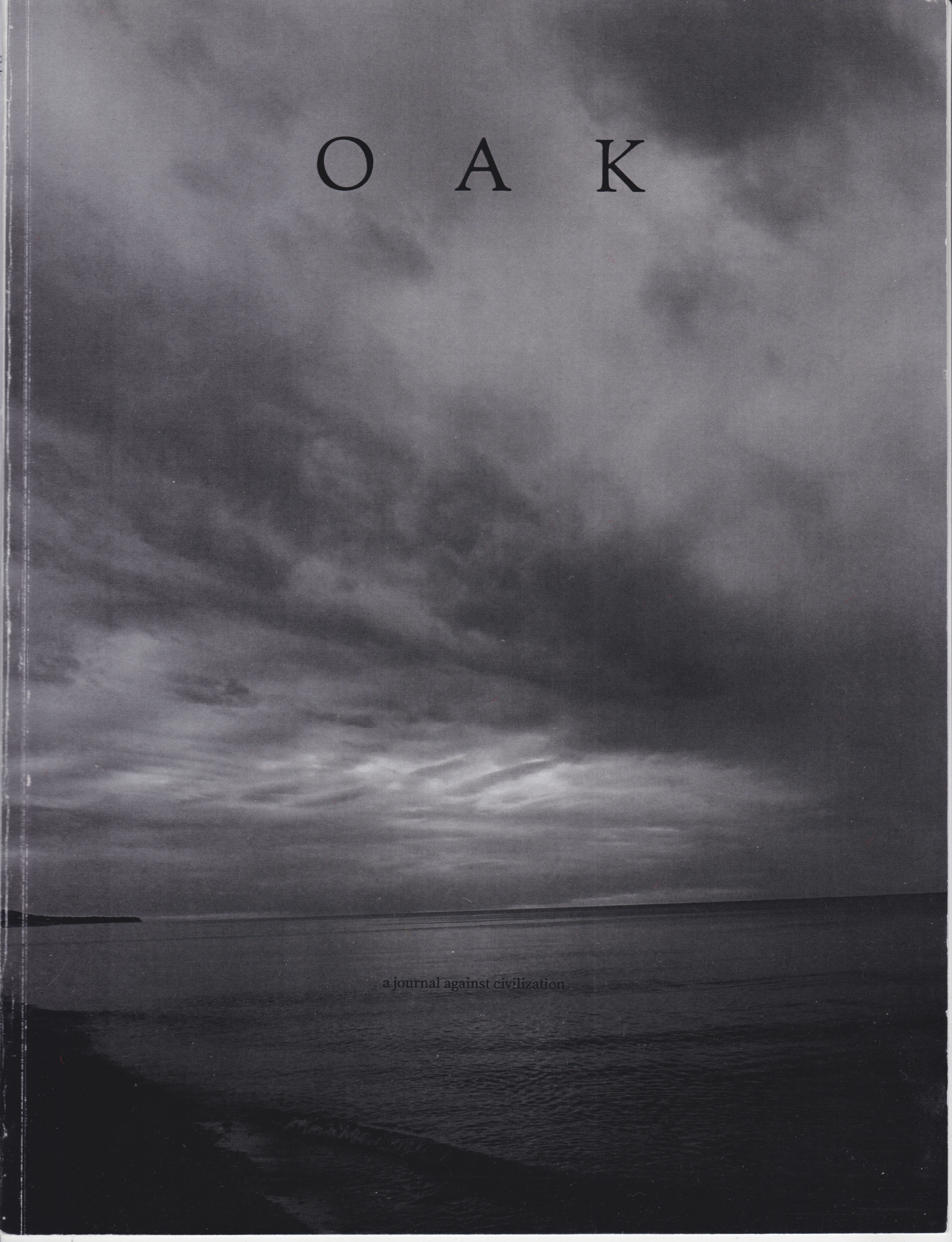
O A K
a journal against civilization

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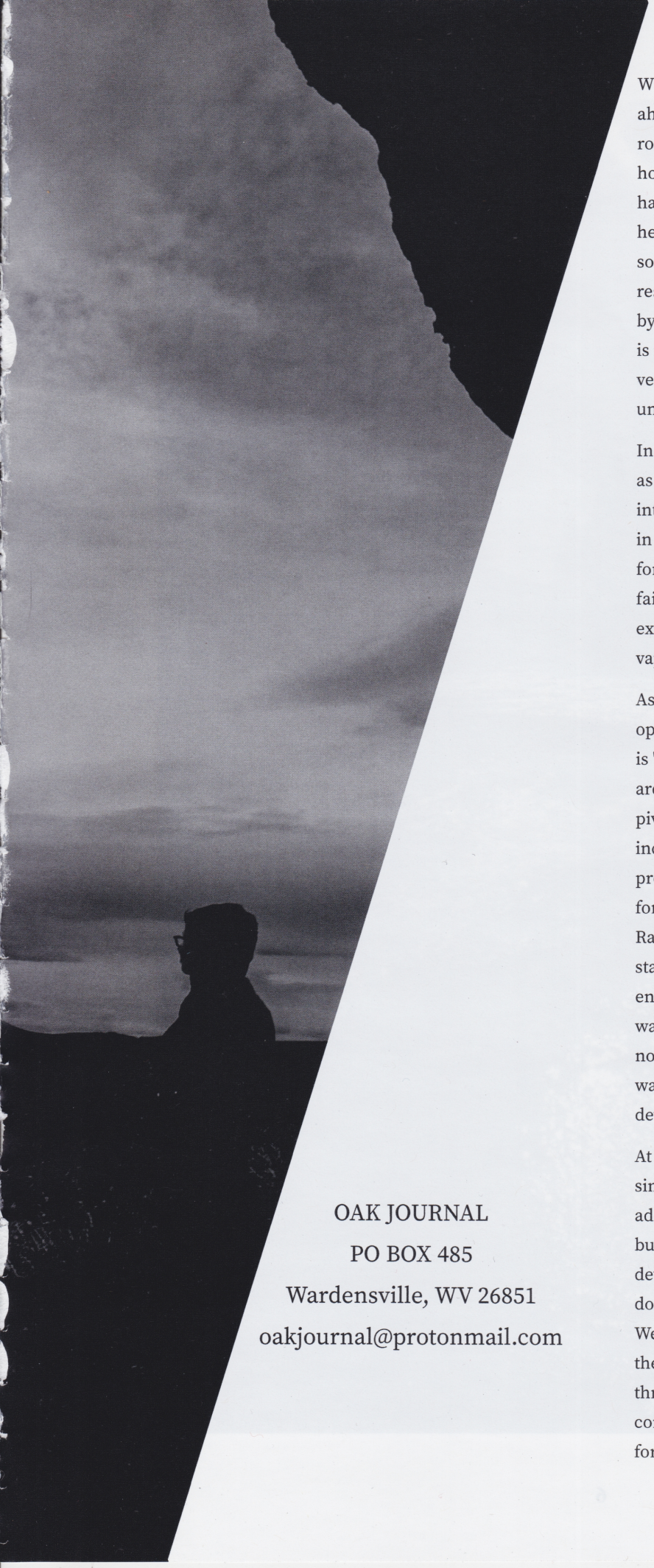
Photography throughout by Anne Kirk with edits by Steve Kirk

# Oak
# Spring 2022

As trite as it may be to comment on the pace of "time passing" it is indeed remarkable that Oak is releasing its fourth issue and that the calendar marks almost three years since the initial call out for contributions. In a sense we must ask, as Giorgio Agamben has, "where are we now?" And the answer to that question, if taken through the lens of our previous issues, is that we are in a place of perhaps equal hope and dread. As Oak One came out, right in the heat of the initial lockdowns of 2020, the "possibility" that swarmed and preoccupied my mind shrank back quickly as I moved into an acute state of fear and trepidation, worrying almost solely about the effects of a virus which, at that time, purported a 3-5 percent infection fatality rate depending on source and method of calculation. This grim picture began in the summer of 2020 to slowly transform for me. The fatality rate calculation, which I monitored hawkishly in an almost perverse addiction to what appeared as ever-increasing danger, began to fall rapidly. Indeed, it was when I came to realize that I had purposefully ignored -- at times outright disbelieving -- the change in mortality figures to under 1 percent that I began to question my fervent psychosis around the dangers of COVID-19 the disease and SARS-COV-2 the virus. This realization was hinted at in Oak's second editorial which opened with the lines "This is no Justinian plague." And indeed, that statement held fast and true, despite what some have said to me, citing no evidence to the contrary but harbouring a feeling that it must be false (one need only look at the relative effects of past pandemics to understand the actual scale of COVID-19 beyond media). As this reality of the true cost of COVID-19 and the litany of restrictions (governed by an official and unofficial apparatus of control) took hold in my mind a parallel realization also appeared: the vitality and justification for governance had taken on invigorated meaning and force. Any remaining artifice of the old styles of power was nearly gone in the West, the ruling of the population now largely rested on appeals to science and objective fact. The rising force of scientism and its appeal "only to the unmediated authority of the fact", as Christopher Lasch put it, more fully took control of daily life. It had come to pass in such a way that no debate was necessary. The necessity of this new regime, which in a single swipe redefined governance and market patterns across the world, was apparent to the new class of ruling elites -- the credentialed professionals, managers and academics who look down with small reserves of pity and massive stores of disgust at the hordes of the poor and their "misinformation".

And so I abstained from comment in Issue 3, preferring to let the contributors speak and let me contemplate the meanings in this shift of governance and styles of domestication.



What seems abundantly clear is that the path laid out ahead has become devoid of many of the previous roadblocks to technological development. Working from home is a standard, in-person communication has been hampered and devalued by facial coverings and ritualistic health monitoring, retail commodity that may retain some element of human contact (and therefore human resistance) is shuttered in favour of warehouse work driven by barcodes and infinite legibility. The content of our lives is increasingly transparent to the governing forces and the veneer of their aesthetic legitimacy is characterized by unquestioned well-intentioned convenience.

In some ways these trends can be viewed as "accelerations" as many in the media have noted in their banal intellectualism. But there is something of fortunetelling in this appraisal. Who is to say that this trend shall go on forever, that we shall live under the reign of civilization's failures and counterproductivity along with its ceaseless expansion of commodity? I certainly do not consent to the vapidness of such a world and I hope you do not either.

As we get ready for print the invasion/incursion/military operation/proxy war has begun in Ukraine. Perhaps it is "over" when you read this. One thing is certain, we are all slaves to the media moment and narrative which pivots and shifts in well-greased fashion, slipping past inconvenience of prior eras, sliding right on to the next progressive degradation. The invigorating effects of war for the civilizational machine should never be forgotten, Randolph Bourne's warning that "war is the health of the state," while perhaps tripping over more trite tripwires, still encapsulates the geopolitical reality. The domain of that warfare has clearly changed, though it is typically additive, not subtractive, and those who seem to believe kinetic warfare is a thing of the past should be humbled by this development.

At risk of repeating myself from another editorial I will simply remind that not only are the domains of warfare additive and comensurate to technological development but also that the catastrophe of civilization and its developing crises are also often themselves additive. We do not, as it appears in the media, hop from crisis to crisis. We inhabit all of them simultaneously, though the depth of their effect is indeed mediated by our exposure to their fact through the simulacra of experience we call media. This complexity, while daunting, is clarifying and simplifying for resistance: Get off the internet.

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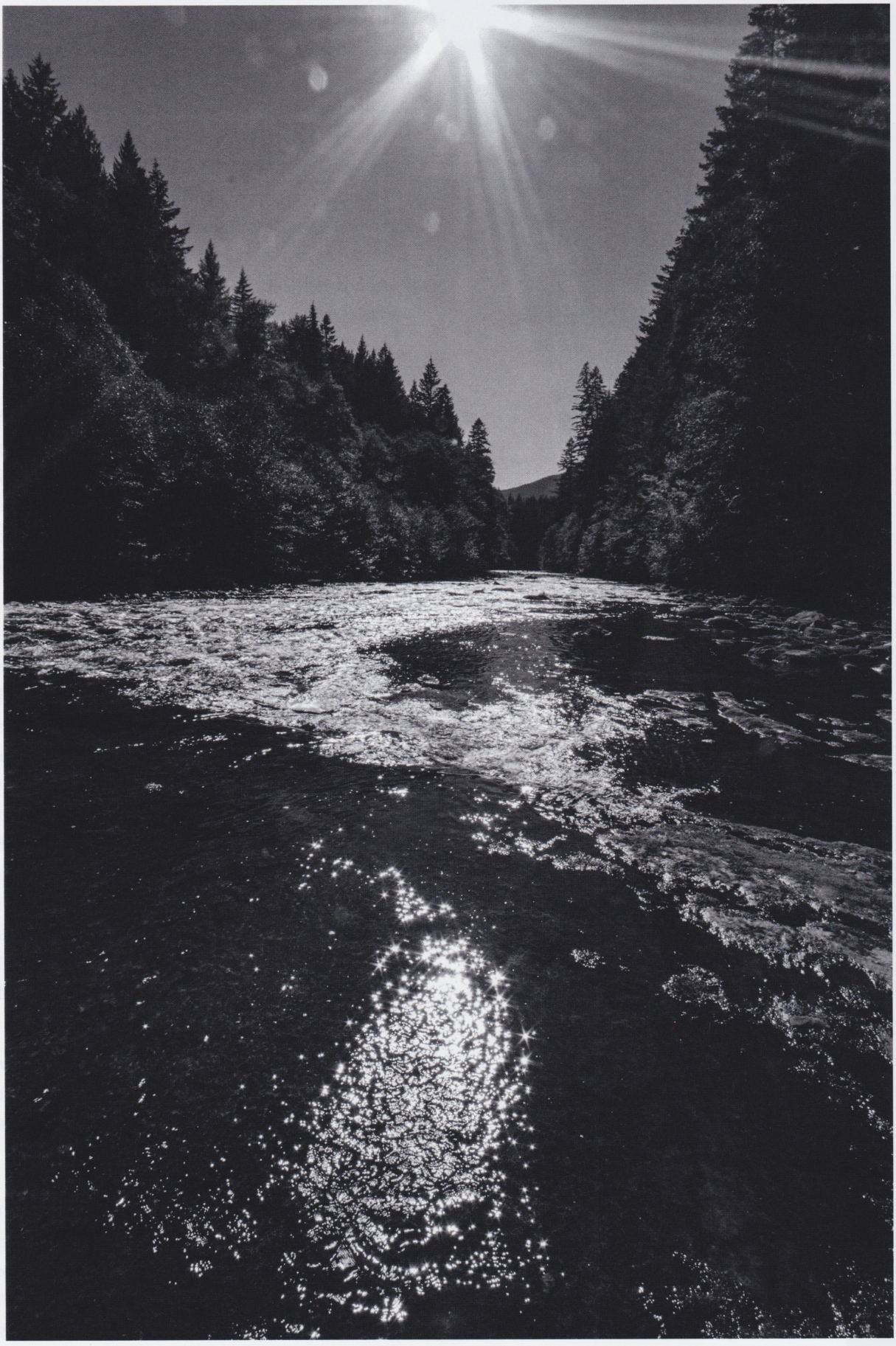

# The Cyclical Dreaming of Wildness and Freedom

**Deep in remote mountain country, far away from the centers of mass-society, walking along the shore of a small lake, I poke my walking stick into a pile of bear dung to get a feel for its age...**

The dung is crusty on the outside but still a bit moist on the inside. A couple of days old. I am always testing bear piles like this because the fresher they are the more likely there is a bear close by, and thus the more I need to be on my toes. In this country there is a good chance that a bear won't just run off if encountered. An *Ursus* here is prone to perceive a two-legged as a food source, or, at best, a threat which needs to be somehow neutralized.

A day earlier I came across a similar berry-filled pile. This one was fresh, perhaps within minutes. I froze and then could hear something, a distinct sound I've come to know – the sound of a bear in the brush. The sound of a bear foraging is different from the sound of a deer or elk moving. It's hard to describe precisely how these noises contrast. The sound of a bear moving is heavier than that of the browsing deer, more active, and more full-bodied. I've come to know this sound the hard way – from once assuming, while long-bow hunting, that I was hearing the sound of a moose in the forest and accordingly stalking my way towards the unique noise only to find out that I had actually just silently stalked my way to within thirty feet of an enormous mama grizzly. I tried to slowly back away but before I could move two feet she was on me, huffing and charging full speed to within ten feet away. Luckily for me her charge was only a bluff: '*look motherfucker, you come one step closer into my zone I will fuck you up real good*,' that was what she was saying to me. I of course didn't try to argue back, instead I got to walking way back from where I came.

I think I still got a little PTSD from that day. So now whenever I come across ultra-fresh bear scat, or hear that bear-foraging sound, I go into hasty-and-silent retreat mode – and that's exactly what I did the day previous to the day we are discussing here: I saw the scat, heard the bear in the brush, and quickly changed my course, going up and over a hill in a new direction, coming to a different valley, and on to a new unforeseen adventure.

That redirect the day before is what led me randomly on the trajectory towards the remote lakeshore I'm walking along now. After writing off the bear scat there as old-news, my steps resume and off to my left something else grabs my attention – a sharp and pointy, but almost dome-shaped, object jutting out of the lake water. I move closer to recognize that it's the end of a sunken metal canoe. This is surprising to me because I am not exaggerating in my description that this little lake is really in the middle of nowhere, in trail-less country, way out, over 30 miles from any moto road. "Wow, some crazy fucker by some means carried a canoe all the way out here," I exclaim to myself. Then, at my feet, something else catches my eye. It's an old rope so covered in green moss that if you weren't really looking you wouldn't notice. With this I realized that the canoe was once anchored to the shore by the rope and somehow got loose and then ended up sunk. I look around more, and a little ways into the woods on my right I make can out the distinct shape of a man-made structure.

It's an abandoned crumbling-over little cabin. The bottom half is made from forest logs in the old way, and the top is made with milled lumber, plywood, and corrugated metal roofing that is spray painted in a make-shift camouflage pattern. The remains of a small deck jut-out from the cabin entrance but the floor is collapsed, as is, I realize upon entry, the entire interior floor of the cabin. Porcupine seem to now call the floor space a winter home but the remains of old cabin supplies are scattered about. Makeshift shelves still adorn the walls and a woodstove that looks to be still operable sits in a corner.

What arises immediately in my mind here is wonderment about the story of this place; who was the person (or persons) that built this shelter, what drove them to build it way out here, to haul all of these materials this far, and why was the project abandoned?

"Somebody's dreams of wildness," are the initial words I utter to myself. No matter what the maker's philosophical background, at base, the motive must have been that worldwide well-documented common dream of the human caught in the civilized rat-trap, spirit held back by the mental and physical shackles of domesticated life, making bold moves to escape it, to find solace, peace, freedom, resilience, and life-force in wildness. At least this is clear to me. But the rest of the story, who knows?

The scrappy attempt at a camouflage exterior paint-job tells me that the person (or people) didn't want to be found. The sunken canoe tells me that when whoever was here departed they had expected to come back soon but for some reason never did – someone planning to be gone for a while would not have left their canoe floating in the water but would have instead beached it and flipped it over for safe storage.

One theory; "did the guy do a McCandless[1] and die out here somewhere? Drown? Break a leg and freeze? Get eaten by a bear?" The other possibility; the person returned back home to civilization and for some reason never came back to their mountain refugia.

If it was the latter case then the interesting question is why didn't they come back? Was it simply the circumstances of life; going back to 'work,' the need to take care of children or elders or friends, personal illness of some type? Something like this could have occurred, a fork in the road that simply disallowed the originator to continue pursuing those once strong dreams of wildness and freedom. Or, to me the most interesting possibility: did the seeker fail to return because they made a choice to give up - after giving it all they had for several months, or years, was a decision made that 'going wild' was the wrong choice; too hard; too dangerous; too lonely; not actually possible to survive?

I know this country well and am intimately familiar with what it would take to survive on wildness alone here. This is a place that is more wild and more free than 99% of the planet today, but making it here on wildness alone, especially without communal support, a solid band of feral-future comrades, is a challenge of the highest order; mentally, physically, and logistically. So it could easily have been the personal-choice-to-abandon scenario. It's highly likely that the list of difficulties at least played some role in the abandonment of our mystery person's dreams of wildness and freedom.

This story of abandoning former hopes and dreams of resistance, wildness, and freedom is one that has played out over and over

again throughout the history of industrial civilization's domination of the planet, and, even more noteworthy, it is likely a story that has in fact occurred in various formats for thousands of years. What this expresses is domestication's multidimensional capacity to reign over human life once it sets in, making overcoming its stranglehold, even for the most committed, immensely challenging.

How many stories are there, over the course of western history alone, of people who wanted out, who in their full-scale immiseration within mass-society the answer for authenticity and healing was in 'nature,' to attempt developing a simple way of life living within one of the evermore diminishing non-domesticated portions of our world? The stories are countless, in one form or another, across the historical record. An extremely important theme in all known history is that, as a rebel response to the dominant order, thousands of economically poor colonists, escaped prisoners and slaves, military deserters, and all types of the generally disillusioned, have 'gone Native,' or died trying. Once caught: "You dun' gone Injun, daind't you boy?' as the steel-toed boot of one of Leviathan's despicable soldiers smacks you in your bloody face[2].

And the stories are ongoing. Deep underneath all the veils, it seems that almost anyone and everyone actually does want out, albeit the various types of formats followed, both today and in the recent past, mostly amount to, in the end, just more subtle versions of pathological surrenderings to mass-society, consumption, technophillia and other ridiculous maladaptive afflictions.

I'm pretty sure that since before I was ten years old I've wanted out. And now I'm almost 50 years old and I certainly still do want out, both personally and holistically; I want other humans to get out, get wild, get free, and I certainly want the earth to get out from under civilization's never ending destructive pressure. Nearly forty years of undying effort for me, I guess, in one format or another, and I've made a lot of progress, certainly more the most I think. But I've also paid a lot of prices for that progress; socially, physically, mentality, family-wise, economically, and most recently, legally.

A few years back I was nearly to the point where I could get by without participating in the machine but then new crazy shit happened and the machine sucked me back in. It is a relentless bastard, and equally relentless in their pathology are all of the machine's (in) human soldiers. Now I'm trying to figure out how to pay off over $30,000 in legal debt without needing to 'get a job.' How the fuck am I going to pull that off? I'm sitting here wondering what the hell to do and writing this out. I don't have any solid answers. But one thing for sure is I aint ever giving up on wildness and freedom. I'll fight until the end for this.

I could write out here all the details of my personal drama but that would probably get boring, even though I'll bet a good bunch of you want to know; you'd rather post gossip drama on social media nowadays than work diligently yourself to find a way out. You'd prefer to live in indolence staring into your screens than to make real effort to build supportive relationships with others who are authentically making strides to physically achieve wildness and freedom, people moving to '*Abandon the Death Ship*[3]' and abandon it not just selfishly but as THE act of resistance and rebellion against this monster that is killing us and everything else more and more every day.

Yet here is an essential reality: pretty much anybody who is making solid movement towards abandonment isn't on social media much. Being on social media much actually lends to a highly accurate mathematical equation; THE MORE YOU ARE 'ONLINE' = THE MORE YOU AINT ACTUALLY DOING FUCKING ANYTHING.

But forgive me, please. I usher such strong words with humility. I'll confess something else related to why people end up abandoning their dreams of wildness and freedom: It's very true that as one ages it gets harder to keep up physically. Nearly 30 years of non-stop rugged mountain travel on foot, many of which have been chasing animals and carrying heavy loads of meat, are taking their toll on my joints now. This year I started wondering how long I can keep doing it. It was during that hike when I discovered the abandoned cabin, in connection to my wonderment about who abandoned it and why, that I felt some first twitches of abandonment myself, well not necessarily abandonment, but change; a shift in strategy. I ended up covering about sixty miles on that trip. Alone, exploring terrain and thinking about future camps, dreaming not just of wildness but of wild community, building up a band of folks who would be down to travel this land with me; hunt, fish, gather, camp; help each other out; make it all more doable and less lonely.

A few days ago I got a call from a friend. Like me, an anarchist since his teenage punk days, and one of the best hunters I know. He was telling me about a recent moose hunt and said he was getting tired of carrying so much weight, like me, his joints were getting older. I said "yeah man, this year carrying moose meat for several miles was the first time I started telling myself that I might need to start reeling myself in a little bit next season." He replied: "I'm not giving up but I just need to stop fucking up my joints doing this. What we need is to start trying to recruit a bunch of kids, take them out into the country and teach them what we know, we could start passing on this knowledge and practice of foot hunting and we could split up these loads better." "I'm with you 100%," I said "We gotta keep pushing for community, build up our camps and really focus on making all of this multigenerational." I continued "you know, this is the way it's always been, the older hunters get tired, the new ones come along and take on the harder work. But the problem is; where are these younger hunters? And also, pretty much everyone we know that is down still needs to always get back to civilized life, they don't have time for the old ways, extended camps where we didn't need to carry entire animals back to cars and freezers and get back to a job. It's the rush-rush-rush aspect these days that also makes our hunts more demanding than they should be." "Yep, for real. It's all a major problem. But next season let's try really hard to start orienting our hunting towards community building and teaching kids rather than just getting meat for ourselves," he replied. "I'm with you all the way!" I said.

As I declared above, I'll fight until the end for wildness and absolute freedom from Leviathanic enslavement. Even if what I've been doing will never be enough, I'll still never give in to the idea that surrendering to domestication is a viable (or honorable) alternative. Through years of research and my own dirt-time, I've come to understand that, to-the-core, this lack of surrender is what it means to be a hunter-gatherer. Our hominid evolutionary heritage, the hunter-gatherer way of life, is not just about living in wild places and mostly on wild food – total resistance to all threats of tyranny is what hunter-gatherers do. Hunter-gatherers do resistance better than anybody else, they are humanity's proven greatest freedom-fighters, our most enduring insurgents against attempts at domination by egoists and narcissists – you know them: the type of (in)human entities who generally run the show here on planet earth now.

Ever since the rise of socio-economic complexity, around 35,000 years ago perhaps - escalating specialization, division labor, resource intensification, warrior-mentality, territorial encapsulation, and increasing sedentism, - mobile hunter-gatherers have been THE human entities that have rejected the enslavement trajectory, while others slowly and, often unknowingly, gave in.

A first step for the capitulators was that they privileged an evolving hyper-sociality and hyper-alienating symbolics over freedom, an initial hominid mental-idealization of social complexity - art and artifice, technique, sophistication, decorum, manners, specialized ritual - romanticized feel-good distractions that subtly began to usher in self-enslavement. Organized logistical leadership geared towards intensified resource procurement are the backbone political and physical elements.

Some felt uncomfortable with all this. They walked away into the more remote, marginal areas. They made camp. Hunted animals. Gathered roots. Hung out for a while to eat and then moved on. They did not amass things and sell shit. They stayed free and stayed wild. These are the people who came to be known historically as 'extant nomadic hunter-gatherers,' and there are still a handful of these folks around, believe it or not; the last free human beings on the planet. They never gave up. Their elders saw the mechanisms of enslavement, identified how these mechanics evolve, and passed on the embedded spiritual and physical knowledge for how to avoid the traps. That's how and why many humans, all of which are known hunter-gatherers, avoided hierarchy and civilized enslavement for tens of thousands of years.

This is of course all counter to what the bourgeois housebroken wine-bar loving professors Graeber and Wengrow have to say about it all[4]. Making a shit-ton of money off reassuring the evermore afraid liberal masses that civilization is actually redeemable, and getting away with not doing any real depth of introspective research on hunter-gatherers while failing to understand how hunter-gatherers actually do measure up in terms of evolutionary sustainability, when compared to a measly few thousand years of lesser-impact settled life by the incipient civilizations which set the stage for the real full-blown thing. Who are the greater of the jokers – these slime ball civilization loving liberal professors? Or the ultra-domesticated western intellectual readers who lap up such propaganda because it helps them feel a little better about their self-perpetuated helplessness? The entire thing just gets more fucking hilarious, and authentically scary, as each month passes now.

The problem with modern persons (from both the colonized and colonizer categories) who do have authentically in their heart a desire for justice, change, sustainability, freedom, equality, stopping the obliteration of the planet and our humanity, and so forth, is that they continuously lack, and I think, due to the discomforts presented by the reality, avoid, the actual deep-ancestral knowledge concerning how to truly escape the traps, especially the ultra-vital material/physical components. Many individuals and groups make valiant efforts to resist, to get themselves and others free, but they always slip back into their domestication, their total tethering to the machine - focusing on only the metaphysical stuff, the 'worldview,' philosophizing, politics, self-identities, having an 'internet presence' and so on. These paths are chosen not through people's own conscious faults per-se but because we are all so fragmented and unable to truly come together for any type of long-range physical existence (subsistence), because we ALL carry so much mental and physical civilized fucking baggage.

Nevertheless, please hear me: if you want a fighting chance for yourself, your kin, and for this world, immediately encode this into your brain and act on it: *subsistence IS resistance*[5]. It's time to begin holding as a core strategic ideal the enactment of a physical & material multigenerational-anti-commodification-subsistence-long-game.

I don't think the cabin was abandoned because the person who built it and tried living there was eaten by a bear, I think the cabin was abandoned because of the person's complicated-to-disengage-from association with some type of civilized baggage. All so hard to overcome for us, but for the earth, for all other-being, and for ourselves as the two-leggeds who evolved, not as the *demonic male*[6], but rather as the gender egalitarian *cooperative ape*[7]. We just can't give up that essential evolutionary legacy.

At all odds some of us will keep fighting for our human truth, our actualized fitness, and most of all - for the small ones who will certainly inherit this world. The children will inherit what is next to come and I boldly proclaim that some situations for them, yet certainly not all, will ultimately evolve to again be redeemable.

The new redeemable worlds shall develop dynamically, organically and not entirely by design, such as how the sudden presence of a great bear blocking one's path leads us to a different road of expanding activation and revelation.

Even though we usually can't see it, it is happening. Some folks out there living on mountain, sand, water, rock, and forest paths are on a new road. The worlds we desire, the emerging redeemable worlds, are really unfolding, through the actions, both large and small, past and present, of all persons making physical strides towards wild and free lifeways.

Us here now, those of us out on the land, we are first creation in the wake of the arising collapse.

I disclose that every day I feel it - my own swath of domesticated baggage wanting to kill me, to see me drown. But if we as creation here and now do not defy such Leviathanic sorcery, then our next creation surely shall not exist in defiance. Everything now goes forward and feeds what is next: fit, undomesticated beings recovering animated wild minds and places. This will not happen in a straightforward formulaic routine; rather, it will be a winding and niche-specific multigenerational path. Perhaps several generations more.

For the indigenous, everything has always been multigenerational and never much about individuals. Every being ultimately becomes what is next, but in new form[8].

Understand that things are not really about you or me anymore. It's about something larger – that is why I keep on.

I'm sure I'm not going to make it very far myself, and I don't think you are going to make it very far either, but there is hope for the young ones if they can be brought into the fold quickly, shown a thing or two about how to be, and what to strive for as ongoing agents of resistance now encircled by the 21st century turmoil of global mass-society crumbling.

Agents of the tundra, the taiga, the desert sands, the backwoods, and backwaters, creating a community of memories, camp stories being passed on, stories passed down about why we do what we do, why we refuse to go along, or go on with this netherworld that the digitized/micro-chipped-masses are now digging their heels into with increasing desperation.

There is no way around this truth – inevitably, my spirit, my small contribution to rewilding, no matter how defeated and flawed, becomes that of the child, and it gets carried further forward, amplifying, indigenizing and re-indigenizing, slowly returning to become PART of the land, as opposed to - and in defiant opposition to - the evermore prevailing trend of persons continuing to become more and more a part of the machine: devolving towards inhuman.

Do not abandon wildness and freedom. Spit back in the face of it all – Go Proper Injun' and take your licks – for next creation, in total insubordination to everything that is killing us and our world.

Endnotes

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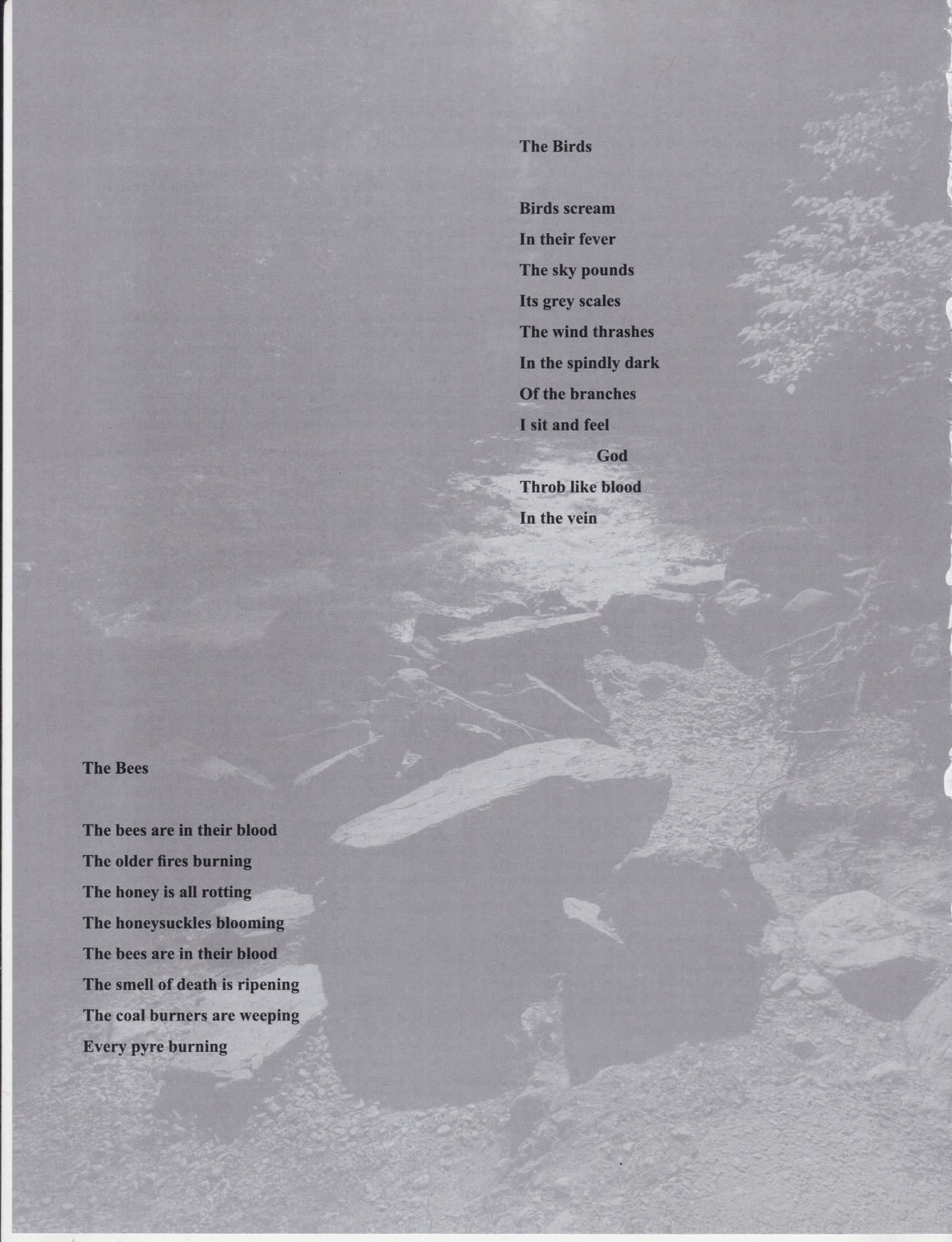

## The Birds

Birds scream
In their fever
The sky pounds
Its grey scales
The wind thrashes
In the spindly dark
Of the branches
I sit and feel
God
Throb like blood
In the vein

## The Bees

The bees are in their blood
The older fires burning
The honey is all rotting
The honeysuckles blooming
The bees are in their blood
The smell of death is ripening
The coal burners are weeping
Every pyre burning



# Anybody Home?

## A Myth in Crisis

By Clare Follmann

*A Preface on Terminology*

*I am writing this piece as a renter living in an apartment in a small city on Turtle Island, assuming a readership composed of people living in cities, suburbs, and rural towns within the domain of industrial capital states. In writing this piece, I have found it difficult to come up with a phrase to describe the mythological modern home that I am trying to discuss, a struggle that is indicative of a larger issue regarding the difficulty we have with defining this era that we live in and in which we find ourselves. The subject of this difficulty would be an article for another issue, or perhaps many hours long conversations (I certainly have had many in trying to come up with the perfect term!). How best to define the socio-political present? Colonial? Capitalist? Anthropocene? Technophilic? Western? In earlier drafts, I used the phrase "the capitalist home" until I recognized how this home appears in socialist countries as well. One can also trace the formation of this home of which I speak to predate capitalism, another strike against my original phrase, and also a reason as to why I do not find the phrase "the modern home" wholly accurate either. However, instead of taking on the responsibility of coining a new term, I am using what I believe to be the best phrase I have available. So, when I use the phrase "the modern home" in this article, I am speaking specifically of the types of home that most of us in industrialized countries find ourselves dwelling in. I hope this explanation clarifies, or at least provides context for the nuance embedded in this semantic riddle.*

In late February to early March of 2020, I would wander to work as if in a daze. There was then a peculiar feeling of collective breath withheld, and a gentle relaxation of expectations. One by one, movie showings, parties, shows, and other events were postponed. And then stores began to close, one by one. My coworkers stopped showing up to work. I stopped showing up to work. Teetering on the brink and then there it was, the imminent lockdown that sent us back home, indefinitely.

The words "Stay Home, Stay Healthy" popped up in emails, advertisements, billboards, electrically spelled out in orange above highway roads. This was Washington state's official lockdown message, and it served as something a little beyond urge or suggestion. Stay Home, Stay Healthy. Stay home; save lives. I remember driving across the bridge that overlooked a newly empty highway and there would sometimes be people with fancy cameras photographing the view—the sudden desolation of the once car-crowded roads now being captured by an errant photographer. The absence of the cars reminded me coolly that I should hurry on home.

In many ways, we were forced to confront head on our relationship to our homes as we found ourselves retreating from the out of doors now newly bound to our dwelling spaces—this, of course, also assuming one even has a home to go to!—and the idea of home as a place of safety, of sanctuary, a veritable fortress standing alone against the danger of the outside that is embedded in the message of *Stay Home, Stay Healthy* exacerbated and rekindled a misplaced memory of what it now means to be at home in the modern world.

In a world that claims to be rapidly reshaping our homes into autonomous sovereign spaces that can encapsulate everything from restaurant (the kitchen overflowing with food and cookbooks!) to love shack (time to hit the sheets!) to vacation space (staycations!) to workplace (remote work!) all contained in one neat package, it is important to remember how our homes got to be so all-encompassing, and so lonely.

The modern home's façade, made of rooms, doors, windows, walls, roof, will often resemble other homes in one way or another in much the same way that we also, in one way or another, resemble each other. On the inside, our dwelling places will often mirror our unique character—our thoughts and our preferences and our histories and our beliefs can be tattooed across the insides of our homes. In fiction, it is not uncommon to stumble upon a home that will stand in as a metaphor for the psyche and state of being of the dweller of that home—a common literary trope which illuminates the stakes of understanding what it really means to be at home. Our dwellings therefore can be understood to be reflections of ourselves—similar to, but wholly distinct from, others.

The myth of the modern home suggests that your home is yours, it is you, it is filled with all your stuff, all belonging to you and you alone, different, individual, and uniquely so! Your favorite blanket, a potted plant, some picture or poster that shows you something you love or admire or aspire towards. You buy things, you make things out of things you have bought, and aestheticize your home in a way that you believe is wholly uniquely yours, separate from anyone else's*.

3

> *The spectacle presents itself simultaneously as society itself, as a part of society, and as a means of unification. As a part of society, it is the focal point of all vision and all consciousness. But due to the very fact that this sector is separate, it is in reality the domain of delusion and false consciousness: the unification it achieves is nothing but an official language of universal separation*[1].

The mythological modern home is also perhaps the one place you might be allowed to be your true self. It is at last and at the end of a long day, a private space where you can finally kick back and relax, where you can strip off all the layers and labels and masks which you are required to place so precisely upon yourself when you leave your home to inhabit public spaces. The "you" that you present to the world is not the "you" you embody at home! This public "you" is defined by your behavior, your character, your attitudes, and mannerisms, but ones that are pruned and soothed and smoothed over so carefully as to be acceptable by the status quo. But when you come home, all those societal rules which saturate the world outside the home can be immediately torn off, like your shoes, like your coat. You can shut the door to the outside world with its rules and expectations and you come home to your own self, naked and bare. The myth of the modern home promises a space where you are able to finally relax, to finally be yourself in the privacy of your own home. In this sense, the nature of inhabiting the modern home requires it to be—by definition—not a common or public space. A modern home is private! It is private property. Private from the prying eyes of the public. Private for personal use, private deeds. Private for you, all for yourself, fenced in, guarded well with locks, bright lights, and cameras.

Walls, doors, windows are all made to keep ourselves in and the rest out. In that sense, a home is a shelter built as a form of separation from the elements and everything else that belongs out of doors. The modern home has certainly pushed this notion to an extreme; it is largely built in a way to provide its dwellers an excess of ease and comfort. With

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* In this article, I am collapsing together the idea of one's unique home and the idea of one's unique room—these shall be synonymous when I speak of one's home. The isolated nuclear family to which one might ascribe, or the roommates with whom one might share a house both abide by the myth of the modern home, albeit in different ways. Home can mean many things, and I am particularly interested in the individual, unique, separate and private space in which individuals dwell if they are privileged enough to have a roof over their head, be it an entire house or a room inside a house. In this essay I speak of the literal home or house or dwelling place which a global modern society portrays as an end goal of sorts—the home as seen within the spectacle.

a flick of a switch or the twist of a knob I can make the air hot, or cold, I can make light, or dark. I have many cushioned places to recline and rest. I can lock my door. These homes are boxes, empty spaces carved out to be separate from the rest of the world. Homes are what keeps us in and everything else out. If the going gets tough, if the weather gets rough, we can just go home.

To obey to mantra of *Stay Home, Stay Healthy*, we were made to remember that the modern home is something that is inherently *separate*. It is a space that we perceive to be cut off from others—other people and other spaces. This, then, is the myth of the modern home that is perfectly idealized, the subject of the spectacle, the object of commodified desire! You see it on commercials and in television shows, in books and in movies. Often it is multi-storied, or white picket-fenced, though sometimes it is a many-roomed flat—spacious and inviting and warm. It is an isolated secular unique private individual unit, separate from the rest of the planet and the elements, separate from the people and the pathogens, separate from society, separate from neighbors and from strangers.

Today, my modern home is my bunker just as much as it is my sanctuary. It serves both purposes, with the underlying condition of it being a separate place. But what are the ways in which it is not the separate, private, unique, individual entity that we are told to believe? Who tells this myth of the modern home, and for what purpose? Is the home at all true to this myth of separation? If so, in what ways?

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Home is a composite of parts. Parts of a whole. There are the distinguished rooms with their names, yes, and the walls and the doors and the windows and stairs and the ceiling and the roof. But there is also the invisible network within the home that stands to make it connected to the world beyond the walls, and in that way, inherently inseparable from that world.

> *Our society is not one of spectacle, but of surveillance; under the surface of images, one invests bodies in depth; behind the great abstraction of exchange, there continues the meticulous, concrete training of useful forces; the circuits of communication are the supports of an accumulation and a centralization of knowledge; the play of signs defines the anchorages of power; it is not that the beautiful totality of the individual is amputated, repressed, altered by our social order, it is rather that the individual is carefully fabricated in it, according to a whole technique of forces and bodies.*[2]

This modern home is a breeding ground for surveillance. From Amazon Alexas to doorbells with cameras, from smart phones to web tracking cookies to clouds, your cherished privacy is part of the myth of the modern home that is continually non-consensually connecting you to strangers who feed off your privacy. And within the walls themselves are yet woven even more agents of connectivity; if you press your ear to the walls, you can hear the gurgle, the electric hum.

> *Beyond the boundaries of the home itself we find a vast interlinked system of networks, pipes and wires that enable the modern city to function.*[3]

Our light switches, our faucets, our electrical outlets, our gas and our heat, our daily appliances—our possessions we can often take as indisputable comforts tend to be heavily divorced from their often-violent origin. We are not readily told of the blood that is metaphorically caked on the walls when we move into a house, when we buy a new appliance. We might ignore the ghosts that haunt all these things that make up our modern home when we sign our lease or receive a deed, thrilled as we are to have a house to live in. Many never think about it. It can be easy to forget that to have a gas stove, a humming fridge, light by electricity, that the lives of plants and animals and people are dimmed forever by the ways in which all the energy and appliances that fuel the modern home are procured. Fracking, drilling, mining, enslavement, pollution, toxic waste—it can be easy to forget these poison ingredients that go into the making of the modern home.

It can be easy to forget the many ways in which our modern homes are haunted.

This is a poem by Xu Lixhi, a poet and an iPhone factory worker from China who took his own life due to the abhorrent working conditions determined by the company that owns the factory:

《我就那样站着入睡》
"I Fall Asleep, Just Standing Like That"

眼前的纸张微微发黄
The paper before my eyes fades yellow

我用钢笔在上面凿下深浅不一的黑
With a steel pen I chisel on it uneven black

里面盛满打工的词汇
Full of working words

车间，流水线，机台，上岗证，加班，薪水.....
Workshop, assembly line, machine, work card, overtime, wages…

我被它们治得服服贴贴
They've trained me to become docile

我不会呐喊，不会反抗
Don't know how to shout or rebel

不会控诉，不会埋怨
How to complain or denounce

只默默地承受着疲惫
Only how to silently suffer exhaustion

驻足时光之初
When I first set foot in this place

我只盼望每月十号那张灰色的薪资单

I hoped only for that grey pay slip on the tenth of each month

赐我以迟到的安慰
To grant me some belated solace

为此我必须磨去棱角，磨去语言
For this I had to grind away my corners, grind away my words

拒绝旷工，拒绝病假，拒绝事假
Refuse to skip work, refuse sick leave, refuse leave for private reasons

拒绝迟到，拒绝早退
Refuse to be late, refuse to leave early

流水线旁我站立如铁，双手如飞
By the assembly line I stood straight like iron, hands like flight,

多少白天，多少黑夜
How many days, how many nights

我就那样，站着入睡
Did I – just like that – standing fall asleep?

— 20 August 2011[4]

The company for which Xu worked, Foxconn, mass produces the majority of the world's iPhones and has had twenty-three confirmed suicides of workers since 2007, including that of Xu, who was 24 when he died*.

In the grotesque origin stories of modern comforts, I'm reminded of the misogynistic perspective of the wicked fairytale witch. If you read The Malleus Maleficarum: The Hammer of Witches by Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger, you will see something like this as being her story:

> *Once upon a time, there was a witch. She lived all alone in the deep, dark woods, where even the bravest animals, wolf and cougar did not dare to dwell. It was here she made her elixirs and cast her spells to harness her power. But where did her power come from, you might well ask! Why, from the blood and bones of the children she would sacrifice for the sake of the bidding of the devil! For the witch would take unto herself as midwife, and seek the pregnant Christian woman, and bear her baby during the labor. After the labor, the witch would take the newborn babe, kill it, and sacrifice it unto Lucifer. From this sacrifice, the witch was given ever more power of evil, and lived in greed, and abundance, and in wicked deliciousness where all her mortal needs taken care of, and her mortal sins deliberately explored.*

What strikes me about this story** is the fear and condemnation surrounding the witch's sacrifice and slaughter of innocent lives committed in order for her to gain wealth, power, and live in extravagant comfort. Is this not what we all partake in during this modern era?

To live the modern life today means to be complicit in state-sanctioned murder of people and planet. How much spilled blood is smeared on a phone? How many bones were broken to extract the metal from the mountains to build a car, a computer, a toaster oven? How much suffocation of our world does the void of those trees that were made to make books, doors, shelves, cabinets, tables, toilet paper contribute to?

Do you know how much blood is on your hands?

The occupation of and dwelling within the modern home is an act of violence upon this world that goes unnoticed or is intentionally erased because the spectacle is curated so that as many consumers as possible are taught to be physically and emotionally distanced from these atrocities. Yet, the destruction or displacement of that which lives on the land is the first step in the construction of the modern home. Much of the land upon which the modern home dwells was stolen, taken by violence, colonized, and then sloughed for development—this is land that is haunted by the genocide of people and the demolition of ecosystems. The draining of wetlands, the felling of forests, the conversion of rivers to sewers, the act of burying streams alive, and the mass slaughter of Indigenous peoples and displacement of survivors to the reservation—a violent terra-deforming is integral to the birth of the modern home.

For many, this home they would call home is not really their home. It is made up of so much that was not theirs to take, so much of what was not made to be taken.

Even quite literally, the home that you call your home is most likely owned by the landlord, or the bank. If you are one of the very few who no longer need to pay mortgage or

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*Inequality is inherent to (and quite possibly the origin of) the division of labor. Companies wring value from workers and the more-than-human world (derisively termed "natural resources"). The creation of most of our cherished modern products rests upon a foundation constructed from the suffering of others.

**This ritual sacrifice of a new-born baby is intentionally misunderstood and misconstrued, for the women who were witches and midwives did have the power to help cease unwanted pregnancies, not through a pact with Satan, but by way of emmenagogues (herbs to bring on the menses even if pregnant which would then terminate the pregnancy) or abortifacients (herbs to cause abortion if the pregnancy is in its later stages). The Malleus Maleficarum purposefully depicts the mythological violent slaughter of living children as a grotesque exaggeration of herbal birth control methods and is nothing more than a myth for a patriarchal society to seek false justice through misogynistic torture and murder of those so-called "witches" whom they feared and were jealous of for their power among the people and of their knowledge of the natural world. See Carolyn Merchant's The Death of Nature for more on this topic.

rent for your home, you probably either spent a good third of your life working very hard to do so, or you inherited it or bought it outright by the means of a privilege that requires others to go without. Either way, in the grand context of time, soon you will die, and your home will then belong to your inheritors (if you have any) or it'll go back to the bank. More likely than not, it will someday fall once again into the hands of the landlords.

We can spend time trying to erase *that* connection, too—we can try to ignore the way the home is haunted by the specters of landlords and of banks. We can spend money making this home seem like it is *our* home, not our landlord's home, nor the bank's home. We spend time and money decorating our home with unique purchases, books, photographs, paintings, posters, furniture, carving out a perceptibly unique aesthetic, but at the back of our minds just as we know on some level that so much death and destruction goes into the making of the modern home, so too do we know, on some level, that this home does not belong to us. We must be complacent in order to simply inhabit this space, "our" home.

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To inhabit the modern home, you must be an active participant in an industrial economy, overflowing with commodities cleverly articulated to catch your eye. I remember one day my philosophy professor told his students about a time when he and his wife had moved into their first home together. They spent many careful months decorating, they were selective in purchasing pieces of furniture which they believed would reflect their own unique aesthetic. It was that perfect blend of timeless traditional combined with some quirky unique modern pieces that made it so distinctly theirs! Shortly after moving to this space and turning it into their home, they were invited to dine at a new friend's home. They made their way to the house, and stepped inside, removing coat and hat. In the foyer, they gladly received and exchanged salutations and greetings, a welcoming handshake, a tinkle of laughter, and all were relaxing gently into the visit, when—suddenly! My professor and his wife were momentarily struck dumbfounded! They were shocked to see that the home of this new friend looked almost exactly like their very own home.

**30**

> *The alienation of the spectator, which reinforces the contemplated objects that result from his own unconscious activity, works like this: The more he contemplates, the less he lives; the more he identifies with the dominant images of need, the less he understands his own life and his own desires. The spectacle's estrangement from the acting subject is expressed by the fact that the individual's gestures are no longer his own; they are the gestures of someone else who represents them to him. The spectator does not feel at home anywhere, because the spectacle is everywhere*[6].

Today, this phenomenon can be only more extreme! We are now no less than constantly exposed to the aesthetic of the spectacle to taint and tint our desire, through the glare of screens and commercials, almost all of it. Algorithms raid the history of you to design personified advertisements that suggestively and successfully beckon to you. *I promise you*, spake the spectacle, *you want this. If you buy that*, lulls the algorithm, *you will feel better. Why, the purchase of this, it is self-care! You deserve it. This piece is so uniquely you.*

The pleasure of self-care dwindles, the high of the purchase wears off as it somehow does not quite fill the void, the soul-gaping wound that this modern way of living sustainably gnaws into. The act does nothing to heal the ache. As consumer, you greedily consume the momentary bliss of purchase until it is all gone, and instead of satiation, you are left wanting, and confused. For when we engage in self-care, we take full and sole responsibility for the care of ourselves, and when these acts of self-care do not heal the ache, gratify the hunger, fill the void, it can become our understanding that we have failed. We can be led to believe then that there is something wrong with us. How could we have neglected our responsibility to take care of ourselves!

Depression has been rising steadily, particularly in North America, for the past fifty years[7] and has more than tripled since the beginning of COVID-19.[8] Can it be the fault of the depressed individual for not seeing the world through rose-tinted glasses? Is it not easier to understand this mental health crisis as a symptom of a society and way of living that is, itself, sick?

**69**

> *The image of blissful social unification through consumption merely postpones the consumer's awareness of the actual divisions until his next disillusionment with some particular commodity. Each new product is ceremoniously acclaimed as a unique creation offering a dramatic shortcut to the promised land of total consummation. But as with the fashionable adoption of seemingly aristocratic first names which end up being given to virtually all individuals of the same age, the objects that promise uniqueness can be offered up for mass consumption only if they have been mass-produced. The prestigiousness of mediocre objects of this kind is solely due to the fact that they have been placed, however briefly, at the center of social life and hailed as a revelation of the unfathomable purposes of production. But the object that was prestigious in the spectacle becomes mundane as soon as it is taken home by its consumer — and by all its other consumers. Too late, it reveals its essential poverty, a poverty that inevitably reflects the poverty of its production. Meanwhile, some other object is already replacing it as representative of the system and demanding its own moment of acclaim*[9].

The pursuit of self-care is relatively commonplace and

requires the prioritization of the self. But putting oneself first doesn't come naturally. The human being is a social creature. We like to run in our packs, and we rely on one another to survive, thrive, and to live meaningful lives. A true community is inherent to life and a life worth living, and this mass prioritization of the self would mean certain death in a bygone age. And still, under modernity, and especially under capitalism, we have been made to market ourselves as unique and wholly distinct from other people. We wear a new and different brand, we compete our marketable uniqueness, our individuality, and our special talents against our kin and our comrades, against our friends and neighbors and against perfect strangers too. We are against each other, we are not together, we are not for each other. We are for ourselves.

We are "independent".

In 1928, a presidential speech given by notoriously racist mine operator (who referred to himself as a "self-made millionaire") Herbert Hoover spoke to this insistence of independence:

> *We were challenged with a peace-time choice between the American system of rugged individualism and a European philosophy of diametrically opposed doctrines—doctrines of paternalism and state socialism.*[10]

In this speech he proclaimed how the American system should be one that is run by the rugged individual, and the American citizen should continually strive for self-reliance. Years later, during the Cold War, President Ronald Reagan took up the torch and continued to profess the capitalist myth of rugged individualism as a direct response to general condemnation of communism. If communism implies a common, shared ownership and responsibility for society, then capitalism must be the opposite. In the U.S., we were organized into nuclear families isolated behind the walls of our home, or nuclear units made of come-and-go roommates, where we were made separate from our neighbors, from each other, where true community was nearly impossible.

I currently live in a small city in the Pacific Northwest, where in any neighborhood you will find punks, anarchists, and people with low incomes living in the same neighborhood as the business-owners, the bosses, and the upper-class, who are also living in the same neighborhoods as the conservatives, the liberals, the fascists, the cops. I don't think this is a unique situation. My friend Olga speaks to this in a piece of writing she sent me where in the city we are expected to "silently consent to be in community with strangers on a constant basis."[11] What in the hell could community possibly mean in a place like this? Isn't community meant to be formed of those with similar affinities, who look out for one another, who support and push and nourish each other? Formed by members who trust one another, with deep relationships formed over time, over the act of growing and building and living together? How can you live in community with those to whom you must hand over so much of the money you are required to earn simply to survive in this lethal modern society? How can you live in community with those who want you dead?

My neighbor is a landlord. My neighbor is a fascist. My neighbor is an anarchist. This is not community.

No, in the modern home, we cannot truly rely on our neighbors. Community is formed haphazardly, sometimes online and across many miles of distance. Community is fragile and fleeting. And so, we are responsible wholly for ourselves or for our nuclear families. And so, we are strong for providing for ourselves. And so, we aim to be self-reliant; we would be weak if we relied on one another. And so, we begin to believe that isolation is empowering.

**5**

> *The spectacle cannot be understood as a mere visual excess produced by mass-media technologies. It is a worldview that has actually been materialized, a view of a world that has become objective.*[12]

I have said that the home has been used as a trope that is meant to represent the self. If we can suppose that we are made to perceive our home as a private, unique, and wholly separate entity, so too can we imagine that we ourselves are also meant to be a similarly separate, private, unique, individual entity as well.

Isn't this the capitalist myth, boiled down?

To follow in these footsteps, to find power in isolation, to seek separation, to favor self-reliance, self-care over collective care, is to maintain these capitalist ideologies and modern myths.

**4**

> *The spectacle is not a collection of images; it is a social relation between people that is mediated by images.*[13]

In Plato's Republic, Plato writes a dialogue in which Socrates is sharing a story with Glaucon about people who are chained up in a cave. They are chained up in a way that they can only see right in front of them, but they cannot see that behind them there are unchained others who are holding up objects in front of a light so that the objects cast a shadow on the wall in front of the chained people. These chained people are presented with a whole slew of shadows of objects. The people in the cave see the shadows and are made to believe these shadows are the objects themselves, that the shadows are the true thing. Then, one of the people in the cave is let free of his chains, and, with great difficulty, is made to leave the cave. When he steps outside and adjusts to this whole new world, he is absolutely awestruck. *Wow*, he thinks. *Colors exist! It's extremely bright! Things are tangible! I can touch them, and they all feel different! The world is three dimensional!* And he runs back into the cave to share his findings with his people. Instead of being excited at the beautiful world that awaits them beyond the cave, Socrates explains that the people in the cave, if they

had the means to, would surely kill this man. Glaucon agrees.[14]

Without ascribing any anarchist beliefs to the man who wrote with such fondness of the city state, I will say that I still find Plato's cave allegory to be an incredibly appropriate metaphor for life under modernity. Modernity presents us with shadow versions of basic desires like connection, community, passion. Lacking an authentic frame of reference, we may find ourselves confusing this pseudo-world, in the words of Debord, for the real one, just as Plato's fictional cave dwellers mistook cast shadows for the world itself. We may be able to find sporadic and unstable community that is often changing. We might dive head-first into self-care. We could turn our passion into our job, our livelihood, our survival. We would connect, online. We may live in a somewhat comfortable home that exudes an air of distinct separation. We take them and think: *Well, perhaps this is the true thing. I suppose it must be. I see nothing else that will fill this void inside me. I will make do with what I have, and I must be happy. This must be a meaningful life.* With some sadness we will take this small part of what could be beautiful, and we try to fill the void with it. Some of us may try so hard to believe that it is fulfilling that we will actually begin to feel some stable joy in this life. But while we may even yet find meaning and some happiness within the modern life inside the cave, it is but a shadow of the true beautiful happiness and meaning that we would find outside and beyond this modern life that we are led to believe is all we can hope for.

**6**

> *Understood in its totality, the spectacle is both the result and the project of the dominant mode of production. It is not a mere decoration added to the real world. It is the very heart of this real society's unreality. In all of its particular manifestations — news, propaganda, advertising, entertainment — the spectacle represents the dominant model of life. It is the omnipresent affirmation of the choices that have already been made in the sphere of production and in the consumption implied by that production. In both form and content the spectacle serves as a total justification of the conditions and goals of the existing system. The spectacle also represents the constant presence of this justification since it monopolizes the majority of the time spent outside the production process.*[15]

I don't think it is self-care that we crave. I don't think self-care is truly possible. Or rather I worry about how easy it is to slip into mindless self-indulgence and apathetic gluttony when self-care feeds addiction of thoughtless, pleasure-seeking consumption and cements said self as a constituent of capitalism. Self-care is but the false shadow version of a real basic desire. What we crave isn't self-care, then. What we crave is community. What we crave is mutual aid, and collective care. We miss being together. We miss sharing the responsibility of caring for all of us together. To build and grow for one another to thrive instead of working for oneself to survive.

When I am hurting, I want to be taken care of. I am tired of taking care of myself. When you are hurting, I don't want you to take care of yourself. I want us to take care of you.

In much the same way that it can be easy to believe that we are separated from the world within our homes, it can also be easy to believe that we are unique and separate from one another. But home has never been these things. Even now, the sense of home as separate, unique, and private, though very strong, is largely untrue. If home has never been these things, if home is not this separate space even now, perhaps we follow suit. We are not alone. We are not separate from one another. We influence, inspire, and infect each other. The outside always finds a way to press in.

Once upon a time we lived in true community with one another. The home of bygone days involves a home that is not separate, a home that is connected, a home that is shared, a home that is communal. The modern home of today differs in almost every regard. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, we have been made to spend a lot of time dwelling within this modern home. We have been made to think about what it means to be at home, and I for one do not like what it means.

《出租屋》
"Rented Room"

十平米左右的空间
A space of ten square meters

局促，潮湿，终年不见天日
Cramped and damp, no sunlight all year

我在这里吃饭，睡觉，拉屎，思考
Here I eat, sleep, shit, and think

咳嗽，偏头痛，生老，病不死
Cough, get headaches, grow old, get sick but still fail to die

昏黄的灯光下我一再发呆，傻笑
Under the dull yellow light again I stare blankly, chuckling like an idiot

来回踱步，低声唱歌，阅读，写诗
I pace back and forth, singing softly, reading, writing poems

每当我打开窗户或者柴门
Every time I open the window or the wicker gate

我都像一位死者
I seem like a dead man

把棺材盖，缓缓推开
Slowly pushing open the lid of a coffin.

— 2 December 2013[16]

To dwell in the modern home means to believe we are

separate. How then can we change what it means to be at home? If we abandon this illusion of separation to its fullest, what is left of our modern home?

Amid the trillions of varieties of different dwelling places that scattered across this world, there is the one home that we all share—it is this earth, this big, brilliant whole world that is always around us, infuses us, *is us* and which has been home to us since time immemorial. This is the lesson we have been made to forget—that our home is not this room, this box, it is not this neighborhood, this city, this town, this country. It is not carved out separate from the rest of the world; our home *is* this world. And our modern way of living is fundamentally at odds with this world. Our modern comforts continue to destroy our one and only common home. They do not have to.

This is an invitation for you to come back down to earth. This is an invitation for you to touch the soil with your bare feet and to deplete the modern diaspora of civilization that separates us from our tether to this world.

This is an invitation to welcome you back home. How you make yourself at home here is up to you.

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1 Debord, 1977

2 Foucault, 1978

3 Gandy, 2005

4 chuang, 2014

5 Institoris, 1987

6 Debord, 1977

7 Iliades and Bass, 2013

8 Watts, 2021

9 Debord, 1977

10 Hoover, 1928

11 Mikolaivna, 2021

12 Debord, 1977

13 Debord, 1977

14 Bloom, 2016

15 Debord, 1977

16 chuang, 2014

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# A Correspondence Interview with Bob Black

Bob Black's reputation is one of the most notorious in the world of anarchist politics. Black is the author of numerous essays and books of considerable influence. Some titles include: *Anarchy After Leftism, After Work, Friendly Fire,* and *Defacing the Currency.* This interview was conducted by Ian Blumberg. Oak is grateful to be able to publish this insightful interview with Mr. Black.

*What initially got you interested in politics?*

My father did. He was keenly interested in politics. He subscribed to the two Detroit newspapers and to several magazines, and he watched TV news, so I did too, such as NBC's Huntley-Brinkley Report. I was very interested in politics at least as early as the 1960 presidential election, when I was nine years old. I watched the Kennedy/Nixon debate (or debates: I forget). As far as I could tell, the only issue was fighting Communism (whatever that was). Nixon struck me as being slightly more anti-Communist, so, I preferred Nixon, although then, as now, nine year olds did not get to vote. In 1964 my father was a "precinct captain" in the Oak Park, Michigan Republican Party. That was the year Barry Goldwater was the Republican nominee. Goldwater was the first ultra-conservative candidate in history. The Oak Park city director of the party resigned because he could not stomach Goldwater. My father couldn't stomach him either, but, he accepted the position of city director. He knew that Goldwater was a train wreck, so, he concentrated on trying to salvage the down-ballot candidates. In 1968, my father ran to be a delegate at the 1968 Republican convention. He was a Midwestern isolationist: against the Vietnam War, but a social conservative. Because he was anti-Nixon he was not selected. He really liked George Romney, Michigan's governor, who also tried for the 1968 nomination, but failed. George was Mitt Romney's father. He knew another Michigan politician, Gerald Ford, who later became President in 1974. He told me that Gerald Ford was just not very bright.



*What lead to your becoming a leftists?*

I think several things led to my becoming a new leftist (the word I preferred, and more often heard, was "radical"). I took a one-credit course, "Politics of Vietnam," taught by some radical (that word again) grad students, which persuaded me that the rationale for the war was bogus. I pondered more fundamental political questions. An anarchist group made a presentation in Chicago House, a subdivision of a dorm, West Quad. They struck me as a ludicrous crew (such as the ex-Randroid lesbian with a knife swinging from her belt). I didn't serious look into anarchism for several more years. I got involved in student government, I was Vice Chairman of the Central Student Judiciary, and in the following year, the LS&A Student Government (LS&A was the College of Literature, Science and the Arts). I was strong for "student power."

In the spring term was the Black Action Movement strike for increased black admissions: "Open it up or shut it down!" It attracted national attention, being denounced by Spiro Agnew, for instance. Many professors cancelled classes in sympathy. Others were shut down by protestors such as myself. It was a general strike, a holiday. One day there was a demonstration before the Administration Building, a new, almost completely brick structure that looked like Piet Mondrian in 3-D. It was designed to be riot-proof, but there were some puny saplings in front with bricks inlaid in the dirt around them. Naturally these were dug up and thrown at the building, probably not damaging it, but afterwards, the bricks were replaced by wood chips. Lots of riot cops showed up. It so happened that the Administration Building faced Chicago House. At one point, the cops charged, and the demonstrators retreated. One of them, hippie-looking, fell down -- someone always does. A cop caught up with him and began to beat him with a nightstick. At least, he raised his club for that purpose, crouching over the hippie idiot. Somehow I was behind them. I ran up,

**HE LOOKED AT THE TITLE OF A BOOK [PRESUMABLY ASSIGNED READING] WHICH ANOTHER CO-OPER WAS CARRYING. HE LAUGHED OUT LOUD. THE BOOK WAS SOCIALIST HUMANISM, EDITED BY ERICH FROMM.**

made a running jump, and kicked the cop in his helmeted head, soaring over him. I then ran into the crowd and made my way into Chicago House where I ran up to my room (second floor) and stayed there until the action was over.

*What made you take anarchism seriously?*

It was from a growing dissatisfaction with the (new) left. On the one hand -- some might find this ironic -- I found it too "negative." It was against the draft, the war, racism, sexism, capitalism, etc., but as abstractions. Any concrete action seemed to be usually reformist at best (like increased black admissions), or theatrical at worst (is this what they now call "performative"?). All this did not add up to a vision of a world I wanted to live in. I was a history major, but, being anti-American and all, I took courses only in European history, which I assumed had more radical highlights, which I suppose I still believe. I liked courses on revolutions and popular movements. By a process of omission, I eliminated Marxism, especially Marxism-Leninism, from consideration. This was at a time when the organized left was decomposing into various more or less authoritarian Marxist or identity politics groupuscules, or just decomposing. Meanwhile I had a second and closer in-person exposure to anarchists in the form of two guys (one of them a Wobbly) who lived in Xanadu housing co-op, as I did. I will give credit to one of them. He looked at the title of a book (presumably assigned reading) which another co-oper was carrying. He laughed out loud. The book was Socialist Humanism, edited by Erich Fromm.

I undertook self-study in ultra-left and anarchist history and theory (including ultra-left Marxism, council communism, and various types of anarchism). As a student at the University of Michigan, I had access to excellent libraries, including the Labadie Collection, one of the two greatest collections of socialist, anarchist and labor materials in the world (the other is the International Museum of Social History in Amsterdam). At that time, Dover Books, was reprinting anarchist classics by Kropotkin, Proudhon, Goldman, Berkman and others). A little later, I began to obtain publications from the "libertarian socialist" Solidarity group in London, from authors like Maurice Brinton and Pierre Cardan (pseudonyms). I would consider myself a libertarian socialist until sometime in 1974-1976. By then, I was in law school. You might think that would deradicalize me, but it had the opposite effect. Have you ever read What is Property? by Proudhon? I had. He deconstructed property, if you pardon the anachronism, by analyzing the French law of property (the Civil Law), exposing its contradictions. Anglo-American (common law) property law is very different from the Civil Law, regarded from a common law perspective. But I found it to be just as riddled with contradictions, which is why it is so complicated (not because judges and lawyers made it that way to mystify the laity). It was a fantastically intricate superstructure resting on an almost obviously irrational base.

It was in 1975 that Detroit's *Fifth Estate* newspaper, which had gone from hippie/New Leftist to Maoist, now went anarchist, as did Fredy Perlman's Black & Red publishing project, also in Detroit (there were close personal connections). I was reading everything from both of them, including the situationists, Jacques Camatte, Fredy Perlman himself, and early John Zerzan. By 1976-1977, I was putting up prototype Last International posters in Georgetown law school. I took my degree in 1977.

*What was your introduction to zines?*

From about 1975 I contributed to an APA, SRAFBull (Bulletin of the Social Revolutionary Anarchist Federation), whose editor Jim Bumpas, after becoming a lawyer, dropped out of the anarchist scene. By the time I moved to San Francisco in fall 1977, I was aware of posterists like Upshot and No Limits -- indeed I hung out at first with Zerzan and his entourage, which I dubbed the "Z Crowd." I came across punkzines like CREEP (Mickey Creep, later a lawyer, and for awhile, as Mickey Sampson a Facebook Friend), Punk Globe (Ginger Coyote, a tranny, whom I didn't know), and Search & Destroy (Vale) which published me once: I knew Vale. The *Fifth Estate*, a newspaper, not a zine, published a Last International poster, but otherwise it never published me, I never understood why not. Soon I was seeing many zines.

*What was your first published writing?*

It was in the magazine of the International Society for Japanese Philately. I collected Japanese stamps (mint plate blocks and used singles). It was for a feature where members wrote about a particular Japanese stamp and what it meant to them. I wrote about a stamp commemorating the Suigo Quasi-National Park, circa 1962-1963. It was a parody of rhapsodic paeans to Japanese landscape art. I laughed out lout while writing it. However, I do like Japanese art. Every year I buy a Japanese art wall calendar for my bedroom, and a larger, purely functional wall calendar for the office.

*First political writing?*

The first 3 or 4 Last International posters I actually made while in law school. These included "The 7 Danger Signs of Subjectivity" and "Religion as Banality . . . Divinity as Tyranny." There was no contact information, although a few people knew I was doing it. I was corresponding with Zerzan then. My first essays or articles were short texts I contributed to the neo-hippie San Francisco's Appeal to Reason published by John Bryan, who had typeset the "Theses on Groucho Marxism" for me. My column was called "Appeal to Treason" and differed from the leftist material around it. A few of those texts are in The Abolition of Work and Other Essays.

*How'd you meet Zerzan?*

I met Zerzan when I accepted his invitation to crash with him upon my arrival in San Francisco. I may have stayed there a couple of weeks. Then I moved into a small studio apartment on Market St. at 8th Street owned by a big landlord named Angelo Sangiacamo who never returned security deposits and whose huge across-the-board rent increases a year or two later aroused his tenants to demand rent control, which was in fact enacted. I didn't stay long; I moved into a boarding house, the San Francisco Residence Club, whose residents were mostly recent arrivals in the city who were looking for jobs, as I was. In the Crowd were his girl friend, Linda Wiens, who later did a poster, "The Private Life of the Inner Circle." Another girl friend was Melen Lunn from Philadelphia; there were a couple of other people from Philadelphia. They had been involved with Wooden Shoe Books which they denounced as too capitalistic; one of them wrote "Working for Wooden Shoe Books." Theirs was an emotionally infused version of what I would later call post-left anarchism -- their harshest criticism of anything was that it wasn't "human" -- not a choice of words that the later Zerzan would use. There was Bob Brubaker, a nice guy who had been one-half of "No Limits" in Madison, and acted as a JZ disciple. He later moved to Japan, had a Japanese girl friend, and died of athsma. Lee Roi Doyle was an anarchist and single father. There was a little group from Chicago including Freddie Baer, her boy friend Jim Gilman (the most politically purist of them all), Bernard Marszalek who in his teens had been in with the Chicago Surrealists, and his French wife Ann. JZ was very affable but condescending. On the fringe was a guy named King Collins, who had his own entourage, whom I later learned had been famous for his radical activism. Also Paula Zerzan, separated from JZ but still friends, with her punk boyfriend Will Shatter, whose band was then Negative Trend, and later was in Flipper. Through him, a little situationism trickled into punk, and punk was taken up by the Z Crowd, although we were a little old for it. Another boyfriend was poet Peter Plate, a depressed but intense guy who was one of the White Night Riot defendants although he wasn't gay. I was once visiting her when he phoned, found out I was there, and threatened to come over and kill me. Some of us, including JZ, Paula, Brubaker and myself, were drinking heavily. Will OD'd on heroin. The Crowd was cultlike, not in exacting loyalty, but because we all shared an anarcho- pro situ worldview.

I don't remember what Vale published, probably not something written for him. An older guy, Japanese American but tried to ignore that, for instance, not using his surname, Hamanaka. He had been born in the Manzenar (sp?) concentration camp and was ex-Communist Party, although I only learned that much later. He was also originally in Blue Cheer but was dropped when it adopted a power trio format and also, maybe, because he was viewed as an obstacle to their going big time because he was Asian. Even more than Zerzan, Vale imparted avant garde politics to the punks, although he had a more literary turn (venerating J.G. Ballard and William Burroughs, for instance). I think that I and the Z Crowd were "into" punk because of the nihilism we imputed to it, which, of course, insofar as it was there, we to some extent put it there.

*Ever try psychedelics?*

Yes. In college I took psylocibin four times and mescaline twice (or was it the other way around?). I've done mushrooms at least once since -- at one of Mike Gunderloy's Factsheet Five parties, when he lived in the area, in Rensselaer. I got it from Hakim Bey. He asked, "Do you want a buzz or a dose?" I said, "A dose!" What I particularly remember about that occasion was the distortion of the time sense. When the party was breaking up I couldn't believe that much time had passed. I asked someone the time. She told me. I said: "A.M. or P.M.?"

*When did you start practicing law?*

I have not, strictly speaking, often "practiced" law, but I have worked in the law. That is, I haven't often advised or represented clients. I've worked for legal publishers. I wrote a chapter on civil RICO for a practice manual published by the National Consumer Law Center (it is occasionally in the news). I wrote the materials on Texas Oil & Gas Law for SMH, Inc., a company that did bar review courses. You may not have known that even after 3 years of law school (I think it's at least a year too long), you have to pass "the bar exam," which usually consists of the Multistate Bar Examination (a daylong multiple choice test on generic law) and a daylong exam (essays and/or short answers) on the law of the specific state. A prep course is necessary because nobody remembers much from their first year courses (typically including Torts, Contracts, Property, Civil Procedure, and maybe either Criminal Law or so-called Criminal Procedure), and almost no one has taken courses on all the topics on any state's bar exam. I took and passed the California bar exam (in 1977) and the New York Bar Exam (in 2001). New York had several silly old topics such as Suretyship. California had Community Property, a system of marital property which is in effect in 5 or 6 states which had been French or Spanish colonies. Usually you can avoid one or two topics on the exam. Anyway, SMH originated in New England and catered to exam takers in those states. Its usual method, when it entered a new state, was to base a new outline on one of its existing outlines. I did several such rewrites. There were two big nationwide bar review companies, and one of them went out of business. SMH tried to take some of its business. In Texas, and a few other states, Oil & Gas Law is on the bar exam. SMH didn't have any outlines for that, so they turned to their Mission Impossible guy, me. This was in Boston (its headquarters were in Somerville). They got me permission to use the Harvard law library. Oil & gas is a rather bizarre area of law, and Texas has the most bizarre version of it. I would have been at a loss were it not that Texas is such a big state that it has been provided with its own legal encyclopedia. What I wrote was little more than a paraphrase. I worried that my outline would be a fiasco. At that point I moved to Albany for another job (teaching legal research and writing). Years later -- possibly for my NY bar application -- I had to provide statements of good conduct or something from previous employers. SMH had gone out of business. I finally found my boss there working for another bar review company. I wondered if my Texas outline was

why SMH went out of business. He said no. The problem was that the company computerized prematurely.

The other legal work I have mainly done was what I do best -- research and writing -- for lawyers, mainly litigators, who often don't like library work, or aren't good at it, or both. Sometimes it was contracted to me by companies. Occasionally I solicited work directly. For the last ten years I worked (2007-2017), my work was subcontracted to me by a Long Island lawyer whose business was to service lawyers in the greater New York City area by doing their research and writing, appellate argument (something I would have liked to try), and complex litigation. She subcontracted almost all the research and writing (mainly appellate briefs) to me. I've written hundreds of briefs. A small number of trial lawyers generated a lot of her business. But eventually they began retiring or dying, and she retired too. This was sooner than I wanted to stop working: it left me with only Social Security as cash income (and at times SSI, but not now). My work was never specialized by area. I have an LL.M in Criminal Law but since getting it, in 2006, I've never worked on a criminal case. In the last ten years, my typical assignment was to write an appellate brief for a plaintiff personal-injury lawyer whose case had been dismissed on summary judgment. Almost always the case involved only New York law. Often I could recycle parts of previous briefs, but, the work though easy, could be boring. My peculiar situation in those years is irreproducible. Legal research today is done mainly online, using services (LEXIS and WESTLAW) I can't afford and am no longer familiar with. Much of it merely automates research methods I know, but some of it is novel (such as Boolean searches). I could never teach legal research today, although I could teach legal writing. Anyway, I am unlikely to work again. I'm counting on a MacArthur Prize.

Spanish law was not "common law," it was based on the Code Napoleon, in turn based on Roman law. At various times in English legal history, partsof this "civil law" were incorporated in the common law. I believe that the "condominium" as a type of property comes from civil law. I noticed, when studying criminal procedure -- which has largely been Constitutionalized -- that many of the big cases in the 1960s came up from Louisiana, Texas, California and other former civil law jurisdictions which were not always following Anglo-American procedures. The first Supreme Court cases on the Cruel and Unusual Punishments Clause of the 8th amendment, for instance, was an appeal from the new Philippines territory about a punishment not used in common law jurisdictions. Oil and gas law is, I believe, an American invention, and exists in several versions according to the state. In my work, I never had to concern myself with these matters.

The point is that most countries don't produce petroleum. England didn't. The U.S. oil industry started, I believe, in Pennsylvania around 1850. What was not immediately known was that oil is found underground in vast pools usually underlying various surface landowners. Traditionally, in common law, a landowner owns all the resources under his property, all the way to the center of the earth. But oil is "fugacious." The first owner to drill can take all the oil in the pool, since as he removes it from under his land, more oil will pour in from the rest of the reservoir. I don't remember the rules any more, but in Texas they are administered by the Railroad Commission for some reason. I do remember that "slant drilling" is prohibited. You can drill on your own property, but only vertically, not at a slant under adjoining properties. One of the causes of the Iraq/Kuwait war was that Iraq accused Kuwait of slant drilling. Texas oilman George Bush I would have understood the issue.

*What has your contribution to anarchist thought been?*

You mean so far? I feel I am being asked to write my own epitaph. I'm not finished yet, or so I hope.

**Critique of Work.** As I have complained, this aspect of my writing, which commenced in 1985, has received too much attention, relative to all the rest. I was prevailed upon to write "Work after Coronavirus" as recently as last year. Except for that, 40 years of anti-work polemic is collected in my latest and possibly last book Instead of Work (2015). I never claimed originality for this ensemble of ideas. Probably all of the arguments appear in earlier writers, some of whom I knew about, and others, not. I've credited the ones I know about. Originally, the argument was not especially tailored for or targeted to anarchists. I was pretty disgusted with most anarchists in 1985. But it was the anarchist press which first reprinted "The Abolition of Work" (which first appeared as a pamphlet that year). *Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed* (whose circulation then was much higher than it is now), which was then in tabloid format, included the essay as an insert. More surprising was its publication in *The Industrial Worker*, official publication of the Industrial Workers of the World. Jon Bekken, an acolyte turned enemy, later claimed that this only happened because for a short time the workerists lost editorial control of the newspaper. Meanwhile, when I sent the pamphlet to Mike Hoy of Loompanics, he told me, it is time for a Bob Black book, and he published it: *The Abolition of Work and Other Essays*. I wish somebody would reprint that book. The essay has been translated into, I estimate, about 20 languages, including Esperanto. Eventually, even academics such as Kathi Weeks and David Graeber, started writing about work itself as a political issue. Sometimes they credited me (Graeber did) and sometimes they didn't (Weeks didn't). Anyway -- maybe I have never made this explicit --- tell me what you don't like about the state -- I won't like it either -- and I will tell you what I don't like about work. It will be the same thing.

Just what do anarchists want? "Freedom"? Well, who doesn't? Freedom from what? Freedom to do what? Many workplaces, as I have been saying since 1985 (actually earlier), are as close to being totalitarian, as are any of

**WORKERS HAVE NEVER BEEN SO MICRO-MANAGED, NOT EVEN IN SLAVERY TIME.**

**THE STRUGGLE AGAINST THE STATE AND THE STRUGGLE AGAINST WORK ARE OF AT LEAST EQUAL IMPORTANCE.**

# The Molted Husk of a Cicada (or Forge (or Shoving the Queer))

*B.B. Leering*

*"So that if I may venture So to express it, their periodical return is Seventeen years, but they, like the Comets, make but a short stay with us -" Benjamin Banneker's June 1800 Astronomical Journal*

*"n. 1. Counterfeit money.*

*2. a homosexual.*

*To shove the queer*

*to put counterfeit money in circulation"*

*-Webster's 1913 Dictionary (cit. 2021)*

**Brood X**
What a weak wuss
was, was

Treehouse
Dominion Energy tower
roof antennae
(Fox Five)
born speechless
(screaming wings)

Jazz squares smirks and sneers
once more once more like ten before
Rehearsal in the dresser mirror
those days selfsame onefold removed
nowadays telephone multitude

Nancy and the curlers she would wear
in her hair (sanctimonious)
searches the closet corner, seizes the pieces
which take for me the fall

Ransacks every pocket and drawer
Confiscates (by undone hinges) bedroom door
names me bastard

Later, "a lying, cheating son-of-a-bitch"
(on account of tender counterfeit)
Ronald said,
bald head
and sweat in a Crown Vic

**Brood X**
Spring migration whistles rarer now than bees
a cardinal like a stainless windchime's hone passed
past my binoculars, an effortless descent

Down off old Bear's Den
along route seven to eighty-one
which gets ya seventy
to Baltimore and back

Shenandoah sheared in intimate unravel
by railroad trackmarks
crooked needles
camels, candles
spoons, dismantled cotton swabs

Coasting cumulonimbus-like over
all historic civil slaughter sightseer celebrations
red flags
and all the naïve moments where
unwitting in the worst

I was spared the valley by grace of a degree so
infinitely approaching zero
as the skin of my
skin

The seventeen-year cicadas do not know me
and I vanish on the wind

the nation-states which have been denounced for being totalitarian. These are the factories and offices where most workers in the developed world toil. Workers have never been so micro-managed, not even in slavery time. The struggle against the state and the struggle against work are of at least equal importance. I hope that my critique of work has become part of the general anarchist argument. It will deepen that critique and It will make that critique more popular. I don't think all the anarchists are on board yet, but, work is a mainstream anarchist issue, thanks mainly to me, if there is such a thing as an anarchist mainstream.

**Critique of Democracy.** The irony here is, I defend the traditional anarchist position which is without qualification anti-democratic. Considering how few anarchists there are anywhere, there's no reason for them to vote in any election, not even opportunistically. No anarchists, as best I remember, when I became an anarchist in the 1970s, were for any kind of democracy. It was the socialists who were equivocating about democracy. Then along came Murray Bookchin, about whom Gary Snyder said: "He claims to be an anarchist, but he writes like a Stalinist thug." I remember what Bookchin published in the 1970s: *Post-Scarcity Anarchism* and *Towards an Ecological Society*. He was then what he later denounced as a "lifestyle anarchist"! He also wrote some bizarre stuff about the imperialist. slavery-based oligarchic democracy of ancient Athens as anarchist. By then, I had taken a college course on ancient Greek history, and I knew this was nonsense. But I just let it pass, as an eccentricity. So did other anarchists, apparently. They may have been impressed by the ersatz erudition of an old Marxist/Leninist/Trotskyist/left communist with a high school equivalency diploma. For many years, the 1980s and early 1990s (as I mention in *Anarchy after Leftism*), Bookchin disappeared from the anarchist milieu, instead trying to take over the environmentalist/Green movement, with zero success. Bookchin has always had zero success. I, by the way, had no personal communication with Bookchin, although we exchanged publications. But, Bookchin aside, some anarchist academics such as Dana Williams, Cindy Milstein, Ruth Kinnah, Brian Morris, and David Graeber, began to promote the notion that anarchy is the perfected form of direct democracy. This is clearly a leftist takeover attempt. I distilled many years of critique of democracy (the distinction between representative and direct democracy is of slight importance) in Debunking Democracy. Who is behind the left-democrat attempt to take over anarchism? Follow the money. It's the publishers (such as AK Press and PM Press) and the bookstores. I once visited Left Bank Books, in Seattle, ostensibly an anarchist bookstore, over 40 years ago. The first floor was all liberal, leftist, identity politics, and third world liberationist books. Lots of Noam Chomsky... Where (I asked) were the anarchist books? Upstairs -- in a small upper room. It was like a store that sells pornography but keeps it behind the counter. On my way out, I asked, do you carry any Bob Black books? No.

**Critique of Leftism.** This is closely related to the critique of democracy, although, leftists haven't always been very democratic, after seizing power. Here too my criticisms go back 40 years or more. Insofar as I invented the label "post-left anarchism," and others have picked it up, I think I have reinforced anarchist criticisms of leftism on many grounds. Here too I might cite some classic predecessors. And I am not the only anarchist critic of leftism, although, for a long time, it seemed that way. Impressionable anarchist youth have been told by Murray Bookchin, David Graeber and Noam Chomsky that anarchism is left-wing leftism. That's not true, but, the bookstores and publishers push that line, although all its promoters but Chomsky are dead, and he is even less believable as an anarchist than the other two, and soon he too will be dead. So it remains to be seen, if this contribution takes hold. I think I have at least made it easier for anarchists to come out as critics of leftism.

**Critique of Morality.** Here too, I haven't had great influence, although, I carry on the tradition of Max Stirner, Emma Goldman, and Renzo Novatore, among others. Anarchy (the goal of anarchism) is about the best society, the best way to live. Which I don't believe consists of following rules -- not better rules than the rules of utilitarians, Christians, or Marxists -- I mean, not living by following any rules. Provisional rules, rules of thumb, they may facilitate group decisions, but, they should be only advisory. A currently important spinoff from moralism is "human rights." I hope my critique of human rights has some impact, but, I don't know that it has.

**Disputing Processes.** For freedom-loving people -- who may not be especially numerous -- anarchism has some appeal, but they ask, reasonably, what about violent predators, rapists, psychopaths? Anarchists have given perfunctory attention to crime at least since Kropotkin, but what they've had to say is at best unsatisfactory, and at worst, ridiculous. We may suppose that economic equality will reduce what was classified as "crime" before laws were abolished. We may suppose that gentler methods of child-rearing will do that too. We may suppose that anarchistic methods of education (Ferrer, O'Neill, Goodman, etc.) -- minimally coercive, unhurried, "hands-on," do-it-yourself, practical -- will be effective without the regimentation (the violence) which still characterizes most schooling of children, and that children will grow up to be less violent. But what about the ones who don't? Even in the anarchist forager band societies, there is some lethal violence (almost always between young men who are drunk, or quarreling over women, or both). There is nothing contrary to anarchism if they are shunned, ostracized, and if all else fails, a community consensus forms for them to be killed.

But that largely misses the point. "Law" in state societies isn't mainly about crime and punishment. Much law, as Kropotkin contended, is intra-governmental, or intra-capitalist. But much else remains, including the resolution of disputes between individuals. But here, Kropotkin and Malatesta, and other anarchists, get vague. They suggest therapy for some troublemakers. But that assumes, falsely, that there is something necessarily pathological about interpersonal conflict. It requires nominating one of the disputants as the guilty one. But many stateless primitive societies regard many disputes, not as crimes to be punished, but as disagreements to be resolved, as socially dis-

ruptive. They employ processes such as mediation which do not adjudicate guilt or innocence. This, I've argued, should be the primary way in which anarchist societies should resolve conflict, as I have suggested in several texts which are probably not widely read, and in "Justice, Primitive and Modern," which has not been published in English. I think this is my most important contribution to anarchist thought since "The Abolition of Work," but, few anarchists know about it yet.

*What was your introductions to the critique of work?*

I was introduced to the ethnography of work and the (historical and contemporary) revolts against work before I was introduced to the critique of work. In college (1969-1973) I majored officially in history and unofficially in anthropology. Because I was on an anti-American kick, I took only courses in European history, where possible taking courses in social movements. I also read beyond the required readings. I read E.J. Hobsbawm (Primitive Rebels), E.P. Thompson (The Making of the English Working Class and the essay on time and work discipline in the Industrial Revolution), George Rude (The Crowd in History and other books), Keith Thomas, etc. Later, when I outgrew my anti-American prejudices, I read Benjamin Hunnicutt and Richard Edwards. If they didn't show that work could be abolished, or that it should be, they at least showed that it could be different, because it had been different: it had been more skilled, more sociable, and more leisured. I also learned these things -- even more forcefully -- from ethnography," from Sahlins' "The Original Affluent Society," from the writings of R.B. Lee, Jiri Tanaka, Lorna Marshall and others, on the Bushmen.

From around 1972, I was reading anarchist and utopian socialist authors I found in the Labadie Collection and elsewhere. As I've often said, Charles Fourier and William Morris had an explicit critique of work. By 1975. I was reading essays by John Zerzan about resistance to work in the *Fifth Estate.* I also read Fredy Perlman there. By 1978, when I was in San Francisco associating with Zerzan and his circle, I was among people for whom the rejection of work was taken for granted. In 1980, in San Francisco, I gave the speech ogainst work which was the basis, in 1985, for "The Abolition of Work." Someone would have to comb through my correspondence in those years to produce a more detailed account of the development of my thinking.

*Examples of leisurely work?*

The expression "leisurely incarnations of work" might not be well-expressed, especially given my definitions of work and leisure. What I had in mind is work (as I define it) performed in circumstances of unsupervised sociability. When your question arrived I was rereading Roy Porter's social history of 18th century England, which reminded me of my readings in Keith Thomas and E.P. Thompson and others about work in pre-industrial England. In my own books I mention examples (I think this one is from "Primitive Affluence: A Postscript to Sahlins") the Kpelle dry-rice farmers of Liberia. William Morris wrote about this too. I think I will have to stop for now and take another nap.

*What are your thoughts on anarcho capitalism? Did you read Graebers 'Debt'? Thoughts there?*

I agree with anarcho-leftists and post-left anarchists, who don't agree on much, that anarcho-capitalism is a nonsense phrase, an impossibility. "The Libertarian as Conservative" discusses just some of the reasons why I think so.

I have read Graeber's *Debt* and also his *Bullshit Jobs* (which owes much more to me than he admitted). Both books contain a lot of interesting information -- in *Debt*, new to me, and in *Bullshit Jobs,* not so new to me. But then both books, in their conclusions, just collapse: "Capitalism is crazy." One could put it that way, but then, what is to be done? I don't think Graeber ever mentions, for instance, anarchism, in books that his academic colleagues might read, not even in the leftist London School of Economics.

*Whats the worst job you ever had?*

My first real job, not counting taking over a friend's paper route for two weeks, was, after my expulsion in twelfth grade, in 1969, was with Nelson's, an imitation of McDonald's. The manager was a leather jacket greaser Fonzie type. The elite workers were the ones who fried the hamburgers. I had a second-class job as steamer of hot dog buns and fryer of French fries. I remember when Fonzie chewed me out when I dropped a hot dog on the floor and then threw it away.

But the worst job was the one that brought me to Albany, at Albany Law School, from Boston; teaching legal research and writing to two sections of first-year law students. This was a grossly underpaid non-tenure, one-year job. I got no respect from tenured faculty who hadn't even been published as much as I had. This course was a kind of orphan in law schools then (and maybe since). Traditionally, law schools taught only courses on subjects which would be on the bar exam, and the bar exams tested only subjects that were taught in law schools. Law school graduates knew nothing about how to practice law. Law firms complained. Law schools responded, haltingly, with "practice" courses such as clinical courses (I was expelled from one for not being nice enough to a landlord's lawyer).

Albany Law School, the fourth oldest law school in the United States, and by no means a distinguished one, was not in the vanguard here, but, by 1989, all law schools taught legal research and writing to first-year students. But the tenured and tenure-track faculty despised us research and writing instructors. Our course was not included in the standard A-E grading system. The grades in our course did not affect the student's official grade point average, as the students soon figured out. So they of course put their efforts into the real courses. And they could take our their

frustrations against their other teachers against us, with impunity. A few of them did.

The curriculum, which I had no role in designing, might have been invented to infuriate the students. The first semester was on research, which included, correct citation, tested by weekly short quizzes. A Uniform System of Citation (unofficially, the Harvard Bluebook) is ridiculously specific. Students who had done the research right got mad when they lost points for not citing their correct findings correctly. Students could redo their assignments and return them correctly the following week. Of course they all compared their answers and returned correct answers the next week. What was the point of that?

The next semester, where the emphasis shifted to writing, I might have liked better. But I was fed up, and quit. I had to sue the law school in small claims court for my last paycheck. I won.

*What was your best job?*

My first job after law school: as a research clerk for the Michigan Court of Appeals in Detroit. I got that job, probably, because a friend of mine, Steve Silverman, was a clerk for one of the judges. I think that's usually how people get good jobs. Silverman was an "elbow clerk" for a particular judge, Judge Kaufman (fortuitously, no doubt, both were Jews). I was, instead, a staff attorney, working for the court collectively. This was in 1977-1978. The court was divided into three divisions with headquarters in Detroit, Lansing and Grand Rapids (east to west). The Detroit division was the busiest, partly because more goes on in Detroit -- by then a shadow of what it was in the 1950s, but still the Motor City, and still by far the biggest city in Michigan, so there was plenty of business-generated business -- but mostly because it was also the Murder City, nationally notorious for the volume of its violent crime. Under a U.S. Supreme Court ruling, anyone convicted of crime has a constitutional right to one level of appeal. Under other decisions, every such convicted defendant has a right to appointed counsel if he can't afford to hire counsel, as was usually the case for the vast majority of the black lumpen Detroit criminals. So, many -- very many -- of these criminal convictions were appealed (why not? nothing to lose). (I say "he." I don't remember any cases of female defendants.) They provided me with work.

We research attorneys worked in a venerable downtown Detroit skyscraper whose name I forget. It was poorly heated in winter, so I brought a space heater into my office. One my fellow attorneys remarked, "You need a heater in Detroit."

This was the job. I would receive the "record on appeal" in a case, consisting of a trial transcript, legal briefs from the prosecution and defense, and some documents. I wrote a "pre-hearing report" for the appellate judges who would listen to oral argument, according to a standard format: introduction, statement of the facts, statement of the issues, legal analysis, recommended decision, and usually a proposed written opinion for "per curiam" disposal of the case, or occasionally I recommended a "full authored opinion" which would be written by elbow clerks like Silverman. Almost always the court did what I recommended.



Why was this a good job? For several reasons. I was able to live in Ann Arbor again (where I had attended the University), and commute to Detroit by train. The salary was to this day the highest I have ever received. The working conditions were excellent. I had an office to myself, its walls lined with all the books, such as "reporters" of all Michigan appellate court decisions, which I usually needed to do my work. Sometimes, I got permission to stay in Ann Arbor and do research at the University of Michigan law library which was just a half mile down the street from where I lived (I lived near the train station). We had a boss, Dorean Koenig, who passed on all our pre-hearing reports. She had a distinguished legal career behind her, and we respected her because she knew her shit, although she might occasionally irritate me. But she treated us as professionals.

But in December 1977, she left to accept an appointment as a professor at some law school. Shortly before then, a new staff attorney arrived, John Roels, transferred from the Grand Rapids office. Because I took the train, I and several other train commuting attorneys and clerks, including Silverman, arrived early at work, if I recall, up to an

hour early. That was okay by me, because, I am good for nothing, first thing in the morning. I would buy a coffee and doughnut, a massive caffeine and sugar high, in the lobby of the building, and take it up to my office. Without that I wasn't good for much for an hour or two. Anyway, Roels (pronounced "rules") arrived early too, although, he didn't have to, because he had relocated to Detroit or some Detroit suburb. I couldn't draw him into conversation. If I'd known about autism then, I might have suspected him of autism. Anyway, we soon learned why he was there. He was appointed to Dorean's job, although, he had no more expertise than any of us did. The management in Lansing, under a Harold Graves (an executive, not a lawyer), brought in Rules to increase productivity. Instead, we all staged a work slowdown. My best job was not good any more. I prepared to resign. Before I did, I sent a letter to all the judges, scheduled to arrive the day my resignation letterdid. In fact it arrived a day earlier, and this was good for me, because Harold Graves phoned me, and offered me 3 weeks severance pay, if I would be out of the office by the following day.

*What do you think studying law did for your view or approach to thinking about anarchism?*

I studied them in tandem. I started law school in fall 1973 at the University of California at Davis. By then, I had been investigating the treasures of the Labadie Collection for, I don't know, at least a few months. And I continued these readings at law school, although I remember reading more H.P. Lovecraft. Law is taught, especially in the first year, by the "case method," which is grossly inefficient and doubles the time necessary to learn some law. You read an edited "case," usually the written "opinion" of an appeals court. In what is parodically called "the Socratic method," the professor than calls upon students to explain this or that feature of the case. If he is really on his game, he can demolish either side of any question he torments the students with. First year law school is a place that humbles many hotshot college graduates. Finally, the all-knowing professor announced a provisional resolution, and the students file out to their next class for the same treatment. Next time, the students have read the next case (the pace is usually 15 pages per class) which apparently totally contradicts the first case. But does it really? Assuming the second case to be correct, can the student "distinguish" the first case so that it is also right, but the first case has a narrower application than it seemed to have? And the game goes on that way. The study of law is said to sharpen the mind while narrowing it. That is perhaps a half-truth, and you can guess which half I consider the truth. Law school law is the study of judges changing the law while pretending not to.

I am much better informed of the anarchist critique (or critiques) of law than when I was in law school, or for a long time after. Kropotkin's critique of law is that it originated in conquest (that is debatable), and exists mainly to uphold the state and private property. It's not really possible to quantify the functions of law the way Kropotkin tries to do. It never occurs to him that some law is facilitative. You can use law, for instance, to change your name in a public and authoritative way. You can win the lottery. Then there are laws against laws: constitutional rights. The fundamental fault in rule by law, even if fairly and intelligently administered, is that it orders life by obligatory rules, and the problem is not just that they are obligatory, it is also that they are rules, The best critique here is from Godwin which I didn't read myself until a couple of years ago. Even if rules provide the best solution to a problem at a certain time, life continues to evolve but the rules remain the same, until the judges twist and tweak them, but then the new rules are subject to the same defect. Law always lags behind life.

A fashionable topic of instruction in law schools today, but unknown when I was in law school, is Alternate Dispute Resolution. As you know, I discuss this in "Justice, Primitive and Modern." Some forms of ADL are characteristic of stateless societies, but, I argue, incompatible with state societies (one more reason for living in stateless societies). I am trying to bring this message to anarchists before I die, but I am far from having accomplished that.

**Impressionable anarchist youth have been told by Murray Bookchin, David Graeber and Noam Chomsky that anarchism is left-wing leftism. That's not true, but, the bookstores and publishers push that line, although all its promoters but Chomsky are dead, and he is even less believable as an anarchist than the other two, and soon he too will be dead. So it remains to be seen, if this contribution takes hold. I think I have at least made it easier for anarchists to come out as critics of leftism.**

# LAW VERSUS CUSTOM, CULTURE VERSUS NATURE, OR, TEVYEH VERSUS HIS HORSE[1]

**-Bob Black**

Sir Alfred Zimmern, Murray Bookchin's favorite historian,[2] intended some derision when he wrote, many years ago, that "the modern anarchists have reinvented 'unwritten laws,'"[3] but modern anarchists – or some of them -- refer to custom, not to unwritten law. Whether the customs of certain primitive (*i.e.*, stateless) societies ever qualify as (unwritten) "law," is a matter of largely sterile terminological quibbling among anthropologists.[4] Its many definitions "are typically inseparable from theoretical conclusions about it."[5] For my purposes, if not for all purposes, law is governmental social control.[6] There is then a sharp distinction between the rule of law and the order of custom.[7] Law is statist. Custom is anarchist.

This was the position of the classical anarchists, as expressed by Errico Malatesta: "Custom always follows the needs and feelings of the majority; and the less they are subject to the sanctions of law the more they are respected, for everyone can see and understand their use."[8] George Woodcock agreed: "Customs and not regulations are the natural manifestations of men's ideas of justice, and in a free society customs would adapt themselves to the constant growth and tension in that society."[9] Those are somewhat idealized formulations. Nonetheless, custom is the basic ordering principle in primitive society, and anarchists have traditionally (dare I say, customarily?) seen it as the replacement of the state by acephalous order. Where custom prevails, it expresses common values "although no common political organization corresponds to them."[10] Here is a more recent formulation: "The rules of good behaviour are decided by custom and consensus, and enforced by what some authorities call 'diffuse sanctions.'"[11]

On this view, each and every custom is not assumed to be benign. Customs are collective habits. Societies, like individuals,[12] may acquire bad habits. For societies, once-useful customs may lose their usefulness as the society changes. They may become merely useless, and linger awhile as harmless habits, or be kept on out of nostalgia. It would be difficult to assign a current social function to throwing rice at the newlyweds at a wedding, the christening of a ship by smashing a bottle of champagne on it, or saying "God bless you!" when someone sneezes. But laws are even more notorious for outliving their usefulness, those which ever had any. Customs wither away to the extent that they are no longer observed, and finally forgotten. The enforcement of laws may lapse, for various reasons, but, like the state, laws never wither away. They always represent the permanent possibility of repression. They must be abolished.

However, some modern anarchists buy into the conventional view that the order of custom is irrational and, even worse, not modern. Thus Murray Bookchin, who was once hailed, mainly by himself, as the greatest of modern anarchists, categorically condemned "unthinking custom" as irrational, as "a dim form of inherited tradition."[13] Now I am well aware that Bookchin later renounced anar-

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1 Based on Bob Black, *Nightmares of Reason (*2010), ch. 9, available at ,www.theanarchistlibrary.org but recently revised.

2 Zimmern, a leftist and Zionist, has been credited by Wikipedia with inspiring Bookchin to advocate "face to face or assembly democracy." "Libertarian Municipalism." Janet Biehl, Bookchin's hagiographer, does not mention Zimmern. *Ecology or Catastrophe: The Life of Murray Bookchin* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2015). In the 5th century B.C., the population of Athens – Bookchin's exemplary democracy – grew to 250,000-300,000, including 20,000-40,000 citizens (the ruling oligarchy). The citizens were the ones authorized to attend the assembly. Obviously, Athens was not a face to community, and its assembly could not have practiced face to face democracy, unless, as was usually the case, most of the citizens stayed home. Black, *Nightmares of Reason*, 276-78.

3 Alfred Zimmern, *The Greek Commonwealth: Politics and Economics in Fifth-Century Athens (*5th ed.; New York: The Modern Library, 1931), 127 n. 1 (this is a highly idealized account of Athens). According to David Graeber and David Wengrow, "Bookchin's ideas about human prehistory . . . are based on information which is many decades out of date." *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2021), 568 n. 17.

4 Laura Nader & Harry F. Todd, "Introduction: The Disputing Process," in *The Disputing Process – Law in Ten Societies,* ed. Laura Nader & Harry F. Todd (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 9-10.

5 Bob Black, "More Modesty All Around: on Barclay's *The State," Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed* No. 63 (24)(2) (Spring-Summer 2007), 53, accessible at www.theanarchismlibrary.org. My opinion: "The onset of coercive hierarchy marks the qualitative break in social development which should primarily interest anarchists." Ibid., 54.

6 Donald Black [no relation], *The Behavior of Law* (New York: Academic Press, 1976), 2.

7 Stanley Diamond, "The Rule of Law versus the Order of Custom," in *The Rule of Law,* ed. Robert Paul Wolff (New York: Touchstone Books, 1972), 115-144.

8 Errico Malatesta, *Anarchy* (London: Freedom Press, 1974), 42.

9 George Woodcock, "The Rejection of the State," *The Rejection of the State and Other Essays (*Toronto, Canada: New Books, 1972), 25

10 J.G. Peristiany, *The Institutions of Primitive Society* (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1972), 25.

11 *What Is Anarchism?* ed. Donald Rooum & Freedom Press (London: Freedom Press, 1995), accessible at www.theanarchistlibrary.org.

12 Murray Bookchin's bad habits, according to Janet Biehl, included cigarette smoking, junk food, and occasional heavy drinking.

13 Murray Bookchin, *Anarchism, Marxism, and the Future of the Left: Interviews and Essays, 1993-1998* (Edinburgh, Scotland & San Francisco, CA: AK Press, 1999), 71 (quoted); idem, Toward an Ecological Society (Montréal, Canada: Black Rose Books, 1980), 135; idem, *Remaking Society: Paths to a Green Future* (Boston: South End Books & Montréal, Canada: 1991), 9 (quoted).

chism, although he didn't publicly admit it for a few years.[14] I was among those who had long since demonstrated that Bookchin was not an anarchist.[15] But for several years he continued to write, although he was now secretly a statist, as if he were an anarchist.[16] His ostensibly anarchist publisher, AK Press, which must have known of his apostasy, published him anyway, because Bookchin's enemies were its enemies.[17]

Bookchin was not a typical anarchist leftist, or even a typical leftist, because of his many political peculiarities. Even leftists would have looked askance, had they not been looking the other way, at some of Bookchin's ideological eccentricities. He was that worst of insufferables, a semi-literate, pedantic autodidact. He is easy to ridicule, and I have often done so. So to some, my use of him here as a surrogate for conventional anarcho-leftism may seem unfair, even unsporting.

Nonetheless, Bookchin was as much of an anarchist as any leftist was – I know that's not saying much – during the period when he pronounced his final judgment on primitive societies in general, and custom in particular. His is a vulgar version of ethnocentric 19th century anti-primitive scholarly prejudice. Bookchin was nothing if not vulgar. He articulated the assumptions of the anarcho-leftists, and leftists generally, who are usually inarticulate. He was a joke as any kind of scholar. But he did cover a widely range, however clumsily, and he thought about, however poorly, some things that leftists should think about, but do not. Bookchin sometimes expressed what they took for granted. As far as I know, they never repudiated his explicit lifelong affiliation with the left either during his lifetime or at any time since. Instead they exploited it. I am unaware of him having any leftist critics. AK Press keeps his books in print, and keeps up the imposture of Bookchin as an anarchist. So I believe I am justified in putting him to use as a bad example.

Bookchin defined custom as "behavior that is unreflective, that is, practiced unthinkingly as though it were an instinctive rather a learned heritage."18 It is not instinctive. And it never occurred to Bookchin that a follower of custom might reflect upon it. When he defines a word (there are many other examples), invariably his definition is idiosyncratic and at variance with common usage, that is to say, with what the word really means. One dictionary definition is: "A habitual or usual practice; a common way of behaving; usage, fashion, habit."[19] Custom is not by definition unreflective. Bookchin's definition is at once overinclusive and underinclusive. It is overinclusive because much, perhaps most, unreflective behavior is not customary behavior. It is when we act in an unusual way, and regret it, that we say, "I wasn't thinking."

Most unthinking behavior is not customary behavior, although some of it is habitual behavior. Compliance with the law is a good example. Most motorists obey the traffic laws, if they obey them at all, unthinkingly. If they paused to reason out their every decision, they would never get out of the driveway. Activities like swimming, riding a bicycle, tying your shoes, and even breathing may actually be impeded if you think about doing them: "Your breathing goes wrong the moment your conscious self meddles with it."[20] Customs are obeyed – or rather, observed – far more willingly, or rather, far more spontaneously, than laws.[21] The traffic example also further shows that Bookchin's definition is defective because it fails to distinguish custom from law, a distinction the anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski may have been the first to notice.[22]

The definition is also defective because it is underinclusive. To follow a custom is not necessarily unthinking. Most of the customs which anthropologists identify for a particular people are expressed in "emic" or native categories of thought, which must be reflected upon before the natives can articulate them to the ethnographer.[23] They are not reported to have ever had any difficulty doing so. It is unlikely that the first time aborigines reflect upon their customs is when they are debriefed by an anthropologist. It can even happen in our own aberrant, outlier society that people have to research certain customs in order to follow them – for example, to have a proper traditional wedding. By Bookchin's defective definition, they are customs if you don't have to look them up, but not if you do. If the occasion for following custom only arises occasionally, resort may have to be made, to get it right, to a tribal wise man, or to *Emily Post's Etiquette*.[24] Since that book is in its eighteenth edition, obviously Bookchin's ideas about unchang-

14 "Bookchin Breaks with Anarchism," accessible at www.theanarchistlibrary.org; Biehl, *Ecology or Catastrophe,* 302; Lawrence Jarach, "Having No Dog in the Fight: AK Press versus Michael Schmidt," *Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed* No. 77 (2016), 44 & 48 nn. 7-8.

15 Black, *Nightmares of Reason;* Bob Black, *Anarchy after Leftism* (Columbia, MO: C.A.L. Press, 1997).

16 Murray Bookchin, *Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism: An Unbridgeable Chasm* (Edinburgh, Scotland & San Francisco, CA: AK Press, 1995); *Bookchin, Anarchism, Marxism.*

17 Jarach, "Having No Dog in the Fight," 44; see also Bob Black, "Class Struggle Social Democrats, or, The Press of Business," *Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed* No 64. (25)(2) (Fall-Winter 2007), 26-29, accessible at www.theanarchistlibrary.org.

18 Bookchin, *Anarchism, Marxism,* 71. Bookchin had a shuddering revulsion for anything "instinctive," for "animality," for anything natural or bodily. He had a bad case of what Hakim Bey has called "gnostic self-disgust." *T.A.Z.: The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism (2d ed.;* Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 2003), 2.

19 *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), q/v "custom."

20 George Bernard Shaw, "Maxims of a Revolutionist," *Bernard Shaw: The Collected Plays with Their Prefaces* (London: The Bodley Head, 1971), 2: 791.

21 Robert H. Lowie, *Primitive Society* (New York: Boni & Liveright, 1920), 398.

22 Bronislaw Malinowski, *Crime and Custom in Savage Society* (London: Kegan Paul, 1926), 50.

23 Marvin Harris, *The Rise of Anthropological Theory: A History of Theories of Culture* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1968), 571, 576-77.

24 (18th ed.; New York: William Morrow, 2011).

ing custom are wrong.

The justification for many a custom is that it was thought through once, it worked, and nobody has to think about it anymore.[25] So it is not necessarily an objection that custom prescribes how one does certain things in a certain way but offers no rationale for doing it that way except that it is how it has always been done. Despite the exhortations of Rousseau and Bookchin,[26] rarely does a *law* come with a justification either. And when it does, the preamble (the explanation) is not to be trusted. It does not control the interpretation of a statute.[27] What a legislature claims to be doing, and what it is really doing, knowingly or otherwise, may not be the same. Anarchists are the last people who should take a lawmaker's word for it about anything.

Custom is recurrent social behavior. Custom is collective habit. Custom is not something apart from social organization. Custom is implicit in all social organization. Reality runs a race with rules and reality always wins. "Even in supposedly advanced societies, behavior is governed more by custom than by law in the usual sense of that word."[28] Law plays a surprisingly small part in social control.[29] Custom is not something which it is possible to overthrow entirely, even in a revolutionary situation. Were all custom to be overthrown, we might finally experience, in real life, the state of nature (a condition in which Bookchin and I do not believe). Like some of Bookchin's other anthropological insights, the notion of custom as quasi-instinctual, as animalistic, seems to have been gleaned from the Tarzan movies where, egged on by witch-doctors, the natives act out insane rituals as if they were zombies. Bookchin was the last man to believe that "Custom is king." But that is precisely what it is not.

A critical difference between custom and law, as everybody else knows, is coercion.[30] Bookchin, getting that exactly wrong, conceives custom to be coercion, command.[31] But whatever the force of custom is in modern societies – and it is considerable – in primitive societies, according to a Bookchin-vetted anthropologist, Paul Radin, it is not compulsion: "But customs are an integral part of the life of primitive peoples. There is no compulsive submission to them. They are not followed because the weight of tradition overwhelms a man. That takes place in our culture, not in that of aboriginal man. A custom is obeyed there because it is intertwined with a vast living network of interrelations, arranged in a meticulous and ordered manner."[32] There is no society in which customs or rules or even laws are automatically followed. Thus anthropologist Edmund R. Leach scoffed at "the classic anthropological fiction that 'the native is a slave to custom.'"[33]

It never occurred to Bookchin (not much ever did) that there was anything incongruous in his denouncing custom by using language, which is the most fundamental of all customs: "All speech is a form of customary behavior."[34] Thus Bishop Berkeley wrote of "common custom, which you know is the rule of language."[35] Every society, including advanced capitalist societies, is riddled with customs (concerning child-rearing, for instance) which could never be codified in law. It could not persist without them. According to the anarchist Herbert Read, customs cannot be eliminated, only replaced.[36] Some laws originated as customs. Some customs are codified in law.[37] In the United

25 Robert Boyd & Peter J. Richerson, *Culture and Evolutionary Process* (Chicago, IL & London: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 288. As Sir Humphrey Davies, Attorney General for Ireland, wrote in 1612: "For a Custume taketh beginning and growth to perfection in this manner: When a reasonable act once done is found to be good and beneficiall to the people, and agreeable to their nature and disposition, then do they use it and practice it again and again, and so by often iteration and multiplication of the act it becometh a Custome; . . . " Quoted in J.G. Pocock, *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law* (2d ed.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 33.

26 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "A Discourse on Political Economy," in *The Social Contract and Discourses,* trans. G.D.H. Cole (New York: E.P. Dutton and Company & London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1950), 295; *Bookchin, Anarchism, Marxism,* 288.

27 Alexander Addison, "Analysis of the Report of the Committee of the Virginia Assembly," in *American Political Writing During the Founding Era, 1760-1805,* ed. Charles S. Hyneman & Donald S. Lutz (2 vols.; Indianapolis, IN: The Liberty Fund, 1983), 2: 1091. There is a large American legal literature on this topic.

28 Burton M. Leiser, *Custom, Law, and Morality: Conflict and Continuity in Human Behavior (*Garden City, NY:Anchor Books, 1969), 112 (quoted); George C. Homans, *The Human Group* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1951), 28-29.

29 Donald Black, "Social Control as a Dependent Variable," in *Towards a General Theory of Social Control,* ed. Donald Black (2 vols.; Orlando, Florida: Academic Press, 1984), 1: 3, reprinted in Donald Black, *The Social Structure of Right and Wrong* (San Diego, CA: Academic Press, 1993), 1-26; Bob Black, "An Anarchist Response to 'The Anarchist Response to Crime,'" in *Defacing the Currency: Selected Writings, 1992-2012* (Berkeley, CA: LBC Press, 2012), 235-36; idem, "'Wild Justice': Crime as an Anarchist Social Order," Defacing the Currency, 235.

30 E. Adamson Hoebel, *The Law of Primitive Man: A Study in Comparative Legal Dynamics* (New York: Atheneum, 1968), 26-27.

31 Bookchin, *Anarchism, Marxism*, 204.

32 Paul Radin, *The World of Primitive Man* (New York: H. Schuman, 1953), 223. I say "Bookchin-vetted" because Bookchin cites him approvingly in several places. Bookchin read very little modern anthropology.

33 *The Essential Edmund Leach,* ed. Stephen Hugh-Jones & James Laidlow (2 vols.; New Haven CT & London: Yale University Press, 2000), 1: 76.

34 Ibid., 1: 168.

35 George Berkeley, *Three Dialogues Between Between Hylas and Philonous,* ed. Jonathan Dancy (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press), 131.

36 Herbert Read, *Anarchy & Order: Essays in Politics* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1971), 16-17.

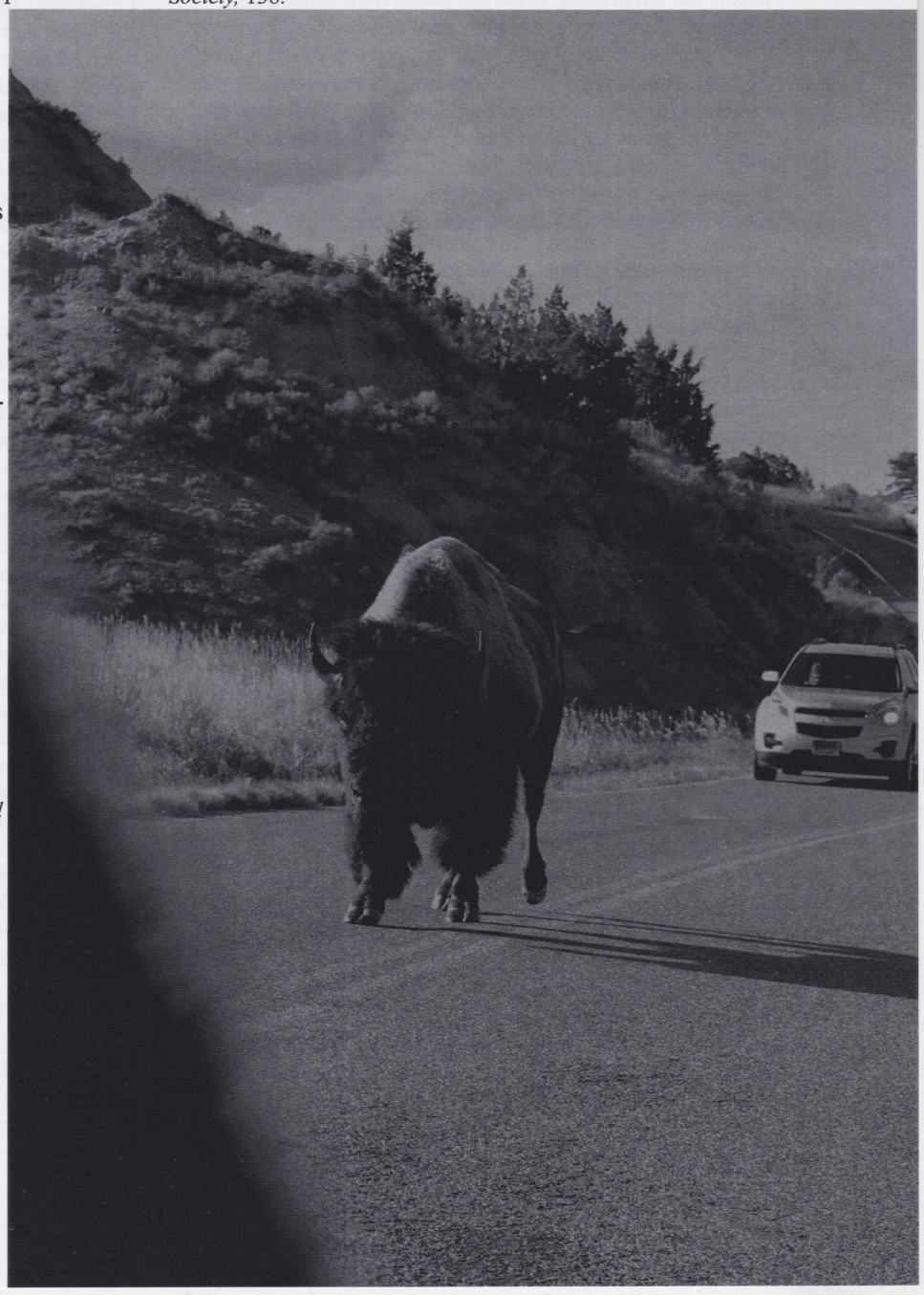
37 In U.S. law, the Uniform Commercial Code modestly codified commercial custom, to the limited extent that, in interpreting a commercial contract, the "usage of trade" in the industry may be considered. Uniform Commercial Code § 1-205(2)-(4); Richard Danzig, "A Comment on the Jurisprudence of the Uniform Commercial Code," Stanford Law Rev. 27(2) (Feb.

States, the rule about driving on the right side of the road originated in custom, in the covered-wagon days.[38] The rule is arbitrary, but rational. Most of the world drives on the left side of the road, which is just as arbitrary, and just as rational.[39] Sometimes all that matters is that there be one rule or another, regardless whether it derives from immemorial custom, or right reason, or a coin flip.

There is nothing inherently irrational about custom. A regular theme in anthropology is the discovery of positive functions in superficially arbitrary or irrational customs. That may even be true, or may once have been true, of such famous food tabus as the Hindu proscription of beef and the Jewish proscription of pork. Americans also have food tabus.[40] Murray Bookchin, for instance, did not eat the insects in his garden.

Presumably falling under the rubric of custom is the most mysterious phrase in Murray Bookchin's dyslexicon, "the blood oath." He refers to and deplores it freely, without ever defining it, as if all the world already spoke his private language. The phrase is unknown to anthropology and unknown to any dictionary. I finally found an explanation of sorts: "The loyalty of kin to each other in the form of the blood oath – an oath that combined an expression of duty to one's relatives with vengeance for their offenders – became the organic source of communal continuity." Thus he refers to "the archaic group cemented by the blood oath."[41]

Now that's a funny thing. It is generally believed that kinship ties *themselves* – what Bookchin calls "mere kin ties" – provide the organic source of communal continuity. Bookchin considers family relations to be "organic" in the sense of purely biological.[42] Tribal peoples, he believes, have not emerged from animality.[43] But the "blood oath" is not biological, organic, or animalistic. It is – if it exists – juridical. It has nothing in common with animal behavior. It has much in common with the oath of a juror or a witness in court. It is meaningless outside the context of a legal system. Which is to say, to ascribe this practice to primitive societies, without



1975): 621-635; see also Benjamin N. Cardozo, *The Nature of the Judicial Process* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press), 58-65. British colonialism, for instance, legalized Nuer custom and enforced it in new tribunals. P.P. Howell, *A Manual of Nuer Law (*London: Oxford University Press for the International African Institute), 1-2. Codification typically transforms the content of custom.

38 John Chipman Gray, *The Nature and Sources of the Law* (2d ed.; Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1963), 289.

39 A. John Simmons, *Moral Principles and Political Obligations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), 194.

40 Max Gluckman, *Politics, Law and Ritual in Tribal Societies (*Chicago, IL: Aldine Publishing Company, 1965), 300; Marvin Harris, *Cows, Pigs, Wars and Witches: The Riddles of Culture* (New York: Random House, 1974), 11-57; Marshall Sahlins, *Culture and Practical Reason* (Chicago, IL & London: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 169-176.

41 Bookchin, *Remaking Society,* 51 (quoted); Bookchin, *Toward an Ecological Society,* 135.

42 Black, *Nightmares of Reason, ch. 10.*

43 Primitive societies are not really societies at all, unlike cities, "which provide[ ] a strictly human basis for association. Economic and social life ceases to depend exclusively on a sexual division of labour and kinship ties – the biological matrix of social life that segregates the labour process according to brute physical capacities and views the stranger as the enemy [see below] – but rather is organized along territorial lines that open the possibility for social life as a function of self-worth and uniquely individual capacities, thereby establishing the basis for a community that is properly human and social." Bookchin, *Toward an Ecological Society,* 138.

citing a scrap of evidence, is nonsense. An oath, bloody or otherwise, is cultural, not biological. Oaths are taken, not among kin in stateless societies, but in states. The oath belongs in a society based not on status but on contract. According to a 4th century B.C. Athenian politician, Lycurgus, "what holds democracy together is the oath."[44]

However, there have been (with one identified exception) no family blood oaths, anywhere, any place, at any time. It is a dark fantasy concocted out of Bookchin's own troubled family life. His father deserted his mother when he was very young.[45] He was raised – he really says this! – by the Communist Party, "and frankly they were very thorough."[46] No doubt. The father betrayed his marriage oath. The son must have gotten this "blood oath" stuff out of pulp fiction and misremembered 19th century anthropology. If it were a universal feature of primitive societies, surely some ethnographic fieldworkers would have mentioned it. None of them has. Instead of being universally present, it is universally absent.

This is not surprising, since the blood oath notion is sociologically (if not quite logically) self-contradictory. It supposes that, in a society based entirely on kinship, family feeling is insufficient to provide support or revenge, but an additional voluntaristic tie, the blood oath, motivates the relatives to provide the assistance which was already their obligation. This, in a society where contract is peripheral, or unknown, and where contract is completely unknown except possibly in dealings with strangers!

The wily Bookchin has explained away the universal absence of something which, according to him, should be universally present: "The blood-tie and the rights and duties that surround it are embodied in an *unspoken oath* that comprised the only visible unifying principle of early community life."47 How can an oath be visible which is not even audible? An oath "is oral by its very nature"; in the ethnographic record, only in rare instances are there silent oaths.48 How can anybody rely on a silent oath?

As a matter of fact, the only example of a blood oath known to me or cited by Bookchin is the one taken by some aristocratic extended families of Italian city-states around 1200 A.D.:

> Drawing upon a strong sense of clan and consanguinity, noblemen clustered into tight-knit associations and built fortified towers so as to defend themselves or to expand their rights and privileges. Each such *consortaria* was a sworn corporate grouping, consisting of males descended from a common male ancestor. It was therefore a male lineage, although, when extinction threatened, the line might be transferred via a woman. In time the *consortaria* entered into sworn association with other neighborhood groups.[49]

Here is what Bookchin called "libertarian municipalism," literally with a vengeance: confederations of sovereign neighborhoods in arms. This is a lot like what the more extreme of American right-wing armed extremists, such as the Posse Comitatus, are calling for. And here is, apparently, kinship with the oath superadded. These short-lived medieval communes are counter-examples to the thesis (to be discussed) that Bookchin advances elsewhere, that loyalty to the city supplants loyalty to the kin group. Medieval Italian city-states were not primitive societies: they were states.

Otherwise, the use of real blood to solemnize an oath with the "oath sacrifice" is best known among – Bookchin's beloved ancient Greeks. From Homeric through classical times, oaths were accompanied by animal sacrifice[50] and blood libations, involving immersion of the hands in the blood, and dismemberment of the animal followed by squeezing or trampling upon its testicles. This gory procedure was used to confirm contracts and treaties as well as in court.[51] So much for urban Greek rationality.[52] Those involved were unrelated to, and potentially hostile to each other.

Oddly, Bookchin never says *why* the blood oath is so bloodcurdling. He relies instead upon evoking the unreasoning qualms of the squeamish, such as myself. His "blood oath" has nothing to do with blood. It is merely a political metaphor, something Bookchin denounces almost as often as he uses one.[53]

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44 Quoted in Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion,* trans. John Raffan (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 250. This is not Lycurgus the legendary Spartan lawgiver.

45 Bookchin, *Anarchism, Marxism,* 23.

46 Bookchin, *Anarchism, Marxism,* 24.

47 Murray Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom: The Emergence and Dissolution of Hierarchy (*Palo Alto, CA: Chelsea Books, 1982), 53 (emphasis added). This book, haled as his magnum opus, presents a cartoonish theory of the origin of hierarchy, and says nothing about the dissolution of hierarchy.

48 Ivan Illich, *In the Mirror of the Past: Lectures and Addresses, 1978-1990* (New York & London: Marion Boyars, 1992), 172 (quoted); John M. Roberts, "Oaths, Automatic Ordeals, and Powers," *American Anthropologist* 67(6) (pt. 2) (Dec. 1965), 186.

49 Murray Bookchin, *The Rise of Urbanization and the Decline of Citizenship (*San Francisco, CA: Sierra Club, 1987), 101; *Lauro Martines, Power and Imagination: City-States in Renaissance Italy (*New York: Alfred A. Knopf 1979), 35-26. "An intricate relationship between blood ties and territorial ties stands out as an intrinsic and defining feature of the medieval city." Diane Owen Hughes, "Kinsmen and Neighbors in Medieval Genoa," in *The Medieval City,* ed. Harry A. Miskimin, David Herlihy, & A.L. Udovitch (New Haven, CT & London: Yale University Press, 1977), 95.

50 There must have been a time when the Greeks practiced human sacrifice. Agamemnon sacrificed his daughter Iphigenia to secure a fair wind to Troy. Euripides, *Iphigenia in Aulis*, trans. Nicolas Rudall (Chicago, IL: Ivan R. Dee, 1997).

51 Burkett, *Greek Religion,* 250-54; Louis Gernet, *The Anthropology of Ancient Greece*, trans. John Hamilton (Baltimore, MD & London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), 167-170.

52 See E.R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1957).

53 In *Anarchism, Marxism,* 199-200, in six paragraphs Bookchin uses political metaphors 20 times in denouncing political metaphors. "From the very beginning political science

The assumption that "blood vengeance" is "unreasoning retribution" is gratuitous and parochial, as well as forgetful of the prominent role capital punishment played in ancient Athens and in the history of Europe and the United States. What Bookchin must have had in mind is some celluloid image of prehistoric McCoys and Hatfields trapped in an endless cycle of retribution.[54] That's not how it worked. A feud – regarded as three or more homicidal acts – is not usually endless, although it may occasionally go on for a rather long time. On the south Pacific island of Bellona, one counterattack came after 225 years![55] As Lewis Henry Morgan explained, with reference to the Iroquois, clans did avenge the murder of their members, but it was their duty first to try for a composition of the crime through compensation.[56] As I have discussed,[57] many primitive societies have dispute resolution mechanisms, usually versions of mediation, which resolve lesser disputes and even some homicides. Among the Nuer of the Sudan, where killings are common and the blood feud is obligatory for a lineage, compensation is usually arranged through the mediation of a leopard-skin chief.[58] Even the headhunting Jívaro, considered the most warlike group in South America, accept compensation when a killing is unintentional.[59] Among the German barbarians, according to Tacitus, the blood feud was an obligation, "but the feuds do not continue without possibility of settlement," since even murder was atoned for by payment of a specific number of cattle and sheep.[60] In the *Iliad*, Ajax reminds Achilles that even the slaying of a brother or child may be compensated by a blood price.[61] Even in the exceptional situation where Bookchin is not making up *all* of his ethnography, he follows obsolete, long-discredited sources.[62]

Bookchin's argument implies that the blood feud is a universal feature of kin-based primitive society. Most such societies, however, do not engage in blood feuds. In a cross-cultural study of the institution, feuding was frequent in 8 societies, infrequent in 14, and absent in 20. It has been argued that that certain social structural features encourage feuding, specifically, patrilocal societies with "fraternal interest groups," groups of related men who live near each other. There proved to be a positive correlation, although, even in 10 out of 25 patrilocal societies, feuding was absent.[63] Thus urbanization is not the solution for averting the blood feud, because most non-urban societies do not have feuds anyway.

The 19th century evolutionists propounded the theory that primitive justice was a punitive and automatic reflex. That gave our enlightened modern justice, said to be compensatory and forgiving (as we all know), something to evolve out of. Actually, the Jívaro distinction between unintentional homicide (a tort redressed by compensation) and intentional homicide (punished as a crime) is not that far from where American law is today, and even closer to

has abounded in analogues and metaphors." Erik Rasmussen, *Complementarity and Political Science: An Essay on Political Science* (n.p.;Odense University Press, 1987), 48. Bookchin's fellow Jewish mystic, Spinoza, likewise believed that "the less occasion we humans use metaphors, the greater our chance of blessedness." Quoted in Richard Rorty, *Truth, Politics, and "Post-Modernism"* (Assen, [Netherlands]: Van Gorcum, 1997), 19.

54 Bookchin, *Remaking Society*, 96 (quoted), 97. The McCoy/Hatfield feud lasted 12 years, with 12 killings. Altina L. Waller, *Feud: Hatfields, McCoys, and Social Change in Appalachia, 1860-1900* (Chapel Hill, NC & London: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 6. The feud commenced with litigation over possession of a pig. An interfamily, extramarital romance was also involved. Ibid., 2-3; Black, "'Wild Justice,'" 252 & n. 45.

55 Rolf Kuschel, *Vengeance Is Their Reply: Blood Feuds and Homicide on Bellona Island. Part I: Conditions Underlying Generations of Bloodshed* (Kobenhavn, Denmark: Dansk psychologisk Vorlag, 1988), 18-19. Feuds take place within, and wars take place between political communities. Keith F. Otterbein, *The Evolution of War: A Cross-Cultural Survey* (n.p. [New Haven, CT?]: HRAF Press, 1970), 3.

56 Lewis Henry Morgan, *Ancient Society* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1877), 77-78. Kropotkin is thus in error to say "there is no exception to the rule" that bloodshed must be avenged by bloodshed. Indeed, he immediately goes on to say that intra-tribal killings may be settled if the injured tribe accepts compensation. He concludes that with most primitive folk, "feuds are infinitely rarer than might be expected." Peter Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution* (Boston, MA: Horizon Books, 1961), 106-108

57 Bob Black, "Justice, Primitive and Modern: Dispute Resolution in Anarchist and State Societies," 14-23, 55-56 (2016), accessible at www.academia.edu and www.theanarchistlibrary.org.

58 E.E. Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer: A Description of the Modes of Livelihood of a Nilotic People* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1940), 152-55. Societies of unilineal descent groups with complementary opposition, such as the Nuer, are formidable in wars with other, more loosely organized tribes. Marshall D. Sahlins, "The Segmentary Lineage: An Organization of Predatory Expansion, "American Anthropologist 63(2) (pt. 1) (April 1961): 322-345 .

59 N.W. Stirling, *Historical and Ethnographical Material on the Jívaro Indians* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1938); Rafael Karsten, *Headhunters of Western Amazonas* (Helsingfors, [Finland]: Societas Scientiaro Ferrico, 1953), 270-71 (Stirling plagiarized Karsten).

60 "Germany," in *Tacitus' Agricola, Germany, and Dialogue with Orators,* trans. Herbert W. Benario (rev. ed.; Norman, OK & London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 7.

61 *The Iliad of Homer,* trans. Richard Lattimore (Chicao, IL & London: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 215.

62 I can only find a single relevant citation: Robert Briffault, *The Mothers* (3 vols.; New York: Macmillan Company, 1927), Bookchin, *Ecology of Freedom,* 75. Briffault's book is the definitive Marxist exposition of the discredited hypothesis of primitive matriarchy. Bookchin relates that he "had been influenced in this regard by the work of Robert Briffault, a Marxist anthropological writer [but not an anthropologist], as far back as the 30s." Bookchin, *Anarchism, Marxism,* 117. In the 30s, Bookchin was first a Stalinist, then a Trotskyist.

63 Keith F. Otterbein & Charlotte Swanson Otterbein, "An Eye for an Eye, A Tooth for a Tooth: A Cross-Cultural Study of Feuding," American Anthropologist 67(6) (pt. 1) (Dec. 1965), 1472, 1473 (Tables 2 & 3).

where American law used to be. Nuer custom also distinguishes unintentional from intentional homicide; both are compensable, but for intentional homicide the damages are higher. Indeed, U.S. law has in many areas gone back to the strict liability rules of primitive jurisprudence (e.g., strict liability for defective products, workers' compensation, and under no-fault liability insurance). The contrast between primitive/punitive and complex/compensatory breaks down at the outset. The most primitive (the least socially complex) peoples, according to Bookchin and the old evolutionists, are the hunter-gatherers. Among them the blood feud, where it exists, tends to be *less* punitive and automatic, and *more* compensatory and discretionary than among tribal peoples (herders and agriculturalists): "Indeed, legal anthropologists demonstrate little sympathy for an evolutionary scheme in which principles of collective responsibility and strict liability are considered hallmarks of primitive legal systems while doctrines of justice are thought embodies in civilized legal institutions."[64]

The passage from Lewis Henry Morgan also, it turns out, looks like the remote source of Bookchin's misconception, because it was closely paraphrased by Friedrich Engels, but not closely enough. Engels wrote: "From this – the blood ties of the gens [clan] – arose the obligation [*Verpflichtung*] of blood revenge, which was unconditionally recognised by the Iroquois. If a non-member of a gens slew a member of the gens the whole gens to which the slain person belonged was pledged [*schuldeten*] to blood revenge."[65] The first sentence, which is correct – at least for one tribal confederation, the Iroquois – speaks of an obligation arising out of the family relation. Correctly read, so does the second. "Pledged" is a mistranslation of the past tense of *schulden*, a word properly rendered as "owe; be indebted to." The German words (intransitive verbs) for "pledge" are not *schulden* but rather *verphaenden* and *verpflichten*.[66] No word like "pledged" appears in Morgan, and there is no doubt that all Engels does here is repeat Morgan.

No primary sources, including a classic monograph by Morgan, and no secondary sources say that the Iroquois swore blood oaths. In fact, reported Iroquois practice rebuts the supposition of a reflexive, automatic resort to violence. Crime was almost unknown. Iroquois ideology idealized the "stern and ruthless warrior in avenging any injury done to those under his care," but the kinfolk of a murder or witchcraft victim were usually expected to offer compensation to the victim. Or they might kill the offender with impunity – *if* the offender's family admitted his guilt. Thus there was scope for discretion on both sides.[67] Even Engels must have known as much, since he wrote that "blood revenge threatens only as an extreme or rarely applied measure."[68] Morgan wrote that "a reconciliation was usually effect, except, perhaps, in aggravated cases of premeditated murder."[69] In any case, nothing can be generalized about primitive or prehistoric behavior from the customs of a single tribe in the 17th and 18th centuries. The evidentiary void is typical of Bookchin's inept, pretentious generalizations.

Bookchin has perhaps confused his imagined blood oath with the institution of blood *brotherhood*, also known as blood pacts or blood covenants, whereby *unrelated* individuals swear mutual loyalty after an exchange of blood. If so, he has again been confounded by irony. Bookchin is forever carrying on about "the stranger," how he is feared by primitives but welcome in the city. Blood pacts are often entered into precisely to *protect* the stranger – specifically, the trader, when he ventures to distant lands where he has no kin.[70] A well-known essay on the subject is "Zande Blood-Brotherhood" by E.E. Evans-Pritchard, who himself entered into the relationship. Among the Azande of central Africa, the principal purpose of the relationship is often business, not justice: to secure for traders a safe-conduct through, and to, hostile territory. Kinsmen *never* formed blood pacts: "A man cannot exchange blood with his own kin," for the obvious reason that "they were already bound to one another by the social ties of kinship."[71] Among the Tikopia (southwest Pacific), too, where the covenant does not involve exchange of bodily fluids, the primary function of bond friendship is to give a man a trusty confidante outside the circle of kin.[72] Strangers are frequently taken as bond-friends. Among the Kwoma (New Guinea), "a pseudo-kin relationship is established with the young men whose blood is mixed with his at the time of adulthood."[73]

"The Stranger" is stranger than most of Bookchin's tropes. Like the tall taciturn Stranger riding into a wary town in the Westerns, Bookchin's Stranger evokes "the primitive community's dread of the stranger."[74] The primitive com-

64 R. Thurnwald, "Blood Vengeance Feud," in *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences,* ed. Edwin R.A. Seligman (13 vols.; New York: Macmillan Company, 1937), 2: 589; Howell, *Manual of Nuer Law, 223;* Norman Yoffee, "Context and Authority in Early Mesopotamian Law," in *State Formation and Political Legitimacy*, ed. Ronald Cohen & Judith D. Toland (New Brunswick, NJ & Oxford: Transaction Books, 1988), 96 (quoted).

65 Frederick Engels, "The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State," in Karl Marx & Frederick Engels, *Selected Works in One Volume* 520.

66 Friedrich Engels, "Ursprung der Familie, des Privateeigentums und des Staats," in Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels, *Werke (*Berlin, Germany: Dietz Forlag, 1960), 21: 87; *The New Cassell's German Dictionary* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1971), q/v "Schuld, -en," "pledge."

67 Anthony F.C. Wallace, *The Death and Rebirth of the Seneca* (New York: Vintage Books, 1969), 25-26, 30 (quoted).

68 Engels, "Origin of the Family," 528.

69 Lewis Henry Morgan, *League of the Iroquois* (Secaucus, NJ: Citadel Press, 1969), 330-333, 333 (quoted).

70 "Blood Pacts or Blood Covenants," *The Dictionary of Anthropology,* ed. Thomas Barfield (Oxford & Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 42-43.

71 E.E. Evans-Pritchard, "Zande Blood Brotherhood," *Social Anthropology and Other Essays* (New York: The Free Press, 1962), 257-287, 261 (quoted), 280 (quoted).

72 Raymond Firth, *Tikopia Ritual and Belief* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1967), 110-111, 114.

73 John Whiting, *Becoming a Kwoma* (New Have, CT: Yale University Press & London: Oxford University Press, 1941), 154.

74 Bookchin, *Toward an Ecological Society,* 138, 147

munity hates and fears the Stranger, who is viewed as an enemy and may be slain summarily.[75] The problem, see, is that "tribal and village societies are notoriously parochial. A shared descent, be it fictional or real, leads to the exclusion of the stranger – except, perhaps [!], when canons of hospitality are invoked."[76] Among tribesmen, the Stranger is in danger because he has no kin to protect him. Happily, history came to his rescue in the form of the city, "the shelter of the stranger from rural parochialism." The emergence of cities began to overcome the self-enclosed tribal mentality. "As 'strangers' [why the quotation marks? whom is he quoting?[77]] began to form the majority of city-dwellers in late classical and medieval times," kin-based life became limited to urban elites. In the city, "the suspect stranger became transformed into the citizen."[78]

It is difficult even to imagine the tableau. Who the hell *is* the Stranger and what is he doing in an alien community? Is he a tourist, a hitchhiker, a backpacker? Seemingly not. If he has no apparent business there, it might not be unreasonable to suspect that he is a thief or a spy. But while he might inspire distrust, it is hard to imagine why the villagers should feel dread. After all, they heavily outnumber him, and he has no friends or family there, so, as Bookchin says, he might be killed with impunity, or simply sent on his way. Logically, the Stranger should be the fearful one. At times, he probably was. Needless to say, Bookchin adduces no evidence on this eminently empirical question, and hedges by saying that "perhaps" customs of hospitality might protect the Stranger.

Why "perhaps"? They *do* protect the Stranger in many societies, for example, among Bedouins and Kabyles. As Kropotkin wrote, "every stranger who enters a Kabyle village has right to housing in the winter, and his horses can always graze on the communal land for twenty-four hours. But in case of need he can reckon on almost unlimited support."[79] Among the pastoral Arabs in northwestern Sudan, when a stranger arrives they throw a party for him.[80] Among the peninsular Arabs, according to T.E. Lawrence (of Arabia), the law of the desert was to offer three days' of hospitality.[81] Among the Tikopia, the taking of bond-friends, just mentioned, "is done partly from the tradition of caring for the welfare of visitors."[82] Eskimos welcome the stranger with a feast.[83] Among Montenegrin tribesmen (white men *can* jump), "generous hospitality and honesty were prime moral values for men."[84] And there is no better example, according to Morgan, than the Iroquois:

> One of the most attractive features of Indian society was the spirit of hospitality by which it was pervaded. Perhaps no people ever carried this principle to the same degree of universality, as the Iroquois. Their houses were not only open to each other, at all hours of the day, and of the night, but also to the wayfarer, and the stranger. Such entertainment as their means afforded was freely spread before him, with words of kindness and of welcome. . . . If a neighbor or a stranger entered [an Indian woman's] dwelling, a dish of hommony, or whatever else she had prepared, was immediately placedbefore him, with an invitation to partake. It made no difference at what hours of the day, or how numerous the calls, this courtesy was extended to every comer, and was the first act of attention bestowed. This custom was universal, in fact one of the laws of their social system; and a neglect on the part of the wife to observe it, was regarded both as a breach of hospitality and as a personal affront.[85]

Among the ancient (pre-polis) Greeks, guest-friendship was an effective substitute for kinship; but any visitor, guest-friend, ambassador or Stranger, was fed before he was asked his business.[86] For Aeschylus, "all wanderers/ and beggars come from Zeus," and "rudeness to strangers is not decency."[87] Although inhospitable tribes do exist in the world (for instance, the Dobuans), "Ordinarily, savages pride themselves on being hospitable to strangers."[88] Even

(quoted).

75 Bookchin, *Remaking Society,* 50.

76 Bookchin, *Remaking Society,* 78. It is not universally true that in tribal and village communities, all residents are believed to be kin.

77 The abuse of quotation marks is characteristic of leftist hack writing. Theodor W. Adorno, "Punctuation Marks," The Antioch Rev. (Summer 1990): 300-305; Black, *Anarchy after Leftism,* 38-39, 42. In reviewing a Bookchin book, John Zerzan wrote: "Another device is to ignore the real history of urban life, as if illusory; he resorts at times to putting such terms as 'elected' representatives, 'voters' and 'taxpayers' in quotes as though the terms really don't, somehow, correspond to reality." John Zerzan, "Murray Bookchin's Libertarian Municipalism," *Future Primitive and Other Essays (*Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 1994), 165. "As if to confirm that he's incorrigible, Bookchin refers to this review, not as a review, but as a 'review.'" Black, *Anarchy after Leftism,* 42, quoting Bookchin, *Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism,* 59.

78 Murray Bookchin, *The Limits of the City* (New York: Harper & Row, Colophon Books, 1974), 76 (quoted); Bookchin, *Remaking Society*, 50. In late classical times, urban populations fell drastically. People were moving out of, not into cities. The population in general declined.

79 Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid,* 134-35. Didn't Bookchin even read Mutual Aid?

80 Ian Cuneson, "Camp and Surra," in *Peoples and Cultures of the Middle East,* ed. Louise Sweet (2 vols.; Garden City, New York: Natural History Press, 1970), 1: 332.

81 T.E. Lawrence, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1962), 267.

82 Firth, *Tikopia Ritual and Belief,* 114.

83 Franz Boas, *The Central Eskimo, Report of the Bureau of Ethnology* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1888), 609.

84 Christopher Boehm, *Montenegrin Social Organization and Values: Political Ethnography of a Refuge Area Adaptation* (New York: AMS Press, 1983), 86.

85 Morgan, *League of the Iroquois,* 327-28.

86 M.I. Finley, *The World of Odysseus* (rev. ed.; New York: Viking Press, 1965), 106, 134-35.

87 Aeschylus, "The Suppliants," in *Prometheus Bound, The Suppliants, Seven Against Thebes, The Persians*, trans. Philip Vellacott (Baltimore, MD: Penguin Books, 1961), 68

88 Marshall Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics* (Hawthorne,

in civilized countries, except maybe in urban democracies, hospitality is the rule, according to David Hume: "Strangers and foreigners are without protection: Hence, in all polite countries, they receive the highest civilities, and are entitled to the first place in every company."[89]

Although Bookchin's attitudes announce their own emotional, personalistic essence, a basic intellectual error enters into several of his fallacies, namely, a childish literalism. He takes everything at face value. (This also explains his antipathy to metaphor.) If the rules say an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, to him that means real eyes and real teeth in pairs. People of the same "blood" are not merely related through descent. The *same* blood flows through their veins, and somehow they intuit this. If the rule of blood revenge requires the retaliatory killing of a man from another clan which "owes blood," such a killing by the same rule requires another, etc. Feuds must be endless. But feuds are not endless. But in tribal Montenegro (I am quoting its vocabulary), that is *not* what usually happened. By a variety of mechanisms, homicides were composed, if not immediately, then sooner or later, despite the bloody ideology.[90] There is always a difference, in Roscoe Pound's phrase, between the law on the books and the law in action.[91]

The first generation of anthropologists to go into the field often returned to report conceptually elegant clockwork kinship systems. Departures from the system on the ground were ignored, minimized, explained away, or adjudged deviant, even if they went unsanctioned. Eventually, anthropologists began to see the rules as flexible, and above all open to interpretation. Rules open to interpretation are also open to negotiation. They might be invoked selectively and tactically, perhaps as bargaining counters, just as in our legal system the legal definition of the crime will be invoked in plea negotiations, but only as one factor. Raymond Firth, who was of that first generation, was also one of the first to appreciate that the idealized native rules usually provide for options for action.[92] Thus the blood feud is not perpetual, the Stranger is not always an enemy, custom is not programming, shamans are not theocratic terrorists as Bookchin believed,[93] and rules are made to be broken.

The reality of large-scale, long distance trade among contemporary, historic and prehistoric primitives reveals that Bookchin's fears for the Stranger are greatly exaggerated. "Interlocked regional exchange systems have been in existence since the Neolithic," indicating extensive permanent dealings between strangers, so that Danish amber ended up in Mycenaean tombs, and faience from Egypt is found in Poland and Britain. Amber circulated in the Baltic zone from the early Neolithic (3500-2500 B.C.); by the late Neolithic (1900-1600 B.C.) it reached Germany and northern France; and by the early Bronze Age (1900-1600 B.C.) it reached Britain, southern France, Hungary, Romania and Mycenaean Greece. Circulation of goods was a basic precondition of Neolithic societies. Large volumes of luxury goods moved more than several hundred kilometers. Some flint mines were up to 15 meters deep. European peasant communities were not self-sufficient.[94]

That was in prehistoric Europe, but was the same all over the world. Prehistoric primitives regularly interacted with middlemen, *i.e.*, Strangers, in long distance exchanges. So do contemporary primitives, the most celebrated example being Bronislaw Malinowski's Trobrianders.[95]

In real life – a place where Bookchin was never comfortable – the Stranger "as such" is usually not feared, hated or murdered, because he has business, literally, in the village. "Usually" is not "always"; in the Fijian language, the Stranger is someone you can eat.[96] Fiji is best avoided by traveling salesmen.

Bookchin has unwittingly conjured up the protagonist of a famous essay in sociology: "The Stranger" by Georg Simmel. Unlike, say, our relations with the inhabitants of Sirius – the example is Simmel's – our relation to the Stranger is part of the interaction system of a community which he is simultaneously inside of and outside of. The Stranger is "an element of the group," in such a relation to it that "distance means that he, who is close by, is far, and strangeness means that he, who also is far, is actually near."[97] If that was a bit abstract and paradoxical, this is not: "Throughout the history of economics the stranger everywhere appears as the trader, or the trader as stranger." His position is actually accentuated if he settles in the place of his activity. He comes in contact, sooner or later, with everyone, but he "is

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New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1972), 216-17, quoting *Sixteen Years in the Indian Country: The Journal of Daniel William Harmon, 1800-1816* (Toronto, Canada: Macmillan, 1957), 43.

89 David Hume, "The Rise of Arts and Sciences," *Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary,* ed. Eugene F. Miller (rev. ed.; Indianapolis, IN: The Liberty Fund, 1987), 132.

90 Christopher Boehm, *Blood Revenge: The Anthropology of Feuding in Montenegro and Other Tribal Societies* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1984).

91 Roscoe Pound, "Law in Books and Law in Action," American L. Rev. 44 (1910): 12-36.

92 Raymond Firth, *Elements of Social Organization (*3rd ed.; Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1963), 65, 236; idem, "Foreword" to E.A. Leach, *Political Systems of Highland Burma: A Study of Kachin Social Structure* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1954), vi-vii. Firth's own We, the Tikopia and Evans-Pritchard's The Nuer are among those clockwork classics.

93 Black, *Nightmares of Reason*, ch. 8.

94 Kristian Kristiansen, "Chiefdoms, States, and Systems of Social Evolution," in *Chiefdoms: Power, Economy, Ideology, ed. Timothy Earle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 25; Andrew Sheratt, "Resources, Technology, and Trade: An Essay in Early European Metallurgy," in *Problems in Economic and Social Archaeology,* ed. G. de G. Sieveking, I.H. Longworth & K.E. Wilson (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1976), 559-566; Norman Yoffee, *Explaining Trade in Ancient Western Asia* (Malibu, CA: Undena Publications, 1981), 3.

95 Bronislaw Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1922).

96 Marshall D. Sahlins, *Tribesmen* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1968), 10.

97 "The Stranger," *The Sociology of Georg Simmel,* ed. Kurt H. Wolff (New York: The Free Press & London: Collier Macmillan, 1950), 402 (quoted), 402-403.

not organically connected, through established ties of kinship, locality, and occupation, with any single one." And in a way, the Stranger really does prefigure urban social relations. One relates to the Stranger, unlike persons to whom one is organically connected in particularistic relationships, on the basic of more abstract, general qualities or interests in common. Urban man is both near to and far from his neighbor.[98] The relationship of, and with, the Stranger is the first alienated, the first estranged relationship. Simmel used the same word that Marx used.

The just-so story about the elite families retiring to brood over their bloodlines while Strangers crowd into town is funny, but false. That never happened anywhere, not even in ancient Athens, the one city you might think Bookchin knew something about (but you would be wrong). Intermarried aristocratic or patrician oligarchy is the norm in the pre-industrial city, be it Babylon or Barcelona, Alexandria or Amsterdam, Tours or Tenochtitlan.[99] As Athenian democracy reached its apex under Pericles (an aristocrat, incidentally), access to citizenship was made more restricted as an influx of Strangers vastly increased the population.[100] In fact, on the proposal of Pericles, the assembly made citizenship hereditary, *i.e.*, a privilege of blood. It remained the jealously guarded privilege of an endogamous caste until Macedonian and then Roman rule made it meaningless.

It is in fact the city – until relatively recently, usually huddled behind its walls – which is historically the epitome of the exclusivist community. And that is as true, probably more true of the supposed urban democracies which Bookchin claimed, as harbingers of his Communes, in Switzerland, Italy and New England. In the New England towns, for example, "strangers were discouraged or denied permission to settle." They were "warned out": "towns could legally eject 'strangers' and have constables convey them from town to town until they were returned to the town where they legally belonged. Society had to be an organic whole."[101] Legally, the towns were "tight little islands."[102] The towns of Massachusetts Bay – direct democracies all -- took urban exclusivism to an extreme. Between 1737 and 1788, Worcester County warned out 6,764 persons: "Thus the system discriminated against unfortunate strangers." As late as 1791, the selectmen of Lancaster, Massachusetts warned out over 100 persons.[103] It is almost as if these historians wrote for the specific purpose of refuting Murray Bookchin. But no historian has ever heard of Murray Bookchin.[104]

It requires no keen psychological insight to realize that the Stranger is Bookchin himself. The neurotic fear he projects onto the communities of alien Others expresses his estrangement from them, just as his utopian Communes reflect a yearning for the lost community he imagines from his childhood.[105] Like the exiled Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman, Bookchin is nowhere at home. But his is an internal exile (a common fate for revolutionaries, such as Bakunin, in Czarist Russia). The explanation is straightforward and, again, begins with Simmel. Trade is "the sphere indicated for the Stranger, who intrudes as a supernumerary, so to speak, into a group in which the economic occupations are already occupied – the classical example is the history of European Jews."[106] The Stranger is the Jewish peddler anxiously approaching the Gentile village: "in the Pale of Settlement of Czarist Russia peddling was an important means of livelihood up to 1917."[107] Only the economic division of labor brings Jew and Gentile together: "Each distrusts and fears the other"; "Beyond this surface dealing, however, [is] an underlying sense of difference and danger."[108]

Bookchin was born, as he has related, in the then-Jewish ghetto of the Lower East Side soon after his parents arrived from the chaos of revolutionary Russia. His first language was Russian. The new ghetto his family inhabited was Communist as well as Russian-Jewish: "In a sense, [his parents] remained a part of the Russian workers' movement even after they came to the United States."[109] The relevant influence is not Judaism – his parents were secular leftists[110]

98 Ibid., 403 (quoted), 403-408.

99 Gideon Sjoberg, *The Preindustrial City: Past and Present* (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1960).

100 Black, *Nightmares of Reason*, ch. 14.

101 George Lee Haskins, *Law and Authority in Early Massachusetts: A Study in Tradition and Design* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1960), 78 (quoted); Robert A. Gross, *The Minutemen and Their World* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1976), 90-91; Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 20 (quoted).

102 Lawrence M. Friedman, *A History of American Law* (2d ed.; New York: Simon & Schuster, 1985), 89-90.

103 Josiah Henry Benson, *Warning Out in New England, 1656-1817* (Boston, MA: W.B. Clarke Company, 1911), 10 (quoted), 18, 56.

104 I discuss the Italian city-states, the Swiss democracies (which were rural, not urban), and the "sections" of revolutionary Paris in *Nightmares of Reason*, ch. 9.

105 Late in life, Bookchin waxed nostalgic about the "colorful ethnic neighborhoods" of his youth, *Ecology of Freedom,* 334, quoted in Black, *Anarchy after Leftism,* 84, but he got out of the crowded, dirty, impoverished Lower East Side as soon as he could, as did everybody who lived there in the 20s and 30s. It was young Jewish writers of the 1960s, who were not writing from memory, who created the myth of "the Lower East Side as a place where Jews had resisted the rule of bourgeois respectability." Hasia R. Diner, *Lower East Side Memories: A Jewish Place in America* (Princeton, NJ & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000), 167 (quoted), 173, 182, quoted in *Black, Nightmares of Reason,* 322 n. 1083.

106 Simmel, "The Stranger," 403.

107 H. Wasserman, "Peddling," in *Economic History of the Jews,* ed. Nachum Gross (New York: Schocken Books, 1975), 263.

108 Mark Zborowski & Elizabeth Herzog, *Life Is With People: The Culture of the Shtetl* (New York: Schocken Books, 1975), 66-67.

109 Bookchin *Anarchism, Marxism,* 15-18, 16 (quoted).

110 "I was never given a Jewish education, or taught Hebrew or even Yiddish, or exposed to Jewish rituals. Basically, my family educated me in revolution." Bookchin, *Anarchism, Marxism,* 18.

– but rather the exclusivist culture of the *shtetl*, the "town" in which Jews abided, or sojourned might be a better word, since "a long history of exile and eviction strengthens the tendency to regard the dwelling place as a husk." The urban ghetto was its continuation. The Jews and the goyim, explains Simmel (a Jew), are near, yet far: "In a small stetl the Jews and the peasants may be close neighbors. In a large one, most of the Jews live in the center and the peasants on the outskirts, near their fields. . . . The non-Jew, a goy, is a farmer. The Jew, officially proscribed from owning land, is urban."[111] This is true even of the Jew stuck in a village in the sticks. Here is the origin of Bookchin's antagonism toward the country. It is a prejudice which does not jibe very well with his social ecology or his libertarian municipalism (later rebranded as "communalism").

The *shtetl*, however humble, is a seat of Talmudic learning, set apart from the surrounding illiterate, animalistic peasantry. Bookchin's Commune is not only a glorified *polis*, it's a glorified *shtetl*, inhabited by culturally superior Strangers who are as exclusive as they are excluded. The *shtetl* is also the community which came closest to exemplifying Bookchin's notion of the tyranny of immutable custom. The law on the books (the Talmud, with its 613 commandments) was comprehensive. But Jewish law, in Czarist Russia, was custom, not state law. As *shtetl* life was remembered by emigrants to the United States,[112] it was timeless and unchanging. It was not. Life never is. Hassidism, a pietist, enthusiastic revitalization movement, swept over Eastern European Jewry in the eighteenth century.[113] The timeless world which the emigrants remembered was relatively new, historically. Murray Bookchin must have been familiar with the Hasidic community in Williamsburg, Brooklyn.

That these themes really do illuminate Bookchin's *mentalité* is suggested by an unexpected source: *The World of Sholem Aleichem*, by Maurice Samuel. In one of Aleichem's stories, a Jew named Tevyeh drives his wagon through the vast Russian forest on his way back to the *shtetl:* "The man on the driver's seat, a little, bearded Jew in a ragged capote, keeps his eyes half closed, for he has no inclination to look on the beauties of nature." Like Bookchin, Tevyeh is indifferent to what Bookchin dismissively calls First Nature; indeed, he is afraid of it. As it grows dark, "he thinks of the demons who haunt the forest." Tevyeh, described as a "wage slave," has been engaged in the ecologically destructive practice of logging.

Like Bookchin, Tevyeh is impatient with animality. He kvetches to himself about the slowness of his horse, "a wretched beast." Like Bookchin, he tries to overcome his fear of the natural world with words: "Teyyeh tries to spin the thread of rational discourse." Finally, Tevyeh – Second Nature – tries to impart directionality to First Nature by talking to his horse: "Here I am at least talking, while you are dumb and cannot ease your pain with words. My case is better than yours. For I am a human, and a Jew, and I know what you do not know."[114]

According to Bookchin, "emancipated humanity will become the voice, indeed the expression, of a natural evolution rendered self-conscious, caring, and sympathetic to the incoherent aspects of an evolution left to its own, often wayward unfolding."[115] Humanity has evolved to where it can personify Nature: "Humanity, in effect, becomes the potential voice of a nature rendered self-conscious and self-

111 Zborowski & Herzog, *Life Is With People,* 62.

112 The sources for Zborowski & Herzog, *Life Is with People.*

113 Gershon David Hundert, *Jews in Poland-Lithuania in the Eighteenth Century: A Genealogy of Morality* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004).

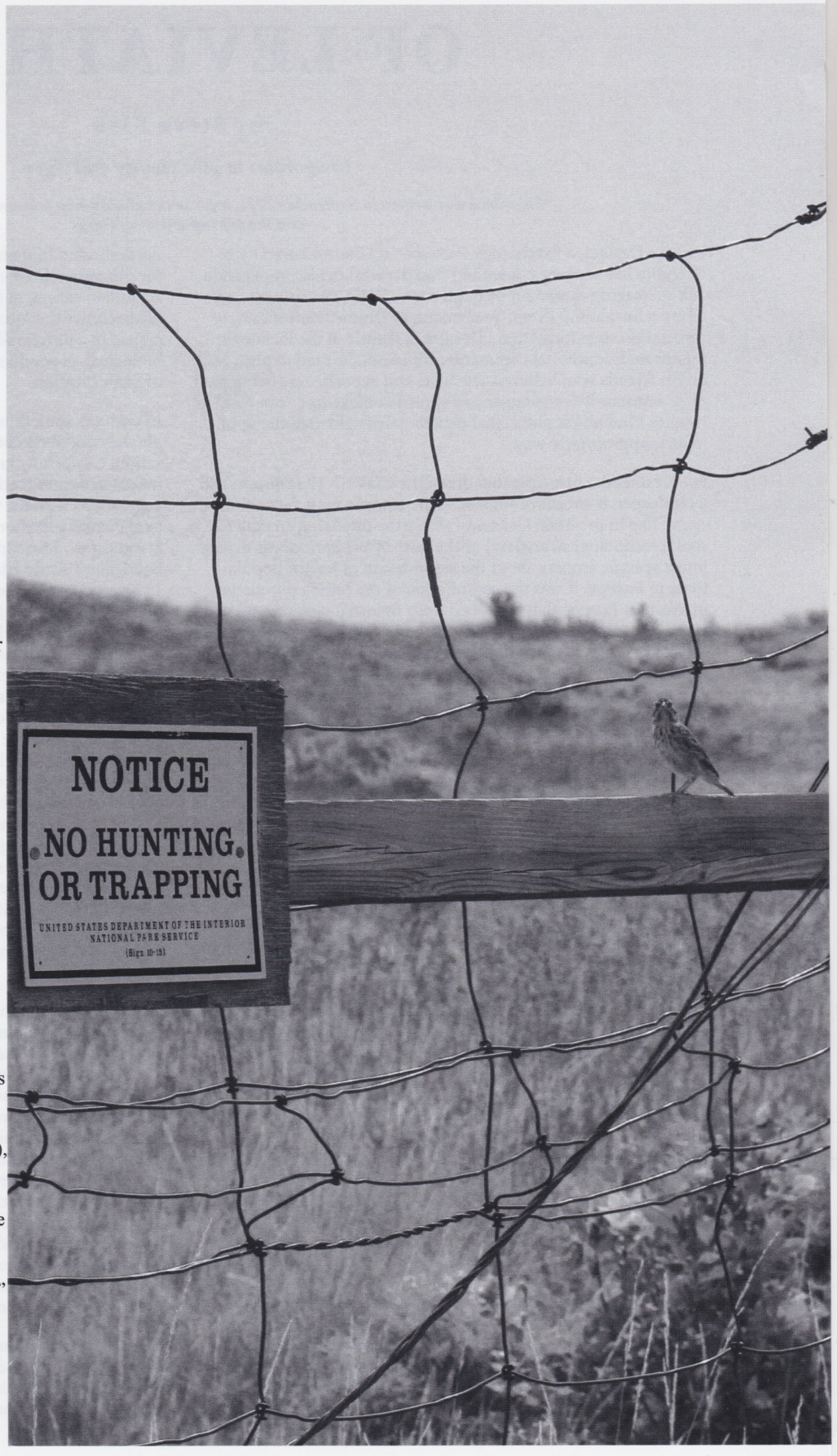
114 Maurice Samuel, *The World of Sholem Aleichem* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969), 8-26.

115 Bookchin, *Remaking Society,* 202-203, quoted in Black, Anarchy after Leftism, 98. Only someone who hates animals could have vilified anarcho-primitivism for its "four legged animality." Bookchin, Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism, 39. Four legs bad, two legs good! "The separation of humanity from nature" is, in the long run, an opportunity: it "marks the potential for mind in nature itself, the latest spirit in substance that comes to consciousness which comes to consciousness in a humanity which melds with the natural world." Bookchin, Toward an Ecological Society, 27. Bookchin, who had no imagination, could not himself have come up with this mystical drivel. And he didn't: "The German idealist philosopher Johann Fichte had remarked that humans are 'nature rendered self-conscious'; Bookchin agreed only by adding the qualifier 'potentially.'" Biehl, Ecology or Catastrophe, 212. She might better have left Fichte out of it. Fichte was not merely an "idea ist philosopher" like Hume or Kant. His philosophy was Subje ctive Idealism, Absolute Idealism. His Egoist makes Max Stir ner's Egoist look blushingly modest. Stirner thought so too:"When Fichte says 'the ego is all,' this seems to harmonize perfectly with my thesis. But it is not that ego is all, but the ego destroys all, and only the self-dissolving ego, the never-being ego, the – finite ego is really I. Fichte speaks of the 'absolute' ego, but I speak of me, the transitory ego." Max Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own,* ed. David Leopold (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 163. Stirner seems to think that Fichte's Absolute Ego was an attribute of abstract Man, who is imaginary. Fichte was, in Bookchin's abusive terminology, an irrational egoist or individualist. He was also a theist and a mystic. I think that Fichte, a megalomaniac, believed that he, personally, was Second Nature: "In short, Nature be comes in me conscious of herself as a whole, but only by beginning with my own individual consciousness, and proceeding from thence to the consciousness of universal being by inference founded on the principle of causality; -- that is, she is conscious of the conditions under which alone such a form, such a motion, such a thought in which my personality consists, is possible." Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *The Vocation of Man,* trans. William Smith (LaSalle, IL: The Open Court Publishing Company, 1955), 21 (emphasis added). Fichte was the first German philosopher of the Will, whose Triumph would be so unfortunate. His Will is "a formative power in Nature," which "absolutely disregards all earthly objects lying out of itself, and recognises itself, for its own sake, as its own ultimate end." Ibid., 143. A man after Bookchin's own heart. He heaped praise on this book. Bookchin, *Anarchism, Marxism*, 283. At the same time, he could write: "The philosophical pedigree of this ego and his fortunes can be traced through Fichte back to Kant. Stirner's view of the ego is merely a coarse mutilation of the Kantian and particularly the Fichtean ego, marked by hectoring rather than insight." Book chin, *Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anachism*, 11*. What! Bookchin doesn't like hectoring? It's almost the only thing he ever did.

creative: "[116] In speaking *to* his horse, Tevyeh was also speaking *for* his horse. Emancipated humanity is the vanguard. Nature is the proletariat. A properly organized vanguard party has a leader. Who might that be?

It's Culture versus Nature. Nature will be free only when Culture is in the saddle. This also recalls the Glory that was Greece: "In ancient Greek culture, the image of horse and rider represented the victory of reason in the eternal battle of civilization with anarchy. Horsemanship had a spiritual meaning as the discipline of our animal impulses."[117] The *shtetl* is tiny but crowded amidst the vast Russian expanse. Its ethnohistorians ask: "What are they shrinking from? Perhaps the loneliness and formlessness of space, perhaps the world of the uncircumcised, perhaps the brutalizing influence of untamed nature. They fear the bucolic."[118] So did Bookchin.

Tevyeh is the beloved protagonist of the popular Broadway play *Fiddler on the Roof*, based on Aleichem's stories. So, the next time you think of Tevyeh, the Fiddler on the Roof, think of Murray Bookchin, the Fiddler with the Truth.




116 Bookchin, *Remaking Society,* 201, quoted in *Black, Anarchy after Leftism,* 97. If Man is the voice of Nature, just whose voice is it? Presumably Bookchin's.

117 Camille Paglia, *Vamps & Tramps: New Essays* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 192. In the eternal battle of civilization with anarchy, if it comes down to that, I know which side I'm on. "Around the Parthenon the frieze showed people and horses. This, to the Greek eye, was symbolic. Horses have to be tamed. Man is the animal that tamed himself." Guy Davenport, "Introduction," *Pure Pagan: Seven Centuries of Greek Poems and Fragments,* sel. & trans. Burton Raffel (New York: The Modern Library, 2005), xxi.

118 Zborowski & Herzog, *Life Is With People, 66.*

# INVIGORATION OF LEVIATHAN

**by Steve Kirk**

***Invigorate: to give vitality and vigor***

****This piece was written in September 2021, prior to the mainstream awareness of Desmet's theories and the subsequent controversy***

Mattias Desmet, a Psychology Professor at Ghent University in Belgium, has recently contended that the worldwide propaganda and messaging campaign through the COVID-19 crisis created a "mass formation" event, an element, as Desmet identifies it, of totalitarian state formation. Desmet, a skeptic of the lockdown regime and occasional commenter on Lacan, wanted to push back on his friends who believed scientists and experts were being paid off to constantly fearmonger and spread context-free "raw fact," as Jacques Ellul might put it, that deliberately frightened the public in an inappropriarte way.

For Desmet the principle that drove the COVID-19 response had a far deeper, if not more sinister, root. It was a mass formation event, like in pre-Nazi Germany where the totalizing anxiety (at root a technological anxiety) of the post-WWI period was driven into a specific anxiety about the assimilation of Jewish populations in Europe. It was the assimilation of the Jewish population in Western Europe that provoked deep fraternal violence, just as it was the closeness of the Huguenots to the Catholics in France that invigorated the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre -- the populations who slaughtered each other shared far more similarities than differences in their day-to-day lives. The "contagion" (as antisemites* knew the Jews; the McCarthyites knew the Communists; and the neocons knew Wahhabism) in civilized crises must seemingly be known and knowable, of a closeness that harkens back to Cain slaying Abel -- an eternal tale of civilization's deep structural rot of homogeneity. Now the contagion is literal and the enemy internal, a "civil war" where each of us are at war with ourselves, as Giorgio Agamben summarizes it.

Desmet's analysis of this crisis is difficult to dismiss, one only look at the deep polarization and rampant misinformation or miscontextualization taking place on all media to understand that a mass -- and possibly its mirror opposite -- has taken hold, often unswayable in assertion and emotion, regularly stoked by slogan and symbol. "Stop the Spread." "Flatten the Curve." "Stay Safe." The sigils of authoritarian control appear, as they always do, as banal affirmations of generalized positivity. This mass formation is of course orthogonal to the facts of the pandemic but in a thoughtless culture analysis of the totality can be dismissed out of hand as bad information itself, as if analysis of cultural phenomena could be categorized along the mechanical lines of valid or invalid fact.

Revealed in Desmet's analysis is that this mass formation can only take hold in a society deeply troubled, deeply shot through with anxiety and fear of a non-specific nature. As people are isolated (pre-lockdown) and driven to meaningless work, meaningless consumption, meaningless existence, suicide and addiction soar. The mass formation is a totalitarian capitalization of these conditions, it sublimates the total crisis to a specific and manageable anxiety, in this case COVID-19. In this way the pandemic can be seen, not just as a consequence of mass society and ecological crisis (as it is in any exploration of viral origins) but also, in the cruel twisted logic of unending commodification, an *invigorating* dynamic to the totality. As the hollowness of modernity rots away life and its vitality the anxiety of existence as "citizen" (read: domesticated human) becomes unbearable. The pandemic allows for this generalized crisis to be stripped down to the "bare life", as Agamben calls it, of biological animation. The medicalization of life becomes the "quantified self", as technophiles know it -- in the appeal to a universally superseding crisis of health the very fact of biological-as-mechanical survival degrades all value of life outside of quantification.

In each era something must invigorate the population, must keep life dependent on commodity expansion, generalized homogenization, conformity and the wage slavery that accompanies these trends in domestication. The population must not simply be propagandized with the values of the totality, they must be invigorated to expand civilization-animating consumption and its concomitant institutions. These invigorating events are increasingly worldwide. Baudrillard wrote after 9/11: "Throughout the stagnation of the 1990s, events were 'on strike' (as the Argentinian writer Macedonio Fernandez put it). Well, the strike is over now. Events are not on strike anymore." His words heralded in the dawn of a 20 year campaign of "terrorism" where the ghost which chased the hamster on the wheel was seemingly the opposite of the previously mentioned fraternal threat: the infernal other.** And so it comes as not much of a coincidence that in the era of COVID-19 and "climate emergency"*** we see the waning of the American terror project, typified perhaps by the withdraw from Afghanistan. The invigorating events which animate the Leviathan's expansion (which has not even peaked, to be clear, growth has not subsided) have clearly shifted. In an era where power lies primarily with professionals, managers, and college-educated bureaucrats it is little surprise that the power of "terrorism" as precursor for governance has waned and crises of "science" have come to rule. The social engineer's appeal to"reality itself", as Christopher Lasch called it, makes antiquated previous "apologetics" (often religious or nationalistic) that surrounded the ruling classes.

These large events -- 9/11, COVID-19 -- exist within other shifting invigorating phenomena at different levels of society. In the realm of ideological or domestic policy invigoration in the United States, Russell Jacoby, in *The End of Utopia*, has remarked that leftism is the "left flank" of dominant liberalism. Jacoby argues, in effect, that the animating purpose of leftist critique, one that demands a utopian vision of the future, is to invigorate the dominant liberal modes of thinking. His lament is that this mode of thinking, the utopian mode, has waned and shriveled -- now we only have policy and semiotics, the fake revolutionaries no longer even bark at the doors of power. Jacoby's ultimate point is nonetheless a stark warning (even if his conclusions advocate a de facto incongruence): we live in an age of apathy where intellectualism is hollow and meaningless. The academy, fully colonized by the logic of commodity, offers only advanced adaptations to capitalism and domestication. It creates siloed technicians, not grand thinkers.

Perhaps there is an innate comfort to the position that reclaiming a lost intellectual tradition of radical critique and vision, far from being obsolete or pointless, offers a way to further charge some dimensions of the global order. This lane of thinking seems to acqui-

esce to the totality before even articulating its critique. It shouts at the frontlines of the battle that defeat is not only inevitable but has already happened -- in fact this is not a battle at all but a lame reenactment. It begs us to question: when does this "change" we believe in start?

Nevertheless, an invigorating principle that hinges on clinging to the hope of a massive transformation (even as it tacitly admits its impossibility) is more valorous than the current invigorating principles at work in our day-to-day desiccated culture which, as Desmet correctly points out, suffers unfathomable and all-time highs in addiction, suicide, chronic disease and, I would add, pathological solipsism. A near entire population preforming as computers, as nodes on a network. A population living in complete rejection to existing as a being-in-the-world. A thoughtless population whose ability to resist has been ground to the dull nub of social media posting.

All of this thinking on invigoration made me consider a piece I penned for *Fifth Estate* entitled "The Continuing Colonialism of Climate Change Solutions" -- as inartful as the title may be I believed it crucial to point out that the solutions to the crisis of climate change were patently absurd. "No, a car that is more powerful and burdened by ever more gadgetry and sophisticated equipment cannot consume and pollute less. Of course not." So writes Matthieu Auzanneu in a commentary that reveals the absurdity of "planet saving" in a permanent paradigm of so-called societal improvement. Auzanneau summarizes the point more succinctly than I could. It reminds of Christopher Lasch, who pointed out in his least appreciated work, *The True and Only Heaven,* that the animating principle of this societal "improvement" and "progress" was often simply the emptiness of ceaseless commodity expansion, a development he lamented.

We must admit, however, that the animating stimulant, the invigorating core, the harvesting of the human life-soul which is the primary unit of domestication's consumption, is not the mere solutions offered to a specific crisis. In this era, it is not the solutions or the ideologies around persistent issues that invigorates -- those qualities require too much thinking in a progressively degraded human population.

What invigorates now is the spectre of tragedy itself, it is the sublimation of anxiety itself to the magic of technical solution. The machine has failed, we know it has failed, so we again appeal to the mystery of knowledge through expertiseism -- a mystery maintained by division of labor -- for a solution that is at once in service to an objective reality and also appeals to our sense of fantasy. The youth cult of scientism magnifies this trend and its need for unlimited solutionism. "Science Rock!" says the adolescent t-shirt and children are presented with the sigils of truth in a paradigm where the church spire is a ubiquitous interchangeable touch screen.

That this pandemic can be a consequence and an invigoration to the totality and its continuation should at this point be obvious. We have watched as all counter trends, all critiques and information, have been swallowed by commodity and its extension: propaganda.



I have been wondering lately, when does *it* start? Not when is the revolution, I am confident it is not coming and, if it does, I will be on a wrong side. And not the insurrection, fleeting and unsustainable as it is. But when does the life we have dreamed of start? When do we walk in a path of total rejection, not because of its inherent strength, but because its inherent difficulty is proof of its validity? When do we struggle, live our values as more than abstractions? Perhaps all of our "beliefs" and stances, theory and endless publications are a suite of excuses. Perhaps we are, along with the rest of the homogenized mass, just as invigorated to continue the non-life of consumption and work, secretly dreaming of the next improvement. I can only hope not -- all evidence points otherwise.

*It is worth remarking that "antisemitism" as a term was developed by an antisemite who wanted a more definitive term for his hatred. Wilhelm Marr married four times, three of his wives were Jewish.

** This should not be taken literally. There is no doubt that Salafist Islam is indeed incredibly modern. See *Bloodlust* by Russell Jacoby and *Al-Qaeda and What it Means to be Modern* by John Gray

***The quotation marks indicate the manufactured nature of the constantly shifting PR campaigns and their reworking of the phraseology around climate change.

# ritual, ceremony & living wild and free

## an interview with the tamarix poroject

INTERVIEW BY STEVE KIRK AND JOHN ZERZAN

Tamarix: I'm still in Portland. It's actually our last day. And my friend has been trying to start a rabbit colony in his backyard. So, we're going to kill a bunch of his rabbits today and eat them and make little booties out of their fur hides, it'll be fun.

Kirk: Right on. So, you're traveling right now but typically you're out of Utah?

Tamarix: Yes, always, we never leave Boulder. Once a year we come to the Northwest because we have friends and family up here and see the city, do city things, see what the rest of the world has been up to. We leave our little alternate reality. It feels really important because I'm very aware that we live in an alternate reality. I haven't seen anyone wear a mask for a year, for an idea of how isolated and remote we are.

It's two hours to a grocery store (laughter). It's another world. So, it feels really important to -- at least once a year -- leave and have a really good, embodied experience of consensus reality and mass society and, wow, this is what people are dealing with right now -- this is where the world is. It feels important to know and not just stay in our little isolated utopia.

(JZ joins)

Kirk: So, we tried this interview a couple months ago and the audio got bungled pretty bad. It was pretty long, and we explored a bit of everything. Just for context.

You are Tamarix of the Oak and Bone School.

Tamarix: Yes! (Laughter). I am Tamarix of the Oak and Bone School, correct. Also of other things.

Kirk: Tell us a bit about that to get rolling.

Tamarix: That's a big opener. So the Oak and Bone School of Belonging and Remembrance is many things. Really, it's a front. Because what we're actually doing is pretty hard, almost impossible, to put language to. We don't really have words or language for what we're attempting to do. It's hard to connect with: we're doing a project of reinhabiting an animate world. It's a hard lead-in to a conversation (laughter). So, we're calling it a school because that's a lot more accessible. People have some framework for holding the form of a school.

It is a lot of things. We are laying the foundations for a place-based tradition. We are laying the foundations for a horribly abused word: Village -- which I understand as a gathering of initiated humans who are claimed by the same landscape, who are more or less inhabiting the same bioregion. It's a school of initiation which is a whole god damn conversation in its own right - what that means and why it's very different from therapy or self-help, even pretty different from the Jungian individuation process. There's really not much context for what initiation means in our culture.

We also have a school of herbalism, specifically in the alchemical tradition creating spagyric tinctures and working in the hermetic or alchemical tradition. We also are a school of wild food - we do tons of foraging and harvesting, and wild tending and hunting and we have a wild food kitchen where we make delicious wild food for people, both for our community as well as selling at the farmers market in town. Rewriting the narrative of scarcity, abundance, and food. Especially where we live -- it's a very, very rural town -- there's so much, especially when the pandemic started, so much food scarcity. People buying 50lb bags of rice and beans, preparing for the end. And feeling very sad and unnecessary because there's so much food around all the time, we've just been deskilled. People don't know that the plants they are dumping poison on in their yard are actually very powerful food and medicine. You don't need to poison these, you need to be honoring them and actually tending them. This is your food. This is going to save your life.

A lot of working with wild food, trying to invite others into an understanding of that. We also do a lot of wild tending, so having wild gardens in the mountain, collecting acorns from oak trees. We're doing a lot of work with oaks.

We're also a school of ancestral skills and all the things that come under that heading. We do a lot of hide tanning, basketry, friction fire, shelter building, primitive pottery too.

Zerzan: Could you tell us a little bit about your locale and how you came to do your projects there?'

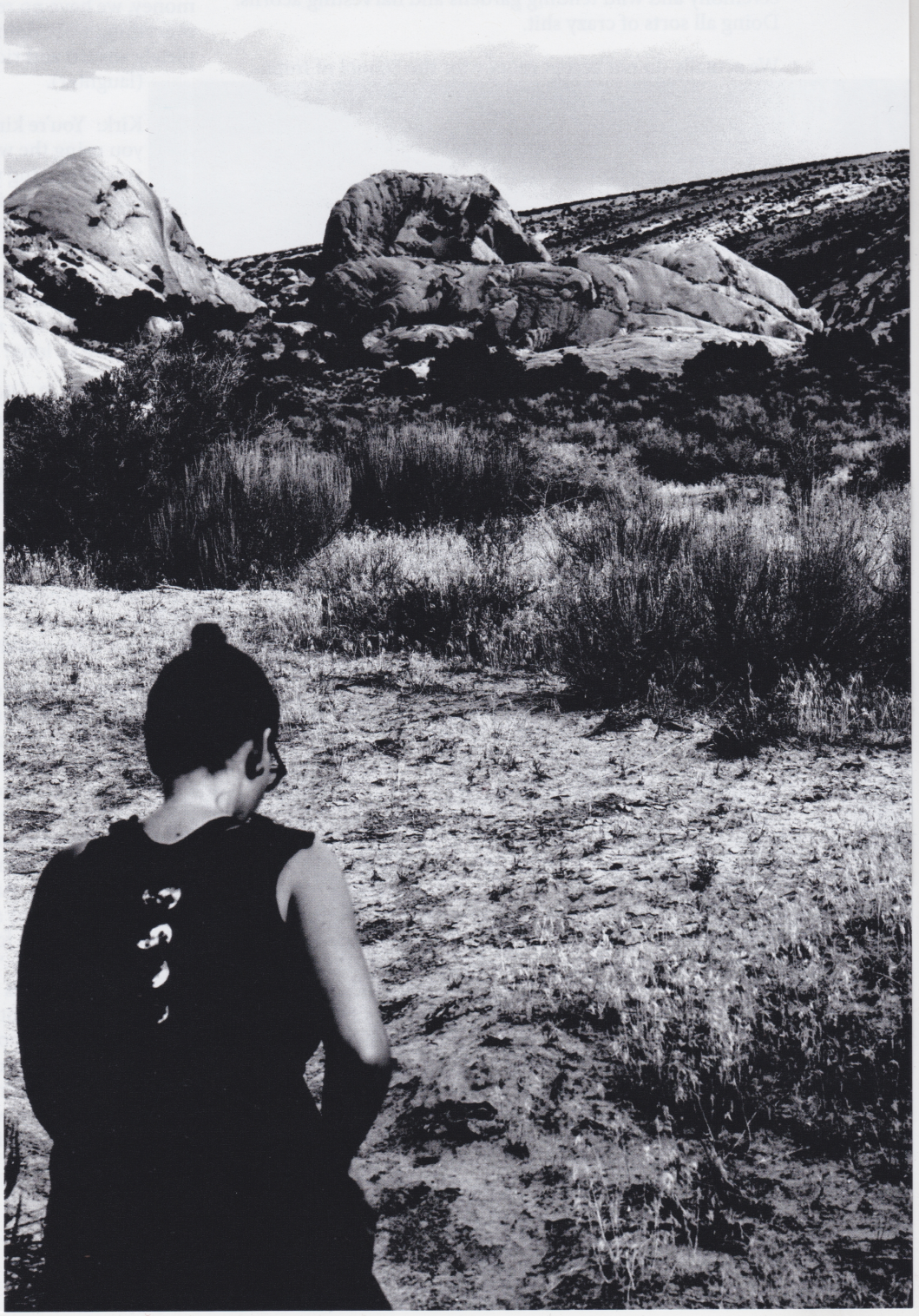
Tamarix: The story of how I came to this mountain is a long and beautiful story and cannot be easily encapsulated but it is a story that took place well over a decade. Many twists and turns. The shortest and most vulnerable and honest thing I can say is that this mountain very explicitly called me in and has been tracking me for a long time. It took me the better part of two decades to hone in on that, to say yes, to realize what was happening. But the story has

much more to do with the mountain and this place than it has anything to do with me or any of the humans that are involved in this project.

Its most common name is Boulder Mountain, and the political boundary is South Central Utah. It's adjacent to the Grand Staircase Escalante National Monument. It's near Capitol Reef National Park. Those are some of the ways that people can start to situate it in their heads. I think it's one of the most intact bioregions left in North America. There is a whole series of interconnected public lands in Southern Utah that form a contiguous wilderness area so that we have all sorts of apex species. We have 2000 head of elk on the mountain, tons of bear and mountain lion. Antelope, deer, old growth forest. We have bristlecone pine forests that are impossibly old.

It's a huge, huge mountain. Boulder Mountain is also the highest plateau in North America, it tops out around 11,200 feet. It's a huge mesa with dozens of lakes on the top and it dispenses water in all directions that eventually lead to the Colorado River which is how this bioregion is known, the Colorado Plateau. Of course, if you know anything about the Colorado River, it no longer reaches the Gulf of Mexico, which is another way of saying the water in this landscape is holding a great deal of frustration, tension and grief and that's deeply encoded into what it means to live here. The river no longer reaches the ocean; the cycle has been interrupted. And that's been so for almost 60 years at this point.

So, where I live is a little town that's located on the southern slopes of Boulder Mountain, known as Boulder Town, Utah. Population about 300. Very far from anything. No grocery store in town. Not much in the sense that most people understand how to survive. Not a lot of commodities being offered. So it's a very unique place to live and it's very protected, completely surrounded by public lands. And it's also very hard to live here because it's considered this exclusive fancy place. Seventy percent of the homes in Boulder are not occupied because they are owned by wealthy people -- it's their second or third home -- so that they can stay here a week or two out of the year. They feel like they have some access or ownership to this magical landscape. It's very difficult, almost impossible for working class people to live in Boulder. Our housing situation is very precarious and has been so for years and continues to be so and there's really no room



for poor people in Boulder but we're here anyway which some people do not like. Constant tension and a dance living there.

Zerzan: If I understand this correctly, you're really doing all this stuff without money. Is that right?

Tamarix: Yeah, we don't have any money at all (laughter). For example, for the School of Initiation, which is a sub-school -- as a school we have a lot of sub-schools, you can come and just participate in our school of herbalism or just participate in an ancestral skills course -- but at the core of the school is a full immersion school of initiation in which we are nomadically wandering around the mountain according to seasons and eating wild food and doing ceremony and wild tending gardens and harvesting acorns. Doing all sorts of crazy shit.

We actually do not accept money for the School of Initiation. Not only do we not ask for it, we wouldn't accept it if someone tried to give it to us. It feels like an act of integrity on our parts to really follow through with what we mean by initiation. It can't be commodified. It can't be contained in the insulated barrier of a commodity. It's not an exchange for a good or service. Another way of saying: "You can't pay for this. You can't buy your way into an animate world, it doesn't work."



And, in fact, the more money you have the harder it is to do because you're more attached and you feel like you have more to lose. Working with money and working with the gift economy and finding other ways of creating value and understanding value is really deeply woven into the heart of what we're doing. The simple version of it is: we have no money, we have no resources, we're basically homeless and everything we're doing is based on public land. It's completely absurd and ridiculous and we're doing it (at least) (laughter).

Kirk: You're kind of talking about a model. I hear you using the word school but at the same time I hear you distancing yourself from education or the schooling of society kind of idea. But are there other places where public lands are situated in at least a similar configuration that this might happen. I'm thinking about it here on the East Coast. In a sense it's possible, but not persistently in the way that you all are doing. So that really intrigues me, how is it that it's lasting so long?

Tamarix: Really good question and there's a paradox here. On one end is, yes, Boulder Mountain is incredibly special and unique, and we fully appreciate that. We hold what we have very tenderly and sacredly. We do not take it for granted. And we realize that what we're able to do here, on many levels, is pretty unprecedented and could only happen here. On the other end of the paradox is -- one of the beautiful things about us being poor as fuck and having no resources whatsoever is we're being forced to create a model that is incredibly reproducible.

If someone were to walk up to me and be like, "I like what you're doing, here's land" or "here's a bunch of money" -- I'd fucking take it, absolutely (laughter). There's no asceticism here. But that hasn't happened yet, so we're forced to work with what we have. And what we have, essentially, is some tarps, some dromedary bags, some pots, and a handful of down-as-fuck humans who have decided we're going to do this no matter what. And that feels really beautiful in the sense that -- as someone who has fought and played in this terrain for many, many years now there's been this feeling of: "Yeah, but we need land! You need all these resources to start." And there's this moment of realizing it's not going to happen. No rich person is going to give up what they have to help our project. Our project is inherently threatening to the project of wealth accumulation and domination and capitalism. So, okay, we don't have that so how do we create a model that exists -- which, the form doesn't exist.

Waiting for the form to exist or to happen is just going to get us eternally frustrated. Let's do it anyway. Let's squat and eat weeds and have wild gardens and do these things.

So, in that sense, it does feel highly reproducible. And that's actually the hope. The school is very explicitly encoding in all of our students that this is not an enclave. This is not a retreat from mass society or civilization. We're not hiding and trying to just build up our resources and watch the world burn. Our hope is to call people in, to go through the school, have an embodied experience of what it is to live in a relationship with the world outside of civilization, that it is possible. To feel that and to see that. It's right here. It is doable.

Zerzan: And you are calling people in. Is it growing a bit?

Tamarix: Yes. A lot of people are very interested and we're also capping - The School of Initiation, specifically - we're only taking eight new students a year. So very small, very focused. But, again, the hope is that after people go through it -- and it's a one to three year school -- the hope is that people who stick around for one to three years can then leave, take this model -- what works for them -- and find a way to do it wherever they're from because there's so many places that need humans that know how to be humans, that know how to be wild humans right now. There's all sorts of mountains and landscapes and forests that -- I imagine -- were a couple humans to spend time earnestly inquiring into: what is needed? what do you need from us here? what does it mean to be human in service to the land in this place? Some answers would start arising.

That's the hope, that this will become the seed for many similar projects that don't need a bunch of land or money or resources to start with. Because there are tons of people like us.

Zerzan: Is there a link at all to the native people in that area or were there?

Tamarix: Very good question. That question opens up a really fun mystery -- a fun conversation around the last humans that lived on this mountain in this landscape that inhabited an animate world and knew what it meant to be human are known as the Ancestral Puebloans, also known as the Anasazi, we refer to them as the Hisatsinom. They ceased inhabiting this area about 900 years ago. There's all sorts of theories as to why that happened. It gives rise to all sorts of archeological and conspiracy theories and the Pueblo peoples, a couple hundred miles to the south of us, the Hopi, Zuni, Tohono o'odham and all the Pueblo peoples -- they all say that the Hisatsinom were their ancestors and that they migrated south and have different stories that account for why this happened. And in the school we have our own story that weave in all the pueblo narratives as to why the mountain was abandoned and why now humans are being called back here. So, it creates a very rare bird, especially for this continent, in that this landscape does not carry scars of European ethnocide and genocide. Specifically on the human inhabitants, it definitely does on the non-human inhabitants. The first thing the Mormon settlers did when they came here was of course kill all the beavers, destroy all the beaver damns, began carving up the mountain to make it suitable for agriculture. And those scars are still very much alive and present.

There are Ute bands where Boulder Mountain was a part of their migration pattern. They would come here for either hunting or acorn harvesting and there's definitely conflict between Mormons and Utes. But as far as humans that were placed here, the ones that centered here, they left 900 years ago. There was never violent contact between them and Europeans. So it's unique. I don't know of many other places where that is true and it creates its own palette for certain things and it also creates a lot of -- we don't have -- it's kind of a blank palette in the sense that we don't have any ethnobotany. We don't have any languaging, any ceremonies, any of the traditional placed-based wisdom to draw from and in that direction we're very much starting from scratch.

I have reached out to some Hopi people in an attempt to create some kind of dialogue and if they are at all interested or being a part of this project, knowing that they inhabited -- they are the descendants of those who lived here a long time ago. And there was some communication that was going to happen and then COVID happened and I haven't heard from them since that happened. I think that it would be very fun and interesting to create conversation with the Hopi Nation regarding a bunch of dropout weirdos from the Celtic diaspora who are inhabiting the mountain that they abandoned 900 years ago. Very curious as to what they would think and feel about that. That has not happened yet.

Kirk: One of the things is this idea of ceremony and you started to talk about ritual there, could you speak about that for a minute?

Tamarix: Oh, I could (laughter). Ceremony. I spend a lot of my life talking about ceremony. Yeah, ceremony, at its core is the act of making something true, embodying something on the physical plain. Something that either is already true or has already happened or is currently happening or that you want to make true in the physical world, in the metaphysical (terrain). Another way of saying that is working in the terrain of things that you can point to. There are really only two instances that I can use because our culture is so abhorrently horrible at ceremony and even knowing what it is and that is: weddings and funerals. So, you can't point to love, to a love that two people share, that's a metaphysical thing. But you can point to a party and a cake and a photographer and a ring and things like that. So a wedding is humans ceremonializing love and partnership and a desire to create life between people. When this thing is true it needs to be honored. There is a very important felt distinction between two people that like each other and move in together and decide to keep waking up next to each other for a couple decades and then maybe have some kids and they just keep doing it, and two people that decide to throw a fucking party and have a ceremony and invite their friends -- look at what we're doing, let's celebrate this thing that we're doing. It's important, it's why we do it.

A funeral is another instance. It's always awkward when you're talking to your friend and they stop talking to you and they slump over and a couple days later flies show up and they start smelling bad. You can't point to death, it's a metaphysical thing. But there's something very clear that just happened, your friend was talking to you and now maggots are eating him so what the fuck was that? So, we do ceremony, we do funerals to try and hold this weird thing. We stand in certain places and wear certain clothes, say certain things, if you're from the Midwest you make casserole, and that's a funeral.

Ceremony needs to be grounded in integrity as well. It has to be grounded in something real. A wedding where two people don't love each other and aren't committing their lives to each other is meaningless. It's not a meaningful ceremony, you can't just make shit up. A funeral where no one has died, it's meaningless. Pointless. Ceremony is working in the terrain of finding the things that are metaphysically true that have not been honored, have not been worked with, have not been grounded and given form. Given embodiment. And making that happen is also an act of integrity on the tail end where if you have the most lavish, expensive wedding in the world and you wake up the next day, cheat on your partner and leave them, that ceremony was rendered meaningless because you didn't have the integrity to follow through. Ceremony doesn't make anything happen. It's not like: oh, I did the ceremony, the thing is automatically true. You have to wake up the next day and live according to the things that you said even if you don't feel like it (laughter). Ceremony has a lot to do with integrity and accountability. We do a lot of ceremonies here. People get really excited. They get really expanded and feel this possibility of these versions of themselves that they're calling in and claiming and then they go home and realize how hard it is. "Wow, it's really easy to just forget that I did that and forget that I said those things." Because it's really scary and really hard to embody. We need accountability in the villages and people to support and hold us in our ceremonial makings.

Kirk: I guess, in light of that, what is the importance of the ceremony? You're saying that if you're not bound to the ceremony, how does it serve, in the context of what you're doing to create that binding to belonging?

Tamarix: In one sense there are so many different ceremonies. For instance, we have a men's fast here every year and the intention of that ceremony is to take accountability for your experience of masculinity, whatever it may be. Everyone has their own story of masculinity and that is, specifically, about: what does it mean to take accountability for the fact that I came into the world with this set of genitals and associations that came with them? What does that mean? What is the intelligence there and how do I want to work with it and how do I want to carry that?

So, the importance of that ceremony -- why do it -- is because, well, I personally don't have any instances of role modeling, really at all, of that being done, of masculinity being held with integrity and accountability and with humility. That's a really deep wound of my whole life and at some point, you realize it is creating more suffering. My refusal to take accountability for this truth and waiting for someone else to do it for me, to find the person that had done this well. And I kept not finding it and kept being really frustrated. So it's like: I have to do this. I have to figure this out for myself. The natural consequence of that was then finding other people that were pursuing similar lines of questioning and then creating a ceremony for others to do the same thing.

Every ceremony is different. Maybe to return to the heart of your question, why do it? Because the world desperately need men who know what it means to be men and are not afraid of taking on that and are willing to confront that. The world needs that more than it needs our insecurities and our uncomfortabilities and our bullshit (laughter). We're willing to take that on and confront it.

Kirk: Ultimately, you simultaneously have to be in the process of creating the meaning of the ceremony.

Tamarix: Entirely. We're very much working in the terrain of creation.

Kirk: There's a way of looking at it and saying, right, we have very few actual ceremonies and then of course there's another way of looking at it and saying, well, we have a ton of rituals which are totally meaningless and we preform every day in service of technology or a broken culture. What do you think about that, the difference between ritual and ceremony?

Tamarix: So, we work very specifically from self-designed or self-generated ceremony. That's the terrain that we're in and I name this very explicitly with every fast that we do. We give a whole talk: no one is going to initiate you. You come from a culture that has told you that you have no belonging, no traditions, no elders and no way in. There's a tremendous amount of grief that needs to be metabolized there and just realizing that this is true, this is the story I've been given. On the other side of metabolizing that grief is the invitation to create and to explore and the realization that there is no wrong way for you to do ceremony because no one has done it in your way before. You are the first of your lineage. You've been severed, you are an orphan, an exile of your people. And, therefore, you get both the tragedy and the opportunity of doing the hard work of figuring out how to do this. So, it's very much in the terrain of play and humility and laughing at ourselves and just realizing that we have no idea what the fuck we're doing. The Oak and Bone School and all our friends and family, we're not presenting pre-made ceremonies, that's not at all what's happening. But we're holding a container for people to be present with their lack of cultural knowledge and then to engage and create. Folks who've decided, "well, ok I've inherited this cultural poverty and I'm either going to keep passing it on as my parents and grandparents have done or I decide that it stops here." Someone needs to decide at some point that humans belong to the world and have the right to do ceremony and connect with the non-human

world. That needs to happen.

The people who show up to our fasts and our ceremonies are people that have decided, "yeah, I have no idea how and I'm terrified and super embarrassed but am willing to at least meet that and be present with it and try to engage with it. Create ceremony. Be the first in my lineage to do something."

Zerzan: It sounds like it's really, at base, being present to each other and being present to the earth.

Tamarix: Entirely.

Zerzan: That's what I think is, the nature-oriented part, that's what's missing a lot in this area it seems to me. There are these different strands. For example, I have a friend who is into chaos magick and that doesn't seem -- is there any connection to that, does that ring a bell?

Tamarix: Yes, I have many friends that are in that world but, no, that's not the direction that we lean in. It's much more animism and witchcraft.

Seeking contact is one way that I phrase it often. Consistently trying to move beyond metaphors and symbols and ideas of things and... actual contact with the thing. I spent many years in the terrain of wilderness therapy and ecopsychology, very deeply immersed in that world. Had to leave it because it was too insulated, it was too removed. It was using nature as metaphor. It said: these things are symbols of you. And I said: no. Just as it would feel radically inappropriate and unethical to take a client, as a therapist, to an abused children's shelter and be like, go sit with these children and find how children are a metaphor for your own healing. That would be on its face unethical. And then to leave and go home and say, "yes, I learned so much about myself from sitting with these sad children." That's largely what ecopsychology and wilderness therapy does. The clearcut forest or the poisoned river are not metaphors for violent assault and domination, they are actual living beings who are trying to survive and find pleasure and meaning and connection in the same world that has also poisoned and clearcut my body and my soul. To really sink into that, to let the devastating grief of that truth pierce you, takes you away from the neatly commodified world of ecopsychology pretty quick and opens up much more beautiful and dangerous possibilities.



We are seeking deep embodied contact with the more-than-human world - not as metaphors or symbols or things to control and gain power over, but as kin - as friends and allies and beings whose survival and beauty and wisdom and intelligence are all deeply bound up with ours.

**The most accurate words I have found that point to the spiritual heart of what we are doing is: animism and witchcraft. Animism because it is a word that points to a world of ensouled beings, both visible and not, plants and animals and rivers, spirits and ancestors and all sorts of relational possibilities that our culture is founded on destroying and negating at every turn. And witchcraft because it points to a very specific lineage and a way of working with shadow. Which is to say: as a school, we are very consciously taking on, fully embodying the shadow of our culture. We are confronting the mythic core of civilization - the story of exile, the story that humans do not belong to the world and are therefore not accountable to life. And historically, the tradition of folks confronting this myth with their bodies- and often dying for it - is the tradition of witchcraft, as I understand it. So yeah, as a school we are explicitly confronting the deep fuckery of civilization, we are taking a clear stand with what we believe humans are for and how humans are supposed to be in relationship with the non-human world and we are not going to hide that or act like this is a politically neutral project. Thats what I mean by witchcraft.**

# Escapism

-JASON RODGERS

**The dream of escape, fantasies of evasion, is always attractive. There is always the dream of escaping from civilization to live an autonomous existence outside of the tentacles of control. This provides the motivation both for dropping out to Walden pond and for building space colonies.**

## Escape Into Space

Robert Anton Wilson was a major advocate of space migration. He adopted Tim Leary's acronym SMIILE, which he explained as "Space Migration plus Increased Intelligence plus Life Extension means expansion of humanity into all space-time" (Wilson Cosmic 217). One of the more realistic applications of this concept was the L5 society, an advocacy group for the building of self sustained space stations. According to Robert Anton Wilson, Lyndon LaRouche accused the L5 Society of being a "Gnostic cult" (Wilson Everything 280). Kenn Thomas brought up a strange fact related to claims of this sort. A group that merged with the L5 Society was the National Space Institute, a group founded in part by Werner Von Braun, a Nazi rocket scientist that had been smuggled into the US, via Operation Paperclip (Thomas 38). Regardless of conspiratorial accusations, there are obvious problems with the material basis for such programs. They require the division of labor inherent in the planetary work machine. Someone would have to mine and smelt the metals to build the space stations. There would be no space migration for these slave laborers. There is an authoritarian core to the material basis.

There have been proposals by countercultural folks to escape into space. Experimental jazz musician Sun Ra returned to this theme all through his career. There was a strange advertisement in issue 9 of Jim Keith's "Dharma Combat" zine that claimed Panic and Hakim Bey had begun plans to found a "Homeland for Marginals in Outer Space" on "Autonomous Autarkik asteroids of Aten, Apollo & Amor". The text of this ad read:

> "A Great Project Has Begun... PANIC has joined with the ASSOCIATION for ONTOLOGICAL ANARCHY, POH-MO BOLO, PANOPLY GAME SYSTEMS TACTICAL UNIT and an undisclosed number of Futant Marginal Types for the planning and development of an expedition to homestead the earth-crossing asteroid groups ATEN, APOLLO & AMOR tentatively leaving earth in the year 2000... **the conquest of space has become a matter of vital importance to the advance of the neverending quest for land and freedom...** (including complete freedom to pursue that further goal, THE CONQUESTS OF DEATH- all we want is worlds enough, and time...) What else is there to do? JOIN US!!"

There was a group, or more accurately a collection of decentralized autonomous groups sharing the same name, called the Association of Autonomous Astronauts, who advocated for a DIY space program. One group wrote "What we need today is an independent space-exploration programme, one that is not restricted by military, scientific or corporate interests" (Inner City AAA 48). This was done specifically with the motivation of escape. They wrote "The days of this society are numbered. Its reasons and merits have been weighed in the balance and found wanting; its inhabitants are divided into two parties, one which wants to build their own spaceships and leave this society behind" (Inner City AAA 48). This group was primarily active around 1995 to 2000. They engaged in all sorts of strange activity, including anti-globalization protest actions while wearing makeshift spacesuits. There was a temptation to assume they are joking or using a metaphor, a temptation they denounced: "These twats proudly inform us, as if they've just completed another crossword puzzle, how great it is that we are creating a living myth that anyone can participate in" (Inner City AAA 51).

Another AAA group (South London Association of Autonomous Astronauts) issued a text called "The Dreamtime Mission" which suggested that their space travel may have been something more like astral projection. They wrote "Our space travel will destroy the Gnostic concept of an inner space of mind (spirit) that conquers the outer space of the universe (matter)" (SLAAA 144). They wrote "Once we had then located the particular orbit our concept-craft was taking around the earth, we simply climbed aboard. We could now move through a new space with the infinite speed of thought" (SLAAA 145). Their space travel appeared to be psychic. The early UFO contactees used methods taken from spiritualism and séances, thus it would make a certain sense to use astral projection to

travel to space. It certainly solves the problem of the material basis of misery necessary for normal space travel.

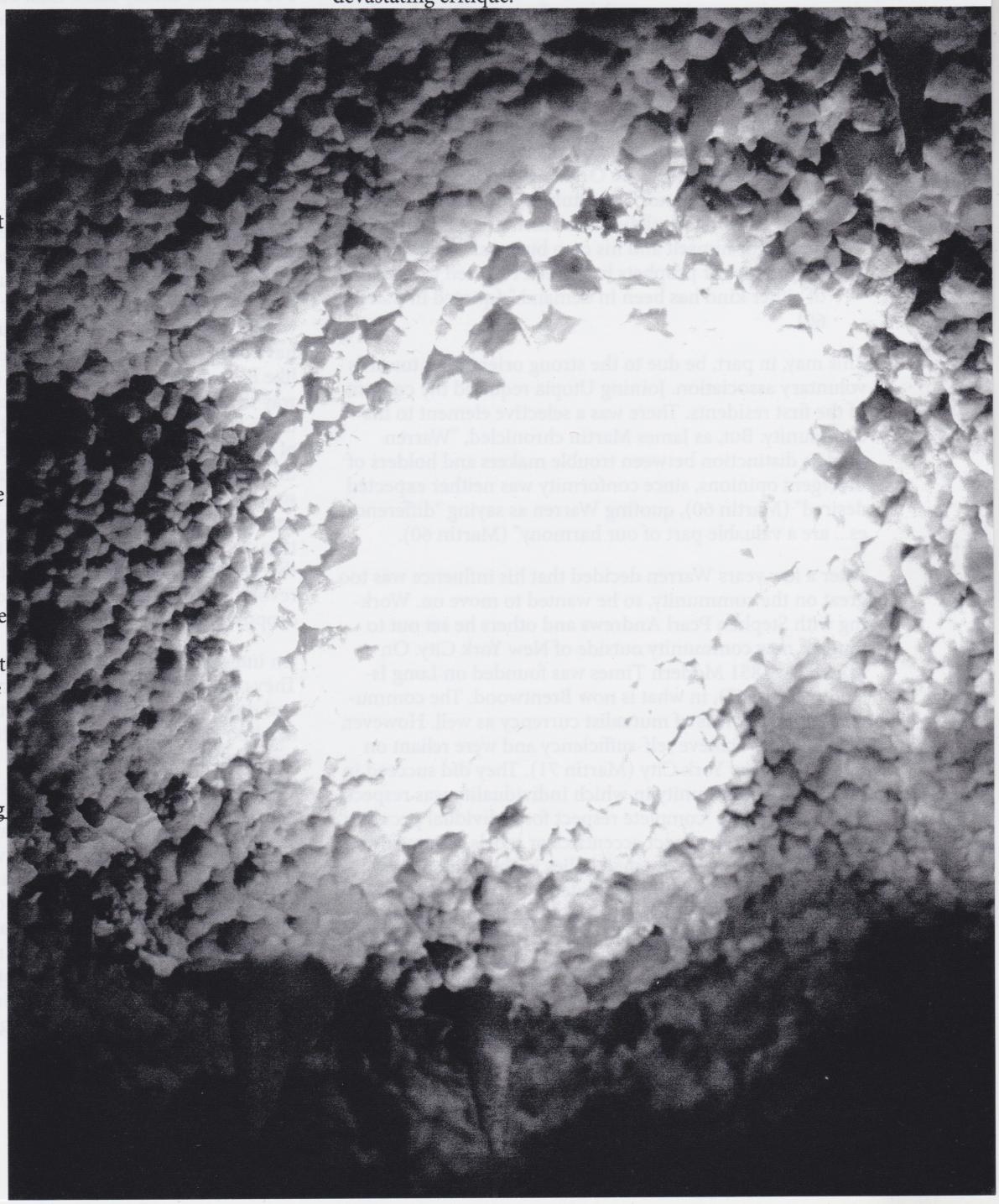
There is a short story that is notable in the way it addressed these tech escape fantasies. I am going to reveal plot elements, so skip this paragraph if that bothers you. The story is "Red Star, Winter Orbit" by Bruce Sterling and William Gibson. The plot of this story is that a Cosmonaut named Colonel Korolev has been living on a space station for many years. The space station is going to be decommissioned, but he will not be able to go back to Earth. His bone structure has adapted to space, and he wouldn't be able to live on Earth. The opening sequence is melancholy, with the Colonel looking back nostalgically at his life, which he feels is about to be over. The twist is that after he's alone there is a knocking. All of a sudden the hatch opens and squatters enter. They had gotten to the station by hauling "these surplus booster engines up the cables to the balloons, drop 'em, and fire 'em in midair" (Sterling & Gibson 107). The squatters tell him "It was our one chance to get out here on our own. Who'd want to live out here for the sake of some government, some army brass, a bunch of pen pushers? You have to want a frontier" (Sterling & Gibson 107).

**Back To Earth**

These space fantasies can be fun, but they are just that: fantasies. We need escape in everyday life. In order to do this the escape must be decidedly more low tech. When Henry David Thoreau built his cabin upon Walden pond it was an attempt to escape from the confines of civilization. It was a statement that civilization cannot be reformed or improved, it must be eliminated. Thoreau attempted to do so by leaving it. He wrote a short book called Walking which I see as probably the most explicit rejection of civilization that he wrote. I think it is appropriate that the theme was about literal walking, as it is also suggesting walking away from civilization. He opened the book by writing:

> "I wish to speak a word for Nature, for absolute freedom and wildness, as contrasted with a freedom and culture merely civil, -to regard man as an inhabitant, or part and parcel of Nature, rather than a member of society. I wish to make an extreme statement, if so I may make an emphatic one, for there are enough champions of civilization: the minister and the school-committee, and every one of you will take care of that" (Thoreau 5).

Or as he later put it explicitly "Give me a wildness whose glance no civilization can endure" (Thoreau 31). Recently it came out that Thoreau's mother would sometimes bring him sandwiches at Walden pond. Social media hipster scum made a big deal of this, exhibiting their domestication by calling him a hypocrite. I say they were afraid of his devastating critique.



There have been attempts to build alternative communities outside of civilization. One community was called Utopia. Originally this had been the Clermont Phalanx, a community that implemented the ideals of utopian socialist Charles Fourier. This group existed on the Ohio river, about 30 miles from Cincinnati. This group had partially dissolved when, in 1842, they were visited by individualist anarchist Joshia Warren, who convinced them to attempt a form of individualist anarchist mutualist community. The results were called Utopia (Martin 57-58). The group adopted an economic system based around "labor note currency" (Martin 59), a sort of mutualist banking system to facilitate the exchange of labor. I will admit that the applied economic portion of the mutualist oriented American individualist anarchists is often very boring to me (I have found Benjamin Tucker's economic articles to be nearly unreadable, for instance). However, in this case it seemed to have worked well for these folks, possibly because they were determined to use these models as they saw fit, rather than be constricted by these models. On this subject Warren wrote:

> "Throughout the whole of our operations on the ground, everything has been conducted so nearly upon the Individual basis that not one meeting for legislation has taken place. No Organization, no indefinite delegated power, no 'Constitutions,' no 'laws' or 'bye laws', 'rules' or regulations but such as each individual makes for himself and his own business. No officers, no priests nor prophets have been resorted to- nothing of either kind has been in demand." (quoted in Martin 60).

This may, in part, be due to the strong orientation towards voluntary association. Joining Utopia required the consent of the first residents. There was a selective element to the community. But, as James Martin chronicled, "Warren made a distinction between trouble makers and holders of divergent opinions, since conformity was neither expected desired" (Martin 60), quoting Warren as saying "differences... are a valuable part of our harmony" (Martin 60).

After a few years Warren decided that his influence was too great on the community, so he wanted to move on. Working with Stephen Pearl Andrews and others he set out to found a new community outside of New York City. On March 21, 1851 Modern Times was founded on Long Island (Martin 67), in what is now Brentwood. The community adopted forms of mutualist currency as well. However, they failed to achieve self-sufficiency and were reliant on trade with New York City (Martin 71). They did succeed in providing a community in which individuality was respected. Martin wrote "complete respect for individual peculiarities also served to attract eccentrics or rebels at convention, and in the case of enlightened ladies in the habit of wearing bloomers or men's clothing, created a sensational focus for scandal for outsiders" (Martin 73). The community was the subject of many scandals, which likely was a contributing factor in its unraveling as an intentional community. But then again this was likely its greatest value, even if it meant it had to be temporary.

Looking at these experiments in mutualism there is a sort of tension. On the one hand, these are attempts to break away from civilization, to live in freedom. On the other hand, these are generally based on a mutualist market model, which might make it easier for them to be reintegrated into the larger totality. One might draw parallels between mutualist anarchists and anarcho-capitalists. There are crucial differences in focus. Anarcho-capitalists tend to want to preserve the techno-industrial society, which results in their corporatists models they intend to replace the state with. Mutualist anarchists are more focused on the individual, thus in practice they tend to be aim towards low-tech, decentralized, and self-sufficient.

**Escape Versus Attack**

I've read the theory more than once that individualist anarchists in America were more peaceful than their European counterparts because America still had unoccupied zones where one could flee to find freedom, where Europe did not. Thus America saw escape and evasion, while Europe saw an assault on the system. America had Walden Pond and Modern Times. Europe had bank robbery. There was very little space, so sometimes this meant that individuals needed to go to war with society.

I should note that Giz, of the zine Cheap Toys and the CIRA archives, has told me of less known examples of European anarchists dropping out, creating land projects, etc, so this division is not as clear as I once supposed. I would suspect that these individuals and projects might have been influenced by European individualist anarchists like E. Armand, who defined the state in a more expansive way than anarcho-communists (and such), writing "What is the State? An organism which bills itself as representative of the social body, to which power is allegedly delegated, this power expressing the will of an autocrat or popular sovereign" (65). This orientation was thus critical of society and what we would call civilization. This also led to a rejection of revolutionary parties and federations. In the end this would mean a rejection of what is popularly considered revolution, instead choosing a model along the lines of dropping out.

An interesting historical figure to contemplate is the pirate. They often displayed a fluctuation between going to war and dropping out. They would attack the trade routes of official power, while also evading the powers that be. In fact, many of the pirates were soldiers and staff to trade ships who had escaped from their role. In some ways these were structurally similar to many barbarians. Sometimes they also exhibited the same problematic relationship to slavery. One figure in pirate history who was unambiguously opposed to slavery was Captain Mission. who was described as making "war on all of the world, since it would deprive him of that liberty to which he had a right by the laws of nature" (quoted in Hill 18). Around 1700, he founded a settlement for pirates off the coast of Madagascar, called "Libertalia". In this community the residents would sign the articles, agreeing not to engage in coercion against their

fellow pirate. This was not an anarchist society. It might better be called a libertarian republican community. Christopher Hill described how it also seemed "to echo Levellers, Winstanley and Milton" (Hill 19). The community was short lived though; it collapsed following an attack from the natives of the island.

William Burroughs used Libertalia as a setting on a couple of occasions, such as his book Ghost of Chance. In this he presented the attack by the natives as a setup. A cabal in London sent an agent to murder a lemur, which are sacred to the native people (at least in the novel). The motive was simple: containment. Presenting dialog from a conspirator, Burroughs wrote "If three hundred men- then three thousand, thirty thousand. It could spread everywhere. It must be stopped now" (Ghost 8). This became one of Burroughs' classic narratives of freedom versus control. The loss of Libertalia was a great loss for Burroughs, writing "Mission knows that a chance that occurs only once in a hundred sixty million years has been lost forever" (Ghost 21).

Some historians questions whether the figure of Captain Mission had been manufactured by Daniel Defoe in his 1774 book History of the Pyrates, the only source for this story. I find it unlikely that he would have manufactured a single story in an otherwise factual book. Christopher Hill pointed out that there were serious radicals in the midst of the pirates, writing "a surprising number of English radicals emigrated to the West Indies either just before or after 1660. Joseph Salmon the Ranter went to Barbados" (Hill 20). I am interested in how the pirates blend into the mythic and archetypical realm. The pirate exists as a reconciliation of the desire to attack and escape, positioning them as complements not contraries. They have a great appeal for many people, showing that the desire to break free may be more widespread than often assumed.

**Smash Cartography!**

In the past there were many options for escape in the past. One could go native, drop out, and join up with an indigenous group. Or one could go to an unoccupied zone, such as an island. These days there are few such locations. Everyplace has been mapped, surveyed, and occupied. The empire of control extends everywhere. Hakim Bey wrote:

> "The last bit of Earth unclaimed by any nation-state was eaten up in 1899. Ours is the first century without terra incognita, without a frontier. Nationality is the highest principle of world governance- not one speck of rock in the South Seas can be left open, not one remote valley, not even the Moon and planets. This is the apotheosis of 'territorial gangsterism.' Not one square inch of Earth goes unpoliced or untaxed... in theory" (Bey 102-103).

This is the important point Bey made on this "Within the fractal complexities of actual geography the map can see only dimensional grids. Hidden enfolded immensities escape the measuring rod. The map is not accurate; the map cannot be accurate" (Bey 103).

This is why a concept like the Interzone holds a special appeal. William Burroughs wrote, in his essay "International Zone", "The special attraction of Tangier can be put in one word: exemption. Exemption from interference, legal or otherwise. Your private life is your own, to act exactly as you please. You will be talked about, of course" (Burroughs Interzone 59) It was not a pure uncolonized zone. Rather it is a location where control has devolved, where entropy has occurred. Tangier was not fully occupied, in a sense, while Burroughs lived there. It is this search for points of system breakdown that provides an opportunity for liberation.

Samuel Delany wrote a classic science fiction novel about a form of interzone. Dhalgren is about a city named Bellona which has suffered some kind of catastrophe. It is never actually explained what happened, but something is wrong with time. Some people chose to live there, rather than flee, because of the opportunity of freedom they found in the ruins.

Some people still search for interzones now. This search might take weak forms such as the traveler kid circuit. This subculture may be inspired by a genuine desire for freedom, but more often than not its practice takes the form of "spanging" and consuming corporate malt liquor. The form it takes now is reliant on panoptic technology, such as social media and smart phones, in order to coordinate these travels. It is a rather depressive strategy, an acceptance of degradation. Clearly this emphasis upon physical travel is an unproductive literalism. More important than physical nomadism is psychic nomadism. Without freeing our minds we stay trapped in the same behaviors no matter where we live. Finding actual places of freedom is important, of course, but without changing the narratives we use these places will never be liberated. This psychic freedom allows for the points of breakdown to be found, to grow. This may allow us to find a place to grow, a land base to connect to. If enough people begin to do this the structures of control may be weakened. The structures can be turned to compost. Life may bloom.

**On the Dual Power Strategy of Composting Totality**

The desire to save civilization shows a profound alienation. Certainly it shows that the do-gooder does not actually hold the concept of decency they claim to. Anthropologist James Scott wrote "in the case of, say, flight or rebellion against taxes, corvee labor, or conscription, might we not celebrate- or at least not deplore- the destruction of an oppressive social order?" (Scott 32).

Scott wrote:

> "Some of the runaways went to neighboring states, but a good many of them- perhaps especially captives and slaves- left for the periphery and other modes of subsistence. They became, in effect, barbarians by design. Over time an increasingly large proportion of nonstate people were not 'pristine primitives' who stubbornly refused the domus, but ex-state subjects who had chosen, albeit in desperate circumstances, to keep the state

at arm's length" (Scott 232).

These runaway slaves became "second order primitives". This has been used as an argument against anarcho-primitivism and anti-civ anarchy, with the argument that the anthropological field work was not a good representation of life in the stone age. Well maybe not, but it certainly shows that it is possible for modern humans to adopt a life outside of confinement. If the band societies that have been observed once lived a more enslaved existence and then freed themselves, then maybe we could too.

Anthropologist Pierre Clastres did fieldwork with hunter-gatherers and addressed the devolution to "second order primitives". He wrote "I have shown that the Guayaki <of Paraguay>, who are pure hunters and nomads of the forest, gave up cultivating corn towards the end of the sixteenth century" (Clastres 69). That is, many primitive people are so by choice, because they have tried other ways and now know better. They are not simply waiting to evolve to some higher form of society, once the right knowledge or technology is introduced. Clastres wrote "if primitive societies are based on a subsistence economy, it is not for want of technological know-how" (162). He wrote "primitive societies are not overdue embryos of subsequent societies, social bodies whose 'normal' development was arrested by some strange malady" (Clastres 168). This is an active refusal "to allow work and production to engulf them; by the decision to restrict supplies to socio-political needs" (Clastres 168). To put it bluntly, Clastres wrote "primitive societies <are> without an economy, because they refuse a economy" (168). This work suggests that not only is escape from civilization possible, it is historically common.

Returning to James Scott's work, the agriculture that forms the basis of civilizations and states is grains. Scott argued that this was because "only the cereal grains can serve as a basis for taxation: visible, divisible, assessable, storable, transportable, and 'rationable'" (Scott 129). Scott wrote "Beyond their <'grain states'> horizon were a variety of what might be called nonappropriatable subsistence practices, the most important of which were hunting and gathering, maritime fishing and collecting, horticulture, shifting cultivation, and specialized pastoralism" (Scott 135). Those who practiced these forms of subsistence were often escapees from states (or their descendants), who made the conscious decision to leave.

We can find an example of this sort of escape at the very beginning of European colonization of America. The earliest colony in North America was the Roanoke colony in Virginia. The colonists were struggling, starving. They sent for assistance from England, but when the ship returned the colony was empty and there was a carving on a tree stating "Gone to Croatan". Some people think that the Croatan American Indians slaughtered the colonists. This is rather preposterous. If this were the case than who carved "Gone to Croatan"? A colonist being slaughtered? Unlikely. More likely is that the people all joined the Croatan people. This historical incident served as the inspiration for Ron Sakolsky & James Koehnline's anthology Gone to Croatan. In the preface Sakolsky wrote:

> "When the Roanoke settlers, who were of European descent, said to hell with Sir Walter Raleigh and the plutocrats and ran off to join the Croatan Indians, they were not merely 'going native.' In essence, they were challenging the newly constructed boundaries between wilderness and civilization, and in so doing, were rocking the freshly laid colonial foundations of North America" (Sakolsky 9).

America has a rich history of escape. Marginalized and oppressed people fled and attempted to create separate societies. Eugenicists attacked this as degeneration, and labeled these groups "Tri-Racial Isolate Communities". The Tribe of Ishmael was one of the most well known of these groups. Hugo P. Leaming wrote "The tribe incorporated all three ethnic groups most despised by the majority society of the day. Moreover, their amalgamation into one community flaunted the violation of a most powerful taboo" (Leaming 37). This group incorporated poor whites, runaway African slaves, and American Indians. They lived a nomadic lifestyle throughout the 19th century, following a triangular path that brought them between Indiana and Illinois. Eugenicists and religious leaders attacked them through law and social work (such as putting their children into orphanages); until by the early 20th century the group had mostly dissolved.

In the 20th century efforts to dropout continued. In 1934 Ralph Borsodi founded the School of Living, an educational project that was one of the most important influences in the modern homesteading movement. The school still exists. His vision was more refined than some of the other well known influences. Consider (the much later) The Whole Earth Catalog, which portrayed a vision in which becoming a homesteader or an information technology worker were equally good choices. Borsodi, on the other hand, felt that decentralization, dignity, and quality of life were much more important than the options provided by "this ugly civilization". In the book This Ugly Civilization he promoted the value of escape, writing "Enclaves of this sort- little islands of intelligence and beauty amidst the chaotic seas of human stupidity and ugliness- would not only free the quality-minded from exploitation by the quantity minded, but they would furnish to the rest of mankind the pattern for a more comfortable and more intelligent existence" (Borsodi 234). Borsodi provided a devastating critique of the factory system and industrial society in this book from 1929. In it he outlined how factory work deskills the worker and forces society to be quantity minded rather than quality minded. He wrote of work in industrial society "it is, however, so tedious, so uninteresting, in the modern factory, that it can be said truly that the worker is required to yield half of his life to boredom in order that he might devote the other half to eating more than is good for himself; wearing out more things than is rational; and destroying the natural resources of the earth faster than real comfort and true enjoyment make necessary!" (Borsodi 175).

Borsodi encouraged a transition to self reliance based on learning the skills to produce our own foods and artisan goods. This would increase the quality of life by allowing people to engage in productive activity that is more inter-

esting, more stimulating and more varied. This would also allow more individualization in ways of life. This was not rugged individualism (the straw man that mass collectivists love to trot out); since he thought it would be necessary for the homestead to involve a community of people. He wrote "The homestead must be organized so that it can continue to function uninterruptedly even when individual members are absent traveling or adventuring, or working or studying away from home" (Borsodi 329). In his model this would increase personal and community liberty. He wrote "Economic independence cannot, unfortunately, completely free us from government. But it can enormously reduce the field of activity for government as a whole" (Borsodi 421).

More recently permaculture has arisen from the same general currents as homesteading. Permaculture differs from agriculture in that it is based on using a variety of plants in the same area, in a way that they exist mutualistically. Ideally this involves setting up conditions in which the permaculture garden can be mostly self sustaining, requiring significantly less work than traditional agriculture. When John Zerzan was called to answer what practical steps could be implemented to put the total critique of primitivism into action one point he made was the use of permaculture towards transition. He wrote "permaculture is a technique that seems to attempt an agriculture that develops or reproduces itself and thus tends toward nature and away from domestication. It is one example of promising interim ways to survive while moving away from civilization" (Zerzan 117).

There was a historical precedent for these sorts of models. In 1808 Charles Fourier released the book The Theory of the Four Movements. In this book he became one of the first people to attack civilization. He also provided a model for how to escape from civilization. This entailed dropping out of society in order to form a phalanx, as they did in the previously mentioned Clermont Phalanx. On civilization Fourier wrote "but our task now is to emerge from it, rather than studying it or improving it. This is why I am always trying to persuade readers of the necessity of rejecting all half-measures and going straight to the goal by immediately founding a canton of progressive Series" (272). He explained that this Progressive Series "achieves its purpose of producing *industrial attraction* and using the lure of pleasure to involve us in agricultural labour, which at present is a torment for a well-born man" (Fourier 289). This involved the redefinition of work, from being based on coercion and alienation to one based on "the Passional Series" (Fourier 290). This would entail engaging in productive activity in such a way that it is interesting and rewarding based on our tastes, activities that are intrinsically rewarding. Fourier argued that this "progressive Series would ensure that everybody's passions were fully developed, irrespective of sex, age or social class" (Fourier 15). Fourier's model was based on the idea that once enough people withdrew from civilization to live in a Phalanx, that civilization would no longer be able to sustain itself and would die off.

It has been said that every cynic is a wounded idealist. This plays a part in the dream of escape. At some point we all want to change the world. And this generally fails. This can leave one in a bind, where to remain positive one has to join the oppressor, become a technician of the system in a bid to reform the system. Individualist anarchist Laurance Labadie wrote "as far as the moronic and imbecilic can go in the way of grasping what it's all about is to latch on to the 'if you can't beat 'em, join 'em' theory, i.e., become a super-patriot, a huzzarer to non-existent gods, and go out to slaughter peasants throughout the world, especially if they don't consent to be the conquered slaves of your masters. 'Fuck you all', I say, as I try to keep out of your sight" (Labadie 13).

Jacques Camatte wrote, in his essay "Against Domestication", "as long as revolutionary struggle is conducted not on its own ground but on the terrain of capital, there can be no significant breakthrough, no qualitative revolutionary leap" (Camatte 119). The solution to this problem, he proposed, is "if we are to successfully abandon the old centers of struggle, it will require a simultaneous movement toward the creation of new modes of life" (Camatte 119). In a later essay he would declare "we must abandon this world dominated by capital, which has become a spectacle of beings and things" (Camatte 170).

It seems that if we are to escape now it would require finding a spot where control has devolved within empire rather than attempting to leave empire. Land projects based on permaculture and forest gardening seem like a good place to start. Doomsday preppers and survivalists might be a darker vision of this. These folks are taking steps to assure their survival after what they see as an apocalyptic collapse. But, as James Scott discussed, collapse does not need to be considered so brutal, it will not be a Mad Max vision. And even if a land project cannot be started, a bolo bolo might be, as a sort of embryo of affinity that may some day be born as escape to freedom.

In the past I have been critical of escapism, arguing that the totality is all encompassing, thus no longer possible to leave. I argued that this left the option of struggle and conflict. At this point I realize that I remained too tied to revolution models (which I had thought I had superceded). As the totality has become more all encompassing it has become more necessary to escape, in order to find points of confrontation that are not so heavily controlled. Pragmatically, urban living has become less sustainable on a personal level. Gentrification and development have made it economically difficult to live a marginal existence in an urban center. One has to work too much and too hard to do this. At the same time, many of the draws are no longer sustainable. The number of infoshops, independent music venues, and artspaces seem to be dropping heavily in most cities. The centers of anarchist culture are possibly shifting towards a rural setting. In many ways this might be an individual solution to larger difficulties, but it also provides a solid base that might facilitate survival through potentially hard times. Without individual survival there cannot be social struggle, so it is not contradictory. Escape doesn't need to take the form of vacation or tourism. It might also take the form of a withdrawal of support, no longer letting

leviathan sap our vitality, and leaving it to wither and die.

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# TOWARDS A LUDDITE INTERCOMMUNALISM: A NEW VIEW OF GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT AND ACTION



## Correcting Mistakes

This is a continuation of a previous piece I wrote, "Regional Collapse, Regional Liberation or: The Primitivist Theory of Combined & Uneven Development" (*Oak Journal*, Issue One, Spring 2020). I expressed an idea of international analysis that saw the world developed unevenly, where technology, culture, and economics are never equal. In addition to uneven development, there is the concept of combined development, wherein cultures, nations, etc, adopt some aspects of other regions, be them economic, technological, or otherwise. On this basis, I expressed that our praxis and understanding of world development must be understood on these notions.

I still largely believe in the notions I expressed in that piece. I simply intend to develop it further, cutting out the sores in my thought, but expanding in places I find that are still correct. The core of my old argument, which continues to serve me now is the following:

> This is not to say we dismiss the idea of a total civilizational collapse, or don't want it, but we don't see it as necessarily realistic. If we understand the rise of civilization, agriculture, capital, and technology as uneven, and sometimes in completely isolated areas, how can we expect the collapse of industrial / world society to be some sort of global apocalypse? We can't.[1]

One issue I take up with my old writing is my understanding of Compressions and De-scalings. I felt I rushed past these topics and even misunderstood them, leading to an incorrect understanding of technological development. I expressed compressions as a phenomenon purely in the developing world, or in primitive cultures. While I would say this t*ends to be the case*, it is not exclusively tied to the developing world. For example, say Britain has a breakthrough in cloning technology that puts them decades ahead of other countries. From here, Britain shares this technology with the United States, or even China obtains it through corporate espionage. The United States or China have small compressions in technology related to cloning. An example of a more backwards country experiencing a compression is the United States' adoption of the methods and technologies of Britain's Industrial Revolution, which accelerated the country's industrial abilities across several industries, such as textiles. 2

## Intercommunalism: What is it?

With these concepts better understood, we can understand better how technology in the First world continues to develop. In fact, technology is developing at a pace unprecedented, evening to the point where it is making Moore's Law outdated.3 In the event that this trend continues and so goes the expansion of the global economy, we can only expect that third world and first world countries will both continue to rapidly develop their industrial infrastructure and technological methods of production

1 *Regional Collapse, Regional Liberation or: The Primitivist Theory of Combined & Uneven Development,* 'Regional Collapse'

2 'The Spies Who Launched America's Industrial Revolution' by Christopher Klein

3 Moore's Law is one way of measuring technological development by measuring computer processing speed, which Gordon Moore posited to occur about every 18-24 months.

and control. What does this mean for an anti-technology movement?

Huey Newton, co-founder and lead theoretician of the Black Panther Party developed the concept of intercommunalism. This theory is a development of the concept of internationalism, but through the lens of modern globalism / neo-liberalism. Newton put forth that:

> We believe that there are no more colonies or neocolonies. If a people is colonized, it must be possible for them to decolonize and become what they formerly were. But what happens when the raw materials are extracted and labor is exploited within a territory dispersed over the entire globe? When the riches of the whole earth are depleted and used to feed a gigantic industrial machine in the imperialist's home? Then the people and the economy are so integrated into the imperialist empire that it is impossible to "decolonize," to return to the former conditions of existence.
>
> If colonies cannot "decolonize" and return to their original existence as nations, then nations no longer exist. And since there must be nations for revolutionary nationalism or internationalism to make sense, we decided that we would have to call ourselves something new.
>
> We say that the world today is a dispersed collection of communities. A community is different from a nation. A community is a small unit with a comprehensive collection of institutions that serve to exist a small group of people. And we say further that the struggle in the world today is between the small circle that administers and profits from the empire of the United States, and the peoples of the world who want to determine their own destinies.[4]

With all that said, I want to make some statements concerning questions and concerns people will have with Newton's theory. Firstly, the United States is not the only empire of the day, but is truly a leader of the imperial project. It does compete, especially with China, as China rises to meet the near monopoly of violence that the United States holds. European powers are secondary to the United States, acting only when the United States Empire allows. Even the combined power of the EU lags behind the US, and is failing to meet the power of China. Russia is an imperialist power, of course, but is moreso located in the old Soviet countries, especially Ukraine.[5]

Chinese imperialism, less conflict oriented than the United States, operates primarily on so-called humane development projects in Latin America, Africa, and parts of Asia. One such program is the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), expanding across the Eastern Hemisphere, especially in East Asia and parts of Africa. The World Bank states that the BRI "includes 1/3 of world trade and GDP and over 60% of the world's population," across 71 countries and on top of ⅓ of world trade, includes about "40% global merchandise exports."[6] *China Worker*, an anti-CPC Communist organization said this about the BRI:

> The purpose of Chinese loans and connections to governments and presidents is not to improve the lives of the poor masses in these countries. On the contrary, payments on debts take an increasing share of public expenditure, working conditions worsen with increased exploitation and poverty increases as it does now in Zambia. Many regimes in the Belt and Road Initiative are authoritarian, constantly attacking democratic rights. The Chinese regime and system is an integral part of the global capitalist (and technological -my note) system.[7]

I do not believe the fact that there are many empires negates the ideas of Newton but enhances them. Not only can nations not escape the global system, but any alternative to US imperialism is likely Chinese, Russian or US-adjacent imperialism (see the NATO-Russian tug of war over Ukraine).

Another point of contention is that Newton, being a Marxist-Communist, endorsed the idea of the lower classes taking political power from the ruling classes, and this includes technology. Newton states that, "...[W]e say that this technology can solve most of the material contradictions people face."[8] Naturally, I disagree, but I think he is correct in the belief that the spread of this technology, especially communication and transportation, links the many world's communities together in a way never seen before. This comes from Marx and Lenin before him, but he shows how technology, used for the control and exploitation of people, continues even after their perceived anti-colonialist movements. This is possibly Newton's great point, that he, unlike some Marxists, understands the explicit role of technology as a medium of *control*. "[A] ruling circle, a small group of

4 "Intercommunalism" (1974). Accessed via *Viewpoint Magazine.*

5 See recent conflicts with Ukraine and the absorption of Crimea. Note: The invasion of Ukraine began during the late editing process. Solidarity with the Ukrainian people!

6 "Belt and Road Initiative." *World Bank*, World Bank, 29 Mar. 2018, www.worldbank.org/en/topic/regional-integration/brief/belt-and-road-initiative.

7 "China's State Capitalist Imperialism." *China Worker*, 15 Apr. 2021, chinaworker.info/en/2021/04/05/28350/.

8 "Intercommunalism" (1974). Accessed via *Viewpoint Magazine*

people, control all other people by using their technology."[9] You can call this group of people who control the rest bourgeoisie, domesticators, technocrats, it is all the same -- they control us and maintain the status quo with international systems of technology.

Finally, I *do* believe that decolonization is possible, *but only through a movement that rejects civilization and technology as a whole*. If I were to endorse world-building and leftist ideologies of Communism or Socialism, I would agree with Newton in this regard. I am also skeptical of Newton's claim since it seems to lead to the idea that only nations are able to be colonized, and not other levels of community. Still, given the fact that we exist in a highly connected world-society, it is fair to reanalyze the terminology we use, much as the Panthers did. In fact, since Primitivists, Luddites, and so on are primarily concerned with community and individual autonomy, it makes all the more sense to move away from "internationalism" to "intercommunalism."

Despite my grievances, Newton is right in saying that because the majority of the world population is under control of the ruling class, even when sections of the ruling class are in conflict, there is (or can be) a sense of shared struggle. Some view this through the lens of class conflict, as Newton did, alongside most Anarchists, but class is only part of, possibly even inconsequential, to an anti-civilization analysis. Now, I am not saying that class does not play a part of this control, surely it does; we live under class society, after all! I simply posit that anti-civilization, as a point of analysis, sees class only as a part of the larger issue of control. Naturally, anti-civilization anarchists are anti-class and should sympathize with many class struggles, especially in the Third World, but that conversation can be discussed at a different time.

One effect of the control via modern technology and global markets, as stated above, is the dissolution of nationhood, or the traditional understanding of nationhood. This is a dehumanizing effect, and an intentional one. The system breaks down these bonds and atomizes individuals and communities. It should be quickly noted that nations are relatively recent, and the acknowledgment of nations and nation states became commonplace in the 18th and 19th centuries with the rise of liberalism. Still, it shows the fact that what is acknowledged can easily be erased and negated by technological development. In place, we have communities, "a small unit with a comprehensive collection of institutions that serve a small group of people." This could be at the level of a neighborhood, or including all peoples under a State. The fallout of this is broken solidarity and a sense of defeat in the face of global / superpowers.

9 Ibid.

**Intercommunalism as Solidarity**

However, in contradiction to this breakdown and atomization, many of these oppressed communities have a shared interest in resisting this totalitarian affair. Where Newton saw this resistance building to the development of Communism, I see it towards decentralization and autonomy. This is where the idea of intercommunalism fits nicely with the concepts of Regional collapse and liberation. Regions, or places of communities, can be the locus of insurrection and future projects. As I spoke of in my prior essay, these movements can vary by logic and background:

> Typically the regional liberation side of balkanization will likely exist in the Developing world, or areas within developed nations that are 'backwater'. For example, in China, the peasants stand in stark contrast to the urban centers. In America, share-cropping exists in its own contrast to Western development. Internal semi-colonies in America may also prove to be hotbeds of such liberation movements.
>
> Otherwise, balkanization movements, either with politics that are Primitivist or not - will have their own reasons. These may be a result of political turmoil, desertification or other destabilizing events.[10]

These movements could be some urban Nihilist movement in Portland, a radical peasant uprising in Colombia, or anti-Western insurrection in Lebanon. To me, it doesn't matter. I share many sympathies with Bellamy Fitzpatrick and what he spoke about in the first *Oak Journal*, in the interview with him and John Zerzan. He expressed the hopes of reaching people across different beliefs on the ideas of "radical decentralization, pan-succession, Luddism of some form.."[11] I appreciate his notion, and while he states he is not primarily concerned with a specific platform or organization, there might be room for such a thing, but this is not the place to discuss that, but I will touch on it briefly. Kathleen Cleaver, ex-member of Black Panther Party and Black Liberation Army, spoke on the need of a communication network to bring together various political organizations to work on the gathering and distribution of information in the form of propaganda, as well as to coordinate actions.[12] Perhaps this may be one such direction we can go. As a basis, anarchist solidarity is a great starting place. We should and can expand on this to a sort of "green" or "luddite" solidarity. Others can and should design a

10 *Regional Collapse, Regional Liberation or: The Primitivist Theory of Combined & Uneven Development*, 'Regional Liberation'

11 *Oak Journal: A Journal Against Civilization*, Issue 1 - Spring 2020, page 24.

12 See her speech at UCLA in 1971.

platform of unity, one that brings together various green or localist types, perhaps attempting to bridge the radical and reformist trends, if needed. That said, I have no love, only disgust for so-called "eco-fascists," regardless if they have green in their name.

Building off of this, the notion of getting behind Indigenous movements is that one many green-anarchists do support, and this is something I respect in the works of Kevin Tucker, such as in his 2019 work, *The Cull of Personality: Ayahuasca, Colonialism and the Death of a Healer*. While I am skeptical of what decolonization means today, in face of global civilization, their movements for cultural, economic, and land autonomy are as valid as ever.*

Another avenue is one I am not new to voice is the work against pipelines (not far disconnected from Indigenous struggles, especially in the US), as well as nuclear and other "green" energies. As civilizations begin to confront its environmental destruction on a scale unseen, it must and has begun to try and rectify these issues. We must be vocal in the failure of these systems to fix the issues we have, while also speaking out against oil and gas extraction.

A final one I will mention is support of workers against automation. A growing number of politicians and advocacy groups are confronting the looming danger of mass automation displacing workers. A few that come to mind right away are those workers in the transportation field (truckers, cab drivers) and office administration (telemarketers [which is well on its way, as many of us know by screaming on the phone to talk to real people!] and accounting clerks). We can quite easily help organize and raise the voices of workers who fear or struggle with their replacement by machines, while at the same time, opening discussion with these people. We cannot hope to gain any support for ideas or actions if we exist solely in our own bubbles online (all irony intended). We must connect with radical environmentalists, localists, indigenous peoples, disgruntled workers, and all others who are becoming aware (or are aware) of the dangers of this industrial hell we call modernity.

**Apparent Contradiction**

An initial thought I had when writing this, and perhaps one some readers may have, is how luddism / anti-civilization can be seen in contradiction to the idea of intercommunalism. Expansive technological and economic development is what ties up all communities and peoples of the world. As Lenin wrote: "Capitalism has triumphed all over the world, but this triumph is only the prelude to the triumph of labour over capital."13 We find a similar, albeit more abrupt, notion with Ted Kaczysnki, "It will be easier to destroy the industrial system on a worldwide basis if the world economy is so unified that its breakdown in any one major nation will lead to its breakdown in all industrialized nations."14** Either way, the point remains the same; that we can utilize the conditions we find ourselves in to our own benefit. While we exist in a global system of technology and capital, we have tools and infrastructure to use against itself! There is no contradiction, only the myth of it.

As is the case with my previous piece, "Regional Collapse, Regional Liberation or: The Primitivist Theory of Combined & Uneven Development," I anticipate being called a Leftist, fake Primitivist, or something of that nature. I am aware of my reliance on Left-wing thinkers, specifically Marxists. While I would naturally prefer to utilize the history of anarchism in my arguments, I often find anarchists are unwilling or incapable of confronting certain issues, at least in easily accessible ways I need for my work. This is not to say I approve of all of Lenin's, Marx's, Trotsky's, or Newton's ideas, if really at all. I am firm in my anti-Marxism. We shouldn't be afraid of intellectual honesty in realizing that those we disagree with might hold a kernel of precision. I broadly compare what I do with Marxism for Primitivism to Deleuze and Guattari's ideas of Nomadism.

13 Lenin, V.I. "The Three Sources and Three Component Parts of Marxism." *Marxists Internet Archive*, www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1913/mar/x01.htm.

*What I mean is many decolonization movements are led by or influenced by globalist or leftist leaders. I do not mean I don't support decolonization, I do.

14 *Industrial Society and Its Future* by Ted Kaczynski, paragraph 196.

**This notion is quite similar to Karl Marx's argument in his 'On the Question of Free Trade' speech (1848) in which he and Frederich Engels put forth a support of free trade as it tied up the nations of the world into a global market, which brought a deeper international solidarity of the workers. Marx said, "In a word, the free trade system hastens the social revolution. It is in this revolutionary sense alone, gentlemen, that I vote in favour of free trade."

# Grace

-John Zerzan

Can there even be a state of grace today when more and more, all those around us, consciously or unconsciously, seek solace, direction, but taste only despair? Loren Eiseley to a child: ""We are in something called a civilization,' I said, 'a kind of wagon with horses. It is running over the black bridge of nothing.'"[1]

Prayer? To no Authority? It is more about what we owe each other, what do we give, according to my friend Ian. The blessing of the gift is a path to wholeness.[2] And gratitude. Grace, from the Latin gratia. The Italian grazie--thank you--expresses gratitude.

There's its opposite, disgrace. Rapture may perhaps be close to grace; one is rapt by a great force. Not forgetting that rapture comes from the Latin rapere, to seize. As in rape. In a world seemingly always made more barren, what opposes grace is usually not very distant.

"Suffering is man's only biography," proclaimed E.M. Cioran.[3] The challenge, of course, is what to do with it. Richard Rohr counsels, "If you do not transform your pain, you will surely transmit it."[4] Therein lies the promise. As the poet Hölderlin put it, "Danger itself invites the rescuing power."[5]

Grace is usually thought of as a transcendent affair, specifically a Christian concept or condition. Simone Weil was determinedly Christian, and in fact, a kind of martyr to her faith. But she also saw philosophical intellect as a means of grace, and even considered grace a condition of our very existence. In *Gravity and Grace*, Weil wrote, "All the natural movements of the soul are controlled by laws analogous to those of physical gravity. Grace is the only exception."[8] Three centuries earlier, another Christian, Blaise Pascal, concluded something similar in his Pensée number 521: "Grace will always be in the world, and nature also, so that the former is in some way natural."

The early Heidegger was, like Weil, Catholic in orientation, and before he lurched to the Right with accompanying existential jargon, he saw a few things correctly. He understood that nature had become an object and thereby the opposite of grace; heretofore they had been united.[9]

Heidegger's correspondence in 1919 discloses his elevation of the possibility of "graced moments" that interrupt humdrum, unexamined lives.[10]

We turn to nature as a form of grace. A consolation, a healing force, oneness with nature. Both resist instrumentality, strive to remain apart from domination. To quote Mark Taylor, grace is not God but "that which remains and approaches when gods fail" and fail to be present in our re-presentations.[11]

Robin Wall Kimmerer, a Potawatomi botanist, expresses real presence--and grace?--as follows: "I come here to listen, to nestle in the curve of the roots in a soft hollow of pine needles, to lean my bones against the column of white pine, to turn off the voice in my head until I can hear the voices outside it: the shhh of wind in needles, water trickling over rock, nuthatch tapping, chipmunks digging, beechnut falling, mosquito in my ear, and something more--something that is not me, for which we have no language, the wordless being of others in which we are never alone. After the drumbeat of my mother's heart, *this* was my first language."[12]

The forgetful self of technology is not only the loss of meaning; it works to extirpate indigeneity. Absence of grace. In 1983 Edward Feigenbaum and Pamela McCorduk rejoiced at the dawning of the computer age and predicted that the arrival of Artificial Intelligence would usher in a new spirituality.[13] Is there anyone at all who thinks that this is happening?

The Fall, into domesticated life and civilization, was a fall from grace, and we are still falling. Prior to this epochal shift and for an extremely long time, we lived in a qualitatively different world. I have cited before the case of a woman who lived 1.7 million years ago, a remarkable story.[14] In her 2020 autobiography, paleontologist Meave Leakey does renewed justice to one who suffered from vitaminosis A, a painfully crippling condition, and yet who lived on. Leakey concluded, "There is only one way to explain how far her disease had progressed: she lived in a social group in which members took compassionate care of the infirm to an extraordinary degree."[15]

What is left of that state of grace? Loren Eiseley wondered whether a pre-historic individual might have questioned what lay ahead: "Perhaps he knew, there in the grass by the water, that he had before him an immense journey."[16] "In wildness is the preservation of the world," Thoreau famously said, but the world isn't being preserved. Gary Snyder put it in a more personal vein: "Wildness is the state of complete awareness. That's why we need it."[17]

Grace is not abstract. It is immediate, it is face-to-face. Emmanuel Levinas drew literal attention to the face as the site of our interactive responsibility to others.[18]

Another literal focus is Gilles Deleuze's attention to light. His luminosity concept may be another way to apprehend the nature of grace, at least in places. The "luminous principle" is a fulcrum of Deleuze's metaphysics, especially as his thinking progressed.[19] Immanence is basic to Deleuze, and he noted that "the plane of immanence [non-transcendence] is entirely made up of light."[20] Hanjo Berressen found that "life-affirming light and warmth that is given by the sun suffuses Deleuzian philosophy at all moments."[21] The task of perception entails pulverizing the world, but is also one of spiritualizing its dust,[22] further revealing Deleuze's orientation in this area. I don't think it too much of a stretch to make out something of a parallel between the luminous and grace, at least to some degree. "To see the light" as a grace moment. And, as Weil saw it: "There is only one fault: incapacity to feed upon the light, for where capacity to this has been lost all faults are possible."[23]

It may be easy to ponder the meaning of grace, its features, but the state of things is undoubtedly grace-less. If it is anything, grace is not a thing, but a gift in movement. As Karl Barth wrote, in a Christian context, "Grace must find expression in life, otherwise it is not grace.[24]" How do we get to a state of whatever grace is, in the now-sense, on a non-transcendent plane? We know that all the moments are here and now; the past and future are beyond our reach.

The Christian hymn "Amazing Grace" dates from the 18th century, but became an anti-slavery anthem. The spiritual must become spirited, armed.

Mark Taylor's 2011 novel *The Gospel of Anarchy* is a tale of young twenty-something-non-believers seeking, I believe, what

I've spent these few words writing about. It ends with these lines:

> To live even in time without limit.
>
> No blood for the true faith.
>
> An old monument falls down forever.
>
> We are the young world screaming *Grace*.

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1 Loren Eiseley, *The Night Country* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), p. 76.

2 David Richo, *The Power of Grace* (Boston: Shambhala, 2014).

3 E.M. Cioran, *Tears and Saints* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 9.

4 Richard Rohr, "Transforming Pain," Center for Action and Contemplation, October 17, 2018.

5 Quoted in David Richo, *Shadow Dance* (Boulder, CO: Shambhala, 1999), p. 72.

6 Vance G. Morgan: *Weaving the World: Simone Weil on Science, Mathematics and Love* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), p. 23.7

7 Ibid., pp. 96, 190. Also Henry Leroy Finch, Simone Weil and the *Intellect of Grace* (New York: Continuum, 1999).

8 Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), p. 45.

9 Ben Vedder, *Heidegger's Philosophy of Religion* (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 2007), pp. 168-169.

10 Benjamin D. Crowe, *Heidegger's Religious Origins* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana Unversity Press, 2006), pp. 171, 235.

11 Mark C. Taylor, *Tears* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1990), p. 231.

12 Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass* (Minneapolis, MN: Milkweed Editions, 2013), p. 48.

13 Edward Feigenbaum and Pamela McCorduck, *The Fifth Generation* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing, 1983).

14 The prior reference is Alan Walker and Pat Shipman, *The Wisdom of the Bones* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996), pp. 165-166.

15 Meave Leakey, *The Sediments of Time* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2020), p. 240.

16 Loren Eiseley, *The Immense Journey* (New York: Vintage Books, 1957), pp. 125-126.

17 Quoted in Kit Kalen, *Poetry, Consciousness and Community* (E-Book from Brillo, January 2009).

18 Roger Burggraeve, editor, *The Awakening to the Other: A Provocative Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas* (Dudley, MA: Peters Leuven, 2008), passim.

19 Miguel de Beistegui, *Immanence--Deleuze and Philosophy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), p. 87.

20 Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p. 60.

21 Hanjo Berressen, Gilles Deleuze's *Luminous Philosophy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), p. 182.

22 Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* (London: Continuum, 2006), p. 99.

23 Weil, op.cit., *Gravity and Grace*, p. 48.

24 Quoted in Helmut Gollwitzer, *An Introduction to Protestant Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1982), p. 174.

# The Flight of Abstraction

-John Zerzan

Abstraction is slippery. We think we know what it is, but can we really situate it? Michael Fortescue takes the position that abstraction has always been a presence as we evolved.[1] But if, as commonly thought, it is a requirement for the symbolic, if abstraction is inherent in the creation of a symbolic form, it cant be said to have been there all along. Symbols and symbolic culture are relatively new human developments that first appeared in the Upper Paleolithic. Homo intelligence vastly predates any symbolic dimension, and thus predates abstraction.

Any grasp of our topic must account for the emergence, role, and historical transformation of abstract concepts. Aristotle credits Thales of Miletus as having founded a school of philosophy that sought the principles of all things in abstract properties, but the commonly accepted notion of abstraction is Aristotle's. George Berkeley quotes him as saying,"There is scarcely anything so incomprehensible to me as the most universal notions because they are most remote from sense."[2] A reminder that to abstract is to detach from, to be separated from what is material or specific.

A couple of millennia later René Descartes posits, "I think, therefore I am." Thomas Merton provides a critical take on what he saw as a prime example of abstraction: "This is the declaration of an alienated being, in exile from his own spiritual depths, compelled to seek some comfort *in a proof of his own existence* (!) based on the observation that he 'thinks.' ...He is reducing himself to a concept."[3]

Around 1400, the Old French word *abstraction* meant a withdrawal from worldly affairs-- literally, asceticism. A movement away from lived, affective spheres sees its parallel in the distancing of philosophers from day-to-day life. Michael Jackson terms this an illusion, that thought can transcend materiality; he dates its appearance to the mid-15th century. He goes on to judge, "Abstraction's capacity to ignore what is real...is undoubtedly where most evil begins."[4] One facet of this process is served up by Jürgen Renn: "The same abstract knowledge that marked the distance from ordinary experiences could also serve to demonstrate technological superiority."[5]

Another form of "superiority" is political domination/op-



pression: for example, when Palestinians face settlement, exclusion, and violence abstracted into law against them. Marx pointed out that the commodity form, central to capitalism, is an abstraction that commands the social. Modernity itself is an abstraction, captured brilliantly by Georg Simmel.[6]

Paralleling Michael Fortescue's erroneous idea that abstraction has always been with us, is the view that the time dimension has always been an inseparable aspect of human experience. Lacan is so much closer to the mark: time is essential to the symbolic order. Even closer, in my opinion, is to understand symbolizing as producing time. That's how time emerges as a symbolic dimension. The birth of time consciousness in the movement away from the immediacy of the real, into the symbolic.

It's part of time's nature that it must be represented, symbolized. We can only discuss it via representations. "Time flies"--time is represented as that which flies. Time passes, like the flow of a river; but it obviously isn't a fluid. It doesn't exist outside the symbolic, which speaks to its origin.

Ever more reified and spatialized, *all* time comes to be identified as abstract time. Reification is a process of abstraction. Spatialization means that time becomes as homogenous and empty as space. Doreen Massey gets us back to basics: "It is not space that takes the life out of time, but representation."[7] Counting and number enter here; they presuppose representation or abstraction.

The connection between abstraction and time is obviously present today, and can be studied empirically. A clear example from the social sciences is an exploration titled "How Symbolic Meaning Influences Time Perception in Primary School Children and Adults."[8] Daniel Everett's *Don't Sleep, There Are Snakes* tells of the Amazonia Piraha people, who live without time; "No number and no counting in any form."[9] No symbols, only the immediacy of experiences. Elissa Maudlin is an Indiana college student who writes columns for the *Ball State Daily* under the heading "Abstraction." Her May 3, 2021 column calls Gen Z "Generation Google," as in Just Google It to get fast, non-experiential answers. A marked contrast with the Pirahas' completely experienced-based knowledge.

Though widely considered a very abstract philosopher, Hegel argues in "Who Thinks Abstractly?" that thinking is the effort to move past the abstract to the concrete, the particular. Ludwig Wittgenstein's effort against abstraction was more consistent. He maintained that philosophy really says nothing, because its mainstay, abstract truths, are illusions. So-called philosophical problems yield nothing and should be discarded. His late-innings *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics* depicts math as invention, not discovery, a needed antidote to Alain Badiou's hyper-alienated, hyper-abstract mathematics as ontology. Merleau-Ponty and Husserl fell back into abstraction, and thus phenomenology's aim, to return to the things themselves, failed.

In their *Abstraction in Artificial Intelligence and Complex Systems*, Saitta and Zucker argue that abstraction is a fundamental mechanism underlying both human and machine perceptions.[10] Fundamental for machines, pretty much by definition. But human, non-abstract cognitive development emerged very early on, "already among the capacities of the Homo erectus" a million years ago. [11] And as George Woodcock put it so well, "Complete liberty implies freedom from the tyranny of abstractions as well as from the rule of men." [12]

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1 Michael D. Fortescue, *The Abstraction Engine: Extracting Patterns in Language, Mind and Brain* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2017).

2 *The Works of George Berkeley, Bishop of Cloyne,* eds. A.A. Luce and T.E. Jessop (London: Bibliotheca Brittanica Philosophica 1948-1957), II, p. 130.

3 Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions, 1961), p. 8.

4 Michael Jackson, *Critique of Identity Thinking* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2019), p. 12.

5 Jürgen Renn, *The Evolution of Knowledge: Rethinking Science for the Anthropocene* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2020), p. 34.

6 See Daniel Miller, *Material Culture and Mass Consumption* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987).

7 Doreen Massey, "Some Times of Space," in Amelia Groom, ed., *Time* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2013), p. 118.

8 G. Mioni et al., "How Symbolic Meaning Influences Time Perception in Primary School Children and Adults," Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences, Vol. 126, 21 March 2014.

9 Daniel Everett, *Don't Sleep, There Are Snakes* (New York: Pantheon, 2008), p. 117.

10 Lorenza Saitta and Jean-Daniel Zucker, *Abstraction in Artificial Intelligence and Complex Systems* (New York: Springer, 2013).

11 Mircea Anghelinu, "Fitting the Ladder to the Tree: A Common Sense View on the Cognitive Evolution of the Pleistocene Human Lineages," *Archeologia Moldovei*, vol. xxxvi, 2013, p. 7.

12 George Woodcock, "The Tyranny of the Clock," *War Commentary* (11-12 March 1944), n.p.

# UNCOMMON ALLIANCE

-JESSICA CAREW KRAFT

In January of 2021, I moved to the Sierra foothills of California from the Bay Area. After my divorce the previous year, I left my family's four-bedroom house in the Berkeley Hills and took up residence in a 112-square-foot tiny home loaded onto a Ford F-350 truck that was once a U-Haul. I radically minimized my belongings. I was done with the American script of consumption. I was finished with the pressure to provide all the things considered normal for my two daughters' happy childhood nowadays. Something in me had woken up, and I could no longer stomach the contradictions inherent in my middle-class, nuclear-family life in California techno-utopia.

I was going to live by my own standards and seek more wildness and autonomy. Instead of comparing myself to the Joneses, I preferred to use ethnographic benchmarks of how humanity had lived for the longest periods. Hunter-gatherers like the San people or the Hadza don't accumulate personal goods. They do barely any housekeeping and have tiny structures, if any, just to sleep and take shelter in. Their tools, apparel, and adornment are handcrafted and can be packed away in one leather cape that can easily be hauled to the next camp.

My truck was this cape. Indeed, the interior was handmade. It was lovingly refurbished and decked out by a surfer couple with a double fold-out bed, a compost toilet, a wood-burning stove, solar panels to operate a set of lights, a phone charger, and a running sink. Hardly hunter-gatherer, but I had to start somewhere.

I didn't know what I was going to do; if I'd adjust to living in the truck or if I'd need to get a studio apartment near my kids to be able to parent them part-time. I knew that I couldn't afford, nor did I want to encumber myself with a big property and resume paying the bills to a system of power, gas, fiber optics, and garbage in the world's most politically correct city.

I slowly mastered driving a massive vehicle amidst narrow avenues, (don't ask me about that big dent) and learned the best spots to "work from home," while still taking care of my kids half the week. I asked for permission from people I know to park on their land adjacent to nature preserves to do my naturalist activities, forage, and scatter seeds.

I kept searching for little patches of land near my old house that I might be able to rent for cheap and bring the truck onto as my living quarters. But I found out that this idea was highly irregular and most likely illegal. I had always sort of known this, but it became clear that you cannot live in urban civilization unless you play by all of the system's rules, which may not be in your best interest. Say you have a self-sufficient method for creating power or getting water. Unless you do it with express permission, if you try to disconnect from the water mains or the electricity grid, you might be forced out of your house and your kids might be taken away by Child Protective Services because you are now providing substandard conditions.

Yet officials do endorse the substandard living conditions next to polluting trash incinerators, toxic fracking mines, and clear-cut mountains — no problems there, as long as you pay your bills. Eat all the diabetes happy meals you want; no one's going to stop you. But just try safely burying your poo in your backyard — that's criminal. Civilization expects us to depend upon its mass infrastructure, whether that's for basic daily needs, high-tech communications, or emergency health care. Our utter dependence is also what keeps us obedient to authority, which in our culture is established by our parents, perpetuated by our bosses and law enforcement, and reinforced by experts that we come to trust more than we trust ourselves. Every point in the system is designed to erase our self-sufficiency. This is where our society, as a whole, completely deviates from our evolutionary blueprint. For nearly all of *Homo Sapiens*' existence, we lived in small, nomadic, egalitarian groups without hierarchy or absolute rulers, in which each person was capable of supporting their own needs for short periods of time. Yet when I would broach this topic with my liberal friends and colleagues, I was widely criticized and accused of naivete or unappealing radicalism, and sometimes called out for my feral parenting choices.

Ever mindful of my hunter-gatherer benchmark, I knew that I had to find others who thought like me in order to survive. None of us can make it alone for the long term. I had read about people who tried to challenge the dependency system with age-old principles of natural law, purportedly based on values inherent to all humans, and pre-dating any kind of state governance. Interestingly, the folks most open to the idea of flouting "official" law tended to fall along more politically conservative camps, which intrigued me. Having gone to a "liberal arts" college where I avidly studied Marxist postmodernism and having voted Democrat my entire eligible life, I tended to assume that the people most susceptible to anarchist thought would be oriented toward the political Left. After all, these are the folks who most passionately advocate for reform. But in the past year, I've come to the opposite conclusion. Those most open to implementing anarchist ideas, specifically the social structures of egalitarian hunter-gatherer bands, tend to be rural and libertarian. They don't even believe it's possible to reform a system. In fact, it's the whole idea of system that pisses them off. The only laws that we are fully obligated to obey—without exception—are those of nature. They respect nature in an embodied way because they live in it and deal with the essential resources of life every day, unlike urban dwellers for whom nature is an abstraction to be fenced off in preserves and admired on short weekend outings.

A prominent example: Montana mountain man, Ernie

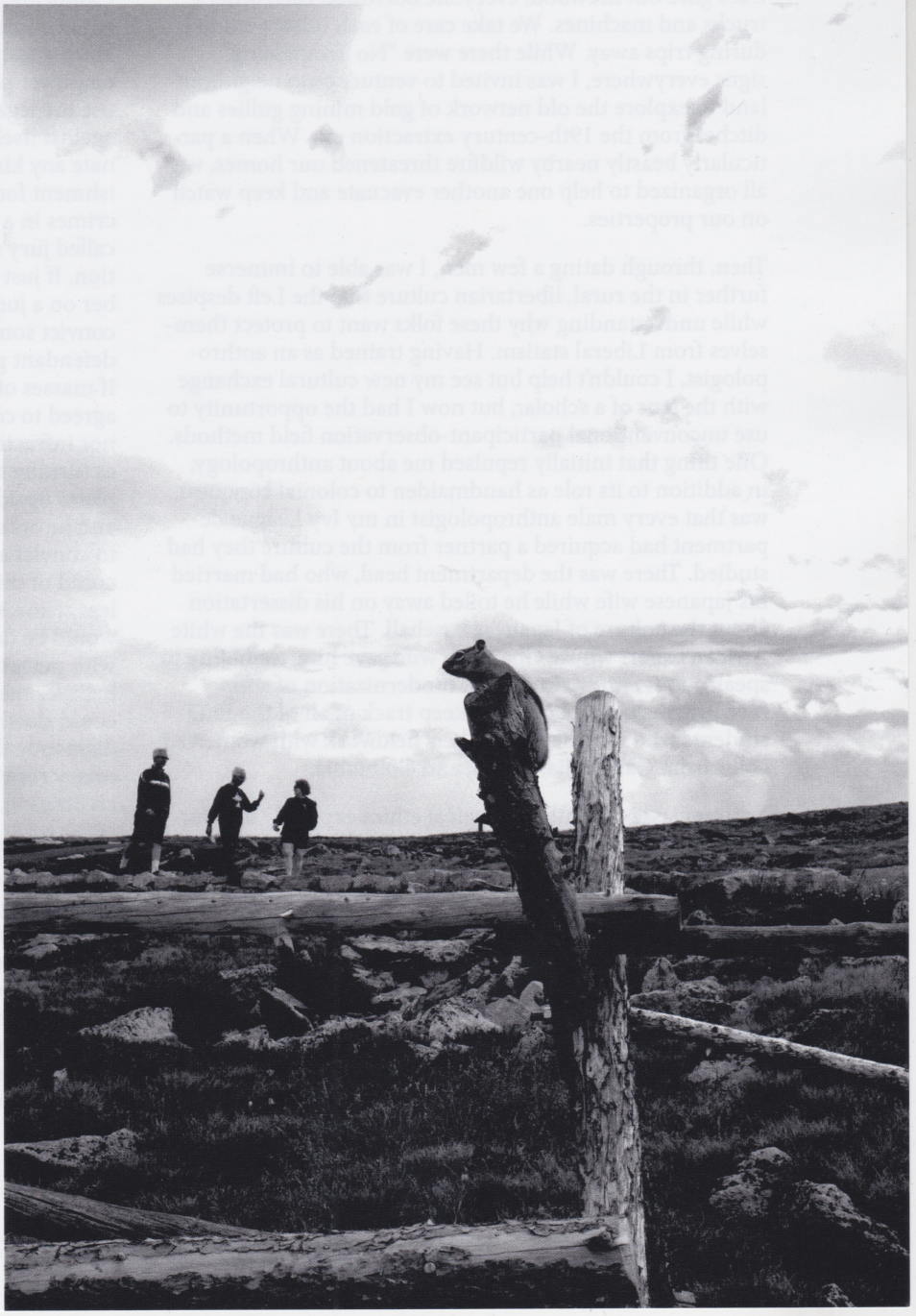
Tertelgte, was caught fishing with his son without a license in 2013. Ernie refused to show his ID, and insisted that he was within his rights to fish in a public waterway. The game warden had him arrested, and Tertelgte represented himself in court against misdemeanor charges. He used a "natural law" argument to justify feeding himself from the wild.

Tertelgte is as eccentric as one would have to be to try this maneuver—his old-timey glasses, bushy beard, tri-cornered hat, and felted coat form the perfect costume for a Tea Party radical. His court appearance went viral on Youtube because of his over-the-top theatrics. He refused to show respect, wouldn't remove his hat, and yelled back at the judge. "I was searching for something to put in my stomach as I am recognized to be allowed to do," he said. "I am the living man, and I have the right to forage for food when I am hungry." He was fined $150, and in further proceedings, was sent to jail for thirty days. Note, he was entirely peaceful during his arrest and his court appearances. He just wasn't obedient, so he became a public enemy (according to the Southern Poverty Law Center civil rights advocacy group) because he tried to get food. I don't care what politics he has; his argument is challenging the fundamental contradictions of civilization. Plus, he was funny about it, which you need to be to deal with hypocrisy. He refused to enter a plea officially. "I never plead," he scoffed. "Animals plead, [with] sounds like baaaa, oink oink," he said.[1]

I wasn't one to tangle with the law, though, not only because I didn't own any interesting costumes. My approach is under-the-radar, since I have too much to lose as a mother if I get into trouble with the law. As various neighbors kept calling the police about my camper van being parked near their houses, I decided I had to get out of urban life entirely. While our city had a housing crisis and a growing unhoused population that Berkeley liberals openly sympathized with, those same people couldn't stand the eyesore of my truck in their street. While they plastered their windows and yards with Black Lives Matter signs, and lamented the effects of climate change, I didn't see anyone altering their lifestyle to make our society more equitable or less polluting. What really irked me was that Berkeley parents would talk about the need to connect their children more deeply to nature, but their only effort in this department was a weekend hike, decked out in the finest REI gear. Their politics was all symbolism, convenience, and consumer-assisted engagement with nature.

I sought a landscape in which to immerse in nature, hunt, fish, and forage, showing my daughters an alternative to urban life and endless consumerism. I was also sick of the culture of safety that governed their schooling and programs. They had to wear life vests when merely wading in water, were denied access to the creek on their school campus, and were discouraged from picking up feathers or nibbling on plants (that they knew were edible) by adults afraid of some unknown contagion or legal liability. I wanted my kids to enhance their human instincts, not restrain or deny them because of unfounded fears.

My father was slowly, sadly deteriorating from an undiagnosed neurological condition, so he offered to assist me with purchasing a property with my future inheritance. I bought twenty acres of wooded forest abutting 100 acres of National Forest out in the Sierra Foothills. If I was going to lose my one beloved parent soon, I would at least have Mother Nature. This move gave me the freedom to forage and collect roadkill, develop relationships with all of the living beings, and practice a life of wood-chopping, stocking food, wild-tending, and looking after the health of the forest and my own well-being. I had to learn how to live on the land and manage my own waste. Initially, I thought of my place as a wild solo mother retreat where my kids would



join me on weekends. Having been schooled in the ways of rural America from fearful liberals, I had an ingrained distrust and condescension towards my salt-of-the-earth neighbors. Yet day by day, these attitudes started to shift.

About ten households live on properties off of a gravel road that the county doesn't maintain. That means that we all have to work together to keep the road in driving condition. I began meeting these folks and started appreciating their resilience and self-sufficiency. Our default neighborhood association seemed to function just as stateless groups operate all over the world and throughout history. We adapt to each other's needs and idiosyncrasies. We come to consensus over what has to be done. The occasional aggression from the one crazy lady is tolerated with eyerolls and mockery, which has always been how human groups attempt to modify antisocial behavior. Our reciprocal relationships nurture us and provide support when we suffer because we are generous with one another. Neighbors with chickens supply the others with eggs; people with fallen trees gave out firewood; everyone borrowed each other's trucks and machines. We take care of each other's animals during trips away. While there were "No Trespassing" signs everywhere, I was invited to venture onto neighbors' land to explore the old network of gold mining gullies and ditches from the 19th-century extraction era. When a particularly beastly nearby wildfire threatened our homes, we all organized to help one another evacuate and keep watch on our properties.

Then, through dating a few men, I was able to immerse further in the rural, libertarian culture that the Left despises while understanding why these folks want to protect themselves from Liberal statism. Having trained as an anthropologist, I couldn't help but see my new cultural exchange with the lens of a scholar, but now I had the opportunity to use unconventional participant-observation field methods. One thing that initially repulsed me about anthropology, in addition to its role as handmaiden to colonial conquest, was that every male anthropologist in my Ivy League department had acquired a partner from the culture they had studied. There was the department head, who had married his Japanese wife while he toiled away on his dissertation about the culture of Japanese baseball. There was the white African expert whose Ghanaian wife gave him credibility to speak about family rituals and modernization of a former British colony. I couldn't keep track of all of the PhD students who returned from their fieldwork with women of color from Cambodia, China, and Colombia.

Yet our classes in anthropological ethics explicitly discouraged intimate relationships while studying another culture. Developing romantic relationships with sources was seen to compromise "objectivity." But everyone knows that the easiest way to understand another way of life is through pillow talk and being intimate with "the other." Romance can provide some of the best access points for fieldwork, and dating allows you to understand a new culture faster and more deeply than any kind of formal educational process. If intimacy is so effective in the field, and the men are taking advantage of it behind the scenes, why is it so taboo? Why shouldn't we use our entire suite of human interaction capability for cultural understanding? And why shouldn't both sexes enjoy the benefits of pillow-talk anthropological insight? While I'm not engaged in any kind of academic anthropological study, I loved the idea of shirking off official ethics, and indulging my analytical nature in my personal life. I considered it part of my process of de-institutionalization.

I met Steven through his anti-state advocacy online. At 42, he has been working for a few years to de-link himself from all forms of state identity which imply some sort of contract that he never consciously agreed to. He has gone through the bureaucratic hassle of officially returning his driver's license, rescinding his right to vote, and choosing not to hold insurance of any kind. He tries to have no services tied to any address and is building a van that he wants to live in full-time while traveling around doing good deeds for strangers. In the midst of all this, he takes care of his two daughters on weekends, gardens, keeps chickens, and travels around central California, performing at comedy shows. His biggest aim is to empower people to use the legal system against itself to eliminate any kind of punishment for victimless crimes in a maneuver called jury nullification. If just one member on a jury refuses to convict someone, the defendant goes free. If masses of people agreed to commit minor infractions, such as turning their license plates upside down, and jurors agreed not to convict anyone accused of this victimless crime, the courts would be flooded with petty cases. He believes this maneuver could slowly begin to dismantle the unnecessary restrictions of civilization.



Our mutual interest in self-sufficiency was the starting point for opening him up to my anarchist viewpoints based on the long human history of hunter-gatherer egalitarianism. He now sees the value in pro-

cessing roadkill, harvesting edible plants, and questioning technology. When he rants about how the DMV and other government agencies curtail his liberties, I offer arguments about how bureaucracy is a defining feature of civilization meant to dehumanize and domesticate us. He's adjusting his rhetoric, having broadened his view that civilization has enslaved him. He's helped me stop obsessing over the permits, licenses, and petty regulations that delimit our lives in civilization. If I ask him: "Is that legal?" he always says, with a smile, "I don't care."

About a quarter of a mile down my road lives another renegade single dad, Will, who believes he is a slave to the system, and can't wait to accumulate enough cash to buy land in rural Montana so he can eject himself from all institutions. Cowboy boots, work pants, American flag T-shirts—he's got the uniform of the rural woodsman. When my liberal friends from the city visit and sit down to a card game with him, I can see that they find his grammar poor and his attitudes harsh. But I no longer subscribe to stereotypes, and from taking time to hear his truth, I know that behind a redneck exterior lies a keen intelligence and practicality that my college-educated cohort have rarely encountered. He and I also have fruitful dialogues: when I object to how he is reliant on industrial food and alcohol, he objects by saying he doesn't have time to source his supplies from nature; he's got kids to support. Yet he spends his free time building his own machines, fishing, hunting, exploring national forest land near him (and getting appalled at the encroachment of civilization on these spaces.) When I whine about the restrictions I face in parenting kids part-time in a liberal city, he schools me on how to take a hardy "fuck-off, I can do what I want" attitude. He owns six gold mining claims on public land and is pleased that his method of recreational mining isn't as destructive or as bureaucratically intense as corporate mining. Furthermore, when the financial system collapses, he won't be stuck with useless stocks and bonds. He'll have mountains full of gold, if only he can pick it out.



We once spent an afternoon touring around campsites he used to freely roam through, noticing how they had been developed for upscale fee-paying visitors. Staring at a new bank of pristine cabins linked by paved roads, he shook his fist and yelled, over and over: "you destroyed the forest!" Later that day, as we canoed up a river, he pulled over the boat to collect some trash. Shouting expletives at the "flatlanders" who came up to recreate, I could see that he was genuinely hurt, and a more ardent nature-lover than any of my Prius-driving pals.

He loves that our road is not county-maintained, which, to him, means he can drive around however he wants, even though he has two DUIs. While my friends insinuate that he is racist, I understand that he's open to changing the words he uses so as not to cause offense. I taught him not to employ the word "Jewish" as a generally disparaging term as his father did. I explained to him why he should appreciate the Jews (myself included) as incredible survivors, particularly because he sees himself as a potentially persecuted person, which is why he maintains so many weapons. It is perhaps the guns that cause liberals so much distress since they have no experience with them. Yet what self-sufficient group of humans has ever survived without weapons—for hunting, and occasionally for defense? Again, the hunter-gatherer benchmark falls closer to Will, his pals, and my other neighbors than it does to the urban-dwelling, "open-minded," democratic believers.

It's true that these men I've met in the foothills tend to be influenced by conspiracy theories. For me, these are distractions from the biggest issue of civilization as a whole diminishing every shred of human freedom. Yet, I see any strains of suspicion about systems and institutions as an opportunity to open folks up to anti-civ arguments. Through long conversations and adventures on the land, I've been able to build this bridge, which was never possible in Berkeley. Interacting with them has challenged my indoctrination in elite culture and allowed me to advance my understanding of the contradictions in contemporary liberal thought that don't mesh well with rewilding and ejecting from civilization. I don't know what's going to happen with these relationships, but I hope that I can keep learning and exchanging ideas with people who are most open to creating a way of life more in line with our evolutionary heritage.

When I'm looking for allies who don't trust centralized authority and hierarchy; who want to make choices for themselves and guard their autonomy; and who are ready to pitch in to a mutual aid network, I'm no longer going to attend an urban social justice protest. If I could sum up what I've learned from getting fully, integrally involved in the ecosystem of this new land, it's that the seeds of wild anarchy are ready to germinate in the rural West.

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[1] Neiwert, David. 2014. "Montana's 'Natural Man' Defies Courts, Sets Up Another Rural 'Patriot' Showdown." Southern Poverty Law Center. April 2014. https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2014/05/01/montanas-natural-man-defies-courts-sets-another-rural-patriot-showdown.

# AGAINST WRITTEN THOUGHT

*by Sascha Engel*

*Stripping the continuously present world of its marvel, written thought is an autocracy in all senses of the word: its rule is of itself, by itself, and for itself. Its primary - indeed, its only - gesture is the transformation of deixis into writing, ossifying the continuous world into discrete entities, enabling their use and abuse. By way of clarifying what each of these terms means, we will be able to develop a strategy against them.*

*'Deixis' means any gesture by which an entity is singled out of any given continuum. Its archetype is the gesture of pointing with the (aptly named) index finger. By doing so, I single out a part of the continuum unfolding before me, and render it a discrete entity which I can name, identify, and ultimately control. But such pointing gestures need not solidify. What I have provisionally identified as an entity in the distance may well turn out not to be one - it may be a shadow, a mirage, a reflection. Physical deixis remains tentative, open to the marvel of the present world. Moreover, it is synaesthetic and undermines itself by synaesthesia: my finger may point, but meanwhile my ears and nose hear and smell otherwise. I can temporarily identify what I need to survive, yet the world remains a flickering continuum of temporary constellations.*

*Writing, by contrast, solidifies temporary and tentative deixis, replacing situational interplays of light and shadow, sound and silence, taste and smell with conceptual rigidity. The play of shadows in front of me is rewritten as a tree, source of wood and linchpin of 'reforestation' moralisms. The loving vibrancy by my side is rewritten as a human, source of labor power and linchpin of 'human rights' pontifications. The loving, caring mother of four is rewritten as a cow, source of milk and linchpin of PETAesque publicity stunts. And the stream of semi-conscious thoughts at the center of marvellous presence is rewritten as a personality, registered at the passport office, tethered to employment and bank accounts, expropriated property-owner with login details and passwords. It is the readability of the world that strips it of its marvel: "Language, and symbolism in general, are always substitutive, implying meanings that cannot be derived directly from experiential contexts" [0].*

*The rule of discrete thought renders the temporary deixis of discrete constellations permanent, eradicating the continuum from which they sprang. That is, it operates by substituting each deictic gesture with linguistic gestures: instead of the living, breathing entity before me, I perceive a 'human' or a 'dog', and instead of the play of shadows and gentle green, I perceive a 'tree'. Once identified this way, industrial society can close in on living beings. The lush green before me becomes so many 'trees', each an iteration of the written word 'tree' and its ossified deictic content. Breathing constellations of bodies on pastures become so much 'cattle', each derived from a number on a page or screen and paying for the sin of wanting to be more than that with their lives. And I become a person, an overworked zombie tethered to my online identity.*

*The readable world thus becomes an industrial hellscape, "an arid, anti-spiritual dimension, emptier and colder with each re-enactment" [1]. But rendering oneself defenseless is no escape: illiteracy is not a strategic move against discrete writing. On the contrary, as every illiterate person and indeed every illiterate creature can attest, the empire of literacy closes over those illiterate with all the more precision. Relegated to a mute outside, illiterate 'humans' are barely able to exercise their fabled 'human rights', while illiterate animals and plants are reduced to so much cattle and development, respectively.*

*What is required is rather a means of "practically challenging the present social order" which "aims at a rupture" with it and thus "begins with an attack upon all institutions of this society" [2]. Challenging their core, the substitution of deixis with writing, we need to read continuously. The strategy at hand must go back to the basics of how deixis solidifies, if it is to show a way out. How do I know that the lush green before me is 'a tree', how do I identify it? Deixis provides a stream of experiences: I can touch what is before me, smell it, even taste it - and see it, of course. In itself, this does not involve the subordination of its presence to a phrase (the word 'tree') or its content (the discrete entity 'tree'). Rather, the constellation emerging before me implies others: a chorus of voices points towards birds, a play of shadows points towards nests and foxes and other plants, elastic branches point towards a path, moss points towards what side I need to go, and so forth. Thus a continuous mode of being in the world emerges, "a flux, a movement of myriads*

*of be(com)ings. And when I have the opportunity to relax into thoughtlessness, into 'self-forgetfulness', I become the center of this flux and take it all into myself" [3].*

*Deixis of 'this tree' however remains temporary, and both I and the entity before me recede into continuum as soon as we have concluded our interaction. The play of shadows and light, the presence of fur and skin, and the gestures of hiding and chasing, playing and fighting, create and destroy so many unions of egoists. These unions go beyond the supposedly solid barriers of species: "As I stand on a hill and see individuals I might call buzzard, hare, oak or foxglove, my egoism affirms them as being the world that is an extension of me and that I am extension of. That is both a solitary encounter and one that is shared between us" [4].*

*To be sure, even the temporary gesture sketched here includes a form of recognition, even short of (written) identification. I have to single out the 'tree' before me, even just for the purposes of swerving. And of course my own survival will take the form of making use of it, ending its existence as a tree and rendering it kindling. Some gesture of recognition, and indeed of use - and thus of abuse - remains. The union of egoists before me need not be romanticized either. Its members, too, can be antagonistic to one another. Yet these antagonisms are situational and resolve as soon as as the constellation dissolves that gave rise to them. Ending up between what my deixis temporarily identifies as a bear and her cub is and remains a deadly experience. Yet it's nothing like the systematic enslavement, rape and war which industrial society forces onto what it constitutes through discrete thought, once and for all, as 'nature' [5].*

*Deixis does, therefore, temporarily and tentatively, identify. Yet its ossification into writing need not persist. Consider how I know that this is 'a tree'. In everyday life, this identification will mostly be through language: I call it 'a tree', thereby identifying it, which is to say, carving its shape and characteristics into continuous constellation, substituting 'the tree' for the living union of egoists before me. The archetype of this gesture is the written letter.*

*To make this clearer, consider these two questions.*

*First, consider how I know that this specific set of experiences, right here and right now, corresponds to the set of experiences I had when someone pointed them out for the first time and explained that they're referred to as 'a tree'? Moreover, even if there was a way for me to know that this specific set of experiences right here and right now is the same as the one back then: how do I know that my sets of experience are the same as those of the person who first pointed? The other's sets of experiences are theirs, not mine - how do I know their experiences correspond? Perhaps, too, the person wanted to mislead me and pointed at a 'house', telling me it's a 'tree'? [6]*

*Secondly, assuming I have some sort of way of telling not only that the sets of experiences I have of 'a tree' are the same each time, but also that they correspond to those of the one who first pointed it out to me - how do I know that these sets of experiences, mine and theirs and everyone else's, correspond to the set of experiences which ought to be indicated by the word 'tree'? In other words, how is it guaranteed that 'tree' means 'tree' each time I say it or someone else says it?*

*Once these questions are posed, the authoritarian core of discrete thought becomes evident. 'The tree' is 'a tree' because by identifying it, I constitute it - and by constituting it, I follow rules telling me how to do so. For the question - 'how do I know that my set of experiences corresponds to that evoked by the word 'tree'?' - needs to be rephrased to: 'how is the spoken word 'tree' made to apply to a specific set of experiences?' After all, "what we indicate is by speech, but the things that exist and that are are not speech" [7]. The word 'tree' is, in itself, nothing but agitated air, just another sound in a continuum of sound, or again nothing but a series of ink marks on a page, just another colored blip in a continuum of sight. "So it is not the things that are that we indicate to other people, but rather speech, which is different from the things that exist" [8]. There is nothing inherent to the sound of saying the word 'tree', or inherent to the ink marks on the page, which makes them stand in for the living constellation before me.*

*Nothing, that is, but authority and the reiteration of this authority. The sound 'tree' hits my ears in waves, just as the ink marks 'tree' hit my eyes in photon traffic. The mechanisms by which these are perceived are exactly the same as those effected by the sound waves of leaves rustling in the wind, and again the same as those effected by the photon emissions of those same leaves' green surfaces. Yet at some early point my domestication begins. Someone - with the necessary authority - takes me aside, points to a constellation of sound and light, and says 'tree'. They do it again and again, until hearing the sound waves which form the word 'tree' combines with the leaf-sounds and the leaf-light and -shadows. Thus a set of experiences is formed, combining word-sound and leaf-sound [9]. Yet this initial set of experiences is unstable and polysemic - a family resemblance at most, of 'tree', 'shrub', 'hedge', and so forth - and thus needs to be refined and reified by ever more precise impositions. Each of these comes about in a similar process: as I get older, calling things 'trees' that 'are not trees' carries ever more social sanction. What I learn over time, then, is not 'what a tree is', but in what situations it is permissible to refer to which constellations by which words [10].*

*Which is to say: I learn how to impose the notion of 'a tree' as a discrete entity onto the synaesthetic continuum unfolding before me. I learn that the constellation of sight and sound needs to be structured by the meaning of the word 'tree' rather than vice versa; that the word-sound precedes the leaf-sound. Indeed, I learn that the word-sound precedes me. After all, to call a 'tree' anything but*

*'tree' requires me to unlearn the word and replace it with something else, exchanging one authority for another. (This is why it's so difficult to learn a new language: it's a social problem, not a cognitive one.) Authority never stops governing [11].*

*Yet the challenge to authority - and its response - don't end here. For what such authority implements at its core goes beyond (quasi-)juridical sets of rules for speech [12]. It is the subordination of leaf-sound and word-sound to iterated regularity: to an institutionalized inability to separate deixis from the iteration of authority.*

*Consider the structure of the act by which authority imposes the sound 'tree' as a substitute for deictic acknowledgement of a union of egoists. Agitated air drumming against my ear seems to be merely an audible element within a continuum of sound. Which would mean that it's subject to the same temporary and tentative deixis as every other such entity. The sound of the word 'tree' needs to be singled out in differentiation to the sound of leaves rustling in the wind, birds tweeting and, yes, cars passing by and ferries honking in the distance. In such constellations, and in different languages, the word-sound 'tree' will never be the same. Yet it is 'recognized', i.e., imposed, each time. The authoritarian imposition of 'the tree' for its deixis is therefore not the imposition of this specific sound. Were that the case, the relation between word-sound and leaf-sound might as well be reversed: "Surely speech is constituted out of the external things that strike us, that is, from perceptibles... But if this is the case, it is not the speech that presents the external thing, but the external thing that indicates the speech" [13].*

*What is imposed is writing, inhabiting speech and working through it: an incision into the continuum of the world which regulates and standardizes each constellation by dissolving its continuousness into iterated discrete entities. This is already acknowledged for so-called 'performative statements': "Could a performative statement succeed if its formulation did not repeat a 'coded' or iterable statement, in other words if the expressions I use to open a meeting, launch a ship or a marriage were not identifiable as conforming to an iterable model, and therefore if they were not identifiable in a way as 'citation'?" [14] But this iteration is not just at the heart of performative speech, but of all speech. It inscribes writing, the dissolution of continuousness into iterated discrete entities, into the heart of speech [15]. This encompasses writing in the conventional sense, on paper and screen, but also rock carvings and paintings, pottery sheds used for doodles and ostraka, road signs and warnings on fences. Yet it also includes the roads themselves and the fences, landfills, dams, and farms, borders and landmines. Nor does it need to be monumental: iteration is also imposed in any discrete gesture which I repeat because 'it's done that way' or 'I was brought up that way', any footprint I leave in dust or mud, any bottles littering the landscape, any name I give or accept, any social role I play (no matter how badly).*

*Not all of these are iterated to the same extent. My footprint in dust or mud is easily erased. My plastic bottle, on the other hand, will vastly outlive me. Writing in general is a sliding scale of subordination of continuous deixis to discrete iteration. Where a gesture solidifes to the extent that it becomes 'the same' in each new constellation, this gesture gradually sheds its deictic continuousness, its connection to other gestures in a union of egoists, and becomes discrete iteration: writing. At the end of that sliding scale is the written ink mark on page or screen, which is - seemingly - nothing but iterated imposition [16].*

*This means, first, that writing is never simply opposed to deixis, and does not constitute its straightfoward negation. The deictic content of a sentence is still there when it is uttered and even when it is written down in the conventional sense, but now reified as an abstraction. Thus 'a tree' becomes a biological entity to be described and dissected, felled and reforested. By the same token, deixis is never without writing. Even temporarily and tentatively approaching a union of egoists, I impose discrete boundaries on constellations of light and sound. Yet as I repeat this gesture over and over in the same way, I carve 'tree' and 'bear' ever deeper into the continuum of the world; which is to say, I write.*

*This means, secondly, that a feral strategy which is aware that writing inhabits deixis cannot simply claim that speech is closer to deixis and thus needs to be exalted as a remedy. Nor can such a strategy affirm an interiority of thought, nor an immediacy of sensual impression. Appeals to immediacy are, after all, themselves implemented in writing. Thought and speech are both projected, from within written language, as that which is beyond written language.*

*Just as the relation between writing and what is beyond - speech, thought, world - is not a simple negation, so a critique of writing will not consist of a negation of this negation. Rather, it can be implemented as an escalation. "To negate a negation does not bring about its reversal; it proves, rather, that the negation was not negative enough... What is negated is negative until it passed" [17]. Such an escalating negation transposes the script by which writing, in its classical sense, comes to be implemented. Rather than what is written, the escalating negation assays the script itself.*

*In this way, the escalating negation re-inscribes deixis into the core of writing in the classical sense which, because this type of writing is at its heart, constitutes a potentially terminal threat to writing in general. Even if I accepted the authoritarian imposition of this iterated sound (the sharp motion of a 't' followed by 'ree' rolling off the tongue) and this iterated constellation of ink marks ('t-r-e-e') for the living union of egoists, how do I know that this particular set of ink marks, and this particular sound, form a coherent*

*entity? How does their deixis work? How do I know that the shape of a "t" is a 't', how do I know the shape of an "r" is an 'r'? Moreover, how do I know that this scribble right here ('t') is indeed the shape of a "t", and this one here ('r') is that of an "r"? Why do I not apply the same doubts to the coherence of a letter, a syllable, and a word, as I do to a tree, a cow, and my so-called personality and physical integrity [18]?*

*And secondarily: not only is the connection between the set of experiences which deixis might tentatively identify, and its reification as 'a tree', irreducibly questioned. Rendering writing subject to deixis also threatens the integrity of the 'set' here and now. How do I know this particular set of experiences is a discrete entity at all - that these leaves belong to this tree - rather than, say, this other one - where they belong to a nearby shrub - or this third one - where I am strapped into an Oculus Rift? After all, as Gorgias points out, "it is manifest that the same individual does not even perceive similar things" at the same time, "but instead different things by hearing and by sight, and differently now and formerly" [19]. How do I know, except by the authoritarian imposition of iteration, of writing, that these sights and these sounds 'belong to the same entity'?*

*Once these questions are taken seriously, writing is threatened at its core. This A is not the same as this A which is not the same as this A, which means that each dissolves into constituent lines, pointing up, down, and sideways towards their surrounding paper, to the hand holding it, to the knee on which it rests, the perch and plants surrounding me as I jot this down, the sky above me and the river before me, the raindrops connecting them and the pen and again this A and this A and this A, neither dissolved nor disappearing but now thought in their radical individuality, which is simultaneously - but not identically - their union of egoists with paper and river and sky and raindrop, their continuousness within this particular constellation. Each A solidifies, first as I type them now, later, where they form a union of egoists again with the screen and my fingertips and the USB stick and my desk and the stack of books on it, and then as you read them on the screen. Each time, iteration attempts to re-inscribe this A and this A and this A into 'the A' governing all of them, but each time they don't ossify fully, for you, too, now see this A which is not the same as this A, neither of which are any of the previous As, and all of which form unions of egoists with you and the sights and sounds around you; continuous being unfolding in different ways.*

*Destabilizing writing thus destabilizes discrete entities and constitutes a step towards the re-emergence of continuousness. Such re-emergence is not that of a pure tapestry without any imposition. I remain within it, and so do you, and thus so does deixis, and thus so does writing. But I, too, dissolve, and am in continuousness, and continuously "experience the so-called communities we inhabit, or the alchemy of the chemical combinations we ingest, or the people we love, or the wars we wage, or the bacterias in our gut, really any situation or context" [20]. Continuousness is thus not a mythical state before an equally mythical fall, but the recovery of a world always already at my fingertips, concealed by an industrial hellscape.*

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*Notes*

*[0] John Zerzan, Twilight of the Machines (Port Townsend: Feral House, 2008), 5.*

*[1] Ibid, 9.*

*[2] Wolfi Landstreicher, Barbaric Thoughts, via The Anarchist Library, ch. 2.*

*[3] Apio Ludd, "My Worlds and I," in Egoist Ecologies (Greensburg, PA: Enemy Combatant, n.d.), 39.*

*[4] Julian Langer, "An eco-egoist destruction of species-being and speciecism," via The Anarchist Library.*

*[5] Note, too, that this reification is at work not just in industrial civilization's own gestures, but also in all-too-simplistic countercurrents. Cf. on this e.g. Egoist Ecologies, 17-19.*

*[6] This is, of course, the Cartesian challenge of the genius malignus. And just as Descartes did, so contemporary society seeks refuge from this doubt in authority: in Descartes' case, the authority of God; in ours, that of 'adjustment' by whatever means necessary.*

*[7] Gorgias D26b, at 84 (Andre Laks and Glenn Most (eds), Early Greek Philosophy, Vol. VIII (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), 241). There are a lot of difficulties with these passages - not least the fact that they have come down to us in two different traditions, neither of which preserves Gorgias' actual words - but for reasons that should be evident, this doesn't bother me here.*

*[8] Ibid.*

*[9] Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth, 2014), 19-20.*

*[10] Ludwig Wittgenstein's On Certainty comes closest to acknowledging the authoritarian background of this in no. 204, yet somehow continuously misses this particular mark.*

*[11] Hobbes, Leviathan, 21.*

*[12] Which is where Derrida leaves the matter in his "Signature Event Context".*

*[13] Gorgias D26b, at 85, in Laks/Most, Early Greek Philosophy, 241.*

*[14] Jacques Derrida, "Signature Event Context", in Margins of Philosophy (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1982), 326.*

*[15] Hobbes, Leviathan, 26.*

*[16] Ibid, 27.*

*[17] Theodor Adorno, Negative Dialectics (New York: Continuum, 2007), 159-160.*

*[18] It goes without saying that the present text endorses the expanded, or eliminitavist, version of identity, over its narrow-minded econometric incarnation. For more on that, see Egoist Ecologies, 29-31.*

*[19] Gorgias D26a, at 25, in Laks/Most, Early Greek Philosophy, 229.*

*[20] Invecchiare Selvatico, "Living and Breathing Anarchy", in Egoist Ecoligies, 12*

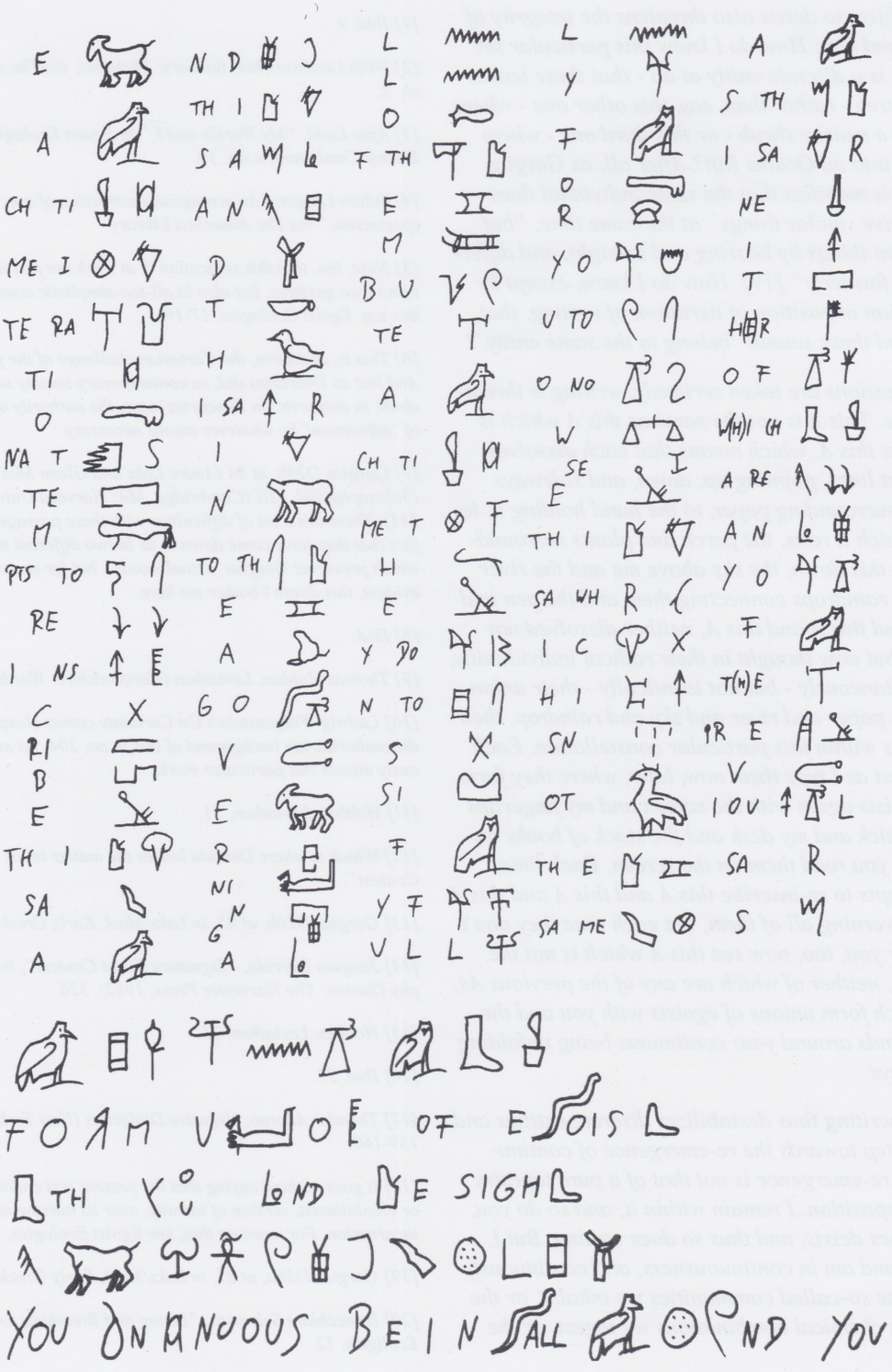
Addendum:

Towards

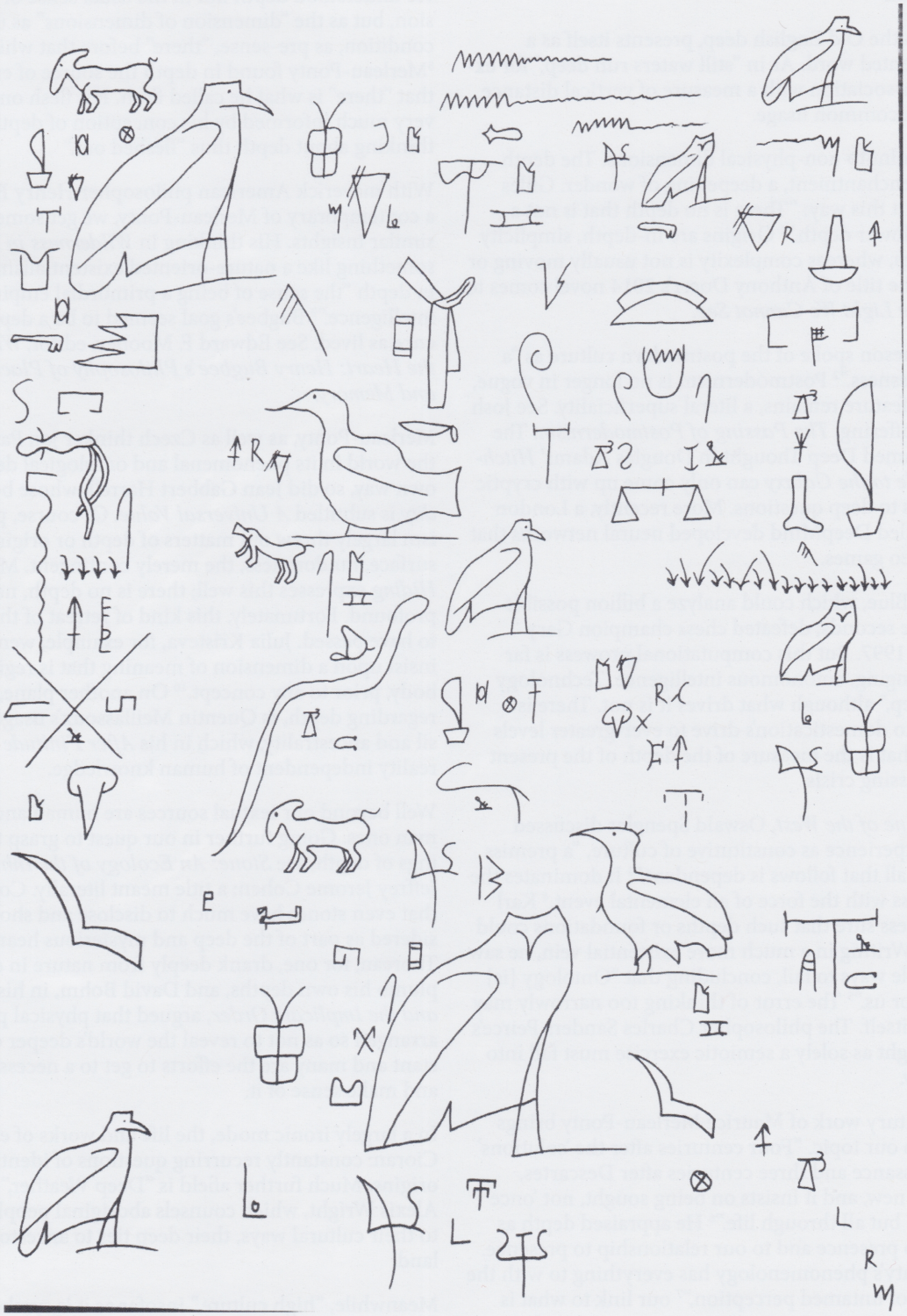
Feral

Writing

One potential way of reestablishing the continuum of deixis and world is a feralization of writing. One might proceed in two steps. First, one might restore polysemy to the imperialism of the Latin alphabet, reintroducing older elements ranging from ancient Phoenician consonant scripts to ancient Mycenaean Linear B and ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphic scripts. Thus one sentence of the preceding text may become a mixture of glyphs



- A second step might then deemphasize the abstract elements and instead emphasize the deictic elements of the alphabet thus created, rendering the text-space of the previously created polysemic alphabet that much more feral -



# From the Deep, to the Depths

-John Zerzan

Depth, from the Old English deep, presents itself as a spatially oriented word. As in "still waters run deep," for example. The association with a measure of vertical distance is certainly a common usage.

It can also point to non-physical dimensions. The depth involved in enchantment, a deepening of wonder. Gilles Deleuze put it this way: "There is no depth that is not a 'seeker' of a lower depth."[1] Origins are in-depth, simplicity of beginnings, whereas complexity is not usually moving or profound. The title of Anthony Doerr's 2014 novel comes to mind: *All the Light We Cannot See*.

Frederic Jameson spoke of the postmodern culture as "a new depthlessness."[2] Postmodernism is no longer in vogue, but this key feature remains, a literal superficiality. See Josh Toth's 2010 offering, *The Passing of Postmodernism*. The computer named Deep Thought in Douglas Adams' *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* can only come up with cryptic non-answers to deep questions. More recently, a London company called DeepMind developed neural networks that can play video games.

IBM's Deep Blue, which could analyze a billion possible moves in five seconds, defeated chess champion Gary Kasparov in 1997. But this computational prowess is far from free-ranging, autonomous intelligence. Technology is the "undeep," although what drives it is not. There is great depth to domestication's drive to ever-greater levels of control. That is the measure of the depth of the present all-encompassing crisis.

In *The Decline of the West*, Oswald Spengler discussed the depth-experience as constitutive of culture, "a premiss upon which all that follows is dependent."[3] It dominates the consciousness with the force of an elemental event.[4] Karl Jaspers was less sure that such depths or foundations could be grasped. Writing in a much more existential vein, he saw many possible ways to fail, concluding that "Ontology [is] impossible for us."[5] The error of thinking too narrowly may also present itself. The philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce's view of thought as solely a semiotic exercise must fall into that category.

The mid-century work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty brings more light to our topic. "Four centuries after the 'solutions' of the Renaissance and three centuries after Descartes, depth is still new, and it insists on being sought, not 'once in a lifetime,' but all through life."[6] He appraised depth as connected to presence and to our relationship to presence. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology has everything to with the "deep world of untamed perception,"[7] our link to what is present in us.

He understood depth not in the usual sense of dimension, but as the "dimension of dimensions" as underlying condition, as pre-sense, "there" before that which is sensed.[8] Merleau-Ponty found in depth the source of embodiment, that "there" is what he called flesh. His flesh ontology is very much informed by his conception of depth, and his thinking about depth thus "fleshed out."

With maverick American philosopher Henry Bugbee, a contemporary of Merleau-Ponty, we get some rather similar insights. His thinking in *Wilderness in America* is something like a nature-oriented existentialism. He found in depth "the sense of being a primordial empirical root of intelligence."[9] Bugbee's goal seemed to be a depth of presence as lived. See Edward F. Mooney, editor, *Wilderness and the Heart: Henry Bugbee's Philosophy of Place, Presence, and Memory.*

Merleau-Ponty, as well as Czech thinker Jan Patocka, saw the world in its phenomenal and ontological depth. In her own way, so did Jean Gabbert Harrell, whose book *Profundity* is subtitled *A Universal Value*. Of course, postmodernism largely threw out matters of depth or origin in favor of surface, randomness, the merely contingent. Mark Taylor's *Hiding* expresses this well; there is no depth, nothing is profound. Fortunately, this kind of retreat of thought seems to have passed. Julia Kristeva, for example, went deep to insist upon a dimension of meaning that is registered in the body, prior to any concept.[10] On another plane, but similar regarding depth, is Quentin Meillassoux's usage of archifossil and ancestrality, which in his *After Finitude* indicate a reality independent of human knowledge.

Well beyond our textual sources are human and non-human ones. Going further in our quest to grasp the meanings of depth, see *Stone: An Ecology of the Inhuman*, by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen; a title meant literally. Cohen argues that even stones have much to disclose and should be considered as part of the deep and mysterious heart of nature. Thoreau, for one, drank deeply from nature in order to plumb his own depths, and David Bohm, in his *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, argued that physical particles are arranged so as not to reveal the world's deeper order. Constant and many are the efforts to get to a necessary depth and make sense of it.

In a largely ironic mode, the life and works of essayist Emil Cioran: constantly recurring questions of identity and origins. Much further afield is "Deep Weather," an essay by Alexis Wright, which counsels aboriginal people to hold on to their cultural ways, their deep ties to ancestors and the land.

Meanwhile, "high culture," insofar as it is symbolic culture, lacks depth. Both Freud and Lacan noted that representation, a core feature of symbolic culture, is a pale and

empty substitute for a relationship with the world. Henry Bugbee cites the example of experiencing birds he sees, "If you counted them, how could you have seen them?"[11] And within the dominant culture, an obvious sense of disillusionment has set in, a time of "post-truth," "as much about losing the past as it is about winning the future."[12]

Bugbee said somewhere that to live humanly is give account of oneself. It has to do with direct and courageous learning, the depth of our experience, including uncertainty and possibly unimagined deep places.

Our comprehension, even when it deepens into intimacy with the real, must remain partial in today's milieu. Intimacy and especially love are matters of depth. The world of technology knows no such depth, and its possible trans-humanist next stage would have no life.

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1 Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, translated by Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp. 234-235.

2 Michael Hardt and Kathi Weeks, eds., *The Jameson Reader* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), p. 193.

3 Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West, vol. 1* (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1929), p. 169.

4 Ibid., p. 173. See also pp. 168, 174, 241.

5 Karl Jaspers, *Philosophy, vol. 3* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1971), p. 140.

6 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind," quoted in Sue L. Cataldi, *Emotion, Depth, and Flesh* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993), p. 29

7 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973), p. 118.

8 Cataldi, op.cit., p. 78.

9 Henry Bugbee, *Wilderness in America* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), p. 59.

10 Discussed in Ruth Ronen, *Representing the Real* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002), e.g. p. 38.

11 Henry Bugbee, *The Inward Morning* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1999) p. 227.

12 Herman Paul and Adriaan van Veldhuizen, eds., *Post-Everything: An Intellectual History of Post-Concepts* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2021), Epilogue, p. 246.

# THE PLAGUE OF FALSE LIBERATION: JACOBY'S *ON DIVERSITY*

**Russell Jacoby *On Diversity: The Eclipse of the Individual in a Global Era* 2020, Seven Stories NY, NY Reviewed by Steve Kirk**

In the recent 2021 Holberg "Debate" critical theorist Judith Butler ended by implying that her view of personal freedom had changed dramatically in the COVID era and that, because we all breathe the same air and are enmeshed in the same reality, we must all behave according to some communal standard. "I'm a little more skeptical of personal liberty these days," says Butler. Perhaps even this desire for personal liberty is a form of liberalism motivated by a "death drive" that is typified in villains like Trump. In fact, Butler claims, these ideas of "personal liberty" push a certain kind of "individualism" that "refuses regulations" based on an idea of "egoism" that doesn't acknowledge the "deep ways" in which "we are connected to each other." Butler, not an anarchist by any definition, never mentions how these mutually desirable codes of conduct will be constructed or what bureaucratic institution will create them -- hold on, I bet it's The Science -- but such droll concerns are for conservative naysayers. Why would anyone be concerned with the "biosecurity state" as Agamben calls it (Butler acknowledges Agamben in rhetoric, but not by name, only to toss his concerns aside immediately in a mealymouthed dance of hands and neurotic blinking)? In this latest episode of deep and penetrating irony however, it is the totality itself, in its relentless push for homogenization and concomitant cultural destruction, which creates the preconditions for such a denial of the individual. Butler's thoughtless display and mental acrobatics to conform to the cultural milieu of leftist academic culture is noteworthy only because of its possible impact. Butler delivers the inane gospel of the biofascist science-worshipping leftist goons in her classic obtuse and confusing formulation. Her brilliance is either assumed or not, no proof is given, but for those who accept her superior reasoning powers she may serve as convenient priestess for the new class war disguised as well-meaning therapeutic collectivism. What more could be expected from a group which eschews family and organic community for a life of relentless and groundless criticism of these already crumbling institutions -- all while play-acting about fighting the centers of power?

It is worth starting here because the reach of Jacoby's book is beyond that of simply "diversity" and runs deep into the questions which have plagued Jacoby's branch of critical theory since his initial interrogations of "conformist psychology" in the 1970s. Jacoby has never been able to suffer, it seems to me at least, the fake radicalism of counter-culture warriors who never seem to grasp the very dogmas

*Jacoby Continued:*

they supposedly rebel against. As a result, and perhaps because of his deep respect for and influence from Adorno, Jacoby sees many ideas of the dominant leftist milieu as products of the totality which offer no real resistance to or analysis of that dominating reality.

Jacoby's *On Diversity* is less about the culture war issue of "diversity" and more about, as the subtitle puts it, *The Eclipse of the Individual in a Global Era*. While Jacoby does not address COVID and he may even agree with Butler's invocation of anti-individual pandemic restrictions, he gets at the core of what Butler ignores: the individual's disintegration is a product of the global hegemony machine. This disintegration is anything but liberation. What Butler mistakes as a turn towards communalism is a byproduct of capital's relentless destruction of the idiosyncratic, of authentic diversity itself. In the end this idea of personal liberty Butler is responding to doesn't even exist, it is a political figment of her imagination. The "fascists" she fears are her brothers in commodity and technology. Jacoby helps clarify this reality by asking an obvious question: "Globalization knits the world together into one vast market. We become more alike -- and simultaneously we proclaim our differences. Can both be true?"(1)



Leaving aside Butler (who Jacoby subtly savages in an endnote on page 184), Jacoby is out to make an argument against the jargon of diversity. He is concerned with homogenization. Homogenization in clothing, language, culture, politics, in all facets of human existence. Jacoby's concern with homogenization is a long-running one, his book *Bloodlust* focused on the link between fraternalism and violence and particularly the rise in cultural homogenization and the concomitant rise in mass violence and genocide. Jacoby, most famous for his study *The Last Intellectuals*, shows remarkable consistency in his work, going back to his Freudian days of the 1970s, though his style has become a bit more reserved and personal.

"We do not hear complaints from the Amish or Hasidic Jews of underrepresentation,"(3) points out Jacoby in his typical cutting tone. The modern jargon of diversity is dependent on an assumption of assimilation and sameness. Jacoby tells us that "individual, not group, diversity" is his concern. He continues to clarify that "Diversity in its multiple incarnations turns hollow if the individuals are becoming not less, but more alike."

Jacoby takes us through brilliant passages of Walter Benjamin and chronicles the death of diversity in language and fashion. The trend lines all so startlingly clear that it is a wonder this book feels so novel, few remnants of the critical-theory-left have stood the test of unrelenting wave of sameness and the desiccation of life. Jacoby, while always tip-toeing in an embarrassing way around conservative writers and technology (he clearly fears the label of luddite), does manage to reveal the obvious price of technophilic culture when he observes that "the demise of quiet boredom impedes unfettered curiosity. To experience diversity depends on the ability to step out of the self and to imagine -- and embrace -- the world" (92). How can one do this if living is mediated through the screen, through the Oculus, through the ever-expanding life-denying gadgets of Late Civilization? Jacoby also draws the line from decline in biodiversity to decline in human diversity, a sobering and retrospectively obvious correlation. "Everywhere industrial capital lays waste to the variety of the natural world and undercuts the individual. Meanwhile, the diversity cheerleaders schedule another celebration." (27)

One of the joys of reading Jacoby is that he is almost evenly enlightening and infuriating, that is to say he has vigor and importance in his words. They are words meant to be understood and wrestled with. When Jacoby tells us that "Marxism has retreated to graduate seminars where professors serve gluten-free gibberish to aspiring professors" (26) he is inviting us to disagree, to walk wide-eyed into this area of thought. In fact, his example uses Foucault and Agamben in an interrogation of the biopolitics that I find relevant to our current predicament, as you might guess from my opening critique of Butler. But even here Jacoby says something undeniable, he is not critiquing the ideas in this "gibberish", he is laying waste to the pretense that something radical motivates any of it. "Today the specter is a specter of itself and political diversity turns ghostly. Evidently political differences exist, but the register has narrowed." (26) Who in good faith can disagree?

Jacoby wrote, in 1975, in his classic *Social Amnesia* that the modern mind can no longer "think thought" but only locate it in space and time. As thought has been transformed into a commodity, and the individual has become eclipsed by group orientation and membership to an appendage association of the totality, the political consequences have been racking up with few to even notice, much less care. We now live in a time of fake diversity and all-too-real thoughtlessness. Jacoby has done a service dispelling the nonsense jargon of diversity in a world of near ubiquitous technological domination. He offers us no solutions. He puts it rather bleakly in his epilogue that "The path forward is not clear. Every solution is the wrong one. Nevertheless, it is better to see the situation for what it is than to pretend it is something else." (180) I couldn't agree more.

# ESCAPING THE NARRATIVE MACHINE: JASON RODGER'S MICROPOLITICAL WAR AGAINST THE TOTALITY

**Jason Rodgers *Invisible Generation: Rants, Polemics, and Critical Theory Against the Planetary Work Machine* 2021, Autonomedia Brooklyn, NY. Reviewed by Steve Kirk**

Jason Rodgers is prolific. Anyone on his mailing list knows that Jason's commitment to low-tech information warfare -- often including posters, collages, and zines – yields him a significant advantage over the conformist high-tech communication robots. As such it is encouraging to see a book-length compilation of Rodger's work.

Rodger's new book combines all the best features of Rodgers' writing: rants, polemics, essays and scanned copies of flyers and collages (often containing their own rants or brief essays). It is difficult to easily characterize Rodgers' perspective, he is consistently anti-technology and occasionally borders on a kind of primitivism. But equally he is fascinated by the occult and critical theory. This makes reading Rodgers a joy, the reader never knows what exactly comes next. There are plenty of recurrent themes however: the destruction of radical possibility by the consumption of radicalism itself, a stand against destruction of the self and the individual, and a distrust of all dominant political tendencies.

"The sterilization, commodification, and repackaging of radical concepts as lifestyle brand accessories is inevitable. Thus it is necessary to keep moving, exploring new terrain or become trapped by this process." (27) How do we resist a totality which engulfs and consumes its very critics? Rodgers is aimed at the right target. However, Rodgers' sometimes preoccupation with psychic resistance – which carries an inevitable ambiguity – seems to blind him from other possibilities rooted in geography and daily interaction. While Rodgers is right that "claiming acquaintances as friends merely degrades them", the conclusion that it is "better to be a lone wolf than a collaborator" is painfully vague and carries with it, in its logical extensions, absurd conclusions. If all actions with anyone but "actual friends" are relegated to a category of interaction without possibility, where you "would just rather shove them" than interact from a place of commonality and empathy – a place where you assume and create the anarchy you want an interaction to inhabit – there seems to be little in the way of hope for any future anarchic community. Then again, these are rants and who hasn't felt the overbearing reality that in their "daily life" they "have almost no friends" and that the masses "feel like nothing more than sheep." (53) The feeling, all too real, is in the end perhaps one we should not give in to. It may be the case that this disillusion comes partly from the plague of leftism in anarchy, which has destroyed many souls. As Rodgers succinctly puts it: "Anarchy has done more than enough for the left. What has the left done for anarchy? Nothing." (98)

There is more to the book than can easily be summarized here. A review of "right-wing" nihilist Nick Land, cogent and important thoughts on Stirner and Rojava, an analysis of transgressive art, a Bob Blackian hit piece on Jon Bekken of the *Anarcho-Syndicalist Review*, and plenty more. The book is broad in its total grasp but refreshingly narrow and thorough in its particular analyses.

A curious point of, perhaps subtle, disagreement arrives in the essay "Technical Authority: Ideology, the Social Construction of Technology and Technocracy", an interesting and well-read overview of technological critique, short as it may be. The part of the text I'm going to look at also appears verbatim in the essay, also in the book, "Command Lines Control Lines", save the last line of the quote. "Technical Authority" opens with this observation: "Technology reproduces the ideology of the totality. As a technology proliferates it changes the people and communities that use it, in subtle but total ways. This point should not be confused with technological determinism. Technology is socially constructed. Technology doesn't produce society. Society produces technology and technology then reproduces society." (104, all following quotations unmarked come from this essay) Now, the essays in this collection are not marked by year so I cannot pinpoint if this is an old or new idea for Rodgers (the most recent citation is 2008 in "Technical Authority" and 2011 in "Command Lines") but given it appears twice I'll take it as important. When Rodgers says that "technology doesn't produce society" he is of course correct, but then again nothing can "produce" society, society exists as a prerequisite (on some scale) for the existence of the very conversation about society. Society therefore produces technology, but technology cannot produce society because it is not a thing, it is a system of relationships (which animates the materiality of technology).



The "production" of society is a mechanical metaphor for the changing of social relationships as determined by the actual production of technology. That this determinism is not teleological should be obvious, it does not exist on a plane of preordination. By perverting our very essence as a being-in-the-world it exists in an even more insidious dimension where choice and meaning dissolve their importance in willing subservience to, and enclosure by, the technological structure.

Technology, by including and precluding ways of being in the world, necessitates a negative accumulation, similar to Ivan Illich's concept of "counterproductivity." Technological interaction determines how we are a being-in-the-world, the most fundamental essence of existence. In its expansion it erases ways of being and doing. Rodgers indeed makes this clear when he says, "In a technological society it becomes impossible to live autonomously." Impossibility implies there is a certain kind of determinism at work. When Rodgers says "The object changes a person as they use it, allowing them to do certain things and eliminate the need to do others" he is hinting at negative accumulation. But it misses the mark, it does not eliminate "the need" it eliminates *the way* of doing (existing) and, as such, eliminates ways of being. That is to say: it determines our way of being (and not being) in the world. Does it determine society? Well if society is a precondition for human collective existence, which I believe it is under some definition, and if technology determines how we exist in relationship to the world, then at the basic level of being alive technology is deterministic and, it would logically follow, determines the very undergirding of any and all societies. That there is flux and input from humans misses the experiential determinism of technological use. In fact, Rodgers already admits this when he says technology changes people in "subtle *but total* ways"(emphasis mine).

In determinism generally we are talking about the weight of influence on those human relations we call society, such that they change the nature of that productive unit, in the sense of physical production and not production-as-metaphor. As such, it is entirely appropriate to say human life is largely determined by technology. Rodgers quotes Wolfi Landstreicher to emphasize that technology's effect is determined by "its context" but such a banal observation tells us nothing about the inevitability of any technology to determine the relationships of humans that we call society. Technology does not exist as society does. Again, society, meaning humans living together in mutual understanding of reality for my purposes, is not akin to technology. A handful of stranded humans on an island will have a society, they will not necessarily have technology. Since absolute self-sufficiency is a clear myth and humans overwhelmingly live in society (the hermit being the exception which proves the rule), the throwing away of deterministic language makes no sense beyond being deterred by its implications – a thing's uncomfortable implications do not falsify the thing, despite the tendency to view theory in this way. That humans exist in the feedback of technology is obvious, it is a human invention after all (baring an alien explanation), but that says nothing of the results of that feedback. As Jacques Ellul reminds us, "reality is itself a combination of determinisms, and freedom consists in overcoming and transcending these determinisms." And lest anyone believe that my advocating for a deterministic view of technology is anti-freedom we need nearly remember that "freedom is not static but dynamic; not a vested interest but a price continually won." (Ellul, *The Technological Society*)To deny that we are suffocating under this blatant technological totality, to say that it is somehow changing us totally but is not a deterministic force upon us is to underestimate our common enemy, even if you conceive of freedom in terms unlike Ellul's.

But this rather obscure point of mine shouldn't be taken too seriously. After all Rodgers is attacking technology and sees no way of liberation that doesn't involve the collapse of modern technology. So we are in agreement politically, even if we see the nature of being alive in different ways. Which is an easy segue to Rodgers' refreshing tolerance of other ideas. He is "allergic to dogma" and, I might add, allergic to the purveyors of dogma.

It is interesting to note that Rodgers' typical references to Freudian, anti-Freudian and psycho-analytical critical theory revolve around Deleuze, Reich, Laing, Foucault, some of the usual suspects for an anarchist (and the left). When it comes to the interpretation of the asylum and psychiatric domination Rodgers perhaps does too little to condemn the humanistic and progressive roots of this scourge. When we turn to Laing and other "radical" psychiatrists and psychoanalysts we are assured of their innate radicalism but historically it has been these "radical" reform movements which have invigorated the institutional bearers of medical authority.

Rodgers tells us the obvious: "There is something that strikes me as authoritarian in the notion that certain modes of thought are objectively sick. Ideally the notion of neurodiversity should mean something more than begging for pity." (161) But what is "neuro-diversity" anyway? In a world of homogeneity, it strikes me that neuro-diversity is nothing more than a catalog of diverging symptoms arising from the same illness. There is no authentic diversity within the totality, only the managing of response typologies.

Rodgers uses Laing's interpretation of "normal", which until some point in the 19th century simply referred to construction existing at a right angle to something else – more akin to "plum" or "level" than a popular diagnostic of individual character -- to understand the pathology beneath therapeutic diagnosis. Ultimately however humanistic policies (including Laing's) of reform reconfigured traditional patriarchal structures to a superstructure of state-corporate paternalism animated by a so-called medical reality. My point is one of emphasis rather than disagreement. Crucially Rodgers see the crux in the development of the asylum and psychiatric and medical domination as industrialization itself.

When Rodgers says that "much of the radical scene is little more than a live action role-playing game" (58) he invariably indicts both the strategy and "praxis" of modern

radicalism but also call into question the category of critical theory itself. After all, there must be some relatively contemporary antecedents to this reality of de facto capitulation. A reality, it might be noted, more self-evident than ever. Between the play-acting of "autonomous zones" or the performative street battles of the last few years (believing that an aesthetic mimicry of Exarcheia could yield some level of authentic resistance?) there is much evidence this problem has intensified.

And here we find the problem of reviewing such a broad and excellent book: too many things to say. I have merely scratched the surface of the topics discussed. I could write a thousand more words on each essay and still have much more to say. Biting tone and bright humor mark the pages of Rodgers' work, along with something that is typically assumed to be absent in contemporary times: authenticity. Here's to more psychic warfare by cut and paste collage!

# *Regression*

-John Zerzan

To regress is to step back, go backward, from the Latin *regredi.* For my purposes, in social terms, it means an erosion of what was, a forgetting of what was once known. This takes many forms and has been under way for some time.

In 1979 Christopher Lasch offered a study in regression, *The Culture of Narcissism: Amerian Life in An Age of Diminishing Expectation*s. From the erosion of competence and autonomy to the fixation on celebrity, already there was what he summed up as "a dying culture." And this was before the tech explosion of PCs, smartphones, etc., the increasing artificiality of life and the dehumanization of human existence in the name of technological progress.

The techno world itself as regressive, regression as a defense of the self. We see a variety of childishness in popular culture, a host of irrational projections, including conspiracy "thinking" on both the right and the left. When nothing is trusted anything goes, and regression is the easy path. Memory condemns the present, so there's much less historical memory on offer.

Instead of resistance to the environmental catastrophe now arriving on all fronts, the regressive mode now takes the form of "resilience" or adaptation. Not facing what's at stake, but adjusting, accepting defeat. Not even the very inadequate environmental reform gestures are pushed much anymore.

A cultural marker of regression was the endless deferral of meaning involved in Deconstruction. As practiced by Jacques Derrida and others, assertions are subjected to examination and re-examined to the point of fragmentation. Meaning is thereby destabilized, made indeterminate.[2]

Jean Baudrillard carried this regression even further, denying the very existence of a reference ground to meaning. He proclaimed the age of the simulacrum, the copy for which there is no original.[3] Virtual Reality may be the perfect product of this worldlessness, a condition of existence that is itself virtual.

Hegel criticized Kant for imposing a priori standards for knowledge. Hegel asserted that standards arise from experience and are not fixed prior to experience. But what is "experience" now? What has happened to it? How much depth and substance does it have? Is there experience in cyberspace?

Despair, anger, hopelessness mark our crisis, with the pandemic deepening a flight from reality: e.g. UFO sightings are way up. Loneliness and isolation are also on the rise, as networks of support shrink. An Associated Press story (June 10, 2021) reported that almost 50 million Americans have only one person, or no-one they can turn to in an emergency. Fewer friends, fewer parties. The planet overheats; human warmth ebbs.

But there may yet be another side of regression. To go back to a more primitive place, to stop Progress and instead to regress is exactly, literally, what's needed. "You can't go back!" is the common, insistent objection, but regress we must.

Civilizations regress, and disappear. This last, universal civilization, on an unmistakably suicidal path, has to go.

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1 Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in An Age of Diminishing Expectations* ( New York: Warner Books, 1978), p. 396.

2 Douglas Burnham, "The Buck Stops Here: Deconstruction and the Regression of Authorisation," in Jonathon Dromfield and Nick Midgley, eds., *Responsibilities of Deconstruction* (Warwick Journal of Philosophy, June 1997).

3 Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1983).



# NO GODS, NO MASTERS: NO THANKS

By Bob Black

*No Gods, No Masters: An Anthology of Anarchism.* Edited by Daniel Guérin. Oakland, CA & Edinburgh, Scotland: AK Press and London: Kate Sharpley Library, 2005.[1]

What is conspicuous about this long book (699 pp.) is its narrow scope: geographical, temporal, linguistic and philosophical. It was originally published, in French, in four volumes, in 1980. It begins with a bang (Max Stirner) but ends in a whimper (Federica Montseny, one of the anarchists who became a government minister during the Spanish Revolution). She is given, in 1980, an opportunity to reply to her critics of 1938.[2] Except for that, the book ends in 1938 – implying that, so did anarchism. The final chapter is about "Anarcho-Syndicalism in Government." Who could take seriously an anarchism whose historical climax, according to this book, is anarcho-syndicalism *in government*? AK Press often publishes books which are calculated to discredit anarchism, not to promote or explicate it. Even more often, it publishes books which are explicitly Marxist, Leninist, nationalist, racist, sexist or authoritarian.[3]

The authors anthologized are all deceased white continental Europeans. All, except for Montseny, are men. Some women have made significant contributions to anarchism, although Montseny isn't one of them.[4] Even British authors are excluded. The anthology should properly have begun with William Godwin, as did George Woodcock's history of anarchism.[5] Godwin remains unsurpassed in comprehensiveness. If he has never had the influence he should have, that is in part because he has been ignored by anarcho-leftist publishers such as AK Press. Max Stirner, too, has not had much influence until recently.[6] The British anarchist tradition is rich. To some extent, Peter Kropotkin inspired it. An anthology of classical anarchism should, in 699 pages, find room for Charlotte Wilson, Herbert Read, Alex Comfort, George Woodcock, Colin Ward, and Nicolas Walter – or some of them. If their leftist orthodoxy is suspected, no such suspicion attaches to Vernon Richards, Albert Meltzer and Stuart Christie. The anthology is Eurocentric, even Gallocentric. Even the texts by Russians such as Bakunin and Kropotkin were written in western Europe in French or English.

Italian anarchism is also inadequately represented. Inevitably, Errico Malatesta is included, in snippets, but not by "Anarchists Have Forgotten Their Principles" (1914) and "Pro-Government Anarchists" (1916) – his critiques of pro-war, pro-government anarchists such as Kropotkin and Jean Grave.[7] Italian anarchists as impeccably orthodox as Luigi Galleani, and as peccably orthodox as Renzo Novatore, do not appear. Among contemporaries, Alfredo Bonanno does not appear (which is just as well).

American anarchism is ignored. Josiah Warren, Henry David Thoreau, Lysander Spooner, Stephen Pearl Andrews, Jo Labadie, and Benjamin Tucker – maybe the editor never heard of them or, if he did, dismissed them as "individualists" or something.[8] But it would not be possible, for that reason, to dismiss Voltairine de Cleyre, Albert Parsons, Emma Goldman, G.P. Maximoff, Alexander Berkman, Rudolph Rocker, and Paul Goodman. Although his omission is probably out of ignorance, Murray Bookchin will not be missed. Neither will Guérin's publicist Chomsky.

There's a clear bias – this is why AK Press is the publisher – against any who might be considered "individualist" anarchists. The concept of individualist anarchism had

1 Volume I of the translation was apparently first published in 1998 by AK Press. Ruth Kinna, *Anarchism: A Beginner's Guide* (Oxford, England: OneWorld, 2005), 40 n. 13.

2 Her defense consisted of this. First: she and her fellow government anarchists were victims "of circumstances, always stronger than men's will," and of "historical necessity" – as if somebody held guns to their heads. "A Would-Be Justification," in *No Gods, No Masters, 659, and "Federica Montseny Sets the Record Straight,"* 671 ("compelled by circumstances to take up government portfolios"). Why have I never been compelled by circumstances to take up a government portfolio? Second: she has learned her lesson: she won't do it again. Ibid., 675. She never got the chance. As of that time, at least Spanish organizationalist anarchists had not arrived at "a clear conclusion" that the participation in government was an error. Juan Gómez Casa, *Anarchist Organisation: The History of the F.A.I., trans. Abe Bluestein* (Montréal, Quebec, Canada: Black Rose Books, 1986), 251; see also Vernon Richards, *Lessons of the Spanish Revolution (1936-1939)* (London: Freedom Press, 1972), Part II.

3 Bob Black, "Class Struggle Social Democrats, or, The Press of Business," *Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed* No. 64 (Fall/Winter 2007): 26-29, available online at www.theanarchistlibrary.org.

4 These include, in addition to Emma Goldman – an inexcusable omission – Louise Michel, Lucy Parsons, Charlotte Wilson, and Voltairine de Cleyre. Kinna, *Anarchism: A Beginner's Guide,* 13.

5 *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements* (Cleveland, OH: Meridian Books, 1962), ch. 1.

6 But in the 1890s, anarchists searching for their forebears found, among others, Stirner. Even the Marxist George Plekhanov (an ex-anarchist) could write: "Max Stirner has a legitimate right to the title of the father of anarchism." Quoted in *Max Stirner: The Ego and His Own,* ed. John Carroll (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1974), 26.

7 *Malatesta: Life & Ideas,* comp. & ed. Vernon Richards (London: Freedom Press, 1965), 243-251.

8 See James J. Martin, *Men Against the State: The Expositors of Individualist Anarchism in America, 1827-1908* (DeKalb, IL: The Adrian Allen Associates, 1953); William Reichert, *Partisans of Freedom: A Study in American Anarchism* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green University Press, 1976); Rudolf Rocker, *Pioneers of American Freedom: Origin of Liberal and Radical Thought in America* (Los Angeles, CA: Rocker Publishing Committee, 1949), Part II; Eunice Minette Schuster, *Native American Anarchism: A Study of Left Wing American Individualism* (Port Townsend, WA: Loompanics Unlimited, 1983) (originally published 1932). Guerin had, however, heard of Parsons, Goldman, Berkman and Rocker. Daniel Guérin, "Bibliography," *Anarchism: From Theory to Practice,* trans. Mary Klopper (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970), 161, 162.

some content in the 19th century. Its proponents were *not* those people now called anarcho-capitalists, who did not exist then. Individualist anarchists were anti-capitalist. Benjamin Tucker called himself a no-state socialist. Jo Labadie had been a union organizer, a member of the Knights of Labor, which was something of a precursor to the Industrial Workers of the World. In Europe, the so-called individualist anarchists were mostly working class, and often dedicated to violent class struggle. Emile Henry, a bomb-throwing anarchist, is accorded five pages in the anthology. Guérin could not have been ignorant of the large *French* individualist anarchist literature, if he was aware of Henry. Recently a large anthology of this literature, in English translation, has been published.[9] Even someone far less knowledgeable about French anarchism than was Guérin, namely, myself, was able to include Octave Mirbeau, "Voters' Strike!" in an anthology I co-edited.[10] I hoped that it would be reprinted in the English language anarchist press. It wasn't.

I, of all people, am not calling for compulsory diversity. It may be that no Korean or African or Latin American anarchist writings have the stature of, say, the writings of Nestor Makhno or Fernand Pelloutier (who are anthologized here) -- although I doubt it. Most of those materials were probably not readily available to Guérin; but, I doubt that he sought them out. I've seen examples. I'm sure that something by the Mexican anarchist Ricardo Flores Magon might even exceed the high standards set by Nestor Makhno and Federica Montseny. But the editor could not be unaware of the anarchist writings of Leo Tolstoy, or of a book such as John Henry Mackay, *The Anarchists*.[11] Guérin could scarcely have believed that between 1938 and 1980, no anarchists anywhere wrote anything worth anthologizing. If so, this anthology is just a collection of quaint, antiquated ideas.

In addition to its poor editorial decisions, which are too numerous for further discussion, the anthology is fundamentally flawed in its very structure. Almost all its texts are brief excerpts. The book is like a tourist guidebook to an imaginary country called Anarchism. There is only space for ideas to be declaimed, not discussed. Even Bakunin, whose rhetorical excesses fit only too well into this book, is not as exclusively bombastic as he comes across here.

It may be impossible to do justice to anarchism in an anthology, but you could hardly do worse than here. The only way to do that, would be to publish an anthology under a title such as *The Anarchists* where most of the contributors are not anarchists – such as Fyodor Dostoyevsky and Philip Selznick -- and some of them, such as Joseph Conrad, are writing to refute or caricature anarchism. This book exists.[12] Unfortunately, so does *No Gods, No Masters*.

The conception and execution of this anthology involved a considerable measure of ignorance and ineptitude. In fact, the editor seems to say that it was compiled in haste, as a "reshuffled text," a salvage job.[13] I have reason to suspect that some of the translations are poor, but, I am not competent to go into that. Guérin boasts: "Attention has been focused on the great masters: and those we have considered their second-rate epigones have been left out."[14] A wise decision, but why leave out their *first-rate* epigones? I daresay that Benjamin R. Tucker, Leo Tolstoy, Emma Goldman, and Paul Goodman are, if not "great masters," at least, really first-rate epigones. It is also a bit difficult to recognize, as great masters, James Guillaume, César de Paepe, Diego Abad de Santillán, and – once again – Nestor Makhno and Federica Montseny.

Guérin, like too many currently prominent anarchists, has a checkered (Cheka?) past – he is a former Stalinist. I'm not questioning the sincerity of his eventual espousal of anarchism. However, Murray Bookchin sincerely espoused anarchism – for awhile -- and Noam Chomsky sincerely espouses anarchism[15] but they were mistaken. A pure heart is no substitute for an empty head. The fundamental flaw is the anthology's overt leftist ideological agenda, as stated by Guérin, ingenuously, himself. He thinks, condescendingly, that he is "re-opening the case for examination" – that is, the Marxist case against anarchism, which, without even bothering with the usual show trial, found the anarchists guilty on all counts: "For in fact it seems that anarchy's constructive ideas are alive and well and that they can, provided they are re-examined and held up to critical scrutiny, help contemporary socialist thinking to strike out in new directions."[16] Even Alexandre Skirda, a severely leftist anarchist (a "Platformist"), derided Guèrin's attempt "to marry anarchism and Marxism" as "chalk and cheese": "To this end he devised a "libertarian Marxism, praising it to the skies."[17]

This was exactly what Guérin said previously, in his book *Anarchism: From Theory to Practice*, as summarized by the stupidest of all current anarchist geniuses, Noam Chomsky:

9 *Disruptive Elements: The Extremes of French Anarchism* (Berkeley, CA: Ardent Press, 2014).

10 *Rants and Incendiary Tracts: Voices of Desperate Illumination, 1558 to Present,* ed. Bob Black & Adam Parfrey (New York: Amok Press & Port Townsend, WA: Loompanics Unlimited, 1989), 74-78 (Mirbeau as freely translated by Hakim Bey).

11 John Henry Mackay, *The Anarchists: A Portrait of Civilization at the Close of the Nineteenth Century*, trans. George Schumm (Boston, MA: Benjamin R. Tucker, Publisher, 1891), available online at www.theanarchistlibrary.org.

12 *The Anarchists,* ed. Irving Louis Horowitz (New York: Dell Books, 1964). But the book has a good introduction. It is listed in Guérin, "Bibliography," 161.

13 "Foreword," *No Gods, No Masters,* 1.

14 "Foreword," *No Gods, No Masters,* 3.

15 Bob Black, *Anarchy after Leftism* (Columbia, MO: C.A.L. Press, 1997), ch. 10 & passim (Bookchin); Bob Black, "Chomsky on the Nod," *Defacing the Currency: Selected Writings, 1992-2012* (Berkeley, CA: LBC Books, 2013), 61-172. I am not alone in doubting Chomsky's anarchism. George Woodcock, "Noam Chomsky's Anarchism" *Anarchism and Anarchists (*Kingston, Ontario, Canada: Quarry Press, 1992), 224-28; John Zerzan, "Who Is Chomsky?" *Running on Emptiness: The Pathology of Civilization* (Los Angeles, CA: Feral House, 2002), 140-43; David Watson, "The Failure of Civilization & the Failure of Noam Chomsky," *Against the Megamachine: Essays on Empire & Its Enemies* (Brooklyn: Autonomedia & Detroit: Fifth Estate, n.d. [1999?]), 75-179. Bookchin renounced anarchism. Chomsky should do that too.

16 "Foreword," 3.

17 Alexandre Skirda, *Facing the Enemy: A History of Anarchist Organization from Proudhon to May 1968* (trans. Paul Sharkey (Edinbrgh, Scotland & Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2002), 176. Skirda apparently knew Guérin.

> Daniel Guérin has undertaken what he has called a "process of rehabilitation" of Marxism. He argues, convincingly I believe, that "the constructive ideas of anarchism retain their validity, that they may, when re-examined and sifted, assist contemporary socialist thought, to undertake a new departure . . . and contribute to enriching Marxism." . . . . This is natural and proper.[18]

In other words, for Guérin, as for Chomsky, the only value of anarchism is to rehabilitate or enrich socialism or Marxism. That anarchism might be an *alternative* to socialism, Marxism, leftism, liberalism, etc., never occurred to either of them. Socialism is the entrée; anarchism is just a condiment. Changing metaphors: anarchism is cosmetics for socialism with a human face. Or as Guérin elsewhere put it: "By taking a bath in anarchism, today's Marxism can emerge cured of its pustules and regenerated."[19] Too bad Marat didn't take the cure. We have AK Press, and its spinoff, PM Press, and doctrinaire punk leftist periodicals like *Maximum Rock 'n' Roll*, to thank for ruining anarchism's historical opportunity, after the demise of European Communism, to liquidate (as the Marxists might say) Marxism in theory as in practice. We might have come forward as what we have always been, the only real revolutionaries. Some of us attempted that.[20]



Notwithstanding his solicitude for Max Stirner,[21] this is true: "Guérin, an ex-Marxist, understands anarchism – as does Chomsky – in the most Marxist possible way, considering that these theories are irreconcilable."[22] George Woodcock also believed that Guérin and Chomsky were left Marxists who were cherry-picking anarchism for "those elements which may serve to diminish the contradictions in Marx's doctrines."[23]

If there is reason to believe that Guérin was not well-informed about anarchism – and there is -- there is also reason to suspect that he was not very bright. The Situationists contemptuously referred to him as "one of our famous intellectuals, and a libertarian at that." His pamphlet on Algeria (1965) reveals Guérin to have had a fatuous faith in the revolutionary virtue of the deposed nationalist dictator, Ben Bella, whom he found to be charismatic: "Whether they are partisans of the self-managing masses or of police-state bureaucracies, the 'leftist intellectuals' of the period from which we are just emerging [wishful thinking] always have the same awestruck admiration for power and government."[24] By 1970 – perhaps after reading this – Guérin, although still idealizing Algerian and Yugoslav "self-management," conceded: "These good intentions are far from being carried out in practice. In these countries self-management is coming into being in the framework of a dictatorial, military, police state whose skeleton is formed by a single party.[25] At the helm there is an authoritarian and paternalistic authority which is beyond control and above criticism."[26]

A really good anarchist anthology might be difficult to assemble. I know that there have been other anthologies. I have read several, which I am not now evaluating. In fact, I have now edited, for publication in Russian translation, n anthology of Western anarchism since 1945. But if it is difficult to assemble a really good anarchist anthology, that is no excuse for assembling a really bad one. The Hippocratic Oath begins: "First, do no harm." Anarchism has no more reason to "enrich" or to "rehabilitate" socialism than to "enrich" or "rehabilitate" capitalism or fascism.[27] Anarchists, if they understand anarchism (some do not), reject socialism and capitalism. First and foremost, they reject the state. Marxists, even "libertarian" Marxists, do not. You have to get that right *first*. Working out some of the implications, can be difficult. But some of it is easy. [28]

18 Noam Chomsky, *Chomsky on Anarchism,* ed. Barry Pateman (Edinburgh, Scotland & Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2005), 128, quoted in "Chomsky on the Nod," 130. Chomsky, who is published mainly by AK Press these days, provided a back cover blurb for the Guérin anthology.

19 Quoted in Skirda, *Facing the Enemy,* 176.

20 Jason McQuinn (letter to Bob Black, March 11, 2018) thinks that I "give much, too much credit to AK, PM and MRR for the effectiveness of their projects." Post-left critiques, he says, are effective when they are encountered – I hope so, but there remain almost no places to encounter them. The historical damage was done by the left a century earlier. But if anarchism has never recovered, it is because most of it is part of the left. That is usually the public face of anarchism when first encountered.

21 Guérin, *Anarchism*; see Black, "Chomsky on the Nod," 76-77 & nn. 35-36.

22 Black, "Chomsky on the Nod." 76-77.

23 Woodcock, "Chomsky's Anarchism," 228, quoted in Black, "Chomsky on the Nod," 77 n. 36, and in Kinna, *Anarchism*.

24 "The Algeria of Daniel Guérin, Libertarian," *Situationist International Anthology*, ed. & trans. Ken Knabb (rev. & exp. ed.; Berkeley, CA: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006), 236-37 (originally 1966). Guèrin, one of the founders of the gay liberation movement in France, may have found Ben Bella attractive.

25 Is that a skeleton inside a framework, or a framework inside a skeleton? Guérin is a wretched writer.

26 Guérin, *Anarchism*, 146. By 1970, he understood the failed Algerian Revolution almost as well as the Situationists had in 1965. "The Class Struggles in Algeria," Situationist International Anthology, 203-212.

27 Black, "Chomsky on the Nod," 130-31.

# Review/Critique of

# A Hunter-Gatherer's Guide to the 21st Century: Evolution and the Challenges of Modern Life (2021)

## by Heather Heying and Bret Weinstein,

## Reviewed by Mark Seely

What follows is not a book review, proper, but rather a cursory and admittedly biased critique of Heying and Weinstein's ideas and overall perspective. As a book, it has several problematic elements, starting with an extremely misleading title. If you are in any way interested in hunter-gatherers, or how hunter-gatherer lifestyles might inform modern-day challenges, you will be sorely disappointed. Additionally, it is not at all clear who the audience is supposed to be. Although it is structured like a typical self-help book, with boxed lists of end-of-chapter bullet points (they call this feature "the corrective lens"), I'm not sure exactly who the information is being targeted to. Many of their bulleted suggestions are trite and somewhat patronizing (e.g., "listen to your body," "avoid sex without commitment," "breastfeed your children"), and others are incoherent or too abstract to count as actionable advice ("recognize that our differences contribute to our collective strength," "learn to hack and kludge your own mental architecture for a better life").

It's the factual and logical pitfalls of their particular evolutionary perspective, however, that I want to focus on. Heying and Weinstein are a husband-and-wife team of evolutionary biologists, with several decades of experience both in the field and in the college classroom, and by all accounts they are very good at what they do. But I suspect that their expertise, ironically, may have led them down a conceptual rabbit hole. It's the old adage about when your only tool is a hammer, every problem looks like a nail.

The book is billed as "a provocative exploration of the tension between our evolutionary history and our modern woes—and what we can do about it." There is a subtle hint here about the lack of careful phrasing that will unfortunately turn up again and again. The real tension is not between our evolutionary history and our modern woes, it is between our evolutionary history and modern society—a fundamental mismatch in lifestyles. Given the scope of the mismatch, our woes are entirely expected results. No tension here. The inclusion of the "and what we can do about it" part is a less subtle hint, suggesting that they are in possession of solutions, or at least some ideas about ways to address these woes. And in the introduction, we are told explicitly that as evolutionary biologists and as unyielding adherents to the scientific world view, Heying and Weinstein believe they are in a unique position to speak to these issues.

Their argument is summarized in its most general form in the very last sentence of the final chapter: "The problem is evolutionary. So is the solution" (p. 243). Their rough sketch of what this solution might look like leans heavily on science, technology, and social engineering, and there is something about this that has a distinct transhumanist feel to it. This is perhaps not so surprising, I suppose, considering the role that evolution, specifically evolution of the artificial, intentional kind, plays in transhumanist thought.

Despite their ecological sensitivities and their background in evolutionary biology, they are clearly civilization apologists. Just seven pages into the introduction they present the following claim: "And we are not adapted only to being hunter-gatherers—we also adapted, long ago, to being fish; more recently, to being primates; and most recently, to being postindustrialists" (p. xv). So, postindustrial civilization is just another stage in the evolutionary progression of the human species? Really? If it is true that we have adapted to being postindustrialists, then where does the "tension between our evolutionary history and our modern woes" come from? Surely the existence of these "modern woes" are a sign of a lack of adaptation, perhaps even maladaptation. Let's be clear, they are wrong here. Woefully wrong. Postindustrial civilization is not just another niche that humans have adapted to, and it is most definitely not a natural or inevitable outcome of our species' biological evolution.

Also, who is this "we" that is being referred to? It may be the 21st century, but there are still humans living in noncivilized ways, a few as actual hunter-gatherers. Are these people to be considered part of the human species? Are they a subspecies? Most likely, the authors are merely oblivious to their cultural bias. As active participants in a dominant and dominating global social order built atop millennia of genocide and colonization, they, like most of their fellow postindustrialists, are operating from an insular perspective that sees the characteristics of Western civilization as a direct reflection of innate human nature.

In case there was any doubt, their civilization apologist agenda is on full display in the last sentence of the introduction: "We are explorers and innovators by design, and the same impulses that have created our troublesome modern condition are the only hope for saving it." So, the solution, as it so often is in technological society, is to make minor adjustments to the formula for the poison that is making us sick. Perhaps we can cure alcoholism by finding a better way of distilling gin.

Chapter one, titled "The Human Niche," opens with a bizarre caricature of the first Americans: thrust westward from Beringia by a warming climate, humans who were "modern in every genetic and physically sense" made their way into North America, where they encountered a land full of never-before-seen challenges. It is interesting that

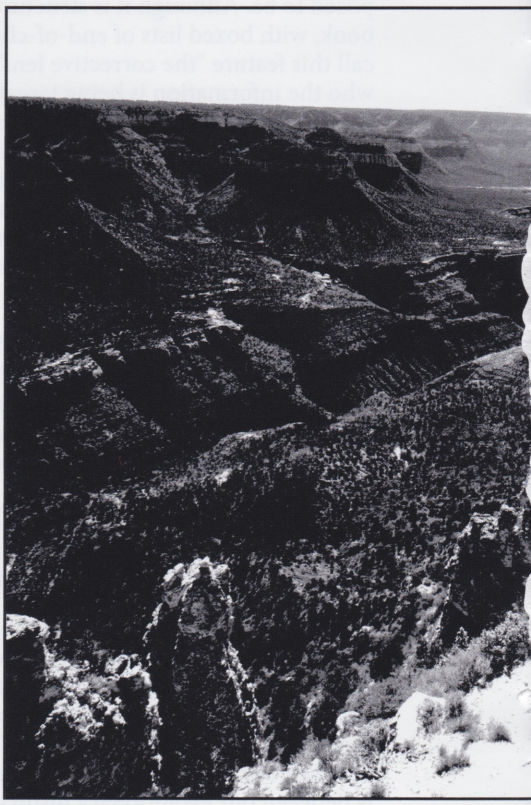
they chose to start with the populating of the Americas, an extremely recent chapter in the human story. This may or may not reflect the powerful Western bias discussed above. What is more interesting, perhaps, is their projection of a sharp division of labor into prehistory, albeit disguised as disparities in natural talent. For example, we are told how "insightful observers and engineers, crafters of tools and synthesizers of information" gathered around the fire to share their ideas and talents. We are also provided with a just-so story about a man named Bem who saw a bear eating fish and wondered whether humans might eat these fish as well. Bem shared his idea with Soo, who had spent enough time watching fish to know how they could be caught. Unfortunately, neither Bem nor Soo were very good engineers. But their friend Gol was, and their mutual friend Lok was really good with crafting rope. So, between the four of them, they were able to innovate their way into a fish dinner.

I won't attempt to enumerate the many ways their description of the first American cultures appears to be in conflict with modern anthropology. But I do want to look more closely at the way they take great pains to highlight the need for cooperation among people with different skillsets and abilities. This is in fact how civilization (and academic science) works, through a finely tuned partitioning of labor and expertise. In reality, it is quite likely that the first Americans, like all other humans on the planet at the time, were living lifestyles that by necessity included little or no division of labor outside of that relating to (typically non-binding) cultural expectations involving gender roles. And as far as top-down political structure goes, there was really none to speak of. Modern day hunter-gatherers operate along the far end of the anarchist political spectrum, where egalitarian social dynamics, augmented by potent norms of sharing and reciprocity, greatly temper the impact of disparities in talent and ability.

But prehistoric division of labor was an essential ingredient, according to Heying and Weinstein. Humans are generalists as a species in that we are able to adapt to pretty much any environment the planet has to offer. But our generalist quality as a species is due to the fact that differences in aptitude and ability lead us to specialize as individuals. We are able to transcend our personal limitations as specialists by hooking up with other people who are good at the things we are not so good at, giving the larger society the capacity to adapt to the demands of novel environments. Their generalist/specialist discussion is littered throughout by statements that seem more at home in a speech by the CEO of a silicon-valley startup company: "Most of the best ideas that our species has generated, the most important and powerful ideas, have been the result of a group of people who had different but consilient talents and vision, nonoverlapping blind spots, and a political structure that allowed for novelty" (p. 4).

They call this "the human paradox," that fact that we are specialists and we "enjoy the competitive advantage of being specialists, without paying the usual cost of lack of breadth." In other words, normally, when a species specializes, that specialization makes it more difficult to adapt to different environmental conditions, and in a rapidly changing environment, it is better to be a generalist. But humans, who are "exceptionally exceptional" have found a way to specialize while at the same time enhancing our capacity to adapt—and it is precisely our ability to specialize that has allowed us to do so. Truly a paradox, if they are correct.

The tradeoffs between being a generalist and specialization may or may not be consistent with their contention that division of labor is something built into our species as an evolutionary adaptation. But they also claim that division of labor and social hierarchy are evolutionary adaptations to increases in cultural complexity. Things have gotten so complex recently, they say, that it's difficult to coordinate the many needed specializations and direct them toward solutions to our species-wide problems. Today, we are in need of individuals who are generalists, people who are able to operate across domains. And in order to "encourage the development of generalists," we need to tap into a more "nuanced understanding" of what evolution is.



It turns out that that "nuanced understanding" involves epigenetics, and the knowledge that culture serves as a flexible epigenetic regulator, adjusting the phenotypic expression of our genome as conditions warrant. They reference sensitivity to the Müller Lyer illusion among people raised in carpentered environments as an example. The adaptive effects of culture are not independent of our genes (something they refer to as the "Omega Principle"), however, which means that persistent cultural traits, everything from harvest feasts to the construction of monumental buildings to the existence of Catholicism (!) should be assumed to be adaptive simply because they have been in existence for an extended period of time. As a further complication, they invoke a logical problem called Chesterton's fence, which holds that when you are dealing with a complex system you shouldn't discard something just because it appears to be useless, because it might be serving an essential but unrecognized function. So, we need to be very careful about what we dispose of as we try to engineer solutions to our modern woes because we might be throwing the baby out with the bathwater.

They never really address the obvious problem with this. Adding Chesterton's fence to the presumed adaptive

functions underlying long-term cultural traits puts us in a paralyzing bind. How do we know which persistent cultural traits should stay and which should go? We can't get rid of something that we don't like just because we don't like it; it might be serving an unrecognized adaptive function that we can't live without. Think about enduring features of modern civilization in this context: massive wealth disparity, or systemic racism, or the wholesale destruction of natural ecosystems. All they really have to say about this problem is that we need to embrace the precautionary principle.

Their discussion of human evolution is littered with distortions and questionable assertions throughout. They recite the classic fable in which humans have inherited both the warlike characteristics of chimpanzees and the peace-loving characteristics of the bonobos. Of more concern is the way they appear to conflate the biological evolution of the species with cultural and technological evolution. In addition to division of labor and social hierarchy, they include among universal human characteristics, the creation of laws and rules of succession and leadership status associated with age, gender, and kinship. Domestication, of course, is also an evolved human trait. And, just as an aside, we are told that domesticated animals have if pretty good compared to their wild counterparts. Chickens today are thriving in numbers that dwarf those of their wild ancestors. Even ignoring the "more is better" (il)logic, these domesticated creatures are not at all *thriving*, many are living lives of compounded misery and are so dependent on humans that they literally can't survive without constant human intervention.



Heying and Weinstein claim that our real problem is that we face "novel levels of novelty, and selection simply can't keep up" (p. 57). Our minds are constantly doing a cost-benefit analysis with respect to everything we do, with fitness as the ultimate goal. And this is wired into us by evolution. The real problem with the modern world is that our evolved systems can no longer distinguish the signal from the noise. As a result, our civilization is starting to deteriorate. "Civilization as we know it is going to become senescent because that which made us successful will ultimately destroy us. The answer, in simple terms is to consciously build a system that is resistant to senescence" (p. 229). It is interesting that they chose to use the word senescence, here. Not only does it invoke a biological metaphor, but senescence is different than simple aging. In biology, senescence is a condition in which the cells are still alive but experience arrested growth and are no longer able to replicate, leading to a gradual deterioration of the affected tissues or of the entire organism.

But, "that which made us successful" and "will ultimately destroy us" is also that which can save us. And here is where we see their latent transhumanism start to bleed through: "We have unlocked many of the universe's secrets, substantially freeing ourselves from the natural order that created us" (p. 224). "We moderns have become a threat to our own persistence. We are built to figure out how to move between modes of being. It is time to rise to collective consciousness and prototype a way out of this" (p. 226). They talk about the "fourth frontier," which involves "the idea that we can engineer an indefinite steady state that will feel to people like they live in a period of perpetual growth, but will abide by the laws of physics and game theory that govern our universe."

That is their solution in a nutshell. Manufacture a society that feels like it's going somewhere but is in fact standing still. I am reminded of a short sci-fi story I read several decades ago about a future society that had solved the problem of car accidents by adjusting speedometers so people thought they were driving much faster than they actually were.

As a final observation, one of the things that stands out most sharply about their proposed solution is their repeated use of the term *prototype*. "We're going to reach it [this future state] by agreeing on the characteristics that such a desirable and plausible world must have, and then we must prototype, evaluate the results, and prototype again" (p. 241). They are not clear about what they mean, exactly. How do you create a prototype civilization? Do we try small-scale communities first? Do we legislate one way for the whole society to operate, and, if that doesn't work, scrap everything and try something else? How much time do we allow before deciding whether the prototype works? Whatever they mean by prototype, it is clear that they view the future of the species as an R&D problem.

Probably the most disappointing thing about Heying and Weinstein's book is that hunter-gatherers—actual hunter-gatherers past and present—really *do* have something important to offer as a guide for navigating our 21st century challenges. Hunter-gatherer lifestyles have persisted for hundreds of thousands of years, allowing humans not just to survive but to *thrive* in a wide variety of Earth environments. Hunter-gatherer cultures embody exactly those qualities that Heying and Weinstein are looking for in terms of a sustainable steady-state society that nonetheless abides by all of the laws of the natural world, and also in terms of providing opportunities for perpetual personal growth—not merely the perception of growth, but the real thing. Why do we need to prototype when we already have a successful time-tested production model at our disposal?

# Simplicity

John Zerzan

On some level, the yearning for a simpler, less complicated life is a commonplace. As we move farther and farther from simplicity, and are more and more detached from the natural world, we are well on the road to what Joseph Tainter analyzed so importantly in *The Collapse of Complex Societies* (Cambridge University Press, 1988). Primitive future, simple future--or there won't be a future.

Progress destroys simplicity, just as it has destroyed community. And yet we want it; we see that most explicitly in the enduring Voluntary Simplicity movement, or minimalism, as some now refer to it. The offerings are many; for example, Linda Breen Pierce's *Choosing Simplicity* (Gallagher Press, 2000). *Living Cheaply with Style* by Ernst Callenbach (Ronin Publishing, 2000), William Coperthwaite's *A Handmade Life: In Search of Simplicity* (Chelsea Green, 2002), *Less is More*, by Cecile Andrews and Wanda Urbanska (New Society, 2009), and Kyle Chayka's *The Longing for Less: Living with Minimalism* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2009).

Chayka sees the minimalist tendency as less of a voluntary personal response than "an inevitable societal and cultural shift responding to the experience of living through the 2000s."[1] The experience of life in untable times cautions against dependency on an over-extended system of largely artificial wants. Material simplicity presents itself as more stable, a condition of greater autonomy. Adel Daoud expresses this well in a 2011 *Review of Social Economy* article,[2] which calls to mind Marshall Sahlins' wonderful essay, "The Original Affluent Society," recalling pre-civilization.[3]

As a response to so-called affluence, minimalism is not deprivation. It is basically neither subtractive nor eliminative. To have dozens of brands of a commodity to choose from is not freedom, but a way to consume one's time. I have felt most free when I possessed the least. There is much forced "affluence," for example, with the issue of computer access. Which is at base less a matter of "access" to computers than who is allowed freedom from the ubiquitous screens.

Pythagoras and Plato were early mechanist philosophers who viewed the world as ultimately a machine whose parts, animate and inanimate, obey the design and laws of a machine. How better to frame the dynamic of domestication/civilization, with the technosphere its medium these days.

Slightly later, another Greek thinker saw the world differently. Zeno of Citium was a Stoic who forsook his wealth and had no interest in machine or mastery as a world-view; perhaps he was the original minimalist. In late antiquity certain Christian theologians developed a perspective on simplicity vis-à-vis early humankind. Namely, that in the beginning there was no sexual differentiation, rather a state of primal androgyny.[4]

The 19th century travel writer Isabella Bird observed the simplicity and sharing of northern Japan's Ainu people, noting that "This seems a strange virtue which is not strong enough to survive much contact with civilization."[5] *The Soul of the Indian* is Dakota Sioux Charles A. Eastman's meditation on indigenous values and customs. "The Indian in his simplicity literally gives away all that he has, to relatives, to guests of another tribe or clan, but above all to the poor and the aged, from whom he can hope for no return."[6]

Civilization indeed wars against such values, as each of its core institutions undermines them. And a standardized, homogeneous, flattened world repels those who would look more deeply. Ludwig Wittgenstein counseled that "The aspects of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity."[7] Real simplicity is not reductive; in its depth and texture, it invites scrutiny and exploration. It is not the placeless no-place in cyberspace. Wallace Stevens put it well:

> The greatest poverty is not to live
>
> In a physical world.[8]

*Simplius Simplicissimus* by H.J.C. Grimmelshausen is perhaps the first important German novel. It is the story of a simple man who ends up denouncing the world as corrupt. Two centuries later, Thoreau lived out, for a time, a somewhat similar conclusion. His turn to simplicity was not a reduction, but rather an intimacy with the place of Walden Pond. Thoreau's July 12 birthday, fittingly, is celebrated as national Simplicity Day. Many have considered the radical implications of simplicity as a guiding ethos. Self-skepticism and attention to the Other is the gift of simplicity, according to ethics philosopher Emmanuel Levinas[9].

Minimalist aesthetics is a fascinating topic in itself. Let me bring in just a bit of it.

Tom Taylor discussed the powerful directness of Rothko's canvases in his "The Legacy of Mark Rothko: The Simple Expression of Complex Thought" (*Far Out* magazine, 2/21/2021).

"With utter simplicity, [he] sought to create paintings that brought the world to tears." "I am only interested in expressing basic emotions," Rothko once said, adding: "Tragedy, ecstasy, doom and so on." Tragedy, also hope.

Rothko also said, pointedly, "I would like to say to those who think of my pictures as serene, whether in friendship or mere observation, that I have imprisoned the most utter

violence in every inch of their surface."[10]

To simplify is to dismantle, which likely involves violence in one form or another. To get where we need to be, a destination beautifully pointed to in a Bill Baber poem:

> Silence Please
>
> So still and quiet tonight
> not a whisper of wind
> no coyote song
> not even a night bird's cry.
>
> So still and quiet tonight
> that I swear I hear
> the flickering stars
> and rhythmic breathing of mountains.[11]

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1 Kyle Chayka, *The Longing for Less* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2009), p. 10.

2 Adel Daoud, "The Modus Vivendi of Material Simplicity," Review of Social Economy 69:3 (September 2011), pp. 275-305.

3 In Marshall Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972).

4 Leah DeVun, *The Shape of Sex* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021).

5 Isabella Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan* (London: Virago Press, 1984), p. 250.

6 Charles A. Eastman, *The Soul of the Indian* (Lincoln NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2020 [1911]), p. 27.

7 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (New York: Basil, Blackwell & Mott, 1958), p. 50e.

8 Oscar Williams and Edwin Honig, eds., *Major American Poets* (New York: New American Library, 1962), Wallace Stevens, "Esthetique du Mal," p. 296.

9 Important Levinas works include *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise than Being*.

10 Quoted in Karen Painter and Thomas Crow, eds., *Late Thoughts: Reflections on Artists and Composers at Work* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2006), p. 58.

11 Bill Baber, *Where the Wind Comes to Play* (Portland, OR: Berberis Press, 2011), p. 27.

# Conditional Surrender

-Rob Vollmar

We had known of the Grasskine since they first began ripping apart their grasslands just to

plant more grass. It was widely held that they had simply gone insane. That was easy enough

to ignore. But then they started spreading, murdering the men, making slaves of the women.

Then they made slaves of everyone.

At first, it was always along the sol-path. A little upper, a little downer, but always along the sol-path, jamming bloody fistfuls of grass seed into the ground as they went.

Among the tree folk, life went on as it always had.

The Grasskine bigmen rose and fell like mycoblooms. None of us bothered to learn their names until they finally arrived and made war with our Treekine, our gentle undercousins. We were remembered among them only by their stories, but many among us bristled as we saw them march out alone to face those reeking invaders and their civilizations. Some of us intervened when we could, but never where we could be seen.

It was too little. Always too little. In time, they had warred so long that we could no longer tell the Grasskine from the Treekine.

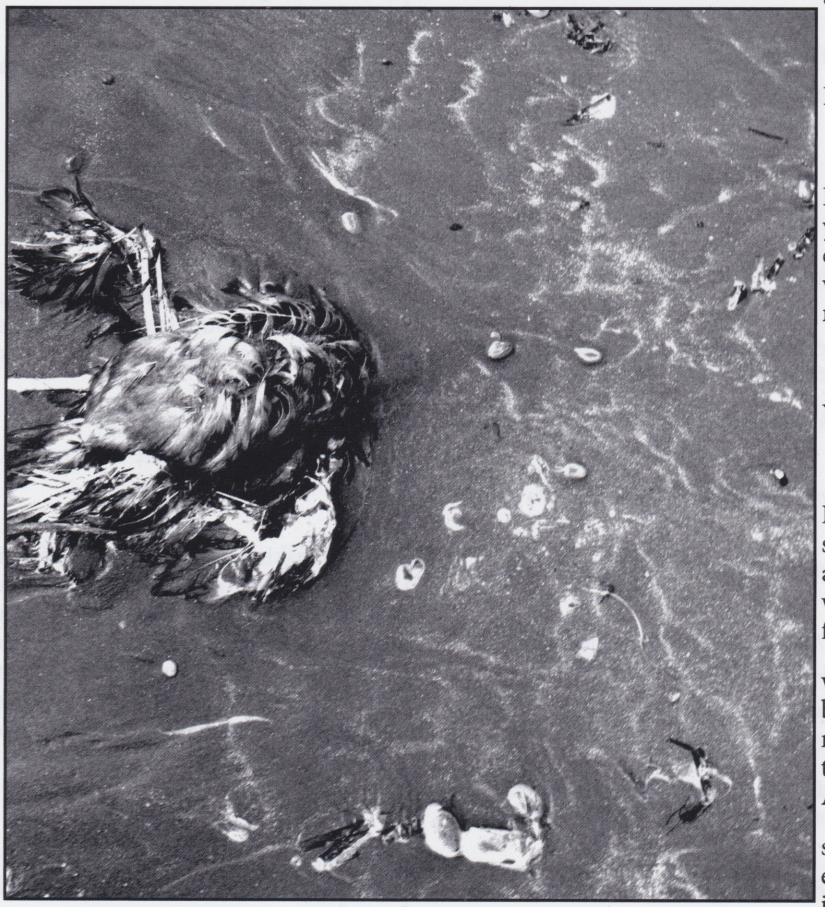
The forest shuddered and receded.

Then came the arguments. Many of our people thirsted for Grasskine blood. "Of what value is our repose if no world outside remains from which to sequester?" We were arboreal in our thinking, half-hundreds of years slipping past as we refined our definitions, built common ground upon which opposing arguments could be reconciled.

The Grasskine ate their bread, coupled in their rank and shabby huts, and boiled across the earth.

Like locusts.

From afar, we heard the cries of distant Folk, and then we heard nothing more. Now there is just us. Or what is left of us, packing ourselves ever tighter into the dwindling deep. Many have gone mad, retreating into the twisted trunks of the trees with magicks so foul as to eradicate all but the faintest glimmer of what made them Folk.



I am not mad, but I am nearly done.

I can hear their machines, ripping apart the earth. They are coming. Good.

How can they be truly ignorant of what has happened to the land under their dominance? Can they not taste the poisons? Can they not hear the fire in the winds? Can they not smell the oceans engorged with sun? All the songs are broken. The mountains ache to swallow the bones of the dead.

I have traveled through the six worlds to speak with the Mother of Poisons. From the pulsing tip of her arched barb, She yielded unto me a single drop of Her killing juice. When my body no longer responds to the sun's warming touch, all that remains will return there to become an eternal subject in Her infinite laboratory of suffering.

It is a fair trade. It is something rather than nothing.

The Grasskine will know fear. They will know that they have been judged and been found fatally wanting. The forest is burning. The charring flesh of old-growth groans, mixing with the soulscreams of the retreated folk inside them. I can hear the machines. They are coming.

I have anointed a virgin white cloth with the Mother's Kiss and tied it to the end of the fallen Speaker's staff. When the Kine shouts finally grow close enough to drown out the screeching machines that bring the fire, I wave it defiantly over my head, desecrating the last of what was held sacred among the Folk.

Here I am.

In bespoiling all life, you have taken the only thing we thought worth dying for. Immersion.

Yes.

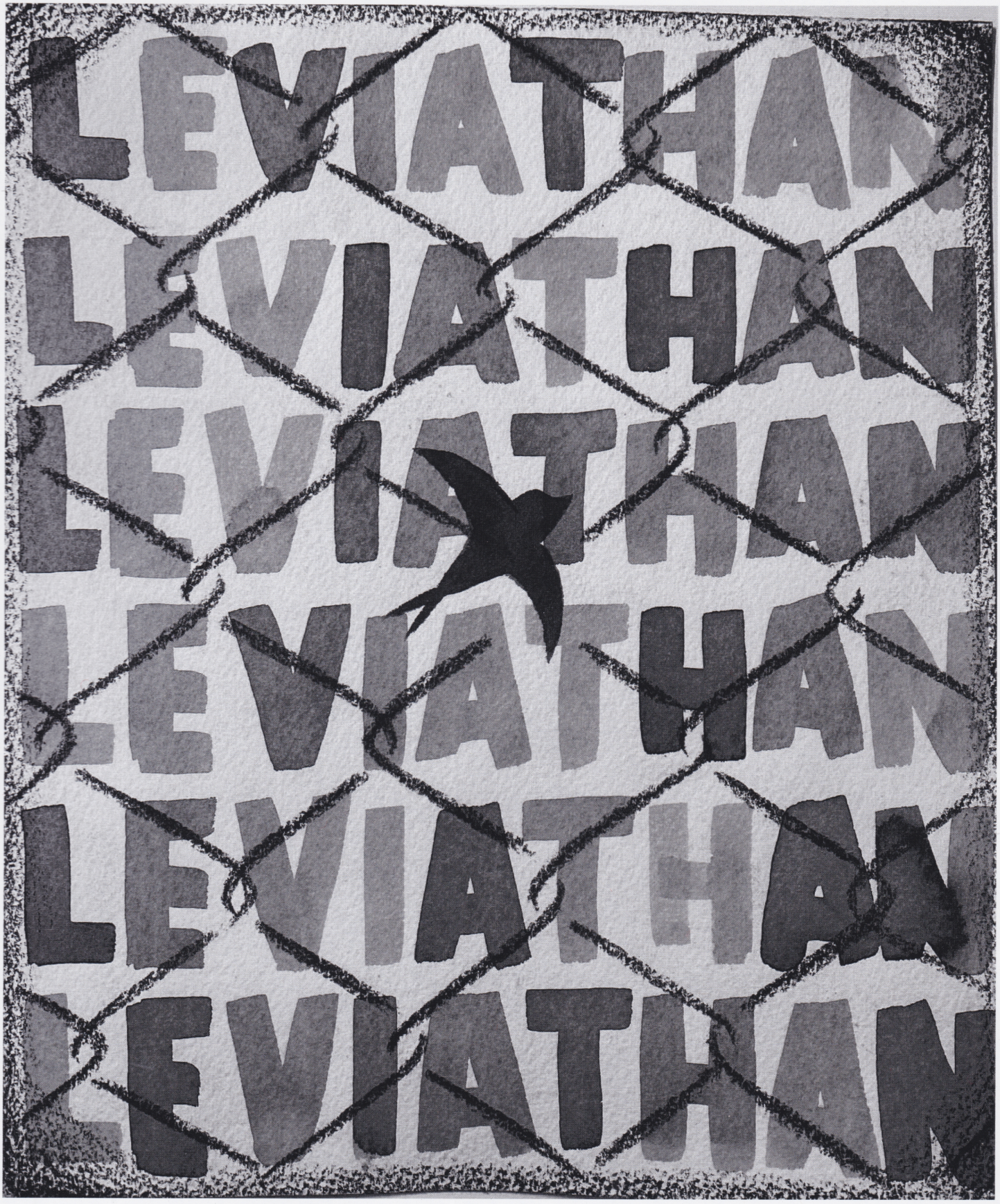
Raise your shiny spears and light-lances and behold the final wonders of a world from

which you are forbidden. Yes. Rend my flesh with your tongues of flame. Yes. Already the

spores from the Mother's Kiss are growing inside you, inside the fragile little skin-balloons that you use to hoard our very breath. Would that I could linger a moment longer to see it belch from one Kine to the next to the last. To see the light fade from every pair of your grassblind eyes.

Mother, I am coming.

*"Conditional Surrender" was first published in Storybook Shorts by Literati Press in 2019.*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Despite endless terrains of meaninglessness and commodity a flame of authenticity remains. We seek its open warmth but also nurture its smoldering possibility in defiance of the bitter cold which sweeps the land and snuffs out souls.



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Issue 4

Spring 2022

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