonder were everyday affairs. Because people lived outside, they had a much greater oxygen content. They lived in a perpetual oxygen bath, which produces highs, heightens the sense of taste and smell, and is very relaxing. Anyone who has camped out in the open air knows this experience.

The energetic connection with the surroundings was immense; an incredible exchange on all levels was constantly taking place. It is within the context of this immenseness that our words, our ‘rationality,’ our technical pragmatics seem so narrow, so very small. Far from being

primitive, these were people enjoying and interested in preserving immenseness. This is no idealism. A concrete experience in nature can demonstrate the incredible power of the outdoors. One may engage in an intense, strenuous experience with others for a few hours (a night hike or some such) and then afterwards meander about in total silence, gesturing at most, exploring movement, smells, and impulses. This will give a taste of how rich it all is. This is what we have lost in our narrow obsessiveness with technicality. What Zen practitioners strive for a lifetime for, our ancestors had by birthright. Sure, they didn't know how to make a waterwheel or how to harness electricity; they didn't want to: they had better things to do! It is even remotely conceivable that they did know of these things, in potential form at least, but saw them as trivial to the process of life.

In the silence, all of the chitchat and all of the worries and all of the monuments fade. In the is-ness, what need to leave one's mark? What need to become immortal through art or culture? Disappearance is erasing the record, off track, no trails, no history. One is in the disappearance already. All one needs is to lose track, to stop recording, to turn off the tape machine, to disappear, it's all right. It's OK to disappear. Do so now. The grass in front of you is all that ever was or will be. It has no memory, no future. Just silence.

So when we know this rich heritage, when we reach into the heart of our being and know that humans very like ourselves lived a good two million years in this way of being, we are awed, and the scum at the top of the pond, the curdled milk of history, our obsession with technicality, pours off and we are left with the pure froth of Being.

Primal Revival Growth Center, Los Angeles,

1998, pp. 12

Theodor Adorno: Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life (1947)

Toy shop. Hebbel, in a surprising entry in his diary, asks what takes away 'life's magic in later years.' It is because in all the brightly-coloured contorted marionettes, we see the revolving cylinder that sets them in motion, and because for this very reason the captivating variety of life is reduced to wooden monotony. A child seeing the tightrope-walkers singing, the pipers playing, the girls fetching water, the coachmen driving, thinks all this is happening for the joy of doing so; he can't imagine that these people also have to eat and drink, go to bed and get up again. We however, know what is at stake.' Namely, earning a living, which commandeers all those activities as mere means, reduces them to interchangeable, abstract labour-time. The quality of things ceases to be their essence and becomes the accidental appearance of their value. The 'equivalent form' mars all perceptions; what is no longer irradiated by the light of its own self-determination as 'joy in doing,' pales to the eye. Our organs grasp nothing sensuous in isolation, but notice whether a colour, a sound, a movement is there for its own sake or for something else; wearied by a false variety, they steep all in grey, disappointed by the deceptive claim of qualities still to be there at all, while they conform to the purposes of appropriation, indeed largely owe their existence to it alone. Disenchantment with the contemplated world is the sensorium's reaction to its objective role as a 'commodity world.' Only when purified of appropriation would things be colourful and useful at once: under universal compulsion the two cannot be reconciled.

Children, however, are not so much, as Hebbel thought, subject to illusions of 'captivating variety,' as still aware, in their spontaneous perception, of the contradiction between phenomenon and fungibility that the resigned adult no longer sees, and they shun it. Play is their defense. The unerring child is struck by the 'peculiarity of the equivalent form': 'use-value' becomes the form of manifestation, the phenomenal form of its opposite, value.

In his purposeless activity the child, by a subterfuge, sides with use-value against exchange value. Just because he deprives the things with which he plays of their mediated usefulness, he seeks to rescue in them what is benign towards men and not what subserves the exchange relation that equally deforms men and things. The little trucks travel nowhere and the tiny barrels on them are empty; yet they remain true to their destiny by not performing, not participating in the process of abstraction that levels down that destiny, but instead abide as allegories of what they are specifically for. Scattered, it is true, but not ensnared, they wait to see whether society will finally remove the social stigma on them; whether the vital process between men and things, praxis, will cease to be practical. The unreality of games gives notice that reality is not yet real. Unconsciously they rehearse the right life. The relation of children to animals depends entirely on the fact that Utopia goes disguised in the creatures whom Marx even begrudged the surplus value they contribute as workers. In existing without any purpose recognizable to men, animals hold out, as if for expression, their own names, utterly impossible to exchange. This makes them so beloved of children, their contemplation so blissful.

I am a rhinoceros, signifies the shape of the rhinoceros. Fairy-tales and operettas know such images, and the ridiculous question how do we know that Orion is really called Orion, rises to the stars.

pp. 227228

Section Two: The Coming of Civilization

The life of savages is so simple, and our societies are such complicated machines! The Tahitian is so close to the origin of the world, while the European is close to its old age. The contrast between them and us is greater than the difference between a newborn baby and a doddering old man. They understand absolutely nothing about our manners or our laws, and they are bound to see in them nothing but shackles disguised in a hundred different ways. Those shackles could only provoke the indignation and scorn of creatures in whom the most profound feeling is a love of liberty. Denis Diderot (1774) aul Z. Simons posits civilization as virtually complete from its inception, as if domestication occurred in a kind of qualitative quantum leap. Such a provocative thesis would surely make that moment all the more compelling an object of study: the most important turning point in our history as a species.

In the clash between precivilization and the ensemble of ways to control and harness life that has all but extinguished it, what was at stake? In Shakespeare's As You Like It, the losing side can be seen in the exiled Duke's defense of wilderness, its "tongues in trees" and "sermons in stone and good in everything." Two-and-one-half centuries later, in a place more tangible than the Forest of Arden, Smohalla, elder of a Columbia Plateau tribe, issued a similar plaint:

"You ask me to plow the ground! Shall I take a knife and tear my mother's bosom? then when I die she will not take me to her bosom to rest.

You ask me to dig for stone! Shall I dig under her skin for her bones? then when I die I cannot enter her body to be born again.

You ask me to cut grass and sell it, and be rich like white men! But how dare I cut off my mother's hair?"

The selections that follow provide some sense of the vast range of this struggle, and something of its many facets, its texture, and its fruits. Civilization's victory has had the most profound impact, both on the natural world and on our species viscerally, culturally, and in every other way.

From Diderot in the eighteenth century, to George Marsh late in the nineteenth, up to the present in a mounting profusion and emphasis that reflects the growing crisis, we can see with increasing clarity what a truly monumental, cataclysmic watershed was the triumph of civilization. This small sampling can only suggest the scope and depth of that cataclysm.

George P. Marsh: The Earth as Modified by Human Action (1907)

Destructiveness of Man

Man has too long forgotten that the earth was given to him for usufruct alone, not for consumption, still less for profligate waste. Nature has provided against the absolute destruction of any of her elementary matter, the raw material of her works; the thunderbolt and the tornado, the most convulsive throes of even the volcano and the earthquake, being only phenomena of decomposition and recomposition. But she has left it within the power of man irreparably to derange the combinations of inorganic matter and of organic life, which through the night of aeons she had been proportioning and balancing, to prepare the earth of this habitation, when in the fullness of time his Creator should call him forth to enter into its possession.

Apart from the hostile influence of man, the organic and the inorganic world are, as I have remarked, bound together by such mutual relations and adaptations as secure, if not the absolute permanence and equilibrium of both, a long continuance of the established conditions of each at any given time and place, or at least, a very slow and gradual succession of changes in those conditions. But man is everywhere a disturbing agent. Wherever he plants his foot, the harmonies of nature are turned to discords. The proportions and accommodations which insured the stability of existing arrangements are overthrown. Indigenous vegetable and animal species are extirpated, and supplanted by others of foreign origin, spontaneous production is forbidden or restricted, and the face of the earth is either laid bare or covered with a new and reluctant growth of vegetable forms and with alien tribes of animal life. These intentional changes and substitutions constitute, indeed, great revolutions; but vast as is their magnitude and importance, they are, as we shall see, insignificant in comparison with the contingent and unsought results which have flowed from them.

The fact that, of all organic beings, man alone is to be regarded as essentially a destructive power, and that he wields energies to resist which Nature that nature whom all material life and all inorganic substance obey is wholly impotent, tends to prove that, though living in physical nature, he is not of her, that he is of more exalted parentage, and belongs to a higher order of existences, than those which are born of her womb and live in blind submission to her dictates.

There are, indeed, brute destroyers, beasts and birds and insects of prey all animal life feeds upon, and, of course, destroys other life but this destruction is balanced by compensations. It is, in fact, the very means by which the existence of one tribe of animals or of vegetables is secured against being smothered by the encroachments of another; and the reproductive powers of species which serve as the food of others are always proportioned to the demand they are destined to supply. Man pursues his victims with reckless destructiveness; and while the sacrifice of life by the lower animals is limited by the cravings of appetite, he unsparingly persecutes, even to extirpation, thousands of organic forms which he can not consume.

The earth was not, in its natural condition, completely adapted to the use of man, but only to the sustenance of wild animals and wild vegetation. These live, multiply their kind in just proportion, and attain their perfect measure of strength and beauty, without producing or requiring any important change in the natural arrangements of surface or in each other's spontaneous tendencies, except such mutual repression of excessive increase as may prevent the extirpation of one species by the encroachments of another. In short, without man, lower animal and spontaneous vegetable life would have been practically constant in type, distribution and proportion, and the physical geography of the earth would have remained undisturbed for indefinite periods, and been subject to revolution only from slow development, from possible unknown cosmically causes, or from geological action.

But man, the domestic animals that serve him, the field and garden plants the products of which supply him with food and clothing, can not subsist and rise to the full development of their higher properties, unless brute and unconscious nature be effectually combated, and, in a great degree, vanquished by human art. Hence, a certain measure of transformation of terrestrial surface, of suppression of natural, and stimulation of artificially modified productivity becomes necessary. This measure man has unfortunately exceeded. He has felled the forests whose network of fibrous roots bound the mould to the rocky skeleton of the earth; but had he allowed here and there a belt of woodland to reproduce itself by spontaneous propagation,

most of the mischiefs which his reckless destruction of the natural protection of the soil has occasioned would have been averted. He has broken up the mountain reservoirs, the percolation of whose waters through unseen channels supplied the fountains that refreshed his cattle and fertilized his fields; but he has neglected to maintain the cisterns and the canals of irrigation which a wise antiquity had constructed to neutralize the consequences of its own imprudence. While he has torn the thin glebe which confined the light earth of extensive plains, and has destroyed the fringe of semi-aquatic plants which skirted the coast and checked the drifting of the sea sand, he has failed to prevent the spreading of the dunes by clothing them with artificially propagated vegetation. He has ruthlessly warred on all the tribes of animated nature whose spoil he could convert to his own uses, and he has not protected the birds which prey on the insects most destructive to his own harvests.

Purely untutored humanity, it is true, interferes comparatively little with the arrangements of nature, and the destructive agency of man becomes more and more energetic and unsparing as he advances in civilization, until the impoverishment, with which his exhaustion of the natural resources of the soil is threatening him, at last awakens him to the necessity of preserving what is left, if not of restoring what has been wantonly wasted. The wandering savage grows no cultivated vegetable, fells no forest, and extirpates no useful plant, no noxious weed. If his skill in the chase enables him to entrap numbers of the animals on which he feeds, he compensates this loss by destroying also the lion, the tiger, the wolf, the otter, the seal, and the eagle, thus indirectly protecting the feebler quadrupeds and fish and fowls, which would otherwise become the booty of beasts and birds of prey. But with stationary life, or at latest with the pastoral state, man at once commences an almost indiscriminate warfare upon all the forms of animal and vegetable existence around him, and as he advances in civilization, he gradually eradicates or transforms every spontaneous product of the soil he occupies.

Human and Brute Action Compared

It is maintained by authorities as high as any known to modern science, that the action of man upon nature, though greater in degree, does not differ in kind from that of wild animals. It is perhaps impossible to establish a radical distinction in genere between the two classes of effects, but there is an essential difference between the motive of action which calls out the energies of civilized man and the mere appetite which controls the life of the beast. The action of man, indeed, is frequently followed by unforeseen and undesired results, yet it is nevertheless guided by a self-conscious will aiming as often at secondary and remote as at immediate objects. The wild animal, on the other hand, acts instinctively, and, so far as we are able to perceive, always with a view to single and direct purposes. The backwoodsman and the beaver alike fell trees; the man, that he may convert the forest into an olive grove that will mature its fruit only for a succeeding generation; the beaver, that he may feed upon the bark of the trees or use them in the construction of his habitation. The action of brutes upon the material world is slow and gradual, and usually limited, in any given case, to a narrow extent of territory. Nature is allowed time and opportunity to set her restorative powers at work, and the destructive animal has hardly retired from the field of his ravages before nature has repaired the damages occasioned by his operations. In fact, he is expelled from the scene by the very efforts which she makes for the restoration of her dominion. Man, on the contrary, extends his action over vast spaces, his revolutions are swift and radical, and his devastations are, for an almost incalculable time after he has withdrawn the arm that gave the blow, irreparable.

The form of geographical surface, and very probably the climate, of a given country, depend much on the character of the vegetable life belonging to it. Man has, by domestication, greatly changed the habits and properties of the plants he rears; he has, by voluntary selection, immensely modified the forms and qualities of the animated creatures that serve him; and he has, at the same time, completely rooted out many forms of animal if not of vegetable being. What is there in the influence of brute life that corresponds to this? We have no reason to believe that, in that portion of the American continent which, though peopled by many tribes of quadruped and fowl, remained uninhabited by man or only thinly occupied by purely savage tribes, any sensible geographical change had occurred within twenty centuries before the epoch of discovery and colonization, while, during the same period, man had changed millions of square miles, in the fairest and most fertile regions of the Old World, into the barrenest deserts.

The ravages committed by man subvert the relations and destroy the balance which nature had established between her organized and her inorganic creations, and she avenges herself upon the intruder, by letting loose upon her defaced provinces destructive energies hitherto kept in check by organic forces destined to be his best auxiliaries, but which he has unwisely dispersed and driven from the field of action. When the forest is gone, the great reservoir of moisture stored up in its vegetable mould is evaporated, and returns only in deluges of rain to wash away the parched dust into which that mould has been converted. The well-wooded and humid hills are turned to ridges of dry rock, which encumber the low grounds and choke the watercourses with their debris, and except in countries favored with an equable distribution of rain through the seasons, and a moderate and regular inclination of surface the whole earth, unless rescued by human art from the physical degradation to which it tends, becomes an assemblage of bald mountains, of barren, turfless hills, and of swampy and malarious plains. There are parts of Asia Minor, of Northern Africa, of Greece, and even of Alpine Europe, where the operation of causes set in action by man has brought the face of the earth to a desolation almost as complete as that of the moon; and though, within that brief space of time which we call “the historical period,” they are known to have been covered with luxuriant woods, verdant pastures, and fertile meadows, they are now too far deteriorated to be reclaimable by man, nor can they become again fitted for human use, except through great geological changes, or other mysterious influences or agencies of which we have no present knowledge and over which we have no prospective control. The earth is fast becoming an unfit home for its noblest inhabitant, and another era of equal human crime and human improvidence, and of like duration with that through which traces of that crime and that improvidence extend, would reduce it to such a condition of impoverished productiveness, of shattered surface, of climatic excess, as to threaten the depravation, barbarism and perhaps even extinction of the species.

pp. 3343

Frederick Turner: Beyond Geography: The Western Spirit Against the Wilderness (1980)

North Americans are urged to think with a certain cautious fondness on our single great parable of intermingling, the marriage between the white Englishman John Rolfe and the Indian princess Pocahantas. This merging is supposed to symbolize a new and hopeful beginning in the New World. But the records of that arrangement tell us something else: the marriage was not based on any true desire for merging but rather on political expediency and a fear that no marriage could bridge. John Rolfe may, as Perry Miller says, have been horrified to find some genuine affection for Pocahantas overtaking him. God, he knew, had forbidden intermarriage to the Israelites in the interests of tribal solidarity and religious purity, and so Rolfe knew that he must find a means of justifying what otherwise could only be construed as a slide into temptation. So he did, professing and maybe believing at last, that he had entered into this marriage "for the good of this plantation, for the honour of our countrie, for the glory of God, for my owne salvation, and for converting to the true knowledge of God and Jesus Christ, an unbelieving creature." On any other terms the marriage would be a wretched instigation "hatched by him who seeketh and delighteth in man's destruction."

It was a difficult business, this possessing while withholding themselves, and the records show that it was not uniformly accomplished, though European governments would do their best by sending out shiploads of white women to keep the white men in the clearings and out of the woods. For neither the French nor the Spanish was John Rolfe a paragon, though it was the English themselves who strove most to avoid his example.

From their earliest days in the New World the English evinced an official desire both stern and shrill to keep the colonists together and to keep the natives at a safe distance. So they recorded with a sour satisfaction the fate of a splinter colony at Wessagusset, Massachusetts, that strayed off and kept Indian women but that managed itself so improvidently that it soon came near to starvation and then became "so base" as actually to serve the Indians for sustenance. One poor, half-starved fellow was found dead where he had stood in tidal mud in his last search for shellfish.

In Virginia, Massachusetts, and Connecticut there were stiff penalties for those who moved ahead of the line of settlement and lived surrounded only by woods, animals, and Indians. Such individuals, it was reasoned, would soon, like the untended olive, turn wild themselves, and one of Cotton Mather's most persistent laments was the "Indianizing" of the whites. As he watched them straggle off into the woods, establish barbarous little outposts, and settle slowly into native ways, he predicted divine retribution as of old.

What all this tells us is that these newcomers had felt obscurely the lure of the New World and that some had responded to it out of old dreams long repressed in the march of Christian history. For the fear of possession does not make sense by itself, as wilderness travelers Joseph Conrad and Carl Jung knew so well. Only when the fear is seen as the obverse of desire does it reveal its full truth. Conrad, witness to the European invasion of the tropics, wrote of those who had succumbed to the temptation and had become lost forever like Willems in An Outcast of the Islands and Kurtz in The Heart of Darkness, who pronounced judgment on his own reversion: "The horror! The horror!"

Almost never do our raw wilderness documents speak openly of this lure, of the human need to feel possessed, body and spirit, by a landscape both visible and numinous. Only negatively can they do so, guiding us in their obsessive loathing of those who did succumb. And only this situation can adequately explain the strange persistence and perpetuation through the centuries of the tradition of the willing captive: one who, being captured, refused redemption or ran away after being redeemed, slipping off from the settlements to return to the tribes and the wilderness. They were variously called renegades, white Indians, squawmen, or simply degenerates, and we might imagine that their shadowy careers would have been consigned to a silence beyond obloquy. But it is not so. Instead, their stories have come down to us, loaded, true enough, with all the weight that can be assigned scapegoats, but they have survived, and this is significant. Never as popular because never as useful (even as cautionary tales) as the orthodox captivity narratives, their persistence tells us of other visions of New World contact that haunted the whites even in the very midst of their victories.

The stories begin with what was for us the beginning of the Americas, with Columbus. One Miguel Diaz of the second voyage wounded a fellow Christian in an argument and to escape

punishment ran away into the woods where he became the consort of the local chieftainess. Like most of his kind, history loses track of him here, but his defection was thought worthy of record in his own time, a strange footnote to conquest.

Then, following like an apparition the traces of further conquests, there are the renegades of Cortes, Narvaez, and Soto. Though, as we have seen, Gonzalo Guerrero was not with Cortes as he pushed off from Cuba for an unknown empire, one would have thought from the diligence with which that driven leader searched for Guerrero that he was indispensable to the success of the expedition. Maybe in some way he was.

With Narvaez there were at least two who preferred to remain with the Indians rather than wander on into unknown dangers, guided only by the hope of coming out once again into Christian territory. Doroteo Teodoro, a Greek, went inland with the Indians and never came out again, though years later Soto's men would catch word out of the thicket that he still lived with his adopted people. And Lope de Oviedo ("our strongest man") turned away from the entreaties of Vaca to escape and stayed on with the natives while Vaca and the others slipped northward in the night.

On the baffled and trackless Soto expedition there were numerous deserters, notably (from a white point of view) Francisco de Guzman, bastard son of a Seville hidalgo; a hidalgo named Mancano; and another named Feryada, a Levantine. And there was an unnamed Christian described by the Portuguese knight who chronicled the expedition:

the Indians came in peace, and said that the Christian who remained there would not come. The Governor wrote to him, sending ink and paper, that he might answer. The purport of the letter stated his determination to leave Florida, reminded him of his being a Christian, and that he was unwilling to leave him among heathen; that he would pardon the error he had committed in going to the Indians, should he return; and that if they should wish to detain him, to let the Governor know by writing. The Indian who took the letter came back, bringing no other response than the name and the rubric of the person written on the back, to signify that he was alive.

We have record too of several black slave defectors, notably "Carlos" and "Gomez," both of whom are known to have lived among the Indians for many years. These were presumed to have so little stake in civilization that their actions could more easily be disregarded by their Spanish masters.

Not so easily dealt with, or even entertained, was the possibility that some members of Raleigh's Lost Colony had survived by merging and migrating inland with Manteo's people. Almost two centuries after John White and his party had panted through the sandy seaside woods in much-belated relief of the colonists and had come upon that tree with its interrupted message, the old sentinel trunk was still being pointed out to the curious as evidence of that tragedy. Expeditions were compulsively sent out in 1602, 1608 and 1610 to find some trace of the colonists, even if fatal, but all failed since they could not see the clues. In 1654 friendly Indians showed another expedition evidence that some of the missing colonists had revisited the site of the old fort, but so unthinkable was the alternative of survival through merging that this hint too was left unexamined.

So, for the same reason, were other hints, before and after, including those from John Smith who
had knowledge of whites living somewhere inland from Chesapeake Bay, and from a German traveler, John Ledered, who heard in North Carolina of a nation of bearded men living some miles southwest of where he was. Still the hints of survival persisted and in the eighteenth century
were so strong that they compelled North Carolina's pioneer naturalist/historian John Lawson to acknowledge them. The Indians of this place tell us, he notes, "that several of their ancestors were
white people and could talk in a book as we do; the truth of which is confirmed by the gray eyes
being frequently found amongst these Indians and no others." But Lawson could not let the spectacle
of miscegenation pass without censure. The evidence of it drove him to remark that the colony had miscarried for want of timely supplies from England; or through the treachery of the natives, for we may reasonably suppose that the English were forced to cohabit with them for relief and conservation; and that in the process of time they conformed themselves to the manners of their Indian relations; and thus we see how apt human nature is to degenerate.

It was only in the last decade of the nineteenth century when the menace of merging was dead that a white historian, Stephen B. Weeks, could put all this information together and make the appropriate inference. And this was that the 1587 colonists, being destroyed piecemeal by the vengeful natives of the mainland, took what they could carry and went to Manteo's people on Croatoan. Together these two groups left Croatoan, which was only a seasonal home for the natives, and moved inland by slow stages, away from the hostiles of the Outer Banks area. They were subsequently encountered on the Lumber (Lumbee) River in the mid-eighteenth century when Scots and Huguenot settlers pushed into the area. And their descendants are there to this day in what is now Robeson County. Here one may meet striking mixed bloods who trace themselves back to that intermingling on the Outer Banks and who carry on the names of the Lost Colonists.

Even while the search for the Lost Colonists was vainly going on, others of the English were becoming "lost" under the very eyes of the orthodox, and of these none excited greater opprobrium and more continuing vengeance than Thomas Morton of Massachusetts. With the single exception of a long section detailing the bestiality trial and execution of one Thomas Granger (another horrid example of the temptation to mix in the wilderness), there is no more luminous passage in Governor Bradford's long chronicle of the early years of Massachusetts than that on Morton. This is so because no one transgressed so flagrantly and almost joyously against the powerful taboo that kept the English from mingling with all that surrounded them.

The man had come out from England in 1622. By the summer of 1626 he had usurped his partner's prerogatives in a settlement venture near the present town of Quincy and was master of a heterogeneous group of indentured servants and local Indians. It was not merely that Morton was trading with the Indians and supplying them with guns, powder and spirits, for by Bradford's admission as well as by other contemporaneous accounts we know that Morton was by no means alone in this practice. Indeed, had all those English been Mortons, there might have been little to fear from selling the natives what would then have been merely hunting arms. What deeply rankled was that Morton was actively encouraging the intermingling of whites and Indians and that in doing this he was accomplishing what was so much feared: the Americanization of the English.

In the spring of 1627 Morton presided over the erection of a Maypole at the place he suggestively and salaciously styled "Mare-Mount" or "Ma-re-Mount." It was too much. A party under the command of the doughty Miles Standish broke in upon the mongrels, arrested Morton, and subsequently deported him, hoping that this would be the end of it. But the man would come back again and again to the scene of his transgression and his triumph. And again and again the English authorities would hound and persecute him. Throughout the New England winter of 164445 they kept the old man in a drafty jail, in irons and without charges, and when at last they let him loose he was broken. When he died "old and crazy," the English were satisfied that this threat no longer existed.

But they could not lay to rest that larger threat of which Morton had been but a particular carrier, for it kept appearing. The wilderness that had spawned it would recede by the year and mile, and with it the Indians, but all along the gnawing frontier where contact was still to be had there was the profoundly disturbing and puzzling phenomenon of "indianization." On the other hand, there were but few examples of Indians who had volunteered to go white and who had remained so. And even the missionaries, to say nothing of their lay captors, seemed ashamed of the pathetic show these converts made.

Observing a prisoner exchange between the Iroquois and the French in upper New York in 1699, Cadwallader Colden is blunt: " notwithstanding the French Commissioners took all the Pains possible to carry Home the French, that were Prisoners with the Five Nations, and they had full Liberty from the Indians, few of them could be persuaded to return. "Nor, he has to admit, is this merely a reflection on the quality of French colonial life, "for the English had as much Difficulty" in persuading their redeemed to come home, despite what Colden would claim were the obvious superiority of English ways:

No Arguments, no Intreaties, nor Tears of their Friends and Relations, could persuade many of them to leave their new Indian Friends and Acquaintance; several of them that were by the Caressings of their Relations persuaded to come Home, in a little Time grew tired of our Manner of living, and run away again to the Indians, and ended their Days with them. On the other Hand, Indian Children have been carefully educated among the English, cloathed and taught, yet, I think, there is not one Instance, that any of these, after they had Liberty to go

among their own People, and were come to Age, would remain with the English, but returned to their own Nations, and became as fond of the Indian Manner of Life as those that knew nothing of a civilized Manner of Living. And, he concludes, what he says of this particular prisoner exchange “has been found true on many other Occasions.”

Benjamin Franklin was even more pointed: When an Indian child is raised in white civilization, he remarks, the civilizing somehow does not stick, and at the first opportunity he will go back to his red relations, from whence there is no hope whatever of redeeming him. But when white persons of either sex have been taken prisoners young by the Indians, and have lived a while among them, tho’ ransomed by their Friends, and treated with all imaginable tenderness to prevail with them to stay among the English, yet in a Short time they become disgusted with our manner of life, and the care and pains that are necessary to support it, and take the first good Opportunity of escaping again into the Woods, from whence there is no reclaiming them.

Colden’s New York neighbor Crevecoeur, for all his subsequently celebrated prating about this new person who was an American, almost unwittingly reveals in the latter portion of his Letters From an American Farmer that the only really new persons are those who have forsaken white civilization for the tribes. “As long as we keep ourselves busy tilling the earth,” he writes, “there is no fear of any of us becoming wild.” And yet, conditions being what they then were, it was not that simple. It was not always possible to keep one’s head looking down at the soil shearing away from the bright plow blade. There was always the great woods, and the life to be lived within it was, Crevecoeur admits, “singularly captivating,” perhaps even superior to that so boasted of by the transplanted Europeans. For, as many knew to their rueful amazement, “thousands of Europeans are Indians, and we have no examples of even one of those aborigines having from choice become Europeans!”

pp. 238245

James Axtell: The Invasion Within: The Contest of Cultures in Colonial North America (1985)

Even when the colonists allowed the native farmers to proceed unmolested, the English ideology of farming clashed with traditional Indian practices and beliefs. In English eyes a farm was the private property of an individual husbandman who fenced and hedged its boundaries to declare his ownership. Its products were the fruits of none but his own labor, and he could dispose of them as he saw fit. Its sole use he reserved for himself by a civil law of trespass. The Indians of the Northeast, on the other hand, held a communal idea of the land. Individual families, represented by their women, might "own" personal gardens, but fields of corn, beans and squash were the possession of the whole village which tilled them and shared equally their fruits. In the absence of corn-craving animals, the natives felt no need to fence their acres, an effort that in any event would have been wasted in their periodic removes to new ground. The southern Indians thought the colonists "childish" for confining their improvements, "as if the crop would eat itself." In the north, where denser European settlement and more numerous cattle posed a constant threat, fences often became an unwelcome necessity. Yet even there the Indians fences' were often described as "miserable" because they did not have the "heart to fence their grounds."

Before the Indians could subsist solely upon the fruits of farming they had to jettison their traditional communal ethic of sharing and hospitality. For unless everyone in the community could shift at the same time to an individualistic, every-man-for-himself philosophy of accumulation, the provident exemplar of the "civilized way" would lose all incentive by being eaten out of house and home by his improvident friends and relatives. Such a shift was doubly difficult to effect because the missionaries themselves preached a gospel message of charity that seemed to deny the meaner spirit of capitalism. Samuel Kirkland's encouragement of the Oneidas to a life of farming, for example, was met with precious little success and the entreaties of his impoverished villagers for food, requests that he could not in conscience deny. For as they reminded him, "You have often exhorted us to be charitable to our Neighbours and hospitable to our Foreign Brethren, when they came this way, and if it be near the end of the week invite them to tarry over the sabbath, and hear Christ's gospel, or good news." By sharing what they had with those in need, the Indians seemed to most Englishmen to have "no care for the future," to be squandering the wealth of the earth upon the lazy and shiftless. But in the eyes of some, "they appeared to be fulfilling the scriptures beyond those who profess to believe them, in that of taking no thought of tomorrow." It was this double obstacle - the ingrained communalism of the natives and the inconsistent philosophies of the missionaries - that in the end prevented farming from becoming the economic salvation of the Indians in the colonial period.

The English failure to reduce the natives to industry can have perhaps no more eloquent epitaph than the petition of the Mohegan Indians to the Assembly of Connecticut in 1789. Nostalgic for a golden past, their plea also bears witness to the powerful bonds of community that sustained them through almost two centuries of forced acculturation, political domination and religious intolerance, but now could sustain them no longer. "The Times are Exceedingly alter'd," they wrote.

Yea the Times have turn'd everything Upside down, or rather we have Chang'd the good Times, Chiefly by the help of the White People. For in Times past our Fore-Fathers lived in Peace, Love and great harmony, and had everything in Great planty. When they Wanted meat they would just run into the Bush a little ways with their Weapons and would Soon bring home good venison, Racoon, Bear and Fowl. If they Choose to have Fish, they Wo'd only go to the River or along the Sea Shore and they wou'd presently fill their Cannoous With Veriety of Fish, both Scaled and shell Fish, and they had abundance of Nuts, Wild Fruit, Ground Nuts and Ground Beans, and they planted but little Corn and Beans and they kept no Cattle or Horses for they needed none. And they had no Contention about their Lands, it lay in Common to them all, and they had but one large Dish and they Cou'd all eat together in Peace and Love But alas, it is not so now, all our Fishing, Hunting and Fowling is intirely gone. And we have now begun to Work on our Land, keep Cattle, Horses and Hogs And We Build Houses and fence in Lots, And now we plainly See that one Dish and one Fire will not do any longer for us Some few there are Stronger than others and they will keep off the poor, weake, the halt and the Blind, And Will take the Dish to themselves. Yea, they will rather Call White People and Molattoes to eat With them out of our Dish, and poor Widows and Orphans must be pushed one side and there they Must Set a Crying, Starving and die.

So it was with “Hearts full of Sorrow and Grief” that they asked “That our Dish of Suckuttush may be equally divided amongst us, that every one may have his own little dish by himself, that he may eat Quietly and do With his Dish as he pleases; and let every one have his own Fire.” Other tribes as well eventually succumbed to the necessities of a foreign economy and an alien work ethic, but seldom before the colonies gained their independence and began to hurl a missionary onslaught at the remains of native “idleness” and independence. But even then the time clock and the regular paycheck could not completely stifle the traditional Indian values of social generosity and personal liberty.

pp. 166167

John Zerzan: Elements of Refusal (1988)

Although food production by its nature includes a latent readiness for political domination and although civilizing culture was from the beginning its own propaganda machine, the changeover involved a monumental struggle. Fredy Perlman's Against Leviathan! Against History! is unrivaled on this, vastly enriching Toynbee's attention to the "internal" and "external proletariats," discontents within and without civilization. Nonetheless, along the axis from digging stick farming to plow agriculture to fully differentiated irrigation systems, an almost total genocide of gatherers and hunters was necessarily effected.

The formation and storage of surpluses are part of the domesticating will to control and make static, an aspect of the tendency to symbolize. A bulwark against the flow of nature, surplus takes the forms of herd animals and granaries. Stored grain was the earliest medium of equivalence, the oldest form of capital. Only with the appearance of wealth in the shape of storable grains do the gradations of labor and social classes proceed. While there were certainly wild grains before all this (and wild wheat, by the way, is 24 percent protein compared to 12 percent for domesticated wheat) the bias of culture makes every difference. Civilization and its cities rested as much on granaries as on symbolization.

The mystery of agriculture's origin seems even more impenetrable in light of the recent reversal of long-standing notions that the previous era was one of hostility to nature and an absence of leisure. "One could no longer assume," wrote Arme, "that early man domesticated plants and animals to escape drudgery and starvation. If anything, the contrary appeared true, and the advent of farming saw the end of innocence." For a long time, the question was "why wasn't agriculture adopted much earlier in human evolution?" More recently, we know that agriculture, in Cohen's words, "is not easier than hunting and gathering and does not provide a higher quality, more palatable, or more secure food base." Thus the consensus question now is, "why was it adopted at all?"

Many theories have been advanced, none convincingly. Childe and others argue that population increase pushed human societies into more intimate contact with other species, leading to domestication and the need to produce in order to feed the additional people. But it has been shown rather conclusively that population increase did not precede agriculture but was caused by it. "I don't see any evidence anywhere in the world," concluded Flannery, "that suggest that population pressure was responsible for the beginning of agriculture." Another theory has it that major climatic changes occurred at the end of the Pleistocene, about 11,000 years ago, which upset the old hunter-gatherer life-world and led directly to the cultivation of certain surviving staples. Recent dating methods have helped demolish this approach; no such climatic shift happened that could have forced the new mode into existence. Besides, there are scores of examples of agriculture being adopted or refused in every type of climate. Another major hypothesis is that agriculture was introduced via a chance discovery or invention as if it had never occurred to the species before a certain moment that, for example, food grows from sprouted seeds. It seems certain that Paleolithic humanity had a virtually inexhaustible knowledge of flora and fauna for many tens of thousands of years before the cultivation of plants began, which renders this theory especially weak.

Agreement with Carl Sauer's summation that, "Agriculture did not originate from a growing or chronic shortage of food" is sufficient, in fact, to dismiss virtually all originary theories that have been advanced. A remaining idea, presented by Hahn, Isaac and others, holds that food production began at base as a religious activity. This hypothesis comes closest to plausibility.

Sheep and goats, the first animals to be domesticated, are known to have been widely used in religious ceremonies, and to have been raised in enclosed meadows for sacrificial purposes. Before they were domesticated, moreover, sheep had no wool suitable for textile purposes. The main use of the hen in southeastern Asia and the eastern Mediterranean the earliest centers of civilization "seems to have been," according to Darby, "sacrificial or divinatory rather than alimentary." Sauer adds that the "egg laying and meat producing qualities" of tamed fowl "are relatively late consequences of their domestication." Wild cattle were fierce and dangerous; neither the docility of oxen nor the modified meat texture of such castrates could have been foreseen. Cattle were not milked until centuries after their initial captivity, and representations indicate that their first known harnessing was to wagons in religious processions.

Plants, next to be controlled, exhibit similar backgrounds so far as is known. Consider the New World examples of squash and pumpkin, used originally as ceremonial rattles. Johannessen discussed the religious and mystical motives connected with the domestication of maize, Mexico's most important crop and center of its native Neolithic religion. Likewise Anderson investigated the selection and development of distinctive types of various cultivated plants because of their magical significance. The shamans, I should add, were well-placed in positions of power to introduce agriculture via the taming and planting involved in ritual and religion, sketchily referred to above.

Though the religious explanation of the origins of agriculture has been somewhat overlooked, it brings us, in my opinion, to the very doorstep of the real explanation of the birth of production: that non-rational, cultural force of alienation which spread, in the forms of time, language, number and art, to ultimately colonize material and psychic life in agriculture. "Religion" is too narrow a conceptualization of this infection and its growth. Domination is too weighty, too all-encompassing, to have been solely conveyed by the pathology that is religion.

But the cultural values of control and uniformity that are part of religion are certainly part of agriculture, and from the beginning. Noting that strains of corn cross-pollinate very easily, Anderson studied the very primitive agriculturists of Assam, the Naga tribe, and their variety of corn that exhibited no differences from plant to plant. True to culture, showing that it is complete from the beginning of production, the Naga kept their varieties so pure "only by a fanatical adherence to an ideal type." This exemplifies the marriage of culture and production in domestication, and its inevitable progeny, repression and work.

The scrupulous tending of strains of plants finds its parallel in the domesticating of animals, which also defies natural selection and re-establishes the controllable organic world at a debased, artificial level. Like plants, animals are mere things to be manipulated; a cow, for instance, is seen as a kind of machine for converting grass into milk. Transmuted from a state of freedom to that of helpless parasites, these animals become completely dependent on man for survival. In domestic mammals, as a rule, the size of the brain becomes relatively smaller as specimens are produced that devote more energy to growth and less to activity. Placid, infantilized, typified perhaps by the sheep, most domesticated of herd animals; the remarkable intelligence of wild sheep is completely lost in their tamed counterparts. The social relationships among domestic animals are reduced to the crudest essentials.

Non-reproductive parts of the life cycle are minimized, courtship is curtailed, and the animal's very capacity to recognize its own species is impaired.

Farming also created the potential for rapid environmental destruction and the domination over nature soon began to turn the green mantle that covered the birthplaces of civilization into barren and lifeless areas. "Vast regions have changed their aspect completely," estimates Zeuner, "always to quasi-drier condition, since the beginnings of the Neolithic." Deserts now occupy most of the areas where the high civilizations once flourished, and there is much historical evidence that these early formations inevitably ruined their environments.

Throughout the Mediterranean Basin and in the adjoining Near East and Asia, agriculture turned lush and hospitable lands into depleted, dry, and rocky terrain. In Critias, Plato described Attica as "a skeleton wasted by disease," referring to the deforestation of Greece and contrasting it to its earlier richness. Grazing by goats and sheep, the first domesticated ruminants, was a major factor in the denuding of Greece, Lebanon, and North Africa, and the desertification of the Roman and Mesopotamian empires.

Another, more immediate impact of agriculture, brought to light increasingly in recent years, involved the physical well-being of its subjects. Lee and Devore's researches show that "the diet of gathering peoples was far better than that of cultivators, that starvation is rare, that their health status was generally superior, and that there is a lower incidence of chronic disease." Conversely, Farb summarized, "Production provides an inferior diet based on a limited number of foods, is much less reliable because of blights and the vagaries of weather, and is much more costly in terms of human labor expended."

The new field of paleopathology has reached even more emphatic conclusions, stressing, as does Angel, the "sharp decline in growth and nutrition" caused by the changeover from food gathering to food production. Earlier conclusions about life span have also been revised. Although eyewitness Spanish accounts of the sixteenth century tell of Florida Indian fathers seeing their fifth generation before passing away, it was long believed that primitive people died in their 30's and 40's. Robson, Boyden and others have dispelled the confusion of

longevity with life expectancy and discovered that current hunter-gatherers, barring injury and severe infection, often outlive their civilized contemporaries. During the industrial age only fairly recently did life span lengthen for the species, and it is now widely recognized that in Paleolithic times humans were long-lived animals, once certain risks were passed. DeVries is correct in his judgment that duration of life dropped sharply upon contact with civilization.

“Tuberculosis and diarrheal disease had to await the rise of farming, measles and bubonic plague the appearance of large cities,” wrote Jared Diamond. Malaria, probably the single greatest killer of humanity, and nearly all other infectious diseases are the heritage of agriculture. Nutritional and degenerative diseases in general appear with the reign of domestication and culture. Cancer, coronary thrombosis, anemia, dental caries, and mental disorders are but a few of the hallmarks of agriculture; previously women gave birth with no difficulty and little or no pain.

People were far more alive in all their senses. !Kung San, reported R. H. Post, have heard a single-engined plane while it was still 70 miles away, and many of them can see four moons of Jupiter with the naked eye. The summary judgment of Harris and Ross, as to “an overall decline in the quality - and probably in the length - of human life among farmers as compared with earlier hunter-gatherer groups,” is understated.

One of the most persistent and universal ideas is that there was once a Golden Age of innocence before history began. Hesiod, for instance, referred to the “life-sustaining soil, which yielded its copious fruits unbribed by toil.” Eden was clearly the home of the hunter-gatherers and the yearning expressed by the historical images of paradise must have been that of disillusioned tillers of the soil for a lost life of freedom and relative ease.

The history of civilization shows the increasing displacement of nature from human experience, characterized in part by a narrowing of food choices. According to Rooney, prehistoric peoples found sustenance in over 1500 species of wild plants, whereas “All civilizations,” Wenke reminds us, have been based on the cultivation of one or more of just six plant species: wheat, barley, millet, rice, maize, and potatoes.”

It is a striking truth that over the centuries “the number of different edible foods which are actually eaten,” Pyke points out, “has steadily dwindled.” The world’s population now depends for most of its subsistence on only about 20 genera of plants while their natural strains are replaced by artificial hybrids and the genetic pool of these plants becomes far less varied.

The diversity of food tends to disappear or flatten out as the proportion of manufactured foods increases. Today the very same articles of diet are distributed worldwide so that an Inuit Eskimo and an African native may soon be eating powdered milk manufactured in Wisconsin or frozen fish sticks from a single factory in Sweden. A few big multinationals such as Unilever, the world’s biggest food production company, preside over a highly integrated service system in which the object is not to nourish or even to feed, but to force an ever-increasing consumption of fabricated, processed products upon the world.

When Descartes enunciated the principle that the fullest exploitation of matter to any use is the whole duty of man, our separation from nature was virtually complete and the stage was set for the Industrial Revolution. Three hundred and fifty years later this spirit lingers in the person of Jean Vorst, Curator of France’s Museum of Natural History, who pronounces that our species, “because of intellect,” can no longer re-cross a certain threshold of civilization and once again become part of a natural habitat. He further states, expressing perfectly the original and persevering imperialism of agriculture, “As the earth in its primitive state is not adopted to our expansion, man must shackle it to fulfill human destiny.”

The early factories literally mimicked the agricultural model, indicating again that at base all mass production is farming. The natural world is to be broken and forced to work. One thinks of the mid-American prairies where settlers had to yoke six oxen to plow in order to cut through the soil for the first time. Or a scene from the 1870s in The Octopus by Frank Norris, in which gang-plows were driven like “a great column of field artillery” across the San Joaquin Valley, cutting 175 furrows at once.

Today the organic, what is left of it, is fully mechanized under the aegis of a few petrochemical corporations. Their artificial fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides and near-monopoly of the world’s seed stock define a total environment that integrates food production from planting to consumption.

pp. 6873

Paul Shepard: Nature and Madness (1982)

After nearly ten thousand years of living with apprehension about food and the binding force of its psychic disablement, it is not surprising that civilized people find it difficult to understand the absence of such worries among hunting-gathering peoples, making them seem careless and imprudent. The repressed distrust of the mother and the maternal earth can then be redirected onto those blithe savages, picturing them as unfeeling for the well-being of their families and coarsely inured to hunger and the other imagined afflictions of a brutish life. This scornful fantasy is easily enough projected upon the rest of brute creation, making it easier to believe that all animals are insentient.

It is not only an abstract Mother Earth who is the victim of this psychic deformity, but all wild things. Characteristically, farmers and townsmen do not study and speculate on wild animals or "think" them in their poetic mystery and complex behaviors. With civilization, typically fewer than twenty kinds of plants and animals in one village were tended, herded, sheltered, planted, cultivated, fertilized, harvested, cured, stored, and distributed. Sacrifice and other ceremonial activity were restricted accordingly. Even the gradual broadening of agriculture to embrace many more kinds of organisms left it far short of the rich cosmos of the hunter. Civilization increased the separation between the individual and the natural world as it did the child from the mother, amplifying an attachment that could be channeled into aggression.

The farmer and his village brethren assumed an executive task of food production, storage, and distribution that would weigh heavily on them for the same reason that all executives wear out their nerves and glands: responsibility in a situation of certain failure - if not this year, then next, or the year after that. Being held responsible for things beyond their control is especially crushing for children, for whom the world may become hopelessly chaotic. They, in their chores of goat tending or other work tasks, like the adults who managed the domesticated community, were vulnerable to weather, marauders, pests, and the demons of earth and air. Blights and witherings were inevitable, bringing not only food shortage but emotional onslaughts. The judgment is guilt, for which the penalty is scarcity.

In such a world the full belly is never enough. Like the dour Yankee farmer who sees in the clear blue sky of a Vermont spring day "a damned weather-breeder," abundance would only set the mark by which shortage would be measured.

But quantity was not the only variable. As the diversity of foods diminished the wild alternatives becoming scarcer and more distant from villages the danger of malnutrition increased. It is widely observed that domesticated varieties of fruits and vegetables differ from their wild ancestors in carbohydrate/protein/fat ratios as well as vitamin and mineral content. Where selection is for appearance, size, storability, or even taste, some food value may be lost. Virtually all the processes that aid storage or preservation have a similar price in decline of quality. The point is that the lack of food is not the only spur to a kind of trophic obsession, but the hungers of those who are superficially well fed might also add to this general picture of chronic preoccupation with food.

The argument can be made that anything that fixates the individual's attention on food can be associated with ontogenetic regression. I mean not only the infantile impatience to eat and the whole alimentary oral-anal romance to which he is so responsive, but the typical conservatism of older children and adolescents the first, perhaps because of a sensitivity to strong or strange new flavors; the second, because of a psychic state in which the groping for a new selfhood is partly one of recognition of codes that identify a group. Teenagers are the weakest gourmets because they have not yet achieved a confident-enough identity to free themselves to develop personal preferences. The young are wary about what they eat, probably for adaptive as well as culturally functional reasons.

The young of hunter societies are probably cautious too, and certainly such cultures had a highly developed sense of food taboos. Nonetheless, the small foraging band ate dozens of kinds of flesh (including invertebrates) and scores of kinds of roots, nuts, vegetables, and leaves. The idea that this range was born of desperation is not supported by the evidence. There were certainly seasonal opportunities and choices, but apparently to be human is to be omnivorous, to show an open, experimental attitude toward what is edible, guided by an educated taste and a wide range of options. As among all peoples, what is eaten or not eaten had cultural limits among hunter-foragers, but these did not prevent somebody in a group from eating at least some parts of almost anything.

The food-producing societies that succeeded the hunter-gatherers attempted to make virtue of defect by intensifying the cultural proscriptions on what was to be eaten in a world where, for most people, there were fewer choices than their archaic ancestors enjoyed. And how was this tightening of the belt and expanded contempt achieved? It was built into the older child and adolescent. It could be frozen at that level as part of a more general developmental check. It may have been inevitable in the shift from totemic to caste thought about animals, corresponding to the change from hunting to farming, in which wild animals ceased to be used as metaphors central to personal identity, to be less involved with analogies of assimilation and incorporation. The growth of self-identity requires coming to terms with the wild and uncontrollable within. Normally the child identifies frightening feelings and ideas with specific external objects. The sensed limitations of such objects aid his attempts to control his fears. As the natural containers for these projected feelings receded with the wilderness, a lack of substitutes may have left the child less able to cope and thus more dependent, his development impaired.

Perhaps there was no more dramatic change in the transition from hunting-gathering to farming than in the kind and number of possessions. Among archaic people who use no beasts of burden, true possessions are few and small. What objects are owned are divided between those privately held and those in which there is a joint interest. Among the latter, such as religious objects or the carcass of a game animal, the individual shares obligations as well as benefits, but in neither case does he accumulate or seem to feel impoverished. The wariness of gifts and the lack of accumulation found in these people are not due to nomadism, for the desire would still be evident. Nor can these characteristics be explained away as a culturally conditioned materialism, as that would beg the question.

This absence of wanting belongings seems more likely to be part of a psychological dimension of human life and its modification in civilization. “Belongings” is an interesting word, referring to membership and therefore to parts of a whole. If that whole is Me, then perhaps the acquisition of mostly man-made objects can contribute in some way to my identity a way that may compensate for some earlier means lost when people became sedentary and their world mostly man-made landscapes. Or, if objects fail to fully suffice, we want more and more, as we crave more of a pain-killing drug. In short, what is it about the domesticated civilized world that alters the concept of self so that it is enhanced by property?

My self is to some extent made by me, at least insofar as I seem to gain control over it. A wilderness environment is, on the contrary, mostly given. For the hunter-forager, this Me in a non-Me world is the most penetrating and powerful realization in life. The mature person in such a culture is not concerned with blunting that dreadful reality but with establishing lines of connectedness or relationship. Formal culture is shaped by the elaboration of covenants and negotiations with the Other. The separation makes impossible a fuzzy confusion; there is no vague “identity with nature,” but rather a lifelong task of formulating and internalizing treaties of affiliation. The forms and terms of that relationship become part of a secondary level of my identity, the background or gestalt. This refining of what-I-am-not is a developmental matter, and the human life cycle conforms to stages in its progress.

Now consider the process in a world in which that Other has mostly disappeared. Food, tools, animals, structures, whole landscapes are man-made; even to me personally they seem more made than given and serve as extensions of that part of the self which I determine. My infantile ego glories in this great consuming I-am. Everything in sight belongs to me in the same sense as my members: legs, arms, hands, and so on. The buildings, streets, and cultivated fields are all continuous with my voluntary nervous system, my tamed, controlled self.

In the ideology of farming, wild things are enemies of the tame; the wild Other is not the context but the opponent of “my” domain. Impulses, fears, and dreams the realm of the unconscious no longer are represented by the community of wild things with which I can work out a meaningful relationship. The unconscious is driven deeper and away with the wilderness. New definitions of the self by trade and political subordination in part replace the metaphoric reciprocity between natural and cultural in the totemic life of the hunter-foragers. But the new system defines by exclusion. What had been a complementary entity embracing friendly and dangerous parts in a unified cosmos now takes on the colors of hostility and fragmentation. Even where the great earth religions of high agriculture tend to mend this rupture in the mythology of the symbolic mother, its stunting of the identity process remains.

Although he formulated the cognitive distinctions between totemic culture, with its analogy of a system of differences in nonhuman nature as a paradigm for the organization of culture, and caste or agriculture, which find models for human relationships in the types of things made, Levi-Strauss avoided the psychological developmental implications with admirable caution. But it is clear from the developmental scheme of Erikson that fine mastery of the neuromuscular system, self-discipline of the body, the emergence of skills, and awakening to tools are late-juvenile and early-adolescent concerns. In farming, the land itself becomes a tool, an instrument of production, a possession that is at once the object and implement of vocation as well as a definer of the self.

As farming shifts from subsistence to monoculture, village specialists who do not themselves cultivate the soil appear. Their roles are psychologically and mythically reintegrated into society as a whole. Smith, potter, clerk, and priest become constituents of the new reality. That reality is for them all like the pot to the potter:

(1) the wild world has reduced significance in his own conscious identity and may therefore be perceived (along with some part of himself) as chaotic;
(2) he himself, like his pot, is a static made object, and, by inference, so is the rest of society and the world;
(3) there is a central core of nonlivingness in himself;
(4) the ultimate refinements in his unique self are to be achieved by acts of will or creativity;
(5) daily labor routine, repetitive motions for long hours at a time is at the heart of his being;
(6) his relationship to others is based on an exchange of possessions, and the accumulation of them is a measure of his personal achievement; and
(7) the nonhuman world is primarily a source of substance to be shaped or made by man, as it was mythically by God.

These are but fragments of the world of the artisan. Gradations exist between that world and totemic cultures. The transition took many centuries before man's concept of the wilderness was indeed defined by the first synonym in Roget's Thesaurus:

"disorder." In the earliest farming societies perhaps there were only nuances of the psychology of domestication. The individual would not see himself as a possession or conceive of being possessed by others until tribal villages coalesced into chiefdoms and he was conscripted or enslaved or his labor sold as a commodity, events that may have been as much an outcome as a cause of the new consciousness. That was many generations in the future as the first harvesters of wild wheat began to save some grains to plant. Yet we see them headed, however tentatively, toward the view of the planet as a thing rather than a thou, a product instead of an organism, to be possessed rather than encountered as a presence.

This attitude connects with the psychological position of early infancy, when differentiation between the living and the nonliving is still unclear. The badly nurtured infant may become imprinted with the hardness of its cradle or bottle so irreversibly that it cannot, even as an adult, form fully caring human relationships. But that is the extreme case. The earliest farmers were inclined to represent the landscape as a living being, even, at first, to conceive life in made things. But as those things became commodities and infancy was reshaped accordingly, the cosmos would become increasingly ambiguous. Attempts to resolve this conflict between the "itness" and the numen of things both the landscape and its reciprocal, the inner self are a major goal of the religious and cultural activity of civilization.

The domestication of animals had effects on human perception that went far beyond its economic implications. Men had been observing animals closely as a major intellectual activity for several million years. They have not been deterred, even by so momentous a change in the condition of man/animal relationship as domestication, but the message has been altered. Changes in the animals themselves, brought about by captivity and breeding programs, are widely recognized. These changes include plumper and more rounded features, greater docility and submissiveness, reduced mobility, simplification of complex behaviors (such as courtship), the broadening or generalizing of signals to which social responses are given (such as following behavior), reduced hardiness, and less specialized environmental and nutritional requirements. The sum effect of these is infantilization. The new message is an emotional appeal, sense of mastery, and relative simplicity of animal life. The style conveyed as a metaphor by the wild animal is altered to literal model and metonymic subordinate: life is inevitable physical deformity and limitation, mindless frolic and alarms, bluntness, following and being herded, being fertile when called upon, representing nature at a new, cruder level.

One or another of the domesticated forms was widely used as a substitute in human relations; as slave, sexual partner, companion, caretaker, family member. Animal and human discriminations that sustained barriers between species were breached, suggesting nothing so much in human experience as the very small child's inability to see the difference between dogs and cows. Pet-keeping, virtually a civilized institution, is an abyss of covert and unconscious uses of animals in the service of psychological needs, glossed over as play and companionship. The more extremely perverted private abuse of animals grades off into the sadistic slaughter of animals in public spectacles, of which the modern bullfight is an extravagant example.

Before civilization, animals were seen as belonging to their own nation and to be the bearers of messages and gifts of meat from a sacred domain. In the village they became possessions. Yet ancient avatars, they remained fascinating in human eyes.

A select and altered little group of animals, filtered through the bottleneck of domestication, came in human experience to represent the whole of animals of value to people. The ancient human approach to consciousness by seeing or discovering the self through other eyes and the need to encounter the otherness of the cosmos in its kindred aspect were two of the burdens thrust upon these deformed creatures. To educate his powers of discrimination and wonder, the child, born to expect subtle and infinite possibilities, was presented with fat hulks, vicious manics, and hypertrophied drudges. The psychological introjection of these as part of the self put the child on a detour in the developmental process that would culminate in a dead end, posted "You can't get there from here."

pp. 3039

Mark Nathan Cohen: Health and the Rise of Civilization (1989)

The earliest visible populations of prehistory nonetheless do surprisingly well if we compare them to the actual record of human history rather than to our romantic images of civilized progress. Civilization has not been as successful in guaranteeing human well-being as we like to believe, at least for most of our history. Apparently, improvements in technology and organization have not entirely offset the demands of increasing population; too many of the patterns and activities of civilized lifestyles have generated costs as well as benefits.

There is no evidence either from ethnographic accounts or archaeological excavations to suggest that rates of accidental trauma or interpersonal violence declined substantially with the adoption of more civilized forms of political organization. In fact, some evidence from archaeological sites and from historical sources suggests the opposite.

Evidence from both ethnographic descriptions of contemporary hunters and the archaeological record suggests that the major trend in the quality and quantity of human diets has been downward. Contemporary hunter-gatherers, although lean and occasionally hungry, enjoy levels of caloric intake that compare favorably with national averages for many major countries of the Third World and that are generally above those of the poor in the modern world. Even the poorest recorded hunter-gatherer group enjoys a caloric intake superior to that of impoverished contemporary urban populations. Prehistoric hunter-gatherers appear to have enjoyed richer environments and to have been better nourished than most subsequent populations (primitive and civilized alike). Whenever we can glimpse the remains of anatomically modern human beings who lived in early prehistoric environments still rich in large game, they are often relatively large people displaying comparatively few signs of qualitative malnutrition. The subsequent trend in human size and stature is irregular but is more often downward than upward in most parts of the world until the nineteenth or twentieth century.

The diets of hunter-gatherers appear to be comparatively well balanced, even when they are lean. Ethnographic accounts of contemporary groups suggest that protein intakes are commonly quite high, comparable to those of affluent modern groups and substantially above world averages. Protein deficiency is almost unknown in these groups, and vitamin and mineral deficiencies are rare and usually mild in comparison to rates reported from many Third World populations. Archaeological evidence suggests that specific deficiencies, including that of iron (anemia), vitamin D (rickets), and, more controversially, vitamin C (scurvy) as well as such general signs of protein calorie malnutrition as childhood growth retardation have generally become more common in history rather than declining.

Among farmers, increasing population required more and more frequent cropping of land and the use of more and more marginal soils, both of which further diminished returns for labor. This trend may or may not have been offset by such technological improvements in farming as the use of metal tools, specialization of labor, and efficiencies associated with large-scale production that tend to increase individual productivity as well as total production.

But whether the efficiency of farming increased or declined, the nutrition of individuals appears often to have declined for any of several reasons: because increasingly complex society placed new barriers between individuals and flexible access to resources, because trade often siphoned resources away, because some segments of the society increasingly had only indirect access to food, because investments in new technology to improve production focused power in the hands of elites so that their benefits were not widely shared, and perhaps because of the outright exploitation and deprivation of some segments of society. In addition, more complex societies have had to devote an increasing amount of their productive energy to intergroup competition, the maintenance of intragroup order, the celebration of the community itself, and the privilege of the elite, rather than focusing on the biological maintenance of individuals.

In any case, the popular impression that nutrition has improved through history reflects twentieth-century affluence and seems to have as much to do with class privilege as with an overall increase in productivity. Neither the lower classes of prehistoric and classical empires nor the contemporary Third World have shared in the improvement in caloric intake; consumption of animal protein seems to have declined for all but privileged groups.

There is no clear evidence that the evolution of civilization has reduced the risk of resource failure and starvation as successfully as we like to believe. Episodes of starvation occur

among hunter-gatherer bands because natural resources fail and because they have limited ability either to store or to transport food. The risk of starvation is offset, in part, by the relative freedom of hunter-gatherers to move around and find new resources, but it is clear that with limited technology of transport they can move neither far nor fast enough to escape severe fluctuations in natural resources. But each of the strategies that sedentary and civilized populations use to reduce or eliminate food crises generate costs and risks as well as benefits. The supplementation of foraging economies by small-scale cultivation may help to reduce the risk of seasonal hunger, particularly in crowded and depleted environments. The manipulation and protection of species involved in farming may help to reduce the risk of crop failure. The storage of food in sedentary communities may also help protect the population against seasonal shortages or crop failure. But these advantages may be outweighed by the greater vulnerability that domestic crop species often display toward climatic fluctuations or other natural hazards, a vulnerability that is then exacerbated by the specialized nature or narrow focus of many agricultural systems. The advantages are also offset by the loss of mobility that results from agriculture and storage, the limits and failures of primitive storage systems, and the vulnerability of sedentary communities to political expropriation of their stored resources.

Although the intensification of agriculture expanded production, it may have increased risk in both natural and cultural terms by increasing the risk of soil exhaustion in central growing areas and of crop failure in marginal areas. Such investments as irrigation to maintain or increase productivity may have helped to protect the food supply, but they generated new risks of their own and introduced new kinds of instability by making production more vulnerable to economic and political forces that could disrupt or distort the pattern of investment. Similarly, specialization of production increased the range of products that could be made and increased the overall efficiency of production, but it also placed large segments of the population at the mercy of fickle systems of exchange or equally fickle social and political entitlements.

Modern storage and transport may reduce vulnerability to natural crises, but they increase vulnerability to disruption of the technological or political and economic basis of the storage and transport systems themselves. Transport and storage systems are difficult and expensive to maintain. Governments that have the power to move large amounts of food long distances to offset famine and the power to stimulate investment in protective systems of storage and transport also have and can exercise the power to withhold aid and divert investment. The same market mechanisms that facilitate the rapid movement of produce on a large scale, potentially helping to prevent starvation, also set up patterns of international competition in production and consumption that may threaten starvation to those individuals who depend on world markets to provide their food, an ever-increasing proportion of the world population.

It is therefore not clear, in theory, that civilization improves the reliability of the individual diet. As the data summarized in earlier chapters suggest, neither the record of ethnography and history nor that of archaeology provide any clear indication of progressive increase in the reliability (as opposed to the total size) of human food supplies with the evolution of civilization.

Similar points can be made with reference to the natural history of infectious disease. The data reviewed in preceding chapters suggest that prehistoric hunting and gathering populations would have been visited by fewer infections and suffered lower overall rates of parasitization than most other world populations, except for those of the last century, during which antibiotics have begun to offer serious protection against infection.

The major infectious diseases experienced by isolated hunting and gathering bands are likely to have been of two types: zoonotic diseases, caused by organisms whose life cycles were largely independent of human habits; and chronic diseases, handed directly from person to person, the transmission of which were unlikely to have been discouraged by small group size. Of the two categories, the zoonotic infections are undoubtedly the more important. They are likely to have been severe or even rapidly fatal because they were poorly adapted to human hosts. Moreover, zoonotic diseases may have had a substantial impact on small populations by eliminating productive adults. But in another respect their impact would have been limited because they did not pass from person to person.

By virtue of mobility and the handling of animal carcasses, hunter-gatherers are likely to have been exposed to a wider range of zoonotic infections than are more civilized populations. Mobility may also have exposed hunter-gatherers to the traveler's diarrhea phenomenon in which local microvariants of any parasite (including zoonoses) placed repeated stress on the body's immune response.

The chronic diseases, which can spread among small isolated groups, appear to have been relatively unimportant, although they undoubtedly pose a burden of disease that can often be rapidly eliminated by twentieth-century medicine. First, such chronic diseases appear to provoke relatively little morbidity in those chronically exposed. Moreover, the skeletal evidence suggests that even yaws and other common low-grade infections (periostitis) associated with infections by organisms now common to the human environment were usually less frequent and less severe among small, early mobile populations than among more sedentary and dense human groups. Similar arguments appear to apply to tuberculosis and leprosy, judging from the record of the skeletons. Even though epidemiologists now concede that tuberculosis could have spread and persisted in small groups, the evidence suggests overwhelmingly that it is primarily a disease of dense urban populations.

Similarly, chronic intestinal infestation by bacterial, protozoan, and helminth parasites, although displaying significant variation in occurrence according to the natural; environment, generally appears to be minimized by small group size and mobility. At least, the prevalence of specific parasites and the parasite load, or size of the individual dose, is minimized, although in some environments mobility actually appears to have increased the variety of parasites encountered. Ethnographic observations suggest that parasite loads are often relatively low in mobile bands and commonly increase as sedentary lifestyles are adopted. Similar observations imply that intestinal infestations are commonly more severe in sedentary populations than in their more mobile neighbors. The data also indicate that primitive populations often display better accommodation to their indigenous parasites (that is, fewer symptoms of disease in proportion to their parasite load) than we might otherwise expect. The archaeological evidence suggests that, insofar as intestinal parasite loads can be measured by their effects on overall nutrition (for example, on rates of anemia), these infections were relatively mild in early human populations but became increasingly severe as populations grew larger and more sedentary. In one case where comparative analysis of archaeological mummies from different periods has been undertaken, there is direct evidence of an increase in pathological intestinal bacteria with the adoption of sedentism. In another case, analysis of feces has documented an increase in intestinal parasites with sedentism.

Many major vector-borne infections may also have been less important among prehistoric hunter-gatherers than they are in the modern world. The habits of vectors of such major diseases as malaria, schistosomiasis, and bubonic plague suggest that among relatively small human groups without transportation other than walking these diseases are unlikely to have provided anything like the burden of morbidity and mortality that they inflicted on historic and contemporary populations.

Epidemiological theory further predicts the failure of most epidemic diseases ever to spread in small isolated populations or in groups of moderate size connected only by transportation on foot. Moreover, studies on the blood sera of contemporary isolated groups suggest that, although small size and isolation is not a complete guarantee against the transmission of such diseases in the vicinity, the spread from group to group is at best haphazard and irregular. The pattern suggests that contemporary isolates are at risk to epidemics once the diseases are maintained by civilized populations, but it seems to confirm predictions that such diseases would and could not have flourished and spread because they would not reliably have been transmitted in a world inhabited entirely by small and isolated groups in which there were no civilized reservoirs of diseases and all transportation of diseases could occur only at the speed of walking human beings.

In addition, overwhelming historical evidence suggests that the greatest rates of morbidity and death from infection are associated with the introduction of new diseases from one region of the world to another by processes associated with civilized transport of goods at speeds and over distances outside the range of movements common to hunting and gathering groups. Small-scale societies move people among groups and enjoy periodic aggregation and dispersal, but they do not move the distances associated with historic and modern religious pilgrimages or military campaigns, nor do they move at the speed associated with rapid modern forms of transportation. The increase in the transportation of people and exogenous diseases seems likely to have had far more profound effects on health than the small burden of traveler's diarrhea imposed by the small-scale movements of hunter-gatherers.

Prehistoric hunting and gathering populations may also have had one other important advantage over many more civilized groups. Given the widely recognized (and generally positive or synergistic) association of malnutrition and disease, the relatively good nutrition of hunter-gatherers may further have buffered them against the infections they did encounter.

In any case, the record of the skeletons appears to suggest that severe episodes of stress that disrupted the growth of children (acute episodes of infection or epidemics and/or episodes of resource failure and starvation) did not decline and if anything became increasingly common with the evolution of civilization in prehistory.

There is also evidence, primarily from ethnographic sources, that primitive populations suffer relatively low rates of many degenerative diseases compared, at least, to the more affluent of modern societies, even after corrections are made for the different distribution of adult ages. Primitive populations (hunter-gatherers, subsistence farmers, and all groups who do not subsist on modern refined foods) appear to enjoy several nutritional advantages over more affluent modern societies that protect them from many of the diseases that now afflict us. High bulk diets, diets with relatively few calories in proportion to other nutrients, diets low in total fat (and particularly low in saturated fat), and diets high in potassium and low in sodium, which are common to such groups, appear to help protect them against a series of degenerative conditions that plague the more affluent of modern populations, often in proportion to their affluence. Diabetes mellitus appears to be extremely rare in primitive groups (both hunter-gatherers and farmers) as are circulatory problems, including high blood pressure, heart disease, and strokes. Similarly, disorders associated with poor bowel function, such as appendicitis, diverticulosis, hiatal hernia, varicose veins, hemorrhoids, and bowel cancers, appear rare. Rates of many other types of cancer particularly breast and lung appear to be low in most small-scale societies, even when corrected for the small proportion of elderly often observed; even those cancers that we now consider to be diseases of under-development, such as Burkitt's lymphoma and cancer of the liver, may be the historical product of changes in human behavior involving food storage or the human-assisted spread of vector-borne infections. The record of the skeletons suggests, through the scarcity of metastases in bone, that cancers were comparatively rare in prehistory.

The history of human life expectancy is much harder to describe or summarize with any precision because the evidence is so fragmentary and so many controversies are involved in its interpretation. But once we look beyond the very high life expectancies of mid-twentieth century affluent nations, the existing data also appear to suggest a pattern that is both more complex and less progressive than we are accustomed to believe.

Contrary to assumptions once widely held, the slow growth of prehistoric populations need not imply exceedingly high rates of mortality. Evidence of low fertility and/or the use of birth control by small-scale groups suggests (if we use modern life tables) that average rates of population growth very near zero could have been maintained by groups suffering only historically moderate mortality (life expectancy of 25 to 30 years at birth with 50 to 60 percent of infants reaching adulthood figures that appear to match those observed in ethnographic and archaeological samples) that would have balanced fertility, which was probably below the averages of more sedentary modern populations. The prehistoric acceleration of population growth after the adoption of sedentism and farming, if it is not an artifact of archaeological reconstruction, could be explained by an increase in fertility or altered birth control decisions that appear to accompany sedentism and agriculture. This explanation fits the available data better than any competing hypothesis.

It is not clear whether the adoption of sedentism or farming would have increased or decreased the proportion of individuals dying as infants or children. The advantages of sedentism may have been offset by risks associated with increased infection, closer spacing of children, or the substitution of starchy gruels for mother's milk and other more nutritious weaning foods. The intensification of agriculture and the adoption of more civilized lifestyles may not have improved the probability of surviving childhood until quite recently. Rates of infant and child mortality observed in the smallest contemporary groups (or reconstructed with less certainty among prehistoric groups) would not have embarrassed most European countries until sometime in the nineteenth century and were, in fact, superior to urban rates of child mortality through most of the nineteenth century (and much of the twentieth century in many Third World cities).

There is no evidence from archaeological samples to suggest that adult life expectancy increased with the adoption of sedentism or farming; there is some evidence (complicated by the effects of a probably acceleration of population growth on cemetery samples) to suggest that adult life expectancy may actually have declined as farming was adopted. In later stages of the intensification of agriculture and the development of civilization, adult life expectancy most often increased and often increased substantially but the trend was spottier than we sometimes realize. Archaeological populations from the Iron Age or even the Medieval period

in Europe and the Middle East or from the Mississippian period in North America often suggest average adult ages at death in the middle or upper thirties, not substantially different from (and sometimes lower than) those of the earliest visible populations in the same regions. Moreover, the historic improvement in adult life expectancy may have resulted at least in part from increasing infant and child mortality and the consequent “select” nature of those entering adulthood as epidemic diseases shifted their focus from adults to children.

These data clearly imply that we need to rethink both scholarly and popular images of human progress and cultural evolution. We have built our images of human history too exclusively from the experiences of privileged classes and populations, and we have assumed too close a fit between technological advances and progress for individual lives.

In scholarly terms, these data which often suggest diminishing returns to health and nutrition tend to undermine models of cultural evolution based on technological advances. They add weight to theories of cultural evolution that emphasize environmental constraints, demographic pressure, and competition and social exploitation, rather than technological or social progress, as the primary instigators of social change. Similarly, the archaeological evidence that outlying populations often suffered reduced health as a consequence of their inclusion in larger political units, the clear class stratification of health in early and modern civilizations, and the general failure of either early or modern civilizations to promote clear improvements in health, nutrition, or economic homeostasis for large segments of their populations until the very recent past all reinforce competitive and exploitative models of the origins and function of civilized states.

In popular terms, I think that we must substantially revise our traditional sense that civilization represents progress in human well-being or at least that it did so for most people for most of history prior to the twentieth century. The comparative data simply do not support that image. (pp. 131141)

Robin Fox: The Search for Society (1989)

Since the beginnings of civilization we have known that something was wrong: since the Book of the Dead, since the Mahabharata, since Sophocles and Aeschylus, since the Book of Ecclesiastes. It has been variously diagnosed: the lust for knowledge of the Judaic first parents; the hubris of the Greeks; the Christian sin of pride; the Confucian disharmony with nature; the Hindu/Buddhist overvaluation of existence. Various remedies have been proposed: the Judaic obedience; the Greek stoicism; the Christian brotherhood of man in Christ; the Confucian cultivation of harmony; the Buddhist recognition of the oneness of existence, and eventual freedom from its determinacy. None of them has worked. (Or as the cynic would have it, none of them has been tried.)

The nineteenth century advanced the doctrine of inevitable progress allied to its eighteenth-century legacy of faith in reason and human perfectibility through education. We thought, for a brief period ('recent history'!) that we could do anything. We can't. But it comes hard to our egos to accept limitations after centuries of 'progress.' Will we learn to read those centuries as mere blips on the evolutionary trajectory? As aberrantly wild swings of the pendulum? As going too far? Will we come to understand that consciousness can only exist out of context for so long before it rebels against its unnatural exile? We might, given some terrible shock to the body social of the species, as Marx envisioned in his way. (Thus returning us to our state of Gattungswesen species-being where we existed before the Greek invention of the polis cut us off from nature in the first great act of alienation.)

p. 240

Chellis Glendinning: My Name is Chellis and I'm in Recovery from Western Civilization (1994)

The emergence of this infirmity had been a long time coming, in slow and continual evolution ever since the initiation of a psychic and ecological development some ten thousand years before. This historic development, the launching of the neolithic, was an occurrence that began penetrating the human mind the moment we purposefully isolated domestic plants from natural ones, the moment we captured beasts from their homes in the wild and corralled them into human-built enclosures. Previous to this event humans had indeed participated in the evolution of the natural world carrying seeds, through the wilderness, dropping, scattering, or planting them, returning later to harvest them; hunting animals by building branch and rock obstructions; catching fish and insects; constructing temporary shelters out of rock, trees, and ice. But this development was something different, something unprecedented. This was the purposeful separation of human existence from the rest of life: the domestication of the human species. To Paul Shepard's mind, the original dualism - the tame/wild dichotomy - came into being, and with it, the elliptical wholeness of the world was clipped.

The fence was the ultimate symbol of this development. What came to reside within its confines domesticated cereals, cultivated flowers, oxen, permanent housing structures was said to be tame; to be valued, controlled, and identified with. What existed outside was wild "weeds," weather, wind, the woods perennially threatening human survival; to be feared, scorned, and kept at bay. This dichotomy has since crystallized and come to define our lives with the myriads of fences separating us from the wild world and the myriads of fencelike artifacts and practices we have come to accept as "the way things are": economic individualism, private property, exclusive rights, nation-states, resource wars, nuclear missiles until today our civilization has nearly succeeded at domesticating the entire planet and is looking, in the near future, to enclose both the outer space of other planets and the inner space of our own minds, genes, and molecules.

"Separation," writes feminist philosopher Susan Griffin of this phenomenon. "The clean from the unclean. The decaying, the putrid, the polluted, the fetid, the eroded, waste, defecation, from the unchanging. The errant from the city. The ghetto. The ghetto of Jews. The ghetto of Moors. The quarter of prostitutes. The ghetto of blacks. The neighborhood of lesbians. The prison. The witch house. The underworld. The underground. The sewer. Space divided. The inch. The foot. The mile. The boundary. The border. The nation. The promised land. The chosen ones. The prophets, the elect, the vanguard, the sanctified, the canonized, and the canonizers."

In the psychotherapeutic process, one assumption mental-health professionals consistently make is that whatever behavior, feeling, or state of consciousness a person experiences, expresses, or presents exists for a reason. A good reason. If you and I were given the task of acting as psychotherapists for this domesticated world, we would immediately focus our attention on the "presenting symptom" of separation and divisiveness. We might wonder if the overwhelming success of linear perspective as the sole definition of visual reality isn't a symptom of some deeper condition seeking expression. And we might ask: why did some humans create and then rationalize with elaborate devices, ideologies, and defenses an unprecedented way of seeing the world that is based on distancing and detachment?

For a clue, we might look to survivors of post-traumatic stress disorder: Vietnam veterans, rape victims and survivors of childhood abuse, sufferers of both natural and technology-induced disasters. One of the most common symptoms to manifest itself after the experience of trauma is the neurophysiological response of disembodiment "leaving one's body" to escape from pain that is literally too overwhelming to bear. Some people who have endured traumatic events, in describing the experience, tell of a sensation of "lifting out of their bodies," of watching the event from a vantage point slightly above, a vantage point not unlike that of linear perspective. Others tell of escaping into a post-trauma state of mental activity devoid of feeling or body awareness, a state not unlike that considered "normal" in today's dominant culture and taught in our schools and universities.

As psychotherapists, we might eventually wonder and ask: could it be that our very culture splits mind from body, intellect from feeling, because we as individuals are suffering from post-traumatic stress?

Could it be that we as individuals are dissociated because we inhabit a culture that is founded on and perpetrates traumatic stress?

Could it be that the linear perspective that infuses our vision from our glorification of intellectual distancing to our debunking of the earthier realms of feeling and intuition; to our relentless “lifting” upward with skyscrapers and space shuttles; to the ultimate techno-utopian vision of “downloading” human knowledge into self-perpetuating computers to make embodied life obsolete that such a perception is the result of some traumatic violation that happened in our human past?

Mythologies describing pre-agricultural times from cultures as divergent as African, Native American, and Hebraic tell of human beings at one time living in balance on the Earth. The western world claims at least five traditions that describe an earlier, better period: the Hebrew Garden of Eden, the Sumerian Dilum, the Iranian Garden of Yima, the Egyptian Tep Zepi, and the Greek Golden Age. Ovid’s words in Metamorphoses are among the most cited and most revealing.

Penalties and fears there were none, nor were threatening words inscribed on unchanging bronze; nor did the suppliant crowd fear the words of its judge, but they were safe without protectors. Not yet did the pine cut from its mountain tops descend into the flowing waters to visit foreign lands, nor did deep trenches gird the town, nor were there straight trumpets, nor horns of twisted brass, nor helmets, nor swords. Without the use of soldiers the peoples in safety enjoyed their sweet repose. Earth herself, unburdened and untouched by the hoe and unwounded by the ploughshare, gave all things freely.

Most of these mythic legends go on to tell of a “fall” consistently depicted as a lowering of the quality of human character and culture. In recent decades such stories may have appeared to us as quaint allegories, bedtime stories, or the stuff of a good film. But today, from our situs within the psychological and ecological crises of western civilization, these stories become dreams so transparent we barely need to interpret them. According to myths of the Bantu of southern Africa, God was driven away from the Earth by humanity’s insensitivity to nature. The Yurok of northern California say that at a certain point in history, people disrupted nature’s balance with their greed. The Biblical story of Eden tells of a great Fall when Adam and Eve removed themselves from “the Garden” and came to know evil.

In his work with survivors of post-traumatic stress, psychotherapist and author Terry Kellogg emphasizes the fact that abusive behaviors whether we direct them toward ourselves, other people, or other species are not natural to human beings. People enact such behaviors because something unnatural has happened to them and they have become damaged. With this important insight in mind, we might consider that the “fall” described in myths around the world was not a preordained event destined to occur in the unfoldment of human consciousness, as some linear-progressive New Age thinkers posit; nor was it the result of what the Bible terms “original sin,” which carries with it the onus of fault and blame. We might consider that this historic alteration in our nature, or at least in how we express our nature, came about as the result of something unnatural that happened to us.

What could this “something” be?

Because we are creatures who were born to live in vital participation with the natural world, the violation of this participation forms the basis of our original trauma. This is the systemic removal of our lives from our previously assumed elliptical participation in nature’s world from the tendrils of earthy textures, the seasons of sun and stars, carrying our babies across rivers, hunting the sacred game, the power of the life force. It is a severance that in the western world was initiated slowly and subtly at first with the domestication of plants and animals, grew in intensity with the emergence of large-scale civilizations, and has developed to pathological proportion with mass technological society until today you and I can actually live for a week or a month without smelling a tree, witnessing the passage of the moon, or meeting an animal in the wild, much less knowing the spirits of these beings or fathoming the interconnections between their destinies and our own. Original trauma is the disorientation we experience, however consciously or unconsciously, because we do not live in the natural world. It is the psychic displacement, the exile, that is inherent in civilized life. It is our homelessness.

pp. 6064

Section Three: The Nature of Civilization

What is civilization? What is culture? Is it possible for a healthy race to be fathered by violence in war or in the slaughter-house and mothered by slaves, ignorant or parasitic? Where is the historian who traces the rise and fall of nations to the standing of women?

Agnes Ryan (1952)

At the close of Section Two, Chellis Glendinning suggests that civilization sprang forth after a long period in which its latent domesticating aspects slowly developed. A gradual, almost imperceptible, growth of specialization, or division of labor, may well have abetted this slippage toward a qualitatively new world of separation and control, as I have argued in Elements of Refusal (1988) and Future Primitive (1994). It seems evident that a struggle of contrary urges was involved; civilization never triumphs without a struggle.

In this section we are concerned with what civilization is, fundamentally. Does it have an inner logic? What is its core nature? At or near its center, its sheer authoritarianism must be recognized.

Michael Mann (1990) saw it this way:

In noncivilized societies escape from the social cage was possible. Authority was freely conferred, but recoverable; power, permanent and coercive, was unattainable.

A related fact is that every civilization in recorded history has routinely engaged in systematic and bloody warfare. It is hard to think of greater control, not to mention the grisly consequences, than that displayed by the institution of war.

Technology is another central locus of domination. Hans Jonas provides an apt description of this modern juggernaut, a cardinal fruit of the will to domesticate:

The danger of disaster attending the Baconian ideal of power over nature through scientific technology arises not so much from the shortcomings of its performance as from the magnitude of its success.

Civilization extends control over the natural and personal worlds, to ever greater lengths, in the direction of absolute manipulation.

In one of the dozen entries in this section, the Unabomber cites the heightened powers of the modern order and the absence of fulfillment one experiences within its now global confines. Most of the other voices testify to other faces or facets: civilization as servitude and sacrifice, sickness, neurosis, psychological misery, frustration, repression, madness, frenzy, impoverishment, mass destruction, and self-destruction.

Friedrich Schiller: On the Aesthetic Education of Man (1793)

Civilization, far from setting us free, in fact creates some new need with every new power it develops in us. The fetters of the physical tighten ever more alarmingly, so that fear of losing what we have stifles even the most burning impulse towards improvement, and the maxim of passive obedience passes for the supreme wisdom of life.

Have I not perhaps been too hard on our age in the picture I have just drawn? That is scarcely the reproach I anticipate. Rather a different one: that I have tried to make it prove too much. Such a portrait, you will tell me, does indeed resemble mankind as it is today; but does it not also resemble any people caught up in the process of civilization, since all of them, without exception, must fall away from Nature by the abuse of Reason before they can return to her by the use of Reason?

It was civilization itself which inflicted this wound upon modern man. Once the increase of empirical knowledge, and more exact modes of thought, made sharper divisions between the sciences inevitable, and once the increasingly complex machinery of State necessitated a more rigorous separation of ranks and occupations, then the inner unity of human nature was severed too, and a disastrous conflict set its harmonious powers at variance. The intuitive and the speculative understanding now withdrew in hostility to take up positions in their respective fields, whose frontiers they now began to guard with jealous mistrust; and with this confining of our activity to a particular sphere we have given ourselves a master within, who not infrequently ends by suppressing the rest of our potentialities. While in the one a riotous imagination ravages the hard-won fruits of the intellect, in another the spirit of abstraction stifles the fire at which the heart should have warmed itself and the imagination been kindled.

Thus, however much the world as a whole may benefit through this fragmentary specialization of human powers, it cannot be denied that the individuals affected by it suffer under the curse of this cosmic purpose. Athletic bodies can, it is true, be developed by gymnastic exercises; beauty only through the free and harmonious play of the limbs. In the same way the keying up of individual functions of the mind can indeed produce extraordinary human beings; but only the equal tempering of them all, happy and complete human beings. And in what kind of relation would we stand to either past or future ages, if the development of human nature were to make such sacrifice necessary? We would have been the serfs of mankind; for several millennia we would have done slaves' work for them, and our mutilated nature would bear impressed upon it the shameful marks of this servitude.

Man only plays when he is in the fullest sense of the word a human being, and he is only fully a human being when he plays.

pp. 27, 29, 33, 35, 43, 107

Charles Fourier: Theory of Four Movements and General Destinies (1846)

After the catastrophe of 1793, illusions were swept away, and political science and moral philosophy were permanently stained and discredited. From that point, it became clear that all this acquired knowledge was useless. We had to look for the social good in some new science, and open new avenues for political genius. It was evident that neither the Philosophes or their rivals knew any remedies for social misery. Under either set of dogmas, the most shameful scourges would persist, poverty among them.

Such was the first consideration that led me to suspect the existence of a social science, as yet unknown, and prompted me to attempt to discover it. I was not scared off by my lack of learning; I set my sights on the honor of grasping what twenty-five centuries of scholars had not been able to figure out.

I was encouraged by numerous signs that reason had been led astray, and above all by the thought of the scourges that afflict social industry: indigence, the privation of work, the rewards of double-dealing, maritime piracy, commercial monopoly, the kidnapping of slaves so many misfortunes that they cannot be counted, and which give rise to the suspicion that civilized industry is nothing but a calamity, invented by God to punish humankind.

Given this premise, I assumed that this industry constituted some sort of disruption of the natural order; that it was carried out, perhaps, in a way that contradicted God's wishes; that the tenacity of so many scourges could be attributed to the absence of some arrangement willed by God, and unknown to our savants. Finally, I thought that if human societies are infected, as Montesquieu believed, "with a sickness of listlessness, with an inward vice, with a secret, hidden venom," the remedy might be found by avoiding the paths followed by our uncertain sciences that had failed to provide a remedy for so many centuries."

in Oeuvres Complètes, pp. 34

Sigmund Freud: Civilization and Its Discontents (1930)

We come upon a contention which is so astonishing that we must dwell upon it. This contention holds that what we call our civilization is largely responsible for our misery, and that we should be much happier if we gave it up and returned to primitive conditions. I call this contention astonishing because, in whatever way we may define the concept of civilization, it is a certain fact that all the things with which we seek to protect ourselves against the threats that emanate from the sources of suffering are part of that very civilization.

How has it happened that so many people have come to take up this strange attitude of hostility to civilization? I believe that the basis of it was a deep and long-standing dissatisfaction with the then existing state of civilization and that on that basis a condemnation of it was built up, occasioned by certain specific historical events. I think I know what the last and the last but one of those occasions were. I am not learned enough to trace the chain of them far back enough in the history of the human species; but a factor of this kind hostile to civilization must already have been at work in the victory of Christendom over the heathen religions. For it was very closely related to the low estimation put upon earthly life by the Christian doctrine. The last but one of these occasions was when the progress of voyages of discovery led to contact with primitive peoples and races. In consequence of insufficient observation and a mistaken view of their manners and customs, they appeared to Europeans to be leading a simple, happy life with few wants, a life such as was unattainable by their visitors with their superior civilization. Later experience has corrected some of those judgements. In many cases the observers had wrongly attributed to the absence of complicated cultural demands what was in fact due to the bounty of nature and the ease with which the major human needs were satisfied. The last occasion is especially familiar to us. It arose when people came to know about the mechanism of the neuroses, which threaten to undermine the modicum of happiness enjoyed by civilized men. It was discovered that a person becomes neurotic because he cannot tolerate the amount of frustration which society imposes on him in the service of its cultural ideals, and it was inferred from this that the abolition or reduction of those demands would result in a return to possibilities of happiness.

There is also an added factor of disappointment. During the last few generations mankind has made an extraordinary advance in the natural sciences and in their technical application and has established his control over nature in a way never before imagined. The single steps of this advance are common knowledge and it is unnecessary to enumerate them. Men are proud of those achievements, and have a right to be. But they seem to have observed that this newly-won power over space and time, this subjugation of the forces of nature, which is the fulfillment of a longing that goes back thousands of years, has not increased the amount of pleasurable satisfaction which they may expect from life and has not made them feel happier.

If the development of civilization has such a far-reaching similarity to the development of the individual and if it employs the same methods, may we not be justified in reaching the diagnosis that, under the influence of cultural urges, some civilizations, or some epochs of civilization possibly the whole of mankind have become ‘neurotic’?

pp. 3335, 91

John Landau: “Civilization and the Primitive” (1995)

What is Primitive?

Primitive is trusting, trusting, trusting. It is naked. It is moving through language to ecstasy. The language of the body, of vocal chords, of dreams and vital ideas. The language of smells. Primitive is the naked foot touching the naked ground. Primitive is not without ideas, but ideas that hold together, embrace, and integrate the instincts. Primitive is dancing, the body moving on impulses. Primitive is letting go of confusion, embracing multiplicity. Primitive is getting lost in all you can be. Primitive is drifting, it is mastery of power expressed. It is bodies congregated in howling, painted packs. It is passion expressing itself in form; it is cunning grounding itself in stalking; it is cruelty creating itself through sensual ritual. Primitive is combat as love, pain as coming-closer, bewilderment as freefall into the ocean of being. It is wet, it is covered in mud, it is amniotic. Primitive is the gathering of plant and animal spirits; it is the hunting of mystery. It is difference bounding wild through fields of color, running free from ideals for the dangerous traps they are, fascinated all the same. Primitive is trusting the earth, the ground beneath one’s feet.

What is Civilization?

Civilization is distrust, it is out-of-touch, it is pretense without play, pretending it is NOT. Civilization is only NOT; it makes sure it is NOT.

It must have negation or it ceases to exist. Civilization is Either/Or. Civilization is “a place for everything and everything in its place” (but nowhere except in its place; while primitive is no place for any thing, for verb is all, as activity or rest.) Civilization is the search for Extraterrestrial life, the desire to leave the earth. Civilization is disdain of the dirt, the soil, the mud. Civilization is being chained to the mind of Ideals, any ideals. Civilization is perfection wreaking havoc on a squirming, squiggling, writhing, bumbling, blustering creature. It is the machine, fragmentation, the violation of integrity into coordinated parts. It is homelessness, exiled everywhere, therefore colonizing all it sees. It is life frustrated, frustrated, frustrated. It is manipulation. It is the belief that only the Good maintains the universe, for without it all would collapse; therefore, it is the demonizing of all it calls evil. It is the domination of paranoia, and therefore the paranoia of domination. Civilization is not fooling around, not blowing your top, not having a temper tantrum, not touching, not following your drift, not ease, not acting like those who are “lower” than you, not farting, not belching, not napping, not breathing, not crying, not resting. It is a litany of “not’s” (/knots). It has no substance, therefore it must overcome all it is not in order to prove to itself it exists. Civilization is Envy, it hates itself, the other side is greener, we must have it, the greed that comes from worthlessness, the desperate blotting out of the whole, therefore the feigning of superiority to save face, whoever saves the most face wins.

(Unpublished, 1995)

Max Horkheimer: Eclipse of Reason (1947)

Domination of nature involves domination of man. Each subject not only has to take part in the subjugation of external nature, human and nonhuman, but in order to do so must subjugate nature in himself. Domination becomes 'internalized' for domination's sake. What is usually indicated as a goal the happiness of the individual, health, and wealth gains its significance exclusively from its functional potentiality. These terms designate favorable conditions for intellectual and material production. Therefore self-renunciation of the individual in industrialist society has no goal transcending industrialist society. Such abnegation brings about rationality with reference to means and irrationality with reference to human existence. Society and its institutions, no less than the individual himself, bear the mark of this discrepancy. Since the subjugation of nature, in and outside of man, goes on without a meaningful motive, nature is not really transcended or reconciled but merely repressed.

Resistance and revulsion arising from this repression of nature have beset civilization from its beginnings, in the form of social rebellions as in the spontaneous peasant insurrections of the sixteenth century or the cleverly staged race riots of our own day as well as in the form of individual crime and mental derangement. Typical of our present era is the manipulation of this revolt by the prevailing forces of civilization itself, the use of the revolt as a means of perpetuating the very conditions by which it is stirred up and against which it is directed. Civilization as rationalized irrationality integrates the revolt of nature as another means or instrument.

The story of the boy who looked up at the sky and asked, 'Daddy, what is the moon supposed to advertise?' is an allegory of what has happened to the relation between man and nature in the era of formalized reason. On the one hand, nature has been stripped of all intrinsic value or meaning. On the other, man has been stripped of all aims except self-preservation. He tries to transform everything within reach into a means to that end. Every word or sentence that hints of relations other than pragmatic is suspect. When a man is asked to admire a thing, to respect a feeling or attitude, to love a person for his own sake, he smells sentimentality and suspects that someone is pulling his leg or trying to sell him something. Though people may not ask what the moon is supposed to advertise, they tend to think of it in terms of ballistics or aerial mileage.

The complete transformation of the world into a world of means rather than of ends is itself the consequence of the historical development of the methods of production. As material production and social organization grow more complicated and reified, recognition of means as such becomes increasingly difficult, since they assume the appearance of autonomous entities. As long as the means of production are primitive, the forms of social organization are primitive.

Speculative thought, from the economic point of view, was doubtless a luxury that, in a society based on group domination only a class of people exempt from hard labor could afford. The intellectuals, for whom Plato and Aristotle were the first great European spokesmen, owe their very existence, and their leisure to indulge in speculation, to the system of domination from which they try to emancipate themselves intellectually. The vestiges of this paradoxical situation can be discovered in various systems of thought. Today and this is certainly progress the masses know that such freedom for contemplation crops up only occasionally. It was always a privilege of certain groups, which automatically built up an ideology hypostatizing their privilege as a human virtue; thus it served actual ideological purposes, glorifying those exempt from manual labor. Hence the distrust aroused by the group. In our era the intellectual is, indeed, not exempt from the pressure that the economy exerts upon him to satisfy the ever-changing demands of reality. Consequently, mediation, which looked to eternity, is superseded by pragmatic intelligence, which looks to the next moment. Instead of losing its character as a privilege, speculative thought is altogether liquidated and this can hardly be called progress. It is true that in this process nature has lost its awesomeness, its qualitates occultae, but, completely deprived of the chance to speak through the minds of men even in the distorted language of these privileged groups, nature seems to be taking its revenge.

Modern insensitivity to nature is indeed only a variation of the pragmatic attitude that is typical of Western civilization as a whole. The forms are different. The early trapper saw in the prairies and mountains only the prospects of good hunting; the modern businessman sees in the landscape an opportunity for the display of cigarette posters. The fate of animals in our world is symbolized by an item printed in newspapers of a few years ago. It reported that

landings of planes in Africa were often hampered by herds of elephants and other beasts. Animals are here considered simply as obstructors of traffic. This mentality of man as the master can be traced back to the first chapters of Genesis. The few precepts in favor of animals that we encounter in the Bible have been interpreted by the most outstanding religious thinkers, Paul, Thomas Aquinas, and Luther, as pertaining only to the moral education of man, and in no wise to any obligation of man toward other creatures. Only man's soul can be saved; animals have but the right to suffer. "Some men and women,' wrote a British churchman a few years ago, 'suffer and die for the life, the welfare, the happiness of others. This law is continually seen in operation. The supreme example of it was shown to the world (I write with reverence) on Calvary. Why should animals be exempted from the operation of this law or principle?" Pope Pius IX did not permit a society for the prevention of cruelty to animals to be founded in Rome because, as he declared, theology teaches that man owes no duty to any animal. National Socialism, it is true, boasted of its protection of animals, but only in order to humiliate more deeply those 'inferior races' whom they treated as mere nature.

pp. 9394, 101105

Max Horkheimer: Dawn and Decline (1961)

In the Circus: Through the image of the elephant in the circus, man's technological superiority becomes conscious of itself. With whip and iron hooks, the ponderous animal is brought in. On command, it raises its right, its left foot, its trunk, describes a circle, lies down laboriously and finally, as the whip is being cracked, it stands on two legs which can barely support the heavy body.

For many hundreds of years, that's what the elephant has had to do to please people. But one should say nothing against the circus or the act in the ring. It is no more foreign, no more inappropriate, probably more suitable to the animal than the slave labor for whose sake it entered human history. In the arena, where the elephant looks like the image of eternal wisdom as it confronts the stupidity of the spectators and where, among fools, it makes a few foolish gestures for the sake of peace and quiet, the objective unreason of the compulsory service which serves the rational purpose of the Indian timber market still reveals itself. That men depend on such labor to then be obliged to subject themselves to it as well is ultimately their own disgrace. The enslavement of the animal as the mediation of their existence through work that goes against their own and alien nature has the result that that existence is as external to them as the circus act is to the animal. Rousseau had an intimation of this when he wrote his prize-winning essays. Civilization as stultification. (p. 145)

Richard Heinberg: “Was Civilization a Mistake?” (1997)

Having been chosen, whether as devil’s advocate or sacrificial lamb, I am not sure, to lead off this discussion on the question, “Was Civilization a Mistake?”, I would like to offer some preliminary thoughts.

From the viewpoint of any non-civilized person, this consideration would appear to be steeped in irony. Here we are, after all, some of the most civilized people on the planet, discussing in the most civilized way imaginable whether civilization itself might be an error. Most of our fellow civilians would likely find our discussion, in addition to being ironic, also disturbing and pointless: after all, what person who has grown up with cars, electricity, and television would relish the idea of living without a house, and of surviving only on wild foods?

Nevertheless, despite the possibility that at least some of our remarks may be ironic, disturbing, and pointless, here we are. Why? I can only speak for myself. In my own intellectual development I have found that a critique of civilization is virtually inescapable for two reasons.

The first has to do with certain deeply disturbing trends in the modern world. We are, it seems, killing the planet. Revisionist “wise use” advocates tell us there is nothing to worry about; dangers to the environment, they say, have been wildly exaggerated. To me this is the most blatant form of wishful thinking. By most estimates, the oceans are dying, the human population is expanding far beyond the long-term carrying capacity of the land, the ozone layer is disappearing, and the global climate is showing worrisome signs of instability. Unless drastic steps are taken, in fifty years the vast majority of the world’s population will likely be existing in conditions such that the lifestyle of virtually any undisturbed primitive tribe would be paradise by comparison.

Now, it can be argued that civilization per se is not at fault, that the problems we face have to do with unique economic and historical circumstances. But we should at least consider the possibility that our modern industrial system represents the flowering of tendencies that go back quite far. This, at any rate, is the implication of recent assessments of the ecological ruin left in the wake of the Roman, Mesopotamian, Chinese and other prior civilizations. Are we perhaps repeating their errors on a gargantuan scale?

If my first reason for criticizing civilization has to do with its effects on the environment, the second has to do with its impact on human beings. As civilized people, we are also domesticated. We are to primitive peoples as cows and sheep are to bears and eagles. On the rental property where I live in California my landlord keeps two white domesticated ducks. These ducks have been bred to have wings so small as to prevent them from flying. This is a convenience for their keepers, but compared to wild ducks these are pitiful creatures.

Many primal peoples tend to view us as pitiful creatures, too though powerful and dangerous because of our technology and sheer numbers. They regard civilization as a sort of social disease. We civilized people appear to act as though we were addicted to a powerful drug - a drug that comes in the forms of money, factory-made goods, oil, and electricity. We are helpless without this drug, so we have come to see any threat to its supply as a threat to our very existence. Therefore we are easily manipulated by desire (for more) or fear (that what we have will be taken away) and powerful commercial and political interests have learned to orchestrate our desires and fears in order to achieve their own purposes of profit and control. If told that the production of our drug involves slavery, stealing, and murder, or the ecological equivalents, we try to ignore the news so as not to have to face an intolerable double bind.

Since our present civilization is patently ecologically unsustainable in its present form, it follows that our descendants will be living very differently in a few decades, whether their new way of life arises by conscious choice or by default. If humankind is to choose its path deliberately, I believe that our deliberations should include a critique of civilization itself, such as we are undertaking here. The question implicit in such a critique is, What we have done poorly or thoughtlessly in the past that we can do better now? It is in this constructive spirit that I offer the comments that follow.

What is Primitivism?

The image of a lost Golden Age of freedom and innocence is at the heart of all the world's religions, is one of the most powerful themes in the history of human thought, and is the earliest and most characteristic expression of primitivism the perennial belief in the necessity of a return to origins.

As a philosophical idea, primitivism has had as its proponents: Lao Tze, Rousseau, and Thoreau, as well as most of the pre-Socratics, the medieval Jewish and Christian theologians, and 19th- and 20th-century anarchist social theorists, all of whom argued (on different bases and in different ways) the superiority of a simple life close to nature. More recently, many anthropologists have expressed admiration for the spiritual and material advantages of the ways of life of the world's most "primitive" societies the surviving gathering-and-hunting peoples who now make up less than one hundredth of one percent of the world's population.

Meanwhile, as civilization approaches a crisis precipitated by overpopulation and the destruction of the ecological integrity of the planet, primitivism has enjoyed a popular resurgence, by way of increasing interest in shamanism, tribal customs, herbalism, radical environmentalism, and natural foods. There is a widespread (though by no means universally shared) sentiment that civilization has gone too far in its domination of nature, and that in order to survive or, at least, to live with satisfaction we must regain some of the spontaneity and naturalness of our early ancestors.

What is Civilization?

There are many possible definitions of the word civilization. Its derivation from civis, "town" or "city" suggests that a minimum definition would be, "urban culture." Civilization also seems to imply writing, division of labor, agriculture, organized warfare, growth of population, and social stratification.

Yet the latest evidence calls into question the idea that these traits always go together. For example, Elizabeth Stone and Paul Zimansky's assessment of power relations in the Mesopotamian city of Maskan-shapir (published in the April 1995 Scientific American) suggests that urban culture need not imply class divisions. Their findings seem to show that civilization in its earliest phase was free of these. Still, for the most part the history of civilization in the Near East, the Far East, and Central America, is also the history of kingship, slavery, conquest, agriculture, overpopulation, and environmental ruin. And these traits continue in civilization's most recent phases the industrial state and the global market though now the state itself takes the place of the king, and slavery becomes wage labor and de facto colonialism administered through multinational corporations. Meanwhile, the mechanization of production (which began with agriculture) is overtaking nearly every avenue of human creativity, population is skyrocketing and organized warfare is resulting in unprecedented levels of bloodshed.

Wild Self/Domesticated Self

People are shaped from birth by their cultural surroundings and by their interactions with the people closest to them. Civilization manipulates these primary relationships in such a way as to domesticate the infant that is, so as to accustom it to life in a social structure one step removed from nature. The actual process of domestication is describable as follows, using terms borrowed from the object-relations school of psychology.

The infant lives entirely in the present moment in a state of pure lust and guilelessness, deeply bonded with her mother. But as she grows, she discovers that her mother is a separate entity with her own priorities and limits. The infant's experience of relationship changes from one of spontaneous trust to one that is suffused with need and longing. This creates a gap between Self and Other in the consciousness of the child, who tries to fill this deepening rift with transitional objects initially, perhaps a teddy bear; later, additions and beliefs that serve to fill the psychic gap and thus provide a sense of security. It is the powerful human need for transitional objects that drives individuals in their search for property and power, and that generates bureaucracies and technologies as people pool their efforts.

This process does not occur in the same way in the case of primitive childbearing, where the infant is treated with indulgence, is in constant physical contact with a caregiver throughout infancy, and later undergoes rites of passage. In primal cultures the need for transitional

objects appears to be minimized. Anthropological and psychological research converge to suggest that many of civilized people's emotional ills come from our culture's abandonment of natural childrearing methods and initiatory rites and its systematic substitution of alienating pedagogical practices from crib through university.

Health: Natural or Artificial?

In terms of health and quality of life, civilization has been a mitigated disaster. S. Boyd Eaton, M.D., et al., argued in The Paleolithic Prescription (1988) that pre-agricultural peoples enjoyed a generally healthy way of life, and that cancer, heart disease, strokes, diabetes, emphysema, hypertension, and cirrhosis which together lead to 75 percent of all mortality in industrialized nations are caused by our civilized lifestyles. In terms of diet and exercise, preagricultural lifestyles showed a clear superiority to those of agricultural and civilized peoples.

Much-vaunted increases in longevity in civilized populations have resulted not so much from wonder drugs, as merely from better sanitation - a corrective for conditions created by the overcrowding of cities; and from reductions in infant mortality. It is true that many lives have been spared by modern antibiotics. Yet antibiotics also appear responsible for the evolution of resistant strains of microbes, which health officials now fear could produce unprecedented epidemics in the next century.

The ancient practice of herbalism, evidence of which dates back at least 60,000 years, is practiced in instinctive fashion by all higher animals. Herbal knowledge formed the basis of modern medicine and remains in many ways superior to it. In countless instances, modern synthetic drugs have replaced herbs not because they are safer or more effective, but because they are more profitable to manufacture.

Other forms of "natural" healing massage, the "placebo effect," the use of meditation and visualization are also being shown effective. Medical doctors Bernie Siegel and Deepak Chopra are critical of mechanized medicine and say that the future of the healing profession lies in the direction of attitudinal and natural therapies.

Spirituality: Raw or Cooked?

Spirituality means different things to different people - humility before a higher power or powers; compassion for the suffering of others; obedience to a lineage or tradition; a felt connection with the Earth or with Nature; evolution toward "higher" states of consciousness; or the mystical experience of oneness with all life or with God. With regard to each of these fundamental ways of defining or experiencing the sacred, spontaneous spirituality seems to become regimented, dogmatized, even militarized, with the growth of civilization. While some of the founders of world religions were intuitive primitivists (Jesus, Lao Tze, the Buddha), their followers have often fostered the growth of dominance hierarchies.

The picture is not always simple, though. The thoroughly civilized Roman Catholic Church produced two of the West's great primitivists - St. Francis and St. Clair; while the neo-shamanic, vegetarian, and herbalist movements of early 20th century Germany attracted arch-authoritarians Heinrich Himmler and Adolph Hitler. Of course, Nazism's militarism and rigid dominator organization were completely alien to primitive life, while St. Francis's and St. Clair's voluntary poverty and treatment of animals as sacred were reminiscent of the lifestyle and worldview of most gathering-and-hunting peoples. If Nazism was atavistic, it was only highly selectively so.

Economics: Free or Affordable?

At its base, economics is about how people relate with the land and with one another in the process of fulfilling their material wants and needs. In the most primitive societies, these relations are direct and straightforward. Land, shelter, and food are free. Everything is shared, there are no rich people or poor people, and happiness has little to do with accumulating material possessions. The primitive lives in relative abundance (all needs and wants are easily met) and has plenty of leisure time.

Civilization, in contrast, straddles two economic pillars technological innovation and the marketplace. “Technology” here includes everything from the plow to the nuclear reactor all are means to more efficiently extract energy and resources from nature. But efficiency implies the reification of time, and so civilization always brings with it a preoccupation with past and future; eventually the present moment nearly vanishes from view. The elevation of efficiency over other human values is epitomized in the factory the automated workplace in which the worker becomes merely an appendage of the machine, a slave to clocks and wages.

The market is civilization’s means of equating dissimilar things through a medium of exchange. As we grow accustomed to valuing everything according to money, we tend to lose a sense of the uniqueness of things. What, after all, is an animal worth, or a mountain, or a redwood tree, or an hour of human life? The market gives us a numerical answer based on scarcity and demand. To the degree that we believe that such values have meaning, we live in a world that is desacralized and desensitized, without heart or spirit.

We can get some idea of ways out of our ecologically ruinous, humanly deadening economic cage by examining not only primitive lifestyles, but the proposals of economist E. F. Schumacher, the experiences of people in utopian communities in which technology and money are marginalized, and the lives of individuals who have adopted an attitude of voluntary simplicity.

Government: Bottom Up or Top Down?

In the most primitive human societies there are no leaders, bosses, politics, laws, crime, or taxes. There is often little division of labor between women and men, and where such division exists both gender’s contributions are often valued more or less equally. Probably as a result, many foraging peoples are relatively peaceful. Anthropologist Richard Lee found that the ! Kung [Bushmen of southern Africa] hate fighting, and think anybody who fought would be stupid.

With agriculture usually come division of labor, increased sexual inequality, and the beginnings of social hierarchy. Priests, kings, and organized impersonal warfare all seem to come together in one package. Eventually, laws and borders define the creation of the fully fledged state. The state as a focus of coercion and violence has reached its culmination in the 19th and 20th centuries in colonialism, fascism, and Stalinism. Even the democratic industrial state functions essentially as an instrument of multinational corporate-style colonial oppression and domestic enslavement, its citizens merely being given the choice between selected professional bureaucrats representing political parties with slightly varying agendas for the advancement of corporate power.

Beginning with William Godwin in the early 19th century, anarchist social philosophers have offered a critical counterpoint to the increasingly radical statism of most of the world’s civilized political leaders. The core idea of anarchism is that human beings are fundamentally sociable; left to themselves, they tend to cooperate to their mutual benefit. There will always be exceptions, but these are best dealt with informally and on an individual basis. Many anarchists cite the Athenian polis, the “sections” in Paris during the French Revolution, the New England town meetings of the 18th century, the popular assemblies in Barcelona in the late 1930s, and the Paris general strike of 1968 as positive examples of anarchy in action. They point to the possibility of a kind of social ecology, in which diversity and spontaneity are permitted to flourish unhindered both in human affairs and in Nature.

Civilization and Nature

Civilized people are accustomed to an anthropocentric view of the world. Our interest in the environment is utilitarian: it is of value because it is of use (or potential use) to human beings - if only as a place for camping and recreation.

Primitive peoples, in contrast, tended to see nature as intrinsically meaningful. In many cultures prohibitions surrounded the overhunting of animals or the felling of trees. The aboriginal peoples of Australia believed that their primary purpose in the cosmic scheme of things was to take care of the land, which meant performing ceremonies for the periodic renewal of plant and animal species, and of the landscape itself. The difference in effects

between the anthropocentric and ecocentric worldviews is incalculable. At present, we human beings while considering ourselves the most intelligent species on the planet are engaged in the most unintelligent enterprise imaginable: the destruction of our own natural life-support system. We need here only mention matters such as the standard treatment of factory-farmed domesticated food animals, the destruction of soils, the pollution of air and water, and the extinctions of wild species, as these horrors are well documented. It seems unlikely that these could ever have arisen but for an entrenched and ever-deepening trend of thinking that separates humanity from its natural context and denies inherent worth to non-human nature.

in Green Anarchist, Autumn 1997

Barbara Mor: Here: a small history of a mining town in the american southwest: warren bisbee az (1985)

From the top rim downward, sheer cascades of colors: mauve, gold, rust, purple, pink, silver, blue, incandescent turquoise. Streaks of orange, streaks of fire, yellow streaks of toxic arsenic. Radioactive greens of lime and fungus. Each color spilled over the others, in corroded terraced levels, channeled by erosion, avalanched by rain, crusted, broken open, merged; each geologic texture, as though alive, crawling over the variegated lumps and rubble of the earthly flesh that came before. And over this, the solid spills of individual rocks, orthorhombic crystals, dredging gears, rusted-out elbows, coils of wire, buttons, nails, hair curlers, stray lead bullets, all runneling, flowing in geological slow motion one over another down to the center of the hole. Deep, deep down. The entire technological history of the Pit was thus laid bare to any observer, in concentric layer after layer, vast polychronic slide upon slide, sloping down from the first simple surface diggings, by hand and stick, of the precivilized beings, immemorial years ago, downward through sediments of beauty, sediments of grief, sediments of nothing very important or useful, sediments of historical overthrow, one solid layer of crushed bones; and then further down the notable sediments of great wealth and petrochemical power, sediments of capital gains, sediments of wrapping paper, one solid sedimentary level each of glass, electrical conducting alloy, and stockpiled war material.

When first civilized beings arrived in the region, in wagons and on horseback, they found indigenous naked creatures squatting in the dirt, digging up small geological objects with bare hands and pointed sticks. Thus the Pit's origin, in what was then only a slight depression of the earth, a sandy little dip. The objects sought by the natives were simple gem stones, turquoise, azurite, malachite, roughly polished and used ornamentally. In the childlike mental grasp of these early beings there was no concept of serious mining, a factor which helped account for their elimination.

With settlement, mining began in earnest. Men came from everywhere, attracted by the adventure. The Pit grew into the largest intentional hole on the earth's surface. Innovators, in the early years, introduced various subterranean approaches to the extraction of ores from earth, but the straightforward digging of a hole, deeper and deeper into the ground, always seemed the most expeditious method for this terrain. Several hundred males, equipped with picks and shovels, simply began digging; as the hole grew, timbers were used to shore up the higher levels of dirt, and these shorings congealed into a circumference of terraces. Later, tracks were built, for railcars, and mules brought in to haul them; deeper down, around and around; the workforce grew from a few hundred to thousands. When groundwater seeped into working levels, as it did more often at greater depths, giant sponges were brought in to soak up the intruding fluids. When water flooded in, violently, without warning, drowning hundreds of workers, and burying hundreds more beneath tons of collapsed earth, the sponges were hooked up behind the mule-drawn railcars and dragged down and around the wet circumference, gradually soaking up the waters. The sponges were periodically wrung out by giant rollers (similar to old-fashioned washingmachine wringers), into the railcars, and the water hauled by more patient mules around and upward to the dry surface; the method was as simple as it was efficient. Drowned bodies were usually soaked up also, lodging in the sponge holes, and removed by the same process; if not, the bones were extracted by shovels from dried sediments at a later date. At great depths, the sponges were working constantly, and pipe systems were eventually installed to transport the fluids, which at some point became quite valuable.

The first substances ordinary gold, silver, copper. Gears. When the legendary gear ran out, no problem. It was followed in quick succession by equally enormous outpourings of nails, ballbearings, screws, the aforementioned lead bullets, and office paper clips. Car windshields and batteries alternated with hand grenades and gasmasks. At one point cigarette lighters flowed out at the rate of 1,523 per minute in precise alternation with 1,523 cans of lighter fluid; this was troublesome when they ignited each other (due to worker error) and the entire level erupted in a blazing inferno of metallic flames reaching almost to the Pit's rim. It burned for three nights and three days. Untold numbers of workers were lost, along with the tragic destruction of 8,632,948 cans of lighter fluid and 8,632,948 cigarette lighters.

When the smoke cleared, the Pit revealed walls of char and molten rivulets; a season's rain was needed to wash down the blackness. This was a difficult time. The fire had sealed over, cauterized the hundreds of thousands of productive little holes from which such great abundance had recently poured. The earth was streaked with hardness, a surface meld of

alloys from so many stray bullets, gears, paper clips, cigarette lighters, etc. Newly recruited workteams went down into the Pit to dig with pickaxes and sledgehammers. As they shattered, uprooted, peeled back this fused metalloid carapace from large scarred flanks and thighs of the damaged inner hole, they uncovered raw blotches of more disgusting things: layers upon layers of half-corroded used sanitary napkins, douche bags, enema hoses and syringes, broken rotten teeth, and the overwhelming stench of something dead. As before, but with increased efficiency, these nauseating items were gathered into large heaps and disposed of immediately. (The death smell of course lingered until the production of aerosol cans.) And then around the edges of these picked scabs, as it were, from around the nocturnal fringes of such terrible scars and unmentionable uses, something new began to ooze. A gooey substance, pellucid green in color. Shyly at first, and then with increasing ebullience, it crept and flowed and jiggled over the lower Pit surface, covering over the recent devastation like an innocent vegetation or spring grass. Something about it invited tasting. Several workers vomited at the thought. But then one, then another, then another and another, bent over and dipped a delicate forefinger in the happy green substance overwhelming their rubber boots, now, to the knees; and tasted. And found it good.

Lime gelatin.

It was mid-century. A difficult period had been experienced, but a challenging one.

Then the deep well of Ink turned red viscid red; when managers went down to test it, their pens clogged, or the words they wrote all looked like death scrawls. And the air was saturated with a thick odor, unlike all others; Dobermans guarding the town's five mansions howled day and night, an incessant whining that became invisible, inaudible as the voice of everything and everyone.

It soaked the rolling hills, pushing gelatinous clots to the surface of coarse dirt. Cracks in the sidewalks filled with red, cement and dust lots permeated with red stains. Red flowing gutters, the flood ditches awash with red. Citizens sprayed driveways and garages with lawn hoses, trying to prevent the disfigurement of cars. But the blood seeped everywhere, and the arroyos surrounding the town were as open veins. Trees and bushes began to suck up the red fluid from their roots, as did the porous walls of the great houses. Within five days it had entered the town's water supply. A mine manager, sprinkling his front lawn in the summer evening of a dry day, turned his hose on a little garden patch of cacti, oleander and budding agave. The black-flecked water spraying out suddenly turned to rust, clogged, and then with explosive force began pouring a stream of pure blood. With the mental control of an executive he continued spraying plants, a perfect, silent adjustment to this final change, as the red viscosity covered his lawn and garden, his gray pants and canvas shoes, with spatters, globs and blotches of an irrepressible bloody dew.

With the appearance of blood in the water pipes, the town's small hospital staff fled, citing a conflict of interest. And with great regret, the Mine Museum closed. The few visitors who did come, after the news got out, were reluctant to park their cars and then walk 25 yards through sticky, scarlet clots to the Museum entrance. In high winds the clots moved, like tumbleweeds of blood. A bridge was built, to accommodate these tourists; but the gluey blobs continued to mass and ooze on the threshold and pile up against the Museum windows. Beings not used to it found this offensive. With cessation of the tourist trade, the town's residents also realized the market shelves had grown quite bare; no food had been delivered for weeks. At this point the Town Council voted to become officially self-sufficient. Indeed, with blood flowing freely through all the town's plumbing, from home faucets, from drinking fountains in banks and gas stations and even the dusty park, most beings had become quite satisfied with this diet.

Some worried about the town's isolation. Incoming roads were silent, mail to and from the outside world ceased. Rarely, a small private airplane flew over in the late afternoon, attempting colored postcard shots of the Pit; but these were sensationalists, who never landed, who were not interested in the ordinary, daily life of the town. In a lonely show of spirit, the postmaster and two postal workers devised a combination stamp and postmark for the local mail. Using sponges soaked in blood from the bathroom tap, they dipped and affixed their bloody thumbprints to the top righthand corner of every envelope dropped through their slots. Unfortunately, town residents had little to say to each other, by mail or otherwise; the post office closed. Eventually the postal workers were reemployed as trash burners at the dumpsite east of town. They now shovel great white and red heaps of paper products into the flames, blood-saturated napkins, tablecloths and medical gowns that smoulder and crackle

thickly throughout the night, releasing a stench similar to burning corpse flesh; which, of course, everyone has grown used to.

From its experience, the town has learned something profound about the nature of its own will, as of the mysterious hidden resources of the Earth. Deeper and deeper, as it had descended into the dark downward and abysm not solely of time but of its own evolution, what it had dug with its historic fingers from this soiled Hole, so to speak, was an implacable knowledge others could profit from, if others would: That the inexorable becomes the simply inextricable, and thus the normal; and vice versa. If only beings strive to make it so. The question of whose blood is never raised. Nor, if the hole extends through the globe to China, could it be Communist blood? Intellectual quibbling is extraneous to the town's experience of itself.

Some beings from the outside have called the Pit a Living Wound, citing the bloodflow as a strong proof. But morbid and negative metaphors do not make the world turn; as gears do, for example, or ball bearings. Or as now, the mining of blood.

1985

Ivan Illich: Toward a History of Needs (1978)

Modernized poverty appears when the intensity of market dependence reaches a certain threshold. Subjectively, it is the experience of frustrating affluence which occurs in persons mutilated by their overwhelming reliance on the riches of industrial productivity. Simply, it deprives those affected by it of their freedom and power to act autonomously, to live creatively; it confines them to survival through being plugged into market relations. And precisely because this new impotence is so deeply experienced, it is with difficulty expressed. We are the witnesses of a barely perceptible transformation in ordinary language by which verbs that formerly designated satisfying actions are replaced by nouns that denote packages designed for passive consumption only: for example, “to learn” becomes “acquisition of credits.” A profound change in individual and social self-images is here reflected. And the layman is not the only one who has difficulty in accurately describing what he experiences. The professional economist is unable to recognize the poverty his conventional instruments fail to uncover. Nevertheless, the new mutant of impoverishment continues to spread. The peculiarly modern inability to use personal endowments, communal life, and environmental resources in an autonomous way infects every aspect of life where a professionally engineered commodity has succeeded in replacing a culturally shaped use-value. The opportunity to experience personal and social satisfaction outside the market is thus destroyed. I am poor, for instance, when the use-value of my feet is lost because I live in Los Angeles on the thirty-fifth floor.

This new impotence-producing poverty must not be confused with the widening gap between the consumption of rich and poor in a world where basic needs are increasingly shaped by industrial commodities. That gap is the form traditional poverty assumes in an industrial society, and the conventional terms of class struggle appropriately reveal and reduce it. I further distinguish modernized poverty from the burdensome price exacted by the externalities which increased levels of production spew into the environment. It is clear that these kinds of pollution, stress, and taxation are unequally imposed. Correspondingly, defenses against such depredations are unequally distributed. But like the new gaps in access, such inequities in social costs are aspects of industrialized poverty for which economic indicators and objective verification can be found. Such is not true for the industrialized impotence which affects both rich and poor. Where this kind of poverty reigns, life without addictive access to commodities is rendered either impossible or criminal. Making do without consumption becomes impossible, not just for the average consumer but even for the poor. All forms of welfare, from affirmative action to environmental action, are of no help. The liberty to design and craft one’s own distinctive dwelling is abolished in favor of the bureaucratic provision of standardized housing, as in the United States, Cuba or Sweden. The organization of employment, skills, building resources, rules, and credit favor shelter as a commodity rather than as an activity. Whether the product is provided by an entrepreneur or an apparatchik, the effective result is the same: citizen impotence, our specifically modern experience of poverty.

Wherever the shadow of economic growth touches us, we are left useless unless employed on a job or engaged in consumption; the attempt to build a house or set a bone outside the control of certified specialists appears as anarchic conceit. We lose sight of our resources, lose control over the environmental conditions which make these resources applicable, lose taste for self-reliant coping with challenges from without and anxiety from within. Take childbirth in Mexico today: delivery without professional care has become unthinkable for those women whose husbands are regularly employed and therefore have access to social services, no matter how marginal or tenuous. They move in circles where the production of babies faithfully reflects the patterns of industrial outputs. Yet their sisters in the slums of the poor or the villages of the isolated still feel quite competent to give birth on their own mats, unaware that they face a modern indictment of criminal neglect toward their infants. But as professionally engineered delivery models reach these independent women, the desire, competence, and conditions for autonomous behavior are being destroyed.

For advanced industrial society, the modernization of poverty means that people are helpless to recognize evidence unless it has been certified by a professional, be he a television weather commentator or an educator; that organic discomfort becomes intolerably threatening unless it has been medicalized into dependence on a therapist; that neighbors and friends are lost unless vehicles bridge the separating distance (created by the vehicles in the first place).

In short, most of the time we find ourselves out of touch with our world, out of sight of those for whom we work, out of tune with what we feel.

pp. viiix

Zygmunt Bauman: Modernity and the Holocaust (1989)

The meaning of the civilizing process he etiological myth deeply entrenched in the self-consciousness of our Western society is the morally elevating story of humanity emerging from pre-social barbarity. This myth lent stimulus and popularity to, and in turn was given a learned and sophisticated support by, quite a few influential sociological theories and historical narratives.

In view of this myth, long ago ossified into the common sense of our era, the Holocaust can only be understood as the failure of civilization (i.e. of human purposive, reason-guided activity) to contain the morbid natural predilections of whatever has been left of nature in man. Obviously, the Hobbesian world has not been fully chained, the Hobbesian problem has not been fully resolved. In other words, we do not have as yet enough civilization. The unfinished civilizing process is yet to be brought to its conclusion. If the lesson of mass murder does teach us anything it is that the prevention of similar hiccups of barbarism evidently requires still more civilizing efforts. There is nothing in this lesson to cast doubt on the future effectiveness of such efforts and their ultimate results. We certainly move in the right direction; perhaps we do not move fast enough.

As its full picture emerges from historical research, so does an alternative, and possible more credible, interpretation of the Holocaust as an event which disclosed the weakness and fragility of human nature (of the abhorrence of murder, disinclination to violence, fear of guilty conscience and of responsibility for immoral behaviour) when confronted with the matter-of-fact efficiency of the most cherished among the products of civilization; its technology, its rational criteria of choice, its tendency to subordinate thought and action to the pragmatics of economy and effectiveness. The Hobbesian world of the Holocaust did not surface from its too-shallow grave, resurrected by the tumult of irrational emotions. It arrived (in a formidable shape Hobbes would certainly disown) in a factory-produced vehicle, wielding weapons only the most advanced science could supply, and following an itinerary designed by scientifically managed organization. Modern civilization was not the Holocaust's sufficient condition; it was, however, most certainly its necessary condition. Without it, the Holocaust would be unthinkable. It was the rational world of modern civilization that made the Holocaust thinkable. The Nazi mass murder of the European Jewry was not only the technological achievement of an industrial society, but also the organizational achievement of a bureaucratic society.

The most shattering of lessons deriving from the analysis of the 'twisted road to Auschwitz' is that - in the last resort - the choice of physical extermination as the right means to the task of Entfernung was a product of routine bureaucratic procedures: means-end calculus, budget balancing, universal rule application. To make the point sharper still the choice was an effect of the earnest effort to find rational solutions to successive 'problems', as they arose in the changing circumstances. It was also affected by the widely described bureaucratic tendency to goal-displacement - an affliction as normal in all bureaucracies as their routines. The very presence of functionaries charged with their specific tasks led to further initiatives and a continuous expansion of original purposes. Once again, expertise demonstrated its self-propelling capacity, its proclivity to expand and enrich the target which supplied its raison d'etre.

The mere existence of a corpus of Jewish experts created a certain bureaucratic momentum behind Nazi Jewish policy. Even when deportations and mass murder were already under way, decrees appeared in 1942 prohibiting German Jews from having pets, getting their hair cut by Aryan barbers, or receiving the Reich sport badge! It did not require orders from above, merely the existence of the job itself, to ensure that the Jewish experts kept up the flow of discriminating measures.

At no point of its long and tortuous execution did the Holocaust come in conflict with the principles of rationality. The 'Final Solution' did not clash at any stage with the rational pursuit of efficient, optimal goal-implementation. On the contrary, it arose out of a genuinely rational concern, and it was generated by bureaucracy true to its form and purpose. We know of many massacres, pogroms, mass murders, indeed instances not far removed from genocide, that have been perpetrated without modern bureaucracy, the skills and technologies it commands, the scientific principles of its internal management. The Holocaust, however, was clearly unthinkable without such bureaucracy. The Holocaust was not an irrational outflow of the not-

yet-fully-eradicated residues of pre-modern barbarity. It was a legitimate resident in the house of modernity; indeed, one who would not be at home in any other house.

This is not to suggest that the incidence of the Holocaust was determined by modern bureaucracy or the culture of instrumental rationality it epitomizes; much less still, that modern bureaucracy must result in Holocaust-style phenomena. I do suggest, however, that the rules of instrumental rationality are singularly incapable of preventing such phenomena; that there is nothing in those rules which disqualifies the Holocaust-style methods of 'social-engineering' as improper or, indeed, the actions they served as irrational. I suggest, further, that the bureaucratic culture which prompts us to view society as an object of administration, as a collection of so many 'problems' to be solved, as 'nature' to be 'controlled', 'mastered' and 'improved' or 'remade', as a legitimate target for 'social engineering', and in general a garden to be designed and kept in the planned shape by force (the gardening posture divides vegetation into 'cultured plants' to be taken care of, and weeds to be exterminated), was the very atmosphere in which the idea of the Holocaust could be conceived, slowly yet consistently developed, and brought to its conclusion. And I also suggest that it was the spirit of instrumental rationality, and its modern, bureaucratic form of institutionalization, which had made the Holocaust-style solutions not only possible, but eminently 'reasonable 'and increased the probability of their choice. This increase in probability is more than fortuitously related to the ability of modern bureaucracy to co-ordinate the action of great number of moral individuals in the pursuit of any, also immoral, ends.

Modern culture is a garden culture. It defines itself as the design for an ideal life and a perfect arrangement of human conditions. It constructs its own identity out of distrust of nature. In fact, it defines itself and nature, and the distinction between them, through its endemic distrust of spontaneity and its longing for a better, and necessarily artificial, order. Apart from the overall plan, the artificial order of the garden needs tools and raw materials. It also needs defence against the unrelenting danger of what is, obviously, a disorder. The order, first conceived of as a design, determines what is a tool, what is a raw material, what is useless, what is irrelevant, what is harmful, what is a weed or a pest. It classifies all elements of the universe by their relation to itself. This relation is the only meaning it grants them and tolerate sand the only justification of the gardener's actions, as differentiated as the relations themselves. From the point of view of the design all actions are instrumental, while all the objects of action are either facilities or hindrances.

Modern genocide, like modern culture in general, is a gardener's job. It is just one of the many chores that people who treat society as a garden need to undertake. If garden design defines its weeds, there are weeds wherever there is a garden. And weeds are to be exterminated. Weeding out is a creative, not a destructive activity. It does not differ in kind from other activities which combine in the construction and sustenance of the perfect garden. All visions of society-as-garden define parts of the social habitat as human weeds. Like other weeds, they must be segregated, contained, prevented from spreading, removed and kept outside the society boundaries; if all these means prove insufficient, they must be killed.

Stalin's and Hitler's victims were not killed in order to capture and colonize the territory they occupied.

Often they were killed in a dull, mechanical fashion with no human emotions - hatred included – to enliven it. They were killed because they did not fit, for one reason or another, the scheme of a perfect society. Their killing was not the work of destruction, but creation. They were eliminated, so that an objectively better human world more efficient, more moral, more beautiful could be established. A Communist world. Or a racially pure, Aryan world. In both cases, a harmonious world, conflict-free, docile in the hands of their rulers, orderly, controlled. People tainted with ineradicable blight of their past or origin could not be fitted into such unblemished, healthy and shining world. Like weeds, their nature could not be changed. They could not be improved or re-educated. They had to be eliminated for reasons of genetic or ideational heredity of a natural mechanism resilient and immune to cultural processing.

The two most notorious and extreme cases of modern genocide did not betray the spirit of modernity. They did not deviously depart from the main track of the civilizing process. They were the most consistent, uninhibited expressions of that spirit. They attempted to reach the most ambitious aims of the civilizing process most other processes stop short of, not necessarily for the lack of good will. They showed what the rationalizing, designing, controlling

dreams and efforts of modern civilization are able to accomplish if not mitigated, curbed or counteracted.

These dreams and efforts have been with us for a long time. They spawned the vast and powerful arsenal of technology and managerial skills. They gave birth to institutions which serve the sole purpose of instrumentalizing human behavior to such an extent that any aim may be pursued with efficiency and vigor, with or without ideological dedication or moral approval on the part of the pursuers. They legitimize the rulers' monopoly on ends and the confinement of the ruled to the role of means. They define most actions as means, and means as subordination to the ultimate end, to those who set it, to supreme will, to supra-individual knowledge.

Emphatically, this does not mean that we all live daily according to Auschwitz principles. From the fact that the Holocaust is modern, it does not follow that modernity is a Holocaust. The Holocaust is a by-product of the modern drive to a fully designed, fully controlled world, once the drive is getting out of control and running wild. Most of the time, modernity is prevented from doing so. Its ambitions clash with the pluralism of the human world; they stop short of their fulfillment for the lack of an absolute power absolute enough and a monopolistic agency monopolistic enough to be able to disregard, shrug off, or overwhelm all autonomous, and thus countervailing and mitigating, forces.

pp. 12, 1718, 9293

T. Fulano: “Civilization Is Like a Jetliner” (1983)

The night the Korean airliner crashed into the newspapers, I dreamed of a tornado. A tornado is a kind of spiral, which is the labyrinth and which is Death.

Death is very powerful right now. Instead of being a passage, Death has become a kind of equipment failure, a technical slaughterhouse. Human and technical failure become indistinguishable when the unquestioning robot and the drooling sadist merge. (I see the Soviet pilot being interviewed - he could be any Air Force gunslinger in any military machine - “I’d do it again and even more and love every second of it.” Of course he had the cooperation of the CIA and the U. S. military, who listened in, taping it all, without issuing any warnings to save lives. That, after all, is certainly not their business.)

So we inch closer to midnight. Death’s festival. Reagan, on a California surfboard of lies and hypocritical self-righteousness, rides the crest triumphant, saying that the downing of the KAL 007 (how could it not be a spy plane with such a number!) represents “a major turning point” in world history, adding, “We can start preparing ourselves for what John F. Kennedy called a long twilight struggle.” Another falsehood: crime flows into crime, from the extermination of the Indian “savages” to the wholesale massacres of Vietnamese “natives” they’ve been fighting their twilight struggle for as long as anyone can remember, these evangelical maniacs, these scourges of the Great Darkness, these agents of Entropy.

But we must remember that the crash is representative, ultimately, of all air disasters, with its dash of militaristic insanity in a sense, only a variant of the technological frenzy thrown in for good measure. Civilization is like a jetliner, its East and West versions just the two wings, whose resistance holds the bulky, riveted monster aloft.

Civilization is like a jetliner, noisy, burning up enormous amounts of fuel. Every imaginable and unimaginable crime and pollution had to be committed in order to make it go. Whole species were rendered extinct, whole populations dispersed. Its shadow on the waters resembles an oil slick. Birds are sucked into its jets and vaporized. Every part as Gus Grim once nervously remarked about space capsules before he was burned up in one has been made by the lowest bidder.

Civilization is like a 747, the filtered air, the muzak oozing over the earphones, the phony sense of security, the chemical food, the plastic trays, all the passengers sitting passively in the orderly row of padded seats staring at Death on the movie screen. Civilization is like a jet liner, an idiot savant in the cockpit manipulating computerized controls built by sullen wage workers, and dependent for his directions on sleepy technicians high on amphetamines with their minds wandering to sports and sex.

Civilization is like a 747, filled beyond capacity with coerced volunteers some in love with the velocity, most wavering at the abyss of terror and nausea, yet still seduced by advertising and propaganda. It is like a DC-10, so incredibly enclosed that you want to break through the tin can walls and escape, make your own way through the clouds, and leave this rattling, screaming fiend approaching its breaking point. The smallest error or technical failure leads to catastrophe, scattering your sad entrails like belated omens all over the runway; knocks you out of your shoes, breaks all your bones like eggshells.

(Of course, civilization is like many other things besides jets always things a chemical drainage ditch, a woodland knocked down to lengthen an airstrip or to build a slick new shopping mall where people can buy salad bowls made out of exotic tropical trees which will be extinct next week, or perhaps a graveyard for cars, or a suspension bridge which collapses because a single metal pin has shaken loose. Civilization is a hydra. There is a multitude of styles, colors, and sizes of Death to choose from.)

Civilization is like a Boeing jumbo jet because it transports people who have never experienced their humanity where they were to places where they shouldn’t go. In fact, it mainly transports businessmen in suits with briefcases filled with charts, contracts, more mischiefbusinessmen who are identical everywhere and hence have no reason at all to be ferried about. And it goes faster and faster, turning more and more places into airports, the (un)natural habitat of businessmen.

It is an utter mystery how it gets off the ground. It rolls down the runway, the blinking lights along the ground like electronic scar tissue on the flesh of the earth, picks up speed and somehow grunts, raping the air, working its way up along the shimmering waves of heat and

the trash blowing about like refugees fleeing the bombing of a city. Yes, it is exciting, a mystery, when life has been evacuated and the very stones have been murdered. But civilization, like the jetliner, this freak phoenix incapable of rising from its ashes, also collapses across the earth like a million bursting wasps, flames spreading across the runway in tentacles of gasoline, samsonite, and charred flesh. And always the absurd rubbish, Death's confetti, the fragments left to mock us lying along the weary trajectory of the dying bird the doll's head, the shoes, eyeglasses, a beltbuckle.

Jetliners fall, civilizations fall, this civilization will fall. The gauges will be read wrong on some snowy day (perhaps they will fail). The wings, supposedly defrosted, will be too frozen to beat against the wind and the bird will sink like a millstone, first gratuitously skimming a bridge (because civilization is also like a bridge, from Paradise to Nowhere), a bridge laden, say, with commuters on their way to or from work, which is to say, to or from an airport, packed in their cars (wingless jetliners) like additional votive offerings to a ravenous Medusa.

Then it will dive into the icy waters of a river, the Potomac perhaps, or the River Jordan, or Lethe. And we will be inside, each one of us at our specially assigned porthole, going down for the last time, like dolls' heads encased in plexiglass.

in Fifth Estate, Winter 1983

Unabomber (a.k.a. “FC”): “Industrial Society and Its Future” (1995)

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Needless to say, the scenarios outlined above do not exhaust all the possibilities. They only indicate the kinds of outcomes that seem to us most likely. But we can envision no plausible scenarios that are any more palatable than the ones we’ve just described. It is overwhelmingly probable that if the industrial-technological system survives the next 40 to 100 years, it will by that time have developed certain general characteristics: Individuals (at least those of the “bourgeois” type, who are integrated into the system and make it run, and who therefore have all the power) will be more dependent than ever on large organizations; they will be more “socialized” than ever and their physical and mental qualities to a significant extent (possibly to a very great extent) will be those that are engineered into them rather than being the results of chance (or of God’s will, or whatever); and whatever may be left of wild nature will be reduced to remnants preserved for scientific study and kept under the supervision and management of scientists (hence it will no longer be truly wild). In the long run (say a few centuries from now) it is likely that neither the human race nor any other important organisms will exist as we know them today, because once you start modifying organisms through genetic engineering there is no reason to stop at any particular point, so that the modifications will probably continue until man and other organisms have been utterly transformed.

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Whatever else may be the case, it is certain that technology is creating for human beings a new physical and social environment radically different from the spectrum of environments to which natural selection has adapted the human race physically and psychologically. If man is not adjusted to this new environment by being artificially reengineered, then he will be adapted to it through a long and painful process of natural selection. The former is far more likely than the latter.

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It would be better to dump the whole stinking system and take the consequences.

in Washington Post, September 21,
1995, theses 177179

Section Four: The Pathology of Civilization

Set down there not knowing it was Seattle, I could not have told where I was. Everywhere frantic growth, a carcinomatous growth. Bulldozers rolled up the green forests and heaped the resulting trash for burning. The torn white lumber from concrete forms was piled beside gray walls. I wonder why progress looks so much like destruction.

John Steinbeck (1962)

This section cannot be cleanly separated from the preceding one. The distinction, such as it is, is one of emphasis. From pictures that help to reveal basic qualities of civilization, we shift in the direction of focusing on civilization's dynamics and what they portend, now and in the future. Fully established, mature civilization is what has to be grasped, in its malignant and metastasizing trajectory.

There is little doubt what is in store: a steadily bleaker and more debased reality, with civilization's ideological defenses eroding to naught. Of course, there have always been some who could see through the massive fraud. Consider William Morris, writing in 1885, a banner year for ascendant industrial capitalism:

"I have no more faith than a grain of mustard seed in the future of "civilisation," which I know now is doomed to destruction, and probably before very long; what a joy it is to think of! and how often it consoles me to think of barbarism once more flooding the world, and real feelings and passions, however rudimentary, taking the place of our wretched hypocrisies. I used really to despair because I thought what the idiots of our day call progress would go on perfecting itself: happily I know that all will have a sudden check."

He was overly optimistic about the imminence of civilization's downfall, but the ranks of its critics, if this collection is any gauge at all, have certainly swelled since Morris registered his judgment.

Even some of the high priests of civilization have abandoned earlier enthusiasm or faith in its latest triumphs. In the contemporary era of high-tech mania and belief in the transcendent contributions of instantaneous computerized interaction, critics are beginning to multiply. By the mid-1970s even Marshall McLuhan came to some very uncelebratory conclusions. For example:

Electronic media reduce personal identity to vestigial levels that, in turn, diminish moral feeling to practically nothing.

Other critics have recognized that postmodernism, far and away the reigning cultural zeitgeist, plays an essential and duplicitous role in the defense of civilization. Qualities like cynicism, relativism, and superficiality are part of this, but the postmodern gloss on society goes even further in its efforts to deflect opposition to civilized social existence.

Frederic Jameson captures this aptly when he asks

"how it is possible for the most standardized and uniform social reality in history, by the merest ideological flick of the thumbnail, the most imperceptible of displacements, to reemerge as the rich oil-smear sheen of absolute diversity and the unimaginable and unclassifiable forms of human freedom."

Postmodernism seems to go beyond mere denial, to actually affirm our ghastly present. Aversion to analysis, a key postmodern trait, can and does obscure that which needs to be seen for what it is, and confronted.

Max Nordau: Conventional Lies, or Our Civilization (1895)

This universal mental restlessness and uneasiness exerts a powerful and many-sided influence upon individual life. A dread of examining and comprehending the actualities of life prevails to a frightfully alarming extent, and manifests itself in a thousand ways. The means of sensation and perception are eagerly counterfeited by altering the nervous system by the use of stimulating or narcotic poisons of all kinds, manifesting thereby an instinctive aversion to the realities of appearances and circumstances. It is true that we are only capable of perceiving the changes in our own organism, not those going on around us. But the changes within us are caused, most probably, by objects outside of us; our senses give us a picture of those objects, whose reliability is surely more to be depended upon, when only warped by the imperfections in our normal selves, than when to these unavoidable sources of error is added a conscious disturbance in the functions of the nervous system caused by the use of various poisons. Only when our perceptions of things around us awake in us a feeling of positive discomfort, do we realize the necessity of warding off these unpleasant sensations, or of modifying them, until they become more agreeable. This is the cause of the constant increase in the consumption of alcohol and tobacco, shown by statistics, and of the rapidity with which the custom of taking opium and morphine is spreading. It is also the reason why the cultivated classes seize upon every new narcotic or stimulant which science discovers for them, so that we have not only drunkards and opium eaters among us, but confirmed chloral, chloroform and ether drinkers. Society as a whole repeats the action of the individual, who tries to “drown his sorrows in the flowing bowl.” It seeks oblivion of the present, and grasps at anything that will provide it with the necessary illusions by which it can escape from real life.

Hand in hand with this instinctive self-deception and attempt at temporary oblivion of the actual world, goes the final plunge into eternal oblivion: statistics prove that the number of suicides is increasing in the highly civilized countries, in direct proportion to the increase in the use of alcohol and narcotics. A dull sensation of irritation, sometimes self-conscious, but more often only recognized as a vague, irresistible discontent, keeps the aspiring in a state of gloomy restlessness, so that the struggle for existence assumes brutal and desperate phases, never known before. This struggle is no longer a conflict between polite antagonists who salute each other with courtesy before they open fire, like the English and French before the battle of Fontenoy, but it is a pell-mell, hand-to-hand fight of rough cut-throats, drunk with whisky and blood, who fall upon each other with brute ferocity, neither giving nor expecting mercy. We lament the disappearance of characters. What is a character? It is an individuality which shapes its career according to certain simple, fundamental moral principles which it has recognized as good, and accepted as guides. Scepticism develops no such characters, because it has excluded faith in fundamental principles. When the north star ceases to shine, and the electric pole vanishes, the compass is of no further use the stationary point is gone, to which it was always turning. Scepticism, also a fashionable ailment, is in reality but another phase of the universal discontent with the present.

For it is only by becoming convinced that the world is out of sorts generally, and that everything is wrong, insufficient, and contemptible, that we arrive at the conclusion that all is vanity, and nothing worth an effort, or a struggle between duty and inclination. Economy, literature, and art, philosophy, politics, and all phases of social and individual life, show a certain fundamental trait, common to all - a deep dissatisfaction with the world as it exists at present. From each one of these multitudinous manifestations of human intelligence arises a bitter cry, the same in all cases, an appeal for a radical change.

pp. 1416 passim

William H. Koetke: The Final Empire: The Collapse of Civilization and The Seed of the Future (1993)

Our generation is on the verge of the most profound catastrophe the human species has ever faced. Death threats to the living earth are coming from all sides. Water, sunlight, air and soil are all threatened. When Eskimos of the far north begin to experience leukemia from atomic radiation and Eskimo mothers' milk contains crisis levels of PCBs, we must recognize that every organism on the planet is threatened.

Compounding this crisis is the fact that the prime force in this affair, the civilized humans, are unable to completely understand the problem. The problem is beneath the threshold of consciousness because humans within civilization (civilization comes from the Latin, civis, referring to those who live in cities, towns and villages) no longer have relationship with the living earth. Civilized people's lives are focused within the social system itself. They do not perceive the eroding soils and the vanishing forests. These matters do not have the immediate interest of paychecks. The impulse of civilization in crisis is to do what it has been doing, but do it more energetically in order to extricate itself. If soaring population and starvation threaten, often the impulse is to put more pressure on the agricultural soils and cut the forests faster.

We face planetary disaster. The destruction of the planetary life system has been ongoing for thousands of years and is now approaching the final apocalypse which some of us will see in our own lifetimes. Far from being a difficult and complex situation it is actually very simple, if one can understand and accept a few simple and fundamental propositions.

The planetary disaster is traced to one simple fact. Civilization is out of balance with the flow of planetary energy. The consensus assumption of civilization is that an exponentially expanding human population with exponentially expanding consumption of material resources can continue, based on dwindling resources and a dying ecosystem. This is simply absurd. Nonetheless, civilization continues on with no memory of its history and no vision of its future.

Possibly the most important source of life on this planet is the thin film of topsoil. The life of the planet is essentially a closed, balanced system with the elements of sun, water, soil and air as the basic elements. These elements work in concert to produce life and they function according to patterns that are based in the laws of physics, which we refer to as Natural Law.

The soil depth and its richness is a basic standard of health of the living planet. As a general statement we may say that when soil is lost, imbalance and injury to the planet's life occurs. In the geologic time-span of the planet's life, this is a swift progression toward death. Even if only one per cent of the soil is lost per thousand years, eventually the planet dies. If one per cent is gained, then the living wealth, the richness, of the planet increases. The central fact must be held in mind of how slowly soil builds up. Soil scientists estimate that three hundred to one thousand years are required for the buildup of each inch of topsoil.

The nourishment of the soil depends upon the photosynthetic production of the vegetative cover that it carries. There are wide differences in the Net Photosynthetic Production of many possible vegetative covers. As a rule it is the climax ecosystem of any particular region of the earth that is the most productive in translating the energy of the sun into the growth of plants and in turn into organic debris which revitalizes the soil.

A climax ecosystem is the equilibrium state of the "flesh" of the earth. After a severe forest fire, or to recover from the injury of clearcut logging, the forest organism slowly heals the wound by inhabiting the area with a succession of plant communities. Each succeeding community prepares the area for the next community. In general terms, an evergreen forest wound will be covered by tough small plants, popularly called "weeds" and the grasses which hold down the topsoil and prepare the way for other grasses and woody shrubs to grow up on the wound. ("Weeds" are the "first aid crew" on open ground.) As a general rule, the "first aid crew" - the first community of plants to get in and cover the bare soil and hold it down - is the more simple plant community with the smallest number of species of plants, animals, insects, micro-organisms and so forth. As the succession proceeds, the diversity, the number of species, increases as does the NPP, until the climax system is reached again, and equilibrium is established. The system drives toward complexity of form, maximum ability to translate incoming energy (NPP) and diversity of energy pathways (food chains and other services that plants and animals perform for one another). The plants will hold the soil so that it may be built back up. They will shade the soil to prevent its oxidation (the heating and drying of soil

promotes chemical changes that cause sterility) and conserve moisture. Each plant takes up different combinations of nutrients from the soil so that specific succession communities prepare specific soil nutrients for specific plant communities that will succeed them. Following the preparation of the site by these plants, larger plants, alders and other broadleaf trees will come in and their lives and deaths will further prepare the micro-climate and soil for the evergreens. These trees function as “nurse” trees for the final climax community, which will be conifers. Seedling Douglas Fir, for example, cannot grow in sunlight and must have shade provided by these forerunner communities.

The ecosystems of this earth receive injury from tornado, fire, or other events and then cycle back to the balanced state, the climax system. This is similar to the wound on a human arm that first bleeds, scabs over and then begins to build new replacement skin to reach its equilibrium state. The climax system then is a basic standard of health of the living earth, its dynamic equilibrium state. The climax system is the system that produces the greatest photosynthetic production. Anything that detracts from this detracts from the health of the ecosystem.

Climax ecosystems are the most productive because they are the most diverse. Each organism feeds back some portion of energy to producers of energy that supports it (as well as providing energy to other pathways) and as these support systems grow, the mass and variety of green plants and animals increases, taking advantage of every possible niche. What might be looked at as a whole, unitary organ of the planet’s living body, a forest or grassland, experiences increased health because of its diversity within.

On a large scale, the bioregions and continental soils, substantially support sea life by the wash-off (natural and unnatural) of organic fertility into aquatic and ocean environments. This is a further service that these whole ecosystems perform for other whole ecosystems.

A few basic principles of the earth’s life in the cosmos have now been established. Balance is cosmic law. The earth revolves around the sun in a finely tuned balance. The heat budget of the planet is a finely tuned balance. If the incoming heat declined, we would freeze or if the planet did not dissipate heat properly we would burn up. The climax ecosystem maintains a balance and stability century after century as the diverse flows of energies constantly move and cycle within it. In the same manner the human body maintains balance (homeostasis) while motion of blood, digestion and cell creation, flow within it.

The life of the earth is fundamentally predicated upon the soil. If there is no soil, there is no life as we know it. (Some micro-organisms and some other forms might still exist). The soil is maintained by its vegetative cover and in optimal, balanced health, this cover is the natural climax ecosystem.

If one can accept these few simple principles then we have established a basis of communication upon which we may proceed. Anyone who cannot accept these principles must demonstrate that the world works in some other way. This must be done quickly because the life of the planet earth hangs in the balance.

We speak to our basic condition of life on earth. We have heard of many roads to salvation. We have heard that economic development will save us, solar heating will save us, technology, the return of Jesus Christ who will restore the heaven and the earth, the promulgation of land reform, the recycling of materials, the establishment of capitalism, communism, socialism, fascism, Muslimism, vegetarianism, trilateralism, and even the birth of new Aquarian Age, we have been told, will save us. But the principle of soil says that if the humans cannot maintain the soil of the planet, they cannot live here. In 1988, the annual soil loss due to erosion was twenty-five billion tons and rising rapidly. Erosion means that soil moves off the land. An equally serious injury is that the soil’s fertility is exhausted in place. Soil exhaustion is happening in almost all places where civilization has spread. This is a literal killing of the planet by exhausting its fund of organic fertility that supports other biological life. Fact: since civilization invaded the Great Plains of North America one-half of the topsoil of that area has disappeared.

The Record of Empire

The eight thousand year record of crimes against nature committed by civilization include assaults on the topsoils of all continents.

Forests, the greatest generators of topsoil, covered roughly one-third of the earth prior to civilization. By 1975 the forest cover was one-fourth and by 1980 the forest had shrunk to one-fifth and the rapidity of forest elimination continues to increase. If the present trends continue without interruption eighty percent of the vegetation of the planet will be gone by 2040.

The simple fact is that civilization cannot maintain the soil. Eight thousand years of its history demonstrate this. Civilization is murdering the earth. The topsoil is the energy bank that has been laboriously accumulated over millennia. Much of it is gone and the remainder is going rapidly.

When civilized “development” of land occurs the climax system is stripped, vegetation is greatly simplified or cleared completely, and the net photosynthetic production plummets. In the tropics, when pasture land is created by clearing forest, two-thirds of the original net photosynthetic production is eliminated. In the mid-latitudes one-half the net photosynthetic production is lost when cropland is created from previously forested land. The next step is that humans take much of even that impaired production off the land in the form of agricultural products so that not even the full amount of that impaired production returns to feed the soil.

This points out a simple principle: Human society must have as its central value, a responsibility to maintain the soil. If we can create culture that can maintain the soil then there is the possibility of human culture regaining balance with the life of the earth.

The central problem is that civilization is out of balance with the life of the earth.

The solution to that problem is for human society to regain balance with the earth.

We are now back to everyone’s personal answer concerning how to respond to the planetary crisis. Most proposals for salvation have little to do with maintaining the soil. All of these seek to alleviate the situation without making any uncomfortable change in the core values or structure of existing society. They only try to “fix” the symptoms. If we had a society whose core values were to preserve and aid the earth, then all of the other values of society would flow consistently from that.

In many important ways civilization functions in an addictive fashion. The culture of civilization functions so that it is self-destructive, suicidal; as if it were a person addicted to alcohol, white sugar, drugs or tobacco. The addict denies that there is a problem. The addict engages in the denial of reality. Civilization is addicted in the same way.

The civilized people believe they have an obligation to bring primitive and underdeveloped people up to their level. Civilization, which is about to self-destruct, thinks of itself as the superior culture that has answers for all the world’s people.

An addict, truly, is a person who is emotionally dependent on things: television, substances, personality routines, other people, mental ideologies, total immersion in some cause or work. If the object of dependency is removed, addicts will experience insecurity, discomfort, distress, the symptoms of withdrawal.

Civilization is a cultural/mental view that believes security is based in instruments of coercion. The size of this delusion is such that the combined military expenditures of all the world’s governments in 1987 were so large that all of the social programs of the United Nations could be financed for three hundred years by this expenditure.

Looking back at the simple principle which says that humans cannot live on this planet unless they can maintain the topsoil, demonstrates the delusion. The civilized denial of the imperative of maintaining topsoil, demonstrates the delusion. The delusion of military power does not lead to security, it leads to death. The civilized denial of the imperative of maintaining topsoil, and the addictive grasping to the delusion that security can be provided by weapons of death, is akin to the hallucination of an alcoholic suffering delirium tremens!

The first step in the recovery of any addict is the recognition that what they have believed is a delusion. The alcoholic must come to see that “just one more drink” is not the answer, the workaholic must come to see that “just a little more effort” will not provide feelings of self-worth and a rounded life. The bulimic must come to see that “just one more plate of food” will not provide emotional wholeness. Civilization must come to see that its picture of reality is leading it to suicide.

Here we have the whole of it. The problem is imbalance and the solution is to regain balance. Here we have the simple principle: if human actions help to regain balance as judged by the

condition of the soil, then we are on the path of healing the earth. If the theory, plan, project, or whatever, cannot be justified by this standard, then we are back in the delusional system.

All of us are addicts. We of civilization have lost our way. We are now functioning in a world of confusion and chaos. We must recognize that the delusional system of civilization, the mass institutions and our personal lives, function on a self-destructive basis. We live in a culture that is bleeding the earth to death, and we have been making long-range personal plans and developing careers within it. We strive toward something that is not to be.

We must try to wake up and regain a vision of reality. We must begin taking responsibility for our lives and for the soil. This is a tall order. This will require study and forethought. Humans have never dealt with anything like this before. This generation is presented with a challenge that in its dimensions is cosmic. A cosmic question: will tens of millions of years of the proliferation of life on earth die back to the microbes? This challenge presents us with the possibility of supreme tragedy or the supreme success.

Creating a utopian paradise, a new Garden of Eden is our only hope. Nothing less will extricate us. We must create the positive, cooperative culture dedicated to life restoration and then accomplish that in perpetuity, or we as a species cannot be on earth.

pp. 914

Joseph A. Tainter: The Collapse of Complex Societies (1988)

Understanding collapse: the marginal productivity of sociopolitical change

Not only is energy flow required to maintain a sociopolitical system, but the amount of energy must be sufficient for the complexity of that system. Leslie White observed a number of years ago that cultural evolution was intricately linked to the quantities of energy harvested by a human population (1949: 36393). The amounts of energy required per capital to maintain the simplest human institutions are incredibly small compared with those needed by the most complex. White once estimated that a cultural system activated primarily by human energy could generate only about 1/20 horsepower per capita per year (1949:369. 1959:412). This contrasts sharply with the hundreds to thousands of horsepower at the command of the members of industrial societies. Cultural complexity varies accordingly. Julian Steward pointed out the quantitative difference between the 3,000 to 6,000 cultural elements early anthropologists documented for native populations of western North America, and the more than 500,000 artifact types that U. S. military forces landed at Casa Blanca in World War II (1955:81).

More complex societies are more costly to maintain than simpler ones, requiring greater support levels per capita. As societies increase in complexity, more networks are created among individuals, more hierarchical controls are created to regulate these networks, more information is processed, there is more centralization of information flow, there is increasing need to support specialists not directly involved in resource production, and the like.

Complex societies, such as states, are not a discrete stage in cultural evolution. Each society represents a point along a continuum from least to most complex. Complex forms of human organization have emerged comparatively recently, and are an anomaly of history. Complexity and stratification are oddities when viewed from the full perspective of our history, and where present, must be constantly reinforced. Leaders, parties and governments need constantly to establish and maintain legitimacy. This effort must have a genuine material basis, which means that some level of responsiveness to a support population is necessary. Maintenance of legitimacy or investment in coercion require constant mobilization of resources. This is an unrelenting cost that any complex society must bear.

There are major differences between the current and the ancient worlds that have important implications for collapse. One of these is that the world today is full. That is to say, it is filled by complex societies; these occupy every sector of the globe, except the most desolate. This is a new factor in human history. Complex societies as a whole are a recent and unusual aspect of human life. The current situation, where all societies are so oddly constituted, is unique. It was shown earlier in this chapter that ancient collapses occurred, and could only occur, in a power vacuum, where a complex society (or cluster of peer polities) was surrounded by less complex neighborhoods. There are no power vacuums left today. Every nation is linked to, and influenced by, the major powers, and most are strongly linked with one power bloc or the other. Combine this with instant global travel, and as Paul Valery noted, ‘ nothing can ever happen again without the whole world’s taking a hand’ (1962: 115 [emphasis in original]).

Collapse today is neither an option nor an immediate threat. Any nation vulnerable to collapse will have to pursue one of three options: (1) absorption by a neighbor or some larger state; (2) economic support by a dominant power, or by an international financing agency; or (3) payment by the support population of whatever costs are needed to continue complexity, however detrimental the marginal return. A nation today can no longer unilaterally collapse, for if any national government disintegrates its population and territory will be absorbed by some other.

Although this is a recent development, it has analogies in past collapses, and these analogies give insight into current conditions. Past collapses, as discussed, occurred among two kinds of international political situations; isolated, dominant states, and clusters of peer polities. The isolated, dominant state went out with the advent of global travel and communication, and what remains now are competitive peer polities. Even if today there are only two major peers, with allies grouped into opposing blocs, the dynamics of the competitive relations are the same. Peer polities, such as post-Roman Europe, ancient Greece and Italy, Warring States China, and the Mayan cities, are characterized by competitive relations, jockeying for position, alliance formation and dissolution, territorial expansion and retrenchment, and continual investment in military advantage. An upward spiral of competitive investment develops, as

each polity continually seeks to outmaneuver its peer(s). None can dare withdraw from this spiral, without unrealistic diplomatic guarantees, for such would be only invitation to domination by another. In this sense, although industrial society (especially the United States) is sometimes likened in popular thought to ancient Rome, a closer analogy would be with the Mycenaeans or the Maya.

Peer polity systems tend to evolve toward greater complexity in a lockstep fashion as, driven by competition, each partner imitates new organizational, technological, and military features developed by its competitor(s). The marginal return on such developments declines, as each new military breakthrough is met by some counter-measure, and so brings no increased advantage or security on a lasting basis. A society trapped in a competitive peer polity system must invest more and more for no increased return, and is thereby economically weakened. And yet the option of withdrawal or collapse does not exist. So it is that collapse (from declining marginal returns) is not in the immediate future for any contemporary nation. This is not, however, due so much to anything we have accomplished as it is to the competitive spiral in which we have allowed ourselves to become trapped.

In ancient societies the solution to declining marginal returns was to capture a new energy subsidy. In economic systems activated largely by agriculture, livestock, and human labor (and ultimately by solar energy), this was accomplished by territorial expansion. Ancient Rome and the Ch'in of Warring States China adopted this course, as have countless other empire-builders. In an economy that today is activated by stored energy reserves, and especially in a world that is full, this course is not feasible (nor was it ever permanently successful). The capital and technology available must be directed instead toward some new and more abundant source of energy. Technological innovation and increasing productivity can forestall declining marginal returns only so long. A new energy subsidy will at some point be essential.

It is difficult to know whether world industrial society has yet reached the point where the marginal return for its overall pattern of investment has begun to decline. The great sociologist Pitirim Sorokin believed that Western economies had entered such a phase in the early twentieth century (1957: 530). Xenophon Zolotas, in contrast, predicts that this point will be reached soon after the year 2000 (1981: 1023). Even if the point of diminishing returns to our present form of industrialism has not yet been reached, that point will inevitably arrive. Recent history seems to indicate that we have at least reached declining returns for our reliance on fossil fuels, and possibly for some raw materials. A new energy subsidy is necessary if a declining standard of living and a future global collapse are to be averted. A more abundant form of energy might not reverse the declining marginal return on investment in complexity, but it would make it more possible to finance that investment.

In a sense the lack of a power vacuum, and the resulting competitive spiral, have given the world a respite from what otherwise might have been an earlier confrontation with collapse. Here indeed is a paradox: a disastrous condition that all decry may force us to tolerate a situation of declining marginal returns long enough to achieve a temporary solution to it. This reprieve must be used rationally to seek for and develop the new energy source(s) that will be necessary to maintain economic well-being. This research and development must be an item of the highest priority, even if, as predicted, this requires reallocation of resources from other economic sectors. Adequate funding of this effort should be included in the budget of every industrialized nation (and the results shared by all). I will not enter the political foray by suggesting whether this be funded privately or publicly, only that funded it must be.

There are then notes of optimism and pessimism in the current situation. We are in a curious position where competitive interactions force a level of investment, and a declining marginal return, that might ultimately lead to collapse except that the competitor who collapses first will simply be dominated or absorbed by the survivor. A respite from the threat of collapse might be granted thereby, although we may find that we will not like to bear its costs. If collapse is not in the immediate future, that is not to say that the industrial standard of living is also reprieved. As marginal returns decline (a process ongoing even now), up to the point where a new energy subsidy is in place, the standard of living is also reprieved. As marginal returns decline (a process ongoing even now), up to the point where a new energy subsidy is in place, the standard of living that industrial societies have enjoyed will not grow so rapidly, and for some groups and nations may remain static or decline. The political conflicts that this will cause, coupled with the increasingly easy availability of nuclear weapons, will create a dangerous world situation in the foreseeable future.

To a degree there is nothing new or radical in these remarks. Many others have voiced similar observations on the current scene, in greater detail and with greater eloquence. What has been accomplished here is to place contemporary societies in a historical perspective, and to apply a global principle that links the past to the present and the future. However much we like to think of ourselves as something special in world history, in fact industrial societies are subject to the same principles that caused earlier societies to collapse.

If civilization collapses again, it will be from failure to take advantage of the current reprieve, a reprieve paradoxically both detrimental and essential to our anticipated future.

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Theodore Roszak: Where the Wasteland Ends: Politics and Transcendence in Postindustrial Society (1972)

The Great Divide f it seems cranky to lament the expanding artificiality of our environment, the fact underlying that lament is indisputable, and it would be blindness to set its significance at less than being the greatest and most rapid cultural transition in the entire history of mankind. This is the historical great divide - in one sense, quite literally. In little more than a century, millions of human beings in Europe and America - and their number grows daily throughout the world - have undertaken to divide themselves off more completely and irremediably from the natural continuum and from all that it has to teach us of our relationship to the non human, than ever before in the human past.

It is all too easy to obscure this pre-eminent truth by conjuring up a picture of the remaining wide-open spaces - the mountain vastnesses and desert solitudes, the faraway islands and jungle thickets - and then to conclude, consolingly, that the cities will never encroach upon these remote corners of the earth. But that is wishful thinking already bellied by fact and supported only by a misconception about the way in which urban-industrialism asserts its dominance. True enough, urban sprawl may never swallow these outlying areas into its concrete and steel maw. But that is not the only way the supercity propagates its power.

Before industrialism, most cities stood apart as modest workshops or markets whose ethos was bounded by their own walls. They were an option in the world, one way of life among many possibilities. The supercity, however - or rather the artificial environment taken as a whole - stretches out tentacles of influence that reach thousands of miles beyond its already sprawling perimeters. It sucks every hinterland and wilderness into its technological metabolism. It forces rural populations off the land and replaces them with vast agra-industrial combines. Its investments and technicians muscle their way into the back of every beyond, bringing the roar of the bulldozer and oil derrick into the most uncharted quarters. It runs its conduits of transport and communication, its lines of supply and distribution through the wildest landscapes. It flushes its wastes into every river, lake and ocean, or trucks them away into desert areas. The world becomes its garbage can - including the capacious vault of the atmosphere itself; and surely outer space and the moon will in due course be enlisted for this unbecoming function, probably as the dumping ground for rocket-borne radioactive refuse.

In our time, whole lakes are dying of industrial exhaust. The seemingly isolated races of Lapland and Tierra del Fuego find their foodstuffs riddled with methyl mercury or radioactivity and must appeal to civilized societies to rescue them from their plight. The Atmospheric Sciences Research Center of Scotia, New York, reported in December 1969 that there was no longer a breath of uncontaminated air to be found anywhere in the North American hemisphere and predicted the universal use of artificial respirators throughout America within two decades. Thor Heyerdahl, sailing the Atlantic on the RA II expedition in 1970, reported finding not one oilfree stretch of water during the crossing. Jacques Piccard, exploring the depths of the seas, warned the United Nations in October 1971 that the oceans of the world would soon be incapable of sustaining aquatic life due to lead exhaust, oil dumping, and mercury pollution, with the Baltic, Adriatic, and Mediterranean seas already too far deteriorated to be saved.

But these now well-publicized forms of pollution are not the only distortive force the artificial environment exerts upon the rest of the world for the sake of sustaining its lifestyle. A single oil pipeline across the wild Alaskan tundra is enough to subordinate its entire ecology (ruinously) to urban-industrial needs. A single superhighway built from Sao Paulo to Brasilia deprives an entire rain forest of its autonomy. Already the land bordering the Trans-Amazonian Highway has been staked out for commercial and urban development; the beasts are being killed or driven off and the natives coerced into compliance with official policy by methods that include the strategic use of infectious diseases. The fact is, there remains little wilderness anywhere that does not have its resources scheduled on somebody's industrial or real estate agenda, less still that is not already piped and wired through with the city's necessities or criss-crossed by air traffic skylanes.

And then there is the tourism that goes out from the cities of the affluent societies like a non-stop attack of locusts. Whatever outright industrial pollution and development may spare, tourism - now the world's largest money-making industry - claims for its omnivorous appetite. There are few governments that have the stamina and self-respect to hold out against the brutal pressure to turn their land and folkways into a commercial fraud for the opulent

foreigners who flatter themselves that they are “seeing the world.” All the globe trotters really see, of course, (or want to see), is a bit of commercialized ethnic hokum and some make-believe wilderness. Just as the world becomes the dumping ground of the urban-industrial societies, it also becomes their amusement park. And how many are there now, even among my readers, assiduously saving up for summer safaris in Kenya or whirlwind junkets of “the enchanted Orient,” without any idea what a destructive entertainment they are planning - but of course at bargain prices?

The remnants of the natural world that survive in the experience of urban-industrial populations - like the national parks we must drive miles to see, only to find them cluttered with automobiles, beer cans, and transistor radios - are fast becoming only a different order of artificiality, islands of carefully doctored wilderness put on display for vacationers and boasting all the comforts of gracious suburban living. It is hard to imagine that within another few generations the globe will possess a single wild area that will be more than thirty minutes removed by helicopter from a television set, an air-conditioned deluxe hotel, and a Coca-Cola machine. By then, the remotest regions may well have been staked out for exotic tours whose price includes the opportunity to shoot a tiger or harpoon a whale as a souvenir of one’s rugged vacation adventure. The natives will be flown in from central casting and the local color will be under the direction of Walt Disney productions. The visitors - knowing no better - will conceive of this charade as “getting away to nature.” But in truth it will be only another, and a climactic aspect of the urban-industrial expansion.

What we have here is an exercise in arrogance that breaks with the human past as dramatically and violently as our astronauts in their space rockets break from the gravitational grip of the earth. And the destination toward which we move is already clearly before us in the image of the astronaut. Here we have man encapsulated in a wholly man-made environment, sealed up and surviving securely in a plastic womb that leaves nothing to chance or natural process. Nothing “irrational” meaning nothing man has not made, or made allowance for can intrude upon the astronaut’s life space. He interacts with the world beyond his metallic epidermis only by way of electronic equipment; even his wastes are stored up within his self-contained, mechanical envelope. As for the astronaut himself, he is almost invariably a military man. How significant it is that so much of our future, both as it appears in science fiction and as it emerges in science fact, should be dominated by soldiers - the most machine-tooled and psychically regimented breed of human being: men programmed and under control from within as from without. Can any of us even imagine a future for urban-industrial society in which the heroes and leaders - those who explore the stars and handle the crises - are not such a breed of warrior-technician?

What is there left of the human being in our militarized space programs but a small knot of neural complexity not yet simulable by electronic means, obediently serving the great technical project at hand by integrating itself totally with the apparatus surrounding it? In this form - cushioned and isolated within a prefabricated, homeostatic life space and disciplined to the demands of the mechanisms which sustain it - the astronaut perfects the artificial environment. Here is a human being who may travel anywhere and say, “I am not part of this place or that. I am autonomous. I make my own world after my own image.” He is packaged for export anywhere in the universe. But ultimately all places become the same gleaming, antiseptic, electronic, man-made place, endlessly reproduced. Ambitious “world-planners,” like the students of Buckminster Fuller, already foresee a global system of transportable geodesic domes that will provide a standardized environment in every quarter of the earth. Something of such a world is with us now in the glass-box architecture of our jet-age airports and high-rise apartments. One can traverse half the earth in passing from one such building to another, only to discover oneself in a structure indistinguishable from that which one has left. Even the piped-in music is the same.

These are momentous developments. The astronautical image of man - and it is nothing but the quintessence of urban-industrial society’s pursuit of the wholly controlled, wholly artificial environment - amounts to a spiritual revolution. This is man as he has never lived before; it draws a line through human history that almost assumes the dimensions of an evolutionary turning point. So it has been identified by Teilhard de Chardin, who has given us the concept of the “noosphere,” a level of existence that is to be permanently dominated by human intellect and planning, and to which our species must now adapt if it is to fulfill its destiny. So too, Victor Ferkiss has described technological man as a creature on the brink of an “evolutionary breakthrough.” Technology, by giving man “almost infinite power to change his world and to

change himself," has ushered in what Ferkiss calls an "existential revolution" whose spirit is summarized by the words of Emmanuel Mesthene:

"We have now, or know how to acquire, the technical capability to do very nearly anything we want. Can we transplant hearts, control personality, order the weather that suits us, travel to Mars or Venus? Of course we can, if not now or in five years or ten years, then certainly in 25 or in 50 or in 100."

The Greek tragedians would have referred to such a declaration as hubris: the overweening pride of the doomed. It remains hubris; but its moral edge becomes blunted as the sentiment descends into a journalistic cliché. Moreover, we have no Sophoclean operations analyst to give us a cost-benefit appraisal of its spiritual implications. The sensibility that accompanies technological omnipotence lacks the tragic dimension; it does not take seriously the terrible possibility that a society wielding such inordinate power may release reactive forces within the human psyche, as well as within the repressed natural environment, that will never allow it to survive for the fifty or one hundred years it needs to exploit its capabilities.

Our politics has become deeply psychological, a confrontation of sanities. But if our psychology is not itself to be debased by scientific objectification, then it must follow where liberated consciousness leads it; into the province of the dream, the myth, the visionary rapture, the sacramental sense of reality, the transcendent symbol. Psychology, we must remember, is the study of the soul, therefore the discipline closest to the religious life. An authentic psychology discards none of the insights gained from spiritual disciplines. It does not turn them into a scholarly boneyard for reductive "interpretations," or regard them as an exotic and antiquated mysticism. Rather, it works to reclaim them as the basis for a rhapsodic intellect which will be with us always as a normal part of our common life.

And suppose the reality we live by should experience such a revolution what sort of political program would follow from that?

Nothing less, I think, than that we should undertake to repeal urban-industrialism as the world's dominant style of life. We should do this, not in a spirit of grim sacrifice, but in the conviction that the reality we want most to reside in lies beyond the artificial environment. And so we should move freely and in delight toward the true postindustrialism: a world awakened from its sick infatuation with power, growth, efficiency, progress as if from a nightmare.

pp. 1420, 414

Andrew Bard Schmookler: The Parable of the Tribes: The Problem of Power in Social Evolution (1995)

The ecosystem has been changed by civilization. To be sure, the old natural structures remain recognizable on the terrestrial landscape. But with the power of civilization over nature steadily growing, the old structures are subverted and replaced at an accelerating pace.

The ancient and time-proven patterns of cooperation give way to a regime of domination. Where previously all were free though unwitting actors in a collective drama of mutual survival, with civilized man there arrived on the scene a single player to write the script for the whole. To secure a place in the old synergistic system, a life form had to serve the ecosystem as a whole. But, increasingly, the prerequisite for a continuing role in the drama of life is service to the single dominant animal. If you impinge upon the interests of man, out you go: wolves and bears and lions, who like the meat that man wants for himself, are eradicated or at best are forced to retreat to refuges. If you are useless to man, however teeming with life, you will be swept aside in favor of something that better serves the master: the magnificent forests are felled and replaced by the more paltry but more "useful" growths of man's cropland. The grains and cattle that fill men's bellies - these thrive and prosper.

Life comes to be governed by a calculus that is fundamentally corrupt. The well-being of man is what rules, regardless of how small may be the human benefit in relation to the costs in well-being to others of God's creatures. Never before has a creature had the power to arrange the pattern of life for its selfish ends, so never before has the ecosystem been corrupted. So pervasive is the assumption of the human right to selfishness in the ecosystem - might makes right - that even the arguments for human restraint tend to be couched in terms of human self-interest: natural environments have recreational value; species we extinguish might have proved later to have unforeseen usefulness to man.

There is one more case for restraint based on enlightened self-interest. Just as synergy is nature's tool for long-term viability, so also the wages of corruption are the long-run decadence and death of living systems. Man uses up the bases of his life. Look at civilization's most ancient homes: once fertile places, many of them now lie denuded of life's basic nutrients. Around the Mediterranean, across the "Fertile" Crescent, deforestation and overgrazing broke the grip by which the living system clung to the sacred soil. The spread of the deserts is accelerating. And for each bushel of corn that comes from Iowa, more than a bushel of its precious soil washes away. Man's corrupt pattern is feast and famine. In that order. The world's fisheries are overfished. The fragile forests of the tropics are recklessly harvested. Across the board, we take in for our use more than we or nature can replace. We have a strip miner's approach to our planet.

The decadence of civilization as a living system is demonstrated by the nonrecycling of its outputs as much as by the nonrenewal of its inputs. For every other living thing, its outputs function as essential inputs for others: the oxygen/carbon dioxide exchanges of plants and animals, the buildup of soil by the leaves that drop from trees and by the excrement of animals. Before civilization, life produced no toxic wastes. Now, our insecticides threaten birds and other species. Our burning of fuels may bring climatic disaster. Our output of fluorocarbons may expose us and other living things to harmful solar radiation. This generation is producing mountains of nuclear wastes that hundreds of generations to come will have to live with, and perhaps die from. And as frightening as radiation is, many warn us that we have more to fear from the countless tons of "conventional" wastes that lurk in thousands of dumpsites across the land. Out of the womb of civilization, down through countless Love Canals, issues forth death.

Civilization has shattered the intricate web that stabilizes the flows of life. Awareness of this problem has grown dramatically in just the past generation. But the direction of the biosphere's movement under the continuing impact of civilization is still toward degradation and decadence. So rapid is the growth and spread of civilization's power that the pace of death has, if anything, accelerated. All life is so interdependent that either we must stop the decline of the biosphere or fall with it, and we must be quick about it. Either quick, or dead.

The intersocietal system of civilization, as we have seen in Part I, is an arena for unregulated conflict. Civilization created conflict by opening for each civilized society possibilities that fostered conflicts of interest among societies, and by creating an anarchic situation that

mitigated against synergistic action on the basis of interests shared by those societies. The consequent ceaseless struggle for power has been unsynergistic in several ways.

First, conflict gains its role in the intersocietal system even against the wishes of mankind. The parable of the tribes shows how even if all or almost all wish to live in peace and safety the structure of the intersocietal system prevents this optimal condition from prevailing. As the general historic plague of war comes to mankind uninvited, so too there occur specific wars no one wanted and other wars that whether wanted or not, benefit no one. As I write, a war is ongoing between Iraq and Iran of which it has been said, “It is a war both sides are losing.”

Second, even when some benefit from the conflict, the struggle for power is almost invariably a minus-sum game, one in which the net gains of the winners are more than offset by the net losses of the losers. War is costly to wage, and the destruction wrought by it leaves the whole less than it was at the outset. But beyond those factors is a more important one akin to the economic idea of diminishing marginal utility: in most human affairs the movement from some to much gives less benefit than the movement from none to some. It follows that the movement from some to none does more harm than the movement from some to much does good. Thus the conqueror who now governs two lands may be better off, but his gain is not commensurate with the loss of the vanquished who is dispossessed. The profit of gaining a slave is far less than the debit of losing one’s liberty. Yet, the history of civilization is full of just such exchanges imposed by uncontrolled force. The pursuit of such conflict may be “rational” (in, again, the economic sense of the pursuit of self-interest) from the point of view of the stronger party who stands to gain, but it is irrational and unsynergistic from the point of view of the system as a whole. In natural systems, such choices do not arise, for the power to injure the whole for the sake of oneself is granted no one. The unprecedented anarchy of civilization’s intersocietal system breaks down the order of synergy, making room for the corrupt regime of power.

Third, the immediate costs of the corrupt rule of power are compounded by the long-term social evolutionary costs. Out of the strife comes a selective process leading people along a path different from what they would have chosen. The absence of an overarching synergy to assure that intersocietal interactions serve the common interests has condemned mankind to domination by ever-escalating power systems largely indifferent to the well-being of human beings or other living creatures.

This unsynergistic determination of our social evolutionary destiny clearly endangers the long-term viability of the system. Never before has a living creature had in its repertoire of possible actions the virtual destruction of itself and other life on earth. Always, there might have streamed out of the indifferent heavens some giant meteor or comet or asteroid to burst the thin film of life’s bubble on this planet. But living things, having been designed with no other options, always served life. For the first time in more than three billion years of life, a living system is relentlessly creating the means not of self-preservation, but of self-destruction.

pp. 224227

Peter Sloterdijk: Critique of Cynical Reason (1987)

Cynicism: The Twilight of False Consciousness

And indeed no longer was anyone to be seen who stood behind everything. Everything turned continually about itself. Interests changed from hour to hour. Nowhere was there a goal anymore. The leaders lost their heads. They were drained to the dregs and calcified. Everyone in the land began to notice that things didn't work anymore. Postponing the collapse left one path open. Franz Jung, Die Eroberung der Maschinen (1921) he discontent in our culture has assumed a new quality: It appears as a universal, diffuse cynicism. The traditional critique of ideology stands at a loss before this cynicism. It does not know what button to push in this cynically keen consciousness to get enlightenment going. Modern cynicism presents itself as that state of consciousness that follows after naive ideologies and their enlightenment. In it, the obvious exhaustion of ideology critique has its real ground. This critique has remained more naive than the consciousness it wanted to expose; in its well-mannered rationality, it did not keep up with the twists and turns of modern consciousness to a cunning multiple realism. The formal sequence of false consciousness up to now - lies, errors, ideology - is incomplete; the current mentality requires the addition of a fourth structure: the phenomenon of cynicism. To speak of cynicism means trying to enter the old building of ideology critique through a new entrance.

It violates normal usage to describe cynicism as a universal and diffuse phenomenon; as it is commonly conceived, cynicism is not diffuse but striking, not universal but peripheral and highly individual. The unusual epithets describe something of its new manifestation, which renders it both explosive and unassailable.

The fertile ground for cynicism in modern times is to be found not only in urban culture but also in the courtly sphere. Both are dies of pernicious realism through which human beings learn the crooked smile of open immorality. Here, as there, a sophisticated knowledge accumulates in informed, intelligent minds, a knowledge that moves elegantly back and forth between naked facts and conventional facades. From the very bottom, from the declassed, urban intelligentsia, and from the very top, from the summits of statesmanly consciousness, signals penetrate serious thinking, signals that provide evidence of a radical, ironic treatment (Ironisierung) of ethics and of social conventions, as if universal laws existed only for the stupid, while that fatally clever smile plays on the lips of those in the know. More precisely, it is the powerful who smile this way, while the cynical plebeians let out a satirical laugh. In the great hall of cynical knowledge the extremes meet:

Eulenspiegel meets Richelieu; Machiavelli meets Rameau's nephew; the loud Condottieri of the Renaissance meet the elegant cynics of the rococo; unscrupulous entrepreneurs meet disillusioned outsiders; and jaded systems strategists meet conscientious objectors without ideals.

Since bourgeois society began to build a bridge between the knowledge of those at the very top and those at the very bottom and announced its ambition to ground its worldview completely on realism, the extremes have dissolved into each other. Today the cynic appears as a mass figure: an average social character in the upper echelons of the elevated superstructure. It is a mass figure not only because advanced industrial civilization produces the bitter loner as a mass phenomenon. Rather, the cities themselves have become diffuse clumps whose power to create generally accepted public characters has been lost. The pressure toward individualization has lessened in the modern urban and media climate. Thus modern cynics - and there have been mass numbers of them in Germany, especially since the First World War - are no longer outsiders. But less than ever do they appear as a tangibly developed type. Modern mass cynics lose their individual sting and refrain from the risk of letting themselves be put on display. They have long since ceased to expose themselves as eccentrics to the attention and mockery of others. The person with the clear, "evil gaze" has disappeared into the crowd; anonymity now becomes the domain for cynical deviation. Modern cynics are integrated, asocial characters who, on the score of subliminal illusionlessness, are a match for any hippie. They do not see their clear, evil gaze as a personal defect or an amoral quirk that needs to be privately justified.

Instinctively, they no longer understand their way of existing as something that has to do with being evil, but as participation in a collective, realistically attuned way of seeing things. It is the universally widespread way in which enlightened people see to it that they are not taken for

suckers. There even seems to be something healthy in this attitude, which, after all, the will to self-preservation generally supports. It is the stance of people who realize that the times of naiveté are gone.

Psychologically, present-day cynics can be understood as borderline melancholics, who can keep their symptoms of depression under control and can remain more or less able to work. Indeed, this is the essential point in modern cynicism; the ability of its bearers to work - in spite of anything that might happen, and especially, after anything that might happen. The key social positions in boards, parliaments, commissions, executive councils, publishing companies, practices, faculties, and lawyers' and editors' offices have long since become a part of this diffuse cynicism. A certain chic bitterness provides an undertone to its activity. For cynics are not dumb, and every now and then they certainly see the nothingness to which everything leads. Their psychic (seelisch) apparatus has become elastic enough to incorporate as a survival factor a permanent doubt about their own activities. They know what they are doing, but they do it because, in the short run, the force of circumstances and the instinct for self-preservation are speaking the same language, and they are telling them that it has to be so.

Others would do it anyway, perhaps worse. Thus, the new, integrated cynicism even has the understandable feeling about itself of being a victim and of making sacrifices. Behind the capable, collaborative, hard facade, it covers up a mass of offensive unhappiness and the need to cry. In this, there is something of the mourning for a "lost innocence," of the mourning for better knowledge, against which all action and labor are directed.

pp. 35

Fredric Jameson: The Seeds of Time (1994)

The paradox from which we must set forth is the equivalence between an unparalleled rate of change on all the levels of social life and an unparalleled standardization of everything - feelings along with consumer goods, language along with built space - that would seem incompatible with just such mutability. It is a paradox that can still be conceptualized, but in inverse ratios: that of modularity, for example, where intensified change is enabled by standardization itself, where prefabricated modules, everywhere from the media to a henceforth standardized private life, from commodified nature to uniformity of equipment, allow miraculous rebuildings to succeed each other at will, as in fractal video. The module would then constitute the new form of the object (the new result of reification) in an informational universe: that Kantian point in which raw material is suddenly organized by categories into an appropriate unit.

But the paradox can also incite us to rethink our conception of change itself. If absolute change in our society is best represented by the rapid turnover in storefronts, prompting the philosophical question as to what has really changed when video stores are replaced by T-shirt shops, then Barthe's structural formulation comes to have much to recommend it, namely, that it is crucial to distinguish between rhythms of change inherent to the system and programmed by it, and a change that replaces one entire system by another one altogether. But that is a point of view that revives paradoxes of Zeno's sort, which derive from the Parmenidean conception of Being itself, which, as it is by definition, cannot be thought of as even momentarily becoming, let alone failing to be for the slightest instant.

The "solution" to this particular paradox lies of course in the realization (strongly insisted on by Althusser and his disciples) that each system - better still, each "mode of production" - produces a temporality that is specific to it: it is only if we adopt a Kantian and ahistorical view of time as some absolute and empty category that the peculiarly repetitive temporality of our own system can become an object of puzzlement and lead to the reformulation of these old logical and ontological paradoxes.

Yet it may not be without its therapeutic effects to continue for one long moment to be mesmerized by the vision attributed to Parmenides, which however little it holds for nature might well be thought to capture a certain truth of our social and historical moment: a gleaming science-fictional stasis in which appearances (simulacra) arise and decay ceaselessly, without the momentous stasis of everything that is flickering for the briefest of instants or even momentarily wavering in its ontological prestige.

Here, it is as if the logic of fashion had, accompanying the multifarious penetration of its omnipresent images, begun to bind and identify itself with the social and psychic fabric in some ultimately inextricable way, which tends to make it over into the very logic of our system as a whole. The experience and the value of perpetual change thereby comes to govern language and feelings, fully as much as the buildings and the garments of this particular society, to the point at which even the relative meaning allowed by uneven development (or "nonsynchronous synchronicity") is no longer comprehensible, and the supreme value of the New and of innovation, as both modernism and modernization grasped it, fades away against a steady stream of momentum and variation that at some outer limit seems stable and motionless.

What then dawns is the realization that no society has ever been so standardized as this one, and that the stream of human, social, and historical temporality has never flowed quite so homogeneously. Even the great boredom or ennui of classical modernism required some vantage point or fantasy subject position outside the system; yet our seasons are of the post-natural and postastronomical television or media variety, triumphantly artificial by way of the power of their National Geographic or Weather Channel images:

so that their great rotations - in sports, new model cars, fashion, television, the school year or rentrée, etc. stimulate formerly natural rhythms for commercial convenience and reinvent such archaic categories as the week, the month, the year imperceptibly, without any of the freshness and violence of, say, the innovations of the French revolutionary calendar.

What we now begin to feel, therefore - and what begins to emerge as some deeper and more fundamental constitution of postmodernity itself, at least in its temporal dimension - is that henceforth, where everything now submits to the perpetual change of fashion and media image, nothing can change any longer. This is the sense of the revival of that "end of History"

Alexandre Kojéve thought he could find in Hegel and Marx, and which he took to mean some ultimate achievement of democratic equality (and the value equivalence of individual economic and juridical subjects) in both American capitalism and Soviet communism, only later identifying a significant variant of it in what he called Japanese “snobisme,” but that we can today identify as postmodernity itself (the free play of masks and roles without content or substance). In another sense, of course, this is simply the old “end of ideology” with a vengeance, and cynically plays on the waning of collective hope in a particularly conservative market climate. But the end of History is also the final form of the temporal paradoxes we have tried to dramatize here: namely, that a rhetoric of absolute change (or “permanent revolution” in some trendy and meretricious new sense), is, for the postmodern, no more satisfactory (but not less so) than the language of absolute identity and unchanging standardization cooked up by the great corporations, whose concept of innovation is best illustrated by the neologism and the logo and their equivalents in the realm of built space, “lifestyle,” corporate culture, and psychic programming. The persistence of the Same through absolute Difference - the same street with different buildings, the same culture through momentous new sheddings of skin - discredits change, since henceforth the only conceivable radical change would consist in putting an end to change itself. But here the antinomy really does result in the blocking or paralysis of thought, since the impossibility of thinking another system except by way of the cancellation of this one ends up discrediting the Utopian imagination itself, which is fantasized, as we shall see later, as the loss of everything we know experientially, from our libidinal investments to our psychic habits, and in particular the artificial excitements of consumption and fashion. (pp. 1519)

labor of ludd: “The Medium Is the Medium” (1998)

There is no equal

Aborigines anticipate apocalypse . . .agriculture aggrandizes arable areas and allots acreage, assuming acquisition and alienation . . . arithmetic adds another abstract axis . . . authority appreciates art - already accepting abstractions’ ascendancy - as authenticating appearances . . . by banishing bounty, bureaucracy’s blackmail breeds bitterness between brothers behind benign banality; business believes boundless buying brings back bliss . . . commodity circulation controls current conditions completely, calculating career compulsions can continue consumption, constantly creating cruel contradictions colonized consciousness conveniently corrects . . . dreams distill dormant desires, darkly divining domestication’s demise . . . disrupting digital discourse dialectically demonstrates dash, dooming domination’s designer discipline . . . duplicity defeats double-driveling duplication . . . equations empower everyday economics, essentially encoding estranged enterprise; elegant ecstasy ebbs . . . “environment” equals earth? . . . formula for fusing formally fragments freed from function’s foundation: fully further facsimiles’ fulfillment; feature “forbidden” fantasies fully filmed; finally, fabricate fetishes fascinating feelings for fashion . . . grammar guards God’s grave . . . hell, having had heaven’s hallucinatory holiday haunting hearts held history’s hostage has hardly helped humanist hacks humble humanity’s heretical haughtiness . . . images interpose intermediating influences inside interests; insubordination is interested in insinuating illusion into identifying itself . . . insolence insists its intelligence is inimitably incendiary, illuminating irony’s impotence . . . jaded judges jeopardize justice . . . know krime kan konjure komedy kontaining kommunist kontent . . . lush laughing lust launches life; lavishly littered likenesses, like, lessen life’s lure . . . language licenses lucidity logically; licentious lucidity loosens letters’ lock laughingly, luminously liquidating leaden logic . . . languorous looting lampoons leisure . . . modestly managing mas(s) o’ (s)chism(s) mutilates multitudes . . . matchless money makes mastery meaningless: modern mutiny must make meaning menace mediation: mimicry means mirror’s measure matched . . . nowadays nihilism’s nothing new . . . our offense? outwitting our overseers’ overly optimistic overthrow of our original obliquity . . . private property produces parity - parity portends production’s ponderous planet-punishing progress piss-pure puns parody preyfully . . . quality’s quintessence quickens . . . relentlessly replicating reality ripens revolts rigorously resisting representations’ recuperations; rewinding reality readies really radical reversals . . . school separates subjects, subjecting subjectivity so separations seem sane . . . scholastic scavengers scrutinize signs showing signification scarcely sustains synthetic scarcity . . . theory that threatens to transform the totality transgresses tedium; tongue-twisters tend to turn topsy-turvy the tyranny that things talking to themselves typifies . . . the training that teaches those throngs to trade themselves to time trembles . . . ultimately, understanding urban upsurges’ unconscious urges uncovers undercurrents undermining uncannily utility’s ugly unwitting velocity . . . videos vacuous veneer veils vast vulgarities: vanishing vitality, vehement veracity, vapid vanity . . . we wage war with words, wither wage work’s wearying world whenever we wield wit which wickedly widens wild wholeness while working wonders . . . xorcising xiled xistence’s xtraordinary xhaustion xposes xchange, . . . your yoke yields yet you yawn . . . z z z z z.

from Dan Todd poster, Tucson, 1998

Des Réfractaires: “How Nice to Be Civilized!” (1993)

Assassinations, massacres, rape, torture: these crimes committed on the soil of what was once Yugoslavia are not the acts of uncontrollable savages; of educationless brutes.

No doubt as children they respected the family order; are now more or less faithful followers of religions; earnest sports spectators; content with television. In a word, civilized folks; normal people doing what society expects them to!

Each crime demonstrates the success of diverse processes of domestication which have come to be grouped under the heading of Civilization.

The killers, rapists and perpetrators of massacres have exceptionally well internalized today’s world’s fundamental logic: to survive, other people must be destroyed! This mutual mangling takes different forms, such as economic competition or war. But the result is always the same: some must be trampled in order to give others the impression that they are living more and better. Being civilized signifies not taking your own life and those of others into consideration. It means letting your life be used, exploited and dominated by the always-superior interests of the collectivity where fate decreed that you would be born and live your life. And all for the financial, etc., gain of the authorities of the collectivity in question. In exchange for this submission one is granted the possibility of being accepted as a human being.

Being civilized, as well, signifies sacrificing your life, and those of others, when those in power attempt to solve their management problems with wars.

Aside from a variety of benefits they offer, wars represent a very efficient means of directing feelings of frustration against people who, designated as prey, can then be oppressed, humiliated and killed without qualms. Those who suffer, as with those who take pleasure in making others suffer, become nothing more than instruments of the conditions of social existence, conditions where lives are only important in relation to the use that can be made of them.

Following the collapse and decomposition of the Eastern Bloc, various local and international gangsters have slots to fill, markets to conquer and energies to channel through the formation of new States.

To help slice up the pie, local political gangs have deftly played the religious and nationalist cards. And if these cards work effectively, unfortunately, it is because, for a portion of the population, this collapse and decomposition have not been perceived as openings towards increased freedom. On the contrary, people have experienced an immense emptiness, one that has been alleviated with nationalist and religious alienations which are often decked out in a tawdry grab-bag of local history and culture. Instead of attempting to understand and attack the real causes of our material and psychological misery, too often people are thrown into a state of disarray. In response to this disarray identities are presented as lost values to be recaptured, whereas these values are simply the ideological cement which is the prerequisite to founding and developing State entities propped up by alliances between local and world powers.

Nor, in a climate of generalized terror, is there any hesitation to accomplish this by displacing populations and practicing ethnic cleansing in order to redistribute land. In this sense, don’t the peace plan concocted in Geneva and hypothetical military intervention rubberstamp the UN’s recognition of the dismemberment of the territory of former Yugoslavia? And if this is to be the price of pacification, everyone just closes their eyes to the cortege of horrors which is integral to every war.

The humanitarian organizations, cynically baptized non-governmental, present the dismal paradox of inciting pity and indignation while at the same time impeding the possibility of spontaneous participation from which true human solidarity could be born.

Today humanitarianism is a true lobby in a financial, human and media sense. But beyond generating money, humanitarianism carries out an educational task, channeling emotions and arousing feelings of indignation on a specific and regular basis - paving the way to military intervention in humanitarian wars which the State undertakes to supposedly respond to pressure from a public indignant about the very real massacre that they are powerlessly witnessing. This type of media treatment’s only goal is to convince people that alone, by themselves, nothing can be done; the State is in a position to come to the rescue and will watch out for their political and strategic interests.

Everything is peachy because everyone consoles themselves with the thought that peace and democracy are a privilege - the proof being that elsewhere, over there, all is war and barbarism.

Denouncing the horrors, collecting accounts from the local population, exhorting the government to intervene, the media have the starring role in this affair. Real recruiting sergeants! As to be expected, the media have carefully edited out any information about those in ex-Yugoslavia who oppose the war, carefully concealing information about the 1992 massacres in Zagreb and Sarajevo which put the finishing touches on repressing the movements against the war. These horrors are necessary in order to lay the basis for the right to intervene, to invent humanitarian wars and to create tribunals to judge the vanquished. The “New World Order” which is coming into being is cutting its teeth on small nation-State wars; it provides the arms, then comes to the rescue, basing its activities in each case on a flood of horrifying images!

Thus exalting ethnic, national and religious identities goes hand in hand with gang warfare to constitute a new hierarchy of Godfathers.

In response to the growth of ghettos - those artificial separations and false communities which allow the world of money and domination to thrive on human life - we, as people who are refractory to the world around us, would like to affirm our community of struggle and aspirations with those who are refusing the war in ex-Yugoslavia, those who see themselves above all as “human beings who want to live” and not cannon fodder.

We are refractory to all that is the glory of civilization. We want to live human relations that would no longer be based on appropriation, competition and hierarchy, and would thus be relations in which individuals would no longer be obliged to treat themselves a priori as adversaries and enemies.

in Anarchy, Summer 1993, pp. 67

David Watson: “Civilization in Bulk” (1991)

Having had the privilege of living for a time among stone age peoples of Brazil, a very civilized European of considerable erudition wrote afterwards, “Civilization is no longer a fragile flower, to be carefully preserved and reared with great difficulty here and there in sheltered corners. All that is over: humanity has taken to monoculture, once and for all, and is preparing to produce civilization in bulk, as if it were sugar-beet. The same dish will be served to us every day.”

Those words were written in 1955. Now that civilization is engulfing the entire planet, the image of the fragile flower has largely wilted. Some of civilization’s inmates are remembering that the image was always a lie; other ways of seeing the world are being rediscovered. Counter-traditions are being reexamined, escape routes devised, weapons fashioned. To put it another way, a spectre haunts the heavy equipment as it chugs deeper into the morass it has made: the spectre of the primal world.

Devising escapes and weapons is no simple task:

false starts and poor materials. The old paths are paved and the materials that come from the enemy’s arsenal tend to explode in our hands. Memory and desire have been suppressed and deformed; we have all been inculcated in the Official History. Its name is Progress, and the Dream of Progress continues to fuel global civilization’s expansion everywhere, converting human beings into mechanized, self-obliterating puppets, nature into dead statuary.

The Official History can be found in every child’s official history text: Before the genesis (which is to say, before civilization), there was nothing but a vast, oceanic chaos, dark and terrible, brutish and nomadic, a bloody struggle for existence. Eventually, through great effort by a handful of men, some anonymous, some celebrated, humanity emerged from the slime, from trees, caves, tents and endless wanderings in a sparse and perilous desert to accomplish fantastic improvements in life. Such improvements came through mastery of animals, plants and minerals; the exploitation of hitherto neglected Resources; the fineries of high culture and religion; and the miracles of technics in the service of centralized authority.

This awe-inspiring panoply of marvels took shape under the aegis of the city-state and behind its fortified walls. Through millennia, civilization struggled to survive amid a storm of barbarism, resisting being swallowed by the howling wilderness. Then another “Great Leap Forward” occurred among certain elect and anointed kingdoms of what came to be called “the West,” and the modern world was born: the enlightenment of scientific reason ushered in exploration and discovery of the wilderness, internal (psychic) and external (geographic). In the kingdom’s official murals, the Discoverers appear at one end, standing proudly on their ships, telescopes and sextants in their hands; at the other end waits the world, a sleeping beauty ready to awake and join her powerful husband in the marriage bed of nature and reason.

Finally come the offspring of this revolution:

invention, mechanization, industrialization, and ultimately scientific, social and political maturity, a mass democratic society and mass-produced abundance. Certainly, a few bugs remain to be worked out - ubiquitous contamination, runaway technology, starvation and war (mostly at the uncivilized “peripheries”), but civilization cherishes its challenges, and expects all such aberrations to be brought under control, rationalized through technique, redesigned to “serve human needs,” forever and ever, amen. History is a gleaming locomotive running on rails - albeit around precarious curves and through some foreboding tunnels - to the Promised Land. And whatever the dangers, there can be no turning back.

A False Turn

But now that several generations have been raised on monoculture’s gruel, civilization is coming to be regarded not as a promise yet to be fulfilled so much as a maladaption of the species, a false turn or a kind of fever threatening the planetary web of life. As one of History’s gentle rebels once remarked, “We do not ride upon the railroad; it rides upon us.” The current crisis, occurring on every level, from the ecospheric to the social to the personal, has become too manifest, too grievous, to ignore. The spectre haunting modern civilization, once only a

sense of loss, now has open partisans who have undertaken the theoretical and practical critique of civilization.

So we begin by reexamining our list of chapters not from the point of view of the conquerors but the conquered: the slaves crushed under temple construction sites or gassed in the trenches, the dredged and shackled rivers, the flattened forests, the beings pinned to laboratory tables. What voice can better speak for them than the primal? Such a critique of "the modern world through Pleistocene eyes," such a "geological kind of perspective," as the indigenous authors of the 1977 Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) document, A Basic Call to Consciousness, put it, immediately explodes the conquerors Big Lie about "underdevelopment" and the "brutality" of primal society, their vilification of prehistory.

The lie has most recently been eroded not only by greater access to the views of primal peoples and their native descendants who are presently fighting for survival, but by a more critical, non-eurocentric anthropology willing to challenge its own history, premises and privilege. Primal society, with its myriad variations, is the common heritage of all peoples. From it, we can infer how human beings lived some 99 percent of our existence as a species. (And even a large part of that last one percent consists of the experience of tribal and other vernacular communities that resist conquest and control in creative, if idiosyncratic ways.)

Looking with new/old eyes on the primal world, we see a web of autonomous societies, splendidly diverse but sharing certain characteristics. Primal society has been called "the original affluent society," affluent because its needs are few, all its desires are easily met. Its tool kit is elegant and lightweight, its outlook linguistically complex and conceptually profound yet simple and accessible to all. Its culture is expansive and ecstatic. It is propertyless and communal, egalitarian and cooperative. Like nature, it is essentially leaderless: neither patriarchal nor matriarchal, it is anarchic, which is to say that no archon or ruler has built and occupied center stage. It is, rather, an organic constellation of persons, each unique.

A Society Free of Work

It is also a society free of work; it has no economy or production per se, except for gift exchange and a kind of ritual play that also happen to create subsistence (though it is a society capable of experiencing occasional hunger without losing its spiritual bearings, even sometimes choosing hunger to enhance interrelatedness, to play or to see visions). The Haudenosaunee, for example, write that "[we] do not have specific economic institutions, nor do we have specifically distinct political institutions." Furthermore, the subsistence activities of Haudenosaunee society, "by our cultural definition, [are] not an economy at all."

Hence, primal society's plenitude resides in its many symbolic, personal, and natural relationships, not in artifacts. It is a dancing society, a singing society, a celebrating society, a dreaming society. Its philosophy and practice of what is called animisma mythopoetic articulation of the organic unity of life discovered only recently by the West's ecologists - protects the land by treating its multiplicity of forms as sacred beings, each with its own integrity and subjectivity. Primal society affirms community with all of the natural and social world.

Somehow this primal world, a world (as Lewis Mumford has observed) more or less corresponding to the ancient vision of the Golden Age, unravels as the institutions of kingship and class society emerge. How it happened remains unclear to us today. Perhaps we will never fully understand the mystery of that original mutation from egalitarian to state society. Certainly, no standard explanations are adequate. "That radical discontinuity," in the words of Pierre Clastres, "that mysterious emergence - irreversible, fatal to primitive societies - of the thing we know by the name of the State," how does it occur?

Primal society maintained its equilibrium and its egalitarianism because it refused power, refused property. Kingship could not have emerged from the chief because the chief had no power over others. Clastres insists:

"Primitive society is the place where separate power is refused, because the society itself, and not the chief, is the real locus of power."

It is possible that we could approach this dissolution of original community appropriately only by way of mythic language like the Old Ones would have used. After all, only a poetic story could vividly express such a tragic loss of equilibrium. The latent potentiality for power and

technique to emerge as separate domains had been previously kept at bay by the gift cycle, “techniques of the sacred” and the high level of individuation of society’s members.

Primal peoples, according to Clastres, “had a very early premonition that power’s transcendence conceals a mortal risk for the group, that the principle of an authority which is external and the creator of its own legality is a challenge to culture itself. It is the intuition of this threat that determined the depth of their political philosophy. For, on discovering the great affinity of power and nature, as the twofold limitation on the domain of culture, Indian societies were able to create a means for neutralizing the virulence of political authority.”

This, in effect, is the same process by which primal peoples neutralized the potential virulence of technique: they minimized the relative weight of instrumental or practical techniques and expanded the importance of techniques of seeing: ecstatic techniques. The shaman is, in Jerome Rotherberg’s words, a “technician” of ecstasy, a “protopoet” whose “technique hinges on the creation of special linguistic circumstances, i.e., of song and invocation.” Technology, like power, is in such a way refused by the dynamic of primal social relations. But when technique and power emerge as separate functions rather than as strands inextricably woven into the fabric of society, everything starts to come apart. “The unintended excressence that grows out of human communities and then liquidates them,” as Fredy Perlman called it, makes its appearance. A sorcery run amok, a golem-like thingness that outlives its fabricators: somehow the gift cycle is ruptured; the hoop, the circle, broken.

The community, as Clastres puts it, “has ceased to exorcise the thing that will be its ruin: power and respect for power.” A kind of revolution, or counter-revolution, takes place: “When, in primitive society, the economic dynamic lends itself to definition as a distinct and autonomous domain, when the activity of production becomes alienated, accountable labor, levied by men who will enjoy the fruits of that labor, what has come to pass is that society has been divided into rulers and ruled, masters and subjects. The political relation of power precedes and founds the economic relation of exploitation. Alienation is political before it is economic; power precedes labor; the economic derives from the political; the emergence of the State determines the advent of classes.”

The emergence of authority, production and technology are all moments within the same process. Previously, power resided in no separate sphere, but rather within the circle - a circle that included the human community and nature (nonhuman kin). “Production” and the “economic” were undivided as well; they were embedded in the circle through gift sharing which transcends and neutralizes the artifactuality or “thingness” of the objects passing from person to person. (Animals, plants and natural objects being persons, even kin, subsistence is therefore neither work nor production, but rather gift, drama, reverence, reverie.) Technique also had to be embedded in relations between kin, and thus open, participatory, and accessible to all; or it was entirely personal, singular, visionary, unique and untransferable.

Equilibrium Exploded

The “great affinity of power and nature,” as Clastres puts it, explains the deep cleft between them when power divides and polarizes the community. For the primal community, to follow Mircea Eliade’s reasoning, “The world is at once ‘open’ and mysterious. ‘Nature’ at once unveils and ‘camouflages’ the ‘supernatural’ [which] constitutes the basic and unfathomable mystery of the World.” Mythic consciousness apprehends and intervenes in the world, participates in it, but this does not necessitate a relation of domination; it “does not mean that one has transformed [cosmic realities] into ‘objects of knowledge.’ These realities still keep their original ontological condition.”

The trauma of disequilibrium exploded what contemporary pagan feminists have called “power within” and generated “power over.” What were once mutualities became hierarchies. In this transformation, gift exchange disappears; gift exchange with nature disappears with it. What was shared is now hoarded: the mystery to which one once surrendered now becomes a territory to be conquered. All stories of the origins become histories of the origins of the Master. The origin of the World is retold as the origin of the State.

Woman, who through the birth process exemplifies all of nature and who maintains life processes through her daily activities of nurturance of plants, animals and children, is suppressed by the new transformer-hero. Male power, attempting to rival the fecundity of woman, simulates birth and nature’s fecundity through the manufacture of artifacts and

monuments. The womb - a primordial container, a basket or bowl - is reconstituted by power into the city walls.

“Thus,” as Frederick W. Turner puts it in Beyond Geography: The Western Spirit Against the Wilderness, the “rise to civilization’ might be seen not so much as the triumph of a progressive portion of the race over its lowly, nature-bound origins as a severe, aggressive volte-face against all unimproved nature, the echoes of which would still be sounding millennia later when civilized men once again encountered the challenges of the wilderness beyond their city walls.”

No explanation and no speculation can encompass the series of events that burst community and generated class society and the state. But the result is relatively clear: the institutionalization of hierarchic elites and the drudgery of the dispossessed to support them, monoculture to feed their armed gangs, the organization of society into work battalions, hoarding, taxation and economic relations, and the reduction of the organic community to lifeless resources to be mined and manipulated by the archon and his institutions.

The “chief features” of this new state society, writes Mumford, “constant in varying proportions throughout history, are the centralization of political power, the separation of classes, the lifetime division of labor, the mechanization of production, the magnification of military power, the economic exploitation of the weak, and the universal introduction of slavery and forced labor for both industrial and military purposes.” In other words, a megamachine made up of two major arms, a labor machine and a military machine.

The crystallization of a fluid, organic community into a pseudo-community, a giant machine, was in
fact the first machine, the standard definition of which, Mumford notes, is “a combination of resistant parts, each specialized in function, operating under human control, to utilize energy and perform work.” Thus, he argues, “The two poles of civilization then, are mechanically-organized work and mechanically-organized destruction and extermination. Roughly the same forces and the same methods of operation [are] applicable to both areas.” In Mumford’s view, the greatest legacy of this system has been “the myth of the machine” - the belief that it is both irresistible and ultimately beneficial. This mechanization of human beings, he writes, “had long preceded the mechanization of their working instruments. But once conceived, this new mechanism spread rapidly, not just by being imitated in self-defense, but by being forcefully imposed.”

One can see the differences here between the kind of technics embedded in an egalitarian society and technics-as-power or technology. As Mumford argues, people “of ordinary capacity, relying on muscle power and traditional skills alone, were capable of performing a wide variety of tasks, including pottery and manufacture and weaving, without any external direction or scientific guidance, beyond that available in the tradition of the local community. Not so with the megamachine. Only kings, aided by the discipline of astronomical science and supported by the sanctions of religion, had the capacity of assembling and directing the megamachine. This was an invisible structure composed of living, but rigid, human parts, each assigned to his special office, role, and task, to make possible the immense work-output and grand designs of this great collective organization.”

Civilization as Gulag

In his intuitive history of the megamachine, Fredy Perlman describes how a Sumerian “Ensi” or overseer, lacking the rationalizations of the ideology of Progress which are routinely used to vaccinate us against our wildness, might see the newly issued colossus:

“He might think of it as a worm, a giant worm, not a living worm but a carcass of a worm, a monstrous cadaver, its body consisting of numerous segments, its skin pimpled with spears and wheels and other technological implements. He knows from his own experience that the entire carcass is brought to artificial life by the motions of the human beings trapped inside, the zeks who operate the springs and wheels, just as he knows that the cadaverous head is operated by a mere zek, the head zek.”

It is no accident that Fredy chose the word zek, a word meaning gulag prisoner that he found in Solzhenitsyn’s work. It was not only to emphasize that civilization has been a labor camp from its origins, but to illuminate the parallels between the ancient embryonic forms and the modern global work machine presently suffocating the earth. While the differences in

magnitude and historical development are great enough to account for significant contrasts, essential elements shared by both systems - elements outlined above - position both civilizations in a polarity with primal community. At one extreme stands organic community: an organism, in the form of a circle, a web woven into the fabric of nature. At the other is civilization: no longer an organism but organic fragments reconstituted as a machine, an organization; no longer a circle but a rigid pyramid of crushing hierarchies; not a web but a grid expanding the territory of the inorganic.

According to official history, this grid is the natural outcome of an inevitable evolution. Thus natural history is not a multiverse of potentialities but rather a linear progression from Prometheus' theft of fire to the International Monetary Fund. A million and more years of species life experienced in organic communities are dismissed as a kind of waiting period in anticipation of the few thousand years of imperial grandeur to follow. The remaining primal societies, even now being dragged by the hair into civilization's orbit along its blood-drenched frontier, are dismissed as living fossils ("lacking in evolutionary promise," as one philosopher characterized them), awaiting their glorious inscription into the wondrous machine.

Thus, as Fredy Perlman argued, imperialism is far from being the last stage of civilization but is embedded in the earliest stages of the state and class society. So there is always a brutal frontier where there is empire and always empire where there is civilization. The instability and rapidity of change as well as the violence and destructiveness of the change both belie empire's claim to natural legitimacy, suggesting once more an evolutionary wrong turn, a profoundly widening disequilibrium.

The frontier expands along two intersecting axes, centrifugal and centripetal. In the words of Stanley Diamond, "Civilization originates in conquest abroad and repression at home. Each is an aspect of the other." Thus outwardly, empire is expressed geographically (northern Canada, Malaysia, the Amazon, etc.; the ocean bottoms, even outer space) and biospherically (disruption of weather and climate, vast chemical experiments on the air and water, elimination and simplification of ecosystems, genetic manipulation).

But the process is replicated internally on the human spirit: every zek finds an empire in miniature "wired" to the very nervous system.

So, too, is repression naturalized, the permanent crisis in character and the authoritarian plague legitimated. It starts with frightened obedience to the archon or patriarch, then moves by way of projection to a violent, numbed refusal of the living subjectivity and integrity of the other - whether found in nature, in woman, or in conquered peoples.

At one end of the hierarchic pyramid stands unmitigated power; at the other, submission mingles with isolation, fragmentation and rage. All is justified, by the ideology of Progress - conquest and subjugation of peoples, ruin of lands and sacrifice zones for the empire, self-repression, mass addiction to imperial spoils, the materialization of culture. Ideology keeps the work and war machines operating.

Ultimately, this vortex brings about the complete objectification of nature. Every relationship is increasingly instrumentalized and technicized. Mechanization and industrialization have rapidly transformed the planet, exploding ecosystems and human communities with monoculture, industrial degradation and mass markets. The world now corresponds more closely to the prophetic warnings of primal peoples than to the hollow advertising claims of the industrial system: the plants disappearing and the animals dying, the soils denuded along with the human spirit, vast oceans poisoned, the very rain turned corrosive and deadly, human communities at war with one another over diminishing spoils - and all poised on the brink of an even greater annihilation at the push of a few buttons within reach of stunted, half-dead head-zeks in fortified bunkers. Civilization's railroad leads not only to ecocide, but to evolutionary suicide. Every empire lurches toward the oblivion it fabricates and will eventually be covered with sand. Can a world worth inhabiting survive the ruin that will be left?

(Footnotes available from Fifth Estate.)

in Fifth Estate, Summer 1991, pp. 4046

Richard Heinberg: Memories and Visions of Paradise (1995)

In the last few years I have come to see that the economic and social foundations of civilization are inherently corrupt and corrupting. Only through a monumental act of insensitivity can one ignore the anguish of the native peoples of the world, who have endured 500 years (or more) of uninterrupted pillage and oppression at the hands of civilized conquerors. And in many respects the situation only seems to be getting worse. Recently the U. S. Congress approved a global trade agreement GATT that creates a nondemocratic de facto world government whose reins rest securely in the hands of huge and unimaginably wealthy transnational corporations, an agreement that promises to inflict vastly increased economic hardship on indigenous peoples everywhere. The forces of centralization and power have succeeded beyond their wildest dreams: the entire planet is becoming one great marketplace, with every last tree and stream, and the labor of nearly every human being, available to the highest bidder. Industrial civilization is invading every last corner of the globe, foreclosing every alternative, narrowing our options to two: participate or die. But participation is death, too. As the global population increases, as wealth and power become more concentrated, and as resources, habitats and species disappear, disaster looms.

Perhaps I did indeed sound too optimistic a note back in 1989. But my real point was not that Paradise is just around the corner. In fact, even then I believed that, if many current trends continue unabated, the next century is likely to be one of unprecedented horror and suffering for billions of people and for the rest of Nature as well. My point then and now, rather, is that this devastation is not the inevitable outworking of human nature. It reflects neither our origin nor our ultimate destiny, which I take to be no more sinister than those of any other creature on this planet.

It seems to me that we human beings, and particularly we civilized humans, are wounded and sick. We reproduce catastrophe because we ourselves are traumatized - both as a species and individually, beginning at birth. Because we are wounded, we have put up psychic defenses against reality and have become so cut off from direct participation in the multidimensional wildness in which we are embedded that all we can do is to navigate our way cautiously through a humanly designed day-to-day substitute world of symbols - a world of dollars, minutes, numbers, images, and words that are constantly being manipulated to wring the most possible profit from every conceivable circumstance. The body and spirit both rebel.

Yet we together - or any one of us - can in principle return at any time to our true nature, wild, whole, and free. This, it seems to me, has been the message of every true prophet. Whether through acquaintance with our “inner child,” through meditation, through wordless play with small children or animals, or through a deep encounter with the wilderness, we can choose to activate the part of ourselves that still remembers how to feel, love, and wonder. Yes, we have a lot of work ahead and a lot of minds to change before we can together create sustainable, diverse, decentralized cultures and leave behind oppression, racism, sexism, and economic parasitism. But that process becomes much easier when we share a sense of possibility, an assurance that we do not have to invent Paradise so much as to return to it; an assurance that at our core we are pure, brilliant, and innocent beings. Our task is not to create ever more elaborate global structures to enforce social and environmental justice (though I sympathize with the motives of people who work toward that end), but to strip away the artificiality that separates us from the magical simplicity that is our wild biotic birthright.

The Paradise myth continues to transform my vision. Some day, perhaps, human beings will be a blessing to the biosphere of this planet. I can imagine new, wild cultures in which people will put more emphasis on laughter and play than on power and possessions, in which our intellects will be engaged in the challenge of increasing the diversity of life rather than merely in finding new ways to exploit it. The path from here to there is likely to be a rocky one, but the longer we wait, the less chance we will have of traversing it successfully.

pp. 276278

Section Five: The Resistance to Civilization

If Man becomes an animal again, his arts, his loves, and his play must also become purely "natural" again. Hence it would have to be admitted that after the end of History, men would construct their edifices and works of art as birds build their nests and spiders spin their webs, would perform musical concerts after the fashion of frogs and cicadas, would play like young animals, and would indulge in love like adult beasts.

Alexandre Kojève (1946)

We move now to offerings that attempt to light the way beyond civilization, to sources and modes of resistance and renewal. The deconstructionist Derrida applies the tactic of placing literary elements "under erasure"; here are some considerations for doing so to civilization.

Julia Kristeva recently rejected the postmodern refusal of narrative, or refusal of viewing the totality, in this way: "Psychoanalysis goes against the grain of the modern convenience that calls attention not to the end of the Story of Civilization, but to the end of the possibility of telling a story. Nevertheless, this end and this convenience are beginning to overwhelm us, and we have been led to criticize and reject them."

One need not adopt psychoanalysis as the answer to the postmodern dead end, but Kristeva's conclusion is most important regardless, in refusing to accept an end to possibilities.

Another necessary rejection of limits concerns a more general or typical defeatism, in parallel to that of postmodernism. From a recent work by former 1960s activist Gregory Calvert:

"It is, I believe, an error (and the weakness of certain kinds of anarchist utopianism) to assume that humanity can somehow return to the "organic" or "natural" societies of the neolithic world, or that there is an end to politics. Human beings have left forever their neolithic past and life in the human realm can never be a simple return to nature."

He means, of course, paleolithic not neolithic, for the latter is synonymous with the arrival of civilization. If there is consensus among authors represented in this section, however, it lies in their rejection of the argument that a "return to nature" is impossible. Calvert's caveat is just another way of saying, "Here is civilization: accept it."

The summer 1995 issue of the British marxist journal Aufheben acknowledges that

"civilization is under attack. A new critical current has emerged in recent years, united by an antagonism towards all tendencies that seem to include "progress" as part of their programme."

Indeed, a question heard with increasing frequency asks how much more progress we and the planet must endure. This critique challenges the basic categories and dynamics of civilization, and demands an altogether different present and future.

Rudolf Bahro: Avoiding Social and Ecological Disaster: The Politics of World Transformation (1994)

What is exterminism?

In order to furnish a basis for resistance to rearmament plans, the visionary British historian E. P. Thompson wrote an essay in 1980 about exterminism, as the last stage of civilization. Exterminism doesn't just refer to military overkill, or to the neutron bomb - it refers to industrial civilization as a whole, and to many aspects of it, not just the material ones - although these are the first to be noticed. It made sense that the ecopax movement in Germany began not with nuclear weapons, but with nuclear power stations, and seemingly even less harmful things. Behind the various resistance movements stood the unspoken recognition that in the set of rules guiding the evolution of our species, death has made its home.

Thompson's statements about the "increasing determination of the extermination process," about the "last dysfunction of humanity, its total self-destruction," characterize the situation as a whole. The number of people who are damned and reduced to misery has increased unbelievably with the spread of industrial civilization. Never in the whole of history have so many been sacrificed to hunger, sickness, and premature death as is the case today. It is not only their number which is growing, but also their proportion of the whole of humanity. As an inseparable consequence of military and economic progress we are in the act of destroying the biosphere which gave birth to us.

To express the exterminism-thesis in Marxian terms, one could say that the relationship between productive and destructive forces is turned upside down. Like others who looked at civilization as a whole, Marx had seen the trail of blood running through it, and that "civilization leaves deserts behind it." In ancient Mesopotamia it took 1,500 years for the land to grow salty, and this was only noticed at a very late stage, because the process was so slow. Ever since we began carrying on a productive material exchange with nature, there has been this destructive side. And today we are forced to think apocalyptically, not because of culture-pessimism, but because this destructive side is gaining the upper hand.

I would like straight away to emphasize that the problem ultimately does not lie in the perversions and associated monstrosities of Auschwitz and Hiroshima, in neurotic lust for destruction or for human or animal torture. It lies in quantitative success, and in the direction that our civilization took in its heyday. This success is not at all unlike that of a swarm of locusts. Our higher level of consciousness has furthered development, but has had no part in determining scale or goal. In general the logic of self-extermination works blindly, and its tools are not the ultimate cause.

For centuries the problem has remained below the threshold of consciousness for the vast majority of people. In the Communist Manifesto, Marx and Engels evaluate the capitalistic preparatory work for the desired classless society:

Through the exploitation of the world market, the bourgeoisie has given a cosmopolitan pattern to the production of all countries. To the great dismay of reactionaries it has pulled the national basis out from under the feet of industry. The age-old national industries have been annihilated and continue to be annihilated daily. They get pushed aside by new industries, the introduction of which becomes a life-issue for all civilized nations.

These new industries don't make use of domestic raw materials, but process raw materials from the remotest regions, and their products are used not only in the land of their production, but equally in all parts of the world. In the place of needs which can be satisfied by domestic production come new ones, which demand for their satisfaction the products of the remotest lands and climates. In the place of the old national and local self-sufficiency and isolation comes traffic in all directions, and a dependence on all sides of nations upon each other.

By means of enormously increased ease of communication the bourgeoisie draws all nations, even the most barbaric, into civilization. The cheap prices of its wares are the heavy artillery by which all Chinese walls are shot down, by which the most stubborn barbarian xenophobia must capitulate.

As we see today, this is written on account of civilized worker-interests, and is a clearly 'social-imperialistic' text. The concern is with the proletarian take-over of business in this civilization, and social-democracy, or even more the trade unions, and the legitimate heirs of this programme, to whose basic cultural themes they adhere unbrokenly.

Wolfram Ziegler has developed a scale which measures, with brilliant simplicity, the total load we are placing on the biosphere, in order to bring about the 'good life' or 'standard of living', and on this basis to defend the 'social peace' of the rich Metropolis, which is certainly being ever more strongly threatened by ecological panic. Ziegler's starting-point is that the decisive lever in our attack on nature is the use of technically-prepared imported energy. The poisoning and destruction of nature is bound up with this material throughout, with the putting to work of our energy-slaves.

For this reason Ziegler takes the amount of energy used per square kilometer per day and multiplies it by a 'damage-equivalent' for the amount of matter-transformation, and impact on nature, in each region. In this way he arrives at a figure for the load on the biosphere measured in equivalent kilowatt-hours per square kilometer per day. This figure is far in excess of the raw energy use because the toxic and noxious effects are factored in. Today in Germany we are impacting the environment to the extent of 40,000 KWh/km2/day [103,600 KWh/sq. mile/day] with real energy use alone - that is, without reckoning in the damage factor. This is about ten times as much as it was a hundred years ago.

Exactly a hundred years ago, the rate of dying out of biological species began to increase exponentially; as a result of which in the mid-1980s a species vanished every day, and by the year 2000 this will have increased to a species every hour. We are monopolizing the earth for our species alone. We began this with the geographical surface, which we don't only reduce in area, but divide up to such an extent that ecotopes lose their wholeness, and the critical number of individuals of any species is reached, such that they cannot share the same living space.

Ziegler has calculated that in Germany the total weight of our bodies averages out at 150 kg per hectare [134 lbs per acre], while all other animals including birds weigh only 88.5 kg per hectare [77.5 lbs per acre]. This excludes the domesticated animals we exploit, which account for a further 300 kg per hectare [267 lbs per acre] however they don't belong to themselves, but to us. In addition to this, we have at least a further 2,000 kg per hectare [1,780 lbs per acre] of technical structures for our transport systems alone, and the lion's share of this is taken by the automobile.

Even though we no longer feel any natural solidarity with the rest of life, we nevertheless depend, for our biological existence, upon the species-variety of plants and animals. Our 'anthropogenic' technical monocultures of 'useful' plants and animals are perhaps the most persistent instruments of suicide that we use. The dying off of species is the most fundamental indicator of the general exterminating tendency: the overgrowth of the industrial system has pushed it to a galloping rate.

For Ziegler a load of about 4,000 real KWh/km2/day [10,360 KWh/sq mile/day] is the threshold at which we finally left ecological stability behind us. It is about where we were 100 years ago, before the rate of dying off of species began to increase, and before - a quarter of a century later - the first organizations for the protection of nature began to react.

It is thus no longer a question of democratic decision, but of natural necessity, that we should reduce harmful end-products of energy and materials-consumption by a factor of ten. By more intuitive methods I had reached the same estimate of the order of magnitude of the necessary reduction, by reflecting on what would happen if the whole of humanity were to lay claim to our level of packaged living.

Environmental protection is a 'solution' one would expect from the priesthood (this time a scientific one) of a declining culture: one more floor on the deficit-structure, which would only increase its load. Ziegler demonstrates compellingly that this is not to be done with technical environmental protection alone, because the energy and material demands of such measures would detract from the load reductions they would achieve, and ultimately cancel them entirely.

Thus in the final analysis environmental protection as a supplementary strategy is only a further stimulus to the economic arms race, whereby the mass of the Megamachine is made to grow, both on the investment and the consumption side. Janicke has demonstrated this from the point of view of costs, basing his work on Kapp (1972). Environmental protection procures a last 'Green' legitimacy for the industrial system, for a short while.

While we protect the environment at critical points, the whole front of stress on the natural order moves unflinchingly ahead. A hundred environment-protecting motors each having only

66% of the damaging effect of earlier models still do more damage than fifty of the earlier models.

Messages about the environment-friendliness of industry, seen today on TV screens and in magazines, create a fatally false impression. For example, via foodstuffs alone we come into contact with about 10,000 chemicals, and in daily life with about 100,000 of them, in industrial nations. Propaganda deceptively plays down this synthetic aspect of civilized life. We can adapt to plastics thanks to the much-praised plasticity of human nature, which we also have to thank for civilization! By exercising our drive to activity, our passion for work, we altogether ruin our entire original fund of resources. In this context ecological market economy is only a new addition to the logic of self-extermination. Its immediate effect is to lower the level of product-or-technology-specific environmental damage, but the long-term overall effect is to increase it.

pp. 1922

John Zerzan: Future Primitive (1994)

Division of labor, which has had so much to do with bringing us to the present global crisis, works daily to prevent our understanding the origins of this horrendous present. Mary Lecron Foster (1990) surely errs on the side of understatement in allowing that anthropology is today "in danger of serious and damaging fragmentation." Shanks and Tilley (1987b) voice a rare, related challenge: "The point of archaeology is not merely to interpret the past but to change the manner in which the past is interpreted in the service of social reconstruction in the present." Of course, the social sciences themselves work against the breadth and depth of vision necessary to such a reconstruction. In terms of human origins and development, the array of splintered fields and sub-fields - anthropology, archaeology, paleontology, ethnology, paleobotany, ethnoanthropology, etc., etc. - mirrors the narrowing, crippling effect that civilization has embodied from its very beginning.

Nonetheless, the literature can provide highly useful assistance, if approached with an appropriate method and awareness and the desire to proceed past its limitations. In fact, the weakness of more or less orthodox modes of thinking can and does yield to the demands of an increasingly dissatisfied society. Unhappiness with contemporary life becomes distrust with the official lies that are told to legitimate that life, and a truer picture of human development emerges. Renunciation and subjugation in modern life have long been explained as necessary concomitants of "human nature." After all, our pre-civilized existence of deprivation, brutality, and ignorance made authority a benevolent gift that rescued us from savagery. 'Cave man' and 'Neanderthal' are still invoked to remind us where we would be without religion, government and toil.

This ideological view of our past has been radically overturned in recent decades, through the work of academics like Richard Lee and Marshall Sahlins. A nearly complete reversal in anthropological orthodoxy has come about, with important implications. Now we can see that life before domestication/agriculture was in fact largely one of leisure, intimacy with nature, sensual wisdom, sexual equality, and health. This was our human nature, for a couple of million years, prior to enslavement by priests, kings, and bosses.

To 'define' a disalienated world would be impossible and even undesirable, but I think we can and should try to reveal the unworld of today and how it got this way. We have taken a monstrously wrong turn with symbolic culture and division of labor, from a place of enchantment, understanding and wholeness to the absence we find at the heart of the doctrine of progress. Empty and emptying, the logic of domestication, with its demand to control everything, now shows us the ruin of the civilization that ruins the rest. Assuming the inferiority of nature enables the domination of cultural systems that soon will make the very earth uninhabitable.

Postmodernism says to us that a society without power relations can only be an abstraction (Foucault, 1982). This is a lie unless we accept the death of nature and renounce what once was and what we can find again. Turnbull spoke of the intimacy between Mbuti people and the forest, dancing almost as if making love to the forest. In the bosom of a life of equals that is no abstraction, that struggles to endure, they were "dancing with the forest, dancing with the moon."

pp. 1516, 4546

William Morris: News from Nowhere (1995)

We went up a paved path between the roses, and straight into a very pretty room, panelled and carved, and as clean as a new pin; but the chief ornament of which was a young woman, light-haired and grey-eyed, but with her face and hands and bare feet tanned quite brown with the sun. Though she was very lightly clad, that was clearly from choice, not from poverty, though these were the first cottage-dwellers I had come across; for her gown was of silk, and on her wrists were bracelets that seemed to me of great value. She was lying on a sheep-skin near the window, but jumped up as soon as we entered, and when she saw the guests behind the old man, she clapped her hands and cried out with pleasure, and when she got us into the middle of the room, fairly danced round us in delight of our company.

'What!' said the old man, 'you are pleased, are you, Ellen?'

The girl danced up to him and threw her arms round him, and said: 'Yes I am, and so ought you to be, grandfather.'

'Well, well, I am,' said he, 'as much as I can be pleased. Guests, please be seated.'

This seemed rather strange to us; stranger, I suspect, to my friends than to me; but Dick took the opportunity of both the host and his grand-daughter being out of the room to say to me, softly: 'A grumbler: there are a few of them still. Once upon a time, I am told, they were quite a nuisance.'

The old man came in as he spoke and sat down beside us with a sigh, which, indeed, seemed fetched up as if he wanted us to take notice of it; but just then the girl came in with the victuals, and the carle missed his mark, what between our hunger generally and that I was pretty busy watching the grand-daughter moving about as beautiful as a picture.

Everything to eat and drink, though it was somewhat different to what we had had in London, was better than good, but the old man eyed rather sulkily the chief dish on the table, on which lay a leash of fine perch, and said:

'H'm, perch! I am sorry we can't do better for you, guests. The time was when we might have had a good piece of salmon up from London for you; but the times have grown mean and petty.'

'Yes, but you might have had it now,' said the girl, giggling, 'if you had known that they were coming.'

'It's our fault for not bringing it with us, neighbors,' said Dick, good-humoredly. 'But if the times have grown petty, at any rate the perch haven't; that fellow in the middle there must have weighed a good two pounds when he was showing his dark stripes and red fins to the minnows yonder. And as to the salmon, why, neighbor, my friend here, who comes from the outlands, was quite surprised yesterday morning when I told him we had plenty of salmon at Hammersmith. I am sure I have heard nothing of the times worsening.'

He looked a little uncomfortable. And the old man, turning to me, said very courteously:

'Well, sir, I am happy to see a man from over the water; but I really must appeal to you to say whether on the whole you are not better off in your country; where I suppose, from what our guest says, you are brisker and more alive, because you have not wholly got rid of competition. You see, I have read not a few books of the past days, and certainly they are much more alive than those which are written now; and good sound unlimited competition was the condition under which they were written, if we didn't know that from the record of history, we should know it from the books themselves. There is a spirit of adventure in them, and signs of a capacity to extract good out of evil which our literature quite lacks now; and I cannot help thinking that our moralists and historians exaggerate hugely the unhappiness of the past days, in which such splendid works of imagination and intellect were produced.'

Clara listened to him with restless eyes, as if she were excited and pleased; Dick knitted his brow and looked still more uncomfortable, but said nothing. Indeed, the old man gradually, as he warmed to his subject, dropped his sneering manner, and both spoke and looked very seriously.

But the girl broke out before I could deliver myself of the answer I was framing:

‘Books, books! always books, grandfather! When will you understand that after all it is the world we live in which interests us; the world of which we are a part, and which we can never love too much? Look!’ she said, throwing open the casement wider and showing us the white light sparkling between the black shadows of the moonlit garden, through which ran a little shiver of the summer night-wind, ‘look! these are our books in these days! - and these,’ she said, stepping lightly up to the two lovers and laying a hand on each of their shoulders; ‘and the guest there, with his oversea knowledge and experience; yes, and even you, grandfather’ (a smile ran over her face as she spoke), ‘with all your grumbling and wishing yourself back again in the good old days, in which, as far as I can make out, a harmless and lazy old man like you would either have pretty nearly starved, or have had to pay soldiers and people to take the folk’s victuals and clothes and houses away from them by force. Yes, these are our books; and if we want more, can we not find work to do in the beautiful buildings that we raise up all over the country (and I know there was nothing like them in past times), wherein a man can put forth whatever is in him, and make his hands set forth his mind and his soul.’

She paused a little, and I for my part could not help staring at her, and thinking that if she were a book, the pictures in it were most lovely. The color mantled in her delicate sunburnt cheeks; her grey eyes, light amidst the tan of her face, kindly looked on us all as she spoke. She paused, and said again:

‘As for your books, they were well enough for times when intelligent people had but little else in which they could take pleasure, and when they must needs supplement the sordid miseries of their own lives with imaginations of the lives of other people. But I say flatly that in spite of all their cleverness and vigor, and capacity for story-telling, there is something loathsome about them. Some of them, indeed, do here and there show some feeling for those whom the history-books call “poor,” and of the misery of whose lives we have some inkling; but presently they give it up, and towards the end of the story we must be contented to see the hero and heroine living happily in an island of bliss on other people’s troubles; and that after a long series of sham troubles (or mostly sham) of their own making, illustrated by dreary introspective nonsense about their feelings and aspirations, and all the rest of it; while the world must even then have gone on its way, and dug and sewed and baked and built and carpentered round about these useless animals.’

‘There!’ said the old man, reverting to his dry sulky manner again. ‘There’s eloquence! I suppose you like it?’

‘Yes,’ said I, very emphatically.

‘Well,’ said he, ‘now the storm of eloquence has lulled for a little, suppose you answer my question? that is, if you like, you know,’ quoth he, with a sudden access of courtesy.

‘What question? said I. For I must confess that Ellen’s strange and almost wild beauty had put it out of my head.

Said he: ‘First of all (excuse my catechizing), is there competition in life, after the old kind, in the country whence you come?’

‘Yes,’ said I, ‘it is the rule there.’ And I wondered as I spoke what fresh complications I should get into as a result of this answer.

‘Question two,’ said the carle: ‘Are you not on the whole much freer, more energetic - in a word, healthier and happier for it?’

I smiled. ‘You wouldn’t talk so if you had any idea of our life. To me you seem here as if you were living in heaven compared with us of the country from which I came.’

‘Heaven?’ said he: ‘you like heaven, do you?’

‘Yes,’ said I - snappishly, I am afraid; for I was beginning rather to resent his formula.

‘Well, I am far from sure that I do,’ quoth he. ‘I think one may do more with one’s life than sitting on a damp cloud and singing hymns.’

I was rather nettled by this inconsequence, and said: ‘Well, neighbor, to be short, and without using metaphors, in the land whence I come, where the competition which produced those literary works which you admire so much is still the rule, most people are thoroughly unhappy; here, to me at least, most people seem thoroughly happy.’

‘No offense, guest - no offense,’ said he; ‘but let me ask you; you like that, do you?’

His formula, put with such obstinate persistence, made us all laugh heartily; and even the old man joined in the laughter on the sly. However, he was by no means beaten, and said presently:

'From all I can hear, I should judge that a young woman so beautiful as my dear Ellen yonder would have been a lady, as they called it in the old time, and wouldn't have had to wear a few rags of silk as she does now, or to have browned herself in the sun as she has to do now. What do you say to that, eh?'

Here Clara, who had been pretty much silent hitherto, struck in and said: 'Well, really, I don't think that you would have mended matters, or that they want mending. Don't you see that she is dressed deliciously for this beautiful weather? And as for the sun-burning of your hay-fields, why, I hope to pick up some of that for myself when we get a little higher up the river. Look if I don't need a little sun on my pasty white skin!'

And she stripped up the sleeve from her arm and laid it beside Ellen's who was now sitting next her. To say the truth, it was rather amusing to me to see Clara putting herself forward as a town-bred fine lady, for she was as well-knit and clean-skinned a girl as might be met with anywhere at the best. Dick stroked the beautiful arm rather shyly, and pulled down the sleeve again, while she blushed at his touch; and the old man said laughingly: "Well, I suppose you do like that; don't you?'

Ellen kissed her new friend, and we all sat silent for a little, till she broke out into a sweet shrill song, and held us all entranced with the wonder of her clear voice; and the old grumbler sat looking at her lovingly. The other young people sang also in due time; and then Ellen showed us to our beds in small cottage chambers, fragrant and clean as the ideal of the old pastoral poets; and the pleasure of the evening quite extinguished my fear of the last night, that I should wake up in the old miserable world of worn-out pleasures, and hopes that were half fears.

All along, though those friends were so real to me, I had been feeling as if I had no business amongst them: as though the time would come when they would reject me, and say, as Ellen's last mournful look seemed to say, 'No, it will not do; you cannot be of us; you belong so entirely to the unhappiness of the past that our happiness even would weary you. Go back again, now you have seen us, and your outward eyes have learned that in spite of all the infallible maxims of your day there is yet a time of rest in store for the world, when mastery has changed into fellowship - but not before. Go back again, then, and while you live you will see all round you people engaged in making others live lives which are not their own, while they themselves care nothing for their own real lives - men who hate life though they fear death. Go back and be the happier for having seen us, for having added a little hope to your struggle. Go on living while you may, striving, with whatsoever pain and labor needs must be, to build up little by little the new day of fellowship, and rest, and happiness.'

Yes, surely! and if others can see it as I have seen it, then it may be called a vision rather than a dream.

(pp. 154158, 220)

Feral Faun: “Feral Revolution”

When I was a very young child, my life was filled with intense pleasure and a vital energy that caused me to feel what I experienced to the full. I was the center of this marvelous, playful existence and felt no need to rely on anything but my own living experience to fulfill me.

I felt intensely, I experienced intensely, my life was a festival of passion and pleasure. My disappointments and sorrows were also intense. I was born a free, wild being in the midst of a society based upon domestication. There was no way that I could escape being domesticated myself. Civilization will not tolerate what is wild in its midst. But I never forgot the intensity that life could be. I never forgot the vital energy that had surged through me. My existence since I first began to notice that this vitality was being drained away has been a warfare between the needs of civilized survival and the need to break loose and experience the full intensity of life unbound.

I want to experience this vital energy again. I want to know the free-spirited wildness of my unrepressed desires realizing themselves in festive play. I want to smash down every wall that stands between me and the intense, passionate life of untamed freedom that I want. The sum of these walls is everything we call civilization, everything that comes between us and the direct, participatory experience of the wild world. Around us has grown a web of domination, a web of mediation that limits our experience, defining the boundaries of acceptable production and consumption.

Domesticating authority takes many forms, some of which are difficult to recognize. Government, capital and religion are some of the more obvious faces of authority. But technology, work, language with its conceptual limits, the ingrained habits of etiquette and propriety - these too are domesticating authorities which transform us from wild, playful, unruly animals into tamed, bored, unhappy producers and consumers. These things work in us insidiously, limiting our imaginations, usurping our desires, suppressing our lived experience. And it is the world created by these authorities, the civilized world, in which we live. If my dream of a life filled with intense pleasure and wild adventure is to be realized, the world must be radically transformed, civilization must fall before expanding wilderness, authority must fall before the energy of our wild freedom. There must be - for want of a better word - a revolution.

But a revolution that can break down civilization and restore the vital energy of untamed desire cannot be like any revolution of the past. All revolutions to date have centered around power, its use and redistribution. They have not sought to eradicate the social institutions that domesticate; at best they have only sought to eradicate the power relationships within those institutions. So revolutionaries of the past have aimed their attacks at the centers of power seeking to overthrow it.

Focused on power, they were blind to the insidious forces of domination that encompass our daily existence and so, when successful at overthrowing the powers that be, they ended up re-creating them. To avoid this, we need to focus not on power, but on our desire to go wild, to experience life to the full, to know intense pleasure and wild adventure. As we attempt to realize this desire, we confront the real forces of domination, the forces that we face every moment of every day. These forces have no single center that can be overthrown. They are a web that binds us. So rather than trying to overthrow the powers that be, we want to undermine domination as we confront it every day, helping the already collapsing civilization to break down more quickly and as it falls, the centers of power will fall with it. Previous revolutionaries have only explored the well-mapped territories of power. I want to explore and adventure in the unmapped, and unmappable, territories of wild freedom. The revolution that can create the world I want has to be a feral revolution.

There can be no programs or organizations for feral revolution, because wildness cannot spring from a program or organization. Wildness springs from the freeing of our instincts and desires, from the spontaneous expression of our passions. Each of us has experienced the processes of domestication, and this experience can give us the knowledge we need to undermine civilization and transform our lives. Our distrust of our own experience is probably what keeps us from rebelling as freely and actively as we’d like. We’re afraid of fucking up, we’re afraid of our own ignorance. But this distrust and fear have been instilled in us by authority. It keeps us from really growing and learning. It makes us easy targets for any authority that is ready to fill us. To set up “revolutionary” programs is to play on this fear and

distrust, to reinforce the need to be told what to do. No attempt to go feral can be successful when based on such programs. We need to learn to trust and act upon our own feelings and experiences, if we are ever to be free.

So I offer no programs. What I will share is some thoughts on ways to explore. Since we all have been domesticated, part of the revolutionary process is a process of personal transformation. We have been conditioned not to trust ourselves, not to feel completely, not to experience life intensely. We have been conditioned to accept the humiliation of work and pay as inescapable, to relate to things as resources to be used, to feel the need to prove ourselves by producing. We have been conditioned to expect disappointment, to see it as normal, not to question it. We have been conditioned to accept the tedium of civilized survival rather than breaking free and really living. We need to explore ways of breaking down this conditioning, of getting as free of our domestication as we can now. Let's try to get so free of this conditioning that it ceases to control us and becomes nothing more than a role we use when necessary for survival in the midst of civilization as we strive to undermine it.

In a very general way, we know what we want. We want to live as wild, free beings in a world of wild, free beings. The humiliation of having to follow rules, of having to sell our lives away to buy survival, of seeing our usurped desires transformed into abstractions and images in order to sell us commodities fills us with rage. How long will we put up with this misery? We want to make this world into a place where our desires can be immediately realized, not just sporadically, but normally. We want to re-eroticize our lives. We want to live not in a dead world of resources, but in a living world of free wild lovers. We need to start exploring the extent to which we are capable of living these dreams in the present without isolating ourselves. This will give us a clearer understanding of the domination of civilization over our lives, an understanding which will allow us to fight domestication more intensely and so expand the extent to which we can live wildly.

Attempting to live as wildly as possible now will also help break down our social conditioning. This will spark a wild prankishness in us which will take aim at all that would tame it, undermining civilization and creating new ways of living and sharing with each other. These explorations will expose the limits of civilization's domination and will show its inherent opposition to freedom. We will discover possibilities we have never before imaginedvast expanses of wild freedom. Projects, ranging from sabotage and pranks that expose or undermine the dominant society, to the expansion of wilderness, to festivals and orgies and general free sharing, can point to amazing possibilities.

Feral revolution is an adventure. It is the daring exploration of going wild. It takes us into unknown territories for which no maps exist. We can only come to know these territories if we dare to explore them actively. We must dare to destroy whatever destroys our wildness and to act on our instincts and desires. We must dare to trust in ourselves, our experiences and our passions. Then we will not let ourselves be chained or penned in. We will not allow ourselves to be tamed. Our feral energy will rip civilization to shreds and create a life of wild freedom and intense pleasure.

in Demolition Derby #1, 1988, p. 30

“Don’t Eat Your Revolution! Make It!” (1995)

In November 7 all the Stalinists gathered on Oktyabrskaya Square in Moscow under the still-standing huge Lenin. Later they headed to Red Square, followed by some small groups of Trotskyists and even some anarchists who successfully created an illusion that “young people” were with them. While the latters’ red-n-black banners and dull papers were surely unable to destroy the traditional way of celebrating the October revolution day, the assault came from where nobody expected it. As the demonstrators were going down their route they inevitably confronted a small group of some vocal revolutionaries who were standing on the side of the road under the banner of ‘primitive communism’ (made of fake red fur) who were fearlessly banging their big drum. As the crowd passed by them and tried to find out what they wanted to say, the atmosphere was getting more and more tense. “The Blind” (that is the name of an artistic group) announced that people who gathered at the demo had nothing to do with revolution, that they ‘ate’ their revolution and shitted it out, that the only thing they can do is ask the government for more money. Their poster announced “Proletarians of all lands, enough eating!” Instead of asking the government for more money, The Blind announced, we should make another revolution and realize the realprimitivecommunism. We should care less about material things and instead turn our attention to people around us. After the demo passed and the shouts “They are Jews, Zionists! Go back to Israel!” addressed to The Blind finally dissolved in the air, the ‘primitive communists’ headed back home and were stopped by police, who asked for their IDs. In spite of that, the affair ended peacefully.

in News & Views From (the former) Sovietsky-Soyuz, February 1995

Glenn Parton: “The Machine in Our Heads” (1997)

Introduction he environmental crisis consists of the deterioration and outright destruction of micro and macro ecosystems worldwide, entailing the elimination of countless numbers of wild creatures from the air, land, and sea, with many species being pushed to the brink of extinction, and into extinction. People who passively allow this to happen, not to mention those who actively promote it for economic or other reasons, are already a good distance down the road to insanity. Most people do not see, understand, or care very much about this catastrophe of the planet because they are overwhelmingly preoccupied with grave psychological problems. The environmental crisis is rooted in the psychological crisis of the modern individual. This makes the search for an eco-psychology crucial; we must understand better what terrible thing is happening to the modern human mind, why it is happening, and what can be done about it.

Deep Thinking

The solution to the global environmental crisis we face today depends far less on the dissemination of new information than it does on the re-emergence into consciousness of old ideas. Primitive ideas or tribal ideaskinship, solidarity, community, direct democracy, diversity, harmony with natureprovide the framework or foundation of any rational or sane society. Today, these primal ideas, gifts of our ancestral heritage, are blocked from entering consciousness. The vast majority of modern people cannot see the basic truths that our ancient ancestors knew and that we must know again, about living within the balance of nature. We are lost in endless political debates, scientific research, and compromises because what is self-evident to the primitive mind has been forgotten.

For hundreds of thousands of years, until the beginning of civilization about 10,000 years ago, humans lived in tribal societies, which produced tribal consciousnessa set of workable ideas or guiding principles concerning living together successfully on a diverse and healthy planet. The invasion of civilization into one tribal locale after another, around the globe, has been so swift and deadly that we may speak of the trauma of civilization. Because tribal peoples were unprepared and unable to deal with the onslaught of civilization, tribal consciousness was driven underground, becoming something forbidden and dangerous. Conquered peoples became afraid to think and act according to the old ways, on pain of death. There is much fear that lies at the origin of civilization.

Ontogeny recapitulates phylogenythat is to say, the development of the individual is an abbreviated repetition of the development of the species. In childhood, a modern person travels an enormous distance between stone-age primitive creature and responsible contemporary citizen. When confronted with the awesome power of civilizationwhose first representatives are parents, teachers, priests (and, later on, police officers, legislators and bosses)the child faces, psychologically, the same situation as its tribal ancestors, namely, conform to the dictates of civilization or die. The helplessness of childhood makes the threat of bodily harm or loss of love, which is used by the parents and others to enforce civilized morality and civilized education, a traumatic experience. The developing little person becomes afraid to express its own tribal nature. There is much fear that lies at the bottom of becoming a civilized adult.

When the child becomes aware of ideas and impulses that oppose the dictates of civilization, s/he experiences anxiety, which is the signal for danger. It is not the insights and urges themselves that the child fears, but rather the reaction to them on the part of those in charge. Since the child cannot escape from those who control its life, s/he runs away from dangerous thoughts and feelings. In other words, the child institutes repression of its primitive self. Tribal ideas are now isolated, cut off from awareness, and unable to properly influence the future course of events.

The trauma or inescapable terror of civilization is responsible for the derangement of reason. That inner dialogue in the human mind that is the hallmark of self-consciousness has ceased, because the depth-dimension of reflective thought, which is the primitive mind, has been silenced. Modern people no longer hear their own primal voice, and without interaction between new ideas and old ideas, the demands of the individual and the demands of the tribe

(and species), there is no deep thinking. On the contrary, when reason is cut off at the roots, it becomes shallow, unable to determine what is of true value in life.

The passage of tribal ideas from the oldest and deepest layer of the mind into individual consciousness is part of the natural, normal functioning of the human mind. Deep thinking is not the result of education; it is innate, our birthright as Homo sapiens. What civilization has done is to disrupt the free flow of ideas in the human mind by shutting down the primitive mind through traumatic socialization. In such a situation, cut off from the time-tested and proven ideas of prehistory, reason becomes one-dimensional, and is unable to solve the problems of modern life. No amount of new information can replace tribal wisdom, which provides the foundation for any good and decent life.

None of what has been said here denies the concept of progress, but it means that genuine progress is the outcome of deep mental dialogue in which new ideas are accepted or rejected by reference to that great complex of old ideas that have been perfected and passed down from one generation to the next generation over many millennia. In other words, genuine progress builds on basic truth. This is not idealization of primitive culture, but conscious recognition of its solid, intelligent achievements. Because civilization repudiates primitive, basic truth, we have no frame of reference for a good and decent life. What we call progress in the modern world is the aimless and reckless rampage of lost individuals. When one is lost, it is necessary to go back to the place where one had one's bearings, and start anew from there.

The False Self

We have internalized our masters, which is a well-known psychological response to trauma. When faced with overwhelming terror, the human mind splits, with part of itself modeling itself after the oppressor. This is an act of appeasement:

"Look," the mind says in effect, "I am like you, so do not harm me." As a result of the civilizing process, together with this psychological defense mechanism known as "identification with the aggressor", we now hear the alien voices of the various representatives of civilization in our heads. Because of these alien ego-identifications we no longer hear our own tribal/primal voice. In order for deep thinking to commence again in the human mind, it is necessary to break down these internal authorities, overcome the resistances, that prevent tribal ideas from coming to consciousness. The modern problem is not simply that we do not listen to primal ideas, but rather that primal ideas are unable to come to consciousness at all, because of the internal counterforces, or ego-alien identifications, that contradict and overpower them.

These ego-alien identifications, built up over the course of a lifetime, cohere and form a distinct, circumscribed personality, or false self, that represents and enforces the rules and regulations of civilization. This false self is observable in the frozen facial expressions, stereotypic gestures, and unexamined behavioral patterns of the general public. This false self determines much of our everyday lives, so that we are seldom the origin of our actions. We lapse into the false self at the first sign of danger, under stress, or simply because it is the path of least resistance. In this unthinking mode of social role playing, we internally reproduce our own oppression.

Trauma is a necessary part of civilizing someone, because a natural, maturing individual will not otherwise accept the ideals of civilization. These ideals - hierarchy, property, the State, for example - are so contrary to our tribal nature that they must be forcibly thrust into the human mind. This causes the mind to rupture, to divide its territorythat is, to surrender a part of itself to the invading enemy. For this reason, the false self is never really integrated into the human mind, but instead occupies the mind, as a foreign body, standing apart from and above normal/healthy mental life.

The Original Self

Beneath the false self, there still lives the original identity of the person. This original self is older than, and other than, the foreign personality that has been imposed upon it. This original self or primitive ego is the person one was in childhoodbefore the mind was ruptured by the trauma of civilizationand the person one still is at the core of one's personal identity. This original self is closely connected to the oldest layer of the psyche. It is an individually differentiated portion of the primitive mindthe first, personal organization of the primitive mind.

As such, it has direct access to primal wisdom, an internally directed perceptivity, that permits the entry into consciousness, as well as the passage into activity, of tribal ideas.

In civilization, this original self is caught in the middle of a war between the status quo false self and the uprising of the tribal self. Even when an individual succeeds in holding its own personal identity, refusing to slip into the false self, the primal voice may remain unheard, smothered by the false self. As a distinct, circumscribed personality, the false self achieves a counter-will of its own that is always operational in the sick mind, at least in terms of repressing tribal ideas. Tribal ideas threaten civilization, so they cannot pass through the censorship of the false self, which functions specifically to ward off all serious challenges to civilization.

Furthermore, the false self tends to become more autonomous and extensive, owing to improved forms of social control and manipulation of consciousness in the modern worldadvertising, for example. Once the mind is broken, the false self, backed by the relentless power of civilization, takes over our lives. The original or primary self has become autistic, or severely withdrawn from active engagement with social reality. However, there remains some awareness, at least sometimes, of our primary identity beneath the false self, and so there is hope for lifting the repressionsset down most effectively in childhoodon primitive mental processes.

The True Self

Through identification, which is a normal psychological basis of personality development, the original identity of the person is stretched into something more and greater, on its path to the true self. This process of identification becomes pathological only when the continuity of the personality is not preserved, i.e. when there is a splitting in two of the mind, giving rise to a new psychic structurea false self. This rupture of the mind is unfortunately precisely what occurs through compulsory training and education of contemporary civilized human beings. In contrast, the development of the natural and sane human mind does not entail any sharp delimitations between its various stages and functions. The true self is a continuation and culmination of the original self; it develops out of the original self, just as the original self develops out of the tribal self. In sum, psychical reality consists of the tribal self, together with the original self, and the dynamic interplay between them is responsible for the development of the true self. The true self is something that unfolds/progresses. Traumatic civilization has not eliminated the original self, but it has stopped the flow of tribal ideas into consciousness, which arrests or distorts the higher/maturer development of the personality. In order to resume deep thinking in the human mind, so that we can become our true self, it is necessary to push back and ultimately dissolve civilization, internally and externally.

The Message

The sadness of the modern age is that the public needs to be reminded of “unchangeable human needs.” This truth is not something to be imposed upon them, but something to be evoked within them. The fact is that people do not feel satisfied in the roles assigned to them by civilization. There is a widespread feeling that one’s true identity or potential is not being fulfilled, but unfortunately there is no awareness of the tribal selfexcept among a small minority of individuals. Once the message of a tribal self is re-introduced into public consciousness, it may lie dormant in the minds of individuals for a long time, but it is never entirely forgotten again, as it was in childhood. This message is the catalyst for an intellectual awakening among the population, accompanied by the feeling that something old and familiar has been uncovered.

The power of this message to move an individual is due to the psychological fact that, although repression shuts down deep thinking, tribal ideas continue to push for entrance into consciousness. The mind seeks always to integrate all its ideas into one comprehensible whole. Whatever is part of the repressed unconscious is trying to penetrate into consciousness. When an individual gets the idea of a tribal self from an external source, via the message, it takes hold deep down. The message appeals to the conscious mind, tugs at it, rings true because it touches and stirs the repressed truth that is striving to break into awareness. For this reason, the triumph of civilization over the tribal self is never secure, so

there must be a constant bombardment of lies and distortions from the representatives of civilization.

Whether or not an individual awakens to the message of a tribal self depends on the mental condition of one's personal life. Crisis can open a person to ideas that would otherwise be shunned or rejected. A desperate or confused person seeking help may accept the notion of a tribal self intellectually, because it makes sense of one's life-history; but this is not yet to grasp tribal ideas from within, the result of deep mental dialogue. Intellectual awareness of one's tribal self, via the message, is the first prerequisite of a sane person, but it is not enough, not the same thing as hearing one's own primal voice. Each individual must validate or prove, for itself, the message or theory of a tribal self.

The Journey Outward

What is required in order to hear one's own primal voice and resume deep thinking is a journey outward by the original self, which is a matter of fighting to live according to fundamental ideas that one recognizes as good and right, a tribal ideal. This is the path of a warrior because civilization without (laws, institutions, and technologies) and within (the false self) is organized against it. It takes inner resolve and courage to go against civilization, outwardly or inwardly. The path of a tribal warrior in the modern world has nothing to do with picking up a spear or wearing a loin cloth; rather, it involves committing to, and standing up for the great ideas of prehistory: face-to-face democracy, rivers and streams as drinking places, respect for wildlife, etc. These ideas do not require more data, arguments, congresses or conferences because they are the irrefutable elements of original knowledge. The warrior stands on the unshakable foundation of basic truth, and the vicious lies of civilizationthat the Earth is property, or that the common good results from each person maximizing its own self-interest, for exampleare dismissed as the meaningless babble of the ignorant.

The psychodynamics of the cure consists in overcoming our fear of deep thinking by strengthening the original ego, through everyday practice, to the point that it no longer turns away from its own subversive ideas. We are afraid to think deeply or critically, due to the horror of the past. It is safer not to think about tribal ideas, and spare oneself the painful memories of punishment (and the attacks of anxiety) that are associated with the recall of these ideas. The childhood fear that one will be murdered or grossly harmed for primitive thinking lives on.

The child settles for an unsatisfactory adaptation to social realitynamely, repression of its tribal self because it is unable to deal with the threatening menace of civilization in any other way. However, adults are no longer in the helpless position of childhood; it is no longer necessary to give up the struggle with civilization. There is plenty of opportunity in our everyday lives to question and refuse humiliating and debilitating authority. What matters, for now, is not that we win this or that battle with external reality, but that we stay true to tribal ideas in the face of civilization, and integrate them into the conduct or character of our lives. This is what slowly brings about a radical change in the personality.

The path of a warrior is that of upholding a tribal idealwith the therapeutic aim of bringing a strengthened ego into direct and open communication with the tribal mind, which dissolves the false self (and its punishment mechanism).

The personal journey of loosening the grip of the false self by strengthening the primary self is certainly not by itself going to bring about the overthrow of civilization; but it is the subjective precondition for building an environmental movement that will achieve this end. The public is firmly in the grip of the false self, which means that a revolution is definitely not on the agenda. The influencing machine of civilization is in our heads, and we must defeat it there first; for it is not to be expected that people brutally held down (for 10,000 years) by counter-revolutionary forces will revoltuntil the psychological groundwork of liberation has been adequately prepared. After enough of us have done the hard inner work of self-restorationthat is, re-claimed enough of our sanity, then we will come together in tribal units and smash civilization.

Crossroads

Human unhappiness within civilization is widespread and growing. People feel increasingly empty, anxious, depressed, and angry. Everyone is seeking an answer to serious mental problems. The Chinese ideogram for crisis combines the sign of "danger" with that of

“opportunity.” This is exactly where we are in history, at the crossroads between two radically different futures. On the one hand, there is the danger of insanity, and on the other hand, the opportunity for a return of tribalism.

The Path to Insanity

Basic, vital needs or tribal needs are not being satisfied in civilization, and this produces frustration, which in turn activates aggression. As civilization “progresses” toward global interlock among new technological forms, we are removed farther and farther from the simple and basic joys of lifesitting in a shaft of sunlight, conversing around a fire, food-sharing, walking, the blue sky overheadand so frustration and aggression also progress. More and more of a person’s concern and compassion for others and the natural world are withdrawing, and re-focusing on the self, in order to neutralize the growing frustration and anger within. This is the psychological explanation for the culture of selfishness that is underway everywhere in the modern worldthe first step on the road to insanity.

The second step, which is now on the horizon, is megalomania, a severe pathological state of consciousness in which the steady withdrawal of love from others and nature gives rise to the deluded mental condition of exalted self-importance. The megalomaniac feels more and more powerful, euphoric, and in control of things (due to an abnormally inflated self-love), while in reality s/he is becoming more and more isolated, impotent, and out of control (due to an excessive loss of love for others and nature). This pathological condition of megalomania is fueled by inner hatred, which is desperately seeking pacification by consuming more and more of a person’s available love, but it fails entirely to deal with the root-cause of our mental illnessnamely, unmet primitive needs.

If people cannot access the tribal ideas that inform them of basic needs, then they cannot find the proper targetnamely, civilizationfor their frustration and aggression. As a result, rage is trapped in our minds and bodies and is destined to reach heights that are psychologically unbearable for any individual, which leads to madness. Insanity, the third and final stage of civilization, occurs when the original self becomes a tortured prisoner within the walls of its own fears, frustrations, and hostility. It is now extremely difficult, if not impossible, to reach and influence the original self with any rational message.

The Path to Sanity

Civilization has enslaved us in the chains of dependency, isolation, and artificiality. All that we have suffered in civilization still exists in our mindsfor nothing vanishes from the human mindand it is accumulating into rage. The mechanism that civilization employs in order to prevent this rage from discharging itself against its sourcenamely, civilizationis the establishment of a dictatorship in our heads, a false self, that re-directs this rage toward the citizen in the form of self-blame. According to the false self, each individual is to blame for its own misery. The false self gets the energy it needs to punish and enslave us from our own blind frustration and aggression. Without conscious commitment to a tribal ideal, a firm hold on basic truth, by which to evaluate, condemn, and go against civilization, a person is at the mercy of its own mounting disappointment and aggression that the false self is designed to turn inward.

The tribal ideal is a staff for strengthening the original self and fighting off the false self. By upholding a tribal ideal, sometimes through the spoken word, sometimes through action, and sometimes through silence, we build self-respect on a solid foundation; for at the core of our being we are still fiercely independent, intelligent creatures, with strong affective ties to small human groups and large natural/wild places.

The importance of this self-respect as a prime motivator of human nature can hardly be overstated; it may enable an individual to defy civilization, even in the face of the hatred of the whole modern world. When an individual acquires fundamental self-respect, then s/he will be made a fool no longer, and all the blows of civilization are nothing but the battlescars of a proud warrior. Civilization is powerless against it, because a person who has re-claimed fundamental self-respect cares nothing about the laws and standards of civilization.

This self-respect leads to genuine self-love, the second and decisive step on the path to sanity, for self-love (and happiness in large measure) consists in becoming one’s own ideal again, as in childhood. This self-love eventually overflows and becomes love for others and

for external nature. Concern for life on Earth is the result of a surplus of love, or as Nietzsche put it, “abundance in oneself the over-great fullness of life the feeling of plenitude and increased energy.” In other words, caring for life on Earth flows from an unbroken and expanding primary and healthy narcissism. Without this caring that flows from self-love, science and ethics will preach in vain for the preservation of biological diversity, ecological integrity, and real wilderness.

The megalomaniac or pathological narcissist has no love for others or for nature, because s/he needs all available psychic energy, and even more, in order to stave off a false self that is becoming more demanding and brutal. In megalomania, the backward flow of love, away from others and nature and toward the self, is a defensive reaction to the underlying reality of intensifying personal hurt and hatred: the original self is becoming weaker, and the false self stronger, because the gross injury to the psyche of the human being, by the trauma of civilization, festers.

Identification with the tribal ideal is the antidote to the massive narcissistic wounds inflicted on us by civilization, and it threatens civilization with disintegration because it goes to the source of our injury and begins to heal it. The third and final stage of the making of a revolutionary or eco-radical occurs when an individual, after arduous intellectual praxis, either remembers or intuits basic truth. The individual now hears its own primal voice, which rises up from within as an unstoppable conscious drive to assist fellow creatures and to make a positive contribution to the planet.

In sum, the path to sanity begins with the awareness of a tribal self. A personal commitment to this ideal builds self-respect, which in turn builds self-love. This self-love eventually overflows to take in others and nature. At last, individuals are psychologically secure and strong enough to enter into cooperative associations with one another in favor of a mass movement aimed at re-establishing small human villages, embedded in a healthy/wild landscape.

Conclusion

When the final crisis of civilization comes in the 21st Century, the present system will do whatever is necessary to perpetuate itself. People who are in the stranglehold of the false self will support whatever the system does, including the exploitation and destruction of National Parks, Designated Wilderness Areas, and The Wildlands Project (whatever it achieves). Unless people possess an assured, sane psychological core, everything else is in jeopardy. The personal pursuit of sanity is, or will shortly become, the overriding issue for the vast majority of people, and toward this end, each person, isolated and fearful in modern society, must be armed with an ideal or vision of what s/he would like to be and should be. There is nothing better to offer people than a tribal ideal. It is, then, up to each person to do the difficult psychological work of personal liberation that must precede real change. This personal task of healing the mind can be and must be accomplished, to a decisive point, in modern-day circumstances.

in Green Anarchist, Summer 1997, pp. 1617

Alon K. Raab: “Revolt of the Bats” (1995)

North America, Turtle Island, taken
by invaders who wage war
on the world,

May ants, may abalone, otters,

wolves, and elk rise!
and pull away their giving
from the robot nations.

Gary Snyder
Mother Earth: Her Whales

The animals are fighting back. By tooth and claw, by wing and paw, they are waging a war against civilized tyranny and destruction.

Sympathetic humans are burning down farm and fur ranch equipment, demolishing butcher shops, and trying to stop rodeos, circuses, and other forms of “entertainment.” But the animals are also acting as their own defenders, fighting for their own liberation.

These actions of revolt are done by individual animals, as well as by whole communities, and take many forms. Escape from captivity is a commonly employed tactic.

Here I would like to remember and salute the orangutan who escaped from his prison cell at the Kansas City Zoo in June 1990 by unscrewing four large bolts; the West African Cape clawless otter who, in December 1991, pushed her way through the wired cage at the Portland zoological incarceration facilities; an alligator who climbed a high ramp at a Seattle science exhibition in October 1991 and vanished for several hours; the elephant at the Louisville Zoo who escaped in June 1994; the sea otter “Cody” who in September 1993, armed with a fiberglass bolt pried from the floor of the Oregon Coast Aquarium took aim at a window and shattered one of the glass layers; the chimpanzees “Ai” and “Akira” at the Kyoto University Primates Research institute, who used keys taken from a guard to open their cages, cross the hall to free their orangutan friend “Doodoo,” and bolt to freedom.

In April 1990, a cow destined for a Turkish slaughterhouse leapt from the truck onto the roof of a car carrying a provincial governor, crushing it and injuring the official. The fate of the cow was not reported, but one hopes she was able to make her way into the hills. A decade earlier, near the town of Salem, Oregon, “Rufus” the bull knocked down the door of a truck carrying him to be butchered, and roamed freely for a few days until captured by bounty hunters, and returned to his “owner.” And in Cairo, Egypt, in June 1993, during the Muslim Eid-Al-Adha (“feast of sacrifice”), a bull escaped upon catching a glimpse of the butcher’s knife. The animal chased its would-be slaughterer up to his third floor apartment, wrecking furniture and forcing him to hide in the bedroom.

Some of the animals were recaptured and returned to their prisons, but the otter, who was last seen crossing the roadway between the Portland Zoo and the Oregon Museum of Science and Industry, making her way into the nearby forests, is a true inspiration, and hopefully a harbinger of many more daring dashes.

Sometimes free animals are in a strategic position to resist greed and profit. In 1991, a bald eagle blocked plans for a three million dollar road expansion project in Central Oregon by nesting near Highway 20. An eagle standing in the way of motorized mania is a beautiful sight to behold.

There are animals who carry the battle a step further, like the wren, nesting in a Washington, D. C. traffic light, who swooped down to attack business people. Other birds commit suicide by entering military plane engines and decommissioning them. In a show of solidarity for a fellow animal, the mule “Ruthie” kicked her rider, Idaho Governor Cecil Andrus, during a hunting trip, as he was loading a murdered elk onto her. Andrus suffered a broken nose and deep lacerations.

The Belgian spaniel who discharged a shotgun, killing hunter Jean Guillaume, the elephant who gored hunter Alan Lowe in Zimbabwe, and the cow who killed Quebec farmer Origene Ste-beanne when he tried to steal her newborn calf, are also worthy of our respect. I prefer persuasion and education to the taking of life, but there is poetic justice in these accounts.

When animals band together they are able to unleash a mighty power. Several years ago, in the depths of the suburban wastelands of Springfield, Massachusetts, ring-billed gulls bombarded a new golf course and its patrons with golf balls. The shocked golfers were forced to withdraw from their favorite water-and-land-wasting activity for several weeks, and consider the fact that for many years these lands were nesting grounds for the birds.

In the summer of 1989, downtown Fort Worth, Texas, came to a halt when thousands of Mexican free-tail bats descended on the city. In the early years of this century, bats wreaked much havoc on many Texas towns. In Austin, bats invaded the courthouse and Capitol building, flying through court sessions, stopping trials and nesting in the dark and cool buildings.

The bats that appeared in Fort Worth chewed into telephone lines and interrupted business as usual. The bats were a reminder to the local population, encased in glass and steel tombstones known as “offices,” that this world is much more complex and wondrous than anything taught in management courses. After a day, the bats vanished as they had come, into the unknown.

In the ancient myths of humanity, a special place of respect is given to animals. Affecting people in mysterious ways, and embodying particular qualities, they acted as messengers, as bearers of souls and gifts, and as symbols of all that was wonderful and magical. Birds, fish and mammals (and their many mutations with humans) were presented in myriad ways. A common theme was their ability to fend off hostile human attacks, through trickery, playfulness and wisdom. Coyote and Raven of the Northwest Coast of Turtle Island, the Keen Keeng of Australian dream time, and the sacred bee of Rhodes, are but some of the many magical beings who protected themselves and the lives of other animals and plants.

Once writing developed, accounts of animals opposing human arrogance and avarice abounded in the literature of natural history. We need only look at the inspiring reports provided by the Roman, Pliny the Elder. He marvels at elephants who trampled hunters, refusing to fight their kin in circuses and attempting to break loose from their shackles. Pliny also wrote of dolphins who rushed to rescue other dolphins from captivity, and of wild horses, loons, oxen, dogfish, rabbits and giant centipedes who resisted humans and often won. His accounts also include many instances of alliances between animals and aware humans, each assisting the other, and gaining mutual love and respect.

The medieval work, On the Criminal Persecution of Animals, provides in great detail the legacies of pigs, cows, sparrows, ravens, sheep, mules, horses and even worms, who brought destruction upon the human world. Animals disturbing church services, interrupting religious processions at their most solemn moment, and spoiling food supplies were common occurrences. As ancient traditions celebrating the sanctity of nature were rooted out and replaced by an anti-life world view, these animals were accused of being in league with demonic forces. The Christian courts held them responsible for their actions. The “criminals” were tried in regular courts of law, convicted and severely punished. In their pious zeal, the accusers missed the fact that the two-legged and four-legged beings were engaged in guerrilla warfare. They were revolting against humans who were attacking the rivers, valleys and forests. They were opposing the invaders who were engaged in that process of control, euphemistically called “domestication,” which, in reality, is enslavement and ecocide.

We are now living in the age of rationality and science, where well-meaning people feel no shame blurting out cliches like “finding the balance between the environment and economic interests,” or “managing wildlife,” as if wilderness was a commodity to profit from, control and manipulate.

The destruction of the wild (out there, and in our own souls) proceeds at an ever-maddening pace. Let us hope that acts of self-defense and resistance by animals, fish, birds and their human brothers and sisters increases. Let these actions multiply and intensify until human tyranny is thrown off and replaced by a community of free living beings, assisting each other in this magical journey, and reforging the ancient bonds of beauty and camaraderie.

in The Bear Essential, Summer 1995, pp. 1819

Kirkpatrick Sale: Rebels Against the Future: Lessons from the Luddites (1995)

Industrial civilization is today the water we swim in, and we seem almost as incapable of imagining what an alternative might look like, or even realizing that an alternative could exist, as fish in the ocean.

The political task of resistance today, thenbeyond the “quiet acts” of personal withdrawal Mumford urgesis to try to make the culture of industrialism and its assumptions less invisible and to put the issue of its technology on the political agenda, in industrial societies as well as their imitators. In the words of Neil Postman, a professor of communications at New York University and author of Technopoly, “it is necessary for a great debate” to take place in industrial society between “technology and everybody else” around all the issues of the “uncontrolled growth of technology” in recent decades. This means laying out as clearly and fully as possible the costs and consequences of our technologies, in the near term and long, so that even those overwhelmed by the ease/comfort/speed/power of high-tech gadgetry (what Mumford called technical “bribery”) are forced to understand at what price it all comes and who is paying for it. What purpose does this machine serve? What problem has become so great that it needs this solution? Is this invention nothing but, as Thoreau put it, an improved means to an unimproved end? It also means forcing some awareness of who the principal beneficiaries of the new technology arethey tend to be the large, bureaucratic, complex, and secretive organizations of the industrial worldand trying to make public all the undemocratic ways they make the technological choices that so affect all the rest of us. Who are the winners, who the losers? Will this concentrate or disperse power, encourage or discourage self-worth? Can society at large afford it? Can the biosphere?

Ultimately this “great debate” of course has to open out into wider questions about industrial society itself, its values and purposes, its sustainability. It is no surprise that the Luddites were unable to accomplish this in the face of an immensely self-satisfied laissez-faire plutocracy whose access to means of forcing debates and framing issues was considerably greater than theirs. Today, though, that task ought not to be so difficultin spite of the continued opposition of a plutocracy grown only more powerful and complacentparticularly because after two centuries it is now possible to see the nature off industrial civilization and its imperiling direction so much more clearly.

Certain home-truths are beginning to be understood, at least in most industrial societies, by increasing numbers of people: some of the fish at least not only seem to be seeing the water but realizing it is polluted. Industrialism, built upon machines designed to exploit and produce for human betterment alone, is on a collision course with the biosphere. Industrial societies, which have shown themselves capable of creating material abundance for a few and material improvement for many, are nonetheless shot through with inequality, injustice, instability, and incivility, deficiencies that seem to increase rather than decrease with technical advancement. Industrialism does not stand superior, on any level other than physical comfort and power and a problematic longevity of life, to many other societies in the long range of the human experiment, particularly those, morally based and earth-regarding, that did serve the kind of “apprenticeship to nature” that Herbert Read saw as the proper precondition to technology.

Say what you will about such tribal societies, the record shows that they were (and in some places still are) units of great cohesion and sodality, of harmony and regularity, devoid for the most part of crime or addiction or anomie or poverty or suicide, with comparatively few needs and those satisfied with a minimum of drudgery, putting in on average maybe four hours a day per person on tasks of hunting and gathering and cultivating, the rest of the time devoted to song and dance and ritual and sex and eating and stories and games. No, they did not have the power of five hundred servants at the flick of a switch or turn of a key, but then they did not have atomic bombs and death camps, toxic wastes, traffic jams, strip mining, organized crime, psychosurgery, advertising, unemployment or genocide.

To propose, in the midst of the “great debate,” that such societies are exemplary, instructive if not imitable, is not to make a romanticized “search for the primitive.” It is rather to acknowledge that the tribal mode of existence, precisely because it is nature-based, is consonant with the true, underlying needs of the human creature, and that we denigrate that mode and deny those needs to our loss and disfigurement. It is to suggest that certain valuable things have been left behind as we have sped headlong down the tracks of industrial progress and that it behooves us, in a public and spirited way, to wonder about what we have

gained from it all and reflect upon what we have lost. And it is, finally, to assert that some sort of ecological society, rooted in that ancient animistic, autochthonous tradition, must be put forth as the necessary, achievable goal for human survival and harmony on earth.

Philosophically, resistance to industrialism must be embedded in an analysisan ideology, perhapsthat is morally informed, carefully articulated, and widely shared.

One of the failures of Luddism (if at first perhaps one of its strengths) was its formlessness, its unintentionality, its indistinctness about goals, desires, possibilities. Movements acting out of rage and outrage are often that way, of course, and for a while there is power and momentum in those alone. For durability, however, they are not enough, they do not sustain a commitment that lasts through the adversities of repression and trials, they do not forge a solidarity that prevents the infiltration of spies and stooges, they do not engender strategies and tactics that adapt to shifting conditions and adversaries, and they do not develop analyses that make clear the nature of the enemy and the alternatives to put in its place.

Now it would be difficult to think that neo-Luddite resistance, whatever form it takes, would be able to overcome all those difficulties, particularly on a national or international scale: commitment and solidarity are mostly products of face-to-face, day-to-day interactions, unities of purpose that come from unities of place. But if it is to be anything more than sporadic and martyristic, resistance could learn from the Luddite experience at least how important it is to work out some common analysis that is morally clear about the problematic present and the desirable future, and the common strategies that stem from it.

All the elements of such an analysis, it seems to me, are in existence, scattered and still needing refinement, perhaps, but there: in Mumford and Schumacher and Wendell Berry and Jerry Mander and the Chellis Glendinning manifesto; in the writing of the Earth Firsters and the bioregionalists and deep ecologists; in the lessons and models of the Amish and the Irokwa; in the wisdom of tribal elders and the legacy of tribal experience everywhere; in the work of the long line of dissenters-from-progress and naysayers-to-technology. I think we might even be able to identify some essentials of that analysis, such as:

Industrialism, the ethos encapsulating the values and technologies of Western civilization, is seriously endangering stable social and environmental existence on this planet, to which must be opposed the values and techniques of an organic ethos that seeks to preserve the integrity, stability, and harmony of the biotic community, and the human community within it.

Anthropocentrism, and its expression in both humanism and monotheism, is the ruling principle of that civilization, as to which must be opposed the principle of biocentrism and the spiritual identification of the human with all living species and systems.

Globalism, and its economic and military expression, is the guiding strategy of that civilization, to which must be opposed the strategy of localism, based upon the empowerment of the coherent bioregion and the small community.

Industrial capitalism, as an economy built upon the exploitation and degradation of the earth, is the productive and distributive enterprise of that civilization, to which must be opposed the practices of an ecological and sustainable economy built upon accommodation and commitment to the earth and following principles of conservation, stability, self-sufficiency, and cooperation.

A movement of resistance starting with just those principles as the sinews of analysis would at least have a firm and uncompromising ground on which to stand and a clear and inspirational vision of where to go. If nothing else, it would be able to live up to the task that George Grant, the Canadian philosopher, has set this way: “The darkness which envelops the Western world because of its long dedication to the overcoming of chance” by which he means the triumph of the scientific mind and its industrial constructs”is just a fact. The job of thought in our time is to bring into the light that darkness as darkness.” And at its best, it might bring into the light the dawn that is the alternative.

If the edifice of industrial civilization does not eventually crumble as a result of a determined resistance within its very walls, it seems certain to crumble of its own accumulated excesses and instabilities within not more than a few decades, perhaps sooner, after which there may be space for alternative societies to arise.

The two chief strains pulling this edifice apart, environmental overload and social dislocation, are both the necessary and inescapable results of an industrial civilization. In some sense, to be sure, they are the results of any civilization: the record of the last five thousand years of

history clearly suggests that every single preceding civilization has perished, no matter where or how long it has been able to flourish, as a result of its sustained assault on its environment, usually ending in soil loss, flooding, and starvation, and a successive distension of all social strata, usually ending in rebellion, warfare, and dissolution. Civilizations, and the empires that give them shape, may achieve much of use and meritor so the subsequent civilization's historians would have us believebut they seem unable to appreciate scale or limits, and in their growth and turgidity cannot maintain balance and continuity within or without. Industrial civilization is different only in that it is now much larger and more powerful than any known before, by geometric differences in all dimensions, and its collapse will be far more extensive and thoroughgoing, far more calamitous.

It is possible that such a collapse will be attended by environmental and social dislocations so severe that they will threaten the continuation of life, at least human life, on the surface of the planet, and the question then would be whether sufficient numbers survive and the planet is sufficiently hospitable for scattered human communities to emerge from among the ashes. But it is also possible that it will come about more by decay and distension, the gradual erosion of nation-state arrangements made obsolete and unworkable, the disintegration of corporate behemoths unable to comprehend and respond, and thus with the slow resurrection and re-empowerment of small bioregions and coherent communities having control over their own political and economic destinies. In either case, it will be necessary for the survivors to have some body of lore, and some vision of human regeneration, that instructs them in how thereafter to live in harmony with nature and how and why to fashion their technologies with the restraints and obligations of nature intertwined, seeking not to conquer and dominate and control the species and systems of the natural worldfor the failure of industrialism will have taught the folly of thatbut rather to understand and obey and love and incorporate nature into their souls as well as their tools.

It is now the task of the neo-Luddites, armed with the past, to prepare, to preserve, and to provide that body of lore, that inspiration, for such future generations as may be. (pp. 273279)

Derrick Jensen: “Actions Speak Louder Than Words” (1998)

Every morning when I wake up I ask myself whether I should write or blow up a dam. I tell myself I should keep writing, though I’m not sure that’s right. I’ve written books and done activism, but it is neither a lack of words nor a lack of activism that is killing salmon here in the Northwest. It’s the dams.

Anyone who knows anything about salmon knows the dams must go. Anyone who knows anything about politics knows the dams will stay. Scientists study, politicians and business people lie and delay, bureaucrats hold sham public meetings, activists write letters and press releases, and still the salmon die.

Sadly enough, I’m not alone in my inability or unwillingness to take action. Members of the German resistance to Hitler from 1933 to 1945, for example, exhibited a striking blindness all too familiar: Despite knowing that Hitler had to be removed for a “decent” government to be installed, they spent more time creating paper versions of this theoretical government than attempting to remove him from power. It wasn’t a lack of courage that caused this blindness but rather a misguided sense of morals. Karl Goerdeler, for instance, though tireless in attempting to create this new government, staunchly opposed assassinating Hitler, believing that if only the two could sit face to face Hitler might relent.

We, too, suffer from this blindness and must learn to differentiate between real and false hopes. We must eliminate false hopes, which blind us to real possibilities. Does anyone really believe our protests will cause Weyerhaeuser or other timber transnationals to stop destroying forests? Does anyone really believe the same corporate administrators who say they “wish salmon would go extinct so we could just get on with living” (Randy Hardy of Bonneville Power Association) will act other than to fulfill their desires? Does anyone really believe a pattern of exploitation as old as our civilization can be halted legislatively, judicially or through means other than an absolute rejection of the mindset that engineers the exploitation, followed by actions based on that rejection? Does anybody really think those who are destroying the world will stop because we ask nicely or because we lock arms peacefully in front of their offices?

There can be few who still believe the purpose of government is to protect citizens from the activities of those who would destroy. The opposite is true:

Political economist Adam Smith was correct in noting that the primary purpose of government is to protect those who run the economy from the outrage of injured citizens. To expect institutions created by our culture to do other than poison waters, denude hillsides, eliminate alternative ways of living and commit genocide is unforgivably naive.

Many German conspirators hesitated to remove Hitler from office because they’d sworn loyalty to him and his government. Their scruples caused more hesitation than their fear. How many of us have yet to root out misguided remnants of a belief in the legitimacy of this government to which, as children, we pledged allegiance? How many of us fail to cross the line into violent resistance because we still believe that, somehow, the system can be reformed? And if we don’t believe that, what are we waiting for? As Shakespeare so accurately put it, “Conscience doth make cowards of us all.”

It could be argued that by comparing our government to Hitler’s I’m overstating my case. I’m not sure salmon would agree, nor lynx, nor the people of Peru, Irian Jaya, Indonesia, or any other place where people pay with their lives for the activities of our culture.

If we’re to survive, we must recognize that we kill by inaction as surely as by action. We must recognize that, as Hermann Hesse wrote, “We kill when we close our eyes to poverty, affliction or infamy. We kill when, because it is easier, we countenance, or pretend to approve of atrophied social, political, educational, and religious institutions, instead of resolutely combating them.”

The central - and in many ways only - question of our time is this: What are sane, appropriate and effective responses to outrageously destructive behavior? So often, those working to slow the destruction can plainly describe the problems. Who couldn’t? The problems are neither subtle nor cognitively challenging. Yet when faced with the emotionally daunting task of fashioning a response to these clearly insoluble problems, we generally suffer a failure of nerve and imagination. Gandhi wrote a letter to Hitler asking him to stop committing atrocities and was mystified that it didn’t work. I continue writing letters to the editor of the local corporate newspaper pointing out mistruths and am continually surprised at the next absurdity.

I'm not suggesting a well-targeted program of assassinations would solve all of our problems. If it were that simple, I wouldn't be writing this essay. To assassinate Slade Gorton and Larry Craig, for example, two senators from the Northwest whose work may be charitably described as unremittingly ecocidal, would probably slow the destruction not much more than to write them a letter. Neither unique nor alone, Gorton and Craig are merely tools for enacting ecocide, as surely as are dams, corporations, chainsaws, napalm and nuclear weapons. If someone were to kill them, others would take their places. The ecocidal programs originating specifically from the damaged psyches of Gorton and Craig would die with them, but the shared nature of the impulses within our culture would continue full-force, making the replacement as easy as buying a new hoe.

Hitler, too, was elected as legally and "democratically" as Craig and Gorton. Hitler, too, manifested his culture's death urge brilliantly enough to capture the hearts of those who voted him into power and to hold the loyalty of the millions who actively carried out his plans. Hitler, like Craig and Gorton, like George Weyerhaeuser and other CEOs, didn't act alone. Why, then, do I discern a difference between them?

The current system has already begun to collapse under the weight of its ecological excesses, and here's where we can help. Having transferred our loyalty away from our culture's illegitimate economic and governmental entities and to the land, our goal must be to protect, through whatever means possible, the human and nonhuman residents of our homelands. Our goal, like that of a demolition crew on a downtown building, must be to help our culture collapse in place, so that in its fall it takes out as little life as possible.

Discussion presupposes distance, and the fact that we're talking about whether violence is appropriate tells me we don't yet care enough. There's a kind of action that doesn't emerge from discussion, from theory, but instead from our bodies and from the land. This action is the honeybee stinging to defend her hive; it's the mother grizzly charging a train to defend her cubs; it's Zapatista spokesperson Cecelia Rodriguez saying, "I have a question of those men who raped me. Why did you not kill me? It was a mistake to spare my life. I will not shut up - this has not traumatized me to the point of paralysis." It's Ogoni activist Ken Saro-Wiwa, murdered by the Nigerian government at the urging of Shell, whose last words were, "Lord, take my soul, but the struggle continues!" It's those who participated in the Warsaw Ghetto uprising. It's Crazy Horse, Sitting Bull and Geronimo. It's salmon battering themselves against concrete, using the only thing they have, their flesh, to try to break down that which keeps them from their homes.

I don't believe the question of whether to use violence is the right one. Instead, the question should be: Do you sufficiently feel the loss? So long as we discuss this in the abstract, we still have too much to lose. If we begin to feel in our bodies the immensity and emptiness of what we lose dailyintact natural communities, hours sold for wages, childhoods lost to violence, women's capacity to walk unafraidwe'll know precisely what to do.

in Earth First! Journal, May-June 1998, p. 5

Anti-Authoritarians Anonymous: “We Have To Dismantle All This” (1995)

The unprecedented reality of the present is one of enormous sorrow and cynicism, “a great tear in the human heart,” as Richard Rodriguez put it. A time of ever-mounting everyday horrors, of which any newspaper is full, accompanies a spreading environmental apocalypse. Alienation and the more literal contaminants compete for the leading role in the deadly dialectic of life in divided, technology-ridden society. Cancer, unknown before civilization, now seems epidemic in a society increasingly barren and literally malignant.

Soon, apparently, everyone will be using drugs; prescription and illegal becoming a relatively unimportant distinction. Attention Deficit Disorder is one example of an oppressive effort to medicalize the rampant restlessness and anxiety caused by a life-world ever more shriveled and unfulfilling. The ruling order will evidently go to any lengths to deny social reality; its techno-psychiatry views human suffering as chiefly biological in nature and genetic in origin.

New strains of disease, impervious to industrial medicine, begin to spread globally while fundamentalism (Christian, Judaic, Islamic) is also on the rise, a sign of deeply-felt misery and frustration. And here at home New Age spirituality (Adorno’s “philosophy for dunces”) and the countless varieties of “healing” therapies wear thin in their delusional pointlessness. To assert that we can be whole/enlightened/healed within the present madness amounts to endorsing the madness.

The gap between rich and poor is widening markedly in this land of the homeless and the imprisoned. Anger rises and massive denial, cornerstone of the system’s survival, is now at least having a troubled sleep. A false world is beginning to get the amount of support it deserves: distrust of public institutions is almost total. But the social landscape seems frozen and the pain of youth is perhaps the greatest of all. It was recently announced (10/94) that the suicide rate among young men ages 15 to 19 more than doubled between 1985 and 1991. Teen suicide is the response of a growing number who evidently cannot imagine maturity in such a place as this.

The overwhelmingly pervasive culture is a fast-food one, bereft of substance or promise. As Dick Hebdige aptly judged, “the postmodern is the modern without the hopes and dreams that made modernity bearable.” Postmodernism advertises itself as pluralistic, tolerant, and non-dogmatic. In practice it is a superficial, fast-forward, deliberately confused, fragmented, media-obsessed, illiterate, fatalistic, uncritical excrescence, indifferent to questions of origins, agency, history or causation. It questions nothing of importance and is the perfect expression of a setup that is stupid and dying and wants to take us with it.

Our postmodern epoch finds its bottom-line expression in consumerism and technology, which combine in the stupefying force of mass media. Attention-getting, easily-digested images and phrases distract one from the fact that this horror-show of domination is precisely held together by such entertaining, easily digestible images and phrases. Even the grossest failures of society can be used to try to narcotize its subjects, as with the case of violence, a source of endless diversion. We are titillated by the representation of what at the same time is threatening, suggesting that boredom is an even worse torment than fear.

Nature, what is left of it, that is, serves as a bitter reminder of how deformed, non-sensual, and fraudulent is contemporary existence. The death of the natural world and the technological penetration of every sphere of life, what is left of it, proceed with an accelerating impetus. Wired, Mondo 2000, zippies, cyber-everything, virtual reality, Artificial Intelligence, on and on, up to and including Artificial Life, the ultimate postmodern science.

Meanwhile, however, our “post-industrial” computer age has resulted in the fact that we are more than ever “appendages to the machine,” as the 19th century phrase had it. Bureau of Justice statistics (7/94), by the way, report that the increasingly computer-surveilled workplace is now the setting for nearly one million violent crimes per year, and that the number of murdered bosses has doubled in the past decade.

This hideous arrangement expects, in its arrogance, that its victims will somehow remain content to vote, recycle, and pretend it will all be fine. To employ a line from Debord, “The spectator is simply supposed to know nothing and deserve nothing.”

Civilization, technology, and a divided social order are the components of an indissoluble whole, a death-trip that is fundamentally hostile to qualitative difference. Our answer must be qualitative, not the quantitative, more-of-the-same palliatives that actually reinforce what we must end.

in Anti-Authoritarians Anonymous flier, Eugene,

1995

Section Six: Under the pavement, the beach. (Paris, 1968)

Permissions

Biographical Note

John Zerzan wrote *Elements of Refusal* (1988, 1999) and *Future Primitive* (1994), and coedited, with Alice Carnes, *Questioning Technology* (1988, 1991). Forthcoming (1999) is a collection of recent essays, *Running on Emptiness*.