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straight lines don't worn anymore

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2008

Thus always does history, whether of marsh or market place, end in paradox. The ultimate value in these marshes is wildness, and the crane is wildness incarnate. But all conservation of wildness is self-defeating, for to cherish we must see and fondle, and when enough have seen and fondled, there is no wilderness left to cherish.
— from Aldo Leopold's "Marshland Elegy"

This morning I woke to gaze out my bedroom window onto a lush May world, where a riot of rhododendron blossoms spills over the roof of a garage below my bedroom, where dogwood and chestnut trees bloom with joyous abandon, where a thousand different trees burst with resplendent green and nature breaks my heart with its beauty. I listened to a bird singing in an evergreen tree with a haunting lonely melody that rose and fell until an airplane drowned out its song. The bird must have flown away because after the growl of the plane died, all I heard was the distant, incessant white noise of a freeway. My

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heart ached for those perfect and patient worlds in our own backyards which have always existed but which remain undiscovered due to our own dull-sightedness. We are too busy with naming and categorizing, counting and delineating.

Everything in this civilized life rakes my sense of wholeness raw, shreds it until I want to run and hide my head in cool and silent darkness beneath the ground. All the frenetic symbols and empty promises wrought in sounds, signs and words, the perpetual profit-seeking seduction, the invasive blare and glare, the screeching rush, the inattentiveness and distraction on blank faces, the caffeinated and drug-addled jitters that pulsate through veins and brains, the weariness, the threadbare insatiable appetites that goad consumers and leave them forever on empty. What we have here is the war of assaults on our well being by those who would dominate and drive to own every person, every object, every ounce of “intellectual property” on the Earth.

I'm part of all of this even though I chide myself for sitting here typing on a computer screen instead of dancing among the trees along a river somewhere (while they still exist and while I still exist with them). Yet the deepest part of me yearns for the same wildness they say my ancestors dreaded as they sought shelter from the terrors of the unknown, freedom from their hunger and the ravage of nature's so-called volatility and unpredictability. Even then, in sneaked the soothsayers and manipulators, the land-grabbers, the domesticators and the measurers.

I mourn all day every day. my heart breaking a little more over what we've lost because of all these abstractions that have subtly divided us from our core selves and what really matters. I have allowed these divisions and subdivisions in my own life because of the fallow ignorance and unconsciousness that defines me as part of the herd because I'm a social animal and others influence me for better or worse. Is it the way I'm wired? My laziness and ineptitude have weighed me down further into

this bog of confusion and ingratitude that erodes a meaningful life. I have no idea why I'm alive right now, in a time with so much misery and violation, brutality and destruction everywhere. And like other ordinary folks, I feel too paralyzed, too helpless to do anything. I find comfort in saying that I'm helpless because it allows me to continue with my cowardice, my laziness, my ignorance which all define me in my puny state of needing shelter in right-angled buildings and a hunk of engineered metal strapped around me to transporting me from place to place. This mantra of feeling paralyzed allows me to trick myself into thinking that someone else will clean up the whole stinking mess and turn things around toward meaning once again. But really, I know "someone" won't. I know that I can only change myself, and that is the only way I know how to change the world. I just don't want to do the work because it's so difficult.

The Buddhist phrase "do nothing" I sometimes scorn as an escapism. Yet our human doing has become our undoing until we feel we have no other options than to do just that — nothing. To be fair, most of us are takers — city dwellers who feed off nature without any means to return her generosity, even if we gave such return a thought. We plod along in our demeaning, demanding lives and jobs because everything costs so much on every level. We do this because we "choose" to go along with the dominant nightmare (hardly a choice, since we've forgotten everything about autonomy, our one chance for survival). So, most of us don't even know what the night sky looks like or what it feels like to pad along the forest floor in bare feet. What if we all stopped right now and did nothing for a few hours or even a day? The late Aldo Leopold, whose quote begins this essay, shot wolves reflexively in his younger days, but as he spent more time in what remained of wild places, he sensitized himself to and mourned the diminishing presence of wilderness. Later he wrote about how deeply he regretted his careless actions. In this way, he painfully discovered his own authenticity.

What if we just sat somewhere and breathed in and out and trusted that life would carry us along in its slow geo-logic, beyond our foolish and dreadful mistakes, just sat and held by simply breathing, without needing to see and fondle, grab and litter, without competition or fear. My guess is that few of us could do it, least of all myself because I can hardly give attention to anything for over three seconds. Yet a deep and growing part of me instinctively knows that the tired, cadaverous tricks of authoritarian manipulation just don't work any more.

To the extent that I continue to pretend that they work (even typing words on a computer screen validates them), as long as I give them any part of my conscious attention, I am perpetuating the fear, division, and destruction that are components of an inauthentic mind.

Authenticity, creativity, and wildness are threats to the authoritarian mind, which intends to control and conserve every thing in its favor forever, as if existing in an embalmed state so that even worms can't bring new life from death. Some green anarchists are actually conservatives because of a longing for stewardship of the Earth. But life is by definition about cycles, transformation, and change; and change is all about the unknown, which can instill fear even in the most stalwart heart. But there is a lesson in this: Only when we understand something, can we begin to love it. How, then, can we love when we understand so little? Science can do nothing except to compartmentalize and tear apart the wholeness that's more than the sum of its parts, so true understanding cannot come from science. Spirituality brings in the danger of crystallizing some mediated belief system (religion), so understanding cannot come from spirituality. That leaves us with the eternal wisdom of the human body (so immensely complex), that sacred container in which we live, that wildness and vastness that we are taught to fight and force to conform and tame to fit into this delusional nightmare of civilization.

If you could stand on the moon and look at Earth, you would see no lines, no boundaries, no color-coded maps. You'd see a lovely blue globe. The artificial lines of private property, cities, counties, regions, states, and countries with their numbered roads, their rail ways, and their grids of time, longitude and latitude, are nowhere at all except in the hegemonic and dominating mind. These are imaginary symbols that police states protect for the wealthy and powerful, the marks of petulant fools. The existence of maps is the invention of separation and starvation, but still only an illusion, because we are all connected with each other and with the planet itself in ways we cannot even yet imagine.

Here is an example of how fear and loathing got it wrong from the beginning: "Everything in nature is curved. There are no straight lines. Even space itself is said to be circular. Inner space, some say, is angular, since only humans abstract and construct straight lines. But the curvature of the brain translates to the curvature of the mind, and that must be why we always reason in circles." Such regret (I see that statement as an expression of regret) suggests how nature is feared and hated and needs to be controlled, domesticated, and dominated at any expense to preserve the "sanity" of reason. In this way, the evasive, adapted, authoritarian mind has mistrusted and eviscerated round things like our Earth, has for ten thousand years sought to hammer curves into straight lines (odd how linear time is measured on a round clock face), which all lead further and further away from meaning and holistic existence.

We feel the authoritarian mind tighten its rusting grip around our throats and ram its corroded cables and lines into our souls. If we long for meaning and holistic existence to re-ignite our lives and perception, let us then bend and curve those lifeless straight lines back into living circles, cycles, spheres and spirals with passion.