

Oak

A journal against civilization

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For a future outside the putrid digestive juices of this towering bio-technological leviathan - SK for Oak

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The Direct Approach

One dilemma, our entrapment by civilization in all its dimensions, can be approached on a primary level. A spiritual level, let's admit.

A brief formulation by Guy Debord in the '60s has turned out to be far truer than he knew. First thesis of *Society of the Spectacle*, last sentence: "All that once was directly lived has become mere representation." To be more specific, in a few decades' time all that was directly lived has fled to cyberspace, to online representation.

Life in deepest techno-society, how deep is it buried? How far has spirit been exiled?

We are less and less present to ourselves, to the world. In a study, individuals were asked which they would choose: giving themselves electric shocks or being alone with their thoughts for 15 minutes. Many said they would choose the electric shocks.

Connectedness has been dissolving, but I am convinced that hunger for presence remains. Even as complexity and its attendant mediations work to bury whatever is direct. Even as fragmentation of experience works to erase direct experience itself.

In a placeless, off-loaded world there is little that remains unmediated. Can community really exist indirectly? What do terms like direct democracy or direct action mean in this context? Silence, presence, love are direct. Wholeness means to apprehend the whole through openness. Phenomenological directness, perceptual phenomenology failed because they gave direct sensorial contact too small a role--an indirect one at best, despite phenomenology's objective of unmediated understanding.

Art, if a work is successful, generally depends on an element of ambiguity--and not just the Mona Lisa smile. So art is indirect. This is art's appeal, its value as consolation, compensation for so much that has been lost. Solace, in a not-direct world.

Truth is a disposable, irrelevant category in the postmodern culture. But in our lives, we strive for it, and expect it from others. "Are you being straight with me?" Straight, direct, truthful. Not being direct is not being true.

We know more and more about our distant predecessors, how hundreds of thousands--even millions--of years ago they lived in a direct relationship with the earth. Everything was crafted by hand, in a face-to-face context, the basis of the well-documented egalitarian ethos of hunter-gatherer societies.

Eventually division of labor set in, and has driven complexity ever since, steadily undoing directness and community. For our survival and the planet's, we must undo division of labor by dismantling its main products: domestication/civilization, and an industrial/technological life-world.

"Industrial Society and its Future," the so-called Unabomber Manifesto, discusses, among other things, the prevalence of "surrogate" activities in modern life. Namely, that inconsequential pursuits (e.g. hobbies) are more widespread, as more meaningful, direct ones are displaced, as society becomes increasingly technological.

Two PBS television series, "Frontier House" (2002) and "Colonial House" (2004), with their unexpected endings, shed light on the need for direct, impactful life rather than that of surrogate activity.

Continued on following page

The Direct Approach Continued:

Randomly selected volunteer participants are put into, respectively, 1880s Montana and 17th century New England, and their survival skills are tested over weeks and months. Would they, for instance, prepare adequately for winter in very much non-contemporary circumstances? The people in each group, a cross-section of Americans, had to roll up their sleeves and buckle down to provide for themselves. Participants were then “graded” on their chances of survival by a panel of scholarly experts; most of them were deemed unlikely to make it.

After several weeks of “blood, sweat, and tears” and a good amount of griping about their conditions, participants returned to their synthetic, indirect twenty-first century lives. And it turned out that many, to their surprise, missed their time of “privation” in previous centuries. The young girls who vociferously missed the mall, and had even tried to escape to a nearby mall, acknowledged that they had lost interest by the time they returned home. They missed feeling useful, essential to the family’s survival. Several adults also found the readjustment very difficult, to almost everyone’s surprise.

The point cannot be missed: a taste of hands-on, directly experienced life can make a deep impression. There is a greater relevance or application, to be sure. Not only by reference to our actual million-year-plus record as human species in face-to-face autonomous societies, but also to small egalitarian movements in recent history. Paris 1968, Catalonia, Chiapas, Rojava, Standing Rock, for example; until the inertia of mass society snuffed them out.

Nicky Reid’s “Why Artsakh Still Matters to American Anarchists” (CounterPunch, November 20, 2020) refers to the fight for Artsakh to survive against Armenia and Azerbaijan, as an example of radical decentralization and its radical promise. She rightly calls for “a million Artsakhs until there are too many embers for the massive tyrants to stomp out.”

Whether in a spiritual vein or in terms of radical (anti-) political resistance, the foundations lie in what is unmediated, what is direct. Similarly, if people aren’t face to face, they aren’t in community. To be “at hand” means to be literally, directly available to others and to ourselves.

Our basic task, in the interest of wholeness and liberation, is to remove everything that is defeating directness.

-John Zerzan

AFTER PANDEMIC

- JASON RODGERS

After the pandemic we shall grow bolos in the compost of civilization's corpse.

Sometimes it sucks to be right.

For years I have been making the point that civilization is so cumbersome and spread out that it is unstable. Due to the excessive division of labor, each part is overly dependent on numerous other parts. The failure of one small area can cause failures in numerous others. This can make the entire structure collapse. As I have looked further into the history of past civilization collapses I have learned that a common cause is pandemic: "devastating epidemic diseases" (Scott 97). Anthropologist James Scott wrote "in the case of a war or epidemic, it is often the case that abandoning the city for the countryside spares many lives that would otherwise be lost" (Scott 210).

As I'm writing this in AlbWwany, NY, a city and a state that has shut down to prevent the spread of the Coronavirus. All schools were shut down. All libraries were shut down. All restaurants were shut down. All public assembly was shut down.

This virus spread in a few short months from China to Europe to New York. In the days of the anti-globalization movement it was popular to say that the New World Order would be defeated by making "Resistance as transnational as Capital". The slogan sounds so naive in the face of a global plague. Leviathan will not be defeated in some sort of dual power strategy of forming a globalized good twin. It is impossible to introduce justice to a global division of labor. As long as we lack local autonomy we will not be stable. As long as we are reliant on an economic system that transports humans like chattel to fulfill the whims of transnational capital we will be subject to global pandemics.

To resist Leviathan asymmetrical tactics must be developed. But the Coronavirus shows

that we must develop means to survive Leviathan's death, and prepare to stand our ground against the beasts that are birthed from its death. Of course beast is a misleading term. Leviathan and what grows from it are not beasts, but animated corpses and automatons.

In the zine "Backwoods", Bellamy Fitzpatrick issued "An Invitation to Desertion". Civilization cannot be defeated in direct conflict, but if enough of us withdraw our support and participation it may collapse. Bellamy wrote "material desertion means decreasing or eliminating dependence on civilized slave economies for one's subsistence- food, water, shelter, fuel, and medicine- in favor of its obtainment through direct interface with one's habitat individually or through voluntary cooperation in free association with others. Psychic desertion means the abandonment of the reified and submissive civilized slave ideologies on which the daily functioning of society is based" (Fitzpatrick 17). Desertion is not simply escapism, it is a robust escapism. It means a refusal that is not separate from attack. The forms of attack will not take the form of martyrdom or revolutionary suicide. They will instead be a revolution of everyday life.

One of the best suggestions of how to desert is the bolo. The bolo is a model of a different world that would be a revolt against the planetary work machine, as outlined by PM in the classic book *Bolo'Bolo*. The book is both totally wild science fiction and the most realistic & applicable model. The bolo is the autonomous group that serves as the basis for individuals to live in relationships based on affinity and mutuality. PM wrote "Every ibu and bolo has its own identity. And bolo'bolo is not a system, but a patchwork of micro-systems" (PM 74). These become communities of difference.



PM wrote “Self-sufficiency isn’t necessarily isolation or self-restraint” (73). Refusal is not a denial. It is empowerment of the individual and human scale community. Self-sufficiency enhances the individual freedom, rather than engage in the false freedom of choice the planetary work machine offers. On the basis of affinity individuals will come together, supporting each other through the expansion of desire. Others will help us towards the realization of our selves rather than the subjugation of our selves, as others so often do in the misery of mass society. Building this network of affinity is one of the most important steps that can be taken towards building bolo’bolo and revolting against the planetary work machine. Many will be unable to immediately begin land

projects and such. But they most certainly can find others, to some extent or another.

The bolo has a maximum number of 500 members. This, coincidentally, is about the maximum population for a group before it is vulnerable to pandemics.

In the bolo there must be local autonomy, but this does not signal nationalism. There will be no boundaries. The edges will be permeable. Travel and visitors will be unrestricted, but there will be no need for hyper-alienated speed. Movement will be leisurely, as there is no need to transport capital to survive.

It is inevitable that pandemics will spread in the world as it is. This is the first of this size. We’ll see if it is the last, if everything collapses in the aftermath. The last will be the one that collapses civilization. There are steps we can take that will help to transition to a lifeway that will survive, that can help to reduce the pain of this collapse. The chains we break now will mean less to drag us down later.

After the pandemic we shall grow bolos in the compost of civilization’s corpse.

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Elm Thoughts

By *prunella vulgaris*

There's an elm tree on my daily walking path that can trick the eye. A stump with beetle trails, half the bark long gone, barbed wire piercings by my ankles and chest.

In passing we've recognized the miracle of the elm, that one thin but strong branch stretching away from the dirt road and into a break in the brambly edge canopy. Some days we cheer on the elm. Other days we lament their mortality.

On one such gloomy day, I stop to count the rings on my elm... 20, 21, 22, 23... and abruptly the rings shrink to paper thinness. I count to forty-seven, squinting at lines as thin as my counting finger nail. It disturbs me to my core. Twenty-three, my own body's age. And then sudden decline.

Alex recalls learning in grade school from a rare field trip guide that "trees are allergic to iron."

"I'm full of barbed wire too..." I console the elm, poorly. It doesn't register. I'm fucking doomed and so is my elm.

The next day there's slightly more clarity. Maybe the rain has ceased and my body is grateful for the movement as I walk upon my elm. I count the rings for a second time, in a respite from emotional weather. My thoughts drift down the elm's body and land on the barbed wire. *Oh fuck.* My eyes dart up and down, confirm my overdue realization. The twenty-fourth ring is the first to be penetrated by the barbed wire. Trees are allergic to iron. I see the rusty fence cut into my elm and poison them. The growth slows in this direction and then stops.

And I also see the one thin branch still stretching toward the sun.

It would be absurd now to bemoan the elm's mortality. It only matters that the tree is alive, seeking sunlight. And so the elm becomes my altar to the okayness of my own mortality or a reminder that I too am alive. When the fences start to rub against and hurt you, change direction. Start again.

In my sleep I see my soul, aching to dance with me. Hungry ghosts need to be reassured I won't be spineless again in this lifetime. Oyster mushrooms use me to spread their reach as I use them for my pleasure and nourishment. Where is the separation? Why the fences of time and property? Where is the healthy middle between rugged individualism and extreme conflict avoidance? Between the urge to bulldoze and the leave no trace ethos of alienation? What neurosis is not born from loss of earthen cycles? A dismal lack of walnut dyed hands and soil caked fingernails? Birth control pills and street lights robbing us of winter, of darkness?

Place is psyche. All fences eventually are transgressed, swallowed up in the edge. Birds plant the shrubs they want to live in.

My stubborn branch is becoming branches stretching toward the sun. Anything is better than stewing behind the fence line letting the wires penetrate, choke off growth. It's already been done. And I've been domesticated. But the elm and I are talking.

KNOWLEDGE OF THE STONE:

A CONVERSATION WITH TYSON YUNKAPORTA AND JOHN ZERZAN

John Zerzan: Can you tell us a little bit about yourself and how you came to decide to write this book?

Tyson Yunkaporta: Look, there's nothing noble about it at all. Just somebody offered me a \$5,000 advance to write something. And I really, really needed \$5,000. I was just flat broke and just in so much strife, I just went "yeah, all right." (Laughter) Game. I'll just write something. So, yes, you write about what you know and that was the stuff I knew.

I spent most of the last decade traveling around Australia trying to pass on those special ritual magic symbols from Old Man Juma up in the north of Australia because he told me to pass them on to as many people as possible. And a number of other elders too, from all over the continent with different messages. And the more I traveled around with these symbols and shared them with people, the more other people – like knowledge keepers – gave me more things to pass on to other people while I did it.

I just thought, I can get rid of all this in this book, then I won't have to do that work anymore. (Laughter) It'll be a labor-saving device. But it really wasn't. It was difficult to write because a lot of the knowledge just wouldn't work as print. And it's been even more difficult to respond to all the relationships that you make from writing a book like that with so many people from around the world – when you write it that intimately.

You have obligations to the knowledge and accountability to the knowledge and to your word. And there's so many people who are quite radically transformed by just by seeing the symbols from that old man. You know, it's – basically, this is just all I do now is follow up from that book. So, it really – I just advise everybody, if you think you can make a quick five grand (laughter) ...

John Zerzan: A little more to it than that.

Tyson Yunkaporta: Look around the corner and down the track a bit because it might end up costing you 10 years or something.

John Zerzan: Wow.

Tyson Yunkaporta: I mean, I tell you though, what I really enjoyed was – see, I did put in there all the yarns I'd been having but I also looked for new people to talk to who were way out of the box. And you, John, were one of them. And just one of the more memorable yarns – we had a very limited medium to work with but we just obviously connected very deeply, very quickly, through our common threads and common story that we have around what it is to be human and what it is to want to transition back to what we're supposed to be, in some way.

And not about going backwards in time but about that retrieving forward, if that makes any sense. It's not transhumanist at all, and it's not a devolution. There just isn't a word for what it is that we're striv-

That rock contains living knowledge and living spirit. It contains knowledge which is connected out to the rest of the system because there's a set of agreements on what those elements are and how they hold themselves together and not just bloody dissolve down into the quantum soup.

ing for and we both have that kind of nameless task in our kind of DNA. So, yes, we connected really well around that and I just really enjoyed putting an anarcho-primitivist right in the middle of this book. Just dropping him in there, it was heaps of fun.

John Zerzan: I'm very grateful, very honored for that.

Tyson Yunkaporta: Well, me too. John, it's my first book. I'd never published a book before. And you had like eight. You were so generous with your time, you know. (Laughter) I could have just been some idiot, but you gave me so much of your time and knowledge. I was really grateful for that at the time. It's so lovely that it's worked out.

John Zerzan: Well, it deserves the prominent publisher that you have, the American publisher. Is it doing well? Sounds like – I would be really amazed if it wasn't reaching a lot of people as it needs to reach a lot of people. Is it doing well, do you know?

Tyson Yunkaporta: Yeah. I've yet to get some final figures for how it's doing in the US. It's done all right in Australia. It's done about as good as books do unless they're the top, number one, really bestseller, whatever. But it's doing weird things in Australia, like it sold more in its second year than the first year and apparently that rarely happens. So, it's really interesting how it's going.

Because of all the disruptions in the world, we haven't done any standard marketing. It's all been word-of-mouth and having yarns with people like this. It's pretty much all I've done. And yeah, it's a lot of word-of-mouth and a lot of – it's got a lot of interest in the sort of tech-bro community and the Game B kind of – what else do they call the Game B – and the sensemaking and all that kind of community and the psychedelics community and the Intentional Community community and all that kind of thing that's kind of swirling together in a kind of meta-community at the moment.

It's gained some interest there in that Jim Rutt who

had me on his podcast a few times. He's the guy who invented domain names and stuff like that. He reckons it's showing signs of early virality. So that would be great, if that happened because then I could, you know, fulfill my dream of not dying on the side of the road in the rain. Could finally realize that lifelong ambition.

And yeah, so, I guess, off we go.

John Zerzan: Wonderful. That's wonderful.

Tyson Yunkaporta: I don't have any figures from the states yet, though, but – and we'll see how it goes there. I think it's kind of – at the moment, it's an underground, whispery kind of – you know, people are nudging each other and going "hey, have you checked this shit out?"

John Zerzan: There you go. Yeah, word of mouth, man, that's the real deal.

I wanted to ask you some specifics. The different chapters, the different yarns. You mention that you provide these simple symbols – well, they're not simple, but they're very direct. And also, you accompany them with something you've crafted, like a wooden dish or a type of boomerang or something. And to me, that also deepened the words, you know, what you're trying to convey. It was an amazing combination. Can you tell us a little...

Tyson Yunkaporta: I should show you, I still – I don't have them all because – a part of making things, it's situated within a traditional economy when you craft things. So half of them have sort of gone out to people and are sort of moving around out in the world in a traditional economy. But I've still got some of them here. And you know what, I've still got the one from your chapter, too.

Hang on, I'm just ...

Go on then, mate. Just going to show you, I know this is a podcast so it's audio. So no one's probably going to see this but I want to show you your thing, what I carved after I spoke to you. Because you

were the last one I needed to talk to for this. So, anyway, that was the one.

And it's the shield, I think you might have seen in that chapter, that I said it just wasn't quite – it wasn't right. And it bothered me and I didn't like it. So I had to keep – like when I was trying to write the chapter after I carved this, I had to put it face down. Because it just kept bothering me, the pattern. But you know what, I've gotten used to it.

John Zerzan: Oh, that's a joy, to see that.

Tyson Yunkaporta: It's making a lot more sense to me now.

John Zerzan: Yes.

Tyson Yunkaporta: Yeah. There's a lot more to it. So, it's basically a parrying shield. It's made out of thaancahal wood from back up home.

John Zerzan: Wow.

Tyson Yunkaporta: Yeah. And so, a lot of what came out in your chapter was that idea of kind of an ancestor mind, a peak neural state, a peak performance state. You know, all that kind of thing. I know there's so much interest in that, weirdly, too, at the moment. I just thought that was something that people were briefly enamored with in the '90s and then forgot about. But I mean, there's heaps of interest in it now, that kind of thing. Lots of people – they're looking at how to do that chemically, how to do it through meditation. Oh, breath work. Every bastard's doing breath work now.

(Laughter)

They're all trying to find the hack. The hack for getting to optimal neural states. And I'm like, bruvv, make yourself some clapsticks. Just make some.

John Zerzan: Too direct.

Tyson Yunkaporta: It's just – you know, do something. Do something meaningful and connective. Just do it and you'll get there. And if you don't,

then fine. At least do something. I don't know, it's not as complicated ...

John Zerzan: So many ways – indigenous ways of thinking. But also, in the middle of the book, you said ways of *being* are as important as that. And that just was like a lovely bombshell. Because that's where you're getting, it seemed to me, in the book. That kind of depth. That's what we're talking about.

Tyson Yunkaporta: Yeah. Well, look, we're encouraged to separate those things. At the moment, most indigenous thinkers for the last 20 years have been being encouraged to separate those things, like through a lot of the post-colonial, post-modern kind of decolonizing, post-colonial schools of thought that are looking into those epistemologies, ontologies, ways of thinking, ways of knowing, ways of being, ways of doing, ways of valuing; kind of separating all these things out and defining them as processes, as – and this is helpful, I think, for a lot of people to come into these things.

But at the same time, I did talk to a few people who were worried about that. Blackie was a woman I spoke to who was sort of saying stuff like that in the book. That it's – everything's ontology now, or epistemology, but really it's hard to separate those things; your ways of knowing from your ways of being.

And why are they separate? In our cultures, for so long, most of these things that we separate now haven't been separated. Society, economy, landscape. Society, economy, ecology, how are those things separate? So, in our way, in our proper way, they're not separate things. In the same way we keep trying to fracture knowledge into smaller and smaller pieces and taxonomies until everybody's over-specialized half to death. Even you just describe what it is to be alive. (Laughter) You got to fracture into eighty different bloody things.

Do you feel that in your disciplines? Do you feel sort of siloed and broken up? Or do you think you can successfully overcome that?

John Zerzan: I think, for some of us, this primitivist thing is deeply spiritual in that we're not comfortable with that but it really is there, it's really at the heart of things, I think. It's not only the effort to tackle everything but there is a spiritual core. It's about oneness and intimacy with the land. And that's what we're talking about, that's what we're yearning for and looking for.

You know, I wanted to mention – you said that in your language, there's no word for culture. That the closest is a phrase – the literal translation, which is "being like our place." That really hit me. We're in a fairly placeless trajectory, speaking of the technology and everything. But being like our place. I think that translates really well.

Tyson Yunkaporta: It's all you can be, is like an expression of the place that you're connected to. That's all you can be. What else can you be? Is it even being? Is it even being, if you're not that?

John Zerzan: Well put. Yeah, I thought that was really worth thinking about and it's pretty baseline stuff.

Oak Journal: Yeah, that was interesting, what you said. I mean, how do you see that – and especially with what you're doing with materials.

You talk about the segregation of the epistemology and the ontology and the way that we sort of silo different sort of philosophical musings in the West. But how does that relate to how we just view materials generally, you know? As sort of fixed, immutable objects that we don't – aren't in flux with all the time, you know?

And I haven't read your book but I'll order it. And then I'll learn more, about what you're saying.

But how do you see that relationship between the perception of working with materials and how that influences your thinking.

Tyson Yunkaporta: Well, there's a couple of things there. It all comes down to what you believe – not even what you believe, all right? It comes down to a couple of questions of what is consciousness, and therefore what is conscious? You know what I mean? So, what has sentience? And then it comes down to, well, what is cognition? And basically, coming into, is it brain-bound or is it something that's haptic and sort of more sitting on our connections with our relationships around us, with the world around us?



So, is your cognition actually, quite a bit of it occurring outside of the brain and outside of the body? Which – if you look at all the embodiment research, all that distributed cognition. Distributed cognition is a big one, you look into all that and you'll sort of see that there is a lot of neural processes happening out in the world around us, and that we're one of three species that science recognizes as having haptic cognition, which is cognition – like where we see things as an extension of ourselves and actually have neural processes occurring out in our relations – of how we're connected to those things.

It does come down to those couple of different questions about, what is consciousness and therefore what is cognition? And then, therefore, what is conscious? What is consciousness and what is conscious? That's the first question set.

And then the next question set is about cognition. And what is cognition and where does it go? Is it brain and body-bound? Or does it go out into the place – connect with the place and relations

with others around us? And so, I've got someone – friend who calls that space of relation where cognition occurs, he refers to that as *va* in Samoan language. This is one of the most important things that you learn, and that there's sort of five stages of knowing around that *va*.

You learn the first one when you're a toddler and you're learning about the relation and the point of relation between your feet and the sand and the water. Right down at the water's edge, your mother teaches you that. And then it goes up through different stages of understanding about that throughout your life until you can perform some pretty amazing feats of memory and knowledge production and transmission along those relational lines.

And so, every culture in the world has that. Every pre-industrial culture, most cultures prior to a century or two ago would have still had that in some form or another. Actually, not even prior to – I think the moment when things turned was Martin Luther when he banged the thing on the door. (Laughter).

Banged, as they say, on the door, and commenced the project of individualism. You know? Because that's where individualism started. Because before that, the West was pretty – the Western mind was still quite a human mind. I mean, it was suffering and it had been traumatized. But it was still a connected, land-based, relational mind. It was after Protestantism kicked off and Catholicism had to compete with it and it also starts schools and such and makes sure that everybody could read their bible and have an individual relationship with God and therefore the universe, and therefore themselves.

That was what changed everything. Martin bloody Luther.

John Zerzan: Yes. The spirit of capitalism born with the protestant reformation. Yeah.

Tyson Yunkaporta: Yeah. It gave us that individualism, it gave it that twist. Because, actually, I'm quite a fan of British mercantile capitalism. Like,

the original. You know, 1.0 wasn't too bad. It's pretty good.

And there was – and it was kind of bound by the laws of physics so even though it was quite expansionist for a bit, there was only so far that was going to go before it wound back. I think if it had been allowed to continue without the bloody protestants ruining everything, I think it probably would have been OK. People would have been fine. There would have been – you know, the civilization, I think, would have just come to its natural conclusion at that stage as most -- civilizations are supposed to die out after 1,000 years, for god's sake.

You know, that's their bloody life trajectory.

John Zerzan: Yeah. Well, I love the way you end the book, getting back to cognition for the moment. You write on the last page, everything in the universe is alive and full of knowledge.

Tyson Yunkaporta: Yeah. So, like I said, there were two parts before and the first is about, what is consciousness and what is conscious? I think once you figure out that it's knowledge – even what we call knowledge. But I think what most people would understand is information. So, what is it that's holding a rock together? It's basically particles that are being held together in a certain form, a certain combination of elements in a certain shape. What the fuck is holding that together and stopping it from just dissolving or flattening like a pancake, or anything else?

What is holding that rock together in that shape and in that substance? It is – and everyone will agree with you, I don't care who they are or what their discipline is, they'll agree that it's information. That rock contains living knowledge and living spirit. It contains knowledge which is connected out to the rest of the system because there's a set of agreements on what those elements are and how they hold themselves together and not just bloody dissolve down into the quantum soup.

There is a set of agreements that we all have on this plane of reality. And that keeps us here on

this plane of reality. That set of agreements is very complex and there's a lot of knowledge for that and we share that knowledge with every single thing you can touch and see and feel and understand. Everything has that spirit. Everything is entity, everything is conscious. A rock is conscious and contains knowledge.

And I think once you see that, it kind of changes things a bit. Because, what does it mean, then, to make a stone axe? Or to make a stone – I'm working on flint knives at the moment. What does it mean to make a flint knife with a wooden handle and a stone blade that's fixed with resin from a grass tree and that has string from bark? What is it to do all that? What is it to use that? What is it to pass that on to somebody? What is it, then, to make that trade and what is that system of trade, then, that economy that you have as human beings together?

What is that pattern? Is that an entity with spirit? Yes, it is. Is that entity of spirit, is that separate from the landscape? No, it's not. All these things are tied together in that same pattern. Because otherwise, this would just be a swirling mess of atoms (laughter) where we'd be sort of floating around, going "Ah! Ah!" trying to figure out what the hell was and wasn't. You know?

So, knowledge is through everything. You know, to make something is really – it's about making meaning as much as anything else because you're working with knowledge and information from different things and you're doing combinatorials of things that are in creation.

You're combining wood and rock and fiber and resin to make something. But in doing that, you're combining the knowledge from all of those entities. That coastal flint that I'm working with, I'm combining the knowledge from that beach and from that trench where it came up from the sea, that rock. I'm combining all that knowledge from all those entities and all those contexts and also the wood from that tree where I take that handle.

The grass tree as well, where I get the resin. There's

knowledge of fire in that. The fire, the bushfire that went through that made the resin boil up from the ground beneath the grass tree. That has knowledge too. That connects out to other totemic entities related to fire, like the sparrowhawk. Can you see what I mean? You're constantly in this web of relations, all of which carry knowledge, all of which contain knowledge; but also, most of that knowledge is sitting in relations between things and the relation between the sparrowhawk and the bushfire and the grass tree. And then the relation between the grass tree resin and the kangaroo shit that I mix that with.

And that's not enough either because it's too brittle then. You have to actually add some charcoal from that bushfire. So, it links back again to that sparrowhawk. Can you see there are these closed loops of knowledge, you know, that are running through this system recycling knowledge. There's no entropy in there, there's only increase when you're working this way. It's very hard to explain.

I mean, nobody's ever been able to explain it and the way I do it, I guess it's just a weird way in that offers a glimpse of it but not the whole thing. Does that make any sense, brother?

Oak Journal: Yeah.

John Zerzan: It sounds like – part of it is the intimacy. If you don't have the intimacy, you don't really have the knowledge, the direct...where we're trying to get to. You know, shirking off domestication and all the things that get in the way of being there with what it is.

Tyson Yunkaporta: Yeah. Well, like I said, it's about meaning making. I mean, you're putting together – you're not just pulling together elements or things when you're making something. You're bringing together stories. You're putting together information from so many different things. And it's very, very tricky. But at the same time, it's just beautiful. There's a lot of genius going on there.

And if you're making meaning around that, then you're doing something very profound; an act

Greenbriar

-BB leering

I. My nascent leaves wince and blink open
to a scrambling, tangling
snare of stalks and stems.

I am enveloped in their trembling lifelong lunge,
out and upward
in aching ascent to fleeting shocks of sun.

Illumination!
Honied golden gleams on baking shale and lichen

Holy swords of fire ignite drifting petals and pollen
like stars bathed in starlight

Constellations flaring and vanishing
in the windswept shadows of the canopy

Sacred and scarce

II. And what of me?
Still in shock of sprouting,
exposed in this creeping sprawl of undergrowth.
(coarse mud,
acorns drilled,
seed husks crushed

termite-forgotten logs
inseparable
from fungus and soil)

A dream of thirst my only past;
a meandering sleepwalk
(as my taproot tells it)
rising from dark and damp

through sand,
through salts,
through soil,

to breach the clinging air and unfurl;
nested in picked-clean silk-string skeletons of leaves,
long past the faintest ghost of blushing autumn.

III. What there?
The frenzied dawn now charges over the ridge
where snow-blind cannons report,
their quaking thunder shining on the hillside

Cacophony!

Rattling and scorching and splintering
from peak to cloud and cloud to valley;
a rancorous longing to lay waste
reverberating in rockslide vanguards and flash flood siege

Depleted uranium shafts nocked to bows drawn in taut grimace
are loosed along trajectories arcing beyond even seraphim
then dive like starlings from their summit;
a siren choir singing vengeance into every hollow

And anointed in the searing hymn of day comes the hunt.
Gaping jaws now recall the ecstatic crack of bone,
and steaming throats howl in chorus with the sky.
(O rend and split!
make us whole by unmaking!)

IV. Indeed, what of me?

Must I be piercing in all closeness?
Be curtained in a fine cloak of needles?
(though they might jab both out and in)

Shall I clench and stiffen,
drive spines from all my skin?
(though I may be made brittle)

And what manner, what measure, what shape and aspect?
Suppose, the glaring venom-green of a wasp?
Would straightforward spikes prevail,
like the pointed staves of a fallen hemlock?
Adorned in lances of Achilles!
(though shields, harder still,
may blunt and bury me)

Wiser yet to bend and sharpen sickles?
Their gleam, the ruby of Caesar's lips;
Clutching, whipping talons
fixed with hooks and barbs to tear and cling
(but how fearsome,
if I should be ripped,
uprooted,
dragged away)

V. Once more I squint high into blinding hope;
petrified to climb,
helpless to burrow.

What might else be like?
To me, it seems a happier thing
to be born not of heavy root
but of foot, or fin, or wing.

of creation that basically we were made to do. We work with that knowledge in all these things in holistic ways as the custodial species because that's our ecological niche, is to be the custodial species. No one can do that except us.

Oak Journal: What do you mean by that?

Tyson Yunkaporta: There's no such thing as wilderness. We have to be in there. We're – our ecological niche is that we are a custodial species. We're supposed to look after everything. We're supposed to keep an eye on the complex systems in every bioregion and we're supposed to look after those things.

And so not just hands-on looking after but also making that meaning, performing increase ceremonies and constantly in an active inquiry to see where the system is moving, how the land is moving, how we can make sure everything moves appropriately within it, how we make sure that there is constant flow of information, knowledge, spirit, resources, throughout the system, and that the system is appropriately dumping entropy in its connection with other systems for whom that entropy is their lunch. Then that system's dumping back into this one. It's basically making sure the loops remain closed so that everything is recycled and that the systems can continue indefinitely in what's basically true sustainability. That doesn't work without human beings. That's – on this world, humans occupy the ecological niche that makes natural systems work. It's very important that we're there to do that.

Oak Journal: Would you contrast that to stewardship? Or are you sort of articulating the same thing?

Tyson Yunkaporta: There is no word for it. There's no word for it in my language, there's no word for it in English. The closest I can come is custodianship. But even that implies some kind of ...

Oak Journal: It sounds a little paternalistic, I guess, to me just hearing it...

Tyson Yunkaporta: Ownership – yeah. There's a kind of ownership thing there that isn't really quite the right thing. And stewardship, it's this kind of hierarchy ...

Oak Journal: It's very popular in the United States.

Tyson Yunkaporta: Yeah, I know. I'm just about to start a series on stewardship of land. And in the end, I just tell people – you know, because people like to say things like "I'm really uncomfortable with that word. I really don't like this term, 'regeneration.' Because regeneration, I think it's all the rage at the moment but I don't like it." It's like, fuck what you like.

There's a couple of things going on in the world where coming up with a word that you're comfortable with for that thing is probably not the most important action we should be undertaking right now. No one's going to agree on the word. Fuck the word. Just do it. So, I don't really care whether we call it stewardship, custodianship, I don't care if we call it bloody whack-a-doodle-doo. Let's just get it done. We need to be out there.

Oak Journal: That kind of relates back to a bit of a problem, I guess, that I see. I don't – a lot of what you're talking about, you know – you're saying that it's difficult to fully explain these things – which I completely agree with – because, at core, there's something inherently ineffable about all these connections, we can call them knowledge or information but that's sort of signaling something, but it's not really the essence of it.

So, is there a sort of inherent danger in explanation?

Tyson Yunkaporta: There is. There is. And as soon as – I mean, as soon as you give something a name, it's finished, as far as I'm concerned. Most of the really important things in the world, like sustainability, things like that, they don't have words in actual human languages. You don't actually do the sustainable thing. There's no word for it because it just fucking is. Why would you need a word for it? I mean, because there's no other

option but to do that. Why would you need a word specifically for that?

It's almost like creating a word for that would kind of ruin it.

Oak Journal: In a sense, that's a big diagnostic.

Tyson Yunkaporta: And I've started to worry lately that we're talking about these things so much, it's kind of like "oh my god, all we're doing is creating more content about the things that everybody should just know by now anyway." Everybody knows what to do. I reckon they should just freeze the internet. At like – not get rid of it completely but just – it should just be read only now. We shouldn't add anymore.

(Laughter)

Oak Journal: Disable all the hyperlinks.

Tyson Yunkaporta: You know, not until everybody's learned what's already there and done whatever they can do with that and figured out all the bugs, all the glitches, all the ethical problems with the knowledge that's there already. You know? Just stop for a minute. Just for a bit. Just for a little while. Just a thousand years or so, just sit with that and read-only memory that one. And everybody can go through at their leisure and they'll find pretty much anything. And they can learn twelve languages, bloody Russian, whatever they want to learn. Because you can learn everything just on YouTube, you know? And that would be enough. But instead, here we are, and we're contributing to the problem, us three, because we're just making more content, going over the same old shit.

Oak Journal: Yeah.

Tyson Yunkaporta: And just trying to put it together in different ways, invent new words for it. "I don't like that word. I don't really – I'm not really comfortable with the word anarcho-primitivist." You know, it's like – who cares? We're supposed to be people. Just relax. Calm down.

John Zerzan: Moving with the land, I thought that was a thread throughout your book that comes

close to expressing that – but then there's everything that takes us away from that, including the technology. Why don't we have that? Why don't we – you know, it's just everything that's in the way. That's the simple way to put it, to get – it seems to me, what you're talking about, what the grounding of all this is, the way we once were and unhappy because we're not that way. Well, what is that? What the hell is in the way? Count all the shit that needs to go. Right?

Tyson Yunkaporta: It's so hard. It's so hard to have any kind of authentic thought in the middle of all that. We try to break the pattern by being iconoclast or whatever you want. We're all rebels without a cause, we're all bucking the thing, we're all trying something new, we're all sick of – "that's so five minutes ago, that way of thinking," you know? Everybody's coming up with a new thing, a new narrative, and they're trying to gain as much market share as they can with that narrative, and off we go and off we go and off we go.

And you know, I'm trying to – I try to keep sabotaging myself from doing the same thing because I can feel myself getting sucked into that vortex of trying to sell a narrative to people. So, I just try to shoot myself in the foot a fair bit just to disrupt that. But then it's like, oh, that becomes a thing. And then I get feedback that that's what people find refreshing and I'm like, "ah! no!"

Oak Journal: That's the guy who shoots himself in the foot. I love that guy!

Tyson Yunkaporta: Exactly, yeah. So, it's like "yeah, that's really cool. That's really ironic." And it's like, ah. Can we just not have the next thing for a while? Can we not have people that we elevate – like someone who's interesting for a minute and people get excited about what they're saying and so then they've got to be elevated to be a guru of everything? You know, that little lens that they have – so what is it, about scale? Excellent, let's apply that to everything now.

This guy – the scale guy, he's the expert for everything. And then it's like freaking donut eco-

nomics and it's like, "wow, let's check everything from there." And for five minutes, because of my book, it's like "oh, indigenous lens, let's chuck that around." And I'm like, oh, have I just contributed to the problem? Probably, yeah.

John Zerzan: Yeah, exactly. And it all moves with the speed of technology, right? The bottom line – that's why there's no attention span and there's nothing but novelty and distraction and diversion. Because the technology speeds up everything. Work, you name it. It makes for superficial – it makes for surface shit, not what you're talking about. And you're not afraid to say, "I'm a Lud-dite."

Early in the book, you just come right out. There you go, no horsing around.

Tyson Yunkaporta: That's it. And it's an unusual position. My position on things is not a standard position in my community or outside of my community. It's weird. I have a weird worldview. Most of my elders are OK with technology. They don't seem to have thought about it very much. And I'm sort of going, but do you know what the Internet of Things is?

Oh, it's things – things on the internet, like whatever. And I'm like, "no, this – there's problems, man." Things are coming. I don't know. I've got an unusual point of view. It's not like a normal point of view, so I guess – I can't really speak from the center of anything. It's always from the edge.

Oak Journal: I think that's a good way to avoid that narrative-building, is to speak from the edge like that. You know, to act as – sort of like you're invading all these different ideas and raiding them instead of operating from trying to build your own center, your own city everybody can flock to.

Tyson Yunkaporta: Yeah, that's it.

Oak Journal: You're a barbarian at the gate, there you go.

Tyson Yunkaporta: Yeah. It's easy to cross the Rubicon when it doesn't mean shit to you, if it's just a river. Yeah, cross it.

Also, John, I remember you – I didn't really go into that much in the book, but I remember you really struggling with a lot of your own positioning within your discipline, within your field, and the problematics of overvaloring hunter-gatherer lifestyles and all that sort of stuff, and sort of wincing at yourself a bit around, "I'm romanticizing this, I'm romanticizing this." But then, at the same time, knowing that you're trying to deliver a counter-narrative against something that is clearly destructive and clearly evil. You know what I mean?

John Zerzan: Yeah. Well, you run up the noble savage slur. That's a good way – ah, that's a noble savage – Rousseau, that's stupid and everything. The only place I can go with that is, I don't know what that means but I do know what is ignoble. We've had enough of that, we can see it so starkly. So, why do you put it off by the term noble savage? I mean, isn't it time for some of that? I mean, come on.

Tyson Yunkaporta: Yeah. Yeah, that's it. I just think most of the stuff that you might get criticized for in that domain, and particularly when you're doing the kind of work that you're doing is – it's not – I don't know. Noble savage has been deployed in some very vicious and damaging ways.



And to justify all kinds of just horrible stuff. But that's not what you're doing in your field. I guess one of the terms to describe what you're doing is white atavism. And most of that, it's not damaging, it's just lame. You know?

So, people can just laugh at you and go "ha ha, he's trying to have a connection to be a real human being but stuff it, he doesn't deserve it, his ancestors are evil and he's still holding onto all that capital, so stuff him and his privilege. It just makes him look silly." And everyone can just point at you and laugh. That's about as far as the damage goes. And there is no damage. There is actually, like, the opposite of damage, potentially, there. An actual reclamation and giving people an alternative of how to be in the world and where to go to that is not white supremacist, that is not destroying the world, that is not competition stepping on everybody's throats.

But at the same time, that white atavism, that noble savage thing, that's actually being deployed by a lot of sort of paleo white supremacist groups at the moment. I've been talking to a lot of fellas in Scandinavia who are involved in reclamation of pre-Bronze Age sort of cultures there in Scandinavia; Friesians and also some people around Denmark and all around the place, doing amazing work.

But then, at the same time as they're doing that, you've got like proper neo-Nazis doing the same thing but sort of reclaiming this kind of master race ideal from that, that's elevating the paleo kind of noble savage to some kind of godlike bloody Nordic giant -- a bloody superhero to support some pretty horrendous agendas and ideologies. They're very worried about that. The people who are doing it for the right reasons and for real, on the ground, and bringing people back into relation with the wetlands and hunting and pre-Indo-European language and all kinds of awesome stuff like that.

It's just -- it's kind of terrifying.

John Zerzan: Yeah, you got to sort it out, that's for sure.

Tyson Yunkaporta: Yeah. Because you can weaponize anything now.

Oak Journal: It's hard to point to one thing and say "that gets weaponized" because everything is weaponized.

Tyson Yunkaporta: But you can also disarm anything and put it to good use. You taking this trope of the noble savage and sort of defusing it and then repurposing it for something useful, that's a good thing, surely. Surely that's not -- you don't get lumped in with the people who are weaponizing the same idea for white supremacy. There used to be nuance. I'm sure there's a couple of years at the end of the '90s when there was some nuance.

Surely there was at some stage. Anyway, maybe I'm just doing that new -- that alt-right of looking back to a golden age that never actually existed. "Oh, when I was younger, there was nuance. People understood about complexity."

Oak Journal: You can just do the other thing and be a futurist.

Tyson Yunkaporta: Yeah, that's it. Right. So, I'll be a futurist, sit myself there, look back to the golden age. It's probably happening now. We're probably all whinging because, like I said, I listen to everybody. don't like listening to that guy who goes "everything's great, what's everybody complaining about?" I can't remember the dude -- he wrote a book about it.

John Zerzan: Steven Pinker?

Tyson Yunkaporta: I think it's him. Yeah.

Oak Journal: There's a few.

Tyson Yunkaporta: Just how, statistically, it's never been as awesome as it is now and -- but at the same time, everybody's complaining.

John Zerzan: That violence pretty much disappeared ...

Tyson Yunkaporta: What if he was right and we're

ruining everything? Like, ah. The whole planet is actually improving, you know? And that all the radioactive waste is not a problem. And that – you know? All the toxicity's not a problem and look at all these people being raised out of poverty. These poor people have just been sitting, living and subsisting, the poor bastards, out of that well and out of that rich, fertile soil for thousands of years and now we're lifting them up out of poverty, like 160,000 people a day being lifted out of poverty around the world. It's never been as good as it is now. Nobody's dying of polio. Look, I tell you, oh, we've got birth control, we've got equal rights, we've got human rights, it's all great. What if – what if we're wrong? What if we're wrong and it's really awesome and all we're doing is wrecking everything and that we're destroying the future for our children by bloody complaining with all this anarchy stuff.

John Zerzan: Yeah, I guess so. It's not a nightmare. No, it's not a nightmare. You can't even get through the day without dope and everything and yeah, it's wonderful. That's just so crazy.

Pinker's a friend of Chomsky who's the leading leftist. He wants more development, he wants more people, he wants – we just have to keep going. No matter how suicidal it is. It's just so asinine.

It's getting to the place where everybody can see through that. On some level, everybody knows it. Kind of like what you were saying before. You can't miss it. You just can't miss it. This is just nothing but destruction.

Oak Journal: I mean, why do you need to write a book about it? I mean, that's an interesting ...

Tyson Yunkaporta: Exactly. Another book that everyone's going to read and then just – oh, endless permutations of discussions, over and over and over again. It's like, oh god.

Oak Journal: This is from somebody who went to Epstein's island. And was kicked off for disagreeing that – what was it? That resource distribution wasn't what Epstein thought, and he got kicked

off the island. I mean, this is – this is a guy who's there, within feet of an elite pedophilia ring and no, it's all getting better. It's so absurd.

Tyson Yunkaporta: Yeah, well maybe they're right. Maybe everyone can trust the institutions again. Maybe there isn't an opioid crisis, maybe people aren't ...

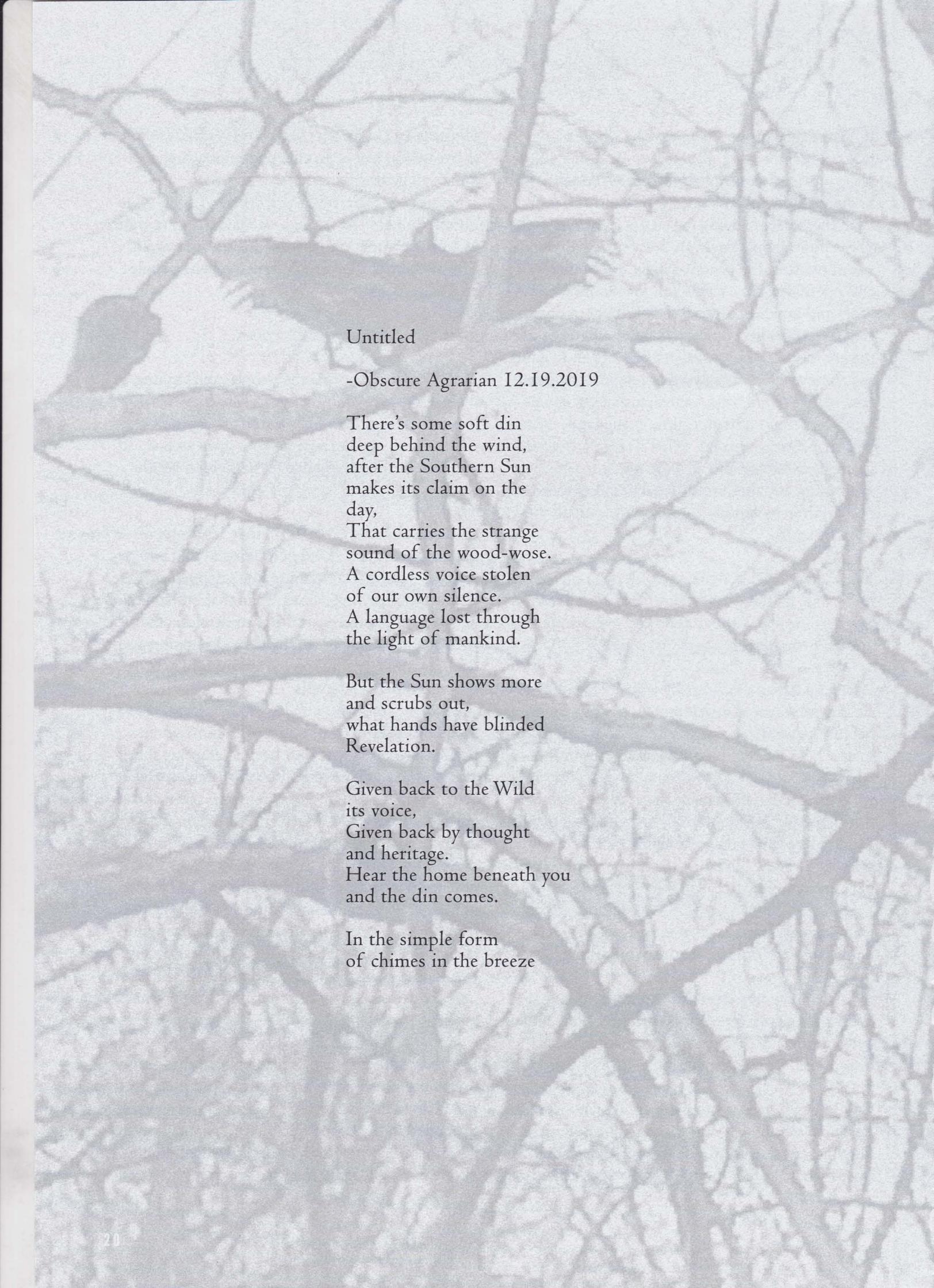
John Zerzan: Yeah. It's all a hoax.

Tyson Yunkaporta: Maybe people aren't killing themselves every minute. And you know what, we look at these stats but we don't really look at what's going on. Because it's so – if we look at – if you look at something like teen suicides, youth suicides.

If you just look at the stats on that, it's pretty disturbing. But you're kind of looking at that and going, oh, that's just something that's happened there. And so you try to get a picture of that but you don't really know anything until you understand that each actual suicide is usually the culminating point of about 100 different suicide attempts. Up to 100 different suicide attempts.

So that's a person who's suffered so horrendously and for so long that they keep attempting that suicide and then one day, probably accidentally, it actually works. There's a lot going on there, there are a lot of stories. And that person then, through each of those 100 attempts, is linked out to a lot of different relationships that aren't working. It's a lot of failed connections and that person's just loose in the universe, so damaged and so suffering and feeling so much of a frustration signal, a genetic frustration signal – you know, just now sitting in this room, look around like “what the fuck is a corner? I can't make sense of that.” You know what I mean?

Like, everything is just [explosion sound]. And there's too much now. Too much. And this is what it is to be a Luddite, is to see it – like, what's happened in the last 10 years. And particularly, to be somebody who got their first personal mobile phone in 2016. That's me. So, I've only had a per-



Untitled

-Obscure Agrarian 12.19.2019

There's some soft din
deep behind the wind,
after the Southern Sun
makes its claim on the
day,
That carries the strange
sound of the wood-wose.
A cordless voice stolen
of our own silence.
A language lost through
the light of mankind.

But the Sun shows more
and scrubs out,
what hands have blinded
Revelation.

Given back to the Wild
its voice,
Given back by thought
and heritage.
Hear the home beneath you
and the din comes.

In the simple form
of chimes in the breeze

sonal mobile phone for four years and I have been able to watch my brain just fall apart.

I've been able to watch my life fall apart just from owning this phone.

John Zerzan: Wow.

Tyson Yunkaporta: And that's accelerated in the last couple of years since writing this book and having most of my conversations online. Most of them. Most of my connections. I mean, you and I are quite – we have quite a profound connection. But it's through this world. And at the same time as that fills me up, it actually quite damages me.

John Zerzan: I think I know what you mean.

Tyson Yunkaporta: That I have this connection in this way. You know?

John Zerzan: Yeah. Not the way it should be.

Tyson Yunkaporta: So, what does it all mean, you reckon?

John Zerzan: I think we should close this off before I have to make a fool of myself trying to answer that.

Oak Journal: From an audio production standpoint, that was a great ending. But ...

Tyson Yunkaporta: Yeah. Close it off, staunch the bleeding.

John Zerzan: But, you know, you're having some wonderful – even though these very estranged mode of connecting. But it must feel pretty good to have – to have found these responses and to get these – to get certain questions moving and people relating to what you've tried to do. It must feel good, huh?

Tyson Yunkaporta: At any point where I start to feel myself inadvertently having a pleasure response to that, I'm sure to jump on it and stamp it out immediately. Because, A, I know it's an illu-

sion. And B, I know it's a destructive illusion in that – that's the narcissism kicking in. I should not have any pleasure responses to anybody's responses to my work. You know?

I can't even think of it as my work. It's the work of so many thousands of people. And it just happens to have come through the ends of my fingers for a minute, for the two weeks that it took me to write the book. It's a series of relations. It's a series of relationships and it isn't me. So, any pride that I might take in that work would be a misplaced pride.

John Zerzan: I see. But it's such – it's a hell of a contribution for those very reasons. I mean, you're not making anything out of it but of course you're not. You know?

Tyson Yunkaporta: It is a beautiful – I think beautiful basin of attraction that I'm privileged to be part of at the moment and I'm really interested to see where it goes. I'm trying to look at it with those timeless eyes out of that ancestor mind and I'm trying to track that patterning of where it's going and what it's doing. And I see it going to good places. I see it doing good things and disrupting quite a lot and having big butterfly effects around the world. But, at the same time, there's a lot bigger things out there competing with that and I – when I start to put all those together, I don't necessarily see it ending up in a great place.

But what I do know is that this story continues with most of us in it, or not. It continues anyway. I know, from deep time perspective, that we've been through that many apocalypses before. That they're kind of just normal. They're fairly routine. And you don't need to worry that much about it. You just need to keep moving with the land and everything else upon it. And you'll probably end up doing the right thing.

Tyson is the author of Sand Talk: How Indigenous Thinking Can Save the World

Kill the Child

By CAM and Voltarine Baedling

Teach your children well
Their father's hell did slowly go by
And feed them on your dreams
The one they pick, the ones you'll know by
— “Teach Your Children” by Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young¹

Children are the future. Frequently interpreted literally, this familiar adage carries an important theoretical underpinning: we must plan for the children of today to become the next purveyors of the social order. In the polemic *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, Lee Edelman coins the term *reproductive futurism* and calls for Queer opposition to it.² Edelman argues that the conception of children as our future is the political idea of the Child: our participation in *politics* is predicated on building a better world for our children. Planning for a future world, whether by reform or envisioning an end-game utopia, has the neat benefit of revealing the social systems and institutions we wish to manifest. Rather than living for the present and people who exist now (including ourselves), we hope to assert the dominance of our politics and desired social order to shape children who will benefit from—and continue—our vision. Planning for this future society precludes the possibility of instead ending or rejecting society entirely. To escape our captivity to Future we must kill the Child: reject the idea of reproductive futurism in favor of an ecstatic queer anti-politic.

The hypothetical deferred Future built on the logic of the Child is irrevocably linked to the idea of straight time. As summarized by McKenzie Wark in her piece on Muñoz's *Cruising Utopia*, “straight time is that of expanded reproduction of the same; [queer] time is an immersion and surrender into the present.”³ This idea of queer time as immersion into the present overlaps with Guy Hocquenghem's idea of *jouissance*, an ecstatic pleasure tied up in daily enjoyment, joyful revolution, and orgasm.⁴ Child-centric futurity impels us to maintain the status quo of straight-cis-mononormative hegemony, acceptance of straight (linear) time, nuclear Families, State oppression, and a civilization that operates under the guise of politics of inclusion—as opposed to tools and forms of life that oppose this order.

Not only is the Child relevant to Future, but it also influences how we understand the past. The Child has been a key tool for development of civilization, private property, and the nuclear family. At the dawn of agriculture (and reified through successive movements for enclosure), the Child became an object used to secure and pass on

wealth, through control of land for farming and possession of private property in the family unit.⁵ In order to efficiently consolidate generational wealth and individual economic security, paternity certainty and primogeniture gained economic and social importance. Which child(ren) “belonged” to whom began to matter in a particular economic way. This dovetails with the development of ideas about who carries our hopes for the future and who is excluded: not one of us, not family, not our child. Perhaps the focus shifts from the whole tribe as “family” to a more limited—though still extended to modern Western eyes—family model. We need the figurative Child to justify and reproduce our hoarding of wealth and resources at the expense of others. If it is “for the children,” privatization of wealth is justified! Under these models, the wellbeing of “our” children is predicated on scarcity and comes at the cost of sacrificing *other* literal children. By extending the timeframe of our future planning to the next generation, the violence and control of this one can be infinitely forgiven.

Of course, we also need literal children to further this vision of societal functioning with privatized family units which produce more laborers to ensure their own survival and feed the nation-state. Again, the mechanics of sexual reproduction become increasingly important. The Second Mythos from *Against the Gendered Nightmare* explains this well:

What was the original sin? A certain heresy tells that the forbidden knowledge was the realization that a certain type of sex leads to reproduction. Once Adam and Eve knew this, they couldn't unlearn it. From here, all of their activities were tied to an emerging symbolic order of domination. Whereas before they had simply indulged in utopia without a future, now their actions had consequences. From this knowledge stems the invention of the role of the Father, as well as the knowledge necessary for agriculture, and even the first form of the rational thought which would later become Science. Patriarchy, Civilization, Reproductive Futurism. All of it stems from this abominable discovery.⁶

People who can gestate fetuses are increasingly seen as always *potentially pregnant*, their bodies either communal/social/state property⁷ and subject to legislative controls (both prescriptive and proscriptive), or the specific property of the person (read: patriarch) who wishes to create a literal child. A child to call their own facilitates transfer of inter-generational wealth and justifies the violence and wealth hoarding held up as “success” in this social order.

Along with the biological reproduction of children and division into more nuclear families comes atomization into couple units, especially heterosexual couples that produce offspring through heteronormative sex. These offspring are necessary today to serve capitalism and the state as both worker-wage-slaves and consumers. This system of social organization, Monogamism, reinforces other systems of power (capitalism, racism, colonialism, etc.) that alienate us from each other and ourselves.⁸ Monogamism is well-rooted as a system of social control whose influence ranges from legally-codified status (marriage, tax benefits, citizenship, social program eligibility) to social coercion (limiting how we interact with others based on their eligibility to be our “match” and/or with whom they are already paired) and our internal self-policing (how/if we want to be acknowledged as “attractive,” our goals and desires in relationships, imposed guiltiness about refusing others’ relationship rules—ie, cheating⁹). Couple units provide a clear foundation for an atomized family unit. In fact, this entire family structure from couples to children, is sold to us by both the State and corporations as the (only) good life. The couple unit becomes both the problem and its solution—dissatisfaction with dating is an individual problem that can be solved by finding the right person or buying the right products.¹⁰ Instead, we must seek the abolition of this system and reject the ways that society controls and limits our interpersonal relationships.

Children are one way that parents can inoculate the next generation with the values they want to see in the world—never mind how this often backfires. “Radical parents,” Emma Goldman wrote,

“though emancipated from the belief of ownership in the human soul, still cling tenaciously to the notion that they own the child, and that they have the right to exercise their authority over it.... The child, being fed on one-sided, set and fixed ideas, soon grows weary of re-hashing the beliefs of its parents, and it sets out in quest of new sensations, no matter how inferior and shallow the new experience may be.”¹¹ These family units are conveniently self-propagating, as each individual is expected to find a partner to form a couple and continue the demanding social norms of Family. Even without producing literal children, the ideas of purpose, legacy, and impact are rooted within the framework of reproductive futurism. The logic of the couple unit folds neatly into the roles demanded by a heteronormative monogamist society and a State that seeks to limit our organization under a framework of rights for individuals and the couple-unit. These children, our future, then propagate civilization with rules that stem from their upbringing. Does it ever end?

The Child is also a rhetorical tool used as political leverage. Children are convenient to advocate for, as they largely lack legal rights and social authority. They supposedly don't know what's best for themselves, don't understand how the world works, or most straightforwardly, don't exist or can't communicate yet! This rhetorical tactic is not the approach of one specific political party or movement, but a tactic applied across a range of positions. For example, consider contemporary mainstream U.S. discourse on abortion:

The Right combines “pro-life” anti-abortion campaigns with child-centric stances against same-sex unions or marriages....

The Left, too, leans on this fulcrum. Defenders of abortion rights don't dare challenge the unmitigated good of a future life, and choose instead to argue from “choice”; environmentalists campaign for the children's future; and, in recent months, protesters scattered across occupy camps held cardboard signs emblazoned with future-looking slogans — it is for the kids' future, for a world with jobs and

*homes and health care, that many are now fighting.*¹²

While these positions appear to be opposite—defending abortion rights or opposing them—both still argue for a future and the place that children may or should occupy in it. As the author later writes, “politics leaves room for difference, so long as the difference also promises to preserve a world for the universalized subject of the innocent Child.”¹² Thus, the Child can support any politic one proposes. Other issues like gender-affirming treatment for youth, safety of youth among transgender adults, and immigration (both for and against) apply this same argument with different justifications for which children should be protected and how.¹³ Individuals and organizations in favor of maintaining the social order argue that we must “think of the children.” Opposition to their ideas is deliberately reframed as a position against literal children to delegitimize any critique and, further, to malign opponents as against the social order.

Moreover, underlying this idea is that no reasonable person would oppose the social order entirely. Maybe have a different vision for it, or take somewhat different actions, but still within the framework of society and civilization in which there exists a Future. As described in *Baedan 3: Journal of Queer Time Travel*, we are not looking for a different form of captivity, but rather an escape entirely—“a way out.”¹⁴ Future, as a deferred structural position in Straight Time, is yet another part of the all-consuming Leviathan; the Child is one of the rhetorical tools that funnels us back into the beast.

Now that we've looked further into how The Child figures into systems of social control, capitalism, morality... we renew our critique of reproductive futurism and The Child by asking: Whose children represent the future? Certainly not all literal children, but rather a subset of children we feel represent “us.” As written by José Esteban Muñoz in *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer*, “The future is only the stuff of some kids. Racialized kids, queer kids, are not the sovereign princ-

es of futurity.”³ Mark Fisher, known by his blog “k-punk,” expressed a similar sentiment in a post written in response to Edelman’s *No Future*: “it is OK for us to bomb other people’s children - because they aren’t the Future.”¹⁶ Indeed, the question of which children are valuable overlaps with systems of power that advantage some individuals at the expense of others. Taken in the context of current-day America, for example, the valuable or representative children are often white, middle-to-upper class, citizens, and otherwise normative. In particular, they largely come from and represent a future of heterosexual nuclear family units with distinct genders and gender roles.

Some anti-natalist critiques and opposition to the Child are mis-branded as ecofascism, as they advocate for reducing births and possibly the human population overall. This begs the question of who is expected to refrain from producing offspring and what punishment will be given to those who break these social (and/or legally-codified) rules. An ecofascist framework maintains that humans are damaging the Earth and a solution to that is less people. Additionally, the belief that resources are scarce or limited (at least in part based on the reality of how resources are hoarded so inequitably by the wealthiest in our society) leads some to believe that the necessary solution is fewer people. In the face of eco-crisis or environmental collapse, the Child acts as a stand-in for the human species: climate change and resource depletion become problems foisted onto this next generation.¹⁷ Following this, the next logical step to protect “our” future is eugenics: some people must be prohibited from reproducing. We see this in a long history of genocide, forced sterilization, environmental racism, and experimentation on uninformed subjects. Of course, the vision of whose future this would protect is executed by dominant social groups with power, influence, status, and resources at the expense of all others.

To critique the Child is *not* to reinforce justifications for atrocities committed against bodily autonomy or intersections of social identity that result in inequitable health outcomes or choices related to biological reproduction. To the contrary,

many literal children have been sacrificed in the name of the Child; for example, in Nazi Germany the ethnic minority children were targeted to supposedly secure a stronger future for the Aryan Child. As written by Natasha Lennard in a response to *No Future*, “Reproductive futurism is thus also about who does or does not get to count as a child worth fighting for.”¹² Rejecting the Child is not an opposition to literal children; rather, it is prioritizing individuals who exist now over the infinitely-deferred potential future.

It is only by refusing reproductive futurism that we can reject all politics whose existence precludes queer liberation. The Child serves to maintain or plan a replacement social order, rather than escape from that paradigm entirely. It was a key idea in the development of the civilization that now ensnares us: agriculture and accumulation of inter-generational wealth instilled economic meaning to paternity certainty, securing the place of a future-driven family unit. Knowledge of the mechanics of sexual reproduction instilled a belief in concrete sexual differentiation, gender, and gender roles—all different iterations of the same myth. Monogamism reinforces the hegemony of child-producing units—couples and families—through social conditioning and legal status that create another axis of politics of inclusion and incentive to trade assimilation and security for our freedom. Beyond the relevancy to (re)production of children and families, the Child is a rhetorical tool that can justify almost any brand of politics. The diversity of policies and opinions is not as wide as it seems; much of it argues from a foundation of reproductive futurism. This harms all of us, including the literal children of here and now—especially those at the margins suffering under environmental racism, hyper-policing, State reproductive control, and white supremacy. Living in service to the idea of the Child will only propagate civilization, politics, and atomization into couple and family units that lend more power to the State. Denying reproductive futurism creates the possibility of a full immersion into the present, and with it all the revolutionary potential, explosion, and jouissance we could embody.

To quote again from *Against a Dream Deferred*, “let’s do away with hope. The challenge is rather to embrace an unmarked aperture — a ‘who knows?’ The challenge is to experiment together to find new ways of interacting, meeting, thinking of space, caring, and fucking; new ways of living. It’s part and parcel of queering...”¹² Embrace queer negativity, spontaneity, and “organize based on a wish to meet and explore each other.”¹⁸ This embodied existence in the present challenges absorption into the Leviathan and its conception of progress based on Straight Time. Instead, let’s build queer time and space. To do this, we must kill the Child.

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Defined by the Center

-Mark Seely

To be civilized is to be contained, to inhabit spaces defined by external borders—many of which are intangible fictions. The civilized live in houses and walled apartments and work in buildings and commute in weather-insulated vehicles. These things have solid enough edges. But they also reside in towns, cities, counties, and states or provinces encased within nations. The borders of each of these artificial, arbitrary, imaginary regions serve as vessels of aggregation, sheaths of containment, and, above all, tools of separation: that which is on the far side of the border is external, outside, other.

This is a wholly unnatural thing. Externally-defined boundaries are inventions of civilization. They are technologies of control that have no true counterpart in the natural world. Nature simply will not abide a boundary. In nature, what looks to civilized eyes as a distinct border shows the very opposite of a boundary with only a slight increase in resolution: the liminal interface in the spaces along the shore of a body of water, or the biologically rich and expansive ecotone that joins a forest to a grassland prairie—even skin has this quality, and it is only by the civilized habit of self-objectification that people think of their own skin as a solid vessel of containment rather than as a permeable membrane of attachment.

Other animals are often said to inhabit territories. And some will fight to the death defending what appear to humans to be arbitrary patches of terrain. From within the civilized mindscape, such fights can only be seen as a kind of border dispute. Humans are quick to project a civilized interpretation, quick to see parallels to civilized notions of property. But property is not a characteristic of the natural world. Property is a reified construct, a convenient fiction. Property is the spatial analog to clock-time. Terrestrial property does not exist in nature any more than do hours or weeks or Thursdays or the eighth of October. Neither do regions or territories. And especially not nations, provinces, states, or city limits. These are all tools of power, technologies of containment and control. And the boundaries associated with these things are defined in terms of the limits of control rather than, necessarily, by the structures or substances or people contained within.

Other animals don't recognize boundaries quite the way civilized humans do. Animals—and noncivilized humans—define boundaries by the center. If there is anything that actually corresponds to civilized notions of property or territory, it is something that travels with them, a zone that moves, a zone that expands and contracts around them according to naturally occurring limitations on the capacity to act in the moment. A mountain range, a body of water, an extended stretch of desert, a tree marked with the scent of a member of a neighboring pack, a sacred ancestral site, these things place restrictions on potential movement—no, perhaps not restrictions so much as conditions. But these quasi-boundaries change, they bleed into each other and dissipate with movement and travel, and with changes in the traveler's purpose and intentions, because they are defined from the center, from the locus of action itself.

To Break the Jaw of the Night Mare: an exorcism

excerpted from the "Liber Serpens" grimoire

-the tamarix project

For one taken with the terror that comes in the night; one afflicted with visitations from the Drymyter, the Mareridt, the Night Mare; for one who is without dreaming, for the dreams are taken from them, violently or silently, night after night; for one whose wild imagination is so atrophied that they cannot imagine a life outside the belly of the Wurm, cannot remember the world that came before, cannot see or feel or smell anything but the Wasteland; for one possessed with the foul spirit of Leviathan, the Great Demon known as the Commodity, the following exorcism is offered.

The afflicted one must commit to a cleansing period of at least three full moons, but up to a year for maximum effectiveness. Throughout this time, you will fast, you will cleanse, you will purge yourself of the Commodity. You will abstain from participating in commodity exchange of any sort, relying on the arts of Gift and Theft for your subsistence. Depending on the degree of possession, this can prove difficult for many, so considerable preparation might be necessary. Example: for your food, you may gather wild plants, hunt, fish, raid dumpsters, beg, or transverse the boundaries of private property. For your shelter, you might set up a tent in the woods, squat in an unused space, or stay with friends who have offered to host you, but do not give or receive money or barter for any goods or service, at any time.

During this cleansing period, the afflicted one must conduct ceremony at each New and Full Moon.

At every New Moon, you will apprentice yourself to Death for a full day and full night. You will go to a place of refuse, to the Wasteland - a place on the Earth which holds the detritus of civilization, the final resting place of the logic of the Commodity. This may be a trash-dump, a poisoned river, an abandoned warehouse or shopping mall. You will

take no food or water or covering from the night. There - in this wasteland of your peoples making, in the darkness and emptiness of the New Moon - you will begin to account for the true cost of your Life. There, sitting in the waste-heap of civilization, you will call in the spirits of all that has suffered and died in your name. You will begin to understand the true cost of your Life, you will allow the turbid wake of your actions to catch up to you. Your chest will heave with the immensity of all that has never been grieved, all the offerings and sacrifices that have never been made. You must give yourself over to Death, and to her daughter Grief, in the most beautiful and sincere way you can possibly manage. You must not only confront these deities, but court them, call them in, make yourself irresistible to them with songs, dancing, drumming, the magic of language:

*Hail and welcome, Ereshkigal
meat-hook waiting
for the favored sister*

*Hail and welcome, Donn
three red horses heralding
the king of the dead*

*Hail and welcome, Hel
half death, half flesh
hidden, always*

At every Full Moon, you will apprentice yourself to the abundance of the world for a full day and a full night. You will go to a place of generosity, health, peace, flowing clean water. This could be a forest, a mountain lake, or the Ocean. You will bring food, wine, gifts of delicate beauty, art of your own making. These are not for you, but offerings to the world, libations to all the beings who have sustained and are sustaining you. While there are

far too many to ever fully account for, you must do your best, with utmost sincerity, humbling yourself before the absurd generosity of the world. There, illumined with the viscous brilliance of the full moon, you will present yourself to the world without shame - without apology or atonement for yourself and the true cost of your being here. For this would be an insult to the generosity to the world. The intelligence at the heart of the universe has chosen you to be here, wants you to be here, and freely offers itself to your beautiful story. You must learn how to receive this truth with heart-breaking humility.

*Hail and welcome, Inanna
queen of heaven and earth
perfect on your throne*

*Hail and welcome, Rosmerta
four wings in your offering dish
wild fruits in the folds of your robe*

*Hail and welcome, Gefjun
lady of the plow
mother of giants*

During these months of purification, ceremony, and apprenticeship to old deities of Death and Life, Humility and Abundance, Grief and Praise, you will be collecting your tears in a vessel of clay or dark-colored glass. If you have truly given yourself to the ceremony, there will be no shortage of this precious substance.

With this aqueous extract, this precious tincture of your Grief, you have begun to prepare the *lapis philosophorum*, the alchemically prepared stone that will free you from the curse of the Night Mare.

For the second preparation, you will now call upon your Longing: the marrow-deep knowing of all that you came into this world expecting - a wild dance of rough-barked magic and verdant mystery - and yet, have never seen. For when your eyes first met this world, you found yourself staring up at the fetid folds of the belly of the Wurm; for you

were born into the Wasteland, the wandering, the great forgetting. And try as you might, and try you surely did, you could never quite accept that this was all the world was meant to be, that there was nothing more to live or die for. Despite having no proof, no resources, no elders, no traditions or stories, no rational explanations for this deep ache, despite having absolutely nothing to validate its existence, the Longing has always been there, all the same.

This is the magical substance you must access, for it is in the marrow of you that your most powerful dreams lie, and you will need all the strength of them to find your way out of the belly of the Wurm.

As you give yourself over to the marvelous pain of this awful knowing, your hands and your tongue and your throat will begin to move and dance and conjure this Longing. You will give birth to this thing in the way that only you can - through keening throat-song and feral language, through brush-jab and pen-slash, through wild howling and limbs dervish-whirling, you will slowly give form to this knowing. You will transform your Longing into art.

You are calling in your soul. You are calling in your wildest, most impossibly beautiful dreams and desires - grief-soaked monstrosities, a wild-fiber tapestry of such absurd beauty that it could never be fulfilled in a thousand years. You are calling in a world that could never fit in the jaws of the Commodity or be digested into the stomach of the Wurm. You are calling in your soul and the world it belongs to. This is the second preparation.

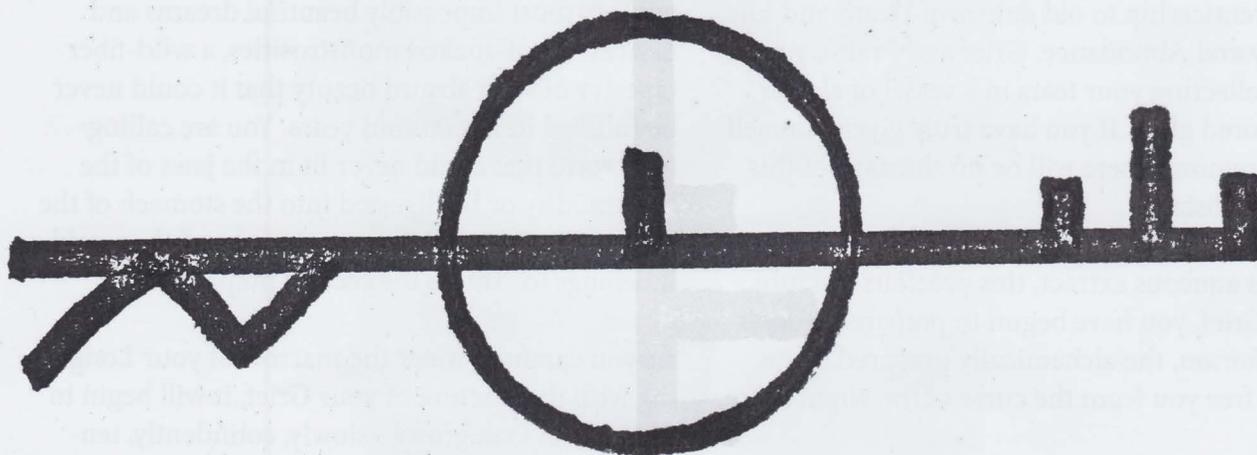
As you carefully water the marrow of your Longing with the tincture of your Grief, it will begin to grow, as an Oak grows - slowly, confidently, tenderly. It will take the form of a large vibrant stone, a frighteningly beautiful creature, the *lapis philosophorum* of your soul. This is the wild heart of your Longing, and it is the only thing that will be able to withstand the crushing jaws of the Night Mare. You are now ready for the descent.

You will prepare a death-lodge for yourself - a place to die, a space to call in the demon and make your last stand, a setting irresistible to the Night Mare. Dig a grave somewhere or make a bed in a terrifying place. This can be your bedroom, but it must be prepared and made desirable to the one you are calling in. Adorn the space with the most terrifying aspects of your worst nightmares - recreate a scene from the most intense or memorable ones, if you can. If you have skills in wortcunning, it is helpful to prepare a medicine for deep dreaming, especially if you are apprenticed to a nightshade.

As dusk approaches on the New Moon, draw a circle of salt and ash around your gravebed and call upon all your allies, ancestors, guides, all that has led you here thus far, to come and give you strength for the journey ahead. For it will be incredibly difficult and dangerous.

As you descend to the Underworld, as the cloaks of Nyx are drawn over you, hold your stone on your chest with both hands and call in the Night Mare:

*horse of darkness, friend of death
come find me here, come final breath*



In the furthest reaches of the shadow-world of your dreaming, she will come. You will feel her approaching from a long way off. You will smell her, sense her stalking presence on the back of your neck, as Wolf to Fawn - the pure distilled fear of prey to predator, the surrender of soft flesh to piercing tooth. The Night Mare will set upon you, her shadowy bulk crushing your chest, paralyzing you. She will open her huge rotten mouth, set her teeth against the wild heart of your Longing, and bite down. If you have followed the spell correctly thus far, she will struggle, reset her mouth, and bite with even more ferocity, until there is a crack and a scream as blood and jagged bits of tooth pour from her mouth.

For your wild, beautiful dreams have cracked the teeth and broken the jaw of the Night Mare.

There will be a great howling, a horrid screech of pain and confusion, for this is not what she came here for. She will thrash about on your limp body, raining shards of shattered bone on your deathbed. She will whimper in confusion, for this is not the story of Wolf and Fawn, predator to prey, piercing teeth into soft flesh. This is another story.

This is when you must summon all your strength, breaking the spell of paralysis which binds you, open your mouth, loosen your tongue, and use your words to spell-bind her, instead:

Hail and welcome: Night Mare, Mareridt, horse of the night, servant of Māra - goddess of the Dead. I name you Marōn, Kana Tevoro, Karabasan, Phi Am, Ogun Oru, Haddiela, Pesanta, Ammuttadori, Pisadeira, the Haint, the Old Hag, the Devil on the back. As I name you, I bind you to this circle.

Fear not, many-toothed one, servant of the Great Wurm, I do not intend you further harm than you have already wrought upon yourself this night. But as you have entered my circle willingly, and as I have named you truly, you must stay until I release you.

You have spoken my name and my story truly,

dreamer, and if you do not intend me further harm, I will stay until you release me. What would you have of me?

Oh great demon, I know your many forms and names, I have tracked the course of your terror, and I must confess it is anger that first set me on this path of our meeting. A profound and violent anger, for I have observed your ruthlessly efficient methods as you have trapped my people and forbid them any escape from the belly of the Wurm. Whenever my people would begin to dream of a way out, whenever the seed of a world bigger than your story would begin to form, you would set upon them in the night.

You have taken our beautiful, tender dreams, as one holds a sprouted seed or a newborn child, stretched open your slaving jaws, and crushed them in your teeth - not only killing them, but then digesting them to provide food for the Wurm, nutrients for the beast that has enslaved us, power for the machine which has trapped us. In our struggles to find a way out, we are only strengthening the bars of the cage; in our beautiful resistance, we are distending the glut of the beast. Our chants of defiance are absorbed, digested, screen-printed, and sold back to us; our demands for freedom and justice are sucked dry and transmuted into milk for the Serpent; our pleas for another world are swallowed in your cavernous mouth, parodied, and cruelly played back to us as entertainment; in our efforts to escape, we are only expanding the borders of the empire, bringing our diseased gods with us, wrapped in blankets, gifts to the natives.

As we have reduced the Great Wolf to a poodle, the Wild Auroch to a cow, the Bezoar Ibex to a goat, so have our wildly chaotic imaginations been reduced to the character limits of twitter, the pixelated boundaries of instagram. As we consume the flesh of beasts who live out the sum of their days in cages so small and cramped that they cannot even turn around, their legs rotting in their own filth, their minds raving mad with suffering, so has our capacity for wonder been so enslaved and caked with our own excrement that we have accepted the confinement of the polling booth as our expansive

frontier, heads down, dutifully feeding from the rotten trough of ethical consumption. As we have laid the Great Forests low and resurfaced them with the singular blights of agriculture, so has our fecund brilliance been so devastated and degraded into repetitive acts of symbolic protest - barricades and brick throwing - pre-scripted caricatures of dissent which have played themselves out in the streets a thousand times over, yet have changed nothing. You have so stripped us of dignity that we have not only given up hope of ever feeling the comforting warmth of pride again, but we have tattooed our resignation on our bare flesh, we have accepted all of these humiliations as our adornments, our pride, our identity, and we call it "freedom."

It is a horribly clever trick - not only do we continually fail in our attempts to escape Leviathan, but our magic is used to reinforce the very thing we hate, the same creature we are struggling against. Our resistance creates the exact terms for our enslavement, and the enslavement of the world; the more we struggle, the tighter the noose. An incredibly powerful spell, a profoundly effectual possession.

This you have done for many lifetimes, in countless ways. Your immeasurable skill in dream-eating has created much suffering for me and my people, and it is this anger which has pointed the way forward, to track you, call you in, and confront you here, in this circle.

Indeed, it is as you say, throat-cunner. Is this why you called me here - to surrender your resentment and anger towards me? If so, then I will be leaving, for I have much more interesting matters to attend to.

No, anger is but the vehicle of my Longing, a raft to navigate the deep waters of my Grief. For I belong to a witchcraft that is older than the Fall and the field of Cain's corruption, older than the Exile, older even than the Watchers and the Cursed Goat. My gods were rooting themselves into the living earth long before you drew your first breath, and I have no interest in wasting my energy on hating

you or your Great Work. For I know who you are, I know who you are in service to, and I know the soil from which that one first witnessed the light of the Sun.

And who might that be?

It is known, although not widely, that you are the Commodity, the one who renders all of Life down into a single digestible unit of value, distilling the vast beauty and myriad wonders of the world into an irreducible lifeless clot for your master - the Leviathan. This is no secret, for those who have the courage and fortitude to pursue it.

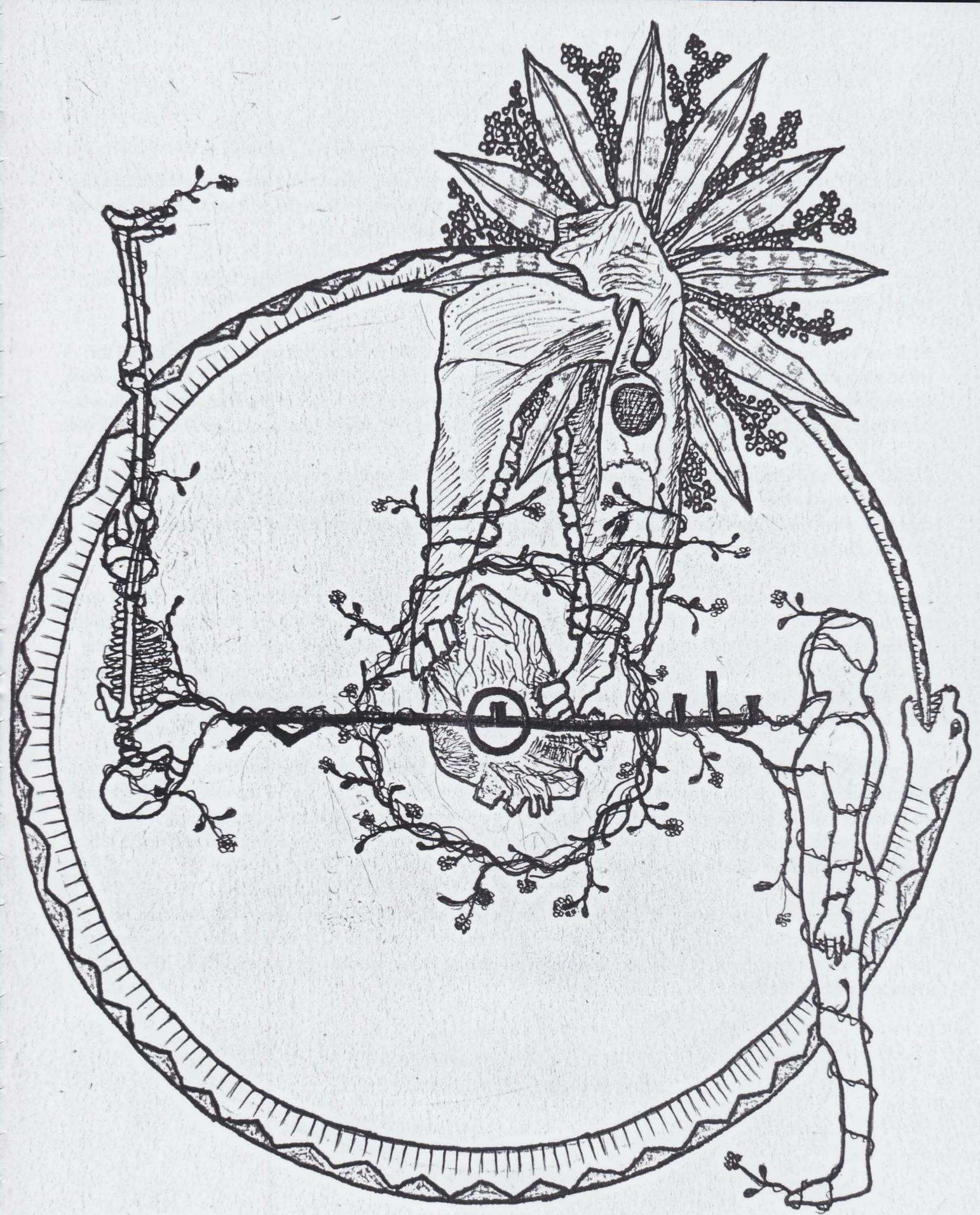
What is not known, but by a handful of cunningfolk, is the soil from which the Great Wurm sprouted from, the fires he was forged in, the waters which first nourished his wrinkled flesh. For I am in service to the first story, the old-woman weaving story, a story much older than you and your lord.

Hating you and your detestable preceptor will not help me or my people escape. Hate is too small a story, anger too fragile a dream, and would be crushed to flakes in your powerful jaws. I know all too well your skill in consuming anger and hate. No, that is not why I called you here this dark night.

Then why have you called me here, hedge-rider?

I called you here to release you from your service, from your curse. You are no longer needed here, for I and my people are closing the sacred hoop, we are coming home, we are fulfilling the contract with Death that we have avoided for so long. You have done your job exceptionally well - ruthlessly consuming the dreams of my people for thousands of years. This you did exactly, horribly well, faithfully ensuring that the debt owed to Death would always be paid in full, despite our cowardice and neglect.

We are the ones who broke the hoop, who cast Asherah down from the mountain and sent out the



Goat, who cut down the Cedars of Lebanon and began our great exile. We are the ones who abandoned the old agreements with Ereshkigal, Donn, and Hel; we are ones who have broken the vows with Death; and we are the ones who must now do the work of rejoining the tapestry of Life.

You, great servant of Death, you dream-binder, have fulfilled your task and served her faithfully; and for this, I offer honor and praise to you.

And not only that, but you have the great wisdom and mercy of always leaving a residue, a subtle trail for those who are determined to find a way out. For one whose feet know the rough textures of the dream-road, the nightmare is the most fertile soil for the initiate, a track for those few who are brave enough to follow it: hag-tapers in the forest, cairns leading into the darkness, towards the soul of the world. For this, I thank you.

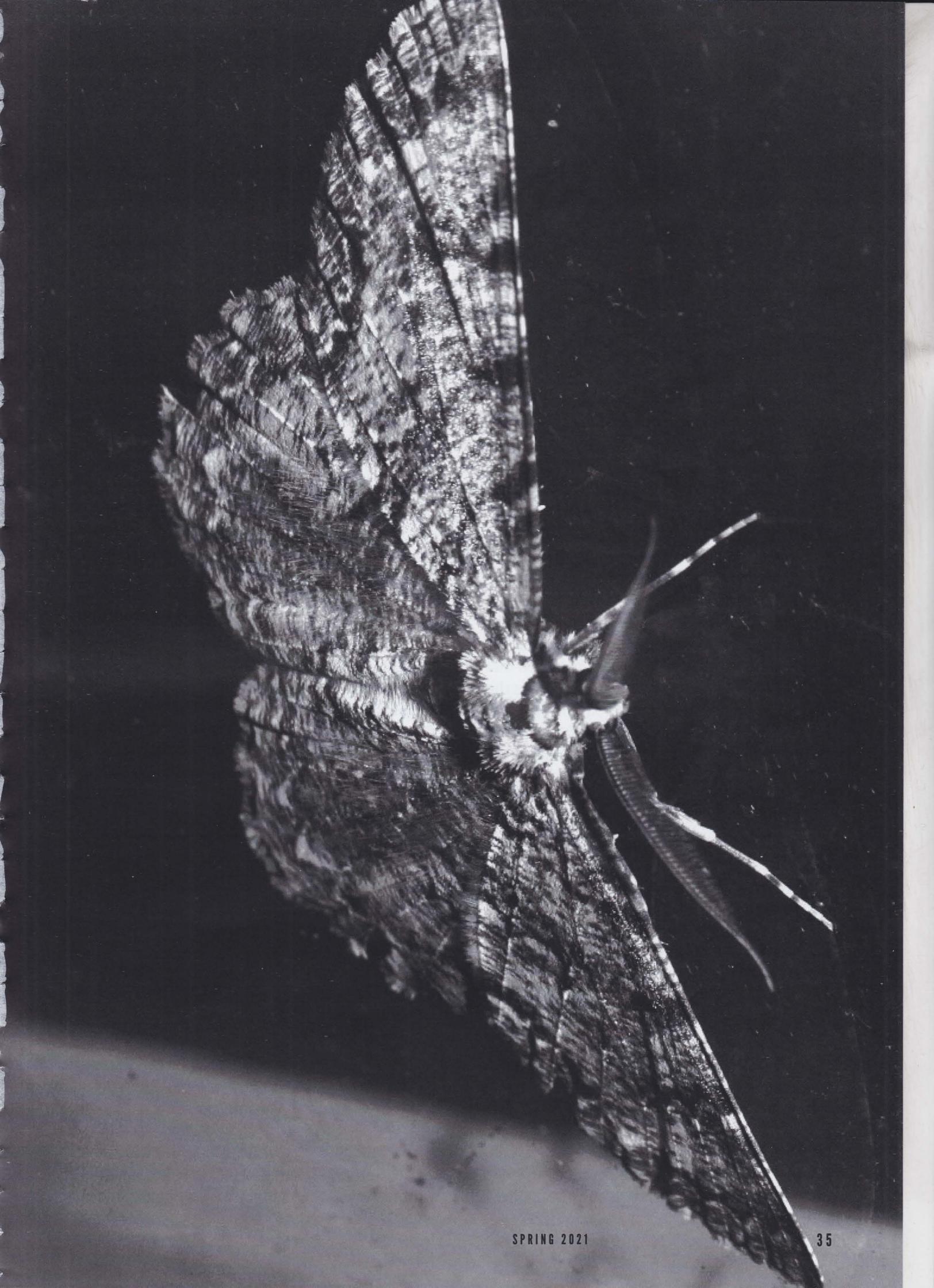
Skilled with your words you are, witch, and well-prepared for this encounter. Yet you must know the laws of my world, the terms of my contract with the Wurm, and with Death. You must know that I cannot and will not cease my dream-hunting until the last of your people have truly and fully rejoined the sacred circle. And this they have hardly begun to do.

Indeed, you will continue your work until you are released from your service by the Great One Herself, and I have no intention of interfering with this task. But when you visit me, and my village, when you come to the beds of those sworn to Death, to those marked by the goddesses of Grief and Longing, you will now come much more carefully. For our dreams will not be crushed in your teeth, our beauty will not fit in your jaws, our souls will not serve your master, for they now belong to the story of the world, to the grand tapestry of Life, to the dark wisdom of Death.

We will not serve the Commodity or the Leviathan any longer, whether in the dayworld or the dreamworld. We are taking accountability for the debt owed to Death, we are tending the soul of the world, we have ended the long exile of our people, we are coming home. I will keep your broken tooth as a reminder, to myself and my people, of this agreement. May we never forget the consequences of our cowardice and neglect. May we always remember the strength of our Grief and Longing.

You are released. Go now to your master and tell him everything that transpired here. Tell him that his story is coming to an end, the great arc of his terror is almost completed; for the humans are returning to the circle, are remembering the old agreements, are claiming their true place in the world. Tell him that the Humans are coming home.

*horse of darkness, friend of death
away from here, circle closed with breath*



Breaking the Frame of Civilized Existence:

An Interview with Mark Seely

12/28/2020

[Editor's Note: After brief greetings the conversation began unprompted]

Mark Seely: Just before the call, I had an old student who sent me this link to this article. Some social anthropologist -- John, you, I think would be really interested in this -- some social anthropologist in UK, Harvey Whitehouse. They've been putting together this massive database of historical facts on society.

And they were testing these hypotheses and one of the hypotheses they were testing with this database was, which came first? The big moralizing gods? You know, you have to have an eye-in-the-sky god that can mete out punishments and all of that in order to have civilization. You need that as a prerequisite. And what they've found was that that's absolutely not true; that you don't get these big moralizing sky gods until way after you have civilization.

And it's really kind of fascinating. There appears to be like a population trigger. When a population gets to be about 1 million overall, that's where you start to see these religions that have this moralizing, punitive, eye-in-the-sky kind of god that can see what you're doing. Kind of fascinating.

John Zerzan: Monotheism is a further development, eh?

Mark Seely: Yeah, and it -- it seems to me it's more evidence of religion as a vehicle for social control. It's really what it is, but anyway, I thought you'd be interested in that. Interesting I just got the link a minute ago.

John Zerzan: Well, maybe I can start, if you don't mind. Really general question; I'm just wondering how you went from psychology to anti-civilization,

Mark?

Mark Seely: (Laughter) yeah. Actually, psychology is what sort of led me there. My area of specialty was cognitive psychology. Right now, I teach every kind of psychology class they offer. I'm sort of a generalist. I don't really specialize in anything.

But I was a cognitive psychologist, and I was really interested in framing effects and how we -- the answer to the question depends on how the question is actually asked. You get completely different answers -- you could use the COVID kind of thing, for example. You can say that you have a 2 percent chance of dying from COVID, or you can say there's a 98 percent chance you're going to live from COVID.

You get completely different responses from people depending on which one of those you use. I was really interested in that kind of a thing and that kind of led me into this place where I sort of examine how I was framing the world. And it was really couched in this mechanistic science kind of thing that the human mind is a kind of machine. I mean, cognitive psychology came out of the computer metaphor for the mind.

So, I was talking about things like short-term memory buffers and stuff like that that just made no sense when we started to really think about applying a sort of technologizing of human thought. That's sort of the initial point of where I was at. And then I read Daniel Quinn and his *Ishmael*. There was something about that really simplistic -- and it is simplistic -- simple kind of distinction he made between the leavers and the takers, that even though it was super simple, it seemed like he hit it right at the joint.

I got really interested in that thing and what would cause people who were living in perfect harmony with the world for a million-plus years to suddenly

not do that. And the way he presents it, you can sort of see there's a viral kind of quality to domestication. I started reading. I went from Daniel Quinn actually to Lewis Mumford, who really describes kind of the early civilization formation process that was kind of fascinating; the role that the division of labor and the top-down hierarchical power structure -- that pyramid structure of power and all of that.

I was already teetering on anarchism just as a general perspective, politically. The first book of yours I read was, I think, *Running on Emptiness*. And it was like, "oh, there are people out there that have already thought about this stuff." (Laughter). And you know, it's even more complicated than that because during this time, I -- we're only talking like 12 years ago or so -- I was diagnosed with cancer and I went through all this stuff with that. I started on the paleo diet just as: OK, I'm eating food that my body hasn't really been evolved to eat. What happens if I start thinking about that more intentionally, about what I put in my body? There were personal kinds of things I was doing. And my wife and I, at the time, we turned our house into an urban homestead.

We were doing all kinds of growing our own food and trying to be food self-sufficient. There was all of that in my personal life that was going on at the same time I was doing this more cerebral, academic kind of stuff. And I don't know. It just kind of all fell together all at once.

John Zerzan: Wow, wow. Well, you know, your interest in cognitive psychology, I mean, in the current issue of *Oak*, your piece, "What Do the Civilized Really Know?" I mean, there -- that's on target, there. Similar focus, if you will, and more developed, I guess, in the case of your thinking. It's a great piece.

Mark Seely: I actually started pulling this stuff into my classroom, sneaking the primitive stuff into my psychology classes because it's real easy to start talking evolutionary psychology, because you start talking about: where do we get these behavioral tendencies? And what is knowledge, anyway, is

one of the things that I cover. Most of our knowledge in our society right now -- it's all based on authority.

What you know is what other people have told you or what you've read someplace. Very little of what we know about anything is actually based on first-person experience.

John Zerzan: Right. And now there's so much written on technology, machine learning -- can the technology actually think? And then, you know, you have to consider what it's thinking. I mean, this is a very big topic, as AI and algorithms and all the rest of it race along and make all these claims and promises. So, it certainly fits there in terms of the topicality.

Mark Seely: Yeah, well, that AI thing, that's like a pet peeve of mine. It goes back to that idea of technologizing the brain. If you think of the brain as a machine, then it's obvious; you can just build a machine to do what the brain does. But the brain isn't a machine. And for all the technology we have and all of the neuroscience capacity that we have right now, we can map out the brain in terms of what it's doing in real time, right down to the individual neurons. But we still have absolutely no idea how a bunch of twitching neurons gives us the first-person experience of the color red.

We can't even explain that quality -- whatever the philosophers talk about, that first-person thing. And so, when people talk about AI being like conscious or something like that, that's just -- to me, that's just ridiculous. The other point of that, though, is the AI is allowing us to completely outsource everything. We don't even have to think about what to do. It tells us when it's time to do whatever and it knows better than us. We'd be stupid not to listen to it.

John Zerzan: Have you -- have you run into Raymond Tallis' work? Raymond Tallis?

Mark Seely: No, I don't think so. Raymond Tallis?

John Zerzan: He's quite marvelous. I think he's a

doctor in Scotland, actually, and he's written quite a lot. And he just points out that the brain is not a computer; it's nothing like a computer. I mean, he just shreds all of these ridiculous points. It's very good stuff.

Oak Journal: How do you see that kind of intersecting with our moment now in the pandemic, and the kind of banality of the constant transhumanist push to just do everything through your screen? I mean, it's like, kind of a Transhumanist Lite thing. I mean, is it as dire as it would seem, do you think?

Mark Seely: For me, I think we were already heading that way. Just, the COVID thing has sort of allowed us to accept the electronic mediation a little bit more than -- in more parts of our life. Earlier today, I was doing an advising appointment with a student on Zoom and people treat that as if it's the same thing and there's absolutely -- there's so much that you lose when you put a screen between people, in terms of the psychological impact of the connection you're having with them.

John Zerzan: That's for sure. You know, I asked that question about -- I don't like to veer back and forth too much here off the train of thought, but conspiracy theory; so much attention to that, whether we call it the authoritarian personality or not.

And allegedly, this is increasing quite a lot -- QAnon and all the rest of that. Do you have any particular thoughts on this whole conspiracy theory? Why is that so big? Or is it really that big? I mean, any thoughts on that?

Mark Seely: I'm still trying to work out what the heck is going on with that. Because it still blows me away that there are people out there that think there's this massive left-wing cabal that is eating babies, and harvesting hormones, and has a giant pedophile ring or whatever. That whole -- that people actually can believe that is -- because it's kind of like the flat Earth thing.

How can a person actually believe that? I think it

probably goes back to that outsourcing of knowledge. How do you know anything? "Well, I read something about it." Where'd you read it? Doesn't matter. It was written someplace so it must be -- there must be something to it. And

John Zerzan: I mean, in a postmodern culture, what's destabilized or deconstructive is a matter of fact or truth. In other words, there's -- you can say anything and you have -- since there are no foundations, one thing is just as good as another. I mean, I think that infects the culture or the ways of thinking, too. You wouldn't call these people postmodernists by any stretch, but I mean (Laughter). If you undo any basis for coming to sensible conclusions, then anything goes. You know, anything gives. Which doesn't explain why it's so big, like you say, but it's part of the picture, I think.

Oak Journal: Yeah. I mean, we've had a lot of conspiracy theories, I guess, through the years. I guess it's pretty easy to sign up for one now. It used to take a little bit of effort. So, I mean, the sort of meme-level knowledge. There's always a sort of -- there's an insistence that the documents and the evidence is there. It's a lot of roleplaying. A lot of it, I think, is an escape. It's basically a live-action roleplaying but it's on Twitter and 4chan and 8chan.

But, you know, you're making believe that you're part of a secret army that's going to bring justice and stuff. So, I think it fills a lot of the same video game (laughter) sort of avenue, too. Just what the people that I've seen get involved in it.

Mark Seely: So, as a society, we're going -- we're turning into a giant Dungeons & Dragons kind of...

Oak Journal: Yeah. Maybe. I mean, I guess if everything is sort of getting worse and crumbling and the basic foundational lies of civilization are less easy to maintain, then it kind of makes sense that the population that's already immersed in screens just picks something that they feel has more value.

John Zerzan: Well, I have a question about -- more

about the specific political culture -- or a little more political, maybe. There's yet another Unabomber-oriented documentary that A&E's going to be doing. I've had some conversations with the outfit that's doing it and the point is, this is much more interesting than some of these other ones, by far, at least potentially. It's about -- what do the Unabomber-type theses about technology, critique of technology have to do with currents today, radical currents.

Are younger people even aware of Ted? You know, to put it one way. And what does it have to do with anticivilization thinking? I mean, this person I've been talking to sees -- you know, Kaczynski's very narrowly focused on technology and nothing else, right? So, they're asking that question; how can you not see it as the larger thing? I mean, as a subset of anticivilization?

It contains the critique of technology but there's more to it. You know, and the roots are deeper, for example.

Anyway, it sounds like this could be quite interesting because this raises the question again, probing the question of, where are we at as an antiauthoritarian milieu, or a culture? Which way is it going? Do you have any -- where you're at, Mark, what do you pick up in terms of people that are antiauthoritarian?

itarian?

Mark Seely: Yeah. Mostly, the people I'm exposed to are -- they're LGBTQ protesters and Black Lives Matter kind of protesters. And they're antiauthority bent is mostly couched in this, "there's a way to fix the problem. We don't need to dismantle the system, we just need to tweak it so that everybody gets to play." The people I'm exposed to, anyway.

I'm living here not too far from Seattle, which has a



lot of anarchists around. But I am exposed on a daily basis to progressive left kinds of people who, in some ways, actually embrace civilization more thoroughly than even the conservatives do. Because the conservatives, especially the super-rightwing Christian ones, they think that this is all just one step to God taking over the world and doing whatever.

But the progressive left

really embraces the idea that we can have a system and we can tweak it to make it so that everybody gets to play equally and it's going to be this utopic, wonderful world, where we can even adjust our technology so that we don't make carbon -- we don't have carbon in the atmosphere and all of this other stuff.

I'm not really picking up the extreme end of that in terms of the extreme antiauthoritarian. I'm proba-

bly the most antiauthoritarian person in the room wherever I go around here, I think. And I just moved -- I just moved a little bit further north of Seattle and so I'm out in more of a rural area and it's very -- I saw a lot of Trump signs in the houses around me, so there's that.

You know, the Unabomber, the Ted Kaczynski thing, that's really interesting that they're actually making the connection between this technological dependence and the anti-civ thing. To me, that's such a logical connection, I can't see how you couldn't make that. You can't have technology in any form beyond just craft, you know, like ceramic and glassmaking maybe, without having some kind of authority structure. You just sort of need that.

Somebody has to go down in the mines, right? To me, it's just such a logical thing that anarchism and anti-civ and anti-tech, those things are all just there. They're all the same thing. You can't have -- they're mutually implied, I guess is what I would say.

John Zerzan: Yeah, I think so. And I found it encouraging that this production company that doesn't seem to have any radical pedigree, this guy's talking like we would, like the three of us would be talking about these challenges and these questions and why don't people see that, or how much do they see it, or why don't they see it?

You know, stuff like that, that's amazing and they're going to peddle this as a mainstream offering, so maybe that itself, if it happens, in terms of the conversations I've had. I've had a little hand in some of these other ones and you want to see the ideas come out, you want to see things challenged and not just the story of Ted and his brother and blah, blah, blah and the drama of it and everything. That's been done a million times and it's well-worn but it's not -- that's not what's relevant, of course.

Mark Seely: Yeah, of course, the whole thing with the Unabomber kind of thing, it's like there's this ad hominem that goes there right away that sort of -- you can just dismiss whatever he said because,

well, you know, he tried to blow people up right, so ...

John Zerzan: Yeah.

Mark Seely: And he -- I think anything you do to just sort of get the ideas out there, how separated from the person even, or separated from that ad hominem kind of thing that will happen, is good.

John Zerzan: Yeah. It injects something into the discussion at least to some degree.

Oak Journal: Do you feel like the idea of trying to reach people and talk to media and different things like that has potential in a positive sense? Or -- where do you see that? Especially with your talk about framing. And I know you even talk about it in the book, the anti-civ -- sort of akin to this like anti-social idea, so curious what you think about that.

Mark Seely: Again, that's a really slippery kind of thing in my mind because as soon as you start to sort of map out how we can disseminate this information in a way that is going to change people's thinking, you fall right into that way of thinking that there's a way to tweak the system to make it work. And on the other hand, the more people who become aware of this, or the more people who start thinking like this -- I mean, it's like a little seed that you plant, you know? Like, "gee, maybe civilization isn't all that good after all."

I mean, that little seed can sprout and grow in a person. So, any way to get it out there, even if you're -- I don't know, mainstream media, even, just to get those seeds out there. But, you know, the Avengers movie, right, where they had to wipe out half the population. That's kind of an interesting thing when you start to think about it. The underlying idea that there's just too many of us and we need to do something about it and here's this guy who's supposedly a bad guy who did this but was he really a bad guy?

Even things like that can sort of plant those seeds

where you get people to think about, what is the purpose of all of this and is it really necessarily a good thing? Does it have to continue?

Oak Journal: Yeah. Do you think that sort of anti-civilization framing is not helpful?

Mark Seely: There's usually a knee-jerk, reflex reaction to that and it's the "anti" part. It's the same with anarchism, you're against stuff. And then, there's also this fact that we're all kind of dependent on this, right? So, we're living in a way that we need to have this system doing things for us because there's very little choice for most people. And so, then you set up cognitive dissonance, which is this really powerful thing. It's probably the most powerful motivator there is, right?

So, civilization can't be bad because I'm involved in it. And I wouldn't intentionally be involved in something that was bad. And so, the anti-civ message runs into that sort of self-preservation kind of thing. I happen to like my cellphone. I happen to like these things. And you're telling me that these have bad consequences. I'd rather not deal with that.

Among other anti things, I'm also an atheist. And there's this book -- I can't remember the author right now, but it's called *Street Epistemology*. It's a philosopher atheist, he goes out and he talks to these people who are evangelizing, like on college campuses, you'll see people who are Jehovah's witnesses, or the evangelicals out there trying to recruit.

Instead of being confrontational, he flips it completely around, like he really wants to believe but he can't. He just doesn't understand faith and he doesn't understand how you could believe something based on faith. And so, they get into a dialogue and it's -- there's no confrontation, so the person is -- there's no protection, essentially, for the person that he's trying to work with.

He ends up planting these seeds. It's faith where -- how do you know that something is true by faith?

And his other friend, who's a Muslim and he really believes and he has just as much faith as you, I'm sure, but one of you guys is wrong. And sort of that kind of approach where you get the person to think about it, and then it becomes their idea, it becomes part of how they're structuring things and you can work around that self-preservation kind of forcefield that pops up when you threaten a person's way of living.

I don't know how you would apply that with the anti-civ thing and I've been thinking about this. I've really been thinking, I have this sort of long-term goal that I'm going to be able to map that out in some way that's going to be -- I'll have something that I can write that will be like a how-to, you know? "How to convince your grandma that civilization's a bad thing and we should start thinking about dismantling this," or whatever. I don't know how to make that transition there.

John Zerzan: Yeah. Tall order. Well, I think you can find common interest; maybe along the lines of what Mark was describing there, that approach. For example, community; everybody wants community. You're not fighting with anyone -- you don't really run into people who are against community.

So, if you want it, what happened to it? You know, what's destroyed it? How has mass society erased it as part of its whole progression?

And then you're not -- you're on the side of community, and presumably the person or persons you're talking to, they are too. And then you can kind of open that exploration, possibly.

Oak Journal: Right, yeah. I mean, finding some sort of common ground of dialogue is really important. I have many friends that I interact with anarchically out here that are not explicitly anarchists. But we have a common understanding and language that's mostly based around where we live and our daily sort of needs and tasks, around -- whether that's foraging together or just hanging out. That's very helpful because it's very -- that's

what's going to matter in a very real sense.

John Zerzan: So, Mark, I wonder if there are any other projects for you in terms of what's next. You mentioned it would be nice to have this whole schema of how you get things across. And are there other things in particular that you're working on?

Mark Seely: Yeah, after the *Civilization Heresies*, I started thinking about another book along the same lines. And I originally had it titled -- it was "Becoming Human." And the idea was to have it more of an applied kind of thing, where I would pull in my psychology knowledge and anarchism and anti-civ and primitivism all together. How can you go about making your individual, personal life more wild?

Basically, how can you rewild yourself? This idea that rewilding isn't an either/or thing, it's a matter of degree. Even right now, you can be a little bit more authentically human by just making a couple little changes in your life. You're a little more authentically human now than you were before. How many of these things can you do?

And I started writing it and I wrote quite a bit of stuff. In fact, that piece about knowledge that was in *Oak*, that was originally something that was going to be in that. But I quickly decided that that was super arrogant. And I have absolutely no idea how to become an authentic human (laughter).

But it was more like I was really talking to myself. How can I do this without -- how can I make myself? I wasn't really walking the walk while I was talking the talk there. I kind of tossed that aside. Maybe in 10 years when I feel like I'm up to that, I might try that again. And instead, I went in this real kind of surreal sort of way. I've got a new book that I'm finishing up. And this is going to sound kind of weird, but it is -- it's a novel where it's the human condition as told from a dog's perspective.

There's this dog that can understand human language. And nobody else knows that. He goes

about these adventures and, during that time, he reflects on the things that are going on around him. What is it like to be a human embedded in civilization? What does that look like from a dog's perspective?

John Zerzan: Wow.

Mark Seely: It's been kind of fun to write and it's -- I really like it and nobody's going to read it, so I have no idea what's going to happen with that. But we'll see. And so, that was my next project and so now I'm starting to think about -- I'm going to see if I can get that published. I'm starting to think about where else I can go.

This is really -- this is where my only strength is. I'm too old to be out there on the frontlines and I'm actually, frankly, too embedded in -- I've got mortgaged debt and I've got stocks. Making myself more authentically human has really been a struggle. I work on relationships with people. I can do that. And then I write and that's pretty much what I do, at this point.

John Zerzan: Would you say you've had a somewhat satisfactory experience in terms of access? Because you've gotten out there and your writing is amazing. It's got the rigor, it's also got the poetic and personal. I mean, you've got different -- not different styles and voices all jumbled together, but you write in these ways that I don't think you see very often combined, that strength.

That's what's effective, I think, in terms of connecting with people. And do you think you're getting published and maybe that's why?

Mark Seely: You know, I'm super bad at self-promotion. I'm really bad at self-promotion. And I think that's been something that's been holding me back a little bit, perhaps. But I'm getting some interest in the books. It's not like -- I'm not going to make any money with this, that's for sure.

But I am getting some feedback from people and it's always positive. It's always, "well, I hadn't ever thought about it this way. And now I kind of have

to think about it this way and I don't really know if I like what you just wrote because now I have to think about it." That's really positive feedback to me. I have family members that are afraid to talk to me now, but that's not necessarily a bad thing.

John Zerzan: Wow. Encouraging, huh?

Mark Seely: Yeah, there's really a limited market out there. But if you want to get a book published about this stuff and out there -- you probably know way more about this than I can even imagine. You've got a platform and you've got decades of prior writing on this. So, you've got some teeth behind what you write. And for me, it's just -- it's what I have to do. It's sort of a compulsion, it's something I have to do. I see it as you go with your strength and this is my strength and so this is what I'm going to do because I can do this.

John Zerzan: I love the idea of that dog book. That'd be really -- wow, I can't wait.

Mark Seely: I deal with a lot of the same kinds of issues, but I really talk about domestication a lot, obviously, with the dog. And there's this one part of the book where the dog meets up with a feral pack and he joins a feral pack and so, you know, we talk -- the dog thinks about what it means to be tapping into its wolf genetics a little bit more directly, and that sort of thing.

And yeah, it's kind of fun. Like I said, I don't know if there's a market for that but we'll see.

John Zerzan: There was for *Ishmael*. If you look at how successful that was, that was amazing, you know. Maybe it's another book like that, even more pointed.

Mark Seely: Yeah, and to be honest, *Ishmael* was sort of the original impetus for that. I thought, "OK, that was great. What animal would I use? I sure wouldn't use the gorilla." My dog was sitting next to me and I looked over at the dog and I said "That's interesting. Let's see what I can do with that." It deals with all kinds of things. Like he, you know, spends some time tied up on the side of the

porch because he attacks somebody and so they tie him up. He spends two years basically confined to the side of a porch. So then he thinks about what freedom is, and things like that. It covers a lot of ground.

Oak Journal: You were kind of talking about this idea of how to guide -- sort of like an incremental rewilding, which I guess is necessarily true. You know, that there's always a state of more or less. Although, I guess that would anger some really maximalist kind of anarchists (laughter), or like some insurrectionary kinds that say it's either there or it's not.

But yeah, I agree. I just wonder, I think you have a piece in here, you talk about John Gray's *The Silence of Animals*. How do -- I guess I'm not sure how to phrase the question, but how do we avoid falling into that sort of pitfall of, we're going to have this gradual expansion to some, like, final stage? Or something like that? You know, and it's going to be constantly changing and be quite a bit different -- yeah, I don't know. The future primitive is not necessarily the -- it's not the past.

Yeah, I'm not sure what my question is, but maybe you can take something from that.

Mark Seely: Yeah, I think you're touching on something that I've really been struggling with ever since I started thinking about these things. And that's that there's this tension there. We grew up in this system, in this civilized system. We have taken on this framing -- back to that framing, the fact that we see the world in terms of a technological template. Right? So, there's problems to be solved and there's stages to be crossed. It's a real mechanistic sort of -- even something like rewilding. First, we do this, and then that and the other thing. There's a procedure involved. All of that is this technological thinking that's sort of the problem.

How do you approach this without falling right back into that systems-thinking kind of trap that is the problem to begin with? That's the sort of underlying tension. And I don't know, really, how to get away from that other than just to recognize

that it's there and that the -- I don't know what the answer is, but I know what the answer isn't; and the answer isn't more of the same, only different, kind of thing.

So, I guess I'll match your "I don't know what the question is" with "I don't know what the answer is."

But there is that tension and I see this a lot, as I'm reading some of the people who think and talk along these lines, that there's a big focus on the physical part. Right? So, it's easy to think about, what does it mean to live without technology? What does it mean to live without civilized authority? And you can sort of -- you can think about the physical part, what we need to be able to have food, we need to be able to learn how to make the tools that we need to get the food.

We can look to the primitive for that; you can look to the past and how was it done in the paleolithic, and all of that. But there's a focus on that physical part. But the problem is that the future, the physical future, is probably going to be considerably different than it was 10,000 years ago, even. The problems and the things -- the conditions of life for humans post-civilization might be really different than the conditions pre-civilization.

Doesn't mean that you can't live an authentically wild human life, right? I don't know where I want to go with that. But the focus is always on the physical part and not enough on how we're thinking about things. And we have to somehow work through this civilized framing that we all have and it's there, it's part of how we think about technological framing of our thoughts.

I don't think it's just me. I think everybody I talk to seems to have that kind of going on a little bit, too. And so, I don't know the answer to that.

John Zerzan: Maybe part of that is what's been quite a lot overlooked, historically; the spiritual. Which is a very elusive dimension, but I think there's more openness to that, raising -- well, talking about it on a very, very primal level and

somehow reconnecting with that, as difficult as the dialogue about that would be. But I think it has a lot of rewards. There are people -- there are certainly anarchists who just would just come up with some: "well, you're just talking new-age shit. This is a backward thing, this isn't radical."

But I've been surprised at how many people that are very strong, very -- well, very militant, for one thing, have quite a spiritual side but they've been afraid to bring it out. Maybe that should be there. I was in Turkey and I was speaking and there was a young woman who said, "I think, at base, this green anarchy deal is a spiritual movement." And I was just kind of knocked out by that.

And she had to leave, catch a bus to go home. So, I didn't get to ask her, what do you mean? Wow, what is that all about? But, you know, it brought up the subject. I've been kind of thinking about that ever since. And anyway, I don't know where that goes but I think -- I don't even know how you start to describe it or start to apply it. Do you think that might be part of it?

Mark Seely: Absolutely. I think absolutely that's part of it. And the idea that green anarchy is spiritual, that's awesome. Part of what I was trying to do with *Civilization Heresies* was to sort of show that getting in touch with nature -- the other way around, the fact that we see ourselves as somehow separate from nature sets up this weird dichotomy that doesn't exist. Hunter-gatherers don't necessarily have a spiritual that can be separated from everything else.

You are embedded in this ongoing, living thing. And so, the spiritual is literally everything. It's in every rock, it's in every animal, you are participating in this. We talk about spiritual as if it's a separate kind of part of the person. **But if you're living an authentic human lifestyle, I don't even know that it would make sense to talk about the spiritual. It would just be life.**

Nothingness

by John Zerzan

We live in a dark time. A time of sadness, not without resistance. We live within what Stuart Ewen (*Artforum*, January 1990) called an “aura of insubstantiality,” traveling toward nothingness.

In this sense where we’re at is anyone’s guess, when “where” has lost its meaning. In a placeless videogame culture in the cyber age, where is somethingness? A culture of loneliness, constant distraction and diversion; is the entire culture slipping away like our shrinking attention span?

With the likes of Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Derrida, modern Western thought turned to nothingness, the avalanche of postmodern nihilism its culmination. According to Avtor Bojas Radez in 2020, “Before there was no nothing, now the West is drowning in it.” In 1971 Michael Novak had already declared, “From year to year, the experience of nothingness grows deeper in one’s life, taking a more inclusive and profound hold.”

Are we losing everything? Are we living through a vast liquidation sale at every level, including that of the biosphere itself? In “Cultural Nihilism” (*First Things*, June 2019), R.R. Reno cited various symptoms of a failing culture: the decline in life expectancy, including deaths of despair seen in rising suicide rates; opi-

oid epidemic overdoses; pervasive homelessness; fairly rampant conspiracy “theory” acceptance.

And so much has gone off to the cloud, leaving us in oblivion, technologically sleepwalking. Robert Hassan’s *The Condition of Digitality* (2020) discusses how definitive and totalizing is the new technological society. With its chilling title, *Posthumous Life: Theorizing Beyond the Posthuman* (2017), Weinstein and Colebrook show that life itself is being redefined. Ed Simon’s “Machine in the Ghost” (*Aeon*, February 2021) actually asks, “Can a Robot pray, Does an AI have a soul?”

Lauren Oyler explores what the modern culture of absence feels like, the sense of a new, fake reality.

Her debut novel *Fake Accounts* looks into the internet/social media ethos and finds ennui, irony, and cynicism in the ascendant. Part of this picture is the popular “Umuranji Generation” videogame that expresses despair these days. “Into the Void” by Kyle Chayko (*New York Times Magazine*, January 21, 2021) argues that American culture is choosing nothingness as an antidote for the overload of technological onslaught.

But the Nothing didn’t show up overnight. It was a virus growing for thousands of years.

Jacques Lacan referred to the lack at the heart of the symbolic order. Maurice Blanchot spoke of the nothingness that makes language.

In the decades since World War II absence has grown markedly, as even a cursory look reveals.



The Catcher in the Rye by J.D. Salinger appeared in 1951 and remains a touchstone of the emptiness of modern American life. Robert Rauschenberg was maybe only a little ahead of his time when he erased a Willem De Kooning drawing in 1953. Mark Rothko achieved his signature style in the 1950s and became known as “the painter of nothingness.” Samuel Beckett’s 1962 *Waiting for Godot* is a classic of Nothing happening. Even in the generally hopeful, often radical 1960s one hears “Paint it Black” by the Rolling Stones (1966) and “The End” by the Doors (1967). Joan Didion’s *Play It As It Lays* (1970) portrays a woman swamped by nothingness and, by implication, a society coming undone. In my *Elements of Refusal* (1983): “Everyone can feel the nothingness, the void, just beneath the surface of everyday routines and securities.”

There are many ways, many areas in which to probe our topic. Georg Ritzer’s piece of it is that the truly local is gone: “The Globalization of Nothing” (2003) focuses on cultural homogeneity, the flattening effect of nothingness. Nothingness is the name of Kate Armstrong’s 2003 show that explored the relationship between art and commerce in terms of online shopping. Chris Kraus’ *Video Green* (2004), her collection of columns and essays, is subtitled *Los Angeles Art and the Triumph of Nothingness*.

“Seinfeld,” the sitcom famously about nothing, was a soft-core standard for a culture of meaninglessness. A sense of emptiness has become pervasive, from Mark Strand’s *Almost Invisible* poetry (2012) to Marco Oliver’s 2013 meditation on “Nihilism in Japanese Anime.” Nihility is a Portuguese band formed in 2012; Nothing is a Philadelphia band whose 2014 debut album, “Guilt of Everything,” was released on Relapse Records. Sample the tweets of Kierkegaardashian and the Culture of Nothingness at patheos.com (June 25, 2014). Lee Ufan: “Close Encounters With Nothingness” discusses the Korean artist “haunted by a nothingness which one can feel, but not quite understand” (*Art Monthly Australia*, September 2019). Don McLean of “American Pie” fame described pop music as having “deteriorated” to a point of non-existence. He told Fox News (April 11, 2020) that it reflects

the spiritual plight of the society: “No-one believes in anything, no-one likes anything, no-one has any respect for anything much. The music shows that.” According to an undated (2021?) issue of LA’s entertainment zine *Time Out*, the Nihilist Cultural Foundation of Echo Park announced an upcoming (and possibly fictional) Nihilist International Film Festival.

Following the thread of this theme certainly doesn’t mean that other parts of culture didn’t and don’t still exist. And there is a good side to nothing, to be sure. For example, the sweet idleness of nothing, expressed by the Italian evocation of relaxation *dolce far niente*. Similarly, “niksen,” the Dutch art of doing nothing. An altogether different side of things.

But a numbness has crept into the dominant ethos, a sense of meaninglessness, that somehow nothing matters (as in the 21st century expressions, “whatever,” “it is what it is”). Culture against itself. And while I see this as having become pronounced, what’s needed is for nihilism to become an active force. Then the sense of nothingness might act as a solvent, dissolving and washing away the massive presence of lies pressing in on us.

There are now more voices wondering if we are not at some kind of turning point, possibly a pivotal moment. A “something’s gotta give” time. We may or may not be there, but we can unmask the Nothing, expose its oppressive reality in dying civilization, and so move against it for life and health.

February 2021

**...the Nothing didn't
show up overnight.
It was a virus growing
for thousands of years.**

Subsistence Gardening as Resistance

"Today we are still preoccupied with creating gardens. Why? To not suffer from hunger. Because having rice, beans, fava beans, maize, peanut - then one can survive." - Renato, of the Canela community (1)

*"The development of what we know as agriculture was not an overnight phenomenon, but rather a several thousand year-long project. In some places in the world, the earliest stages of cultivation were never surpassed, and remain sustainable today. In many more places, the pressures of the global economy have corrupted these practices just in this last century. But in most of the world today, we are witnessing the full-blown colonization of native foodways, and a nearly complete dependence on western industrial practices. To trace this "biodevastation" directly back to cultivation itself, is to ignore the history of conquest and land displacement that pushed the food systems of subsistence cultures to the brink, where they now teeter on the edge of extinction." - Witch Hazel, **Against agriculture & in defense of cultivation***

Situated in dense forests and savanna of the Brazilian state of Maranhão lives the indigenous Canela people. In the past they lived from hunting, gathering and gardening but starting from 200 years ago as they were pushed from their traditional territory as settler farmers occupied the land bit by bit. The lush forests are being replaced by industrial eucalyptus and soyplantations, and cattle ranches. They now inhabit an area 5 to 10 percent of their original territory. Traditionally the Canela travelled from place to place as the seasons changed but now adopt a more sedentary lifestyle living in bigger permanent villages. Although the Canela still depend on hunting and foraging they don't have access to a big enough land base to cover all their needs so they increasingly depend on gardening to meet their needs.

For the Canela gardening is not just to meet their subsistence needs but also a means of resistance against being assimilated into the structures, networks, dependency and the institutional inequality of the Brazilian state, religious institutions, and multinational corporations who are constantly trying to infringe and occupy the Canela's home.

Other threats to the Canelas way of life are from

the environmental effects from the industrialized agriculture of soy and eucalyptus production that causes water depletion which exacerbates drought and soil erosion. The overuse of fertilizers and agrochemicals annihilates plant biodiversity and pollutes the local rivers and waterways with high levels of nitrogen and phosphorus which in turn causes algal blooms which can produce toxins that are harmful to animals and cause dead zones from the reduction of oxygen in the water starving fish and plants. So any flora or fauna living near a eucalyptus or soy plantation is at risk.

The Canela's subsistence gardening approach is totally different from monocrop agriculture. They work with nature using a conscious ecological and more biodiverse method. Typically in agriculture only a small variety of cash crops are grown in large fields covering acres upon acres of land where in the Amazon large sections of jungle are destroyed. For the Canela gardners instead of being dependent on a small variety of cash crops they cultivate over 300 varieties of plants to meet their subsistence needs. Instead of using destructive hellish machines like bulldozers, ploughs, and combine harvesters they use a slash and burn method to clear small

patches just enough for them to use and their tools consist of a digging stick and woven baskets. They only use the same garden for two years and then not use the same area for at least eight years to allow the forest to regrow and return fertility to the soil.

The Canela's vast knowledge of plants helps them determine which ones make good companions that will help each other grow, which ones are natural repellents to predatory insects that will attack the plants, and which plants to grow which will attract beneficial insects such as pollinizers. And likewise their vast knowledge of soil helps them to consciously plant to suit the 10 different soil groups in their area which will help prevent soil erosion, nutrients depletion, and combat against other harmful effects that are typical of agriculture. Their focus is for caring for the well-being of local biodiversity and the nonhuman inhabitants.

The Canel don't see themselves as farmers but parents looking after their plant kin viewing their saved seeds and cuttings as their babies and their growing crops as their infants, genuinely loving them in the same way as if they were their human children caring for the plants as the plants care for them. They view the environment as consisting of human and nonhuman "selves", and gardening as caretaking for themselves and their plant and human families.

ii

"We are being led to our slaughter. This has been theorized in a thousand ways, described in environmental, social, and political terms, it has been prophesied, abstracted, and narrated in real time, and still we are unsure of what to do with it. The underlying point is that the progress of society has nothing to offer us and everything to take away. Often it feels like we are giving it away without a fight: when we sell our time for money, allow our passions to be commodified, invest ourselves in the betterment of society, or sustain ourselves on the spoils of ecological destruction, we openly (though not consensually) participate in our own destruction." -

Serafinski, *Blessed is the Flame, An introduction to*

concentration camp resistance and anarcho-nihilism

Civilizations' death culture of accumulation, exploitation and consumerism, at whatever the cost is at its final stages spreading war and ecocide to every corner of the globe. It has turned individuals into consumerist herds of wage slaves making us all addicted to some degree or other waiting for the false promises that will never be delivered for most.

How many individuals do actually want to work? I know I don't. How many actually find pleasure in it having to repeat day after day, after day? Or have to give up on achieving their dreams, or sell themselves in the hope of reaching them?

This is the culture which creates the conditions of refugees fleeing the carnage of war having to walk across a continent to find safety, a better life for themselves and their family all the while begrudging fools would rather see them drown in the Mediterranean Sea along with their children on dinghies so packed with desperate individuals it sinks.

While taking part in solidarity projects I've seen mothers in France having to live in muddy fields infested with rats, flimsy tents as protection from the elements. Small groups huddle around fires trying to catch some heat. Babies cries can be heard across the camp. I've seen the muddy swamp-like trails that weave through the refugee camp full of rat footprints and urine which appear each morning after the night's darkness has gone. The very same conditions a 100 years earlier, as the first world war raged on, in the exact same location individuals from lower classes fought it out, blowing each other to smithereens all so wealthier classes could expand their riches!

This is the same culture which creates the conditions for a homeless crisis and makes it socially acceptable for individuals to be left to freeze to death on streets in shop doorways in Dublin's city centre. I've seen the tent cities, the queues of soup kitchens, the desperate.

Society finds this all morally acceptable. The contradiction of civilization couldn't be any clearer, on the one hand there is riches and wealth beyond belief and on the other hand there is poverty and exploitation inflicted beyond comprehension. This is the land of despair, cruelty, and greed

iii

*"Agriculture itself must be overcome, as domestication, and because it removes more organic matter from the soil than it puts back. 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. Cultivation within the cities is another aspect of practical transition, and a further step toward superseding domestication would be a more or less random propagation of plants, a la Johnny Appleseed." - John Zerzan, **On the Transition: Postscript to Future Primitive***

So how can this be overcome? How can the shackles placed by technological slavery be broken? There are no ready made blueprints, programs or textbooks that have the one correct way or answers. If civilization is to be overcome it will be through individuals with all sorts of diverse ideas, experiments and actions.

For me, I see my path is by attempting to achieve more individual autonomy and self-reliance away from the dependency on techno-industrial society through permacultural subsistence gardening which can provide for me, my family, and other living creatures that inhabit the area I am in.

I first learned about permaculture from reading the zine *Backwoods*. Prior to this I was focused on the horticultural method of "productive gardening". I suppose the difference between the two is permaculture and woodland gardening is ecologically designed to give back to the soil, and benefit other living organisms, animals, and the local ecosystem in general as much as to help oneself.

It is an ecological sustainable gardening practice of

growing for yourself while simultaneously helping the environment around you. Each individual organism that takes part in the process whether insects, microbe, human and non human animals, all benefit from a mutual utilisation of working together and likewise so does the organic matter and minerals which are needed to create and sustain healthy soil, which in turn when all together creates healthy gardening successions, rich landscapes, biodiversity, and healthy ecosystems.

The individual designs her garden to suit the needs of the local environment or back yard. This includes finding out soil types, and studying how much sun hits the area, where and when different areas might be shaded. From this the individual will research what plants will suit the environmental conditions.

Perennial plants such as fruit trees and bushes combined with a mix of native annuals and self seeding annuals such as edible wild garlic, flowers like nasturtiums, soil enhancers like clover, medicinal herbs, all provide ground cover and help protect the soil from the weather, soil erosion, water retention, and provide fertilizer and mulch, which all help soil fertility, providing life to the organisms that live in and create soil. All combined help local wildlife, pollinators and other insects that are vital for a healthy garden as well as a healthy planet.

I have been gardening for the last four years and started focusing on the permaculture method last year. One does not need a lot of money to start growing. When I had a tiny backyard I used containers of old pots, buckets, and even bags. Seeds and plants can be bought cheap in the right places or else can be shoplifted easily enough. Last March I built raised beds from scaffolding planks I expropriated from a local building site which was closed due to the first lock down and started a mini forest garden on roughly a twenty foot by twenty foot strip of land. If one hasn't a backyard guerrilla gardening is a viable option.

Seeds and cuttings can be got for free in your area if you know what you are looking for. I learned about native plants from plant folklore books

which were rich in folklore and mythical stories based around each plant species, included in the stories was information on edible plants and when best to forage, which ones were poisonous, and the uses of others. Combined, the stories provided a great index for subsistence. The area I live in is urban but I could still find many plants growing in parks, gardens, and the side of roads.

I'm still a long way off achieving my full subsistence needs and gardening obviously won't solve the majority of the problems that stem from civilization but I see it as a potential starting point in my own struggle for individual liberation and creating the life I want to live. I don't think gardening is for everyone either, but for me I get great enjoyment and satisfaction watching plants grow and then eating the produce, and all without having to pay or work a boring ass job for. I just have to open my door and walk outside. I'm no expert on gardening or permaculture so I will leave a list of books that have helped me and where I got inspiration from.

Renzo Connors
the Anarcho-Gardener

Reading list:
Backwoods, A journal of anarchy and wotcunning.

Food Not Lawns: How to Turn Your Yard Into a Garden and Your Neighbourhood Into a Community by H.C. Flores

Gaia's Garden. A guide to home-scale permaculture by Toby Hemenway

The Permacultural City by Toby Hemenway

Forest Gardening, Rediscovering

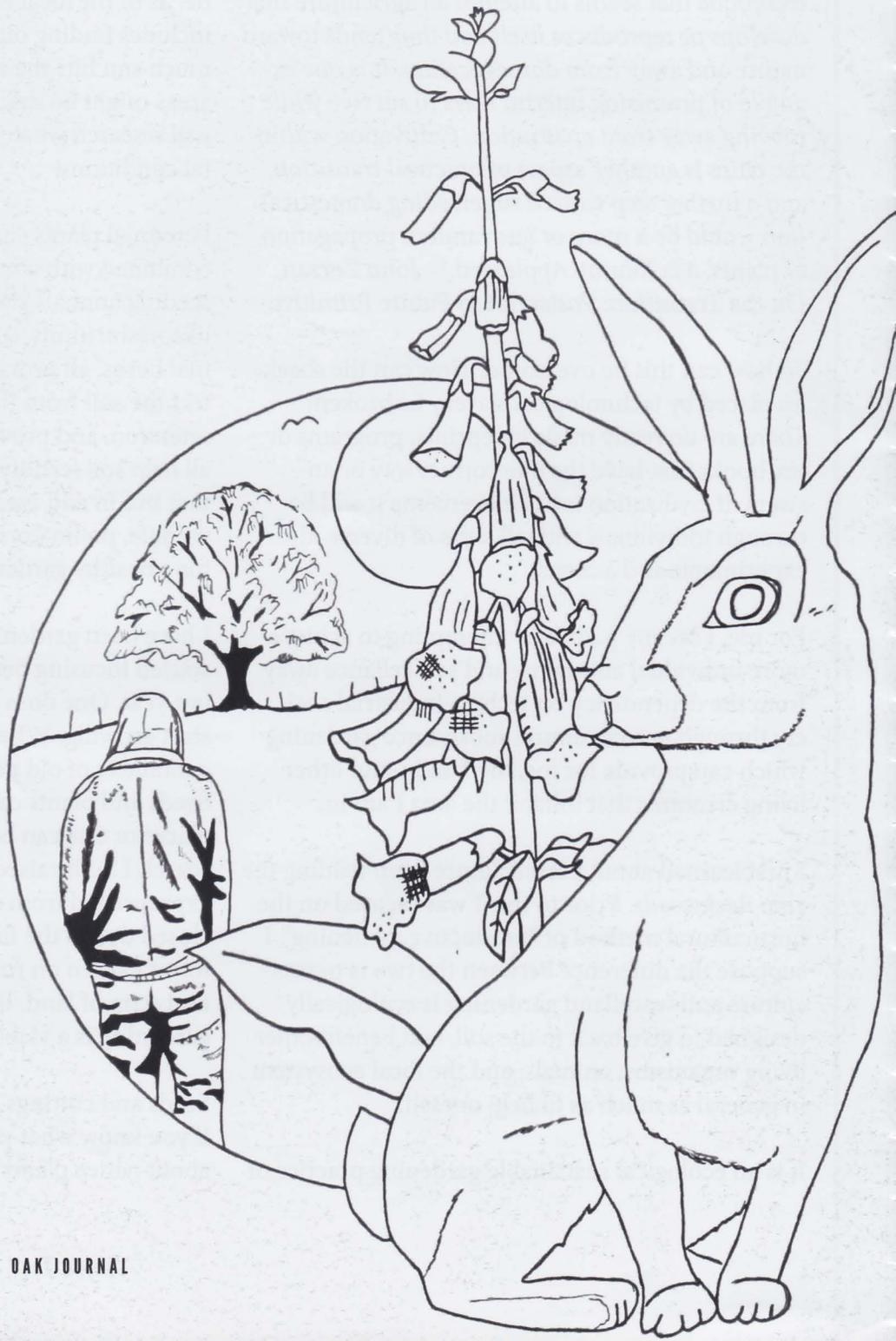
Nature and Community in a Post-Industrial Age by Robert Ade J Hart

Irish Wild Plants - Myths, Legends and Folklore by Niall MacCoitir

Ireland's Trees: Myths, Legends and Folklore by Niall MacCoitir

This Ugly Civilization by Ralph Borsodi

Bibliography:
Plant Kin. A Multispecies Ethnography In the Indigenous Brazil by Theresa L. Miller



Progressive Degradation

"Moses abstracts the King, makes him a god, just as Lenin will abstract Electrification and make it communism" Freddy Perlman Against His-Story, Against Leviathan (56)

Progress and reform try to appear like they make things better (gradually), to get shit done (if slowly). But all too often obvious and explicit forms of oppression and control are merely transformed into more totalized forms. Power is abstracted in order to better subjugate the subjects the reform claims to be helping.

Gustav Landauer described how "the state is a social relationship; a certain way of relating to one another" (214). If the rule set of the structure is not changed, then it will replicate itself, even after a revolution. Often it will amplify itself. Moses resisted the king by claiming that a greater king was above him. This strips sovereignty from the king, but does not eliminate it. Rather it totalizes it. The notion of a monotheistic, paternal god is a control image in itself. God is a universal spook that haunts everything at all times, to the believer. There is always an internal spy, controlling the believer.

With the progress of civilization you find an acceleration of control. Often it is the people who consider themselves good guys who do the worst. Lenin, and other leftists, wanted to fix the oppression of overly structured industrial society by universalizing the instrumentality that underlies industrialism. In order to fix the oppression, everything is put under rational managerial control.

The leftist revolution strives to be the finalization of domestication. In Bolo' Bolo PM wrote "but even socialism only turned out to be another trick of the Work Machine, extending its power to areas where private capital couldn't or wouldn't go. The Work Machine doesn't care if it is managed by transnational corporations or state bureaucracies, it's goal is the same everywhere: steal our time to be able to steal the next generation's time" (PM 30). This is an attempt to rein in the last elements of chaos. This comes to it's realization with the cybernetic society. Advocates of this promote the

information society as the great liberator. But they do this in the same way Moses and Lenin once did. Cybernetics claims to make no judgment, merely function in a technical capacity. In this it naturalizes ideology.

Ellen Ullman wrote:

During my days in the party, we used to say that Marxism-Leninism was a 'science.' And the party was its 'machine.' And when the world did not conform to our ideas of it- when we had to face the chaotic forces that made people believe something or want something or do something- we behaved just like programmers. We moved closer to the machine. Confronting the messiness of human life, we tried to simplify it (30)

Bakunin warned of how scientists could form a sort of priest caste. He wrote "scientific abstraction is their God" (56). He felt this had a political ramification, writing:

"Though we may be well nigh certain that a savant would not dare to treat a man to-day as he treats a rabbit, it remains always to be feared that the savant as a body, if not interfered with, may submit living men to scientific experiments, undoubtedly less cruel but none the less disagreeable to their victims. If they cannot perform experiments upon the bodies of individuals, they will ask nothing better than to perform them on the social body" (56)

Scientists of this priest cast strive to be able to look at individuals and the social body as objects. They act as if they can strip subjectivity away from their viewpoint. Theodore Roszak felt that the concept of objective consciousness was a core ideological component of technocracy. He wrote "Objective consciousness begins by dividing reality into two spheres, which would seem best described as 'In-Here' and 'Out-There'" (Roszak 218). Furthermore, he wrote "when I convince myself that I can create a place within me that has been cleansed of all those murky passions, hostilities, joys, fears, and lusts which define my person, a place that is

"Not-I," and when I believe that it is only from the vantage point of this Not-I that reality can be accurately perceived, then I have begun to honor the myth of objective consciousness" (Roszak 219). This concept of an objective reality that can be viewed by members of a group who are initiated by specialized training continues to thrive. It informs not only scientists and technocrats, but also leftists, Marxists, and others who consider themselves a revolutionary vanguard. But Roszak pointed out this worldview's greatest blind spot: "Scientific culture makes no allowance for 'joy,' since that is something that is known only to the person: it does not submit to objectification" (Roszak 229).

The purely objective view point is a rather outdated model of science. This is a remnant from the time when science imagined itself as a search for a singular truth. These days grand unifying theories are not searched for. Most acknowledge that science is a social practice that is not neutral, but rather involves building and using models to examine existence. Different models bring different results. Models that don't work are discarded. Sometimes contradictory models both work. This is not to promote a postmodern view where everything is equal. Rather, nothing is equal and existence is always subjective.

Ideologues, like Marxists or Objectivists or technocrats, attempt to portray themselves as the only people capable of seeing reality objectively. They attempt to portray themselves as being able to put together the bare facts and create a scientific, objective worldview. They claim to be free of ideology, which only makes their ideology all that much more nefarious.

This sort of thinking is commonly found in many political viewpoints. Lawrence Jarach argued that all leftists shared two common ideas. The first is that "non-political people, left to their own devices, will never be able to alter their situations in a radical or revolutionary manner" (97). The second is that "those with more intelligence or a better analysis are both wise and ethical enough to lead (whether through example or by decree) and organize others for their own good, and perhaps more importantly, the greater good" (97). Subjectivity is

never acceptable to them. People are incapable of being in charge of themselves, leftists think.

Marxists often base their belief on the ideal that their politics are scientific, as opposed to utopian. This is an attempt to create a reification of existence, to alienate oneself in order to create a static world. This is an attempt to control wild existence. It is interesting that the utopian thinkers that Marx thought he superseded, such as Fourier, actually had a model (in the form of the phalanx) that is easier to implement on the level of everyday life.

It should go without saying that it is not science that is practiced by Marxists or Technocrats. It is an abstraction of science, reifying it to a spook to be held above the individual. This focus on the scientific causes Marxists (and other such dogmatists) to focus on getting things done, to focus on instrumentality. This can be done in good faith, as a naive attempt to better the world. This can also be done in such a way as to manipulate others into joining the commie cause. This is portrayed as coalition building, but really it is all about recuperating outside dissent into the power of the party.

These concepts run deeply in political movements. Activists want to fix things, to improve things. Unfortunately they tend to function in much the same way as the corrective function of feedback in cybernetics. Their actions perfect the system of control, smoothing out its internal contradictions. They strive to create the repairman state, to engineer a more perfect death camp.

-Jason Rodgers

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Untitled

-Obscure Agrarian

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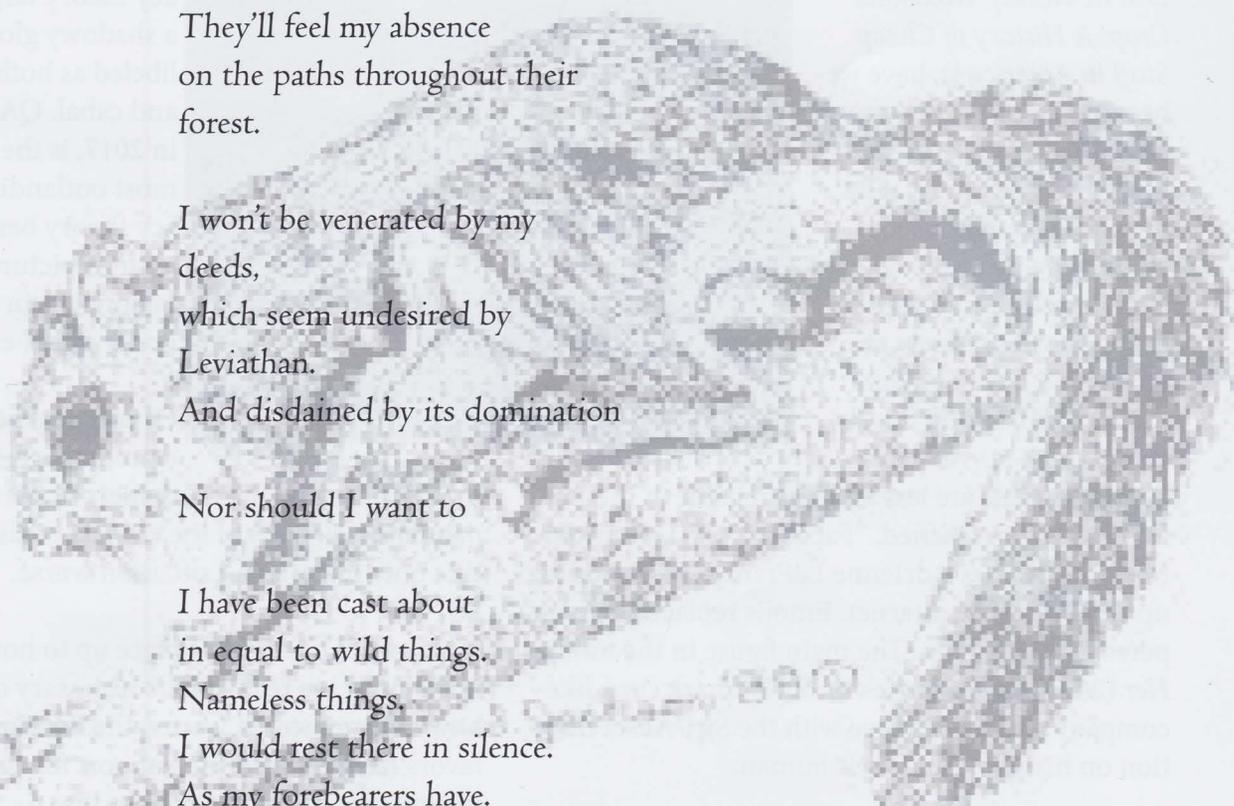
I won't be lauded within
the glittering cities.
But I will between the groves of pine and
thorns.
They'll feel my presence
as a soft disciple.

I won't be remembered by
the waning tastes of humankind,
But I will by the roots
under my feet.
They'll feel my absence
on the paths throughout their
forest.

I won't be venerated by my
deeds,
which seem undesired by
Leviathan.
And disdained by its domination

Nor should I want to

I have been cast about
in equal to wild things.
Nameless things.
I would rest there in silence.
As my forebearers have.



Denial and Conspiracy “Theory”

John Zerzan

For starters, let’s recognize that This—life today—is denial. And that we couldn’t get by without acceding to this reality, without playing our role in this basic denial. This is not the right world, not the right life; meanwhile, this fact can be strenuously avoided.

There are indeed levels of denial. Some we might term excessive, or somehow freely chosen. As if there’s very much that may probably be thought of as free choice within a totalized and totalizing civilization. The totality rules against it. But excesses of denial can be identified as the contradictions deepen.

The contradictions deepen, and life is more and more debased. The implicit question in Wendy Woloson’s *Crap: A History of Cheap Stuff in America* is, have we become crappy in the process? Mass society cheapens life in countless ways. Old people are warehoused, where they die, isolated, from pandemics. Culturally, the world is largely one of arrested development. K-pop, comic book novels, comic book movies. Academic journals are less and less reliable in their findings, often falsified. “Facebook is a Doomsday Machine,” writes Adrienne LaFrance, while ending up defending the internet. Emojis replace original/personal expression. The main figure in the movie *Her* (2013) writes jingles for a Hallmark card-like company and falls in love with the Siri/Alexa function on his phone as if it is human.

The boundary between the real and the virtual has been blurred. It is a time when facts and their meaning are all disputed. Louis Menand (*The New Yorker*, 11-23-2020) writes “What Do You Know? Wikipedia, ‘Jeopardy,’ and the Fate of the Fact.” All

gets reduced to undigested data and “Quack Ads... Circulating Like the Flu” (*New York Times*, 12-28-2020).

Also strongly in circulation is what’s known as conspiracy theory. But theory implies evidence-gathering, explanation, and analysis. Conspiracy theory is short on evidence, long on explanation, and devoid of analysis. A fantasy can provide an explanation, but lacks the evidence needed for analysis.

At base, conspiracy theory expresses powerlessness, avoids what really needs to change. A scapegoat or a cabal of mysterious villains are to blame for one’s plight. One of the oldest forms of conspiracy theory targets Jews, a shadowy global enemy libeled as both scapegoat and cabal. QAnon, formed in 2017, is the latest and most outlandish conspiracy theory best-seller, with its picture of Satanist pedophiles in control of pretty much everything.

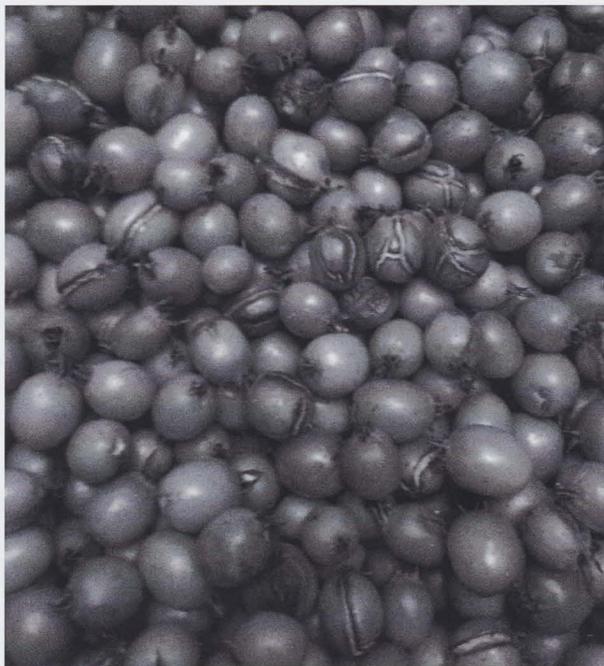
Of course there are less extreme forms of denial.

Pro-Trump, pro-Brexit, deniers of the reality of the pandemic, deniers of the climate crisis—positions that only make a bad situation worse.

It has never been easy to face up to how bad it really is, to see reality at its necessary depth. Given how disempowered we are, the dominant culture favors false choices. But support for the dominant institutions has never been so low.

To paraphrase the Situationists, the only adventure is to do battle with the entirety of bogus choices: namely, civilization.

January 2021



In Review:

“The Future in the Past”: Anarcho-Primitivism and the Critique of Civilization Today.

El-Ojeili, Chamsy and Dylan Taylor. 2020. *Rethinking Marxism* 32(2): 168-186.

Reviewed by Fern Thompsett

I have been a reader of anarcho-primitivist texts for a little over a decade -- a blink of an eye for some, but a significant span within my own life. Even over this period, I have noticed a shift in how people unfamiliar with anarcho-primitivism respond when I sketch out its basic contours. I had grown used to the cynically cocked eyebrow and a non-committal ‘mhm’, as some poor soul visibly scrambled to change the subject. More recently, I have been surprised by how many people -- strangers and friends, from the rural West to the innards of New York City -- find something in anarcho-primitivist theory that scratches a certain itch. If a general sense of malaise is gaining a greater hold -- as it seems to be -- then anarcho-primitivist ideas offer diagnoses that resonate in ever widening circles.

Given all of this, it surprises me less than it once would have done to find an engagement with anarcho-primitivist theories in a fairly mainstream academic journal. In fact, the article’s authors -- both professors of Social and Cultural Studies in New Zealand -- remark that “the themes they [anarcho-primitivists] grappled with are as relevant as ever and are being extended by a number of contemporary critical scholars” (p. 168). In many respects, it’s heartening to see anarcho-primitivism taken seriously in these kinds of fora. At the same time, there are some lacunae here that are worth addressing.

Before getting into these quibbles, it bears noting that el-Ojeili and Taylor have done an admirable job outlining a broad landscape of anarcho-primitivist thought, and some of its influences and lineages. They focus on several key thinkers -- in particular, Fredy Perlman, John Zerzan and Jacques

Camatte -- and the critical role played by *Fifth Estate*, while naming other important publications like *Green Anarchy* and *Species Traitor*. According to their account, anarcho-primitivism developed in the 1970s, “as a response to the perceived failure of other contemporary leftist approaches to adequately question productivism, ‘progress,’ the division of labor, and the seriousness of the environmental crisis” (p. 172). Anarcho-primitivism, they argue, expands the critique of power to encompass all aspects of life -- hence the opposition to civilization itself, which “encompasses state, private property, patriarchy, war, technology, and power relations generally” (pp. 176-7). As a utopic counter-point, anarcho-primitivists envision a “reenchanted unification with nature,” often “influenced by anthropological work on hunter-gatherer and Indigenous social orders” (p. 177). El-Ojeili and Taylor identify a great depth and diversity of roots underpinning these ideas, stretching potentially all the way back to Ancient Greek Cynics like Diogenes (a personal favorite of mine), through the fourteenth-century Brothers and Sisters of the Free Spirit, to the Levellers, Diggers, Luddites, and later anarchists like Kropotkin and Landauer.

As far as definitions are concerned, I’m heartened that el-Ojeili and Taylor describe the anarcho-primitivist “project” in terms of its irreducible diversity -- in their words, as “a family of contention, a ‘highly unstable, non-homogenous composite’ (Favilli 2016)” (p. 172). For me, it has always been important that political thought be enlivened by debate, not deadened by doctrine, and this certainly applies to anarcho-primitivism. Of course, this diversity also means that any reader will be guided by their own predispositions, biases and habits. It makes sense, then, that the map drawn by these scholars is not only incomplete -- that is inevitable for any account -- but that their views diverge from my own at points. And so, let me keep the tradition of contention alive and well by outlining a few of my issues.

My first gripe relates to how the article remains bound within an anthropocentric notion of the political. We can see this in how el-Ojeili and Tay-

lor write about technology -- an axis to which they return frequently. For example, although they note that Zerzan defines technology as the “sum of mediations between us *and the natural world* and the sum of those separations mediating us from each other,” (p. 176, my emphasis), the authors’ treatment of technology mostly deals with its effects on human psyche and sociality, barely touching on the repercussions for human-nature relations or ecological damage. Similarly, descriptions of Camatte’s work focus almost exclusively on his re-imaginings of human community, although they note that in Camatte’s view, “such transformations are urgent, in part because of the pressures of environmental destruction” (p. 175). The ecological causes and consequences of human politics tend to be evoked but then left mostly in the background.

Perhaps this is symptomatic of a Marxist lens, which, I imagine, focuses political thought around industrialism, labour, and social organization -- all questions underscored by figure of the human. But in using such a lens, el-Ojeili and Taylor miss an opportunity to engage with one of the most (in my opinion) important aspects of anarcho-primitivism -- its questioning of human exceptionalism altogether.

Take, for example, the Marxist notion of alienation, which contends that human beings are alienated from their products, their labor, their species-essence, and one another. For many anarcho-primitivists, this is a good start, but ultimately falls short of the mark. The civilizing effect alienates human beings from the entire complex of interspecies relations from which we are all, in fact, inextricable, paving the way for human exceptionalism and domination of the nonhuman world. To be fair, el-Ojeili and Taylor gesture toward this when they engage Zerzan’s work, noting that he critiques symbolic culture as that which establishes a nature/culture binary and “the end of communion with nature” (p. 176). But taking these critiques seriously means following them to political questions that spill beyond anthropocentrism -- or explode the concept altogether. What does it mean, for example, to live well in more-than-human community? What are our responsibilities and obliga-

tions not only to other humans, but to the whole ecosystems in which we participate? How do we expand the old axiom “no one is free until we all are free” across the more-than-human world? For me, these kinds of questions lie at the core of the anarcho-primitivist project, and I would love to see them given a closer treatment.

Interestingly, Marx has been critiqued for his adherence to anthropocentrism from within Marxist scholarship. One of the most important works to do so is Glen Coulthard’s 2014 book, *Red Skin White Masks*. Coulthard -- a member of the Indigenous Yellowknives Dene nation -- picks apart Marx’s narrow focus on human labor as the grounds for struggle and emancipation, to the exclusion of the more-than-human webs of existence in which we are woven. Against what he calls Marx’s “anti-ecological tendencies,” Coulthard writes that, “the theory and practice of Indigenous anticolonialism, including Indigenous anticapitalism, is best understood as a struggle primarily inspired by and oriented around *the question of land*—a struggle not only *for* land in the material sense, but also deeply *informed* by what the land *as system of reciprocal relations and obligations* can teach us about living our lives in relation to one another and the natural world in nondominating and nonexploitative terms—and less around our status as ‘rightless proletarians’” (Coulthard 2014, p. 13, original emphasis). “Rethinking Marxism,” I believe, must take up ecological and anticolonial lines such as those drawn by Coulthard.

My second gripe with the article has to do with how el-Ojeili and Taylor frame anarcho-primitivist critique as a matter of “innocence” versus “the fall.” The authors tend to cast this binary onto the Neolithic Revolution -- the implication being that pre-Neolithic human life is “innocent,” whereas most of what comes afterwards, with the exception of certain Indigenous and/or hunter-gatherer societies, is corrupt. I don’t want to deny that this formula is present in some strands of anarcho-primitivist thought. However, I do want to contest the way in which el-Ojeili and Taylor make it literal and central.

In my experience, these kinds of binaries, or any kind of neat formulae, tend to function as useful ways in to a landscape of political thought -- rather like a simplified trail map. Once you're there, however, landscapes are vastly more complex than they initially appear. Likewise, a closer and broader reading of anarcho-primitivism will reveal a messier and more ambivalent understanding of how human societies have transformed over time and space -- and how we might transform them yet. Is there any true space of human innocence? Has there ever been? Could there ever be? Is "return" really the goal? The answers to these questions are more contested than clear -- and thankfully so! I myself am wary of purist ideals, which are more likely to leave us oscillating between doctrine and despair than to generate movement toward a better world in any of the imperfect ways available to us.

El-Ojeili and Taylor gesture towards a more complex and worlded approach when they write about anarcho-primitivists' commitments to "living otherwise" in the here-and-now, conceptualizing the "future primitive [as] without precedent, rather than being a mere return" (p. 178). But I think that grappings with real-world complexity deserve a bigger piece of the landscape. In my opinion, the notion of "innocence" functions better as a pointer toward a winding path than a destination in itself. In other words, I wonder if el-Ojeili and Taylor have somewhat mistaken the map for the territory. The danger there is not only inaccuracy; I worry that this focus does a disservice to anarcho-primitivist ideas by casting them as more "extremist", purist, or romantic than they need be.

This leads to my third gripe. As perhaps befits an academic journal, el-Ojeili and Taylor's overview

of anarcho-primitivist thought leans largely on its textual and theoretical bases. For instance, much is made of The Frankfurt School, or the writings of Jacques Ellul, Lewis Mumford, and Karl Marx himself. Far less attention is given, however, to the lived, on-the-ground experience that also underpins anarcho-primitivist ideas. The authors note that "the ultra-leftist ideas developed or rearticulated in the 1960s -- council communism, situationism, and autonomism -- have also influenced the development of anarcho-primitivist thought," (p. 172) but I imagine that direct involvement in these kinds of experiments was equally important. Similarly, in a footnote to the article's closing paragraph, el-Ojeili and Taylor acknowledge that "Zerzan was involved in union and then ultra-leftist politics" through the 1960s and 70s. But this information is offered as an aside, rather than as formative grounds for thought and theory. For a counter-point, you only have to look to the Fall 2020 issue of *Oak*, which ran a piece by Zerzan titled 'Actual Nihilism' outlining some of the lived experiences and countercultural milieus that were politically influential in positive and negative senses.



My own view is that political thought -- any kind of thought at all -- is never only textual or theoretical but lived. It is in our messy, real-world lives -- our struggles and relationships, experiments, successes and failures -- that ideas are born, tested, reworked and discarded. This embodied, experiential approach to thought is one of the central pillars of anthropology, of which many anarcho-primitivists are

avid readers. But you don't need to read anthropology to understand this! Texts are foundational to the anarcho-primitivism, to be sure, but giving them too exclusive a focus misses part of the landscape -- the importance of real-world struggle, the ebb and flow of movement-building, all those

never-to-be published, incidental conversations with so-called “ordinary” people. It is infinitely more challenging to trace these paths, of course, than to track the texts that have fed into one another. But I would love to see an engagement with anarcho-primitivism that gives them a little more space.

If the anarcho-primitivist “project” is a “family of contention”, then perhaps any overview will be equally so. No single overview can cover all the ground -- just as no map can ever be the territory -- especially as this ground is shifting, expanding and incorporating new voices. Perhaps the aim, then, is not perfection but proliferation. I look forward to more engagements with anarcho-primitivist ideas, especially as they seem to be spreading far and wide. The more the merrier!

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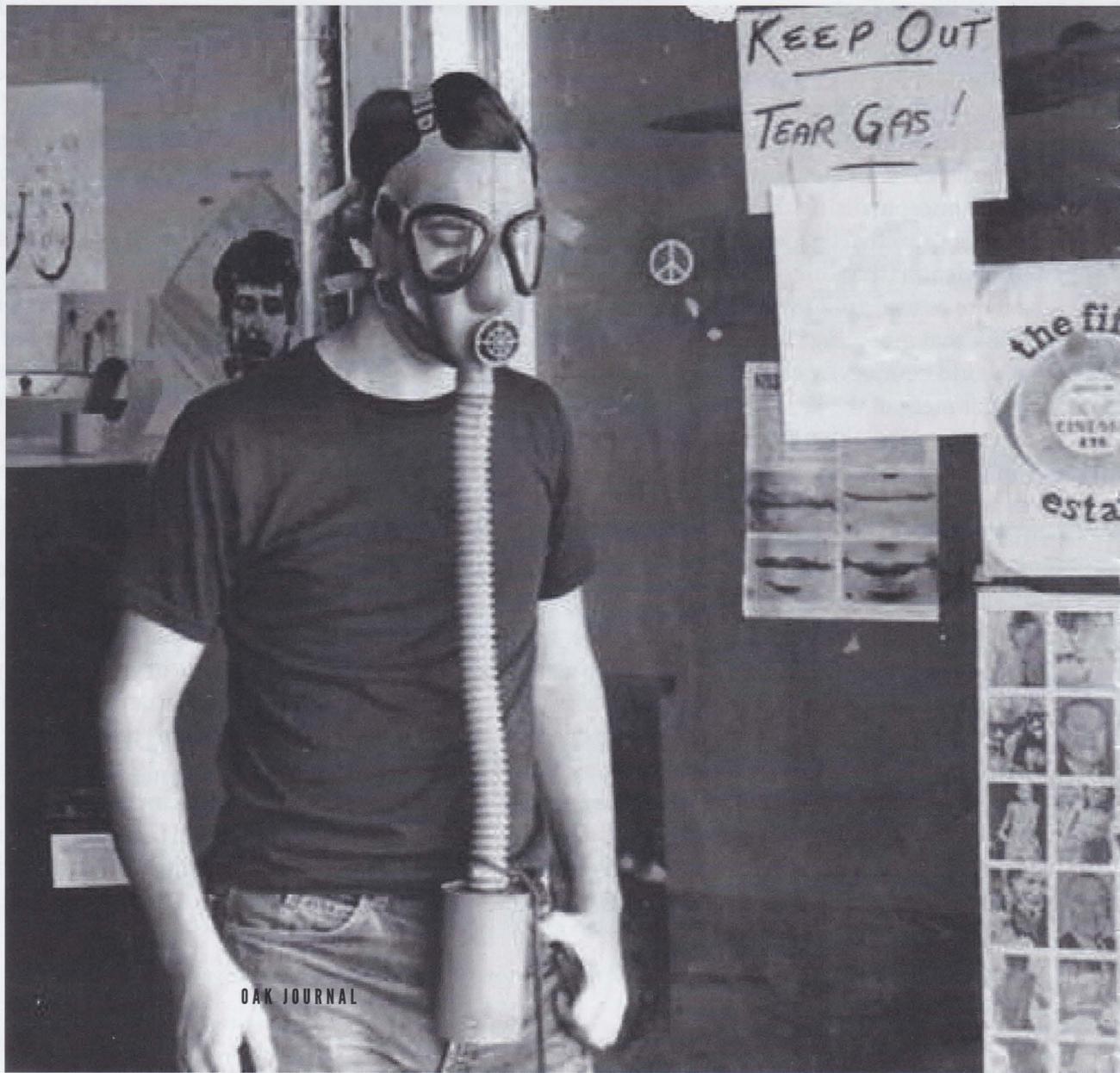
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Summer on Fire: A Detroit Novel, by Peter Werbe. Detroit: Black & Red Books, 2021.

Reviewed by John Zerzan

If you’ve been into *Fifth Estate* over the years, you already know that Peter Werbe is, among other roles, an excellent writer. Probably you also know that he’s always been all about Detroit. It all comes together in this super well-executed autobiographical novel: radical activism, acid, love, violence, friendship, revolutionary auto workers, Wilhelm Reich, racial tension, MC5, Fifth Estate, White Panther Party...

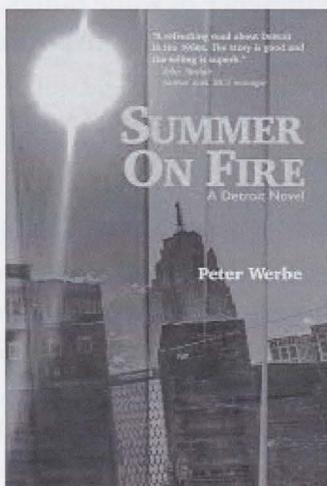
It’s a big leap to write a novel, and Peter pulls it off wonderfully in a rollicking account of what it was like living through a radical season with some folks in their twenties. Heavy, heady stuff--also at times hilarious.



The book's second half has as its backdrop five days in late July 1967, the biggest uprising in modern American history. Set off by the usual white cop brutality, the body count was 43. Thirty-three dead blacks, ten whites (including one cop). Probably the most well-known incident was the execution of three black teens at the Algiers Motel, an especially infamous case of pig brutality. Contrast the mere(!) 35 deaths in the Watts uprising of August 1965.

Like Peter, I came of age in the context of the movement of the '60s, but the San Francisco Bay Area was different from grittier Detroit. On a visit to SF in the late '70s, Peter said it was like Disneyland compared to the Motor City. Our own "summer on fire" (September 1966) was mild by comparison, though it was triggered when white cops killed a black teen joyriding in a stolen car. This happened at Hunter's Point, a black ghetto in the extreme southeast corner of San Francisco, and touched off clashes there that spread to Haight-Ashbury. I had moved to the Haight two months previously, so was in time for a couple of nights of somewhat festive street action. Blacks, hippies, radical students. 50+ injured, no further fatalities beyond the initial one.

In the mid-'70s, Fredy Perlman told me about *Fifth Estate*, the first I'd heard of it, and collaboration with Peter and the rest of the Eat the Rich gang began. Peter's commitment to the fight has never wavered, and now culminates in a marvelously rich and exciting novel, both intensely personal and historically informed.



An Exercise in Futility

("Exercise: What Would an Anarchist Program Look Like?" by CrimethInc)

reviewed by Jason Rodgers

I would have to say that the platformist approach to anarchism is one of the most futile and drained of spirit. This is the approach in which a self declared vanguard party lays out a multi-point plan that if followed would lead to total liberation. But when you look at the points, it is generally unclear as to how they would do so. Generally, the points are not radical, or if they are they are so in a broad and vague fashion. For instance, points will often oppose one of the nasty abstractions, such as racism or sexism. Rarely though do they provide any coherent plan to abolish such abstraction. As the point of the platform is that it can be immediately implemented, this lack of pragmatic value is a major problem.

The anonymous CrimethInc contributor (who will just be referred to as CrimethInc from hence forth) who wrote "Exercise" seems to have at least a partial grasp of this failing, writing that "anarchists take a different approach: rather than offering a prefabricated blueprint, we propose to work things out together, dynamically, according to principles of self-determination, horizontality, mutual aid, and solidarity" (3). So why write a platform at all? CrimethInc explains "Still, whenever people encounter anarchist ideas for the first time, there is a certain kind of person who always demands to see a clear template" (3). So that's why, to appeal to the herd minded. They try to save this by acting as if this "Exercise" was a sort of subversive detournment or "an imaginative exercise" (3). Why not do this as an actual imaginative exercise, wild as lemonade oceans? If I were to use my imagination to create an outlandish utopia, it would involve crazy flights of fancy, such as the organization of masquerade orgies or the creation of subterranean tunnels based upon honeycombs. CrimethInc claims this was an "aid in imagining" (4), but I would say it is an imposition of a limitation upon the imagination. Section two on "Decolonization" is a good example of the vagueness of the platform. They argue that "Settler

societies must be destroyed" (7), but do not explain what this means. Would this mean the destruction of whites, blacks, and Asians living in America? In an issue of *Slingshot*, Isabel Fava Bean wrote an article titled "Dead Inside" on why she had herself sterilized: because a settler having a child is an endorsement of colonialism. This is a pretty ugly reading of decolonization, which I think missed the point.

CrimethInc writes "Anarchists, Indigenous and otherwise, favor models of decolonization that break with colonial logics and repudiate nation-states, ethnic essentialism, punitive and genocidal practices, and mere reforms regarding who holds state power" (7), but they never actually explain what this meant. I support a form of decolonize, but is it the same as CrimethInc? We certainly would not learn from this pamphlet.

A further statement in the decolonize section sounds nice, but contains further blind spots. They write "Communities in countries that maintained external colonial projects (e.g. the United Kingdom, Spain, France) will facilitate a large-scale transfer of useful resources expropriated from their abolished governments, the wealthy, and institutions that existed to serve the wealthy" (8). Okay, sounds great. But how will this be done? This is talking about a large scale, transnational transfer of accumulated resources. This sounds like a task that would require a government or an NGO (which often means a micro-statists form). If decolonize means the abolition of the colonizing state, how is said state going to commence transitioning these resources after its abolition?

The next section of the platform is titled "Reparations and Ending Anti-Blackness", which is a subject that most would treat as the landmine it is. I am not only going to touch it, but to diffuse it. Reparations is the concept that black people had their labor and resources usurped via generational slavery (true thus far), and that they should be economically compensated so as to have greater capital to participate in the capitalist economic marketplace. If you believe that capitalism is an appropriate and desirable system, then this would

likely be a prerequisite to making it function in any decent way. However, it makes very little sense in the anti-capitalist context. If you think that capitalism is an inherently exploitative system, it doesn't make much sense to attempt to redistribute the exploitation to be fairer.

It strikes me that reparation might actually make sense in the context of a market-anarchist solution. I'd imagine that this is not where CrimethInc intended to go. It would likely be a thought crime for them.

It might be argued that this is idealistic and pragmatism is necessary. However, reparations don't seem to be very pragmatic, nor easy to implement. A change of focus might help, such as demanding land. This would also possibly solve the contradictions with capitalism, as it would provide the chance to build a landbase that could aid in transition to an autonomous existence. There are also some excellent groups that teach agrarian and homesteading skills to people of color.

Crimethinc. writes, "Historically racialized neighborhoods that have been gentrified may be reclaimed" (9). This section provides no concrete plan or analytical nuance as to how to do this, other than organize an assembly to organize this. Thou protest too much. I think that much of this was written to help deal with the bad feelings that are still residual from when members of APOC (Anarchist People of Color) organized the "Smack a White Boy" action against a CrimethInc convergence in 2009, claiming their lifestyle promoted gentrification. But, of course, gentrification isn't caused by the presence of white punks. It is caused by the presence of hospitals, universities, and the tech industry. And, of course, CrimethInc is going to want to keep those things, but we're getting ahead of ourselves.

A revenge scenario is outlined in which poor people and people of color will take over affluent neighborhoods. The rich will "move into the vacated, substandard neighborhood" (9). Fine, we all like to indulge in revenge scenarios, sometimes. But this also demonstrates the resentment that

Nietzsche criticized anarchists for holding.

This section also discusses the redistribution of weapons to Black and Indigenous groups, as well as to "volunteer militias" (9). The caveat is that the members of these militias had to have "fought unambiguously on the anti-racist side during the entirety of the revolutionary conflict" (9-10). This is a problematically ambiguous position. There are many people who have nasty ideas, but are in no way participants in oppression. I would guess that a large portion of proletariat have very problematic ideas and biases. It seems unlikely that a worldwide revolution could occur without having to create alliances with people who disgust us. Furthermore, I suspect that a likely scenario would be that if a large insurrection were to break out that the military would be sent in. Provided that the insurrection posed an actual threat, greater and greater levels of oppression through martial law would be implemented. Many members of the military would defect as the oppression became clearer, joining the insurrection. These defectors would not be unambiguous, and would definitely not have been on our side for the entirety of the conflict. What should we do with them?

The section on race ends with the proposal that "truth and reconciliation committees" would be set up to punish people who committed racial atrocities. This sounds like some sort of Maoist people's tribunal. It is unclear how they would investigate these atrocities, particularly since you cannot lay blame on some grunt following orders, but instead need to figure out who was actually giving the orders. I somehow doubt the tribunal would actually be able to, and instead would be performing human sacrifices to alleviate the guilt of white radicals.

It should be enough to strip the elites of power and dignity. It would be unnecessary to seek retribution from these people after their defeat. It is unclear why morality must be constructed to justify behaviors such as appropriation of land and resources after the revolution. Moral talk is unnecessary, when instead you could just take what is needed. Following these sections on decolonization and

racism there are sections trying to articulate what an anarchist society would look like, or in some cases what they think anarchists should be doing to reform the current society. As this pamphlet progresses it became clear that their intent was indeed to reform and preserve the society we live in now.

CrimethInc writes "Anarchists recommend redundant, overlapping forms of organization" (14). Really? I don't remember participating in a consensus meeting to determine that recommendation. This definition could easily mean diffuse power, as in the sort of self-regulating cybernetic systems that are characteristic of control systems in our technocratic world.

In the section on housing, it is written "Anarchists will make it a priority to provide safe housing for people fleeing abusive relationships and circumstances" (15). This would be a priority over what? This isn't clear. What is the hierarchy of who would be prioritized? My priorities are based on whom I have relationships with. Would there be an obligation to provide a stranger with housing if they claimed to be fleeing abuse? Would this include forcing a transfer of housing from someone already occupying. The saddest part about this statement is that in an ideal anarchist community, our social relationships would be based on mutuality and affinity. Thus if someone were fleeing from abuse (or needed any other sort of help) there would be a built in safety net. There would be no need for obligation.

Further in this section they write "Evicting people from their houses is an emotionally traumatizing act" (16). So why do it? This is another statement relating to reparations and gentrification. This again assumes that our forms of neighborhoods and communities would stay the same after a revolution, thus it would be a matter of reshuffling deeds. Instead, I'd rather see a radical re-imagining of what community and neighborhoods mean (which would require an insurrection, rather than a revolution).

The section on healthcare starts off by stating

"Everyone has a right to preventive therapies and living conditions that guarantee them the best possible health" (18). This is another statement that is overly vague and can lead to some dangerous conclusions. It is likely that in any anarchist society we would not have all the same medical technology as we have currently. Medicine, as it now exists, requires massive levels of division of labor. People may not want to participate in the labor that is necessary to maintain such a system. Would they be coerced to do so in order to prevent abusing someone's right to a therapy? Medicine does not exist separate from the rest of the technological system. Alan Watts put it well when he wrote:

"Technical progress is certainly impressive from the short-run standpoint of the individ-

ual. Speaking as an old man in the 1960s, Sir Cedric Hardwicke said that his only regret was that he could not have lived in the Victorian Age- with penicillin. I am still grateful that I do not have to submit to the doctoring and dentistry of my childhood, yet I realized that advances in one field are interlocked with advances in all others. I could not have penicillin or modern anesthesia without aviation, electronics, mass communication, superhighways, and industrial agriculture- not to mention the atomic bomb and biological warfare." (50)

I suspect this section is trying to distance CrimethInc from that old smear that anarcho-primitivists are going to commit mass murder by refusing to allow the use of antibiotics. Never

mind that antibiotics cause their own medical problems or that death by health problems caused by medical intervention is alarmingly common. What is commonly known as modern western medicine is politically problematic in itself, as Lawrence Jarach explained:

"Anti-primitivists who fear life-threatening medical issues also have no comprehension of the history and practice of allopathy- mislabeled Western Medicines by those who share the assumptions of Euro-American colonialism. Aside from being a relatively recent innovation, allopathy as a healing modality... derives many of its successes specifically from military medicine, especially trauma care. Allopaths tend to be authoritarian, basing their



ameliorative treatments on perhaps the strictest division of labor of modern civilization, that between healer and patient. Allopathy is expansionist; its practitioners and protectors continually strive to supplant and/or suppress all other healing modalities. And it is infantilizing; patients are removed from the knowledge and ability to decide upon the course of their own treatments." (Jarach 44)

If you are anti-capitalist, you have to be ready to deal with the fact that your alternative system will not be able to harness the same productive capacity as capitalism does. Imagine the scenario of an uprising seizing a city. The powers that be would try all sorts of tactics to crush them. This would include cutting off food, water, and medicine. There are no guarantees in a situation of freedom.

One of the most terror inspiring suggestions related to health is to "encourage the formation of assemblies that center people's own needs and experiences" (19). Anyone who has sat through an assembly using consensus-based decision-making should easily see the horror of this suggestion. Imagine sitting in a consensus based meeting of 12, which includes 3 green party members, 1 undercover Revolutionary Communist Party member, and a guy in an Infowars hat. This group is now in charge of your prostate exam.

The education section maintains the same orientation towards mass society. They write "everyone must be able to access whatever educational opportunities they desire" (20). This would require education to be completely impersonal, organized as a mass structure. This would also have to be some fantastical place, offering classes in every subject. This would assist in assuring the anonymous nature required to make sure that no one is denied an opportunity because they clash with their teachers or classmates. This mass conceptualization is continued when they write "professions that prove to be useful and desirable after the demise of capitalism will organize educational programs to train new members of the profession" (21). Organizing on the scale of profession is a pretty large group. It would likely be easier to teach a skill set through

personal relationships, like individual apprenticeships.

Scientific organizations will also exist in this CrimethInc fantasy: "They will discuss ways to raise the resources necessary to maintain laboratories and needed technologies without capitalizing on the process of knowledge production" (21). Some forms of scientific knowledge could be easily preserved and developed, such as natural sciences (which can be empirically observed in the world). We could look to the example of someone like Thoreau or other naturalists. On the other hand, atomic science requires division of labor on a giant scale in order to build their particle accelerators. You won't learn how to do it at a skill share.

They assert that "the knowledge the scientists help produce should be a gift back to the community" (22). This is a startling over generalization. Who is going to force them to? How can we be certain that they are not retaining secret knowledge? Will the hermit studying alchemy on a remote mountain pass be dragged back to the urban setting, tortured into confessing their discoveries, and maybe burnt at the stake? The real reason for this statement is that there is an assumption of mass society and division of labor. Clearly, the author assumes that the scientists would not take part in other productive activities and would be supported by the community in order to pursue their important work. An even worse example of this mass society assumption is when they write "accredited scientists who used their knowledge to aid fossil fuel, armaments, and similar industries should be stripped of their perceived legitimacy in the same way that doctors can be delicensed for malpractice." (22). The military industrial complex and fossil fuel companies exist in this fantasy scenario? Way to dream big!

They should have known better than build these elaborate schemes to preserve science. Early in the pamphlet, they write "With current technologies, attempts to stave off death are predicated on multiplying deaths among those who lack access to such technologies" (6). Modern science and modern technology require a material basis that cannot be sustained without institutional coercion. At least I

don't see much potential that someone will actually volunteer to go into the mines or manufacture deadly toxic chemical in unsafe conditions. I hope that the exploited rise up, become egoists, and refuse to be crushed by the planetary work machine.

Their section on "production" continues this confusion. They write "there is no justification for mining someone else's territory or creating toxic substances that future generations will have to deal with" (25), but do not explicitly challenge the assumptions of technological society. They do write a number of statements that should require a total critique of technical structures. For instance: "Ex-workers are encouraged to fully transform their workplaces, deconstructing machinery into its component tools if need be in order to work at a safe pace and create an environment that is healthy in terms of noise air quality, chemicals, and non-repetitive labor" (24). This is a fantastic proposal, one that would mean de-industrialization. This would require the dissolution of the mass society the pamphlet presupposes. They also write another great proposal that didn't fit with their overall proposal "No one may be forced to work" (24). If no one were forced to work, how would foundries be run? They can't be turned on like a switch. It takes a long time to boil that molten metal, thus the work needs to be done at a specific time. I am not sure if the authors know this. It makes me wonder what sort of jobs they have actually ever done. I'd imagine academics and social work. They don't seem to know how industry actually works.

The section "Distribution, Communication, and Transportation" argues for the continuation of these three things, regardless of the costs. To be fair, it does not seem they understand these costs. They write "infrastructure should be maintained to encourage exchange and travel" (26). This maintenance seems like an awful lot of work and petrochemicals. Ditto when they argue "communities will do their best to maintain existing communications infrastructures so that they can remain in touch to communicate globally and share the experiences of their respective revolutionary processes" (26). This would require constant updates

and repairs to the material infrastructure. Communication systems are massive and material. Ultimately, they are very fragile. This becomes another issue of: are you willing to fix it yourself (because without division of labor, you won't be able to foist these problems on another person).

One of the most problematic sections in this pamphlet has to be "safety". In this section we are told police forces will be abolished, but "communities may create some kind of volunteer service to protect against various forms of aggression and interpersonal harm" (29), which I'm pretty sure is another way to say police force. I would imagine that the same type of person would volunteer for this position as the wanna-be cops doing community watch now. Namely busy body do-gooders or the kind of psycho who currently collects police tactical gear and gets caught trying to go vigilante like Charles Bronson (or worse). Bob Black wrote on another similar scheme "All Scott has done is change the names of the law-enforcement institutions. Put 'popular' in front and presto! a coercive institution is an anarchist institution. There is nothing anarchist about replacing full-time cops with part-time cops" (199).

A likely candidate for members of these public safety committees would be former police officers. CrimethInc knows how to assure that this will not pose a danger to the community: ex-cops will "participate in reconciliation processes to address the harm they have caused" (29), which sounds awfully close to the sensitivity training currently offered by many police departments. Former cops "who refuse may be viewed as statist paramilitaries" (29), which I suppose would be different from a People's Security Collective.

CrimethInc will make sure priority of protection is "given to those whose gender socialization, racialization, or physical and psychological difference has specifically disempowered them under current oppressive conditions" (30). What about Incels (involuntary celibates)? This nonsense category constructs their position in the same way. They see themselves as disempowered due to physical and psychological difference (their beta status). They

feel that their natural rights to sex are being denied them (though in reality it is actually just natural selection's great kindness preventing them from breeding). There are differences between what CrimethInc is talking about and how similar concepts are used by Incels and White Identitarians, but the similarities might at least encourage us to pause and articulate how the positions differ.

Not only will the police be preserved, but the military too. Not just the sort of defensive militia you would want and expect, but also to "engage in revolutionary warfare against a statist, imperialist territory" (30). Well, one person's revolutionary war is another person's imperialism.

If, as Bob Black has said, Syndicalism is Fascism minus the excitement, then the platformism of "Exercise" is syndicalism minus the coherence. At least Syndicalists (or anarcho-capitalists) have some internal sense of how they would like the world to function. In this pamphlet, CrimethInc exhibits none of that. The world would totally change, work would be abolished, everything would be different. Yet somehow industry and academics would survive. The environment would be saved and yet technology would flourish. That all sounds great, but there is no explanation of how it would be done.

Platformism is a form of politics that makes no sense anyways. These attempts to detail how an after the revolution scenario would function or even how a revolution would unfold show that you're better off asking a psychic rather than a revolutionary. The revolutionary is rarely right. This shows the value of opposing (or at least being skeptical of) prefigurative politics. These sorts of thought exercises are neither flights of imagination or pragmatic concrete plans on how to get started.

If "Exercise" were just some random article in a zine, this level of attention wouldn't make sense. But CrimethInc is one of the largest producers of anarchist media. They have been around for decades, and should know better by now. These sorts of positions are alarmingly common in the anarchist subculture. The definition of anarchist is mu-

tilated into really radical social justice activist. Just like how direct action training usually just teaches you about organizing protests (which are literally symbolic actions). The revolution will seemingly be a combination of riots and white radicals wringing their hands in guilt. The world after the revolution will be just like the one we live in now, except somehow things work and are fair.

"Exercise" continuously brings up the formation of councils and committees. This is an impersonal form of organization. I'm interested in friendship as organizing principle and dynamical ad hoc affinity groups as structure. CrimethInc would like to build impersonal organizations in order to be all-inclusive. In this, they are recuperating dissent, resistance, and anger. The rage a person feels at their life is channeled into building the organization or party. Where they might otherwise have resisted, attacked, or just bugged out, now they have a safety release vent. Their energy is used to empower the organization. Sometimes this just means energy is wasted, but other times it provides the opportunity for petty cult leaders to gain power over a small group. This is the major weakness of anarchism (of the organizational leftist variety), how it replicates the structure of the dominant culture. The centralization and hierarchy neutralizes the threat that might otherwise have been posed to the totality.

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Poems that Hurt:

A review of SMH's *Cicatrization*,
Infinityland Press 2020
by BB Leering

"All Time Passes Through the Tragedy of
Blood,
That Which Burns in Memory First Burns
in The Flesh" – SMH¹

Every scar tells a story.

Four round marks arranged in a square on the right side of my chest tell the story of when I got chicken pox at six years old and couldn't resist scratching the itch. A little line on my left thumb marks the time I got careless whittling a gift for a friend.

And in hidden places, I carry scars of self-harm inflicted in my youth as I began to fathom the deep dark places in myself and struggle with depression. I can run my fingers over these scars and remember what it felt like to lean deeply into something like pure anti-. That psychic exercise of leaning into pain rather than avoiding it is a skill (if you can call masochism that) I've carried with me through many years of learning and healing.

Cicatrization, the title of SMH's newest offering of poetry, means the healing of a wound in the bark of a tree or in flesh by the process of scarification. A fitting title for a book written as "an attempt to grapple with the terror inherent in sacred experience."² The cover features a cat-o'-nine-tails, or a flail, and it's also a fitting symbol of what awaits the reader in these pages. To read *Cicatrization* is to self-flagellate in a search for meaning, perhaps even for a glimpse of God.

That's why, before each of the book's three parts, SMH places pull-quotes from Heinrich Von Herford: a Catholic historian born around 1300 in who wrote about the black plague and, in part, the frenzy and pain of people whipping themselves

in atonement.³ They believed doing so may spare humanity the wrath of God incorporated by the deadly, invisible disease that surrounded them.

I could only find Herford's "*Liber de Rebus memorabilioribus*" (Book of Memorable Things) in the original German, but here's one translated passage SMH includes in the book.

"Each whip consisted of a stick with three knotted thongs hanging from the end. Two pieces of needle-sharp metal were run through the centre of the knots from both sides, forming a cross [...] They beat and whipped their bare skin until their bodies were bruised and swollen and blood rained down, spattering the walls nearby." – HEINRICH VON HERFORD⁴

However, like a "demented haruspex"⁵ interpreting the entrails of a sacrificial animal, the search for truth here yielded less than I hoped. And that seems to be a core message of the work: that pain just is. Searching for meaning in it is a fool's errand. But, like when I couldn't stand the itching as a kid, we often can't resist the urge to try and make sense of suffering.

So, let's take a look at the instrument of punishment itself. The book consists of 16 poems I'd describe as literature of transgression. It looks good and is the fine making of Infinity Land Press. Martin Bladh of the aforementioned publisher conducts an interview with SMH which serves as an introduction.

The poems are separated into three parts: The "Missionary Killings," the "Cosmic Blood," and the "Holy Abattoir." Each partition of works is preceded by a spread of thumbnail sized photographs, courtesy of Infinity Land's cofounder, Karolina Urbaniak. They are things like aerial views of rivers juxtaposed with lacerated skin. Photos of starvation, carcasses (both human and nonhuman) and burning buildings. Some could be from archives as easily as they could be stills from von Trier's *Antichrist* or something like *Cannibal Holocaust*.

The style of SMH's poetry ranges from lucid and more prosaic at times, especially when a rare first-person monologue is given, to an entropic torrent of third-person descriptions of violence and suffering that strip away all non-essential grammar while remaining workably legible.

The latter, more chaotic, regions of the text are difficult to digest not only due to the subject matter but because each word must be consumed one at a time with equal weight and emphasis like the footfalls of a panicked marathon through and away from horror. I found myself thinking of Sally running from Leatherface in *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* only to be knocked out and brought right back again from the gas station.

And just like in that scene, there is no escape to be found here, only the unrelenting misery of escaping.

Literature of Transgression

CW: Literature of transgression, as its name implies, is experimental and deals explicitly with taboos. As such, this article and the text under discussion include references to and some descriptions of subjects such as rape, sexual abuse, and child abuse.

In Martin Bladh's interview with the author, which serves as the introduction to *Cicatrization*, SMH gives us some insight into his influences and his style. He has diligently studied the authors he mentions, such as Pierre Guyotat and George Bataille, whose extreme writings sought to change language itself through transgression of limits. Here's what Michel Foucault says in his "Preface to Transgression," discussing Bataille's work:

"The enucleated or upturned eye marks the zone of Bataille's philosophical language, the void into which it pours and loses itself, but in which it never stops talking [...] Similarly, but in an inverted manner, the eye in Bataille delineates the zone shared by language and death, the place where

language discovers its being in the crossing of its limits: the nondialectical form of philosophical language." – PREFACE TO TRANSGRESSION, MICHEL FOUCAULT⁶

Pierre Guyotat's writing, like Bataille's, is not only about transgressing the limits of language and death; it also endeavors to transgress the limits of eroticism into a kind of pure and infinite sexuality, uninhibited by any subjective morality. To my read, SMH has mixed success in adapting this style of writing to his own purposes. Each poem is a scene punishingly and nauseatingly focused on a vision of suffering and death.

Punctuation is light throughout and often disappears entirely or is used esthetically without grammatical meaning. Minimal punctuation is a writing device sometimes used for the esthetic of the page, especially by two of SMH's other influences, poet Robinson Jeffers and novelist Cormac McCarthy.

Literary Critic Harold Bloom described Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian: or the Evening Redness in the West* as worthy of Moby-Dick.⁷ SMH tells us "it is a book I am obsessed with and have read more than any other text."⁸ *Blood Meridian* is the likely inspiration for settings of many pieces throughout *Cicatrization*, but especially in "THE MISSIONARY KILLINGS".

The Missionary Killings: Part I

*"In this suffering you will learn,
In this suffering you will learn the way God
has chosen.
The way in which He speaks."
The platter of goods he has set inside of you.
The platter of ripe fruits pulsating in the heat
of your wounds.
The pink fruit pulsating in the beat of your
organs, stretching the web
of your skin"* – TRAIL, SMH⁹

The inaugural poem, "TRAIL," sees a man leading

a boy down a railroad on “a white leash stretching out like spit.”¹⁰ His speech to the child (quoted above) is what first presents the theme of faith. The scene that begins here continues in the next piece, “DITCH,” where a search party is looking for missing bodies while a man cannibalizes and sodomizes the child. SMH writes ...

“Man with hands large and tanned as leather gloves shovels blood out of boy body cleaved body sternum wide as spread labia mouth rooting hot through blood like truffle hog finding organs pulsing ... tongue swabbing outside of heart beating slowly soft tissue hot and sludged as lava ...” – DITCH, SMH¹¹

I saw what I was in for, admittedly far outside my usual reading tastes. My mind wandered around the pantheon of American serial killers. And that one scene in *Paradise Lost* (1996) with John Mark Byers ranting about God and the Devil in the very place his stepson died.

I especially thought of Byers while reading “CULT,” the first poem in Part 2.

The Cosmic Blood: Part II

“God told me to kill. I heard this in the fluff of my pillow the ear buried deep into the cotton mold.” – CULT, SMH¹²

Once again, I was subjected to imagery of a child being violated by a man of twisted faith:

“The man lowers the blade to the child’s head. His skin popping open like desert flowers in the soft bloom of night. He cuts a crucifix turned sideways to cross one from the world.” – CULT, SMH¹³

SMH goes on to explicitly detail a scene where the man masturbates and “raises his sperm to the air, rubs it onto the bleeding forehead of child”¹⁴ and ultimately ends in gunfire. This is the last piece where the focus is on men of faith before SMH

turns his attention elsewhere.

Where does he focus next? Well, SMH tells us in the Martin Bladh interview that “God is buried in the entrails of something screaming and that blood both nourishes and obscures the divine.”¹⁵ If God is easy to find on the tongues and in the deeds of men in the poems up to this point, it sinks deeper and vanishes in the poems that follow.

Some pieces, like “TOOL SHED” and “SUN” are sheer ambience; no action takes place beyond that of decay and decomposition and SMH turns their lens to human remains. He shows us a river in “SUN” where we find “corpses smothered to fertilize the bottom of muddy creek” and “filling shores like sandbags against the coming of flood.”¹⁶

But some of the poems which fill this part of the book feel disingenuous in a kind of B-Movie way. The text is fixated completely on the perspectives of the violent and shows nothing in the way of direct or indirect care or compassion for the receivers of said violence. This kind of inhuman writing is a hallmark of Jeffers’ poetry, and is surely intentional in *Cicatrization*, but it didn’t land with me.

Far and away, children and women are the predominant objects of violence in *Cicatrization*. They are hardly given any description, no voice, and little to no agency in any of the visions SMH transcribes, unlike the lengthy monologues and third person perspective given to men in the writing. All the characters are nameless without exception and their faces are featureless beyond their expressions of intense ecstasy or agony.

They’re unthinking blank slates that exist only in relation to their torturers and killers. When the child is about to be cannibalized in “TRAIL,” SMH quickly tells us “the boy’s eyes crossed in confusion. The boy shook where he stood. The boy opened his mouth. He screamed with scorching throat, shrieking in blood heat.”¹⁷

“CULT” onward is where this lack of care in SMH’s writing really stuck out to me. Women make their first appearance here as well. Members of said cult,

they are “ugly with age” and they are literally in the kitchen, making lunch for everyone before the big sermon.¹⁸

The boy in “CULT” which I mentioned above, who gets his forehead carved up and rubbed with semen, has no thought and no description at all: “The child comes forward. The child kneels ... the child’s eyes roll back into skull.”¹⁹ And that’s it. In contrast, the man gets over 5 total pages to pontificate about death and God, and most of the rest of the poem is describing what he does to the boy.

There are two poems which are graphic depictions of rape in “THE COSMIC BLOOD.” In “MAN AND WIFE,” the titular man experiences an erection while changing the diaper of his “invalid” wife and rapes her. The poem is extremely explicit in its description of the rapist’s actions and gives thought to his feelings as he goes to sleep, then wakes up and hangs himself.²⁰ But SMH does not give the woman he rapes any inner life whatsoever.

In “HUNGER,” there is a brief scene where a mother sends her baby down a river in a basket. This is explained away in one line as she “watches as water moves child away shoulders tense in black cloud of her illness.”²¹ The poem then moves on to SMH’s focus, which is the group of men who discover the child and proceed to dismember and roast it over a fire.

There are so many poems like this in “THE COSMIC BLOOD” that it was a relief to turn each page. My limited understanding of transgressive literature is that it is an attempt to write in a way that does not insist on a human perspective or any moral perspective. But to my read, *Cicatrization* does not only fail to resist a human perspective, it struggles to give a perspective other than that of the violent actor, which is a man in nearly every instance, and most of these failings fall within Part II.

Stephen King said, “you don’t get scared of monsters – you get scared for people.”²² I think the lack of detail given to victims in the writing keeps the emotional impact of the work from rising to horror

beyond mere disgust.

The Holy Abattoir: Part III

The Crucifix hanging over the dream of death.

The Crucifix hanging in death beyond death. – THE CROSS A GAMBREL, SMH²³

Getting through the 20 poems which make up parts I and II was such gnarly work, I found it difficult to give due consideration and time to the remaining four poems of the book. I suspect the author may take my discomfort as a compliment, so I suppose I mean it as such. These last four poems drive home the themes which are clear in the preceding poems.

“THE CROSS A GAMBREL” (quoted above) takes the enacted violence of those scenes and projects it explicitly into the world of dreams. This feels a bit redundant to me as it’s already very clear that we are in a dreamscape. SMH uses the words “dream, fever dream, hallucination,” and “hallucinatory” many times. But you could also read it as the end of a building crescendo.

This continues in the next piece, “DREAM OF EXECUTION,” which begins “Dream of horse jamming penis in dead man’s face.”²⁴ But then the explicit dreamworld setting of these two poems is reeled back for “THE GUTTING CHAPEL” which concerns a hunting lodge to touch on ecocide once more. SMH’s feelings towards animal death is clear, describing “the cabin surrounded by barbed wire like concentration camp lit by floodlight.”²⁵

SMH’s final offering is “THE WOODS A BUTCHER BLOCK.” The consistent style of little to no punctuation and the pounding pace of the more effective poems, some of which read as a pages-long single sentence, is dropped almost entirely. The voice of God becomes quiet and clumsy in this piece which feels to me like a first draft, awkwardly beginning “The wicked world is woods. Woods all smell the same rot chewed through bodies speared

in sharpened branches.”

The book’s actual last page is a slick, black piece of cardstock which quotes “THE CROSS A GAMBREL” and adds a line. “All Time Passes Through the Tragedy of Blood, / That Which Burns in the Memory First Burns in the Flesh.” It would make more sense in my mind to just end on that poem rather than “THE WOODS A BUTCHER BLOCK” and adds to the out-of-tune feeling I got from the final poem.

A Scab to Pick At

“Certain things inside churn in evil and so I exorcise them. Writing for me has always been immediate dictation and almost mechanical in how the images shape themselves. I write what I am fed and what I am fed is largely scenes of psychic apocalypse.”

– INTERVIEW WITH MARTIN BLADH, SMH²⁶

What lingers after reading *Cicatrization* feels less to me like the ache of a fresh wound beginning to heal and more like the relief of finally vomiting after a long bout of sickness. The effect is similar to how we cope with lived pain and suffering: cyclical. I would read through, then overwhelmed and disgusted by what I found, I searched elsewhere for deeper understanding.

I thought by seeking to understand the author through his influences and his commentary, I might appreciate his work more. And after a period of reading and researching, I would return to *Cicatrization* with new context and hoping to find deeper meaning but was disappointed each time to find little more than superficial shock value; it’s the thing where your roommate finds something spoiled in the fridge and brings it to you, saying “Smell this. Gross, right?” Yep, gross.

SMH tells us that “in the past I have not researched ... currently I am breaking that mold and have been writing very little but researching a lot for a planned novel.”²⁷ Perhaps there we will see a more nuanced and potentially more digestible text

dealing with the cosmic darkness SMH is focused on. But if it’s another labyrinth of blood and gore with no relief and no reward, I think I’ll give it a pass.

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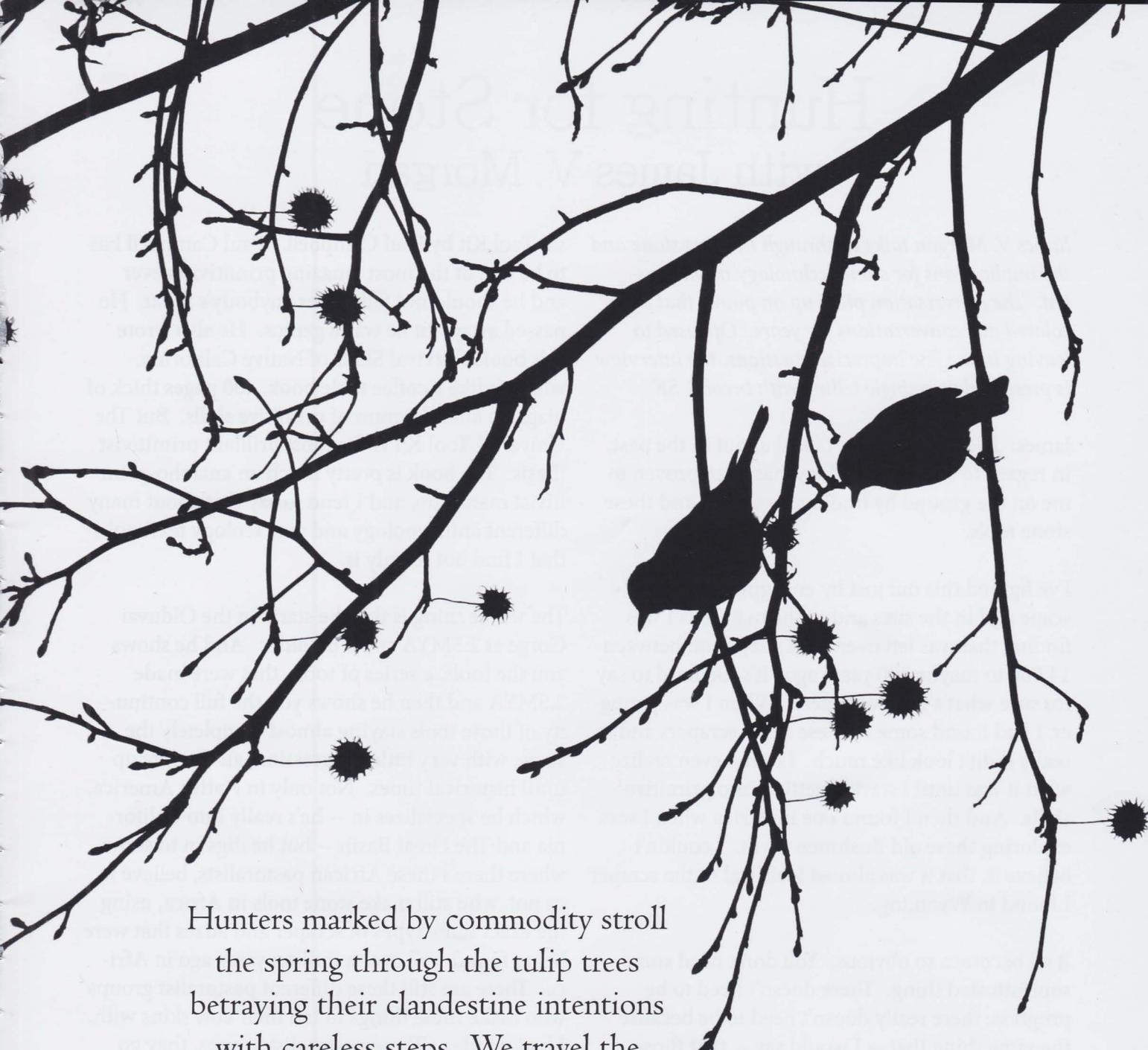
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Endnotes

- 1 SMH, *Cicatrization*, 70.
- 2 *Cicatrization*, front flap.
- 3 Schumann, *Enzyklopädische...*
- 4 Herford, quoted by SMH, *Cicatrization*, 59.
- 5 SMH, “The Woods a Butcher Block,” *Cicatrization*, 68.
- 6 Foucault, “Preface to Transgression,” 48.
- 7 Bloom, “Dumbing Down...”
- 8 SMH, *Cicatrization*, 14.
- 9 SMH, *Cicatrization*, “Trail” 20.
- 10 SMH, “Trail” 20.
- 11 SMH, “Ditch” 23.
- 12 SMH, “Cult” 33.
- 13 SMH, 36.
- 14 SMH, 36.
- 15 SMH, *Cicatrization*, 12.
- 16 SMH, “Sun,” 50.
- 17 SMH, “Trail,” 20.
- 18 SMH, “Cult,” 30.
- 19 SMH, “Cult,” 36.
- 20 SMH, “Man and Wife,” 45.
- 21 SMH, “Hunger,” 40.
- 22 Janeczko, “In Their Own...” 10.
- 23 SMH, *Cicatrization*, “The Cross a Gambrel,” 60.
- 24 SMH, “The Dream of Execution,” 64.
- 25 SMH, “The Gutting Chapel,” 66.
- 26 SMH, *Cicatrization*, 14.
- 27 SMH, *Cicatrization*, 8.



Hunters marked by commodity stroll the spring through the tulip trees betraying their clandestine intentions with careless steps. We travel the hillside and act like mirrors of their carelessness. There is some meager food here, some titillation of delicacy which confounds our instinct into a practice akin but not alike to something for which we strive. The fire we seek puts heat off we can feel yet wayfaring to its blaze there is nothing but a maze of false illumination. We step more carefully from here on in...

Hunting for Stone

with James V. Morgan

James V. Morgan talks us through hunting stone and the implications for stone technology in the present. The conversation picks up on points that have colored our conversations for years. Opposed to leaving in the few imprecise questions, the interview is presented as a single telling with breaks- SK

James: Everything we've talked about in the past, in regard to stone technology, has been proven to me on the ground by finding these sites and these stone tools.

I've figured this out just by engaging in the landscape and in the sites and in the materials I was finding that was left over -- let's say from between 14,000 to maybe 300 years ago. It's too hard to say for sure what's what out there. When I was younger, I had found some of these stone scrapers and it really didn't look like much. I didn't even realize what it was until I started getting into primitive skills. And then I found one in Africa when I was exploring these old Bushmen caves. I couldn't believe it, that it was almost identical to the scraper I found in Wyoming.

It all becomes so obvious. You don't need some sophisticated thing. There doesn't need to be progress, there really doesn't need to be because the same thing that -- I would say -- that those Bushmen caves, who knows how old that is, but it's the exact same technology all the way across from Africa to here and it's super simple. You could easily make this tool with just a little bit of practice in flintknapping and you can use that tool to accomplish all sorts of tasks out there.

That was, for me, super primal awareness about -- sort of digging into this whole fear of not having what you need and this obsession with having to have all this technology. "Oh my God, what are we going to do? We're all going to die." It just becomes kind of laughable when you learn about stone tools.

Then I got turned on to this book which a really cool rewilding person gave me called The Univer-

sal Tool Kit by Paul Campbell. Paul Campbell has to be one of the most amazing primitivists ever and he should not fall under anybody's radar. He passed away but he was a genius. He also wrote this book, *Survival Skills of Native California*, which is like a coffee table book, 400 pages thick of diagram after diagram of primitive skills. But *The Universal Tool Kit* is the most brilliant primitivist thesis. The book is pretty much an anarcho-primitivist manifesto, and I tend to say that about many different anthropology and archaeology textbooks that I find but it truly is.

The whole thing is this: he starts in the Olduvai Gorge at 2.5MYA and a bit older. And he shows you the tools, a series of tools, that were made 2.5MYA and then he shows you the full continuity of those tools staying almost completely the same, with very little progression, all the way up until historical times. Not only in Native America, which he specializes in -- he's really into California and The Great Basin -- but he digs in to show where there's these African pastoralists, believe it or not, who still make stone tools in Africa, using the exact same types of scraper and adzes that were being found well over a million years ago in Africa. There are still these different pastoralist groups who make these things to tan their cow skins with. I had no idea. These pastoralist groups, they go and harvest the stones, just like ancient people would have done, from these old quarries in Africa and they still sit in their places and flint knap and scrape hides.

The other thing that Paul Campbell really digs in to, which is really important, is female flintknapping. I was showing people artifacts and talking about some of these sites that I've been visiting, and I'd be like, "Yeah, this guy was sitting here -- this dude was sitting here knapping, look." And I had a female rewilding friend of mine say, "well, why does it have to be a dude?" She was entirely right. And I started realizing through Paul Campbell and thinking about this that many, many of the tools that I've been finding now over the last seven

or eight years are women's tools. They're not men's tools, they're women's tools. And based on what Paul Campbell is saying about Africa it's very likely that during the Stone Age, when people really used stone tools, prolifically and all of the time, that women were expert knappers just as much as men were.

This is something that I don't think a lot of people think about, especially your modern American flintknapper guy at the skills gathering or the knap-in. My impression would be that they don't even think about the gendered side of this. So that's really impressive. For example, I find numerous shelter sites which I can identify by these rock rings. Sometimes they call them tipi rings, stone circles -- once you know how to look for these things it will blow your mind as to how many there are out there, these old shelters. And then, often times, I've found distinctive, large-size chopper and scraper tools that would just be sitting right next to the shelter ring. You wouldn't even notice it if you were just looking at the ground because it looks just like a rock in the ground. But if you go in there and dig it out and you kind of know what the top of these look like there a scraper will be there. I found this really beautiful one last month right next to the shelter ring. Then, two days ago, I found another shelter ring and there was this little rock sticking out -- sure enough, it was the exact same type of large-size, heavy, hand-held chopper scraper tool that I firmly believe women would have been using to flesh hides or flesh big hunks of meat off of bone.

I'm not going to disclose locations but I'll just say that once you attune yourself to this stuff you will find that, at least across the American West -- because I'm a Westerner, I don't know nothing about the Midwest or the East -- but west of the Rocky Mountains, from the Black Hills all the way through the Great Basin, the amount of evidence of hunter-gatherers on this continent is prolific and it's still out there. Once you attune yourself to this you will find it. You will find it all over the place. It's mind-blowing, it opens up an entire world -- a spiritual world and a world of understanding of the past, that life wasn't always like this and that this amazing landscape was the home of these hunting and gathering people for 10,000 years or more de-

pending on what you believe archaeologically.

This place that we live in is the home of these hunter-gatherers. And we're not talking about equestrian hunter-gatherers that got horses after the Spanish arrived and your normal idea of historical Native Americans. No, these were nomadic large-game hunters that are organized at a band level. Sort of iconic, nomadic hunter-gatherers. Now, that's in these environments where I'm finding this stuff, which is Great Plains, Rocky Mountains, Great Basin. Things are different in coastal areas and also along the larger rivers where there's a lot of salmon runs so you had more complexity. Then also, of course, the development of farming along major rivers and in the desert Southwest and so forth -- starting 4,000 years ago maybe -- that's a different scenario.

But, outside of all that, there's small-scale nomadic foot travelling hunter-gatherers occupying these places. I don't want to say exactly where these sites are but anywhere it's not developed and there's not too much vegetation you can find surface evidence of these sites, tools and shelters -- caches and hunting blinds and even rock-walled game drives. There even still exists free-standing shelters of wood, they still exist in many states in certain hidden spots: Colorado, Utah, Wyoming particularly, Nevada in the White Mountains area I believe. There still exists what are sometimes called wick-iups, basically a conical wooden shelter -- they're still free-standing in these mountains from past hunter-gatherers.

I don't think any of these are over 500 years old because wood deteriorates. What's happened with these wooden shelters is the wood is rotting from the bottom, so they're shrinking. They've been able to analyze the time that it would take for that wood to rot, so they've been able to date some of those approximately. But a lot of these are surface-level finds so you would never know directly, unless you could identify a particular point type or something -- there's several point complexes and specific types of knapping that will help you identify what something is. Otherwise, you don't know. You'd have to be doing an archaeological dig and see the stratified layers.

But, continuity of occupation? For sure, because some of the spots are also really good sources of tool-stone. I've also been able to scope out areas where there's really good outcroppings of tool-stone and wherever those are you will find piles and piles of lithics forever. You'll see the actual stone quarries where they had harvested all the material and that had to have been going on for thousands of years because there's still so much material there. I go to some of these spots to grab tool-stone for my own use.

And that's pretty hard. I've experimented with trying to extract tool stone from right out of the ground and these bigger, giant boulders and it's really hard to do. So sometimes it's a mystery to me, how in the hell were they getting this rock out of the ground?

The point I wanted to make initially on that was I've taken it upon myself to -- some of them are so beautiful I just leave them, they're so amazing -- but you'll find a shit-ton of cores. A core is basically the big cobble that people were knocking flakes off to make tools from. I'll find these things, I call them 'paleo cores'. And they can be small, or they can be really big, big enough to where it's pretty heavy to carry. But you'll see this chunk of rock and you'll see where all the flakes were getting knocked off. This is an anthropogenically modified chunk of rock and I have a few of them right now. I just made a biface out of one where I'm like, you know what, this was a good core, this guy or woman tossed this core because they were done with it, but it's still got a lot of material.

I'll take that thing back home and I'll use that core and knock flakes off and make my own flakes and points out of. I'll basically keep going on the work that someone stopped several thousand years ago, and I'll just pick back up where they left off. And that's phenomenal, you're just holding this stone that -- who knows how many thousands of years ago someone was knocking flakes off of it. Here's a platform, boom, knock a flake off and keep going. At first I thought, I don't want to mess with these because they're artifacts, but there's so much of this stuff everywhere it doesn't really matter. It's kind of this anarchist principle. One of the things you realize when you're out here is these people were

recycling stone after stone after stone, undoubtedly.

This gets to one of the biggest points I want to make: you'll find all this stuff out there that is for sure recycled. It's used for a little while, tossed, maybe someone 300-400 years later picked it up again and decided to make a tool out of it or do a little re-touch and get it sharp and good again -- they'll toss it again. You don't even know for how many thousands of years these individual tools have been recycled and used by these different bands of hunters and different cultures. These landscapes, certain areas are covered with so many stone tools -- I'm not even joking, I'm talking about hundreds of thousands of stone tools littering the landscape. Why would people need to carry these things all around?

You can fully see the mentality when you find these stone tools laying on the ground that it's no attachment to technology. Totally immediate return in this regard. You knock a flake off of a core or you find a flake that someone dropped, and you're like, "this is what I need right now." And very quickly, with rudimentary knapping, turn this thing into something useful to accomplish a quick task. There's no need to carry this thing around because the task is done, and you know you're going to find more stone as you continue to move across the land. So why carry this stuff around? It's completely antithetical to this whole civilized, domesticated scarcity paranoia and obsession with shopping and having all these things.

This is why this is so important to the psychology of rewilding and why people should really dig into this. When I first got into primitivism I went to a knap-in once and I tried flintknapping and I was like, "oh, this sucks. Why would you want to do this? This is just tedious and hard work. I suck at it." I broke a buncha shit and left. "I don't need this, there's going to be plenty of metal -- I'll always have metal tools, they'll always be around. I can get scrap metal and make shit. Why do I need to use rock?" Well, man, a few decades later I realize that was a stupid assumption. The lessons to be learned from messing around with stone tools, in terms of primitivism and rewilding and anti-civ and going against technology are just profound. They are massively profound because what you

learn is you really don't need fucking anything to accomplish so many of life's basic tasks once you unlock this stone tool potential.

Paul Campbell points out that you don't even need good tool stone. I was ignoring any other rocks unless they were flashy tool stone that I could easily identify walking around because it'll shine in the sun. "Oh there's some tool stone!" Run over there -- but Paul Campbell points out that those stones don't even matter that much. They matter -- but even the fancy tool stone like the flint and the obsidian, especially, they are more brittle than the harder stone like quartzite. For doing heavier jobs like cutting down a tree or adzes or cutting out a bow stave or atlatl board, super heavy work, you don't want to use that type of stone. You want to use super hard stone.

You don't even knap it -- sure, you could do percussion flaking on some of that stuff but it's almost too hard to break with percussion, even with a hammer stone. So the way that those tools were created -- and he basically shows you that that's probably the first way people started flintknapping 2.5MYA ago or more -- by smashing these big cobbles of quartzite on to big anvil stones, big rocks laying on the ground that were solid like boulders. You basically just heave the thing over your head in the hopes of smashing it. What you'll get is a really heavy, super robust -- if it flakes correctly you get a super robust chopper that you can do all kinds of shit with, it's like a hand axe, the most primitive hand axe. Paul Campbell shows how you can just go break these quartzite flakes, get this rudimentary hand axe, chop down a tree -- 2 or 3 inch diameter tree -- you can use the same thing plus the flake that comes off of it, which will be a thinner flake usually, and you can make a bow that will kill a big game animals just with a river cobble. He's doing it in 3-4 hours, making a bow and arrow all with quartzite river cobbles, no fancy tool stone. His point is you don't need shit.

Once you learn this you can basically -- all you need is your own two hands and some rocks. And he shows you, you can make fireboard so you can get fire going; can use these things to extract bark to make cordage. He shows how atlatls were made just with these really rudimentary stone tools, nothing fancy at all. Then, the other thing that he

makes really clear is that, points themselves, like these projectile points that we romanticize -- we romanticize these as being this cool stone technology that you find in museums because they're fancy and artsy. These things are not actually as prolific as you think. Campbell shows you how you could easily kill animals with just burnished fire-hardened wood tips that you carve with just little flakes of quartzite river cobble and those are just as sharp as stone and they'll just as easily kill big game. He goes into how to make a bone tool, how to sharpen a bone -- just with these river cobbles.

He's ignoring obsidian and these other fancy stones almost completely. So, before I even read Paul Campbell, I started noticing this too. I was finding these really heavy quartzite hand axes and choppers. It was really cool. They made this big hand axe out of this really heavy quartzite. I would take this type of rock home and try to knap it and turn it into something. I could not break it. I would whack on it with the heaviest hammer stone and I can't break it. How did they do this? These dudes must have been so strong and rugged and gnarly to break this stuff...but now by reading Paul Campbell I have it figured out. You either hold the big piece of quartzite over the top of your head and you either bring it down full force on top of a boulder or you just heave the thing at the boulder as an anvil. Another way to do it is you set the piece of quartzite -- granite is another stone he talks about, granite works too -- you set that down on an anvil and you get another super heavy cobble and then you heave that over your head with your two hands on top of your core that you're trying to make a tool out of. And if you do it right it will make a really sharp flake.

He basically shows that this is the primary way people were making stone tools for millions of years and that fancier percussion and pressure flaking and things like that -- they are important too, but they don't matter as much. So now that I've seen this, I've found tools like this all over the place, they are all over the place. I'm even thinking "is this a tool?" And you think, maybe it isn't but it actually works as one.

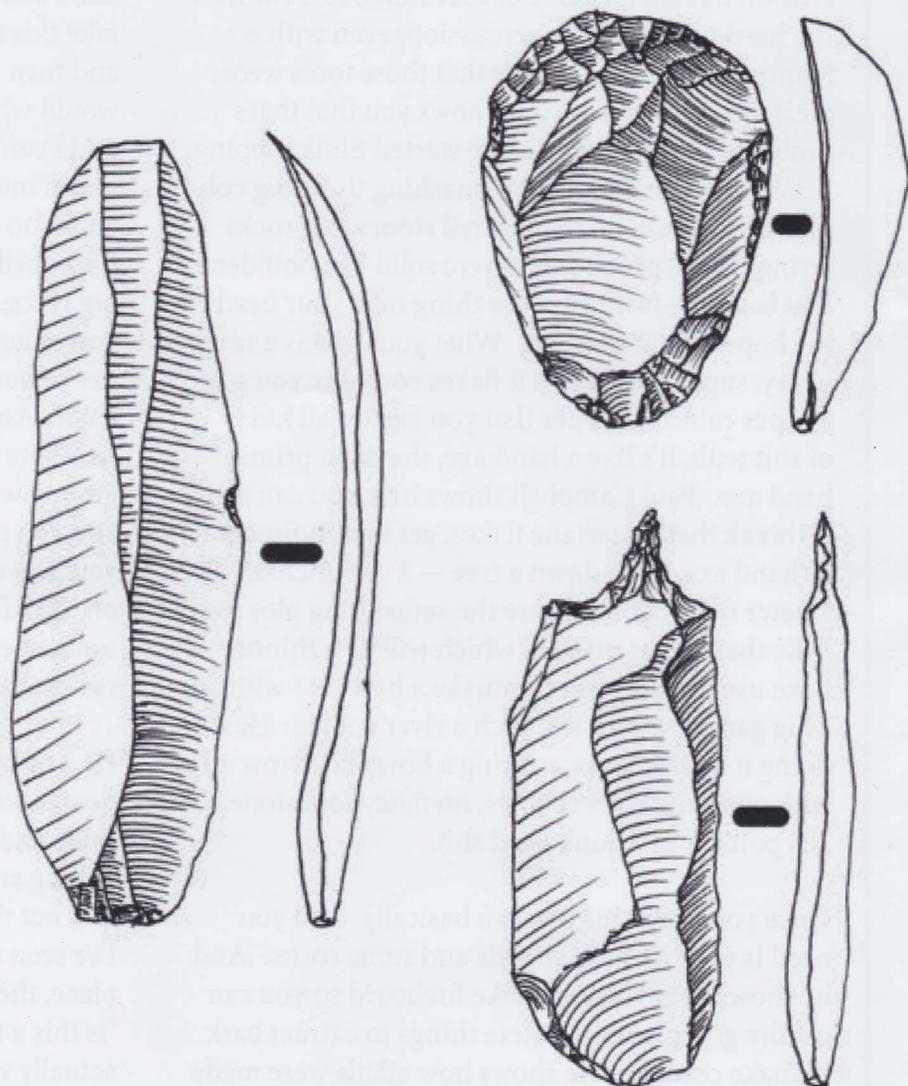
There are these things called scraper planes and,

after I read Paul Campbell, I realized that I was overlooking these tools called scraper planes. I thought they were little miniature cores that people had knocked a ton of flakes off and tossed them. But actually, these scraper planes have a 90-degree angle on one or more of the edges. It's almost like a turtle shell block and it's really sharp. And Paul Campbell says these are scraper planes, like a planer for planing wood; planing off pieces of wood for making a bow stave. Now I find these scraper planes all over the place.

The other day I picked one up, you wouldn't believe -- I was cruising above the top of this canyon and there's a little rock shelf and, sure enough - and this is becoming a constant thing for me - I find these flintknapping sites where someone was just sitting on a nice little rock bench with a view of the country below them flintknapping. And you'll see a bunch of flakes, sometimes you'll find a really nice scraper or a burin or a spokeshave just sitting there on the rock just very cleanly left as if the person did a job, was sitting there on the cliff overlooking the valley looking for game, and then when they were done they just put down that tool and just walked away. And then, however many thousand years later, I show up and sit down in the same spot and pick up that tool. I pick up those tools, I look at them, I set them down and keep going. But the other day I found one of these scraper planes just sitting there next to all these other lithics that this knapper had left there. I was like, wow, this scraper plane is exactly what Paul Campbell talks about and it's super sharp still. So, I took it and started trying to plane out a big piece of wood that was laying right there off to the side. It was so sharp I was just peeling off huge shavings of wood flattening out this log with that scraper plane someone had left there thousands of years ago.

It was so beautiful. But I played with it for a few and then I set the scrap-

er plane back down and kept moving and kept walking and finding more. That could go for any of these tools. I've actually picked up several of these tools and done little jobs. I grabbed some yucca fiber, cut off some yucca leaves and started to extract the fiber, using this tool that I found. A really nice little hand scraper that I found on the ground. I used that to clean the yucca leaves up and then smash it all up so I can clean the fibers. Then I used those fibers to make yucca cordage. I took another paleo stone tool that I found, which is a scraper adze -- which Paul Campbell talks about a lot, like a planing adze with an undercut edge on the scraping side -- I took that thing and it looked to me as if it had been hafted because there



were hafting notches on the far end of it -- archaeologists call that the distal end, the scraping side would be the proximal end. That's just some nerdy stuff. On the distal end there were these notches which I think were used for hafting. I started to, just by using just the stone tool that I found out there, to rehaft that scraper adze to a branch handle that I chopped off of a tree with a stone chopper that I found. I got the yucca fiber and I twisted the cordage. Then I took this little stone saw thing that I found -- I believe they were using as a saw, it had a serrated edge -- and I carved out the handle and the platform for the handle, scraped the bark off the tree branch and then took the yucca cord and hafted that adze with those hafting notches to that handle.

That tool, I know from working with the Lakotas, is a tool they called a wah'inki and is basically a scraping adze but it was a primary tool used for dry-scraping buffalo skin, both the skin and hair side. So I'm sure that's what I found and I sat there and recreated it -- not with my own knapping but with some tool that some native person knapped however many thousands of years ago and I just recreated it myself hanging out there at one of these sites.

The other day I started cruising up this ridge that I wanted to check out and I started to find stone tools scattered here and there. I got to this spot where there was five or six scraper or burin tools just sitting on this rock, very neatly set on this rock. Like the person who was using them had just set them down and left. Well that's really cool. I notice there's another rock with a few more of them set on there just like that. I said, wow, this is cool, someone was hanging out here doing some work and they just left. As I started to zoom back I realized I was right inside of a stone circle, a shelter. Then I realized the whole shelter was littered with stone tools, some of them just laying around some of them set aside all neatly.

And then I saw some more tool stone flashing in the sun and I walked over there, another 15 feet away. There was another shelter ring filled with stone tools and then I found another one. Basically, these three shelter rings filled with stone tools, up on this ridge, with this most commanding view of the country. It's just like...wow, look at how

these people were living. From up there you could see all these different areas where game could have been going through. You have this beautiful camp and they were just there living, doing their work. And there was tool stone all around for them to gather and all these other materials.

I kept going down that ridge and I ended up finding another camp with three more stone circle and the same deal. They had just very neatly cached their stone tools, they had just set them on these rocks very neatly, as if they had planned to come back. And I guess they never came back, civilization came and fucked them over. But that's still there, you can walk right there and look at this. To me, it just never ceases to blow my mind and be inspiring.

The other thing I want to say is, compared to all these basic foundational tools it's really hard to find a projectile point. And I don't know if that has to do with the fact that some of these areas were known in the early 1900s. There was this big artifact collector craze going on, around the 1920s there were a lot of artifact collectors going around looking for native artifacts. And they may have known about these sites and they basically got any of the projectile points that were there. But they ignored -- they didn't even notice or straight ignored the more rudimentary stone tools which are actually the more practical tools that people would be using with their day to day tasks all the time throughout history, throughout this 3 million years that Paul Campbell talks about. Those tools just all got ignored, likely, by these artifact collectors but they got all of the projectile points. So those are very hard to find.

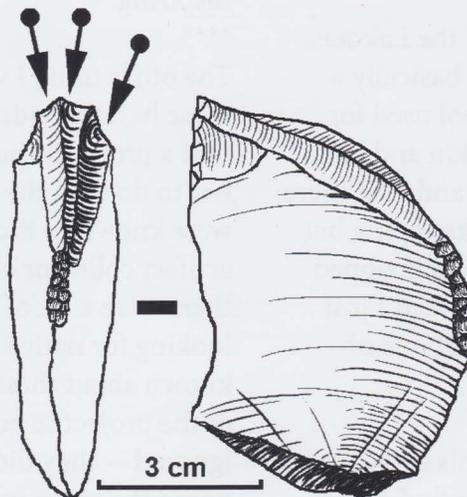
Another angle to that is that it could be that the projectile points were so valuable those things were always carried with these people and they rarely got lost. When they did get lost it was in hunting, so finding one of those is like finding a needle in a haystack. Though I have found several projectile points over the years those are few and far between, a literal needle in a haystack compared to the thousands of stone tools, practical stone tools, laying around.

If any hikers or any normal unattuned people go to these spots it is almost certain they will not

even notice, at all, that they are walking across this hunter-gatherer landscape. They will be completely oblivious to it. They might see one of the shiny rocks, pick it up and look at it, "oh that's a really cool rock." Toss it or take it home because "it's such a pretty rock" but they will not understand that that is actually a stone tool, they won't even get it. In fact, when I was younger, I didn't get it either. I didn't realize that these were actual tools, but they are. I think that, again, just speaks to the unlocking of our psychology that we need here, to realize that we can liberate ourselves from all this bullshit, technological slavery, by embracing this free and uncontrollable stone technology.

You can make a bow that will kill a big game animal in less than a couple hours from almost any tree. I guess making the bow string would be the more time-consuming part. You can literally do that; you can make a quickie bow that will kill big game at a close distance and once that dries out it may not last that long. But you can do it really quick.

Paul Campbell's book is so important, he has dozens of pages just about atlatl technology and all the different atlatl throwing boards and atlatl darts, in terms of their sizes, weights, flexibility. He did all this analysis; he made all these atlatls and darts only with these rudimentary stone tools. He did it all with no knives or anything. This guy perfected the atlatl, made only with stone tools, without even using projectile points. He mastered the knowledge on this that's lost, and he showed how easy it is to actually make this hunting tool. Spears and atlatls are one of the longest enduring human hunting tools, bows are just very short in time. I think there's some agreement there might have been bows 30, 40,000 years ago in paleolithic Europe but I don't even know if that's correct. But we know for sure the atlatl was here forever, until very recent. Paul Campbell just digs into that and how you can make all that stuff that you need for an atlatl kit just with these rudimentary stone



tools. And, not only that, he also explains that if you're at close range then the atlatl is inferior to an easily crafted, hardened spear even with just a burnished or fire-hardened, sharpened wooden tip. That's something you can easily make with these rudimentary stone tools; you can easily make a spear that will kill a large animal at close range.

Also important is that you really don't need fancy, artsy looking finely knapped points or arrowheads to kill big game animals. Simple rudimentary flakes easily knocked off a spall will do, providing they are thin and blade like. Sometimes you will knock off a flake that is almost a perfect blade and is even

pointed. These types of thin flakes are sharper than steel, and way sharper than a retouched, pressure-flaked point. You might need to shape these hasty-type blades a little bit, and you likely do need to add some hafting notches, or at least dull down the hafted end, but the big message I am trying to get across here is that a super simple basic flake/blade is often a more superior slicing and killing tool than is anything with fancy looks. You really don't need to expend a lot of energy, or become obsessed with the symbolic, to achieve a stone point that is wholly lethal.

But you would never know this truth by following the popular museum-like imagery of primitive arrows, spears, and knives etc. And there are archaeological finds where initial interpretations just write-off these projectile like blades as unsophisticated throwaway lithic debitage etc., but then other analysts come along and say 'no, these are actually projectile points that killed animals at this site - it's just that the makers/hunters were able to turn simple flakes into lethal projectiles and seemed to be more concerned with what was quick, easy, and effective rather than with what is fancy.' So when I started realizing all of this I was like 'yep, these hunters who were only using simple sharp flakes to kill game are definitely the anarchists of the hunting and gathering world.'

“Fluttering Omen”

-C.M. Wode

cut through autumn
sky benevolent inverted
monarchs of your
own personal domain

bare the spade
to unearth dominate
weakness and sustain
the sword beneath
coda moons

this is a moment of
demise and period
of bloom so
at least this

once, dear compas,
we must be
more than we
ever imagined

“invitation to anger/invocation of vengeance”

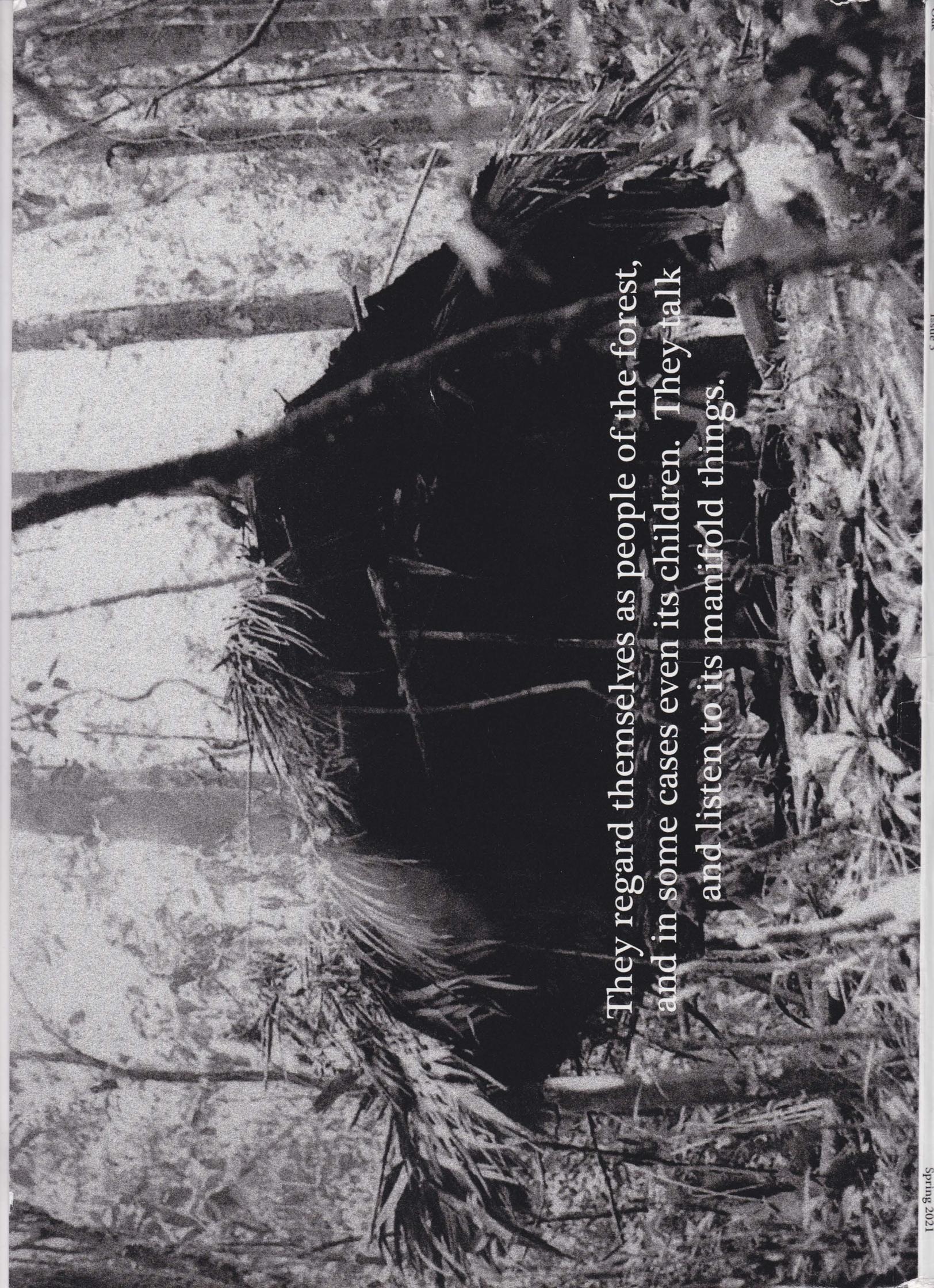
-C.M. Wode

paltry hunger pangs empty
across bisected former forest –
a massacre of limbs and trunks

I shout against the distance
where manufactured noise merits
unnatural silence sought
in further stone and steel

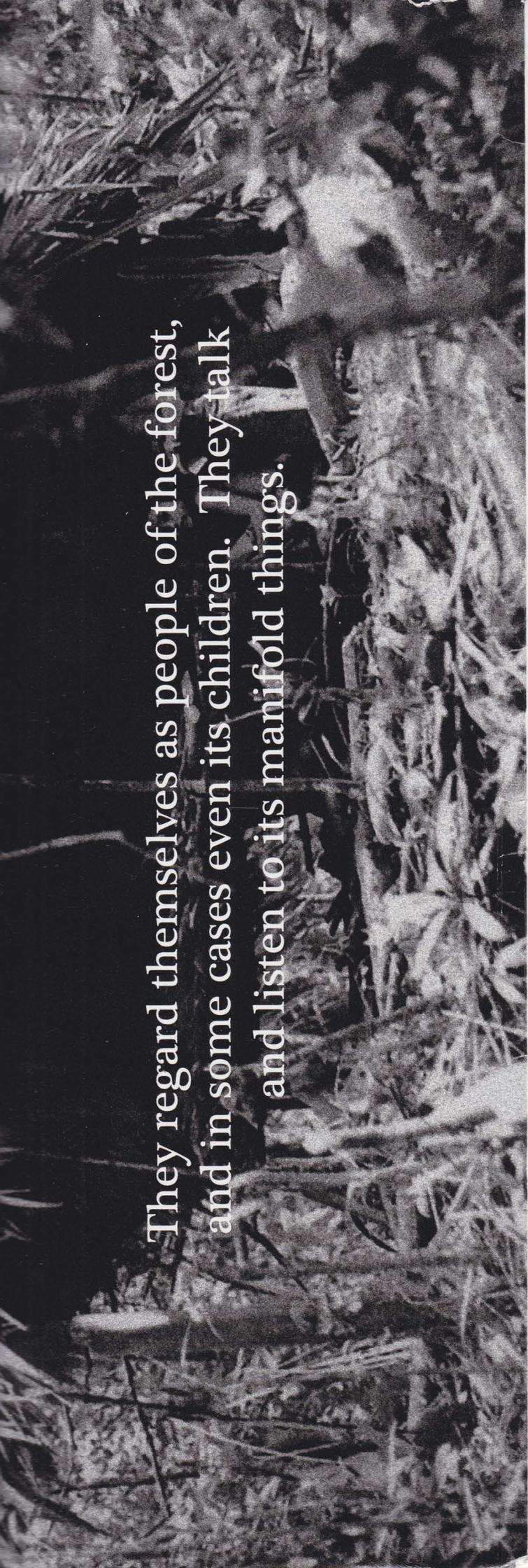
if my voice were those
emissions, I would smother
you. Instead I broadcast
in cabal and argot

tilt at windmills that
fill the landfill “green”
and nifty cracker-jack plastic
further poisons reason
against us

A black and white photograph of a traditional thatched-roof hut, likely made of bamboo or similar natural materials, situated in a dense forest. The hut has a steeply pitched roof and is surrounded by tall, slender trees and thick undergrowth. The lighting is dramatic, with strong shadows and highlights, creating a sense of depth and texture in the scene.

They regard themselves as people of the forest,
and in some cases even its children. They talk
and listen to its manifold things.

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A journal against