

# **Black Seed: Issue 5**

**a green anarchist journal**

Various Authors

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# Introduction

Perhaps you thought we were gone? Two years feels like an eternity in these fast-too-fast times when epic conflicts have a full arc over a weekend, 140 characters creates volumes of commentary and opinion, a day seems like forever when you are refreshing a screen over and over. This project is the opposite of this spirit. Herein we hope to share themes that are fuller in scope, that merit reflection and contemplation. We intend to plant seeds and to care for them as they flower, mature, and decay. The half lives of our pleasures, concerns, and conflicts should be measured in decades and not in the blink of someones eyes or even the length of time the average radical stays active.

Welcome to issue five of *Black Seed*. If you have not seen or heard of us before let us introduce ourselves. We are a small collective of green anarchists who publish a paper-only (or at least paper first) publication intended to broaden and intensify our perspectives. We differ from green anarchist positions that precede us because we have a deep concern about positive political programs (however they are dressed up), the ability of our people to achieve them, and the efficacy of a revolutionary mindset in the first place. Pointedly, we feel as though the academic arts (anthropology first among them) are too mired in the gauntlet of what it takes to become a practitioner to take seriously. This is not to say that we aren't willing to learn about people, the past, or whatever but that the citation of sources, and the othering of people or their superior lifeways is not how we believe a green anarchist perspective begins. But it does begin, mostly by conversations with each other, with people who may also be anarchists but don't use the term. Our experience is that those who are most likely to share our attitude towards an earth first, anti-authoritarian, and anti-ideological perspective are people who are also indigenous. Indigeneity is a confusing smear of bodies, practices, and conversations that we know will continue to inform *Black Seed*.

This issue dwells on these building blocks. New editor Ramon and I write new manifestos contemplating what it means to be a green anarchist in this post-manifesto age, what it means to have an approach that prioritizes pacing and contemplation rather than one of being in such a hurry all the time. Of having big plans that always fall through unnoticed.

This issue also is concerned with the immeseration of daily life. How did we get here? How are we rising above the mediocrity of our times? Are we? *Black Seed* is quite concerned about the small things that reflect the cyclical way of the world.

What does it mean that the world is coming to an end, forever? Perhaps most importantly what is the role of violence in our movement (cough) today and in the ushering of a new one? Anarchists have always been the party of imagination but also of morality. Violence cuts through both of these gordian knots but to what end? These are the questions that *Black Seed* issue five attempts to answer.

## ***Black Seed*—An Old Green Anarchy by Aragorn!**

The original idea of *Black Seed* was to be a spiritual successor to the magazine *Green Anarchy* (out of Eugene, OR, 2001–2008), taking from it an attitude, an anti-civilization type of total critique, and the legacy of a green anarchist perspective. While I would still maintain that our project lay in the same historical vein as *Green Anarchy*, the only editor of *GA* living in a city has made it very clear he does not appreciate the direction *Black Seed* has taken. (The others, living outside the city, have been privately encouraging of this project) This provides some space. Up until now we have attempted (in our way) to be respectful about how we treated the legacy we saw ourselves within. But if we are publicly declared outside of that tradition then let's make a clean break. Let us be forever done with the rhetoric and empty promises of the so called "anti-civilization journal of theory and action." Let us leave grandfather Zerzan to his mealy-mouthed mutterings about the state of the *NY Times* every Tuesday night, and leave his protege to the dusty histories of white-man anthropology and boring sectarian whittling projects. Let us consider a new green anarchist perspective in its grandeur rather than its failures.

If we restart a story about what Green Anarchism was we could begin with the writing of Elisee Reclus and his grand Universal Geography and tell a balanced story that passes through the broader ecology movement, the history of a Great Anarchism that died in Catalan, the thoughts of Murray Bookchin, and ends with Grandfather Zerzan and the catastrophe of post-pre-collapse civilization. This is a fine story and obviously we know it exists but our work is somewhere else.

For us green anarchism predates the term and is a way to talk about our politics (anarchist: no state, no exchange relationships, and a vigorous critique of daily life) and our spiritual life (green: earth-based, concerned with cycles not progress, not moral). For us green anarchism does not begin with a set of bearded European men but in the conditions of Turtle Island (North America). The turtle (Hah-nu-nah) is the earth, and is our life. A green perspective worth its name begins with the story of how humans came to this place. A place that was doing just fine without us. It begins with the stories that composed a social reality that was disrupted by visitors who have long overstayed their welcome. *Black Seed* hopes to be a place where those stories are remembered and shared.

A green anarchism set thusly in clay is about the direct experience of hearing a story, of being part of the continuing story. It prefers the face-to-face and the immediate. It does not process its relationship to small things (like the whole of nature) through the specialized jargon sets of the Western metaphysical project. Not biology or botany. Not anthropology or sociology. Not a history or historization of real living people. It can include the stories of those warriors engaged in the infinite war against the Great Black Snake of capitalism and the state, of colonization and genocide. It can also include the stories of our lives here on this Earth now. Those of us who live in the shadows of the Grey and the Black (cities, asphalt, and concrete), who root about in the weeds and offal of the shit-city, who survive.

This new old Green Anarchism, this elder god of many origins, is about survival in a world-not-of-our-creation, how to face its end, and how we would rewrite its story if we were to start over. To be clear, these are three approaches to a body of ideas we are calling Green Anarchism but we are only using that term to be generous about our own origins (and not because we think they are the best or most accurate terms to describe what we are talking about). In point of fact this new old Green Anarchism will be unrecognizable to others who have used and copyrighted the term. It attempts a base in and orientation towards Turtle Island (and not Ymir, Gaia, Yggdrasil, eight pillars, bhu, etc) and acknowledges its metis or amalgamated characteristics. This is not an exercise in a new geographical puritanism but in holding a position in a world that seems to have accepted a kind of postmodern pastiche that leaves out every individual experience.

## **A New Story**

The start of our story, sadly, is one of a ship of Spaniards landing nearby and raising holy hell. Not only did they rape, slaughter, and enslave everything/everyone they saw. which was strange and awful but they then encamped and started drawing lines around our homes and hunting grounds. These lines were very important to them and were in fact the second arm of their strange religion of death. Death and property (eventually known as Capitalism) were their beliefs, which are impossible to reconcile with our lives: lives that are not abstract, are not filled with proclamations of vengeful gods and geographies, are lived in the here and now.

So we chose a different option. We saw these fragile little boats for what they were and we sunk them. It was a tragedy to see the metal-clad individuals sink to the bottom of the sea but we saved the rest. We saved those whose lot in life was the pull of an oar and to serve these who ordered boats around Turtle Island to rape and enslave. We saved the people and let the metal shod, technologically advanced, and civilized die. These enslaved travelers became part of who we were and not transmitters of their strange and foreign virus. They became us.

As the years went by the phenomenon of these boats and others like them became more and more common. As a result we had to increase the communication we had with the peoples of other islands and of Turtle Island more generally. This increased travel-as-a-form-of-life. This meant that our relatively stable social circumstances became more complex as we had to accommodate a type of self-defense that also included a bit more of a, dare we say, worldly component.

To defend against the new threat, which we later identified as European, we had to find a way to defend against their incursions. We did this by network.

Of course networking wasn't new to us. The shifting relations most of us had to the particular piece of Turtle Island we inhabited was a story of ebbs and flows, of tribal affiliation and disaffiliation, of rhizomatic relations. The difference was that rather than defense from people we now had to defend against not-people, against ideology made material, against little boats that came a long way to destroy us. Defending against the abstract was new to us.

As the years went by the nature of Turtle Island began to change, in some ways good and in some ways bad. Our borders, especially the Eastern Coastline, became hardened by people who became fascinated by conflict and the composition of not-people. Their neighbors began to take an interest in healing rituals and how to talk people down from a war footing. Others began to hear these stories and some sent their youth east to learn what this new composition of war (aka Clausewitzian war, Total War, inhuman war) was. This idea did not spread.

What spread was the idea that something like communication had to happen between people. This required an examination into what nodal relationships could look like. This required tribes and nations to formalize beyond what was ever anticipated.

Spiritual life, aka life, was also changed by this new era. The consequence of drowning these little boats and sinking metal-clad men was a great sorrow and obligation to the spirits. Equivalent contrition for each act of violence had to be borne by the people who committed it. The spirits demanded this much and it was important that warriors not learn to love violence as the metal-clad did. With every arrival and repulsion was a month of ceremony and cleansing. The rites had to be observed otherwise the difference between war and the performance of war (ie bravery by other means) could get confused.

Economic life, aka exchange, was also transformed. With the sinking of little boats came the reclamation of what items existed on those boats. Through this mechanism the people of Turtle Island learned about metal forging, the existence of horses (long since thought disappeared), books, and more. Stripped of weapon-ization, these items became curiosities and topics of long conversations into the night. The East Coast people became central to new sets of conversations about what it could look like to be people and what they had to offer The People. This changed the motivation for increased networking and travel and cross-pollination by complicating self-defense with new kinds of relationships based on interest in new ideas.

Over time Turtle Island became less isolated. It was no longer possible to destroy 500 nations by picking them off one by one. The power of the little boats decreased, to the extent that at some point these boats were allowed to dock and make their individuated cases for dialogue and survival. The people of Turtle Island became members of the world rather than subjects of it. The history of Europe shrank to the size of appropriate limits and their attempts at colonization. The history of Turtle Island became one of establishing clear boundaries while maintaining a healthy curiosity that was, and is, culturally appropriate.

## A Future Change

The day after the revolution (ATR) we will sit and meet with our neighbors and explain our plan. This plan is largely described in the little book *bolo bolo* but let's get down to brass tacks. First step, our block. It contains about 30 households or about 75 people. If optimal bolo size is around 500, that would be about seven city blocks. Our superblock (bounded by major streets) is about 8x14 or about 15 bolos in size. Berkeley as a city is about 120,000 so roughly 200–220 bolos in size. Oakland, CA (our neighbor to the immediate south) is about 3.5 times our size and I imagine that over time the blurring of our bolo'bolo would disintegrate the historical line between the cities (which was only a hundred and forty years old anyway).

In the book there is a great deal of emphasis on counter-cultural continuity as the glue that holds together a bolo. In our hypothetical ATR scenario, on the other hand, human geographical happenstance at the end of property relations would be that glue. Perhaps over time and generations there could be a rise of lesbolos, alcholobolos, and the myriad of thought experiments from the book— but for this exercise the difficulty that would rise from this transforming into over 200 different bolos is enough of a stretch. Plus it would only be a small part of what the end of Spectacle would inflict everywhere at once.

A central part of the definition of a bolo (a group of about 500 ibu who live and depend on each other) is the idea that it would necessarily be materially independent. The end of exchange relations means an end to trading paper, credit, and coin for food. This means we have an immediate urgent problem to address, together. Obviously in parallel are all the problems of converting seven blocks' worth of former-consumers into ibu (individuals) and kana (households). Clearly our anarchism directs much of this conversation in that we would prefer to destroy organization, leaders, and bureaucracy (and those who enjoy these things) but getting down to it (planting in this case) would be rather important.

Logistics first. If seven blocks of 30 households can be chopped up it'd probably look like 30 times  $1/16^{\text{th}}$  of an acre or 14 acres plus all the area currently covered by automobile detritus (25%). One bolo in the former city of Berkeley would probably have around 18–20 acres of land to structure (for kodu: agriculture, sibi: craft, and pali: energy). This means the first order of business (if you can pardon the term) is deciding whose home gets taken down, how to tear out the concrete etc, and how to build the remaining gano (homes) into structures that will work for 500ish socially-broken but socially-needy ibu. A related topic is that we will need at least 50–75 acres to feed everyone (which is a first principle of bolo'bolo) and as Berkeley is only about 18 square miles we have to do some math.

Two hundred bolo equals the land need of at least 10,000 acres. Eighteen square miles is 11,520 acres so there is a serious pinch there. This is a utopian exercise from the word go but if we are going to be frank about this green anarchist bolo'bolo exercise we probably have to commandeer the hills above Berkeley (which are largely empty and/or filled with trails, university research labs, reservoirs, and the bourgeoisie). This requires something like a tram or a low -power way to get people up to farmland for a portion of their day/lives. More thought about this is necessary but perhaps the problems will fade as the need for 6+ million people will blow away from the Bay Area along with capitalism.

The opposite problem is possible though. We likely have at least seven generations of global warming and other nasty problems associated with petroleum culture coming and the Bay has a naturally temperate climate, is near a natural Bay, the Ocean, and some reasonably-sized natural preserves that are desirable along several metrics. It could be that rather than getting out of dodge, many people will want to come here from the toxic agri-bowl of the Central Valley, the scorching hills and valleys of Southern California, or what could very well be the racist bolos of far Northern California and Oregon. Even an impossible utopia isn't immune to idiots.

The project of tearing down and rebuilding the bolo into the shape that makes sense for 500 would be an especially fun and interesting one. I have often thought that the structural limitation brought about by humans (in Turtle Island) mostly living in single family dwellings is one of the under-appreciated sites of abuse, limitations, and toxicity. I've never been a fan of the nuclear family model that necessitates the single family dwelling and I love the idea of what transforming it could look like. Dorms for (nearly) everyone from 13–30; yurts for honeymoon periods; multi-family environments with chickens and dogs. The ideas are limitless and could be fluid if we use materials more local than sticks, pressboard, and nails.

Similarly there are questions that come up around what our sibi (work, craft, industry) could look like. Obviously at the point of ATR we would still find use for wood crafting, shearing and refining wool, and other overlapping needs related to human-land-animal husbandry, but in the category of sibi are also conversations like “will we keep networked computer technologies around?” or “do the genetic labs have to go?” or “will the university have to burn entirely



or should some of it be saved?” These questions will be central, alongside how we do it (what organization looks like when it is no longer top down), how we will survive, and what will be the new principles (sila) of our new, fantastic, ATR world.

Even in this small drift towards talking about a green anarchist future world, you can see the biases and problems. I, in fact, come at a desire for green anarchy from counterculture and anarchy. I do not have any of the traditional baggage of family, job, or an identity wrapped up in this world. I have everything to gain by destroying where we have come from and accepting ATR as my new home. I have been rowing for the bulk of my adult life when I haven't been hiding entirely from boats and men wrapped in metal. When I dream of a future it doesn't include them.

This inflection on green anarchism also includes ideas that we are allegedly against. In this ATR we can imagine the windmills and long town hall meetings of Bookchin. We can imagine a local set of bolo hosting a traveling hunter-gatherer bolo and losing some of our people to the persuasion of their lifeway. I can even imagine living next door to a bolo that primarily believes in their own identity as laborers who are not as fascinated with the whole self-sufficiency life of our bolo. I can imagine desiring contradictions to all this nice, destructive, future ATR thinking.

## Survival

There is no happy story about how we move from here to there. It is not possible to get there from here. This means that we do not spend our time practically planning on transitions from this life, from this world, to another. Instead we spend our daily lives on survival, on coping with the demons of Capital and State. We wait for paychecks, deal with commutes, and then sit at work waiting for the apocalypse, or just about anything else, to stave off boredom. We pick fights and flirts because the intellectual energy for either is about all that we have. We are not our best selves in the shadow of spectacular boredom, we are in fact just like everyone else.

As self-described green anarchists, revolutionaries, or whatever, we do not have unique resources to make our dreams a reality. Those who seem to have these resources also seem incapable of dreaming beyond their own pleasures and conservative impulses.

This is so true that it seems naive to believe that if we or our friends had the power to change the world that any of us would make different choices. I feel strongly that our most political of frenemies would make exactly the same choices that I despise from enemies, as evidenced by the name calling, bullying, and shunning they perform towards anyone who disagrees with them. Their future would be a nightmare for anyone who doesn't subscribe to leftist us-them simplification.

The *Black Seed* project, if we are brave enough to state it out loud, is to find a way to hold these ideas forward. We are the monks of this era, illuminating on sheets of vellum the hidden truths of this world. Power seduces, not corrupts. There is no good or evil in this world but a lot of mediocrity. The world we walk on is more important than the work we do. Relationships are better than ideologies. We attack out of love and not politics. Activism is the enemy of anarchy. Our enemies should be ignored and not engaged with.

If we are lucky, a future generation of people will come who love the idea of wild nature, complexity, and heresy and who have the power to inflict these ideas upon the idiots and politicians of the world. They will know what our illuminations portray and will not judge us for the fact

that we have settled for survival in this shitty world and did not instead choose the quicker end of taking on everything, everywhere at once.

# What Does Green Anarchy Mean Today? by Ramon Elani

*Compost, not posthuman.*

~Donna Haraway

Evoking the spirit of Fredy Perlman, let us say that there is wild joy left to be had by those who continue to dance the circle dance. Green anarchy, as a framework for thinking, seeing, writing, acting, living, is and remains inspiring to many who desire a world of passion, freedom, and wildness. In this regard, however, it is vitally important to reframe and rethink in order for a particular set of ideas to feel dynamic and alive.

In this essay we present a vision for what green anarchy means today. First, we reject the dualism that defines anar-cho-primitivism. The world is far more complex than reducing everything to civilization or hunting and gathering. Second, we remain conscious and skeptical of the Western, academic institution of anthropology and its inheritance of colonialism, racism, and eurocentrism. Third, we acknowledge the importance of coming to terms with eco-extremism and engaging with the ideas in a meaningful way, regardless of whether we agree with every aspect of the movement. Fourth, we revisit some of the sacred concepts of green anarchy and question whether they remain meaningful in today's world. Fifth, we attempt to reignite interest in our history by re-engaging with some of the foundational documents of green anarchy. Sixth, we insist that sophisticated critical analysis is not the same thing as postmodernist obfuscation. The solution to a valueless, abstract, theoretical discourse cannot be reductive, one-dimensional, essentialism. Finally, we must understand that the world is different than it was twenty years ago. Global warming and climate catastrophe are no longer marginal ideas. As green anarchists we must decide what that means to us. We are no longer crying in the wilderness.

*Black Seed* was founded with the notion of maintaining some sense of continuity with *Green Anarchy* magazine as well as pushing forward and beyond, honoring the past and recognizing our debt to those who came before us, but also committed to vitality and growth. From the start *Black Seed* was very explicit in this regard, especially in terms of its grounding in the lived experience of those struggling to understand the world as well as the indigenous voices, which have not been stamped out and silenced despite centuries of attempts to do so. *Black Seed* reminded us that indigenous people are still here and they are still fighting. And even more, it forced us to confront the world not merely in the realm of abstract theories but as a lived reality.

Thus we continue to chart a new direction for green anarchy. We believe that the ideas deserve better than they have lately received. When there is nothing new to say, conversation becomes stale and devolves into narrow-minded bickering. Regretfully, this is exactly what has been happening over the last decade or so. Far too often green anarchist discussion devolves into dogmatic feuds and personal grudges. If people are not inspired, if they are having boring conversations, the horizon for life and action likewise appears bland and lackluster. If the conversation is so

narrow that it is only capable of promoting a select few authorized avenues for action then people will be easily discouraged. We know there are opportunities for meaningful engagement out there. It is likewise very clear that certain ways of thinking, discussing, and acting have reached a point where they can go no further. Part of the problem has been the terms of the discourse.

This is where the distinction between green anarchy and anarcho-primitivism is relevant. In the case of the latter, there is an unfortunate tendency to reduce the world, in its vastness and complexity, to a Manichean binary. There is only civilization and not-civilization. This critique is so totalizing that it leaves very little room for nuanced thinking or joyful action. Paleolithic-or-bust is not a compelling battle cry. The one thing that a totalizing critique is good for is dogmatism. If, as green anarchists, we dismiss agriculture, technology, cities, or any kind of mediated experience or symbolic culture, we simply won't have much left to do. And we will have to write off the experiences of the vast majority of human communities that have existed for the last several thousand years.

In illustrating the new kind of vision that we are promoting here, let us think of Donna Haraway, admittedly a surprising choice. In her current work, Haraway urges us to make kin and compost. This is to say, we have to derive our strength from the confluence of forces, experiences, and substances that surround us and occur within us. By doing so we can find our kinship with fungus, termites, jellyfish. We can learn to live like moss and be cousins to the wolves once again. Use everything! is the credo of the com- postist. We are not in the position to look back over thousands of years of human communities and blithely disregard everything that does not fit a prescriptive vision. If the experiences of a particular community teach us something important about how to negotiate a place for freedom and wildness in the world, we will not ignore them because they are agriculturalists.

Civilization is such a broad term that carries so many different kinds of meanings to different people. It can only ever be a massive catch-all label that we use for convenience. We cannot treat it as a scientific, objective fact. Civilization is imprecise, both linguistically and in reality.

In this devastated world we are compelled to muddle through ruins and fragments. There may not be a holy grail buried beneath the rubble but we have much to work with if we look. Does the modern appropriation of northern paganism by racists and nationalists mean that there is no value to be found in the eddas and the sagas, for instance? That is a lazy conclusion, just as it is lazy to denounce indigenous cultures because they practiced some version of something historians have called "slavery," while the cultures that informed the worldview of those very historians and anthropologists were responsible for largely wiping out those indigenous communities and imposing a brutal global system of colonialism and industrialism. Again, if the only positive vision of uncivilized life is restricted to communities that meet specific criteria established by a handful of authors, then we are left with very little.

As Haraway says "*we need stories (and theories) that are just big enough to gather up the complexities and keep the edges open and greedy for surprising new and old connections*"

The solution to a fractured world cannot be a rigid and unbending dualism. Donna Haraway is again useful here via the concept she is best known for, the cyborg. While green anarchist readers may immediately bristle at the use of term that is synonymous with technology, dehumanization, and militarism, it is important to note the subtleties of Haraway's conception of this figure. For Haraway, humanity has always been cy- borgian. To take it further, all life bears cyborg features. When a bear uses a stick to draw ants out of a hollow tree, it is absorbing something alien and external into its own composition. Life is a coalescence of differences and distinctions. What

does this mean? Simply put, we are never only what we are. The cyborg exemplifies hybridity as a condition.

As living, breathing, eating, shitting, fucking things, we are constantly absorbing and integrating the other into ourselves. As home to millions of microbes and bacteria, as the primary transportation system for countless species of viruses, we are and have always been much less than completely human. Ancient people understood that eating the flesh of an animal meant incorporating part of its spirit into themselves. This model for life and the world, as we shall see, carries with it radical potentialities for being. We are not who we think we are. We are, each of us, a multitude of things that explode in infinite directions and draw us constantly out of the borders of our being and penetrate beyond. We are a part of the multiplicity that we confront.

What does this have to do with green anarchy? In 1979 the editors of *Fifth Estate* wrote: “*Let us anticipate the critics who would accuse us of wanting to go ‘back to the caves’ or of mere posturing on our part—i.e., enjoying the comforts of civilization all the while being its hardest critics. We are not posing the Stone Age as a model for our Utopia, nor are we suggesting a return to gathering and hunting as a means for our livelihood*” In other words, the green anarchist vision has always been a hybrid one. It has always been a position that is based on responding to the crisis of techno-industrial society, as well as looking at contemporary indigenous cultures and communities of the past. The world we live in, as traumatized and horrific as it is, is real. We are not creatures of the Paleolithic, who, by the way, were themselves very likely not entirely what we assume they were. We stand, here and now, against the domination of the techno-industrial world even while we are products of that world and inescapably influenced by it. We are strange, misshapen things. Partly this, and partly that. And we always were. Our challenge and our joy is born from this. To always be creating, dismantling. The cycles of decay and growth. There is no ur-moment. The symbol has always dwelt within us. Our claws and tusks are made for many purposes.

But we are also obliged to heed the ominous whispers in the darkness. There is a darker shade of green that runs through green anarchy, which we will not shy away from. It is a bloody vein that tracks through grisly pagan rites, the cosmic inhumanism of Robinson Jeffers, the savage violence of the primitive warrior, and the serene detachment of the daoist recluses. What these strands weave together is a vision of the world in which humanity does not sit upon a throne. We insist that the world was not made for man and as such the concerns of humanity and human society are not of primary importance. Following Jeffers, we must try to de-center our thoughts and our actions from the merely human perspective.

As the writers of the Dark Mountain manifesto put it, “*Humans are not the point and purpose of the planet. Our art will begin with the attempt to step outside the human bubble. By careful attention, we will reengage with the non-human world.*” As green anarchists we must be sensitive to what it means “to step outside the human bubble.” A vision of a world of spontaneity, joy, and desire, that boldly asserts a cosmic wholeness beyond human values will not resemble the kinds of leftist utopian visions that we are accustomed to. In his foundational “Primitivist Primer” John Moore writes “*Politics, ‘the art and science of government’ is not part of the primitivist project; only a politics of desire, pleasure, mutuality, and radical freedom*” In other words, the emphasis here moves away from traditional realms of social justice. Green anarchy is not about advocating for egalitarian politics.

This brings us to another point, which was always central to *Black Seed* and *Green Anarchy*, the role of anthropology. While it is certainly true that we rely on anthropological and ethnographic works to give us a picture of how many indigenous communities lived, as green anarchists, we

cannot ignore the racism and colonialism that inspired and made possible much of that work. Furthermore, we absolutely cannot put forward a vision for a way of life that depends entirely on the truth or accuracy of these historically-situated anthropological studies. If we put anthropology forward as our main evidence for being green anarchists, that means we are accepting a whole series of assumptions based in fantasies of cultural superiority, hegemony, and scientific objectivity, some of the very pillars of civilization that we oppose. Anthropological works are taken seriously because they are academic and scientific. Ways of knowing that our ancestors have relied on for millennia are dismissed because they are mystical or superstitious. This is an imbalance that needs to be corrected within green anarchy. If we argue and fight against totalizing systemic thinking but uncritically fall back on anthropology as the foundation of our position, then we have a huge problem.

As a corollary to this, the role of the primitive or indigenous themselves within green anarchy must be considered. Too often there is a tendency to reduce traditional peoples and communities into static, one-dimensional figures to be blindly or superficially emulated, rather than recognizing them as dynamic, evolving cultures with their own histories and stories, which have their own sense of how they fit into the larger world. Again, to correct this would mean being willing to challenge the values and truisms that we are often unaware of and engaging with traditional communities in the world today rather than losing ourselves in daydreams and fantasies of a long-forgotten world, one that bears little or no resemblance to the reality we and the communities we claim to admire actually inhabit.

As we have said, if green anarchy does not stay engaged and connected to the world it will become increasingly tone-deaf and meaningless, it will become nothing more than a parody; like arguments about which forms of social media are acceptable and which are not. Thus, picking up where *Black Seed 4* left off, we must consider the question of green anarchy and its relation to nihilism and eco-extremism. This has become an extremely divisive issue over the last several years. Concurrently we have also seen a dramatic intensification of techno-utopianism on the left and a worrying growth in a kind of hybrid leftist vision of anarchy that enthusiastically embraces technology and utterly dismisses a nonhuman planetary perspective.

The bottom line is that there are no easy answers. *Black Seed* wants to remain with the trouble and continue to push through important issues that challenge us to our core. As we acknowledged in *Black Seed 3*, there are likely to be points of disagreement between some green anarchists and some nihilists. These disagreements are not insignificant but they also do not necessitate the kind of hostility and dismissiveness that have characterized much of the interaction between the two perspectives. The kind of energy and force that recent eco-extremists have shown both in their words and action clearly demonstrate what has been lacking in a lot of green anarchy over the last several years. Regardless of what individual anarchists feel about indiscriminate violence, nihilist eco-extremism has tapped into a current that resonates with many in the broader green anarchist community. Again, if we find an idea or a type of action challenging, we believe we have an obligation to dig into that discomfort and to engage with it, regardless of whether we end up agreeing with it or not. New paths can be charted, new formulations, new courses of action, new stories can be told. If, however, our resistance turns out to only be a vestigial form of leftist humanism then we have to consider other options.

Nihilist eco-extremism is also not the only other contemporary strand that can be woven into a broader green anarchist critique. We should be open to expanding our sense of what green anarchy can mean, rather than becoming increasingly dogmatic and myopic.

Let us ask together, can an idea or an action only work within a green anarchist perspective if it conforms to a fixed definition of what anarchism means? If the broad concerns and commitments are consistent, if there is even a marginal point of convergence that may give rise to inspiration and creativity, can we really afford to dismiss it because it doesn't fit into our own constructed identities? There is nothing free about that. The dominant form of anarchism that one sees, unfortunately, appears to have nothing whatsoever to do with freedom.

Sometimes looking forward and remaining engaged with the present requires a reevaluation of the past. Revisiting the history of green anarchy may also help us reorient, refocus, and revitalize ourselves. Once again, from his "Primitivist Primer" John Moore:

*Strictly speaking, there is no such thing as anarcho-primitivism or anarcho-primitivists. Fredy Perlman, a major voice in this current, once said, "The only -ist name I respond to is cellist." Individuals associated with this current do not wish to be adherents of an ideology, merely people who seek to become free individuals in free communities in harmony with one another and with the biosphere, and may therefore refuse to be limited by the term 'anarcho-primitivist' or any other ideological tagging. At best, then, anarcho-primitivism is a convenient label used to characterise diverse individuals with a common project: the abolition of all power relations— e.g., structures of control, coercion, domination, and exploitation—and the creation of a form of community that excludes all such relations.*

And from the "Back to Basics" series of pamphlets put out by *Green Anarchy* magazine:

*Originary considerations have to do with how human life used to be, with who we have been and, in some fashion, may be again. Such investigations give us things to look at, to reflect upon; not as a source of an ideology to impose, not some 'How It Must Be' dogma. In this unprecedented and fearful time, the question of practice is open. In fact, maybe one thing many can agree on is that something new is needed. It seems to us that examining the beginnings of this ongoing disaster is a worthy exercise. Do we not need all the help we can get?*

At this point, both of these passages were written more than a decade ago. A number of interesting issues are present here. First of all, we can see that even in its early days green anarchy was concerned about the same pitfalls that we address here. Namely, that we recognize the need to prevent green anarchy from becoming dogmatic, ideological, and prescriptive. We would do well to keep in mind John Moore's words, when he writes "At best, then, anarcho-primitivism is a convenient label used to characterise diverse individuals" As time goes on, the diversity of the ideas and individuals who adopt this label seems to be fading. It appears to have become more of a group affiliation and dogma. The people who are comfortable with the term resemble each other more and more (young disaffected white males) and their ideas become less and less distinguishable.

In the passage from "Back to Basics" we see the familiar call for something new, though it still remains unclear what is new. We can also see in the passages above a reiteration of the call to use everything available to us in seeking to develop responses to the world around us. John Moore felt that among new courses for action was the creation of

*communities of resistance—microcosms (as much as they can be) of the future to come—both in cities and outside. These need to act as bases for action (particularly direct action), but also as sites for the creation of new ways of thinking, behaving, communicating, being, and so on, as well as new sets of ethics—in short, a whole new liberatory culture. They need to become places where people can discover their true desires and pleasures, and through the good old anarchist idea of the exemplary deed, show others by example that alternative ways of life are possible.*

It has been decades since Moore wrote these words and it is not clear that many such communities have been attempted.

Another point, which has been discussed in previous issues of *Black Seed*, is that there seems to be a growing lack of interest in action among green anarchists. In its early years green anarchy was largely defined by its commitment to militant direct action: animal liberation, black bloc tactics, arson, sabotage, etc. This raises the question, has the primitivist project failed because it's been difficult for anyone to do much more than attend primitive skills workshops and fantasize about homesteading? Primitive skills and homesteading are, of course, wonderful and may be desirable to many. But it is difficult to claim that these choices have any relevance beyond one's own personal lifestyle; they simply do not threaten techno-industrial society. Again, there is a relationship between how we think and how we act. As we have said, new ways of thinking, talking, and dreaming can lead to new ways of acting and living.

In recent years an overwhelming amount of green anarchist writings and discussions have centered around domestication and rewilding. When *Green Anarchy* magazine put out their "Back to Basics" series, for instance, the pamphlet on rewilding was twice as long as any of the others. If we are serious about avoiding the lapse into an increasingly insular, marginal, dogmatic, and out of touch sideshow, let us not hold any idea above critique.

Let's be serious about asking ourselves if ideas, even foundational ones, are still playing the kind of inspiration and galvanizing role they once did. As the ancients ask, does this grow corn or not? Is rewilding, a concept ultimately born from the discourse of wildlife conservation (conserved by whom and for whom?), really an idea and path of action that challenges techno-industrial society? Perhaps the answer will be an affirmative yes. But if that's the case, let's really get into it without relying on the fact that for the past twenty years everyone has been treating the question as settled.

It also seems that green anarchists need to be mindful of the ways that these foundational ideas and core assumptions interact with notions of purity that are ultimately indistinguishable from religious ideas that are so often mocked and derided in green anarchist circles. This is not to say, however, that there is anything wrong with accepting the spiritual or religious implications of green anarchy. The old anarchist maxim "No God, No Masters" may need to be revised.

What's wrong with rewilding, or learning primitive skills? Absolutely nothing. For that matter, there is nothing wrong with homesteading, hunting, going off the grid, or any other kind of lifestyle choice. These are all great things. The point is that they do not threaten or challenge civilization or techno-industrial society. As green anarchists, we need to make sure that we make space for action and ideas that do threaten or worse. We need to stand with those who act, even if we as individuals choose not to. This is not meant to be read as an attempt to chastise. Our hope here is to open an exciting new chapter for green anarchy, one that is bold, alive, and dynamic. One that sees possibilities for joy, radical freedom, and profound kinship with the world.



We will not prevent the catastrophe from coming. It is here. It has been here, long before we acknowledged or named it. We need a form of critique and action that is flexible, honest, and sophisticated to keep up with the world. To end by making kin with Starhawk and ecofeminism, we conclude with a poem:

*Breath deep.*

*Feel the pain*

*where it lives deep in us*

*For we live, still,*

*In the raw wounds*

*And pain is salt in us, burning. .*

*Flush it out.*

# Science is Capital by dot matrix

(new and improved version)

**Atomization** : to treat as made up of many discrete units

**Empiricism** : the theory that all knowledge is derived from sense-experience

**Experimentation** : the process of testing various ideas, methods, or activities to see what effect they have

**Rationalize** : to bring into accord with reason or cause something to seem reasonable: such as (a) to substitute a natural for a supernatural explanation of a myth (b) to attribute actions to rational and creditable motives

**Causality** : the relation between causes and effects

**Methodological naturalism** : an essential aspect of the methodology of science, the study of the natural universe. If one believes that natural laws and theories based on them will not suffice to solve the problems attacked by scientists— that supernatural and thus nonscientific principles must be invoked from time to time—then one cannot have the confidence in scientific methodology that is prerequisite to doing science.

*Revolution can no longer be taken to mean just the destruction of all that is old and conservative, because capital has accomplished this itself. Rather it will appear as a return to something (a revolution in the mathematical sense of the term), a return to community though not in any form that has existed previously. Revolution will make itself felt in the destruction of all that is most “modern” and “progressive” because science is capital.*

~ Jacques Camatte

Science is a system of knowledge acquisition based on empiricism, experimentation, atomization, rationalizing, causality, and methodological naturalism and that is aimed at finding the truth. Theories— predictive hypotheses—are the basic unit of knowledge in this system. Science also refers to the bodies of knowledge stemming from this research.

Most scientists feel that scientific investigation must adhere to the scientific method, a process for evaluating empirical knowledge under the working assumption of methodological materialism (which explains observable events in nature by natural causes without assuming the existence or non-existence or the supernatural). Particular specialized studies that make use of empirical methods are often referred to as sciences as well.

Conversations about science get complicated since the word refers to distinct yet connected things. For example, physics is a science (a field of specialized studies) that is not always scientific (according to the above definition), since quantum physics moves away from the distinction between observer and observed that is fundamental to experimentation. However, to the extent that physicists reject the implications of that moving away, physics continues in the trajectory that science (as a way of thinking) has established.

As the modern problem-solving technique, it behooves anarchists to be skeptical of science. Science is so widely accepted that for many people it has in fact become synonymous with problemsolving. Even people who are critical of most other aspects of the culture we live in, find themselves reverting to science when pushed to defend their ideas, e.g. anti-civilization anarchists who refer to biology when attempting to convince about an optimal diet, or to anthropology to prove the superiority of their blueprint for future societies.

Of the various ways to critique science, the most fundamental addresses the scientific method, which emphasizes a) reproducibility, b) causality (that a thing or event causes another thing or event), and c) the relevance of things (material reality) over all else—more accurately, it emphasizes a specific perspective on material reality, the only perspective that science recognizes as valid, one with, for example, inactive objects acted upon by active agents. One problem with the scientific model is how it maintains and relies on a perspective of the world as a frozen (static) place. Also problematic is the idea that everything can be broken down into discrete, quantifiable parts, that the whole is never more than the sum of its parts. Underlying both of these perspectives is the premise that the best or only way to know the world is to distance ourselves from it, to be outside of it; that this distance allows us to use the world; that use is, in fact, the appropriate relationship to have to the world.

On a practical level there is the understanding that scientists are operating within a system that is based as much (if not more) on hierarchy and funding as it is on paying attention to what is actually going on around us. There are multiple accounts (even from conventional sources) showing that who is funding a study has a substantive impact on what the study discovers, from tobacco's impact on health to the possibility of restricting the spread of genetically modified organisms, but these examples are merely the most obvious.

The more subtle ones have to do with how we ask questions (“when did you stop beating your child?”), who we ask questions of (related to the questioner's access, biases, language, etc.), what questions we think to ask, and how we understand the answers we get, as well as what meta-interests the questions serve (how are the assumptions of this culture fed and/or challenged by who asks, and how and of whom these questions get asked?). If scientists are seeking to discover or define truth-as-a-static, how does that search itself effect the world?

Western education predisposes us to think of knowledge in terms of factual information, information that can be structured and passed on through books, lectures, and programmed courses. Knowledge is something that can be acquired and accumulated, rather like stocks and bonds. By contrast, within the Indigenous world the act of coming to know something involves a personal transformation. The knower and the known are indissolubly linked and changed in a fundamental way. Coming to know Indigenous [ways of knowing] can never be reduced to a catalogue of facts or a data base in a supercomputer; for it is a dynamical and living process, an aspect of the ever-changing, ever-renewing processes of nature.

And on a philosophical level, knowledge is created from foundations that limit and construct it in specific ways. While on one hand science is a response to the superstition and hierarchy associated with religion, it also continues christianity's theme of a pure abstract and universal truth, separate from the sludge of everyday life, with scientists and doctors in the position of clergy that is, people who know more about us than we do. Some people believe in science (as something they don't understand that can solve their problems) in ways similar to how others believe in god. Some people cite scientific references the way that other people cite scripture.

Traditionally, science posits a neutral objective observer, a fantastical being to compare to any angel or demon: this neutral observer has no interest other than truth, which comes from information—information that can be trusted because it is found inside of laboratories or other managed locations, with carefully identified variables and carefully maintained control sets. The mystification of this awesome observer is only magnified, not ameliorated, by the addition of peer review, in which a body of knowledgeable colleagues examine the experiments and data to verify their validity. Added to the stories of peer review being compromised even from the perspective of proscience people, we now have information about researchers writing their own positive reviews and submitting them from catfish accounts. Currently people writing about science and scientists might admit that everyone has biases, but treat those predilections, associations, and assumptions as if they're shallow, easily recognized, and—once recognized—easy to work around.

Science exemplifies this culture's tendency to specialize, and consequently to create experts, people who know every little thing about specific bits, but not how those bits interact with other things—clearly a result of thinking that is thing-based (vs. for example, relationship-based). So for instance, practitioners of allopathic medicine prescribe multiple medications to people, frequently without having any idea about how these specific drugs will interact with each other, much less any idea about how a person's feelings or other life experiences are related to their physical health.

In *The Origins of Authoritarianism*, Hannah Arendt uses the word scientism to express the logical extension of scientific thinking, which makes otherwise impossible moral or ethical questions (such as, “Can someone be worthless? And if so, can that person be euthanized?”) easily resolvable. In other words, the inhuman aspects of totalitarian states are related to the reliance of those states on science as the ultimate arbiter of value: indeed, the idea that everything must be of measurable value is part of the scientific paradigm. In this way science takes on a role that religion has played in previous times, that of a state-sanctioned morality.

## **Fragments on Why Anthropology Can't Be Anarchist**

By definition, anthropologists scientifically study groups of people—relationships, customs, behaviors, and social patterns. (The “scientifically” is what separates anthropologists from say artists, comedians... or just curious people.)

The history of anthropology is of civilized men and the occasional woman going to cultures foreign to them and reporting back about these cultures to their audience, including their funders. As scientists—with all the quantifying and rationalist implications of that word—anthropologists are responsible for interpreting primitive/Other peoples to the mainstream. To the extent that anthropologists are mediators between the civilized and the barbaric, they are also part of a cultural trajectory that includes missionaries, who historically have often been the first or second wave of a so-called civilizing influence.

Anthropologists, as well as other social scientists, extend the realm of science by making people's homes into laboratories, by presuming that it is possible and appropriate to engage objectively with people in cultures very different from their own (or even people from their own culture), for the purpose of distilling the most meaningful information. And, as with all sciences, what is considered most meaningful is part of an ongoing debate (with many unexplored and unquestioned assumptions), a debate ultimately framed by funders—from private grantors to

universities. Why do people get paid to study people? What do the funders get for their money? They get increased markets (in the form of the studied), increased control of existing markets (more information about what motivates people—thus how to sell more effectively), and more products (from tourism to books to drugs).

As a discipline, anthropology is compelling for a number of mostly obvious reasons, including that it provides a more holistic view of people than the views from economics, political science, sociology, etc. More significantly, it provides evidence that our options as a species are more varied than we are taught to believe. Because anthropology provides people (who become anthropologists) with a funded way to do interesting things and have interesting conversations, and the kind of people who want to find out about other cultures can be intriguing people, it is tempting to conflate the people, and their experiences, with anthropology itself. The experience of living among people who demonstrate really different life ways can also be deeply enriching for the individuals involved. There can even be books written that are illuminating for readers who are far away. But the impact of those experiences is at best a safety valve for a stultifying hegemonic society. Anthropologists, in other words, can have only good intentions, can care deeply for the people they're studying, and can produce things that imperialist-cultured people learn a lot from, but the benefits are far overshadowed by the negative consequences.

The study of people scientifically, the creation of experts, the context of meeting and learning about people for the ultimate benefit of corporations and increased hegemony, is inherently skewed and manipulative, no matter the intentions or integrity of the people involved.

In "Anthropologists and Other Friends," esteemed American Indian writer Vine Deloria Jr. refutes the possibility of exploring people in a vacuum. He describes the reciprocal creation that happens between agents of mediation (in this case, anthropologists) and the mediated (in this case, Indians). Deloria examines how the anthropologists, by having clear ideas about "what Indians do" (ie, who is Authentic) and by attending only to those Indians who are willing to act the way they're supposed to, encourage those Indians to continue acting in so-called authentic ways, which then reinforces the anthropologists in their definitions and expectations. This creates a self-perpetuating cycle—a closed loop in which people from two groups create and support mutual judgments (which they take as fact). Two of these judgments are "real Indians do specific kinds of rituals" and "real anthropologists are experts in the culture that they study." It is the very premise of purity, of a static identity (a premise required by science) and one that can be recognized by outside observers, that is so falsifying to experience and so limiting to the sort of information that studiers can gather about the studied. (This model of knowledge creates a similar dynamic between activists and the targets of their activism—leading people to embrace concepts like "real women," "the real working class," and "real wildness.") To the extent that an activist is interacting—in theory or practice—with abstractions rather than with actual relationships, to that extent activists become invested in maintaining the distance between themselves and what—or whomever they are attempting to save. And interaction with abstractions (vs. relationships) is what is required for things like funding and school credit; it is what makes a work scientific.

Anthropologists will always emphasize the difference between the studied and the studier. This tendency is also demonstrated by all people who want (for reasons of money or status, or both) to be experts on another group of people and it usually means reifying the studied, attempting to keep them distinct, pure, Authentic.

In *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology*, David Graeber encourages us to "break down the wall" between cultures studied by anthropologists (cultures frequently described by words like

“primitive” and “kin-based”) and modern societies. He posits this wall as the belief that some inherent, essential shift occurred to create modern cultures as fundamentally different from previous cultures. He suggests that it is much more interesting and relevant to look at the ways that we are the same as the people being studied. While his point about the usefulness of the wall is unassailable, the more significant point is that creating and maintaining this wall is exactly what anthropology is for. As Graeber himself notes, it’s anthropology when people are talking about “primitives,” but sociology, political science, economics, architecture, psychology, etc. when talking about people like the studiers.

Science insists that we distance our- selves—both as groups and as individuals—from the rest of the world, so as to more effectively study and ultimately use it. The social role of anthropologists is that particular category of distancing that involves cultures that are different along specifically those “primitive” and “kin-based” lines.

While major paradigms (like science, like anthropology) will always have offshoots that grow in tangential directions (for example physics, as already stated, and some of the newer emphases in anthropology—moving away from the exotic, becoming more and more like sociology), these branches grow only to the extent that they are useful to the main body. It is also true that interesting people will want to test the limits of the tradition; to the extent that these people expect, and work for, recognition within the field, to the extent that they are judged by standards set within the field, to the extent that their work is used by corporations—then they are part of the scientific trajectory with all that that implies. Anthropology in particular has had significant shifts, on the one hand de-emphasizing studies of people far from western European culture, and on another, dealing with real world events like wars in the Middle East. This seems to be a response to a changing, increasingly mono-culture world, including increasing alienation from each other and ourselves, but perhaps that is a topic for a different essay. At any rate, I would argue that this means that anthropology becomes less and less anthropology, and more something else; that as there become fewer and fewer options for an exotic, un-tamed Other in the world, then the Others must be found closer to home, with developing ramifications. (There’s an argument, for example, that this is one thread in the increase in the ethnocentric, racist violence that becomes increasingly visible these days.)

Regardless, it remains true that the only reason to stay distant from the Other, the whole purpose of an Other, is for control and manipulation of both the Other and the Same. Put extremely simply, Others are easier to kill (however that killing might look in different circumstances), and the easier they are to kill, the more both sides of the Same/ Other split are pressured to conform.

Anthropology, like the other sciences, is useful to the status quo in its ability to make the studied into objects that can be manipulated and consumed by the current system, and in its ability to increase control over the studiers.

# Murder of the Civilized by Mallory Wuornos

*“The Indians who rose up against the New England colonies in 1675 had been exposed to the merciless concepts of European total warfare and had the improved technology and tactics to inflict heavy losses on the white populace. In their desperate attempt to save their culture and to take back their lands, the Indians abandoned most of the self-imposed restraints that had limited the death and destruction in their traditional patterns of warfare.”*

-Patrick Malore, *The Skulking Way of War*

*“‘Man,’ whatever people think of him, is never anything more than a temporary bourgeois compromise.”*

-Herman Hesse, *Steppenwolf*

*“The lesser the motive, the better the murder.”*

-Answer Me! Motto

There is a never-ending debate among anarchists of the left regarding what constitutes violence, what revolutionary violence is acceptable, and whether or not it will motivate the working class to rise against its oppressors. Nowhere in these banal conversations do people take the position that interpersonal violence is inevitable, or even desirable, as it is part of our nature. It puts into question social projects aimed at bettering the world. The Homo Sapien has always been a bad lot, there is no denying that. The earliest skulls dug up have shown evidence of blunt force trauma. Even if every person on earth (currently over 7 billion people) had all our needs met, we would still find reasons to bludgeon one another. There is no rescuing humanity from itself. Illusions of a peaceful and safe world come at a huge price. You merely need to look at the prosperity and peace (mislabeled freedom) of the West, compared to the constant battle for survival in exploited countries.

My obsession with cruelty among humans began at a young age. I grew up in a European country with a much longer history of empire building than the US, but of course that brutality was not in our school’s curriculum (which centered around religious studies). I wouldn’t learn about what empires and colonization meant until I was much older. What was etched in my mind were the endless horrors of the Monarchy, sadistic methods of torture, how to instill fear of all manners of deviance, and the equally cruel methods of execution (which attracted huge crowds to see the gory spectacles of be-headings, hangings, and—most horrific of all—the burnings). Along with these nightmarish tales came stories of the misery of peasant life and the diseases that spread quickly in cities that grew more and more populated and filthy. I was fascinated by the black plague and other diseases that came with industrialization. Along with these gruesome history lessons came the implication that our society has progressed, materially and spiritually. And again, no mention of the brutal subjugation of and robbery from people in far away lands.

Most anarchists believe monsters are a product of society, rather than a uniquely human problem that no utopia, no matter how well prefigured, could ever banish. Anarchists shy away from being called terrorists when we should be accepting that label with open arms. Instilling fear in your enemies when they are much bigger and more powerful is an age-old military tactic for a reason. But lately there has been a reaction against any notion of individual power and the incomprehensible violence it can sometimes take the form of. “Edgelord” is now a common denigration by leftists and others who desire a social revolution for those who talk about the human impulse towards violence and cruelty and what that means for those who believe in a social revolution. In the words of author Christian Fuchs, “the exclusion of killers from humanity makes our world a phoney planet where every serious discussion of violence is repressed.” This is especially true in times where there is a real fear of terrorism and power-hungry authoritarians.

*“We are all murderers to a greater or lesser extent.”*

-Octave Mirbeau

We live in a world saturated by violence, but for most people it is distant and mediated. Despite all the evidence to the contrary—live-streamed suicides and murders on social media, police killings shot on body cameras or civilian cell phones, or the various acts of anti-social violence experienced in the cities and towns—the civilized want to deny that they themselves are capable of cruelty. Those who do violence are the barbarian others, beyond the gates, on the other side of the tracks. Most of the physical violence inflicted on people won’t be seen or felt by those living in prosperity (barring a natural disaster or painful death), who are as removed from this violence as the drone operator sitting safely in a container in Nevada. It’s as invisible to them as the cancer growing in a child’s lung from the choking industrial smog in far away places and as the violence perpetrated within a stone’s throw of Hollywood against those on Skid Row (to those who never have a need to go there).

Like alchemists, anarchists think they can turn shit into gold if only enough people will rise up. The people will revolt and bring on the socialist utopia. Anarchists might envision this magical leap happening through violent actions but the nitty gritty of political violence isn’t clear. How will people be targeted? Who will be up against the wall? How do you eliminate a global capitalist system that so many humans now rely upon to eke out a miserly existence, without increasing suffering? Would anybody be capable of dropping the blade of the guillotine in this age? It’s very messy. Those who take the war against society seriously will be denounced by the very same people who believe in the overthrow of the ruling classes, as if a spiritual awakening will bring about their new world. Remember, utopian attempts have notoriously had effects opposed to what their dreamers envisioned.

The belief that humans are inherently peaceful creatures, enlightened through our reason, is still a tightly-held belief, even for anarchists. There are far too many who would have us also forget those who bombed, assassinated, and plundered until their deaths. A common question among revolutionary anarchists is, why are anarchists so weak? Despite the revolutionary platitudes glorifying violence against the ruling class, the cops, the state, fascists, and every other form our enemies can take, the threats ring hollow for all but a few. Pointing out the brutality that would be necessary to accomplish this task is not macho posturing, it is an observation of the failures and excesses of revolutions. This is why the actions of the lone wolf will always, despite their vileness, be important: they aren’t waiting for a critical mass of “power from below.”



They take power in their own hands. Sometimes this looks very ugly but at its core is always a desire for freedom.

Like a lion in a zoo, our freedom only extends to a concrete fence, making whatever small patch of grass she has to stretch out on seem even more pitiful. Being wild and free in the midst of mass society looks more like attacking anything and everything in the most vicious way possible. To seek freedom means making people, including ourselves, uncomfortable through attacking long-held beliefs, such as those telling us we deserve to be safe and that human life is more important than anything else.

What I call ecologically-motivated murder is more likely to be equated with fascist ideology (the volkisch movement has been researched extensively) than are “lone wolves” who have no clear ideology to explain their disturbing actions. These loners can only be degenerates. Society, including many anarchists, would rather forget its demons, but lately it seems that pessimism could be making a comeback, much to the chagrin of those doing positive social work. Few accept those existing on the fringes who are likely to be more apolitical and morally objectionable to a majority of people, but whose actions reverberate through society in a powerful way.

Cruel and violent people who transgress civilized boundaries, such as the rules of war, are not marketable to the masses, making them irrelevant to anyone who wants to brand anarchism as a cure- all for society’s ills. There is a notion that the viciousness of society is a side effect of civilization, rather than something innate in humans. Those who want to keep anarchy palatable to broader society quickly distance themselves from acts of savagery, and severely compromise anarchist principles (for example working with nationalists). Yet it takes savagery to successfully attack a much larger and stronger force, to instill fear. and to become offensive rather than reactive. Like George Bataille, I also believe we need a thought which does not fall apart in the face of horror.

One of the only Amazonian tribes to successfully fight off the Spaniards knew they had to match the ferocity of the invaders. And match them they did, by using the Spaniards’ own torturous method of execution. In the jungle the Shuar were used to moving to avoid conflict, but a man named Quirruaba had a better idea. He gained followers who swore secrecy and ordered them to seek out as much gold as possible.

When the Governor of Logrono arrived in their area, they stealthily approached at midnight. One account reports that an army of over 20,000 Shuar surrounded and conquered the settlement, slaughtering the Spaniards in their homes before they could come together. Quirruaba entered with troops carrying the gold they had amassed and the tools needed to melt it down. After everybody besides the Governor had been killed, they told him to prepare to receive the tax he had prepared:

*“They stripped him completely naked, tied his hands and feet; and while some amused themselves with him, delivering a thousand castigations and jests, the others set up a large forge in the courtyard, where they melted the gold. When it was ready in the crucibles, they opened his mouth with a bone, saying that they wanted to see if for once he had enough gold. They poured it little by little, and then forced it down with another bone; and bursting his bowels with the torture, they all raised a clamor and laughter.”*

It would be amazing to see earth shoved down the throats of mining executives, or hot oil poured down the gullets of oil executives, giving them only a small taste of the excruciating pain

they have caused so many others. Unfortunately we don't live in the time or the world of the Shuar's fierceness. We are taught from an early age not to solve problems with violence (unless, of course, you are a nation), and history likes to portray all "social progress" as a more or less peaceful expansion of the enlightened civilization of the West. But there are still Quirrubas' in the world who disregard the rules of engagement and fight on their own terms.

John Linley Frazier was a typical middle-class American in the late 1960s. He had a wife and good solid work as a mechanic until he discovered drugs and the hippie subculture. Along with his new lifestyle, he also got interested in ecology. Suddenly, on orders from the Almighty, the mechanic stopped driving and quit his job, explaining that he would no longer contribute to the death cycle of the planet. As you can imagine, his new found love of Nature put a strain on his marriage. He left his wife and moved to a hippie commune, where he proceeded to scare the fuck out of his fellow hippies. They saw him as paranoid and volatile, something that, post-Manson, most in the counterculture were desperately trying to distance themselves from. Wandering from commune to commune Frazier began living what one article described as the lifestyle of an Aquarian Age hermit, and moved into a six-foot-square shack in the woods, (predating by decades Ted Kaczynski's similar retreat from society) not far from a prominent ophthalmologist, Dr. Victor Ohta.

Dr. Ohta had also not ingratiated himself with the local hippie milieu. He flaunted his wealth: a Rolls Royce and a Lincoln Continental, expensive clothes and jewelry, sons enlisted in the best private schools, an opulent mansion designed by a student of Frank Lloyd Wright.

On the 19<sup>th</sup> of October, 1970, it burned to the ground.

As the firefighters made their way up the two dirt roads leading to the property, they found both blocked by Ohta's vehicles. After they had cleared the obstacles and reached the house they made a horrifying discovery: floating in the swimming pool were the bodies of Dr. Ohta, his wife, and their two sons, aged and 12. The doctor's secretary (a wife and mother of two herself) and the family cat were not spared either. They had all been shot execution style, one bullet each, with the exception of the Doctor, who received four.

Frazier had entered the mansion and found Dr. Ohta's wife Virginia alone. Holding her at gunpoint with her own .38, he bound her with one of her colorful scarves and waited. One by one the rest of the family along with Ohta's secretary were taken hostage and bound with the same luxurious scarves. Moving them outside next to the pool, the doctor was given an ultimatum: burn your house to the ground and renounce your materialism, or die. The doctor couldn't part with his worldly goods, and like an avenger for the forest that had once lived where he was standing, Frazier executed them all and tossed them in the pool. In the midst of the bloody carnage, Frazier sat down at the doctor's typewriter before lighting the mansion ablaze. The note would be found under the windshield wiper of one of the cars.

*"Halloween, 1970. Today World War will begin, as brought to you by the People of the Free Universe. From this day forward, anyone and/or everyone or company of persons who misuses the natural environment or destroys same will suffer the penalty of death by the People of the Free Universe. I and my comrades from this day forth will fight until death or freedom against anyone who does not support natural life on this planet. Materialism must die, or Mankind will stop."*

-Knight of Wands, Knight of Cups, Night [sic] of Pentacles and Knight of Swords.

In the end it was the local hippies who squealed on Frazier, who—even while locked up—continued to make people uneasy, showing up to court with half his hair, half his beard, and one eyebrow shaved off. Despite his odd behavior and bizarre crime, he was declared competent to stand trial and received the death penalty. After California put its executions on hold, his sentence was commuted to life in prison. He was found hanging in his cell on August 13, 2009.

A more contemporary ecological murderer is Adam Lanza. I know that to even mention him is a cardinal sin among morally righteous anarchists. He is the person who killed multiple people, most of them children, at his former elementary school. On December 10, 2011 he wrote on a forum he frequented: “I should call in on John Zerzan’s radio program about Travis. I’m really surprised that I haven’t been able to find anything he’s written or said about the incident, considering how often he brings up random acts of violence. It seems like Travis would be a poster-chimp of his philosophy.” [added emphasis] In his call to John Zerzan’s weekly radio show, Adam Lanza, who Zerzan described as being very articulate, discussed the effect domestication had on Travis the Chimp, who after ripping a woman’s face off in 2009 went on a violent rampage that only ended after the police unloaded their fire power on him:

*“Travis wasn’t an untamed monster at all. Um, he wasn’t just feigning domestication, he was civilized. Um, he was able to integrate into society, he was a chimp actor when he was younger, and his owner drove him around the city frequently in association with her towing business, where he met many different people, and got along with everyone. If Travis had been some nasty monster all his life, it would have been widely reported, but to the contrary, it seems like everyone who knew him said how shocked they were that Travis had been so savage, because they knew him as a sweet child. And there were two isolated incidents early in his life when he acted aggressively, but summarizing them would take too long, so basically I’ll just say that he didn’t act really any differently than a human child would, and the people who would use that as an indictment against having chimps live as humans do wouldn’t apply the same thing to humans, so it’s just kind of irrelevant.”*

A year later, Lanza’s crime sent shock waves through the nation. Zerzan had little to say about the incident. It was of course portrayed as another tragedy of civilization, and not as a natural response to an unnatural way of existing in the world. Like Travis, we were raised to be something we are not. Also like Travis, some humans escape the world of the civilized through acts of uncontrollable violence.

He left no manifestos and has been essentially erased, probably due to his immorality. While Zerzan said little to nothing about the nature of the shooting, society (including anarchists!) as usual in their desperate search for answers zeroed in on the easily digestible explanations of access to guns and mental health care. When tragedies occur, the liberal mask of many anarchists’ politics reveals itself as they also cry for the safety of answers. Lanza had demonstrated his interest in anti-civ ideas, not only wrestling with the ideas, but putting those thoughts into terrible action, yet people still seem mystified as to why anybody would do what he did.

People who cared to read what he wrote, knew exactly where Adam was coming from when he opened fire in that classroom. He couldn’t have been any clearer about his motivation. He was the embodiment of Travis the Chimp, Tyke the Elephant, and other beasts who viciously cast off their shackles, their violent rebellion ending with their own deaths. Like skirmishes in

wars long forgotten, there is mass cultural amnesia surrounding these acts of hostility toward the civilized. The town of the elementary school destroyed the school (building a new one over it), and also razed the house that Lanza had grown up in. Apparently unsavory people had begun showing up at the site. Perhaps some of those people listened to Zerzan's show and were making a pilgrimage to pay their respects. The erasure of Lanza extends to his Wikipedia page, which redirects to the Sandy Hook Elementary School Shooting page. This is true of personal wikis for many other school shooters as well.

Attacking innocents is incredibly taboo. Even to admit you understand, much less are sympathetic to, the actions of people like Frazier or Lanza, will cause you to be shunned. This is especially true when the taboo against the killing of children is transgressed. Everything must be palatable to the masses. Nothing is more sacred to the masses than children, who represent hope for the future of the human race. But that future will no doubt be as horrific in its banality as the world now. An article in Newsweek summarized Adam's motivations (adding of course that this way of thinking is deranged):

*“children were indoctrinated from a very young age to become part of a sick machine that was self-perpetuating. They were manipulated to live unhealthy lives. In Adam's deranged world-view, they were already doomed to live in a joyless world that would use and abuse them. By killing them, he'd be saving them from the hell he was enduring.”*

Both Frazier and Lanza's messages were clear to those who understand, but mystified everyone else: humans have, to their detriment, completely removed themselves from nature and through the ways of civilization we have all been imprisoned. Frazier's fury came from a transcendent moment where he saw the obscenity of materialism that we are bound to while Lanza saw how we are shaped from birth to accept this fate and enjoy being caged. Like warriors before them they refused to see humans as more valuable than other life on earth and had no moral qualms about extinguishing lives no matter how young and innocent. In fact, they may be seen as having acted from a place of kindness, as suggested by Adam Lanza's very personal killing of his mother before he left for the school. In his mind he wasn't deranged; he had been pacing his cage his whole life, until he could pace no more. Then he pounced. We are all capable of nurturing and compassion, but we are also capable of the most horrific brutality, given the right conditions. These instances of cruelty, whether from long ago or in our lifetime, shouldn't be swept under the rug. They are not horrible abominations that we must do everything to forget. They are human responses, maybe one of the last meaningful human actions we can observe, which is perhaps what terrifies people so much. As Fuchs observes, “Deep down in every one of us there is a ruthless primal killer inside. Perhaps this is the fundamental truth from which all censors, moralists and inveterate optimists flee in panic.” Let us not flee in panic from our own impulses, but learn from them and come face to face with society, its warts and all.

## Smiles on the Tiles by Jack Diddly

“FUCK!!!” The primal and anguished cry emanated from the refrigerators in appliances, followed by a loud thud. It was just Brad again...Brad resembled George Wendt from the “Da Bears!” ‘90s SNL sketch. He was from Chicago, and of course a diehard Cubs and Bears fan. He’d worked at S-Mart for almost ten years, and had increasingly begun to unravel. He’d go off into the rows of fridges to vent, sometimes pounding them with his meaty fists.

I didn’t hold any of this against him. I knew how he felt. I was a refugee from back east. I’d moved to the west coast several years before, mostly in a vain attempt to escape politically motivated harassment. I’d gotten involved in anarchism through punk rock. Exposure to bands like Crass and Millions of Dead Cops had molded my worldview. The events after 9/11 had motivated me to become more politically active. I had hooked up with a network of Anarcho-Communists, a Platformist federation..I was also active in antifascist activism. I was doing prisoner support for a Palestinian detainee. He was locked up without charges in the hysteria following the attacks in New York and DC. I’d grown up in the suburbs of Baltimore, but had gone to college in a small town in Pennsylvania and, until I moved west, I had never left. It was a right wing town that didn’t appreciate the presence of agitators in their midst. My name had appeared in the local media more than a few times because of an anti-ICE demo we’d planned.

My mental health, which was never great to begin with, had taken a turn for the worse in October of 2005. I had broken off with most of the ancoms by then. They’d had one of their conferences in Baltimore that summer, and I’d completely blown it off. I had suffered through one in Philly, and that was enough. It was excruciating. Over 12 hours of arguing and quibbling over workerist minutia and theory, and that was only day one... I’d sat there and endured it to be a team player. I’d gotten some calls from Philly antifa about this or that bonehead show that was supposedly happening, but had let them all go to voicemail and never responded. People had started walking by my house at night and yelling profanity and abuse. They were kicking over my garbage cans, following me around on foot and as I drove through town. A sadistic woman had been brought in to the corporate bookstore where I worked for the sole purpose of driving me out. I’d been talking to some of my coworkers about attempting to unionize through IWW and UFCW. Someone had ratted me out to management. All of these factors combined to zap my already highly neurotic brain. I’d let my appearance and hygiene go (more than normal).

I eventually had a massive nervous breakdown. I was shaking. I couldn’t sleep. After quitting my job at the bookstore, I was pacing back and forth through the house. I ended up admitting myself into the psych ward at the hospital in town.

As I was being admitted, I had to linger in a hallway where they had cells for psychiatric holds brought in by the cops. I waited by one cell where the occupant had smeared his feces all over the window. I found most of the staff to be callous and uncaring. I tried to pathetically escape from the less secure unit and was put in a higher security wing with more chronic and serious (mental) cases. When I first entered the day room there, I was greeted amiably by a Hispanic chap who stuck out his mitt for me to shake. I immediately regretted this when I felt a sticky film on

his palm and fingers. I later saw him skulking around the unit with his hands jammed down his pants. I was told that he'd been admitted for chronic masturbation, to the point where it made it impossible for him to hold down a job and function in society. Needless to say, I washed my hands very thoroughly. I was later brought into a room with a severe woman with a French accent, spectacles, and her hair in a bun. She looked about 60. She interrogated me for awhile about my political views and other things. When I was being transferred to another area, I glanced at a clipboard with my chart on it. There was a note on there from this woman thanking the hospital staff for allowing her to interview me. At the time, I thought she was probably from Homeland Security. She stated that I displayed "homicidal ideation." News to me... After these preliminaries, I was placed in the ward with the other patients. One teenage girl was in for her third or fourth suicide attempt. A middle-aged man who looked like he'd listen exclusively to classic rock and vote Republican was there with a bandage on his hand. He had punched through the windshield of his car in a fit of rage after his wife had left him. A young black teen was in a wheelchair. I found out that she had shot her boyfriend. It was in the paper that another patient read aloud while she wept softly. The most interesting of the lot to me was one of my roommates. Can't remember his name, but he looked to be in his late 40s. While the rest of us wore street clothes, he wore a hospital gown every day. He was bearded with longer hair. He didn't say much, and he usually sat in the common area and watched TV all day. We had a hall meeting with one of the shrinks, and he asked us what we'd like to do if and when we got out. His response was: "Take off!" I found out that he'd been in and out of the state hospitals many times, and was awaiting transfer back there. I often snore. One night I awoke for some reason, and he was quietly chanting "Kiiilllll Jaaccckk".

He was unhappy about my snoring. He repeated this a few times. Needless to say, I didn't sleep very well after that...

A few years elapsed, and I had left Jess, my partner (in crime), and had met and married Kim in a whirlwind romance. Her brother lived in the Northwest with his wife, and through a series of phone calls and letters, we had decided to make the trek across the country, partially in a vain attempt to escape my ongoing persecution. A COINTELPRO- style smear campaign had begun in earnest in late 2005, and had made things rather difficult for me in that backwater town of 50,000. I had no way of knowing that the same slimeballs, fully aware of my intention to relocate, had already initiated similar corny tricks where we were moving to. We arrived in October of '08, and things didn't go well. Her brother and sister-in-law were intolerable. We were staying on their couch in an expensive trendy flat. They fought constantly, and both lost their relatively high-paying jobs not long after we arrived. We endured four months of hell living with them and desperately looking for any job. I finally tried a temp agency, and got placed in a position at a carpet cleaning business. I drove around all day in a van with a born-again Christian who was in his early fifties. I screwed a few things up, as I'm wont to do. I didn't hook the hoses up correctly. I accidentally tracked some dirt from my boots on a rich lady's white carpet. In a surreal moment, my co-worker got rather heated, angrily denouncing me because I said I liked the Phantom Menace Star Wars film. "Jar-Jar Binks" was racist, you see. After that disaster, I entered a new level of hell as a canvasser. Out of extreme desperation, I became one of those annoying idiots who stand on street corners and harass hapless pedestrians for donations. My cause was the California gay marriage initiative. A coworker and I stood outside of a yuppie grocery store all day and pestered shoppers for money. If you didn't make your quota more than a few days in a row, you were very sweetly and kindly asked to seek opportunities elsewhere,

and please don't let the door shut *hard* on your way out..There was a core group of die hards who had somehow lasted there quite a while. I found out later that they had been fabricating credit card numbers and donations somehow. They all were eventually purged as I had been. The smiley-happy-cheerful coordinator told me "This job's not for everyone." My wife and I applied at fast food places, anything. We wound up hitting the shopping mall when Burger King and Popeye's Chicken snubbed us. I submitted a resume to a place in the food court called Hot Dog on a Stick. You had to wear this goofy multi-colored uniform and hat, just a bit less ridiculous than Judge Reinhold's in *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*.

I turned out not to be Hot-Dog-on-a Stick material. I told myself I was overqualified. The situation with the in-laws had hit critical mass. Kim and I pondered our options. This whole west coast adventure had turned into a nightmare. Her 2001 Nissan Altima was in their garage. We seriously considered getting in, putting on our Supertramp greatest hits CD, turning on the engine, and going to sleep. Another plan was to make our way down to Arizona to link up with her other brother, Ben. He worked for the Renaissance Faire and traveled around the country year-round. We had sold the car in the interim, and one day we struck out south for AZ, on foot. I had one of those big backpacks you see on oogles. We had her little terrier Tyson with us. It was a nice day, and the walk was pleasant at first. We wound up following the river, then an unused rail line. We came to a bridge and thoughts of "Stand By Me" came to me as I looked at the precipitous drop if we should slip or trip. There was no railing or anything to stop us if we were to fall. It was only a bit wider than the track. I had my wife go first, so I could grab her or the dog if anything should occur. Before we got halfway across, she had started crawling on all fours and was hysterically crying. I don't know what we would've done if a train had suddenly come round the bend. Well, we would've died. After that wonderful experience, we came upon a rail tunnel through a large hill. It was this large black hole. Alarm bells went off in my brain as we stood there in terror. It was either go through it or retreat back over the hell bridge... I fished a flash light out of my pack, and it flickered as I flipped it on. We cautiously entered and saw evidence of past human habitation via the dim flashlight bulb. Graffiti ("JIMMY'S A FAGET"), shopping carts, plastic Steel Reserve 40 bottles, human feces, empty cans of Spaghetti-Os. I hoped and prayed with every atom of my being that any inhabitants weren't still home. Every horror movie I'd ever seen came flooding back to me. The wind through the tunnel, dripping water, and our own footsteps were all we heard as we made our way through this seemingly endless black void. Kim was gripping my right arm so tightly that I started to lose feeling in my hand. Halfway through, we saw a mattress with what looked like a large pool of brown dried blood on it. My wife had her face tightly pressed to my chest by then. One solace was that Tyson seemed unconcerned. I thought that he'd notice any dangers before we did. Finally, after twenty minutes or so of white-knuckling it, we came out into the glorious light. We danced, laughed, and hooted, in celebration of not being murdered in some hideous way. After walking most of the day, we'd only made it to the suburbs south of town. After spending the night shivering in the woods, we shamefully negotiated a return trip to her brother's through Kim's mom. That same day, I got a call. I had gotten a job...

I got a call from Mary, the S-Mart HR person. Could I come in to fill out some paperwork and do my drug screen? I had gotten some Niacin pills from Timothy (not Tim), my brother- in-law. My in-laws and wife smoked weed 24/7, so it was difficult for me not to. It felt almost rude to decline. The niacin pills were terrible, but supposedly cleaned up your urine before testing. 10 minutes after ingestion, your face would turn bright crimson and you'd have serious hot flashes.

Sweat would ooze from your pores, and I suppose this is how it worked. I passed the test... I had to go twice because another idiot, Judy, sent me on an extended bus ride to the testing facility without the proper documents.

I've been at S-Mart for several years now, and have had some truly hellish experiences, of course. A big part of my job is getting customers to sign up for our Citigroup MasterCard, with 25% interest rate. I get between \$2 to \$4 per application. My first few months in, I had a very large guy in his twenties sign up. He got approved, then suddenly became unhinged. As an incentive for applying and getting approved, the customer gets \$15 off of their first purchase with the card. I explained this to the cretin, but he started babbling about how I "lied to" him. He bellowed at me, "You're retarded! You're a nerd!" I looked up at him (he was about 6'4), and calmly said, "The only person being retarded right now, is YOU." This really set him off, and he started following me over to Home Electronics. He wound up being ejected by security. It's amazing I haven't been fired yet. I have a tendency to act out when feeling bored or put upon. I've asked out customers at work. I told another guy to shove a shop vac up his ass. He promptly ran over and tried to get me fired. I've come into work completely stoned and/or drunk. One of my previous supervisors, whose dad was a state pig, attempted to get me terminated because I "smelled like marijuana" and I had physically threatened a particularly odious co-worker in front of the store. I've been sober now for over 3 months.

I grew up in a bourgeois environment. Went to private Catholic schools for several years until I was asked to leave in middle school. Grew up in a big house with a swimming pool in white-flight rural Maryland. Since the early '90s, I've been on my own. I failed out of college in '93. I've worked as a day laborer, janitor, factory worker, night stock boy in a grocery, warehouse drone, you name it. All of the ancoms and communists who fetishize the working class or workers make me laugh. My experience with the working class has been far from romantic. I've worked with some really cool and chill folks, but many (or most) have been a bunch of snitches and worms who would sell me (or you) out at the first opportunity. Their worldview(s) are and were pretty horrifying too. I had a redneck who worked at the grocery store feel the need to tell me—unprompted—on the first day that he "hated ALL niggers" and wanted to "throw them in a huge hole and cover it up." A woman at the box plant wanted to "nuke the Middle East" and "kill all Muslims." I could go on and on.

We have these idiotic morning pep rallies before the store opens. They alternately praise and chastise us for our performance. They were forcing us to recite what I would call a "cult chant" at the start. The manager would say, "Why are we here??" And we would bleat in response, "To serve, delight, and engage our members while they shop their way." I would refuse to say it, and even started using my hand as a puppet, my fingers silently mouthing the words in lieu of speaking them. We had a store manager from Germany three or four years ago. She would yell, "Vy aw vee heer?!" She'd get really excited, point her finger in the air, and say, "You must WOW the member!" But it would come out : "You must VOW ze memba!" I mocked her relentlessly behind her back, with sieg heils and nazi references, of course, and I'm pretty sure my coworkers told her. I made the mistake of friending some of them on Facebook, but soon had to block them when I discovered they were showing or forwarding some of my more colorful posts to management. Our current store manager, Melissa, is Mrs Perky Pants. She talks in this "Valley Girl" speak. She sounds sorta like Will Smith's sister on *Fresh Prince of Bel Air*. She introduced herself on the first day as a "perfectionist" who doesn't "tolerate failure." We grinned at each other because we all knew she was in for a very rough ride. She then proceeded to inform us that her husband was a



cop. "I LOVE the police!" I felt my sphincter involuntarily tighten and a thin sheen of perspiration start on my upper lip.

S-Mart has been around since the late nineteenth century. With so many consumers shopping on Amazon and other online retailers, traditional "brick- and-mortar" stores aren't faring so well. S-Mart has been experiencing what's referred to as "corporate failure." They're hemorrhaging money. Recording losses every year in the millions. Their CEO is a former hedge fund guy who has been systematically dismantling and selling off the company's assets. He's been closing less profitable stores and selling the buildings. S-Mart's tool line was sold a few months ago. My store was featured in the local paper as one slated to close last December. We're still open, but the store looks like shit and staffing/hours have been cut to ridiculous levels. Sometimes it just me for hours alone on my floor, attempting to run appliances and hardware, the phone constantly ringing, customers walking out in a huff. We eliminated our electronics department. One happy development is that right now, we have no "loss prevention" or store detectives. They would catch shoplifters, junkies, tweakers, and just poor folks. I'd often see cops taking some poor slob out in handcuffs. They mostly watched us, and there are cameras all over the sales floor and store. They would rat us out for any trivial thing. Management goes in the camera room to spy on us or check the video from earlier in the day to nail us for something or other. I often see and have witnessed kleptomaniacs going down the escalator with tool sets, drills, even bicycles, and pretend not to notice. We have one security clown in our store who floats between two locations and is like a band aid on a severed limb. The other day, he ran upstairs and shouts, "Did you see two black guys come up here?!" There's been so much thievery since they cut LP, that whole walls are almost empty in the tool area. I see the same speed freaks with sores all over their faces come upstairs two or three times a day to pilfer a tool or headphones. All we can do is laugh about what a joke our store and this company is. It deserves to go under, for the shitty pay and benefits, and the way they treat their employees. They took away our meager employee discount in January. I get emails from corporate and "Eddie," the CEO. They talk about S-Mart's "transformation." A particularly amusing recent email discussed how they'd made the "tough decision" to lay off 130 workers in their Midwest corporate offices. Morale is at an all-time low in our store. Melissa still trots out in the morning and gives her motivational spiel. "Smiles on the tiles today, guys! I wanna see smiles on the tiles!"

## The Bones of Mayuk by S-kw'etu'?

The bones of Mayuk, the grizzly, lay strewn amongst the bones of the forest that once had been her home, the same forest where, not long ago, a small group of people (including myself) stood up against the governments, the corporations, the Indian Government, and their agents the RCMP. We had tried to protect this forest and failed.

Mayuk, like the trees that once stood here, is now no more, her destruction is irreversible, as is the effects of this forest and these types of clear-cut logging practices, which are causing landslides, which are destroying the watershed, which is eliminating fish-spawning habitat along with the habitat of so many other species, including our own.

Presently governments, corporations, and their agents, are working together to destroy the water, air, and food, which is beyond foolish. Despite the evidence that this is our reality, many people still argue that this is an unalterable necessity because of economics. Those people frighten me as much as the compliant who choose to follow, never think, and who are always silent.

The strewn remains of our fire is the only evidence that this is the same location where a beautiful forest full of life and complex ecosystems once thrived. Now those stones sit next to one of the far-too-many ugly clear cuts that scar occupied Native territories. Technically the clear cutters leave a few trees standing so they can deny what they are doing: clear cut logging in forbidden areas so they are loophole clear cuts. The trees that remain standing often fall without the support of the forest. The logging practices that have been creating issues with the waterways, fish habitat, and water quality have—despite a great deal of effort to stop them—continued unabated since 1969. Almost fifty years of struggling against the system for the basic human right to clean water has only resulted in evidence of a sickness that impersonates a democracy, and with no effective environmental land stewardship, much less any concern for the health and well being of the citizens it claims to protect.

On a clear December day a few years ago, I sat alongside my family members and participated in a ceremony beside that fire. Our spiritual ceremony was interrupted rudely by agents of the crown, the RCMP, who tend to show up when a corporation is paying for a civil order but refuse to act whenever a person is being subjected to criminal activity, violence, or abuse. We weren't surprised; the fact that they had long planned to log that area was not unknown and the community had been rallying against the logging for half a century to no avail.

Sadly the fact is most if not all of the people who rely on these resources to survive do realize the horrible situation they face but are completely flummoxed, or so they claim, when it comes to what to do about it. They attempt to work within the system believing that the systems have been put into place to prevent and protect them and eventually all they discover is that their systems are simply convoluted and pointless. The established environmentalists fail because they refuse to acknowledge colonialism, or the genocide they too willingly participate in. They do not understand that they have no treaties here, yet are willing to promote the rights of the corporation over the rights of the people, which is how British Columbia came to be; they believe a crown

trade monopoly trumps the rights of the existing nations. What they fail to understand is that they to have no rights and they are the ones who will suffer the consequences, not the corporations.

Moratoriums, law suits, petitions, and bringing up the issue at the legislature all have had no impact; they continue to sell our timber, our minerals, our fish, our water, and even our land despite the fact that our land is unceded and no treaty exists between our Nation and the foreign one destroying our territories. They continue to apply European names to our territories, waterways, lands, and peoples while blatantly denying that white supremacy is the underlying problem. Anything and everything is being sold off to any and all comers without any consultation with the communities, native or non-, and this is just how it has always been since colonization. Nothing has changed, we have just as few rights as Mayuk and the rest of the life that has long been part of our territory.

Before the RCMP arrived that December day there were many unhappy people in the area, some were members of local environmental organizations who have long fought this issue. Most simply represented themselves. Most would think that different people all being threatened in a similar manner would serve to bridge the gap and give us the opportunity to heal and move forward together to positive solutions, but that is not what is happening here. Solidarity is not happening and equality is nowhere to be seen.

After the RCMP arrived most of the home-owning non-native environmentalists over the age of thirty—which was the majority of the group—ran off and hid in the forest, and the professional, fund-raising, grant-collecting environmentalists led the way. They left elders, disabled, and youth to fend for ourselves. This happened because older Canadians are not well educated as to their civil rights and right to protest; they also mistakenly believe that an arrest on a civil injunction will result in having a criminal record, losing their jobs, and all such other nonsense. Basically they fear the economic impact because they are human beings under complete monetary control.

Those of us left, including a seventy nine year old elder, were outnumbered by the RCMP. The police are often predatory in nature, they are opportunists, and I did witness some violence due to their involvement. An older residential school survivor was brutalized, as were most of the youth. I witnessed one slight young man being torn right out of his shoes by thug cops.

Once the RCMP had the young people taken away, their senior officer came to the sacred fire where only native women sat and politely addressed the elder Xwu'p'a'lich asking her to leave the site. She looked him directly in the eyes and responded, "You know I can't do that." and so began a stalemate that was very long—and I imagine very expensive considering how many officers were present. The officers ceased their arrests and simply stood in the cold waiting for instruction, the logging operator was present as well, waiting. The ceremony continued, the negotiations continued long into the day. This is a right by tradition and it is also a right Canada has given us and is supposed to respect, but does not.

When they removed Xwu'p'a'lich from the mountain later that day they arrived to find a large crowd outside the station protesting against the shameful act of removing an indigenous elder and respected member of their community from her own land. The police were pretty uneasy about what they had just done, the truth is they are not well-loved at the best of times, not by any rational people at least.

Later in the day some of us were released but kept under police surveillance. This civil order was very expensive and a waste of energy: tailing octogenarian volunteers on their way to their knitting for the homeless group. These resources would better serve by protecting us from dangerous people who cause harm in the community. Policing is a novel concept, but here it is only

a concept. This is a corporate system that fears repercussions for the conditions it creates, which is misery and nothing more.

Not long after in occupied Vancouver a judge found in our favor and the police had to back off. At the trial the crowd in the courtroom refused to stand for the judge who represented the queen, but did stand for the elders who came to defend the land defenders. No local justices would sign this order, but they finally found one in a place called Vernon, which is a considerable distance from here. The accommodating justice who would sign an order that violated native and citizens rights also acted against the Secwepemc people when their unceded land was being developed during the 2004 Sun Peaks Resort protest, again on unceded indigenous territory.

Presently there is another blockade, it has been active for a month, and once again it is being manned primarily by elders and disenchanting youth who have voluntarily come to stand for the native elders. The youth make camps at the blockade and live on site, out doors, in the cold and wet, only coming off the mountain to get supplies or for work. Neither they nor the elders are professional environmentalists, who are home owners and very comfortable allowing the most marginalized people to put themselves at risk on their behalf.

What I am witnessing is the deep divide between younger and older Canadians. The youth are far more aware, they understand that it is about racism and colonialism; they are also marginalized people, unlike their parents. The youth of today are aware that their country is economically and morally bankrupt and they have been condemned as corporate slaves in retail and service industries, earning less than they need for the essentials of life. So far there has been no injunction against this blockade, the last company backed down and we hope this one will consider the risk and expense of pursuing legal actions not viable at this time—this is highly likely with the economic realities as they are. We may be fortunate enough to avoid another confrontation with the RCMP.

The logging has created ongoing land slides, and also is one cause of dropping water levels. At this point the salmon cannot return to spawn. The other cause is that there are simply too many people using too much water from the same source that the salmon use to spawn.

Illegal land development has had a catastrophic effect. The populations grew considerably when the economy was at its peak in the mid 2000s, before the collapse in 2008. That population growth inspired more development than the water supply could possibly accommodate. Combined with the changes in weather patterns—less snow in winter along with long and very dry hot summers—the coastal region is now experiencing serious water shortages. Just as the economies collapsed in 2008, the Canadian housing bubble inflated, the value of homes here increased seven percent, which resulted in a ten percent more revenue going into government coffers. This increase in property value, although created by disreputable banking types, also inspired many shady corporate types to begin acquiring, logging, and developing more and more land including the watershed; it is all on the development block. The target consumer for this highly priced real estate—in a community where clean drinking water is not available and everything else is in short supply—are retiring Canadian seniors. Mostly these consumers have failed to materialize, however the development plans—much like the plans for pipelines and fracking—continue unabated.

Garbage and other items people no longer have a use for often find their way into the creeks, streams, and rivers. While walking the dry creek bed where the salmon used to spawn I found an automobile that had lain there for years. Not that far from that spot a contractor has thrown contaminated materials, asbestos, and all of the government paperwork, next to the watershed.

Further down the road there is a couch in a stream. Basically you cannot turn around without finding more illegal dumping. The smell of motor oil is not uncommon because that is how it is disposed around here. The residents of the coast are doing just as much to shit on their own plates as the government and industry; they have the same contempt for the Mother Earth and other life forms as they have towards native people. Personally when I am on the coast I do not drink the tap water—actually I do not trust it anywhere.

Canadians have long begrudged the “special benefits” that native people receive. Most of the violence, hostility, and racism we endure is from envy over fictional benefits, things that native people do not actually receive. We are far less discriminatory on our occupied territories than the settlers who live in the nice houses in the nice neighbourhoods, yet they are sharing the same rez water as the natives who live in a shithole ghetto that sits between the power lines and the open pit mine. Many other settlers on other territories are beginning to experience the same special benefits as the indigenous people: poor water, poverty, inadequate health care.

So at long last we will soon have equality and they will no longer feel so excluded. What can one expect when even for such horrendous crimes as the ones at the residential schools, no effort is put towards prosecuting the offenders, many of whom remain at large in our communities today. We cannot expect justice or concern, that is for sure.

The fact is there is more than adequate water, it falls from the skies regularly. However, even in this dire situation I see no evidence of rain water collection. Even though the salmon can no longer return I have found no evidence that the department of fisheries has had any involvement at any point during the forty seven year problem. The people who rely on fishing for their living have seen no evidence either. Even though the salmon cannot return, the people who fundraise on behalf of the salmon who spawn in that creek continue to gather money. Never do I hear a word about the illegal dumping, nor do I see much effort to clean it up. I am pretty sure petrodollars are not edible, drinkable, or breathable, however they seem to be the only thing most people are concerned about, even people in the environmental movement.

There are fundamental systems in place that predate any that human societies have created. These systems cannot be ignored in favor of fantasies we have been foolishly creating. Our existence relies on these systems continuing to provide us with the elements we all need to survive, clean air, water, and food. These things are in very limited supply and it is the responsibility of each and every one of us to protect and conserve our precious resources. Failure to do so is an act of suicide.

# My Mind Below this Beautiful Country: Talsetan Brothers Share Their Stories of Land Defense and Indigenizing

Interviewer: Goat

*This conversation was recorded in the recently constructed Healing Center at the Unist'ot'en Camp. For the past 6 years, the Unist'ot'en clan of the Wet'suwet'en Nation have been occupying their traditional territory and preventing government and industry from entering the land to build pipelines that would transport tar sands and fracked gas to the global market. The Unist'ot'en Camp has served as a site of inspiration where land defenders from disparate regions can meet, network, plan, learn from the Unist'ot'en strategy, seek wisdom, and heal.*

*Days at camp are spent tending the infrastructure of the site, being with the river that has been protected as a result of the imagination and responsibilities assumed by the Unist'ot'en, conversing, cooking, and laughing. Nights are spent beneath the stars, huddled around a fire with fellow comrades, sharing stories, planning, and laughing. While I was at the camp this winter I met Ishkadi and Lo 'oks, Talsetan Brothers who are regular occupiers and visitors of Unist'ot'en, and whose territory is 4 hours drive north from there. They had stopped over at camp en route to their land. One night as some of us were drinking tea and eating snacks, they began to share stories about their home, their language, and their work defending their territories from industry. Several of us stayed up late into the night with the brothers, riveted by their stories and their particular cadence as a duo. What is printed below comes largely from what they shared that night. This conversation was made possible in part by the unique space created by the Unist'ot'en where indigenous and settler radicals can encounter each other and share their stories.*

## **“I Like Devil”: Pop Culture, Punk, the Church, and School on the Iskut Reservation**

Ishkadi grew up colonized on Iskut Indian Reservation No. 6, in so-called Northwestern British Columbia, in Tahltan territory. He has been involved in direct action and blockades in defense of his people's territory for over 10 years. He is pursuing the reclamation of his indigenous identity.

to'oks was born in a hospital outside of Tahltan territory. He grew up pursuing guidance and wisdom from his elders, especially his grandma and grandpa. In his spare time he is crafting a diabolical scheme to dominate the world. He calls it “World Peace.” Ishkadi and to'oks are brothers and they are the two youngest speakers of Tahltan in the world, of which there are currently less than 30 speakers.

to'oks—to'oks ushye. Tlabane nasde. Tl'abanot'in sini ja'. My name is to'oks. I am from Tl'abane. And I am Tl'abanot'in.

Ishkadi—Ishkadi ushye. Ch'iyone es-datsehi. Tl'abanot'in sini ja' Talsetan sini ja'. My name is Ishkadi. I am Wolf Clan. I am Tl'abanot'in of Talsetan people, what they call Tahltan. We grew up in a reservation, ind res no. 6. The Iskut first nations. We were contained there for most of our

lives. Pretty much what we know is res living. We grew up with our grandparents who didn't let us forget what we are. They always told us, "don't be white. Don't forget where you come from." Not necessarily saying we come from the res. They brought us out. They gave us tools to survive on the territory, living on the land, and they also taught us culture and language.

t—For me I had a good vocabulary growing up, but I never could find or understand "colonization" as a concept growing up. Like I could see it, but I couldn't make it out. My whole vision as a young boy was to grow up back on the land and to not live in modern day life. Living out in the woods was exotic to me, it was something that we never did in those days. And it was something I wanted to pursue as I got older. And I looked up to my grandparents because they are the closest window I have for that path. They are the ones who helped me along with that path from the beginning.

I—Yeah, it all has to do with, it came in stages. As a youngster I had no clue about it.

I never really sought out particularly decolonization, I never really quite understood anything. We grew up contained in a res, but we also had small increments of going out on the territory for days or weeks. Then we came back to the res. But I've always been looking for something. When I was a kid playing with my older brother and our cousin, my older brother would always choose to be the good guy, and to'oks was a sidekick, like he was a supporting character in our games, not a main character, and I was always the bad guy. So as early as that, I never went what was the so-called "good path."

t -Yeah, our older brother had access to a lot of music and we would listen to music he listened to. And one of the bands he liked was Guns N Roses and at that point we shifted from the good side to the bad side. (laughing...) We never really said like, "We are gonna be bad all the time", but it was something cool, like we can't be good all the time.

I -There was something attractive about that to us because we would always ask our friends, and we were just kids, and we would be like, "Do you like angel or devil?" They all said angel and me and my brother would be like, "No we like the devil!" (laughing...) That appealed to us. That kind of mentality was just inborn.

Now, reflecting on it that was part of us transitioning into what they call "decolonization." And it all started with pop culture. We grew up with pop culture. Everything about us. Like we can recall movies and seedy movies we saw that challenged society. We listened to music that was abrasive and was good and a lot of people would say, "You can't dance to it" and we didn't care, it was something else. Eventually, as we got older, in our age of self-assurance, we were still pretty colonized in a sense, meaning things were still Biblical. In my case I went completely against religion. That was the thing I went against, and everything about me was like, Fuck Jesus and Fuck the Bible, and everything, it was a different dichotomy, in a sense it was decolonization, but it wasn't targeted at anything, it was just basically aiming my target at Christian religion. Then I came up with so many different rationales, like they burnt so many witches in Europe, and killed so many people in all these places, but I had no clue what they had done to indigenous people. That's what I was missing. But I still looked for other things in Nihilism and Anarchism and Satanism, and all these different things that wasn't Christianity. But because we grew up with Christianity, I went against it within the rules.

t—My thing was trying not to do the same thing everyone else was doing. I've always wanted to do something different than everyone else. During school, colors of clothing was a big thing. Girls had their own thing that was colorful, and all the colors the guys had were black, or white if you were trying to be preppy. All the colors were really plain. The jeans, black jeans, black or

blue jeans. All predictable. I settled on gray. That became something that fit me: gray. I've always preferred something in the middle of something. Everything was always medium. Like I would have medium shirts, medium pants, and gray always seemed to be a color to stick by because it's between everything. Instead of sticking to one side, I observed all sides. When I was young I would ask my parents, "Why do we have to go to school?" "So you can learn," they would say. "Why do we have to learn?" "To get a job." "Why do you need to get a job?" "For money." And I remember being a toddler asking my parents that and when I got older I would ask my teachers and guidance counselors that and the answer was always the same and that goes with everybody. It was all the same. And I didn't want my life to go in that direction. And by the time I get to the end of high school everyone was graduating-

I—And we were taken by that whole ethos, and it kind of started to change when we ventured off of everyone else's music. And we went into kind of a metal phase. This was long before the internet, this was underground stuff. Back at home, no one knew about black metal, death metal. This was strictly our thing because only we knew about it, no one else had that. And the thing that was cool about them and all these other metal rockers and punk rockers was that they had no jobs and they said Fuck the System Fuck Society and Fuck Jobs and we were really taken by that. And we were kids and we hated that stuff. We didn't want nothing to do with it. We hated school. That was another part of our decolonization, was getting away from school.

t—Yeah, when we were in high school, we struggled with marks to pass, eventually we both gave up-

I—Not quite giving up, we resisted...

t—We revolted. I don't want to write an essay on something I wasn't really interested in. If a teacher gave me something to do, I'm not going to be interested in it because a teacher is telling me what to do.

I—Exactly. And we hated when people told us what to do. That is one of the reasons why we hated the church and everything.

t—I remember our cousin who had a girlfriend and he was about to graduate, and he told us later on that his girlfriend said, "Just think after we graduate we'll just be workin' for the rest of our lives." And he told us that and we said, "Fuck..." like, that's a scary thought! (laughing...) That was like the worst thing to do! I didn't want that, but it was like, we all have to do it. And if you don't go down that road its gonna be dark and sad, you gonna be an addict, you gonna have a bad life, you not gonna have good health, and you won't sustain yourself and you most likely will die of starvation or whatever.

I—We stayed true. We've had dreams of becoming something bigger, better, not being in the system. But eventually the system was all around us. Like we worked, that

was the worst thing I did. That was the worst thing I did, I thought "I look stupid." I felt stupid. We spent the better part of our years getting paid pretty much, doing stuff in the system. Giving the government numbers for non-indigenous people. Every job I've had its always gone against my principles, every one of them. It's pretty much just grunt work, at the bottom, giving data, numbers or whatever, if it wasn't making white people rich, it was serving white people for their recreation times. It was always like that, the only way we could get money is that way. I used to be employed for the Tahltan Fisheries. When you think about the Tahltan Fisheries you think,

The Tahltan manage their own fisheries, but in reality they're just employing Tahltan members in this field-and we were doing pretty high level stuff, and getting paid and all-collecting data like measurements, scales from fish, DNA samples, and you count them. So all those num-



bers, they're not Tahltan numbers. You give them to the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. That's Canadian, that's a Canadian Department. This is the reality that we all grew up with and I didn't like doing shit for the Canadian Government, and there are a lot of principles I broke just to get paid. It went from that work to hunting guide outfitters and these rich white people would come visit our territory and they pay the guide money and they take them out on a hunt to get trophies, the biggest males of whatever, and me and my brother would do the same thing and we would pretty much make fires to guide the tourists, and it was fine. It was outside, it was physical work, it did us better in the long run because at that time we were still getting paid by the man. That's what we hated. This system meant the man. And not just any man, it was like the white man, the patriarchal male.

t—It wasn't just the man. The image of the man was a white man who was above all.

I—It wasn't like a woman. A patriarchal woman is different than a patriarchal male. And at the same time we developed a critique of the macho man, and we know them as bros now. We were homophobic in our teenage years but we grew out of that in our later years.

t—We quickly grew out of that in our early teens, because of our exposure to television which gave us insight to what was happening in the world, like Women's Liberation, and the acceptance of homosexuality and all of those things, we had access. We understood what was going on the world. In the location where we lived, television was a big deal. Iskut had many channels while other towns hardly had much television. Because we had television with many channels we had access to learn what was going on outside our world.

I—So you add pop culture, and the fact that to'oks and I are two like-minded individuals, and another factor is our ability to think, and another factor is our ability to converse with each other. So we developed a sense of difference and we went against every homophobe out there, and we went against Christianity and religion, and we even went against capitalism even though the jobs we did, every job we did was pretty much capitalism. Whenever the money came from a rich person on their vacation, it was never quite indigenous owned money, and if it was indigenous owned—they didn't own it. They were just underlings of another person that owned it. This was us in the system. We tried to make the system work in our favor and it never quite did because it was everywhere, so our path of decolonization was more internal from then on, like in our early 20s-

I—We had two choices: we can finish school, go out, continue school, or get a job... t—'Do well!'

I—be a part of the system, or we can stay back, quit school, and just live the common res life, we can go look for bootleg 50 dollar bottles everyday, go look for some job destroying our territory, go do all the drugs we want, and that would be our life. And we didn't want to take any of those routes, those were just like dead end routes to us, so we decided to-

t—But it separated us from all the other things we were tied to, once we had to go to school its kind of like you're tied to do work, and not doing what we want to do. And our friends kept going on doing their own thing, and within the community we stayed away from them. So we were isolated from our friends in our community because our interests were different. And some of them stayed, some moved elsewhere, and would come in and out.

I—Some of them are really active members of society.

### **Teenagers hanging with their Grandparents: Reconnecting with Language and Life**

t—And what we always ended up doing is just going to our grandparents. We would always pay visits to our grandparents all the time. Because that's the only thing to do. And not only the

only thing to do but the only interesting thing to do. Because that's who we come from and we learned a lot from them. Growing up, we were around them, so they were people to hang around with and help and they taught us a lot of things. So going to our grandparents was a refuge from everyday life.

I—There was a point when to'oks started learning to speak the language and I started later, but it was really hard to get our grandparents to teach us at first because of the reservation mentality. The thing with the reservation is the colonizers separated people from the land to keep them away from the land and they contained them in the res and used that system to keep them away from the resources that were on the land that they want to exploit, and they kept the Indians, us Indians, away from the settlers that came to occupy the territory and then on top of that they created laws that prohibited us from being Indian, with the Indian Act, and then they created Residential Schools, and they took kids away from the community into residential schools, and the reason the residential schools were created was to kill the Indian in the child. That was the plan from John A. McDonald, the guy on the Canadian 5 dollar bill, he developed a lot of these systems, he was a white supremacist and his whole model was to kill all the Indians. And then these kids went to the residential schools and they had to have their hair cut, and hair is a big deal to indigenous people, they had their hairs cut to suit the colonial mold. They gotta look presentable, be good Indians, and they told the kids they can't speak their language, and it's like a no good language, a primitive language, they instilled that it was bad to speak that language and on top of that they were prevented from singing their songs. Priests and teachers and the whole government really enforced this policy. Those kids grew up thinking it was bad to be Indian and then, if they were lucky, they would get to go back home, for the summer. Their home was on the reservation, and on top of that they had laws right up until the 1940s that said the Indians couldn't leave the reservation, they had a curfew. In their own home they were told that they were not to go out. So the generational affect of Residential Schools and the Reservation System is traumatic nowadays because people think it's just only the Residential Schools and day schools and such. With day schools, our uncle would tell a story that Indian agents, priests, and RCMP officers came to our grandpa's house and said, "If you don't put those kids in school, we're gonna arrest you" Uncle John remembers all his siblings right there, and grandma was taking it in and she had to take her kids to school. This was from when our great grandfather was keeping our grandfather in the trap lines, away from the Residential Schools. And so they caught up with his kids, and they were mistreated in day school too. My dad and mom would tell us stories. So you've got the education system there that would tell the Indians that they were bad, but the reservation system itself is just as bad. It's keeping Indians from our territory to the point that when we go camping, we called it camping. Our grandparents never called it camping; it was going to Buckley Lake. It was going to, wherever. Like, certain spots of the territory. And in our language, we would never learn that, "going camping" The word for going camping could be loosely translated as, "going to live there, going to lay down there, going to sleep there" It's like I'm gonna live there, I'm gonna stay there.

t—There's a whole different concept of home, and living. Home is not just a house.

In our language, [home] involves the whole territory, that's what keeps you living.

The whole territory provides the food you eat, the water you need to drink, and if you don't take more than you need you could sustain yourself forever. Living is another thing. When you say "I live over there" in English, you're pointing to a house where you go to sleep. But in our language, we say Nasdeh, which means "I'm going to bed", or "I stay here." Because our people

were nomadic, every night was a different place we stayed. They never stayed in one place year-round. Every night is a different country, throughout the whole territory. And so your nights are spread out through the whole territory. So if you go to say 'I live over there' it translates to "I stay there" like "I'm staying the night." It's a nomadic language, from a nomadic lifestyle. If you come into a village, and you make a tent in one spot, and then everyone else has their tents in their spots, and you meet your friend and they say Da da nande, it means like 'Where you stay,' it means you're pointing at a tent, "I stay over there, I live over there" 'Cause it's only for a short time, then you're going to have to move on. You are constantly moving on; you never stay in one place.

I—It's still that captive curfew mentality that our people go through. The colonizers put everything on that reservation, the funding, the unhealthy foods, all the water, whatever, it's all there, the housing, the medical, the education, all that, it's still that we need it. We need those jobs.

The aid, social studies, science, English, math. We need to speak English, we need everything that the colonizers say, that's what the reservation represents.

t—It gave all of us the things we needed to live, like education, go to school and get a job to earn money. Everything is there, and we lost our knowledge of how to do all of that on our own land. We lost our medicines to heal us.

I—It wasn't lost, it was taken from us.

t—It was taken, and it hasn't been practiced, so instead of learning it ourselves we go to a clinic because it's convenient.

I—And it's free, that's the whole thing. That word is a big thing in this capitalist society. Now that Indians get "free medical," "free education." The Indians get "tax-free" gasoline and tobacco. And everybody says, "Oh wow it's free!" ya know? Really, that's just a colonial tool to use to keep the Indians from being Indian. The colonizers have done their job really well, the system is perfect to trick Indians into thinking like that. This is what makes us different, we can rationalize that, to us that is not cool, it's not right, and this is what makes us want to be different. We've always had that sense of doing something else, not fitting in with the status quo of what we were supposed to be doing. When we learned our language, that was a huge thing. That opened up a lot of doors because we realized after speaking the language of our grandparents and our ancestors, we opened up a whole different doorway of lifestyle and way of living. It was a completely different thing because we grew up white, I'll say that all the time, "when I used to be white" Because that's what colonialism is, that's what the reservation is, what the education is, that was everything that we've been spoon-fed ever since we were kids. That's what that is, that's the affects of colonization. Then you've got two choices; go to school and become pretty much white. When we were younger, our elders would say, "Oh that person turned white." Meaning that they're making money, they're rich, they're doing well in society, they're the ones we would refer to now as sellouts. They come back all pompous, they come back all arrogant. Oh look, they made it! That's the thing, they feed off of other people who look at them and say, "I'm proud of you, I look at you and you make me proud." Other people, who have not done that, would look up to them as proud, hard workers. Even people who would go to work in the mines, and when they buy a new truck for themselves, everyone looks to them as higher ranking in our reservation, a hard worker. So having a brand new truck means you're a hard worker. And that just shows how far, how deeply, the colonial situation is, how perfect that they made it. Now we don't need Indian agents to come into the reservation. Our own people can colonize ourselves too. As we

grew up, hearing the same thing with our friends, “You look too Indian, you’re acting too Indian.” That was a common thing. So the biggest thing that we did was starting to learn our language, and our grandparents were really well versed in our language and the culture and everything. We were lucky to have them around ‘cause they could explain specific words, specific concepts, and everything. So we got a greater, indepth look into how they see the world. And it opened our eyes up, spiritually, emotionally, and everything like that. It really helped us heal, really heal, in a way that was far different than any seminar you could ever do. (laughing...)

t—Not only just learning the language, but our grandparents, just from their whole lives, what they grew up with, stayed with them their whole lives. And what they wanted to tell us or teach us, they would tell us very sternly. One time, a person had passed on, and we didn’t know what to think about it, so we went to visit our grandparents. Our grandpa asked us,

“You went to see the family?”

“Well, no...”

“Are you going to? Regardless of what a person has done in their life, no matter who it is, you respect them when they pass.”

He told us to go over to the family. When we went there, everyone thanked us for coming. That was a great move,

I thought that things were gonna be different but it wasn’t. It showed high honor on us, of our presence being there, that changed my thinking of how our people thought as well. I always thought that everyone was against each other, but when we did that, it changed their thinking of us, and our thinking of them as well.

# The Erotic Life of Stones by Dominique Ganawaabi and Soren Aubade

*“The uncertain, unsettled condition of this science of Cetology is in the very vestibule attested by the fact, that in some quarters it still remains a moot point whether a whale be a fish. In his System of Nature, A.D. 1776, Lin- nwus declares, ‘I hereby separate the whales from the fish’”*

Moby Dick

What do stones want? What do we make of their insistent silence? There is a marked quality of difference in our existence and theirs but stones know something of the unfulfilling, predictable routines of daily life. For some of us finding meaning means being receptive to the language of phosphorescent trails left below the surface. If stones have desires they are likely to be as resistant to being expressed in words as ours are.

In Melville’s novel the science of classifying whales is shown in an unfinished state because scientific investigations are always insufficient, cursory, and in process. Ish- mael feels that the study of cetology should be left uncomplete like the “Cathedral of Cologne.” When we ask about the significance of the sea all rigid systems will eventually fail us. Even as we cast our nets the whale has already evaded capture. When the perceived world is torn from the worlds of our bodies and our intersubjectivity, we risk losing full participation in it all. But, if our purpose moves beyond detached inquiry to attunement with the sediment, we can embody the wildly civilized and primitively sophisticated. We can take human form to become flora.

During the Precambrian era, a major uplift occurred when two continents collided. The intensity of the pressure caused sedimentary rocks to turn to metamorphic rocks, magma to rise to the earth’s crust and the land to fold, break and tumble until it became the Black Hills. Volcanic activity contributed to the rise of the Northern Hills but to the south, massive sheets of granite intruded the preexisting beds of sedimentary and metamorphic rocks, including 2 billion year old quartzite, phonolite, and, most notably, dark, bountiful rhyolite. The granitic pegmatites that thrust into their elders were rippled through with crystals— quartz, feldspar, and beryl.

According to Lakota storytelling when the world was created everything was at peace. Every creature was a contented vegetarian. At some point the bison began to think they were the strongest and decided to kill the people and eat their meat. The humans said “That’s not right we should hunt you instead, it’s only fair.” To settle the matter a great race was held. During the race, to decide who could consume whom, a track became worn down and created the boundaries of *Paha Sapa* (the Black Hills). We all know who the victors were. We won our right to eat flesh.

1.8 billion years of watery caresses reduced this jumble of angles to rocky hillsides and clastic pebbles, sand, and clay, which in turn solidified into outlying beds of sandstone, spreading itself over the Dakota formation, the primary rock formation of the area, also sandstone, but born of sand from different rocks.

*“As one group replaced another over the last several centuries, these locations [in the Black Hills] continued to be recognized as sacred locales and to operate within a system of ethno-astronomical and mythological beliefs. The falling star myth cycle clearly illustrates a belief in a dual universe, wherein star people in the sky and humans on earth occupied analogous and sometimes interchangeable roles”*

Mirror of Heaven

For the Lakota, like many traditional cultures, the line between the earth and the sky is undifferentiated or even nonexistent. Looking up at the constellations, we can still find any pattern we are open to sensing. We can see one star as dried willow or a buffalo rib. One thing can contain a duality or be tri-fold. Animism—from *Anima*, the Latin term for life—signals the existence of spirit in all objects and phenomena. By this definition the stones are still breathing. We can have fervent threesomes with the clouds and mountains. We can be penetrated by deer antlers or dissolve in newly forming rivers.

If life is defined by death, reproduction, or movement, at what point does a hill become an orgy?

Love is open to interpretation like all experiences. Trying to define it with the precise use of language can never guarantee an exact answer. As with attempts at understanding the leviathan with Cetology our conclusions will always be incomplete. The erotic life of stones remains obscure to the scientific gaze.

Much more recently after the formation of the Black Hills, just 40 million years ago, on the other side of the same land mass— a crescent of granite mountains were born. They pushed themselves up above sea level, as the land between them fell below it, creating the Columbia Basin. Many volcanoes erupted into the basin, spurring lava over and over again, flooding it with a thick layer of igneous rock— the Columbia Plateau. This flood of rock spilled the inland sea out into a river, slowly parting the mountains and dampening valleys.

Love takes the forms of agape (God), platonic (Friendship), or eros (Passion). Other times it is desire in a general sense. From *philos* we get philosophy, the love of wisdom or of knowledge as if these are necessarily equivalent. *Philia* from the greek denotes friendship. In this sense the use of words like pedophilia, or “friend of boys” could seem euphemistic. We know what one means by the cliché “I love the sunset,” but what if they intended to say “I am unbearably aroused by the Sun’s rays,” or “the ocean gets me so wet?”

38 million years later, the Ice Age brought massive glaciers, ranging in height from 5,000–10,000 feet past the Okanogan Valley. This dam of ice trapped the river channels, causing more water to flood into the Columbia Basin. With the original channel buried in ice, the Grand Coulee began to form. How this happened and the length of time it took remains a mystery. Some geologists believe a succession of floods carved it out, while others claim the Columbia River itself slowly eroded it away from the mountains in its search for a new path. It is impossible to know for certain.

The old Cascade mountains rose up from the earth, but were unable to stop the river’s search—a deep ravine, the Columbia River gorge, was formed. Whereas ice can halt the flow of water, rocks are destined to acquiesce to it.

In Colville Indian mythology, Coyote wanted to help his friend Kingfisher who wasn’t having much luck catching salmon. Four sisters had set up a trap preventing any big fish from swimming up the river. He changed into a small wooden bowl and floated on the water until he got caught

in their trap. The sisters lifted the bowl from the river and used it to hold leftover fish. The next morning the bowl was found empty. At this point, one of the sisters became angry and threw a stone at the wooden vessel. On impact it turned into a baby boy. The sisters decided to keep the child because he would grow up and be helpful to them. When the sisters left to find berries the coyote changed into a man and started digging up the dam they had created to catch fish. Ever since then there have been new rocks and rapids in the Columbia River basin. Coyote had changed its course forever.

Arousal by thunderstorms is a little researched paraphilia. *Ichthyophilia* is the sexual attraction to fish. When bears masturbate they often fantasize about inflexible park rangers or lust after zookeepers in captivity, much like human prisoners imagine guards in leg irons, or how the bourgeoisie play with the idea of being possessed by sinewy lumpen beasts. Ecology is a love for living systems. But, when we speak of pleasure, suffering is never far from our lips. Love almost always conceals a will to sacrifice. Eco-extremists like *Reaccion Salvaje* communicate this when they seem to say “Fuck the World!”

Near the end of the Ice Age, volcanic cones formed the high Cascades. As the ice dams of the glaciers began to thaw and break apart, lakes as far as Montana broke free and washed over the mountains and the Columbia Basin, carrying with them large boulders and flooding the area in 400 feet of water, icebergs, and sediment. After the ice finally, fully melted and the floods ebbed, the river was able to return to its former bed, but the channeled scab lands and large coulees remain, torn through by cataclysm.

It is sometimes said that nihilists are masturbators. Instead of getting on with the hard work of existing the unbeliever revels in an empty space that absolutely nothing can fill. Nietzsche’s *die liebe zum leben* (the love for life) is offered as free of contradiction, but where is the instrument of love located if not the mind, the flesh, or the will? Physicist Erwin Schrodinger defined life as that which “delays the decay into thermodynamical equilibrium (death).” One popular definition of biological life is that it’s a sexually transmitted and inevitably terminal disease. Organic life is resistance to disorder (to order?) in the final instance.

The tribal trickster in native storytelling also affirms life, but almost always while upsetting the peculiarity of communal stillness. A story from Gros Ventre mythology describes how *Nixant* came upon an Elk-skull while he was going along (like he always does). He noticed some white mice dancing inside. In some versions told to anthropologists he wanted to stick his head inside so he could dance with them, in many others he inserted something else and it got stuck. He may be used to changing into water-monsters to grab young girls but sometimes he gets caught. Spider acts like he does because death is unknowable to him, this is not always the case for us but we can still learn something about avoiding the embarrassment of getting snared. The desire to have others take our inclinations as universal is a wish to make frozen the constant movement in this moment preceding the void of non-life, to try to hush a screaming world into silence. If the political pessimist finds love privately in a clenched fist, social anarchists live to jerk-off on other people in the streets. The indigenous eroticism of trickster sexuality leads us to question who and what we should be defiling. Did the Cascades and the Columbia River consent to be bound and ravaged by glaciers? Are they proud to have survived their traumatic past or the beauty born from it?

The Ho-chunk trickster speaks about his sexual organ in the third person. His parts are more like individuated personas than the components of some discrete self reflective creature. Trickster is enacting a new game for humans to play that we could tentatively call hierarchy. In the space of

these stories the tribe is becoming a body-like form that circles towards a hardening unity. The tricky-one *Wakjunkagas* sense-of-self is constantly fractured and his body is in metaphysical conflicts with itself. Always driven to feed his insatiable lust he wears a stone around his neck in order to get hard. When his penis is eventually severed the plants arrowleaf, *tokewe- hira, pqxe*, pond lily, and dog's tooth grow from his phallic root. Egoists sometimes gesture towards a self devouring urge to an expanding union that the Ho-Chunk "being of reversals" might recognize. To be clear we can become clowns in this world but never incarnate the trickster's irreverent flesh.

*Individualidades tendiendo a lo Salvaje* recently left an envelope containing an explosive device that was found by a young girl in Mexico City. Their communique expressed a desire for ever growing attacks on the social fabric in all directions. "May explosive love letters proliferate!" The love of the unhuman is a welcomed novelty in anarchist spaces but if we really want to be done with humanism, why not consider setting the ancestral forests aflame and blowing up the sacred mountains as well?

Although we inhabit the same streams and valleys, the different origin stories we draw from have a defining influence on how we perceive our world and what we are drawn towards. As coyote we are always starting anew. When we see the trickster he is always in midstep. The clown is a constant state of predicament. Omaha rabbit anally impregnated Iktinike when they became *winktes* (two-spirits) for a day. Stones transform one another. Cliffs turn to sediment. As we create our star maps we play them out and become part of them. We are always redrawing them, because the constellations are constantly shifting. What tales have we heard and which will we retell?

When we discover an unknown star we might find a path to the former world.

In Moby Dick, the savage Queequeg is from a place that is not on any map, because "true places never are." Melville's native wants to experience more from civilized society than the taxonomy of captive whales. The boundaries and borders of the New World and the Old World are drawn only by our navigational markings. They do not exist on any chart. Humans are animals. Cetacea can still be fish. Stones can fuck. When we cross oceans we can be sailors, boats, whales, or currents. In our search will we become salmon who shatter themselves on concrete dams, or warriors who throw ourselves from the Nochixtlan Rock to crash onto the conquistadors below, or something else entirely?

Suggested reading:

*Cataclysms on the Columbia*. John Eliot Allen and Marjorie Burns with Sam C. Sargent

*Living Sideways: Tricksters in American Indian Oral Traditions*. Franchot Ballinger

*Mirror of Heaven: Cross-Cultural Transference of the Sacred Geography of the Black Hills*. Linea Sundstrom

*Transmotion*. Gerald Vizenor



# The Way of the Violent Stars *by Ramon Elani*

*"I hate the word peace, as I hate hell."*

-William Shakespeare

*"I shall try to make plain the bloodiness of killing. Too often this has been slurred over by those who defend hawks. Flesh-eating man is in no way superior. It is so easy to love the dead. The word 'predator' is baggy with misuse. All birds eat living flesh at some time in their lives. Consider the cold-eyed thrush, that springy carnivore of lawns, worm stabber, basher to death of snails. We should not sentimentalise his song, and forget the killing that sustains it."*

~J.A. Baker

As green anarchists and anarcho-primitivists, we have utterly idealized indigenous or so-called primitive people. In doing so we have failed to understand precisely the reason we should follow their path. Most discourse around primitive life is drawn from western anthropology, though from the conclusions most anarcho-primitivists and green anarchists have drawn, it is clear that very few of them have actually bothered to read the texts they are referring to. Even given the Eurocentric bias of most anthropologists, those texts paint a much richer, more complex, and more conflicted view of primitive life than one finds in the vast majority of anti-civilization writing and discussion.

The most egregious assumption is that primitive life is supposed to be happy and easy. This is, of course, drawn from notions of primitive abundance and leisure. The fact, however, that individuals in primitive communities only worked for a very small amount of time per day does not mean that there were not other difficulties and hardships to be faced. Anarcho-primitivist and green anarchist writers suggest that modern humanity's neurosis and pathology is entirely a product of the alienating forces of techno-industrial society. Indigenous communities now and in the past had their own ways of understanding and addressing anxiety, depression, and loneliness. Of course, it is likely that they experienced these conditions differently than we do or to a lesser degree but clearly they still exist regardless. To avoid essentializing primitive or indigenous lifeways, we must understand that they experienced as broad a range of emotional states as we do. In other words, the old assessment that ancient hunter gatherers were happier than we are is irrelevant and likely untrue. It is important here to acknowledge the distinction between the terms anarcho-primitivism and green anarchy. While green anarchy presents a wide range of conceptual apparatus for confronting techno-industrial society, Anarcho-primitivism dogmatically insists on a prescriptive vision of non-civilized life. For anarcho-primitivists, the only communities that count are ones in which no power structures or symbolic culture exist at all. In this vision, since there is no oppression of any kind or rupture with the non-human world, there are no social or existential problems. It is, of course, unlikely that such a community has ever existed.

Primitive life certainly involved hardship and suffering. Contrary to much received wisdom, violence was universal among primitive communities and remains so in those that persist to this day. Primitive life was also not a leftist utopia of perfect egalitarianism. Of course, the fact that pain, suffering, trauma, and tragedy was always present does not mean that joy, happiness, and pleasure were not also always present. Perhaps it is so, as I believe, that the very presence of ubiquitous violence and struggle intensified the feelings of happiness, contentment, and satisfaction that ancient people experienced. But in the end, this is neither here nor there. The point is that primitive life is superior to our own because its impact on the biosphere was minimal and people lived in close contact with the non-human world; that is the only reason and that is sufficient.

People who do not know what it means to fight cannot understand violence. They fear it because they have never experienced it. Aside from posturing and play acting, most anarchists and activists have never experienced violence. This is not to say, of course, that many of them have not been brutalized by the police, etc. Fighting with an enemy is not the same thing as being ruthlessly beaten by an anonymous employee whom you cannot strike back against, or harassing racists and idiots in the streets.

The violence of the mob, of the masses, is a different beast entirely. It is more akin to being crushed by a blind stampede of herd animals than anything else. Traditional people understood the need for ritual combat, for battle enacted under the strictest and most sacred terms: to make a square within staves of hazel, to tie your strap to a spear plunged into the dirt.

Among the ancient people of Scandinavia the power of the state was weak and in the absence of a police or military to enforce the law, individuals resorted to ritual combat to resolve conflicts without disrupting the community as a whole. This practice, known as *holmgang*, involved the voluntary participation of both combatants and stipulated that the source of the conflict must end with the conclusion of the duel. In other words, the rules of *holmgang* were designed to ensure that other family members did not get caught up in the feud.

Moreover, *holmgang* did not require one of the two combatants to die. In many cases the drawing of first blood was considered sufficient to determine a victor. Unsurprisingly, the practice of *holmgang* was outlawed in the early 11<sup>th</sup> century as Christian law stamped out pagan ways of life and hegemonic power grew in the region.

Even in such classic works of anthropology as Stanley Diamond's *In Search of the Primitive*, we find a picture of traditional life that fully embraces violence. Diamond writes, "the point is that the wars and rituals of primitive society (and the former usually had the style of the latter), are quantitatively and qualitatively distinct from the mechanized wars of civilization." This is to say, the type of violence, the experience of the violence, makes an enormous difference. As critics of civilization and techno-industrial society we have inadequately accounted for this. Violence and war are not to be feared or condemned. It is the nature of the violence that must be interrogated and reconsidered.

The custom of counting coup, practiced by the tribes of the American Plains, is an important historical example to cite here. To count coup means to demonstrate one's bravery and courage by achieving a number of increasingly difficult feats on the battlefield. As George Bird Grinnell observed among the Cheyenne and Crow, "the bravest act that could be performed was to count coup on—to touch or strike—a living unhurt man and to leave him alive" Joe Medicine Crow, the last war chief of the Crow Nation, achieved this feat a number of times as a soldier during World War II. Among his many achievements include disarming and fighting an enemy officer in hand-to-hand combat, as well as stealing 50 horses from a German battalion and riding off while

singing Crow war songs. According to his obituary, Medicine Crow felt war to be “the finest sport in the world.”

As ancient people understood well through their war cults and warrior societies, there is tremendous wisdom and meaning to be gained through violence. In the first case you learn that pain is just another sensation in the body, it does not need to be feared. In the second case, to stand proudly against another, an equal, is to test yourself in a way that we have little ability to replicate. It is a form of physical relationship with another that is unique. You learn that you are strong, that you are skilled. You also learn that there is strength in the other. That sometimes your strength and your skill are insufficient and you strive to make yourself stronger. You learn about the world, about the nature of life, grounded in the body. Modern humanity is utterly separated from this. To return to Diamond: “war is a kind of play. No matter what the occasion for hostility, it is particularized, personalized, ritualized. Conversely, civilization represses hostility in the particular, fails to use or structure it, even denies it.”

The violence that we experience, as modern, civilized humans, that we perceive around us in countless ways, brings nothing but trauma. It is utterly, radically distinct from the violence of the primitive societies. It is depersonalized, sterile, and more destructive on a previously unimaginable scale of magnitude. In techno-industrial society we experience the violence of the police, the violence of men against women, the desperate random violence of humans driven to madness and hopelessness, violence against minorities, violence against the poor, and most importantly, no matter where we are, all around us, every single hour of every day we experience unspeakable degrees of violence against the earth.

Moreover, the soldier is not the warrior. The warrior longs for meaning, for connection with the cosmos and himself. The soldier is an automated, anonymous employee. It searches for nothing. It kills because it has been programmed to kill. It has no joy, no sorrow, no thought of what it does. When such emotions do occur they are shoved deep into hidden places in the soul and when they break out they cause insanity and horror. The violence of the soldier is the violence of the machine. It is a bloodless kind of violence, a violence that erodes the soul, no matter what it does to the body. Those pitiful beings that serve as the instruments of the brutality of the machine understand nothing, they are numb and insensate. They are appendages of the thing that annihilates. They have never felt the challenge of facing a foe who is trained and prepared for them, to be joined in valor. They execute. They bomb. They murder. Existentially, they count for nothing. Their lives are nothing.

Peace is understood as little as battle. Peace is not synonymous with joy, nor with righteousness, nor with abundance. Peace has only ever been achieved through history’s greatest atrocities. Peace has only ever meant power to the victor and misery and degradation to the vanquished. We, in the heart of technoindustrial society, are experiencing what peace means. A life devoid of joy. A sterile life. A non-life. And worse still, it is a life maintained perpetually by the slaughter of those on the fringes of our world. As the world-machine continues to expand outward, more and more will be pacified and brought within our life of shopping malls, endless highways, obesity, sickness, despair. And peace will reign. Peace, peace, peace.

What do we long for? A life of joy and passion. A life that is alive, throbbing with blood. A world that pulses with vitality. Do we want the icy porcelain bodies of mechanized gods? Or do we want living animal bodies that break and heal and decay and die? The latter is the body that is shaped by violence, by suffering, by hardship. Just as it is shaped by joy, pleasure, and robust health. Ancient people did not live a life without pain. They suffered acutely and they

experienced joy acutely. We experience neither truly. What would you choose? Who would not trade this world of atomic bombs, environmental annihilation, and mechanized dehumanization for a world of primal war?

But let us be clear: the world we have is the world that exists. And wishing will not make it otherwise. Moreover, the skill, courage, and strength of the warrior will never defeat the impersonal mechanized destroyer.

In our greatest manifestations and noblest moments, we are beasts. The myth of human exceptionalism has poisoned us to the core. There is nothing wrong with being animals, in fact it is a far greater thing than the fantasies that humans tell themselves about their supposed superiority. Anything good that has come from human action or thought has come from our animal nature. The evil and vileness we do, contrary to received wisdom, comes the part of us that no other animal shares. To understand this means to understand that the world of beasts involves its own kind of brutality. When lions slaughter hyena babies, it is not because they are hungry. We dislike this because of our human moralizing. We easily perceive that “nature, red in tooth and claw” is not the whole story. But it is an inescapable part of the story.

The only way for humanity to make itself immune to violence is to allow the creation of a vast authoritarian system that protects individuals from personal violence through the endless impersonal violence of the state. If you can't protect yourself, you will rely on someone else to protect you, whether you realize it or not, regardless of the cost. Humanity is capable of radically limiting pain and suffering. We can live longer and longer. We can cure diseases. We can create enlightened societies with relatively low rates of violence. All of these things come at the cost of the earth, the things of the earth, and our connection to the earth.

Posing a vision of humanity without hardship or suffering denies the reality of the wild world and it distracts us from what is truly important: not the avoidance of pain but our unity with the myriad things and spirits of the world. The strength and the future of the human race lies only in its ability to show proper reverence to the gods of the earth.

# The Catalog of Horror by Abe Cabrera

*“Climate change specialist predicts human extinction in 10 years”*

*“Humanity driving ‘unprecedented’ marine extinction”*

*“Arctic ice melt could trigger uncontrollable climate change at global level”*

Etc.

People are numb. They get so much bad news, economically, socially, politically, and environmentally, it just rolls off of them now. Human beings used to be equipped to handle lots of personal crises: injuries, animal maulings, lack of food, tribal/band warfare... The most severe crisis that modern humans (now over seven billion of us) no longer face is the painfully high infant/child mortality rate. In some cultures, children weren't even named until they were of an age when their chances of survival were favorable. Our hardware is equipped for that sort of tragedy: it hurts but we can pull through it. But the death of a planet, of entire species, regions of the Earth, and potentially billions of people? That's preternatural, that's the Kantian sublime. That's above our pay grade, for the wages of humanity is ultimately personal death.

To Jesus, that problematic primitivist of first century Palestine, is attributed the saying, “no prophet is accepted in his own country.” The prophets of old, like the contemporary prophets, often had only bad news. And not just bad news: bad news that came down to an ultimatum: change or else. The prophets of the Hebrew Bible (Isaiah, Elijah, Jeremiah, Hosea, etc.) warned God's people that they had to turn away from injustice and embrace the Lord's ways. or the Lord would stop fighting their battles for them and they would end up captives in a faraway land. Their cities would be leveled, and their wives would be made widows and their children orphans, and so on and so forth. Just like today, people didn't like the prophets: some were stoned to death, others were sawed in half, others faced great hardship on the run in desert places.

That great envoy of God in the Christian Bible, Jesus, also taught people to turn from their ways, and gave the same ultimatum. In this case, Jesus warned of the Romans coming and destroying God's temple, sacking Jerusalem, and casting God's people once again to the winds. The first followers of Jesus after his crucifixion thought that his second coming was just around the corner. This even had ecological implications, as Paul proclaimed in his Epistle to the Romans:

*“For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.”*

The famous last book of the Bible, The Apocalypse, shows the meek man of Nazareth returning to judge the wicked world by fire.

But the eschatological message of Jesus was quickly co-opted to make it friendly to imperial aims. Within a few centuries, it was re-tooled and weaponized to create the official ideology of the wealthy and powerful, with illustrious churches and “Jesus Christ Conquers” engraved on battle shields. The coming of the end times that Jesus proclaimed only served as a battering ram to conquer the rest of the world. If this could be done with the book and the Cross, so much the better. If that didn’t work, there was always the sword and the torch. The same attitude (minus the cross) was taken up by some upstarts from the Arabian peninsula in the seventh century who also weaponized God’s word of judgment and mercy (for those who repent) and who made conquest a sacred duty.

Fast forward through the centuries, and we will see a whole litany of names of those who railed against the worldliness of what Christianity had become: the Gnostics, the Manicheans, the Bogomils, the Albigensians, the Spiritual Franciscans, the Jansenists, the Diggers, the Puritans, the Shakers, etc. etc. In the spirit of the original prophets, these groups believed that the world was evil and doomed, and they shouted their message from the rooftops. And like the prophets, they were persecuted, because people still didn’t like hearing bad news.

This cosmic indignation passed from belief into unbelief, first notably with Thomas Malthus and his theory of population, and then, in the popular imagination, to Karl Marx and his theory of revolution. A disputed doctrine within Marxism is the immiseration of the proletariat, that is, as the productive forces under capitalism develop, the conditions of the working class must grow worse. Along with this is the theory of economic crisis, which leads inevitably to social conflict and war. Some of the most brilliant minds of their time were in and around the largest Marxist party in the world at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the German Social Democratic Party. One of its most famed prophets, Rosa Luxemburg, issued a modern variation of the ultimatum of old: “Socialism or barbarism!” Yet this party, like the nascent Christian church before it, renounced and retooled the message of crisis and killed its own prophets (including Luxemburg). In the meantime, further east, Russia would take up the banner of Marxism, fight a bloody civil war to defend it, and use an ideology based on societal collapse to create its own bloody fundamentalist regime. All of this with the benefit of modern machinery (to paraphrase Lenin, savagery plus electricity).

And we could go on: fascism in Italy, National Socialism in Germany, anarchism in Spain, all the way up to the environmental movement and the modern day Cassandras of the scientific community. The point of bringing all of this up is what I stated at the beginning of this essay: human beings are ill-equipped to deal with social and environmental crises. That is why collapse happens. And citing all of the historical examples shows that the problem, along with the understanding of the problem, is not new. Humans seem to need some sort of mediating narrative or myth through which to view this problem: God, sin, judgment, science, human nature. just to name a few. These narratives allow them to grasp the problem, but through a glass, darkly. They smash problems down to a human size so that they can digest them, and even “do something” about them, but in the process they also distort them. At best, they are well-drawn maps for an unruly and unexplored territory.

The fundamental misunderstanding here is epistemological. Here I must spell it out clearly lest people not get the point:

Understanding gives the illusion of control.

The fundamental doctrine of the modern mind is that if one has all of the information there is to know about something, one can have complete control over it. And, conversely, if one acts with

understanding, the right outcome always occurs. All knowledge that doesn't give control, that doesn't show how to utilize one's means to obtain the best outcome, is not knowledge worthy of the name.

The categorical imperative is simple in this case: give people the information, all the information, and they will act on it. This is what birthed the Green Movement, anarchist or not. Show the people how much the environment is hurting, how much civilization hurts people, how awful civilized life is, and they will wake up and oppose it. Ideologues cite trends such as increased recycling, emissions regulations, electric cars, and the like, as examples that this approach works. Just a few more campaigns to enlighten and inform, and maybe, just maybe, we'll save the Earth and destroy civilization. Just one more issue of the Catalog of Horrors will finally get people to rise up, never mind that this tactic seems to date from the dawn of civilization itself.

I don't completely blame the average person for going about their day while the world falls deeper and deeper into environmental crisis. But I don't let them off the hook either. The leftist wants to have things both ways: he or she wants to place all power in "the People," yet blame all ills on a tiny minority that the People could easily defeat. Which one is it then? Could it be that people aren't the knowledge machines that modern activism expects them to be, that they just want to get through the day and not be bothered with questions above their paygrade? Could it be that not everyone can be bitten with the bug of concern for the Future, that such a preoccupation is by no means universal? Could it be that even those who are driven to make a better Future for their children have only a dim and partial conception of what that could possibly look like?

I do not fault those with the prophetic impulse, that animal hide-wearing feral thirst for justice that roams around the edges of society. I share this impulse, but I have long ceased to want to preach to people to repent and turn from their evil ways. Even if the prophet's voice crying out in the wilderness is only crying to itself, let the voice cry anyway. Let the prophets rise up, even if only for vengeance, as it is written:

*"Take the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape. And they took them: and Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon, and slew them there."*

# Revolutionary Dissonance: Why Eco-Extremism Matters for Those Who Most Hate It by Bellamy Fitzpatrick

*“[...] we no longer take the position of being ‘defenders’ of wild nature, nor that of ‘anticivilization,’ ‘primitivists,’ nor any of the other terms that you have heard applied to us. We have positioned ourselves as the enemy of the human being [...]”*

~29<sup>th</sup> Communique of Individualists Tending Toward the Wild

*“Like any other deluded, sociopathic tyrant, these individuals have declared themselves above reproach, critique, reason, or accountability. They have appointed themselves judge, jury, and executioner [...] As absolutist authoritarians, [...] they think and act like the State.”*

~Scott Campbell, “There’s Nothing Anarchist About Eco-Fascism”

One’s take on Eco-Extremism—the militant anti-social and anti-technological tendency embodied by such groups as ITS (usually rendered in English as “Individualists Tending toward the Wild”) and the now-dissolved RS (“Wild Reaction”)—has become something of a litmus test in the North American radical milieu. It is a sad symptom of adherence to the present technological infrastructure that far too much theoretical positioning—and posturing—takes the form of ingesting a few media bits on people we have never met who are doing things in places we have never been and subsequently solemnly assigning them our self-important thumbs-up or -down for all to see.

Our discourse and thinking can be much more subtle than this dualistic trumpeting: why not ask, *What can we learn from this? How does its presence reflect on us?*, regardless of whether one has affinity or projectual resonance with it?

## “Choosing Sides”: To Condemn the Wrongdoer and the Non-Condemner Alike

The Eco-Extremists’ (EEs’) approach of “indiscriminate attack”—that is, the commitment of violent actions that seriously risk harming not only their intended target(s) but also any passersby—has made the EEs infamous and brought them widespread condemnation. Undoubtedly amplifying their odiousness for their critics is the the frequently braggadocio-filled and mocking rhetoric of their communiques, which have more than once highlighted their contempt for humans at large, who are in their eyes all to some degree complicit with the destruction of what they term



“Wild Nature”.<sup>1</sup> Increasingly since their inception, the EEs have moved away from their beginnings as a sort of fringe splinter of anti-civilization anarchism still interested in a project of liberation, and toward a theological/spiritual war on humanity that they identify as an extension of historical indigenous Mesoamerican struggle against colonization. Beginning in 2012 and especially in the past few years, they have espoused a jeering hostility to anarchists and nearly any anarchist ideas, including notions of liberation and others they themselves formerly held.<sup>2</sup>

At the time of writing this piece, the most recent actions of some EEs have reached their misanthropic zenith: the killing of a hiking couple, simply because their presence in “semi-virgin nature” was an offense, and the killing of an intoxicated woman on the street because she was, in their words, “Only another mass of flesh more, only another accursed human who deserved to die.” ITS, the sect of EE claiming responsibility for the killings, has indicated in word and deed a decisive turn toward being the self-styled enemies of all human beings, whom they see as irredeemable and compare to a virus infecting the Earth, worthless to anything but itself and fit only for destruction.<sup>3</sup>

Correspondingly, the condemnations of EE by prominent voices in the North American anarchist milieu have upticked, wandering into confusion and incoherence in some cases highlighted here.

That self-described “digital community center” of “revolutionary thought and action”<sup>4</sup> known as *It’s Going Down* recently ran an article labeling EE as “Eco-Fascism” in the title and, later, as un-adjectivalized fascism in the last sentence of the article. Besides these two mentions, nowhere else in the article is there any discussion of *fascism*, any definition of it, or any explanation whatsoever of how it relates to EE.<sup>5</sup> If the reader is troubled by what seems to be snarl words in the place of analysis on IGD’s part, they are assured that it is best not to think about it too hard, as at the piece’s climax it is piously declared, “It is the peak of colonial, racist arrogance that those from the safety of their U.S. or European homes feel comfortable debating the finer points of an ideology that amounts to brown people killing other brown people.”—a bizarre prescription that would morally preclude one from analyzing, among other things, a huge swathe of the world’s nation-states and their discontents. Through ignorance and humility comes virtue, apparently—and revolution works its way in there somehow, I imagine, if we just refuse thought sufficiently. Correspondingly, they condemn Little Black Cart, among others, for the publication of *Atassa*, a journal discussing EE. One is left to assume that IGD themselves are exempted from their anathema of “colonial, racist arrogance” when they repeatedly and excitedly discuss the happenings in Rojava because their coverage does not quite amount to “debating the finer points” of the matter.

In a similar vein, *Anarchy Radio* has featured EE as a target of John Zerzan’s habit of near-weekly denunciations of enemies, and he fulminated in a recent episode that involvement in the publication of *Atassa* was “a new low” for this author and his podcasting cohort.<sup>6</sup> And even before

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<sup>1</sup> One among many examples of this tone and content is in the piece “Our response is like an earthquake: It comes sooner or later”, available at [anarchistnews.org](http://anarchistnews.org).

<sup>2</sup> “‘Old ITS’ and ‘New ITS’”, *Maldicion Eco-Extremista* (weblog at [maldicionecoextremista.altervista.org](http://maldicionecoextremista.altervista.org)), May 8<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> “29<sup>th</sup> Communique of Individualists Tending Toward the Wild”, *Maldicion Eco-Extremista*, May 7<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> “About”, *It’s Going Down*, <<https://itsgoing-down.org/about/>>

<sup>5</sup> Through such epithetic usage, “fascism” has of course been almost entirely bleached of meaning; yet one would think its meaning is not yet so exhausted that it would still, at minimum, require statism, which ITS, whatever their other faults, are obviously not embodying in either thought or action.

<sup>6</sup> Zerzan, John. *Anarchy Radio*, 02/14/17.

the recent killings, the self-described editor-in-chief of *Black And Green Review* publicly wished death on the EEs.<sup>7</sup> Both have followed suit in inexplicably employing the “fascist” epithet, with similar incoherence. In accordance with the slogan of *It’s Going Down*, the atmosphere is clearly one of “Choosing Sides”, wherein anything short of overt moral condemnation is seen as insidious complicity. *Jaccuse...!*

## Neither Apoplexy Nor Cheerleading: Another Take on Eco-Extremism

What is erased completely as a possibility by this frenetic binary approach is to simply try to understand the tendency, contextualize what is occurring, and reflect on how EE is the offspring of extant radical tendencies—including, perhaps uncomfortably, one’s own.

In seemingly the most unpopular position of all, I have no moral opposition to political violence; instead, I am deeply dubious about its viability given the historical record. Revolutions have always been mere reconstitutions of civilizations, and they have failed to deliver in even the most promising moments: in Haiti (then the colony of Saint-Domingue) 1791, when huge numbers of African chattel slaves rose up as part of a patchwork revolutionary army that, incredibly, fought off the armies of England, France, and Spain, a victorious new Haitian regime immediately became a new elite with a new State and a new slavery<sup>8</sup>; in 19<sup>th</sup>-century England, when the land and the very fabric of experience were being mutilated for the first time by industrialization, no widespread uprising manifested, despite rumblings of one.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, assassinations can fell particular foes at particular moments; but they fail to damage, and may in some cases even strengthen, the reified social roles occupied by their targets, many of whom are easily replaced. Political violence tends toward the continuation of politics-as-usual by other means.

The EEs, in spite of their extreme actions, appear to essentially agree with my above analysis: they have dismissed revolution in the strongest terms, and, despite their efforts at the assassinations of specialists, they have repeatedly insisted on their disbelief in the effectiveness of their own actions in creating significant change in the world. Their actions thus constitute an odd, self-conscious performative contradiction: *it is useless to attack, yet we see no option but to attack—we see no option but the embrace of violent futility.*

Granted, an urge to destroy is eminently understandable when one looks unflinchingly at our shared world. For many, much of the time, life seems a wasteland. Beautiful, inimitable lifeforms are disappearing at a rate one thousand times faster than average, each one gone forever.<sup>10</sup> From an ecological, anti-humanist perspective, the truest *progress* of civilizations has been their increased pace of denuding the biosphere and their reduction of the human being from a creature that interfaces with the nonhuman world as kin to one increasingly dependent on and familiar only with technological prostheses. And, most painfully ironic of all, and which the EEs have

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<sup>7</sup> “IGDCAST: Civilization, Climate Change, Resistance, Hope”, *It’s Going Down*, 01/16/17.

<sup>8</sup> Davis, David Brion. *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Emancipation*. Vintage Books, Random House LLC. New York, New York: 2015.

<sup>9</sup> Sale, Kirkpatrick. *Rebels Against the Future: The Luddites and Their War on the Industrial Revolution: Lessons for the Computer Age*. Addison-Wesley Publishing. Reading, MA: 1995.

<sup>10</sup> Jurriaan M. De Vos, Lucas N. Joppa, John L. Gittleman, Patrick R. Stephens, Stuart L. Pimm. “Estimating the Normal Background Rate of Species Extinction.” 26 August 2014. *Conservation Biology*, Volume 29, Issue 2, April Pages 452–462.

never tired of pointing out, this crisis is a product of *mass submission*. In a communique, the EEs quote approvingly the words of anarchist prisoner Kevin Garrido:

“[...in] *humanity I find the most civilized target (myself included). These are the ones clinging to progress and who devote themselves to destroying the untamed, all for the filthy and dis- gusting plastic called money.*”<sup>11</sup>

When I first read the above passage, I was immediately reminded of similar sentiments from early 20<sup>th</sup>-century individualist anarchists like Renzo Novatore and Bruno Filippi, who made obvious their contempt for what they saw as a voluntarily submissive proletariat. For both the individualists and the EEs, there is the fiercest possible refusal to victimize people and to instead insist on seeing them as complicit in our crisis, whether as Ar- endt’s Eichmanns, bureaucrats and technicians who are routinely rewarded for their small roles in unleashing the next horror on the world, or simply as slaves too tired, fragmented, and unimaginative to do anything but keep their heads down and shuffle along. The major difference between the two is that for Novatore, Filippi, and others, contempt for the majority of humans and fantastically violent actions were adjuncts or ingredients to a project of individual and small-group liberation, not an end in themselves. Moreover, the individualists had a fierce respect and love for those who refused submission and chose freedom. But for the EEs, such hatred of most human behavior, and its explosive venting, becomes praxis unto itself, seemingly because they see no other options and refuse the possibility or desirability of liberation.

Indeed, the thoroughgoing anticivilization analysis<sup>12</sup> can very easily become paralytic. What does one *do* about the enormous and fundamental causes of our crisis—mass dispossession, agriculture as subsistence, and reification—and what does one furthermore do about the glaring fact that the vast majority of civilization’s slaves are and always have been leagues away from sharing one’s anticivilization perspective? In holding an anti-civilization critique, there can be an overwhelming feeling of facing an invincible, immortal, and abstract enemy; and thus it is that so many answer *What is to be done?* by lapsing into a passive stance of hoping for deliverance by catastrophe, or even into abject defeatism. Living day after day in a bleak slavery while being acutely aware of it entails an unbearable tension, and it is eminently understandable, however mistaken, that one might break that tension by declaring war on the world at large.

## **Ajajema’s Holy Warriors: Eco-Extremism as Revolutionary Theology**

In doing so now at the highest level—by murdering seemingly any human and declaring them culpable and deserving of such a death—the EEs have effectively completed their aforementioned six-year passage from a praxis of liberation to one thoroughly partaking of *theology*, as has even been observed in a very different valence by one of the editors of *Atassa*.<sup>13</sup> Their theology manifests in at least two themes that have been repeated across a diversity of EE communiqués: that

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<sup>11</sup> “I hope that an infinite number of bombs explode against the citizenry”, *Atassa: Readings in Eco-Extremism* (from the weblog *atassa.wordpress.com*). 12/03/16.

<sup>12</sup> Although at least some EEs have recently distanced themselves from the label “anti-civilization” in favor of out-and-out misanthropy, the tendency evidently influenced them and brought them in part to where they are now.

<sup>13</sup> “Of angels and cyborgs”, *Wandering Cannibals: An Eco-Extremist View from the U.S. Southeast* (from the weblog *wanderingcannibals.wordpress.com*). 04/14/2017.

they do not aim to convince or justify themselves to anyone, and that they have no hope of significantly changing the world through their actions.

While the large volume of lengthy communiques makes the EEs' claim of being *entirely* uninterested in justifying themselves or convincing anyone rather difficult to swallow (as I will expand upon in a moment), the EEs can surely not be accused of attempting to politicize the everyperson with passages like this one: "*Let it be known, we have invoked the accursed spirit of the Kawesqar, Aja- jema [...] It awoke furious and full of hate for what the modern human has done to the Earth [...] It has whispered in our ear that humans deserve death for offending the wild with every breath. We respond that we feel the same way. [...] The hyper-civilized human race is beyond help, it cannot be saved. Joy bursts our hearts each time wild nature manifests itself against civilization with ferocious natural disasters [...] And if tomorrow we are the ones who are destroyed because of the wild, know that we will succumb with great satisfaction.*"<sup>14</sup>

Despite their many references to egoist and nihilist strands of anarchism, including quite recent ones concurrent with the above, this is plainly a holy war, *not* a deconstruction of civilization through individual liberation. I see no room for a praxis of individual or small, intimate group liberation in conjunction with such an ascetic, semi-suicidal religious imperative, something that the EEs in other places acknowledge. Instead, there is a divinized moral demand for a self-sacrificial struggle. At best, the individual might receive the satisfaction of personal vengeance against civilization, itself an abstract moral indictment of the world at large.

Moreover, it is only through misanthropic distortion—misanthropy itself being a convoluted form of anthropocentrism, in which reified Humanity trades the role of the lone hero for that of the singular villain—that one can imagine a deity of Nature angrily calling for the deaths of all humans. Humans are part of the world, part of the *bios*, one group of organisms among many whose uniqueness possibly lies more in its unusual anxiety with itself than in anything else. Insofar as one accepts the paleontological consensus, humans are not the first organisms to help bring about a mass extinction; we may reasonably speculate that they will not be the last, either. The first and fourth mass extinctions were caused in part, respectively, by cyanobacteria, the first photosynthetic organisms, and methane-producing bacteria. In tragicomic irony, the third mass extinction is believed to have been caused in large part by climate change and eutrophication caused by the first trees, those indispensable creatures of ecological iconography.

If Nature were a coherent, conscious entity, it would not be a Gaia, a loving mother who creates all of her children in a careful balance and loves all of them; nor would it be an Ajajema, a punishing father who hates particular children for upsetting that order. Instead, it would be Medea, who creates children and later decides to kill them on a whim<sup>15</sup>; better yet, it would be a Blind Idiot God, who is enormously powerful yet not even aware of itself or what it is doing.<sup>16</sup>

Wreaking havoc on the biosphere is something that oddball organisms do periodically. Observing this fact is not to excuse it or say that it is not something worth resisting—indeed, I absolutely believe it *is* worth resisting—but it is an act of profound sanity and necessary critique to recognize that humans are incontrovertibly a part of the biosphere no matter what we do and to thus escape from these ideological moral absolutes upon which every crackpot revolution-

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<sup>14</sup> "30<sup>th</sup> Communique of Individualists Tending Toward the Wild", *Maldicion Eco-Extremista* (from the weblog <http://maldicionecoextremista.altervista.org>). 05/18/2017.

<sup>15</sup> See the Medea Hypothesis of paleontologist Peter Ward.

<sup>16</sup> Yudkowsky, Eliezer. "An Alien God", *Less Wrong* (from the weblog [lesswrong.com](http://lesswrong.com)). 02/11/07.

ary scheme depends. As I have written at much greater length and depth elsewhere<sup>17</sup>, the belief in Absolutes is the necessary basis of slave ideologies and has no place in any thoroughgoing project of liberation.

As for their claims of no hope, it seems plainly to follow from an absurd mission of killing all humans that one is bound to fail (after all, like every pest, there are too damn many and the fuckers breed far too quickly!). Moreover, the deliberate killing of seemingly almost completely random persons, whom the EEs imply they know next to nothing about, and who in all likelihood have *less* complicity than many in our crisis, is an action so obviously far removed from even their erstwhile goals that one is left to wonder whether the EEs were more interested in some spiritual act of self-Othering via purposeless murder than anything else.

What, therefore, do the EEs, with their self-serious divine mission, really *want* with their aforementioned performative contradiction of insisting both upon the necessity of action and the uselessness of action? They seem to achieve nothing quite so much as a more selftransparent, and a more depressed and self-loathing, form of revolutionary militancy: they live ascetically and dangerously, they perform direct actions and then publicize inflammatory communiques, they assert the necessity of action and denounce dissenters and critics as cowards and weaklings, they identify themselves as the inevitable historical product of a corrupt humanity, they declare the current human as insufficient and flawed and pursue a transformative praxis of moral purification through violence—the primary differences between them and their critics cited above are their anti-humanist individualism, their currency of enraged misanthropic despair in place of defiant utopian hope, and their self-transparency about their own theological analysis. Shorn of a revolution, they nonetheless display its trappings.

## **Revolutionary Dissonance: The Failure of Eco-Extremism’s Most Eager Critics**

If, as claimed above, it is a remarkable testament to the seduction of morally dualistic analyses that the mere publication or discussion of EE texts is taken as a championing of their position and actions, it is an even more noteworthy instance of ideological blinkering that the revolutionary—and crypto-revolutionary<sup>18</sup>—critics of EE cannot recognize their morbid reflection in their foes and cannot learn from them. For one—as has been pointed out in considerable detail in the much-maligned *Atassa*<sup>19</sup>—to be any kind of revolutionary is to be for indiscriminate violence, however convolutedly.

Only the most guileless North American insurrectionary anarchist—who selfconsciously strives to increase social tensions, who champions and joins in riots and ruptures, and who dreams of creating ungovernable zones that become communes—can believe that achieving their stated goals to any substantive and lasting degree would not necessarily entail enormous, protracted violence against not only State, paramilitary, and volunteer militia forces, but also huge swathes of the citizenry who would be, at best, ambivalent and, more likely, terrified

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<sup>17</sup> See *Corrosive Consciousness: A Critique of Anarcho-Primitivism* from Enemy Combatant Publications.

<sup>18</sup> For more on how Anarcho-Primitivism is a closeted extreme-Left (rather than anti-Left, as its adherents claim) revolutionary ideology, as well as how all revolutionary ideologies have their origins in theology, again see my *Corrosive Consciousness: A Critique of Anarcho-Primitivism* from Enemy Combatant Publications.

<sup>19</sup> “Indiscriminate Anarchists”, *Atassa: Readings in Eco-Extremism*. LBC Books. Berkeley, CA: 2016.

and opposed to such a (crypto-)revolution. In such a scenario of their dreams, precisely the same everypersons whom the EEs openly malign and now openly kill would become counter-revolutionaries that the revolutionary, insurrectionary, and/or primitivist anarchist would have to malign and either kill or subdue if they were not to falter in their imagined uprising. In this way, the EEs are more honest with themselves and their critics than the (crypto-)revolutionaries.

Feverishly, and very publicly, condemning EE allows their critics to safely blind themselves to that uncomfortable morbid reflection. It is easy and popular to slag as “sociopathic” people who have killed hikers and an intoxicated woman in the name of an unfamiliar, long-dead god. After all, what does indiscriminate violence look like when it is unvarnished by paeans to the everyperson and ensorcelling rhetoric about a post-revolutionary world? It looks quite ugly. One can thus avoid thinking too critically about one’s own carefully veneered calls for righteous, revolutionary violence, which sound almost benign and more closely resemble the tragicomic history of civilizations with which most of us are comfortably familiar.

To be unable to engage in nuanced analysis that eschews moral judgement in favor of asking what the emergence of EE means about our current crisis—existentially, strategically, and in terms of the radical milieu—**and** to unequivocally condemn those who do, is a sad comment on the critical capacity of much of the North American radical milieu. Canned dismissals reign supreme, as too many willingly surrender their critical capacities in favor of listening to, or being, competing theologians endlessly slagging one another.

# Animals Attack!

*We share the following events not as an attempt to speak for our non-human friends or the earth, but rather in recognition that we are not alone. There are those who have been against civilization from the start. We share their passion and howl alongside them in rage. We do not aim to merely celebrate these acts of violence and certainly do not wish to condemn them. When “wild animals” attack campers, they do so because their homes and being are under pressure of annihilation. These stories function as an acknowledgment of the ongoing war of the civilized versus the wild, sometimes spectacular and sometimes mundane, but always a war.*

You Fuck With Us...

An elephant cow crushed and killed a South African big-game hunter in Zimbabwe last week, falling on him after she was shot. That elephant picked up Botha with her trunk, and one of the hunters shot her, causing her to collapse on top of Botha. The elephant and Botha were both killed.

## **The New Normal**

A seven-year-old boy needed hospital treatment after he was attacked by a flock of aggressive seagulls. Thomas West was eating a doughnut when the first bird knocked it from his hand.

It clung on to the terrified lad as blood oozed from a cut to his finger—and four other gulls dived in.

Thomas’s dad, Gary, 37, said: “Thomas was holding his food normally and the gull came from nowhere out of the sky.”

## **Life Versus Drones Tigers 1, Drone 0**

A streak of Siberian tigers in China turned a drone into a chew toy following an impressive hunt and takedown of the tiny aircraft. At least 10 curious tigers chased after the drone as it buzzed around a snow-covered sanctuary in the Heilongjiang Province in northeast China, according to stunning video posted on YouTube by CCTV+. The video shows the cats stalking the machine and one quick kitty suddenly pouncing on it, sending it crashing to the ground. The tiger then chomps at the machine, as others crowd around, before backing away when it starts smoking.

## **Zebra attack! With Crowd**

The enraged equine at the Chimelong Safari Park in Guangzhou, China, bit the man, identified as Li, in the arm and dragged him along the ground into bushes to the horror of tourists. Several of his colleagues chased after the beast to save Li, who suffered only minor injuries during the two-minute ordeal. It was unclear what prompted the zebra to go haywire.

## **Too Much Handling!**

Two zoo keepers were seriously injured after they were mauled by a lion they were prepping for a photo shoot in Japan, according to a new report. The caretakers were giving a bath to the 10-year-old male lion inside a cage at Shonan Animal Production in the Japanese city of Narita on Monday morning when the beast went wild and attacked them, the *Daily Mail* said. The feline began chomping on the faces, heads, and legs of the unidentified workers. The victims suffered

“severe” wounds but were conscious after the attack, *The Mail* said. The lion tried to make a break for it, but his chains prevented him from escaping.

#### **On the Loose**

More than 20 residents of Raiganj, India, were injured while trying to subdue a wild leopard that ran loose in their town. The giant cat was eventually caught, but only after evading capture multiple times.

#### **Come and Play**

Footage shows a sea lion grabbing a little girl off a dock and pulling her underwater. The kid was feeding the male sea mammal bread crumbs near the water near Vancouver, Canada, on Saturday, but when she sat down on the edge of the jetty, the huge creature tried to make a meal out of her—grabbing her dress in its jaws and dragging her into the water.

#### **It Only Consented to a Peck**

Authorities say a Florida man leaned in to kiss a rattlesnake — but got bitten instead. News outlets report the unidentified man was bitten on the tongue Tuesday in the Bostwick area and had to be airlifted to a hospital, where he was listed in critical condition. WTLV in Jacksonville quoted a friend of the victim as saying that he had been drinking while handling the seemingly calm eastern diamondback. But when he moved toward the reptile as if to kiss it, the snake bit him.

#### **Infamously Bad Dental Care**

An infamous pair of lions gobbled up nearly three dozen people because their teeth were too rotten to tackle anything but “soft” humans, according to a study released Wednesday. The big cats were, at one time, believed to have eaten as many as 135 people over nine months in 1898 in the Tsavo region of Kenya, before they were shot dead. For years, the behavior of the Tsavo lions baffled scientists, who assumed that the animals resorted to eating humans—a meal not usually on their menu—because they were starving, according to *Science*. But the new study by *Scientific Reports* shows the African lions suffered from serious tooth decay, and ate around 35 “soft” humans because they were simply a more convenient — and less painful—way to enjoy a meal. Healthy lions normally feast on animals such as antelope, zebra, and water buffalo.



# Eco-Extremism or Extinctionism by John Jacobi

I have up until now regarded eco-extremists as those with warrior spirits—people who value the wild as I do, but who feel compelled to fight in response to the degradation of the wild. Not everyone has this urge. Just like men of civilization can choose to raise a family, join the military, or run for local government, men of savagery have many different paths available to them—and only a few options will align with their general character and disposition, still fewer are suited to their conditions. A single mother in the U.S. might engage in conservation, a bachelor in the Democratic Republic of Congo may sabotage oil rigs. Neither can be called *the* calling of the wild will. They are simply expressions of the same spirit. And some of those expressions are, understandably and *justifiably*, violent.

But eco-extremism has recently made yet another ideological turn, and with the turn I have to dispose of my former tolerance, at least toward large factions of the eco-extremist “tendency.” They have become extinctionists. They argue that they care for the wild, that humankind will invariably harm wild nature, and that humankind must therefore go extinct. This is a ridiculous philosophy, and while what follows will explain the reasons why, I am not at all thrilled I have had to write them out. Only a subset of extinctionism’s philosophical formulations, usually pessimistic and nihilistic, are philosophically interesting (see *Better to Have Never Been* by David Benatar); but the ecological formulation—that humans should go extinct for the sake of wild nature—is *never* good philosophy. And explaining why entails a lot of nitpicky philosophical talk that readers are probably not going to very much enjoy. Nevertheless, because it is a recurring problem even in the mainstream ecological movements, it is necessary, it seems, to disally myself with it.

## Eco-Extremist Strategy?

There is a catch, though. Recently it has become popular to refer to eco-extremism as though it is a single, albeit loose, ideological formulation. This is probably not the most accurate way to view all the terrorism that has gone under that name. Our understanding is improved if we forsake, for a moment, the label “ecoextremist.” At the beginning, there was only the terror cell *Individualidades Ten- diendo a lo Salvaje* (ITS). As their later incarnations explained, the early group consisted of “anarchists, liberationists, and Kaczynskists.” In other words, ITS was not a representative of a single ideology so much as a group of people with widely divergent ideologies who found a common place of overlap, a nexus for common action. As the network grew, and terror cells formed in Europe and all over South America, this loose basis for affinity—or “complicity,” as eco-extremists like to say — continued to typify the tendency. Some terror cells don’t have a shred of ecological thought at all. For example, the nihilist terrorists in Italy speak in incomprehensible poetry and prose about a great existential Void. And, as I just pointed out, there

seems to be a division now between the anti-civilization terror cells and the extinctionist terror cells. But, despite their different ideologies, the cells have found it useful to organize themselves into a network that is unified only in its absolute opposition to civilization, progress, humanism. More concretely, each cell must agree to attack cities, techno-industrial infrastructure, and anything, human or non-human, that makes production of these targets possible.

I do not think even the eco-extremists see it this way, but I tend to interpret their network as an incarnation of some of the fears terrorism analysts expressed during the heyday of the superterror controversy. In short, the superterror theory is the idea that religious and ethnic terrorism would supersede the political terrorism of the 70s, and that combined with the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, this creates a volatile situation: groups unbridled by the typical norms of morality, inconsiderate of human welfare in itself, and willing to wreak massive destruction with their newfound power. (This, the analysts noted, was quite different from political terrorism, which seemed to cause the least amount of harm for the most amount of media attention.) In many ways, this aspect of the superterror debate was and still is overemphasized.

More interesting, analysts warned of a convergence of ideologically distinct criminal organizations, networks, and cells. Jihadis and Mexican cartel gangs, for example, might work together to infiltrate U.S. borders (and they now almost certainly do). Or perhaps distinct strains of terror could join up with a common end in mind, even if they expected to go their separate ways later. This strategy is available to many forms of ethnic terrorism, the analysts note, because unlike Marxist political terrorism, which was inherently internationalist, ethnic terrorism usually sought autonomy for a small region.

If many different regions fighting for autonomy fought together, they could harm a common enemy and continue to let their allies run their regions as they see fit.

Eco-extremism has a lot in common with the religious and ethnic terrorism noted by the superterror theorists. Many strains of ecological thought have repeatedly been pegged as religious in nature (see, e.g., the work of Bron Taylor). And while ecoextremists have no concern for collectivist notions of ethnicity and nation, simply replace “ethnic group” with “individual” or “small group” and you have the same strategic opportunity: many different individuals and small groups fighting for their autonomy, and joining together to strike at a common enemy.

None of this sounds particularly ineffective to me. Indeed, it seems like one of the few strategic options available to an eco-terrorist with eco-extremist beliefs. However, it makes the terms of my critique a little different from what might be assumed. I am not critiquing everything that has been called “eco-extremism.” Rather, I am critiquing an ecological tendency within the superterror network. And this I do only because I want to make clear, in light of my earlier tolerance of the group, where my beliefs are and are not similar to theirs. There are two possible repercussions of the differences. It could be that the non-extinctionist ecological strain of eco-extremism will continue unabated; that extinctionism was only absorbed into the network just as the nihilist Europeans were. If this is the case, then my critique of extinctionism is largely irrelevant to my attitude toward the network as a whole. I do not have an opinion one way or the other in regards to the allies the non-extinctionist eco-extremists decide to make in their reactionary battle against civilization. But if the non-extinctionists have in fact converted to extinctionism, then there is no longer anything of value, to me, in the eco-extremist network. No one there would be acting in the name of values I hold in common.

## Human Values or Divine Values?

A problem with some forms of ecological extinctionism is that they incorrectly identify something other than the individual as the root of moral force. It is exactly what Judeo-Christians do: God is good and has given us a moral law, so to do good we must follow the moral law. Replace “God” with “wild nature” and you have ecological extinctionism. But this is clearly wrong. There is no absolute moral good; “good” is a vague word that individuals ascribe, not gods.

In other words, the source of human values is human beings themselves—their natures or their wills. Collective moral rules are simply ways of accounting for differences in moral opinions, for the sake of cooperation or coercion. And there is no absolute measurement of goodness; to even want that is borne out of weakness, a taught mistrust of the self, an inculcated desire for one’s own presence in the world to be validated by some higher authority. Note that there are good philosophical arguments to be had on this topic but those are for a different essay.

## Nihilist or Environmentalist?

I care for the wild. How do I act on these values in this world of many different movements, tendencies, ideologies, moralities? There is no clear answer. Paths forward will always look somewhat foggy, and I’ll only be able to figure things out by placing my bets and acting. Still, I can sharpen my image of the paths before me by simply looking at my situation.

Some ecological extinctionists argue that the situation is a futile one. No human will ever stop harming the wild. Therefore, if we care for the wild, we must make all humans go extinct. If this is true, then the eradication of *most* of humanity may very well be *logically* justified (though there are problems other than logic here). But the eradication of the individual who holds the values cannot be justified on the same grounds. The wild is valuable to the individual because his will requires wildness to flourish—just like it requires social relationships, food, etc. If he wants to extinguish his *own* life, he can only justify this desire, potentially, with the reasoning of the pessimistic and nihilistic philosophers, who claim that the will’s drive to flourish is impossible to satisfy, the cause of the deep pain of existence. But this is not environmentalism, it is pessimism or nihilism.

## All Humans are Bad or Most Humans are Bad?

How seriously, really, can we take the idea that *no* human will *ever* act appropriately as a reason to be against their existence? All philosophies are imperfect representations of our own beliefs. Applied, these beliefs invariably have grey areas, exceptions, caveats. No one ever fulfills a moral ideal. Further, there is a vast amount of evidence that at least some people care very deeply for the wild and live in wild conditions quite fine: remaining hunter/gatherers, pirates, etc. Eco-extremists themselves recognize this. Some of them write:

*...we know that there are individualists like us somewhere in this beautiful Earth, and we know that they are very few, these acts are an echo that comes to them, which perhaps inspires them to carry out attacks like us.*

If this is true, what does their do they mean when they say they are against the human? Either they have contradicted themselves, changed their mind, or expressed themselves badly. I can discern no other possibility.

## Concerned or Unconcerned with Personal Wildness?

Finally, eco-extremists sometimes say that they are against *humanism*—the belief that all humans are part of a moral community, that they should respect every member of that communities' rights and get along in peace. They are right that this ideology is the dominant one of global civilization: preached by the UN, NGOs, universities, some corporations...

The eco-extremists say that they are against this morality because it implies disdain for the natural human. In order to enforce it, you must have civilization infrastructure and you must instill humanist values into human beings through education, indoctrination, brainwashing. There is a lot of evidence for this view (see, e.g., *The Civilizing Process* by Norbert Elias or *Civilization and Its Discontents* by Sigmund Freud).

This perspective implies that ecoextremists are concerned with preserving their natures against the modifications of technological society, perhaps even restoring them to whatever extent may be possible.

But when they argue for extinctionism, they contradict all that. And if they aren't concerned with conserving and restoring their own wildness, that is, living outside the bounds of civilization to the extent possible, then what is the point of defending the wildness of non-human nature? I say the wild is valuable because I value it. Why do eco-extremists say that the wild is valuable? If they can't come up with another good justification, then their reasoning for extinctionism ("humans destroy the wild") not only won't have any force—it can't have any force.

## Final Thoughts

All that said, I agree with the general thrust of the eco-extremist argument. Vast amounts of humanity, possessing no conscious malice, are nevertheless no better than enemies of wild nature. They will not give up their comforts, will forever acquiesce to higher authorities like the state, etc. And, as we can see in regions hit with natural disasters or technical regression, nature's attitude toward these people is fierce. Those who say they support this reclaiming of the land, this transition from artificial to wilder conditions, need to be able to tolerate the ferocity, perhaps even become possessed by it themselves.

But our discourse, if it is to accurately assess our situation, needs to acknowledge the presence of a small group of people who are willing to embrace the wild. They may not have the ability to survive, and they may not survive even with the ability, but that is the meaning behind that most appropriate battle cry, is it not?—"live wild or die!"

I, like the eco-extremists, speak in public only to reach these people. I do not try to convince people who do not already feel the call of the wild to come with me into the wild. Many people are interested in the ideas, and I don't mind talking to them about it, but I am wholly aware that their way of life, and their unwillingness to abandon it, is precisely why the wild nature I care about is being so thoroughly destroyed.

All these facts can be explained without recourse to extinctionism. The eco-extremists, then, have to decide: do they do what they do because they hate the human (for whatever reason), or do they do what they do because they love the wild?

# Anti-Social Attack!

*Hurry up and bring on your electric chair I want to leave here and take a nose-dive into the next world just to see if that one is as lousy as is this ball of mud and meanness. I am sorry for only two things. These two things are I am sorry that I have mistreated some few animals in my life-time and I am sorry that I am unable to murder the whole damed human race.*

-executed killer Carl Panzram

Every day, every hour, every minute people get fed the fuck up with the world and lash out at society. Sometimes funny, often brutal, always strange. From property destruction to murder and everything in between, here are the best of the worst.

## **Facebook Live: The New Faces of Death**

Back in the days of VHS the morbid and curious could find the infamous Faces of Death series sitting on the shelves of their local video store. With the advent of the internet a whole new world opened up for the exploration of violence where early websites like Rotten.com exposed even more people to both the real and fantasy spectacle of death and suffering. Fast forward to today and there is a new revolution for the mediation of pain: brutality streamed live right to your screen. Of course this is not what it is supposed to be broadcasting and with every nightmare streamed Facebook has to remind everybody that these horrors are unfortunate, calling the events “extremely rare”. These so-called anomalies include the following:

In Chicago thousands of people watched as a schizophrenic man was mentally and physically abused, even communicating with the torturers.

Easter Sunday a 37-year-old children’s counselor in Cleveland, Ohio filmed himself killing a man at random before turning the gun on himself after an extensive manhunt.

A 21-year-old robbery suspect was streaming live when he fell seven stories to his death.

A 33-year-old musician in Memphis lit himself on fire and ran into the bar in an effort to set his ex-girlfriend on fire. The application of the fuel and his self-immolation are caught in closeup on video.

A 12-year-old filmed her own hanging.

A man in Thailand video-ed himself hanging his 11-month-old daughter.

## **Black Jesus Has Risen**

A man in Fresno, California claiming to be “black Jesus” went on a shooting spree killing 4 random white dudes. The cops using their brilliant detective work (looking at social media posts) observed “he does not like white people” and had “anti-government sentiments.”

## **The UK and Ireland’s Anti-Social Menace**

Both Ireland and the UK have always had a mean streak with their hooligan subcultures and recently a new moral panic has arisen in both respective countries with numerous town’s youths receiving warnings. In a few counties in Northern Wales, a dispersal order was put into place “from 5pm 26/5 to 5pm 29/5.” Across the pond in Ireland police are conducting “high-visibility

preventative patrols” in West Belfast in an effort to stamp out anti-social crime. The community representatives say residents are “being tortured by youths involved in drug activity, car crime, criminal damage and street crime.” Tourists are frequently robbed. Of course it is snitches in their own so-called communities that have been calling to make complaints, fearing for their safety.

#### **Arsonist Targets Cars Outside Church**

In San Bernardino, California somebody set fire to numerous cars in the parking lot of a church before running away from the scene of the crime. Police have yet to find a suspect or a motive.

#### **Neighbor Denies Children Happiness**

Video has surfaced online of a “neighborhood grouch” unplugging a bouncy castle at a one-year old’s birthday party. This is the feel good news we need in a time like this.

#### **Shooting Rampage in Mississippi Kills Eight**

After a domestic dispute a man went house to house killing people, including two boys and a deputy sheriff. He told press “I ain’t fit to live, not after what I done,” and “Somebody called the officer, people that didn’t even live at the house. That’s what they do. They intervene... They cost him his life” (referring to the Deputy). “My intentions was to have God kill me. I ran out of bullets,” he said. “Suicide by cop was my intention.”

# The World Without Forms by Rhyd Wildermuth

*I said to a friend, we see the darkness, and some go in.*

*It is the Abyss.*

*We have to find out what is there, to find out if there is meaning. And we see only the abyss. And some go mad. And some never return. And some—*

*And some, I said, come back wielding light against that darkness. Seeing nothing, we bring back fire, we light lamps, candles, torches. We hold light that isn't ours, as how else would any else see?*

Terror often greets the far-off glances on the faces of those who return from the Abyss. The lone wanderers who walked boldly into the darkness past the boundary of fire- or street-light, the mad poet, the uncouth heretic, the unshowered witch: their reckless journeys are not celebrated when they return.

Like the ones who walk away from Omelas, they did not know to where they were going, only somewhere not-here, not the streets full of opulent wealth and the joyous cries of liberation made possible by a founding horror. But unlike in Le Guin's story, the city is the world, and there is nowhere else to go except back to those same streets, their eyes no longer glinting with the shallow laughter of civilization but nevertheless lit with fire.

It is their own fire, and it is a fire others are right to fear. It is a fire that can reforge the world.

I am what some might call an Egoist. I can also be described as a Nihilist, a mystic, an esotericist, a witch, a Pagan, an Anarchist, and also a Marxist. None of these labels actually mean anything— they are only useful when attempting to speak as the locals speak, to use the prescribed language of Capitol/Capital, treating words that stay with the same fetishism which Marx ascribes to com- modity-qua/cum-currency.

It is generally easier to list what I reject (for those of you checking-off boxes on mental clipboards) than it is to begin the litany of what I embrace. Few have the time: there are stories that must be told for each thing before they can be understood, and such narration seems mere obfuscation to those for whom re- ductionism and essentialism (as endemic to the American 'left' as it is to the 'right') are unconscious requirements to get at the 'truth.'

I will tell you what I do not like. I do not like racism or racialism; I do not like gender or genderism. I do not like property or propriety, nor do I like borders and what they define. Also, Capitalism and Liberal Democracy and Empire are my least favorite things in the world, along with their shadow, fascism.

Here, though, I should remind you: "fascism" means nothing at all. It is a word invoked by people overcome with a strong urge to shore up the ruins of Empire by recourse to even more tenuous concepts with even less material basis: Tradition, Race, Gender, Morals, the Nation. Though the words are mere sounds we make with our throats or symbols printed with ink or displayed on screens, they each serve to outline vaguely (and by their vagueness gain more power) ideas which nevertheless have great power in the realm of the human social.



Max Stirner called these ideas “spooks.” Others would call these ‘constructs.’ I prefer to name them spectres or Egregores. They are also the mythic, and it’s the realm of the mythic I understand best, which is also the realm the fascists are trying to take from us.

## Spooks That Kill

Carl Jung gave a speech in 1936 in which he suggested a “Wotanic spirit” had begun to inhabit the National Socialists, as if the people had become possessed by a god:

*“Perhaps we may sum up this general phenomenon as Ergriffenheit—a state of being seized or possessed. The term postulates not only an Erg-riffener (one who is seized) but, also, an Ergreifer (one who seizes). Wotan is an Ergreifer of men, and, unless one wishes to deify Hitler—which has indeed actually happened—he is really the only explanation.”*

Jung invokes his theory of gods as pre- and un-conscious archetypal drives to defend his thesis, but like much of the rest of Jung’s work, it’s always unclear whether he believed there was not really a god there. But Jung does not quite mean what we generally think of as a god. Wotan is a “buried drive” within the Germanic people, one which essentially haunts the ‘race’ until it becomes manifest.

*“Because the behaviour of a race takes on its specific character from its underlying images, we can speak of an archetype ‘Wotan.’ As an autonomous psychic factor, Wotan produces effects in the collective life of a people and thereby reveals his own nature... It is only from time to time that individuals fall under the irresistible influence of this unconscious factor.”*

Jung’s racial essentialism here is tragic and prefigures the biological and genetic essentialism which now dominates Western thought. However, the concept of a mass possession by an unconscious form fits incredibly well with what we know of Nationalism.

Consider the World Trade Center attacks in 2001 in the United States. After the attacks, people experienced (and were diagnosed with) trauma from watching the explosions on television, so much so that some (including otherwise sane and clear-thinking friends of mine) for a little while believed they had either been present at the event or had a close friend or family member within the destroyed towers. Worse, many otherwise virulently anti-war people suddenly regained national ‘pride,’ literally waving flags with such civic devotion that one would have thought their life depended upon it.

Devotion to the Nation after such traumatic events often takes on both a religious quality (similar to that of evangelical Christians) while displaying symptoms of mass hysteria. The Nation appears to haunt the actions of the individuals, manifesting and reifying itself as if by possession or seizing.

What Jung noticed regarding the possession of the German people by “Wotan” is this same process. And while one need not believe it was Wotan who possessed his people (I do not—I’ve asked Wotan myself), Jung’s assertion that a mythic force can operate on the psyche is hardly a unique idea. The same function was described by Max Stirner as ‘spooks,’ ideological and philosophical forms which exert influence when they are unconsciously accepted as really-existing.

**Spook, Spectre, Egregore** Jung's theory of archetypes—as well as Stirner's theory on Spooks—may have been influenced by an occult theory regarding near-deific spirits known as egregores. An egregore (greek for 'watcher') is a spirit composed of the memories, knowledge, personality, and intentions of a group, which either arises organically from the activities and interactions of the group or is constructed willfully by the group.

Egregores could be called “group minds,” though they exist autonomously (like Jung's archetypal Wotan) and maintain the cohesion, survival, and collective identity of a group beyond the individual goals of each member. Unlike an archetype, an egregore does not spring from the unconscious/pre-conscious mind, but rather the myriad actions and interactions of those within in. Unlike a god, an egregore is not something one worships or necessarily invokes. They can be constructed, but after their construction the apparent life they take on is much more complex than what they were constructed to be.

A more accurate explanation may be to say that they are real-ised; brought from the realm of infinite possibility, the world without forms, into the more finite realm of social existence. Yet another theory is that they become inhabited after-the-fact by pre-existing spirits, similar to the way many animistic cultures build shrines as houses that benevolent spirits (or fairies, etc.) will want to move into.

Like Jung's Wotan and Stirner's Spook (and to some degree Derrida's Spectre), the Egregore describes the apparent realness of a thing despite its disconnection from the material world. There is no “there” there, and yet it functions always as if there were, manifesting itself in the actions of those who live within its realm of influence or meaning. And it thus acts also as if it were a god, making demands upon its followers who constantly (and often unconsciously) manifest its existence.

This same process has been described by other means by post-colonialist theorists. Dipesh Chakrabarty, particularly, proposes in his introduction to *Provincializing Europe* that it is precisely European exceptionalism that prevents us from seeing how those of us in Liberal Democratic societies still “*inhabit these forms even as we classify ourselves as modern or secular.*” Similarly, Frantz Fanon and James Baldwin speak to the way that belief in whiteness and its psychological manifestations seem to inhabit those who, in Baldwin's words, “believe they are white.”

One need not necessarily accept a supernatural explanation for the way the mythic manifests as-if it is real in order to comprehend this idea. Benedict Anderson's formulation of the Nation as an ‘imagined community’ also points to the same mythic and Egregoric functioning. For him, the Nation is a modern constructed form creating an indefensible (yet fully-manifest) sense of (false) horizontal kinship with complete strangers, as Anderson says, making “*it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people not so much to kill as willing die for such limited imaginings.*”

America exists; yet we cannot point merely to the constitution of the United States, nor to its government and institutions, soldiers and politicians and police, and say: this is America. America exists within the psyche of Americans, constantly reproduced through self-description and unconscious acceptance of its goals, desires, and inevitability. America is an egregore, a god-form, inhabiting the psyche of its individual constituents, like Jung's Wotan: “. *an autonomous psychic factor, ...produc[ing] effects in the collective life of a people.*”

## The Fascists Know What We Prefer To Forget

Race, Gender, and all other identity categories function this same way. Gays imagine themselves part of a gay community, yet there is no such thing, only an imagined kinship with people who just happen to like sex with people who have the same genitals as themselves. A horrific attack on people who call themselves gay (such as the Pulse massacre in Orlando) thus manifests in individual gays elsewhere (as was the case for myself and many of my gay friends) as an attack on us as well.

We see this egregoric manifestation even stronger in whiteness. Whiteness has no material basis, yet it does not need one to manifest through the social interactions of humans. Whiteness ‘possesses’ the white person, and appears to inhabit their interactions with people possessed by other egregoric racial categories (Black, etc.) regardless of their oppositional nature. In fact, the conflict and tension between egregores only further refines and entrenches their influence and power.

Neither the conservative Right nor most of the liberal or radical Left challenge these egregores. Instead, they strengthen and re-invest these egregores with power by insisting they are real and meaningful fields of social struggle (regardless of their final goals). We see this most tragically on the Left, which generally accepts the constructed nature of identities, yet also insists identity is a valid (if not foundational) field of political struggle.

Consider the problem of Gender. Most Leftists accept Judith Butler’s proposition that gender is performative, not essential or biological (likewise the Egoist position). Yet, particularly on the “Social Justice” Left, essentialism and a fear of straying too far from Liberal Democratic forms creates a contradictory position, seen particularly in the arguments around trans women. On the one hand, Leftists insist Woman is a constructed category, yet then orient their politics towards asserting that trans women are women. That is, Woman is constructed, but in order to liberate another constructed category, they insist trans women (as category) are absolutely (essentially) part of a woman (as category), making both categories essentialist. Similarly, maleness is a category that the Left generally seeks to make irrelevant, but then the Left reduces men to an essential category in which every man essentially causes exploitation, violence, and oppression (“#YESALLMEN”).

Even if it were only the Left attempting to define the boundaries of these egregoric categories, we would find ourselves in an interminable deadlock. Unfortunately, there is a much stronger and less self-conscious current which already understands the great power these egregores have over the actions of humans.

A brief glance at the Nazi project is probably sufficient for us to grasp how fascism not only is more comfortable with the egregoric nature of these concepts, but also understands how best to manipulate them. Nazi theorists (social, occult, legal, scientific, etc.) cobbled together a new mythic reality for Germany quite quickly. Tibetan and Hindu spirituality, Nordic and Germanic folklore, and general occult studies as well as previously oppositional and antagonist political, social, and scientific forms all became part of the egregore of Nazism, seizing the mythic imagination of a (likewise mythic) Nation.

Consider: before the Nazis, the Aryan race was a mere fringe scientific theory. During the Nazi ascension, the Aryan race was a thing, alive, ‘self-evident.’ So, too, Germany itself: suddenly a nation created only three decades before arose fully-formed with an ancient history as if it had always been there.

Did the Nazi theorists actually believe their own mythic creation? Or were they consciously creating something new? It's impossible to know. The same question could be asked of Lenin and Stalin: did they really believe in the existence of the Worker?

Or more controversially regarding the identity politics of the Left: gays did not exist as a category in the 1800's, nor did trans people. When the political category/egregoric identity of Gay and Trans arose, suddenly they were self-evident, alive, meaningful, and strangest of all: 'true.' Did those who constructed gayness and trans identity know they were making something up? How many who embrace these identities (unless they've really read Foucault) even realize that they do not stretch back into prehistory, let alone before the 20<sup>th</sup> century?

The point here is not to unravel the nightmare of Left identity politics, only to show how Leftists unconsciously do the same thing that fascists consciously do. Leftists construct identities and egregores without any reference to the material world, yet then quickly accept them as if they have always existed, just as a Nationalist embraces the Nation and a White Supremacist embraces the White Race.

Leftism (and anti-fascism) as it currently exists is thus insufficient for combating the mythic power of fascism until we acknowledge how much of this mythic, egregoric power we've not only ceded to fascists, but then clumsily mimic.

## **The World Without Forms**

An essay in March of 2017 by Alexander Reid Ross recently warned against the danger of fascist intersections with "Post-Left," Egoist, mythic, and anti-civilizational thought. What these "potential intersections" with fascism all have in common, however, is a rejection of the egregoric spooks over which the Liberal-Left and fascists are currently warring. Also, they all have at least an apparent understanding of the mechanisms by which the egregoric functions, and they each assert the freedom of the individual over these forms as a primary goal.

Ross's essay suggests that these positions seem close to the border past which all is fascist. That apparent proximity, though, is not what he suspects it to be. Rather, the extreme distance of most Leftism from the mythic—and its long complicity with Liberal Democratic secular exceptionalism—makes these non- and anti-fascist positions seem 'close' to fascism.

Leftism—especially American anti-fascism—has been so lost in the world of identities and forms that it has forgotten that they are only merely that: forms. Thus, any who reject the world of forms, or create new ones, will be seen as immediately suspect.

Were the current forms (Liberal Democracy, Capitalism, the Nation, Gender, Race, etc.) worth keeping around, then this error would not be so catastrophic. Some are certainly anti-fascist only because fascism threatens Liberal Democracy, and perhaps it is no longer true to say that Leftism (at least in its American iterations) is anti-imperialist or anti-capitalist any longer, regardless of how much it claims otherwise.

If, however, we are anti-fascists because we are also pro-something else, something besides the current egregoric forms which lead only to exploitation, oppression, and the destruction of the earth, then we must stop looking away from the mythic power we have ceded to the fascists.

We can see how we've done this by looking at one of the symptoms that antifascists use to diagnose whether someone is a fascist: the Black Sun. Though proximity doesn't prove causation,

this is generally a good rule of thumb. However, little to no attention is ever given to why fascists invoke the Black Sun.

The secret of the Black Sun is actually quite simple, and it's one that fascists do not own. Stare at the sun in the sky and something odd happens. It appears first to turn deep red, and then goes black and starts to spin as your retina burns. It also sears itself as an after-image, lingers there for hours (if not days), and creates the perception that there is actually nothing behind the sun. It appears to go flat as it moves, revealing a deep Abyss as if all light and all reality is merely a black hole.

I do not suggest every white boy and girl who uses an image of the Black Sun as their iPhone background has experienced the same mystical transformation that medieval alchemists name *nigredo*; nor do I assert that it is an Abyssal truth limited to mystical traditions or European-derived thought (the Sufis and many animist traditions describe a similar experience). Still, it should intrigue us that in at least one fascist strain, a rite exists which inducts the initiate into the nihilist/spiritual "world without forms."

From that world, through such an initiation, it is easy to transcend societal restraints and enter into the pre-formal realm of perception. Outside the constraints of socially-constructed identity and morality, any new thought is possible and any new form is acceptable specifically because 'possible' and 'acceptable' no longer apply. More so, the experience strengthens the will of the initiate: the vision was survived, the mind intact.

Those who've studied and felt the inebriating mix of mythic power and indomitable will evinced by fascists like Jack Donovan and the Wolves of Vinland will understand my meaning here. Donovan has been able to create an intoxicating, egregoric, mythic conception of the world, cobbling together fragments of the past with terrifyingly violent new ideologies which are pristine in their coherence. There is raw, seductive, violent power here that functions on the 'primal' (pre-conscious, libidinal) level against which anti-fascists have no other defense except no-platforming.

## Reclaiming What We've Thrown Away

If I here seem full of praise for something so horrifying, it is not because I am, but because you may have become so separated from your own mythic power that you've forgotten you can shift these forms the same way the fascists do, except towards a more affirming and fair world rather one of hierarchy and hatred.

I suspect we shun this power for two reasons. First, anyone returning from the Abyss with such mythic visions, transcending the egregores by which the rest of us are ruled, will always be initially marked as a heretic or an outcast. Only when we find others who have seen the same things or who find meaning in these new dreams can such mystics find acceptance.

The other reason? We've so long ago ceded to others our power to make the world that we are more happy to leave such delvings to the fascists than realize we are complicit in our own enchainment.

The world without forms, where we can again reclaim our power, is what Stirner and the Egoists embrace. It is also what Bataille sought, as did his close friend, the Jewish mystic Walter Benjamin. From that world we see both the infinite possibility of human liberation and the infinite

delusions under which we have for too long struggled. It is also where we can learn how to be Walter Benjamin's "real state of emergency" which will eventually make fascism untenable.

The Nation is a false thing that only has power because we give it power. Gender, race, class, religion, morals—even the self itself—are all constructs. Civilization is a spook, one to which we are always subject because we believe there is such a thing as civilization, because other people believe there is such a thing as civilization, and because all of us fail to remember that civilization is just an idea in our heads that causes us to cohere around it and give it more power. Thus, the fascist who warns that civilization is under threat from Islam, or trans people, or Cultural Marxism—as well as the Liberal-Leftist who warns that civilization is under threat from fascism—are both still merely fighting for control over the egregore of Civilization.

Any anti-fascism which seeks to break not only the power of the fascists but also the power of the forms the fascists wish to control must first refuse to accept the forms themselves.

Race, Gender, the Nation, Civilization—these are not our forms, they are forms that enchain us, they do not exist in the world we wish to build, and we must stop pretending otherwise. Instead, we must make new forms while always conscious that they are only just forms, forms we can change at will because it is our will which births them.

We must also refuse to cede the mythic—and the embrace of the self—to the Fascists. Contrary to Alexander Reid Ross's warning, the 'post-leftists' and the Egoists and those who've read Bataille, and also those who've read Baldwin or Fanon or Chakrabarty, and especially all those who would dare walk past the forest's edge in darkness and find there new truths, regardless the consequences—it is to them where we must look for the rituals which will free us all.

It is they, and the magics they find, which can finally help us exorcise fascism's spectre from our world.

# Uncivilized Artists, Violent Aesthetes by Linn O'Mable

*“There is much magickal appeal in aesthetics that arouse and intrigue yet evade so-called logical explanation for their appeal, i.e. simply finding something to be beautiful, for no reason, and from nowhere.”*

~ Liber Nihil

Civilization is hideous, and few of its faces are more repulsive than the city. Steeped in sickening fumes, cities present themselves as nauseating confluences of cement and cable, brutalist filth. Walking amidst the smog and trash, ears battered by claxon and engine-roar, I am repulsed. My being yearns for something better, and my mind—disconnecting from my body—wanders in search of the vine-lashed landscapes populating my dreams.

I reject the idea that we ought not fetishize so-called nature, that by idealizing it we only alienate ourselves from it further. I've spent enough time with trees and oceansides to know that they are beautiful, to develop a fetishized Dream of earth; I would like little more than to reconnect with soil and river by luxuriating in this beautiful, decadent reverie. Idealizations of nature are in some ways farcical and fantastic, but they are also gateways to be passed through, ladders to be climbed and then kicked down from new heights. As I embrace a false division between earth and human, I acknowledge the depths of my alienation; in my life, the divorce of humanity from its aboriginal habitat has been all too real, and I wish to dissolve this split by way of rapturous embrace. Perhaps my idealizations will fade or transform if I am ever fully surrounded by what I wish to be surrounded by (groves, water, ivy). So be it. Until the night comes when I find myself ensnared by the green thicket, I propose centralizing anti-civilization aesthetics in our lives and projects, embracing a violence against the domination machine informed by the relentless pursuit of beauty. Do we want to be encompassed by trash heaps or rolling meadows?

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This piece revolves around aesthetics, so I want to clarify what the word means to me although I do not have a clear definition. I use it gesturally and my understanding of it is comfortably cloudy at the edges, an amalgamation of various definitions encountered throughout life. To think of aesthetics is, for me, to think of clusters of qualia, indescribable sensations and sensuality, gradients of beauty and ugliness, pathos, expressiveness, impossible juxtapositions of sensory impressions, transcendent experiences, what people typically call art, and much more—not to mention the processes of forming judgments and drawing out values about all of the above. Civilized humans love to focus on their own product-objects when they talk about aesthetics, but I am additionally interested in the aesthetics of the non-human world and of lived experience itself (inner and outer).

To view the world through an aesthetic lens means, I think, to reference constellations of thoughts and values as we appraise our lived experience: contingent, personal metrics about

what is attractive to us, what any given stimuli feels like and stirs within us. In this way, all of our worldly experience undergoes some kind of aesthetic evaluation, conscious or not, and therefore aesthetics inform our entire worldview, whether we want them to or not. For me, these values are ineffable and inexplicable, having emerged from the mysterious primordiality of living. I can neither explain nor expel them, yet they have curious resonance.

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I was working under Walmart's fluorescent light when this idea first took hold in me. (Department stores, like cities, may also epitomize abrasive ugliness.)

My goal at work was always to keep thoughts fully detached from what I was doing with my body, in this case through a steady drip of podcast audio wired from pocket to ear. As I shelved another box of Great Value macaroni (dark coal of civilization), Free Radical Radio cohost Rydra made a remark that stayed with me for a long time—I'll quote:

*"For me, I really feel like at its core, anti-civ (and this is gonna sound bad to a lot of people, but I don't think it needs to) can be a purely aesthetic preference—I don't need to infer what human nature is, or if there's a right way to live, or if people did something for billions of years... all of that stuff may be true, it may have happened— who knows? I don't know. I don't have the answers to those questions. I can say that's likely true. I can say it's likely that for 99.9% of human history, y'know, people lived a [certain] way— but the [most important] thing... is just that I don't fucking like cities. I don't like the structure around it, I don't like the fact that resource extraction is happening to create these things, I don't like pollution, I like being able to swim in the ocean; on a purely aesthetic level, [with regard to] my preferences for what I want to see with my own eyes and feel and hear and smell, I am not interested in civilization. It's that easy."*<sup>1</sup>

Those words lingered, sedimenting. Time passed and the concept of mounting an aesthetic argument against civilization became more and more alluring, resonant. Months later, I would be walking through the rain in London, holding my breath to avoid inhaling motor fumes and staring down the sidewalk, thinking: I do not like this place; the ugliness drains me of life; the mechanisms by which it operates are profoundly grotesque. I do not wish to be here—and further, I wish this place were entirely transformed, so that something more beautiful could take its place, so that grasses and oldfields could grow and proliferate. I do not think these are unreasonable desires.

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In my youth politics were of little interest to me, seeming alien, ugly, and out of my hands. Evading the political, I much preferred to plumb inner worlds, until the day I stumbled onto the proselytizing of Noam Chomsky. I found myself dragged down a rabbit-hole, suddenly awake to the horrible nature of this world, suddenly anarcho-syndicalist, and suddenly leaning into an asceticism as severe as that of the monkish Noam himself. I could hardly bring myself to do anything artistic while there was such boundless pain around me—after all, I was one of the only ones who could do anything about it. I was an Anarchist. Aesthetics were off of the table and out of the question, shoved into the corner of my mental room to wither and catch dust as I got down to the business of saving the world.

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<sup>1</sup> Bellamy Fitzpatrick, Cosmo Rydra. *Free Radical Radio*, "Episode 75: FRR Destroys Strawmen That Are Ugly To Them". Quote at 00:26:00. [http:// www.freeradicalradio.net/2015/03/16/episode-75-frr-destroys-strawmen-that-are-ugly-to-them/](http://www.freeradicalradio.net/2015/03/16/episode-75-frr-destroys-strawmen-that-are-ugly-to-them/)



Eventually I adopted post-left anticivilization theory as my primary lens of viewing the world, but even then Rydra's sentiment was somewhat revelatory to me as I toiled in that Walmart. Anarchic anti-civilization aestheticism could go far in resolving the tension between the anesthetized political direness I had previously embraced, and my lifelong fascination with the beautiful. I imagine this might be true for others. Politics are generally quite ugly, rife with protests and dumb slogans, tacky signs on sticks, and senate meetings. Moonlight, summer's wind, the infinity of oceans, leaves in early autumn—I will orient myself towards these things, eschewing dingy political processes and endeavoring to collaborate with like-minded others. I dream of laying waste to mechanics that perpetuate ugliness so that I may better venerate moss. To embrace this more directly is the aspiration of my proposed aestheticism.

I am not suggesting an abandonment of politics entirely. This is partially because the word is slippery, but I also feel that its wholesale rejection may be overkill. (Better to cannibalize politics and discard the rotten flesh.) What I want is a shift in focus away from the polis and its manifold inhabitants—not to mention debates with those who will never agree with us—to the ravenous pursuit of beauty as an end in itself. To relinquish designs of control seems prudent as collapse seemingly sets in and climate chaos takes hold. The world's cities will not be saved, and the sooner Leviathan falls the better; to fetishize forests and ruins will only soften the destructive blow of collapse, render it more ecstatic. And if collapse never comes, then let us still carve out beautiful lives for ourselves and those we love.

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Civilized people like myself have, to various extents, pornified views of the world. Our senses are dulled on plasma televisions and polygons, stereo systems and cheesecake. How can an earthen life compete with movie theaters, death metal, and the Louvre? (Forests can seem gray and dull next to a perfectly manicured synthetic experience in sixteen million colors.) I don't actually think earth can compete, or, more importantly, should. For me, reconnecting with a deep-seated (but malnourished) appreciation for the natural world is an important project, glutted as I have been on film and the music of high technology. I think the anarcho-primitivists are right in that so-called rewilding ought to be high on our to-do list. For those who love art as it is now (the art of music, of painting, of cooking, of cinematography) a critique of civilization will always be deeply and profoundly contradictory. This is not to say we should strive to puritanically purge ourselves of civilized fascinations (let us more simply acknowledge our origins and move on), but most of the art I know and love was built with tools and materials of civilization—piles of wiring, paper and ink, fossil fuels, and gallons of vibrant paints. I would like to expand my sphere of experience outwards and away from all of that. This tension may not be fully resolvable, but it is worth grappling with. At times I conceptualize success in this struggle as a return.

Pornification involves a contradiction: how can civilized life be both profoundly ugly and disastrously over-stimulating in its luster? I think the answer lies with specialization, compartmentalization, and sacrifice—in a word, economics. Art is typically a product dangled in front of us as a reward for work. We drag ourselves through gray worlds of toil and cramped apartments, hideous lives, in order to revel in demarcated aesthetic experiences delivered via Netflix subscription and concert hall, sterilized episodes of consumption with which we have little interaction (or, alternatively, highly controlled and programmed interaction). These are largely passive, flat experiences in which our role is simply that of a user, a spectator. Sometimes it works and the art is wonderful to us—I for one do love some art feverishly, after all—but the cost is high. If we conceptualize art, in its manifold iterations, as one of the ends of civilization

itself, then civilization itself is the cost of art. Everyone works in the machine so that everyone else can work in the machine, and consume art occasionally. I am simplifying, but I hope my point resonates.<sup>2</sup>

So we are offered these aesthetic experiences as rewards for enduring our numbing, slavish, ghastly lives, but these experiences have a way of weakening us and indenturing us to the machine. We become like addicts and for many of us the beauty of sunlit mountains and toadstool-dappled ponds becomes harder and harder to perceive or care about.

If people are afraid of destroying civilization, perhaps this is an important part of why. We do not want to give up the music we listened to when we first had sex, the movie that showed us a new kind of beauty, the video game with which we connect to our handful of friends and escape this drab place. Indeed, we rely on these things so as not to break down beneath the ugliness of it all. I share this sentiment, and I will probably cling to my music collection until the day the power goes out. But if we could somehow attain our wildest dreams of overthrowing this awful machine (or, at least, escaping it), I suspect that wonderfully new, beautiful experiences might come pouring in. This possibility is worthy of unconditional exploration.

An uncivilized life could be full with adventure and beauty of a different kind than we've been made accustomed to. This is what I want: a life that does not need the drug of civilized art to be bearable, a life that is encompassed by tree and vine and lake and moon, a life suffused with ambient, vitalic beauty. I want to be able to jump into the ocean on a whim, or climb a tree to watch the sunset on any twilight. I want to bathe in rivers with loving friends and forget myself on forest floors. I want to make poetry and music with whatever I can, draw with sticks and stones, and luxuriate in inner worlds with no oppressive weight boring into me, without feeling like my art is worthless as anything but a product. I want to free my imagination, and I want other people to be able to do the same, most especially those I love. Further, I simply want to be surrounded by less of the anthropogenic: less that is human and more that is dirt, fur, leaf, and water. These are wild dreams; I do not expect to fully realize them, but they inform my life as objects to be striven for. And to me they are all wildly aesthetic.

I do not require any sect to validate these concerns. When I am honest with myself I realize that my sense of beauty and my aesthetic desires are mine alone, untethered to (but not unaffected by) ideologies and value systems, often defying logic and the political. As a knot of ineffable, irreducible feelings, my aesthetics demand no justification, indeed cannot be justified or reasoned with\*. The idiosyncrasy of these passions makes them strong, and I use this strength to fire my projects and guide my life, seeking the beautiful in everything I do, and fighting to eradicate the vileness haunting my lived experience.

[\* *note from above*: I think there are threads to unravel in this sentiment. Although I feel strongly about my aesthetics, I also feel that they are temporal, necessarily contingent, mutable; this leads me to wonder about others and about the formation processes of aesthetic values. Is it possible to disrupt, redirect, transform the aesthetic sensibilities of others? To what extent can aesthetic values emerge from non-aesthetic modes of valuing? Having no satisfying answer, I would like to see speculation and experimentation attempt answers to these questions. Clearly aesthetic inclinations can and do morph—accruing, dissolving, fluctuating, reshaping—but what-

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<sup>2</sup> Other dangled carrots include vacations, luxuriant lives of wealth, fine dining, etc.-which are all, to some extent, aesthetic prizes. All of this does not account for the allure of power, or other various perks of success in the civilized world; nor does it account for punitive measures used to herd us along. The array of conditions securing our predicament is vast!

ever excites these processes is nebulous and usually met with a typical human resistance to change. Attaining some foothold in understanding all of this may be beneficial to our projects, I think, but I personally doubt that I will, or can, ever understand these processes and properties in their entirety.]

Let us aestheticize ruins. The uncivilized world could be a gorgeous patchwork of toppled ivy-laced chapels and bonfires. Stars pouring through a clearing in the summer's thick canopy could be more beautiful than any painting. Let us destroy dark factories and insipid schools, foul shopping malls and unsightly power plants, for the eviscerated icons of this Leviathan will be truly beautiful to behold. As we disturb the synthetic anti-soil of this astroturf world, let seeds take hold, let weeds grow, let vines overtake, let berries fall and let new hawthorns sway. We need not deny our lust! I say we embrace our desires, ensnared as they may be in the pursuit of viridian ecstasy, and become uncivilized artists, violent aesthetes.

Friends of mine have land where they are establishing a forest garden. After a day spent with them, planting and walking through the woods, I have noticed something special that happens when I close my eyes to go to sleep. In the black ether, I see plants growing, stalks burgeoning, ivy twirling: beautiful magic that I could not have anticipated, like sprouts poking out from seeds planted deep in the soil of my mind. I wonder what else might come of a life suffused in that beauty— radiant, verdant life.

# Resilencing: Social Injustice by John Clark

*Continued from Black Seed issue 4 (full text included here)*

A few weeks ago, New Orleans went through the ten-year commemoration of the Hurricane Katrina disaster. In fact, there were several quite divergent modes of commemoration. At one end of the spectrum there was the Tenth Annual Katrina March and Second-line, the most serious political event of the day, which sponsored speeches and performances at the site of the levee break in the devastated and still depopulated Lower Ninth Ward. It had a significant turnout, though certainly under a thousand participants.

At the other extreme was the Krewe of O.A.K, which practiced a kind of “commemorating by not commemorating” in its annual Mid-Summer Mardi Gras parade and celebration. O.A.K. stands for “Outrageous and Kinky,” in addition to “Oak St.,” its starting point at the Maple Leaf Bar. The parade, noted for its wild costumes and zany ambience, attracted perhaps 10,000 to this Carrollton neighborhood event. According to the *Times-Picayune*, the Krewe chose the theme “Tie Dye Me Up,” to evoke the famous “Summer of Love,” and “bring good vibes to this annual parade.” It added: “No mention of the ‘K’ word, please.”

Most of the “Katrina10” activities fell somewhere between the two extremes, but tended more in the direction of the Krewe of O.A.K., in that they were overwhelmingly in a *celebratory mode*. This was certainly true of the official commemoration that was sponsored by the city administration and local businesses. It focused on recovery, economic and educational successes, and, above all, the remarkable “resilience” of the local community. It presented an upbeat official narrative that erased many of the ongoing problems and tragedies of the city, in addition to effacing many of the most significant struggles and achievements of the community, when these did not fit into the official story. The major concerns here will be this official narrative, which pictures the city’s post-Katrina history through the distorting lens of a politics of disavowal, and the many realities that this narrative disavows.

What then, is “disavowal?” It is in fact something that is quite common in everyday experience, and which we have all experienced many times. We often face two psychological processes in which truth is negated. One of these, which is called “denial,” is a defense mechanism in which the truth can never be consciously recognized or spoken. Denial is *silence*. The other process, which is called “disavowal,” is a defense mechanism in which the truth is at times recognized or spoken, but is systemically forgotten or silenced at every decisive moment, when it really counts. Disavowal is *re-silence*. The Hurricane Katrina Ten-Year Anniversary has been primarily a celebration of disavowal and re-silencing.

## RESILIENCE KILLS

Much of this re-silencing has gone under the banner of “resilience.” While this term has been used throughout the post-Katrina period, it has become a kind of watchword and rallying-cry for the official commemoration and the politics of disavowal that it expresses. Even beyond its

ideological uses, it is in some ways a strange term to use to describe post-Katrina New Orleans. Resilience is defined as: “The capability of a strained body to recover its size and shape” and “an ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change.”<sup>1</sup>

Neither of these definitions describes post-Katrina New Orleans terribly well. As for the “strained body” part, consider this. If someone had a serious accident or disease and after ten years is alive and doing tolerably well—except at only three-fourths of his or her original size—we wouldn’t think of that as the most admirable of recoveries. There are also problems with the “easily” part. Harry Shearer deserves much credit for defying the forces of complacency and self-satisfaction and boldly popularizing the term “the Big Uneasy.”<sup>2</sup> Whether New Orleanians have fully recovered or not, the last ten years have not been particularly “easy” for most of them. Maybe these long years weren’t so hard for those who have had the good fortune to be extremely wealthy, delusional, comatose or dead. But for a large segment of the rest, they have been difficult and even excruciating.

But the major problem with the term is its ideological use. In Post-Katrina New Orleans, “resilience” is associated with tendencies toward regression and mindless compliance. The voice of resilience says, “Congratulations, you’re still here! (Those of you who are still here),” and asks, “How about doing a second line, or cooking up some gumbo for the tourists?” It asks, a bit more delicately, “How about making their beds, cleaning their toilets, serving their food and drinks, maybe even selling them some drugs, and doing a special dance for them at the club.” It urges, above all, “Be resilient. Be exactly what you are expected to be.”

The ideology of resilience ignores the extraordinary creative achievements and visionary aspirations of New Orleanians in the post-Katrina period, and celebrates survival, bare life. It focuses instead on the community’s continued existence as a site for imposition of corporate-state hierarchically-formulated development plans. All the complements to the people of New Orleans for being resilient are a bit condescending and demeaning. After all, it’s not the greatest tribute to people to complement them on their ability to survive. “Thank you for not just giving up and dying *en masse*. If you had done that would have been somewhat of an embarrassment to the greatest country in the world.”

The real post-Katrina story is not a story of resilience. More on this later, but if you want to see the real post-Katrina story, check out the film *Big Charity*.<sup>3</sup> It’s an account of heroic courage and dedication to saving lives and caring for the community. It’s a story of crimes against humanity that are systematically repressed and forgotten. If you want to see the real post-Katrina story (in this case, of the larger region of Southeast Louisiana), check out the film *My Louisiana Love*.<sup>4</sup> It’s the story of passionate struggle for the beloved community and the beloved land. It’s another story of crimes against humanity, and also against nature, that are systematically repressed and forgotten. Both sides of this story, the nobility of struggle and dedication on the one hand, and the criminality and betrayal on the other, are lost in the fog of resilience. They are lost in the resilencing process. They are lost in the Official Story. It is versions of this Official Story that were presented by former President Bush, President Obama, and Mayor Landrieu as part of the official Katrina commemoration.

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<sup>1</sup> “Full definition of Resilience” in *Merriam Webster Dictionary*; online at <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/resilience>.

<sup>2</sup> See the website for his film *The Big Uneasy*; online at <http://www.thebiguneasy.com/>.

<sup>3</sup> Website for *Big Charity: The Death of America’s Oldest Hospital*; online at <http://www.bigcharityfilm.com/>.

<sup>4</sup> Website for *My Louisiana Love*; online at <http://www.mylouisianalove.com/>.

## THE OFFICIAL STORY: THE BUSH VERSION

According to Former President George W. Bush's typically blunt and non-nuanced judgment, "New Orleans is back, and better than ever." In fact, he is *amazed* by what has happened in New Orleans. This is not so astounding, since he specializes in being amazed. He was amazed by the atrocities of September 11, 2001, claiming that "nobody could have predicted" that there would be an attack on the World Trade Center—though about ten years before there had been an attack on the World Trade Center. Hint! He was amazed by the post-Katrina flood in 2005, exclaiming that no one could have "anticipated the breach of the levees"—though several experts actually did, and it had already happened in recent memory during Hurricane Betsy.<sup>5</sup> Hint!

So we should not be surprised, much less amazed, by Bush's reaction to Post-Katrina New Orleans in 2015: "Isn't it amazing?" What amazes him is that "the storm nearly destroyed New Orleans and yet, now, New Orleans is the beacon for school reform,"<sup>6</sup> But what alternative universe does he inhabit? On Planet W, "the storm nearly destroyed New Orleans?" But what storm? Hurricane Katrina didn't hit New Orleans and even what missed New Orleans had lost much of its force by the time its winds came our way. The disaster was not a storm, but rather flooding caused by criminal governmental and corporate negligence. Furthermore, over a quarter of New Orleans was not damaged at all by the storm and flooding and most of the rest could have recovered relatively easily given a reasonable level of response and support.<sup>7</sup> What should be truly astounding is that the victimizers of the city made the recovery so difficult for the victims. Also, Bush should also not be amazed by the quasi-privatization of the school system, since his own administration was responsible for promoting exactly the kind of predatory opportunism and disaster capitalism that produced that system.

Does Bush remember *anything* about what actually happened? Please excuse the foolish question. Of course, he has no idea, and he's counting on everyone else to forget, if they ever knew. As he twice implores of his listeners, "*I hope you remember what I remember.*" This recalls the delusional wife-killer Fred Madison in *Lost Highway*, David Lynch's classic story of monumental forgetfulness. As Fred announces, unconsciously diagnosing his delusional rewriting of history, "I like to remember things my own way." Similarly, Bush's voice is the voice of denial. Never even reaching the level of *re-silence*, it is just dumb silence about anything that counts.

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<sup>5</sup> Hurricane Betsy was a larger hurricane than Hurricane Katrina and hit New Orleans directly, with the passing slightly west of the city..

<sup>6</sup> Cain Burdeau and Jeff Amy "George W. Bush Visits Disaster Zone, 10 Years After Katrina" (Associated Press, Aug. 28, 2015); online at: [http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/U/US\\_KATRINA\\_BUSH?SITE=AP&SECTION=HOME&TEMPLATE=DEFAULT](http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/U/US_KATRINA_BUSH?SITE=AP&SECTION=HOME&TEMPLATE=DEFAULT).

<sup>7</sup> It is significant, and not widely known, that 28% of housing units in the city were not damaged, and 58% were not damaged seriously. See Rachel E. Luft with Shana Griffin, "A Status Report on Housing in New Orleans after Katrina: An Intersectional Analysis" in Beth Willinger, ed. *Katrina and the Women of New Orleans* (New Orleans: Newcomb College Center for Research on Women, Dec. 2008); online at <http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:jd9AwzZZSWgJ:https://tulane.edu/newcomb/upload/NCCROWreport08-chapter5.pdf+&cd=8&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us>.

## THE OFFICIAL STORY: THE OBAMA VERSION

Curiously, the same day that Obama visited New Orleans I got an email from him saying, “Let me be perfectly frank — I’m emailing to ask you for \$5....”<sup>8</sup> My first thought was, “Why don’t you pass by so I can give you the \$5 in person! That would give me a chance to be perfectly frank too, and explain how things in post-Karina New Orleans are not quite as rosy as you’ve been painting them to be.” I was about to send the email to Air Force One, and then it occurred to me that Obama’s problem is not really a lack of information, as his Katrina speech in fact confirmed.

Admittedly, Obama’s speech was infinitely better than the ramblings of Bush, whose unfortunate native tongue is English As a Second Language. Obama usually manages to combine a certain amount of intelligent and lucid analysis (even if it is often intelligently and lucidly deceptive) with a calculated folksiness aimed at mitigating any sins of excessive sophistication and erudition.

Folksiness prevailed in his Katrina anniversary address, which gets the award for more clichés per sentence than any speech ever given here, and perhaps anywhere else on Planet Earth. In just the first paragraph, he managed to dispose of many of the obligatory local references, including “Where y’at,” “the Big Easy,” “the weather in August,” “shrimp po’ boy,” “Parkway Bakery and Tavern,” “Rebirth,” “the Maple Leaf,” “Mardi Gras,” and “what’s Carnival for.”<sup>9</sup> Fortunately, somebody caught him before he told the crowd “jockamo fee nané.”

But the agenda was basically about re-silencing. Obama enthusiastically promoted the neo-liberal corporate capitalist project, including the quasi-privatization and de-democratization of the local schools. He actually cited some damning statistics about child poverty and economic inequality in New Orleans. And he noted that the city “had been for too long been plagued by structural inequalities.” “Had been” before Hurricane Katrina, that is.

But this brief moment of quasi-recognition was lost in the deluge of upbeat generalization. He told the city that “the progress that you have made is remarkable” in achieving, among other things, a “more just New Orleans.” In case we didn’t get his point, he added, “The progress you’ve made is remarkable.” So we are told that post-Katrina New Orleans is not only a model of opportunity for entrepreneurs and developers, as the Chamber of Commerce will enthusiastically inform us, but also a model for *progress in justice*.

Obama’s voice is clearly the voice of disavowal. He knows the truth, and he can even tell you that he knows it. But this truth is consigned to footnotes and asides to a larger ideological pseudo-truth that is to be the focus of our attention. The truth is there only to be strategically forgotten. The dominant discourse remains the verbose but empty speech of re-silencing. So much for *les Menteurs en Chef*.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Barack Obama, “important (don’t delete).” An email from Barack Obama at dccc@dccc.org to John Clark at clark@loyno.edu (Thu 8/27/2015 11:59 AM).

<sup>9</sup> “Transcript of President Obama’s Katrina speech” in *NOLA.com* (August 28, 2015); online at [http://www.nola.com/katrina/index.ssf/2015/08/transcript\\_of\\_president\\_obamas.html](http://www.nola.com/katrina/index.ssf/2015/08/transcript_of_president_obamas.html). The phrase “jockamo fee nané” from the song “Iko, Iko” is a universal favorite, but it is not generally known that it was an invitation by Mardi Gras Indians to their rivals to engage in a certain humiliating act. See “If You Don’t Like What The Big Chief Say... (An Interview with Mr. Donald Harrison, Sr., Big Chief of the Guardians of the Flame)” in *Mesechabe: The Journal of Surre(gion)alism* 8 (Spring 1991); online at [https://www.academia.edu/2948272/An\\_Interview\\_with\\_Mr.\\_Donald\\_Harrison](https://www.academia.edu/2948272/An_Interview_with_Mr._Donald_Harrison).

<sup>10</sup> “Lying Chiefs of State,” which recalls the Chef Menteur Pass in New Orleans East, which, according to one story, was named by the Choctaw “Oulabe Mingo,” or “Lying Chief,” after the French colonial governor.

## THE OFFICIAL STORY: THE LANDRIEU VERSION

Next, the local political and corporate establishment, led by mayor Mitch Landrieu, joined in the celebration. For the anniversary, Landrieu and Walmart, along with other corporate entities, co-sponsored a “Citywide Day of Service.” It’s unfortunate that the community couldn’t organize a large-scale volunteer effort itself, as it did after Katrina, when our state and corporate masters largely abandoned the city, except as opportunities for incarceration and then exploitation emerged. The mayor’s version of a “Day of Service” was four hours of service projects in the morning, followed by an hour of speeches and celebration, and then a break, before three more hours of speeches and celebration.

From Landrieu’s perspective, there was much to celebrate. On his “Katrina 10: Resilient New Orleans” web site he claims that the Katrina disaster turned out to be a positive opportunity and as a result “New Orleans has turned itself around and has built the city that we should’ve built in the first time.”<sup>11</sup> Presumably the city had to wait 287 years for the current experiment in neoliberal social engineering to arrive. Landrieu’s boosterish assessment of Post-Katrina New Orleans can be summed up in his depiction of it as “America’s best comeback story.” In a blatant attempt to mislead readers, he boasts that “the New Orleans region has now returned to approximately 95 percent of its pre-Katrina population.”<sup>12</sup> In fact, as a recent report shows, “New Orleans is now at about 78 percent of its population before the storm” and the recent growth rate has been 1.4%.<sup>13</sup> Aggregating the population with surrounding parishes is a transparent ploy to confuse the public.

Many have not come back to New Orleans because of lack of opportunities here and because the dominant model of development has created obstacles to their return. To make them disappear through fake statistics is an outrage. Landrieu obviously didn’t grasp the ludicrous but painful irony of calling the post-Katrina era, in which almost a quarter of the population did not return, “the best *come-back story*” in U.S. history!

Landrieu’s voice is the voice of denial, deception and delusion. Let’s be explicit about what is denied, silenced and re-silenced.

## RESILENCING: SOCIAL INJUSTICE

New Orleans, this city that has, according to Obama, made “remarkable” strides in becoming “more just,” is second on the list of U.S. cities with the most extreme economic inequality, and the gap between rich and poor has been increasing.<sup>14</sup> The level of economic inequality in New

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<sup>11</sup> Polly Mosendz, “New Orleans Mayor Mitch Landrieu on the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Hurricane Katrina” in *Newsweek* (August 29, 2015); online at <http://www.newsweek.com/new-orleans-mayor-mitch-landrieu-10th-anniversary-hurricane-katrina-367046>.

<sup>12</sup> Mitchell J. Landrieu, “About the Project,” in *Katrina 10: Resilient New Orleans*; online at <http://katrina10.org/about-the-project/>.

<sup>13</sup> Jeff Adelson, “New Orleans area population still growing post-Katrina, but slowly: Post-Katrina increase slows to a plateau,” in *The New Orleans Advocate* (March 28, 2015); online at <http://www.theneworleansadvocate.com/news/11941581-172/new-orleans-area-population-still>.

<sup>14</sup> This is according to a Bloomberg analysis, “Most Income Inequality, U.S. Cities,” on *Bloomberg Business* (updated April 15, 2014); online at <http://www.bloomberg.com/visual-data/best-and-worst/most-income-inequality-us-cities>.



Orleans is comparable to the rate in Zambia.<sup>15</sup> It has very high levels of child poverty in particular and widespread poverty in general. Recent studies have shown that 39% of children in New Orleans live in poverty, which is 17% above the national average, and childhood poverty has been increasing since 2007. The 27% poverty rate for families is also very high compared to other U.S. cities and by historic standards for New Orleans. The Jesuit Social Research Institute recently issued a report showing the shockingly high cost of living compared to income in Louisiana, but especially in the New Orleans area, which has seen skyrocketing property values and rents.<sup>16</sup> In addition, despite heroic efforts by local groups, homelessness has remained a severe problem in the city.

We must not forget the over 100,000 citizens of New Orleans who have never returned, many because of lack of recovery support and the vast proportional increases in cost of living for poor and working class people. The replacement of public housing by mixed-income housing that displaces most former residents has also contributed to a process that should be recognized as a form of ethnic and economic cleansing. There has also been a 55% decrease in public transportation service as of 2015, and the budget of the Regional Transit Authority was still almost 40% below its pre-Katrina level in 2013.<sup>17</sup> New Orleans was once appreciated by locals and newcomers for its combination of *joie de vivre*, rich culture, and modest cost of living, especially for housing. But this financial accessibility disappeared in the post-Katrina housing crisis and the drastic cutback in affordable public services.

The struggle over housing was a crucial one (and one in which I participated actively for a long time). However, the movement unfortunately fell under the influence of narrow leftist sectarians who suffer from fetishism of the state.<sup>18</sup> The result was a one-sided obsession with the less than 5% of pre-Katrina units that were in public housing and an almost complete neglect for the half of all housing consisting of commercial rental units, not to mention a lack of concern for the less privileged home owners who were struggling desperately for just and adequate compensation for damages. Almost 52,000 of about 79,000 seriously damaged housing units were rental property.<sup>19</sup> The vocal activist focus on public housing divided the citizenry and played into the hands of developers and their bureaucratic allies, who quickly developed plans to reengineer both public housing and the housing market in general for purposes of profitable ethnic cleansing and gentrification. The possibility for a broad-based movement for housing justice was lost and the result has been ten years of continuing injustice to renters in particular.

Another area of acute injustice in post-Katrina New Orleans has been health care. Medical services collapsed after the disaster, have continued to lag in some areas, and have remained in a state of crisis in others. Mental health care and addiction treatment have suffered the worst. Emergencies related to mental health, alcoholism and drug addiction are all most commonly

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<sup>15</sup> Robert McClendon, "New Orleans is 2<sup>nd</sup> worst for income inequality in the U.S., roughly on par with Zambia, report says," on *NOLA.com* (August 19, 2014), online at [http://www.nola.com/politics/index.ssf/2014/08/new\\_orleans\\_is\\_2nd\\_worst\\_for\\_i.html](http://www.nola.com/politics/index.ssf/2014/08/new_orleans_is_2nd_worst_for_i.html).

<sup>16</sup> Jesuit Social Research Institute, "Too Much for Too Many: What does it cost families to live in Louisiana?" in *JustSouth Quarterly*; online at <http://www.loyno.edu/jsri/too-much-too-many>.

<sup>17</sup> See Ride New Orleans, "The State of Transit Ten Years After Katrina"; online at <http://rideneworleans.org/state-of-transit-ten-years-after-katrina/>.

<sup>18</sup> Legendary activist and cofounder of Common Ground Malik Rahim once replied to such sectarianism (at a US Federation of Worker Cooperatives national conference in New Orleans) that the goal must be the replacement of so-called "public housing" with democratic, resident-controlled community housing.

<sup>19</sup> See Luft and Griffin.

treated in the same manner, by consignment to Orleans Parish Prison. Furthermore, one of the great tragedies of the neoliberal re-engineering of New Orleans was the fraudulent condemning and closing of Charity Hospital and the deliberate destruction of a historic mid-city neighborhood for the sake of lucrative opportunities in developing its replacement. Charity could have been returned to service within days when it was most desperately needed, immediately after the disaster. The story of its permanent closing is rife with lies by the Jindal administration, and involved literal sabotage of the closed facility in an effort to secure FEMA funds for a new medical center. The public was duped out of \$283 million dollars by deception and disinformation that disguised the fact that the old hospital could have been successfully adapted to fulfill current needs.<sup>20</sup> In addition, it is likely that many lives were lost and a great many people suffered needlessly as a result of this criminal injustice.

All of these injustices have been part of the neoliberal engineering process that has gone under the rubric of “New Orleans as a Boutique City.” This concept was met with considerable contempt in the early days after Katrina, but it has returned repeatedly with a vengeance. Recently, Sean Cummings, a prominent real estate developer and CEO of New Orleans Building Corporation, boasted that “the city is a magnet again for new talent and new ideas, co-creating a new New Orleans.” Cummings disingenuously explained that “a boutique city stands for something. It’s original. It’s authentic. It’s one-of-a-kind.”<sup>21</sup> In fact, this isn’t what it means at all. New Orleans already stood for something, was original, was authentic, and was one of a kind. Creating a “new” New Orleans is based on a quite different agenda. To make it into a “boutique city” means that it will be marketed to more affluent tourists, to new residents from the entrepreneurial and technical (“Silicon Bayou”) sectors, and to wealthy buyers looking for a second or third home in a town with appropriate entertainment and shopping opportunities.

## RESILENCING: THE EDUCATION DISASTER

Post-Katrina New Orleans has gained considerable notoriety as the site of one of the nation’s most far-reaching experiments in the destruction of a public school system and its replacement with a network of charter schools. Andrea Gabor, in a brief analysis recently published in the *New York Times*, discusses many of the problems with charter schools in New Orleans that critics have long found to plague such schools everywhere.<sup>22</sup> The general case against these schools has been argued convincingly, indeed devastatingly, by Diane Ravitch in a series of articles in the *New Review of Books* starting with “The Myth of Charter Schools” and in her book *The Reign of Error*.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> See the “Save Charity Hospital” website; online at <http://www.savecharityhospital.com/> for extensive information on these issues. The film *Big Charity* is a good introduction to the entire story of deception, betrayal, and criminal opportunism. Spike Lee’s *If God is Willing and the Creek Don’t Rise* also covers many of the Charity Hospital issues well. See the website for the documentary online at <http://www.hbo.com/documentaries/if-god-is-willing-and-da-creek-dont-rise>.

<sup>21</sup> Oscar Raymundo, “New Orleans Rebuilds As a Boutique City” on *BBC Travel* (11 February 2013); online at <http://www.bbc.com/travel/story/20130207-new-orleans-rebuilds-as-a-boutique-city>.

<sup>22</sup> Andrea Gabor, “The Myth of the New Orleans School Makeover,” in *The New York Times* (Aug. 22, 2015); online at [http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/23/opinion/sunday/the-myth-of-the-new-orleans-school-makeover.html?\\_r=2](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/23/opinion/sunday/the-myth-of-the-new-orleans-school-makeover.html?_r=2).

<sup>23</sup> See the NYRB’s Diane Ravitch page at <http://www.nybooks.com/contributors/diane-ravitch/> and her book *Reign of Error: The Hoax of the Privatization Movement and the Danger to America’s Public Schools* (New York: Vintage Books, 2014).

Gabor applies many of these same arguments to the New Orleans case. She notes the discriminatory (a euphemism for “racist”) nature of school reform. She cites “growing evidence that the reforms have come at the expense of the city’s most disadvantaged children, who often disappear from school entirely and, thus, are no longer included in the data.” Even establishment education figure Andre Perry, one-time CEO of the Capital One-University of New Orleans Charter Network, admits that “there were some pretty nefarious things done in the pursuit of academic gain,” including “suspensions, pushouts, skimming, counseling out, and not handling special needs kids well.” In other words, the case for charter schools depended in part on injustices to the less privileged students: those who in reality have the greatest needs, and who, from the standpoint of justice, deserve the most attention.

Gabor points out the questionable nature of claims for high performance by charter schools. She observes that studies ignore the fact that many disadvantaged students have been excluded from high-performing schools or from schools entirely and do not appear in statistics. She cites a recent study that concluded that “over 26,000 people in the metropolitan area between the ages of 16 and 24 are counted as ‘disconnected,’ because they are neither working nor in school.” The Cowen Institute for Public Education Initiatives was forced to retract, due to flawed methodology, a study that concluded that the re-engineered New Orleans school system had “higher graduation rates and better test scores than could be expected, given the socio-economic disadvantages of their students.”<sup>24</sup> The biggest innovation introduced by charter schools may be that cheating on tests and reports, a practice once restricted to naughty students, has now become official policy.

However, the biggest flaw in defenses of charter schools in New Orleans is that they are based on comparison with the neglected and underfunded pre-Katrina school system. They do not consider what would have been possible if the same kind of support and resources that have been lavished on charter schools had been devoted to creating a just, democratic, community-controlled school system that is dedicated to the welfare of every student and every neighborhood in the city.

## RESILENCING: THE MIGRATION DISASTER

In the midst of global turmoil over this issue, not a single politician was able to even speak the word “migrant” in relation to our city’s recent history. As is often the case, *the truth is too big to be noticed*.

I grew up hearing New Orleans called “The Gateway to the Americas,”<sup>25</sup> a term that was popular during the long tenure of Mayor deLesseps “Chep” Morrison. It was only much later that I heard the story of United Fruit Company and the part of the history of plunder of Latin America that was directed from board rooms in New Orleans. I discovered that New Orleans was a gateway to the exploitation of those *Other Americas* that are excluded from the official definition of “America.”<sup>26</sup> This aspect of history is, however, systematically forgotten.

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<sup>24</sup> Jessica Williams, “Tulane’s Cowen Institute retracts New Orleans schools report, apologizes” at *NOLA.com* (Oct. 10, 2014); online at [http://www.nola.com/education/index.ssf/2014/10/tulanes\\_cowen\\_institute\\_retracts\\_report](http://www.nola.com/education/index.ssf/2014/10/tulanes_cowen_institute_retracts_report).

<sup>25</sup> New Orleans aspires to regain that image, as a recent editorial story in *New Orleans Magazine* recounts. See “Rebuilding the Gateway” (June 2015); online at <http://www.myneworleans.com/New-Orleans-Magazine/June-2015/Rebuilding-the-Gateway/>

<sup>26</sup> See Stephen Duplantier, ed. *The Banana Chronicles*, an entire special issue of *Neotropica* magazine devoted to the story of the United Fruit Company and the exploitation of Central America; online at <http://www.neotropica.info/>.

Another forgotten reality is the fact that in many ways, New Orleans, “the Queen City of the South,” is a *northern city*. This is true geographically. Our city lies at the northern edge of one of our great bioregional points of reference, the Western Mediterranean Sea, consisting of the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean.<sup>27</sup> This is also true culturally. We are a northern city because of our position at the northern edge of Latin America. Louisiana was for its first 121 years part of the French and Spanish empires, and New Orleans, in particular, has never entirely lost its Latin character. It is becoming more Latin once again.

Thus, we might have thought that the city would celebrate the renewed ties with Latin America that were created when Latino and Latina workers came to rebuild the city after the Katrina disaster. In reality, government and business gave at best an ambiguous welcome to these workers, even when they were most desperately needed. The authorities then either abandoned them, or redirected their attention to disposing of them. The local administration still gives lip service to the efforts of these workers in rebuilding the city, at least on ceremonial occasions. However, it does little to address their problems, while creating additional ones, and at the same time facilitating attempts to expel them from the city.

This treatment has been outrageously unjust and intolerable. For the past ten years, migrant workers and their families have been, and still are, subject to wage theft, dangerous health and safety conditions, housing discrimination, police harassment, arbitrary arrests, ethnic profiling, predation by criminals, terrorization by authorities, and subjection to demeaning tracking with ankle bracelets. In the early years after Hurricane Katrina, while migrants were hard at work rebuilding the city, they were commonly called “Walking ATM’s,” since they were regularly preyed upon by thieves and had no recourse to a legal and penal system that was only interested in criminalizing the victims.<sup>28</sup> A recent interview with representatives of the Congress of Day Laborers (Congreso de Jornaleros) from WHIV radio’s Katrina coverage is an excellent introduction to the experience of migrant workers and their families in post-Katrina New Orleans.<sup>29</sup>

We need to rethink that history and begin to celebrate New Orleans again as “the Gateway to the Americas.” We just have to remember one thing this time: *A gateway opens in both directions.*<sup>30</sup>

## RESILENCING: THE INCARCERATION DISASTER

Randolph Bourne famously proclaimed, paraphrasing Hegel, that “war is the health of the state.” What is usually forgotten is that war on its own citizens is the highest expression of the state’s health. After Katrina we in New Orleans got to see what the state is like when all

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<sup>27</sup> The other great bioregional reality is, of course, the Mississippi River, and this is what makes us also a geographically southern city.

<sup>28</sup> When one looks carefully at the perseverance and determination of these migrants in the face of struggles and extreme hardships, they make the locals look a lot less resilient by comparison.

<sup>29</sup> For information on the Congress of Day Laborers, a project of the New Orleans Workers’ Center for Racial Justice, see <http://nowcrj.org/about-2/congress-of-day-laborers/>. For the WHIV interview, see “Mark Alain and Congress of Day Laborers” (Aug. 29, 2015) on WHIV radio; online at <https://soundcloud.com/whivfm/sets>. During the program, Dr. MarkAlain Dery interviews Brenda Castro and Santos Alvarado, representatives of the Congress of Day Laborers on the Katrina Tenth Anniversary. WHIV was founded by Dr. Dery, medical director for the Tulane T-Cell Clinic, and his coworkers. It is dedicated to “public health, human rights and social justice,” and is New Orleans’ only full-time grassroots community radio station.

<sup>30</sup> A clear recognition of the injustices done to migrants is so difficult for many because it necessarily leads to a questioning of the very foundations of nationalism and imperialism.

its mitigating qualities collapse and it is reduced to its essential repressive nature. This is the “minimal”—but maximally brutal—state. The state as a state of war against the people.

It is important that we remember the terroristic conditions that prevailed in a city with a penal system (the state’s essential moment) and no legal system (the state’s inessential moment). This is what existed in New Orleans during the post-Katrina “state of exception.”<sup>31</sup> This period was a state of “exception,” not in the sense that it varied in principle from the normal and unexceptional. It was “exceptional” only in the sense that the normal reached a level of intensity that it made it so conspicuous that it could not for a certain period of time (before resilencing) be ignored.

But resilencing has followed. Thus, we must remember. We must not forget the prisoners who were trapped in Orleans Parish Prison in the rising floodwaters after Katrina, or herded away to spend countless hours on overpasses in the hot sun. We must not forget the horrors of the makeshift Greyhound Station Prison, “Guantanamo on the Bayou,” where prisoners were put in outdoor wire cages, made to sleep on concrete floors, in oil and diesel fuel, where they were harassed and intimidated, and controlled by shootings with beanbag rounds.

We need to remember the subhuman conditions at Hunt Correctional Center, where inmates from OPP and victims of often arbitrary mass arrests after Katrina were herded together indiscriminately. Where they were thrown naked in bare cells, sometimes with hardened criminals or schizophrenics as cellmates. Where they were then given nothing to wear but jumpsuits, and nothing to read for over a month. Where they were often kept in cells for twenty-four hour a day. Where mattresses were taken away every day so prisoners could only sit or lie on concrete or metal. Where loud bells were rung every 15 minutes, every day, all day, in disciplinary tiers. We must remember the intimidation of citizens into forced labor with the threat of being sent to Hunt. We need to remember the period in which there was widespread police repression while racist vigilantes were allowed to terrorize some neighborhoods. We must remember the period in which power as domination was allowed to reveal its true face. The period in which *archy reigned supreme*.

Finally, we must remember one of the most horrifying of the realities that have been silenced, not only in Katrina commemorations, but in the everyday world of Big Easy business as usual. This is the brutal fact that New Orleans has for all these years been the world capital of “incarceration,” which is merely a sanitized, Latinized term for the caging and torture of human beings. We must not forget that the United States leads the world in incarceration, that Louisiana leads the United States in incarceration, and that New Orleans leads Louisiana in incarceration. We must remember that in some ways incarceration in Louisiana has been the continuation of slavery by other means. We must never forget the murderous nature of a carceral system that destroys generations and destroys communities. This is a stark post-Katrina reality that no politician dares mention or commemorate.

## RESILENCING: THE ECOLOGICAL CATASTROPHE

Beyond all these forms of resilencing lies the most extreme form of post-Katrina disavowal, and disavowal regarding the fate of New Orleans itself. This concerns the social ecology of the

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<sup>31</sup> For an excellent survey of post-Katrina penal and legal issues, see Sideris, Marina, “Illegal Imprisonment: Mass Incarceration and Judicial Debilitation in Post Katrina New Orleans” (Berkeley: University of California Berkeley, 2007); online at <http://www.law.berkeley.edu/library/disasters/Sideris.pdf>.

city in relation to entrenched and accelerating global social ecological trends. No meaningful discussion of the future of New Orleans can afford to ignore the continuing loss of coastal wetlands, the implications of the accelerating rise in sea level, and the very real possibility (and long-term inevitability) of a much more powerful hurricane than Katrina hitting New Orleans directly. The specter of doom, indeed, highly likely doom, hangs over the city and it cannot be exorcised by denial, by disavowal, or by any amount of happy talk by politicians and corporate executives.

The depth of ecological disavowal was highlighted in a Katrina anniversary segment of the public radio program “On Point” Never during the hour-long program was the severity of the global ecological crisis and its implications for New Orleans really explored. However, I was struck in particular by an exchange with Dr. Paul Kemp, a Coastal Oceanographer and Geologist at Louisiana State University.<sup>32</sup> Kemp is one of the major advocates of Mississippi River diversion to create coastal wetlands. Paul Kemp is a good guy, standing up for the region, and, in particular, for the need to restore the coastal wetlands. But this is what makes his comments in some ways so troubling, since they also reflect the larger dominant ideology of disavowal.

Kemp didn’t take on directly the details of how we are to cope with something between the three foot rise in sea level commonly accepted, and the ten foot rise recently suggested by a team headed by James Hansen and sixteen colleagues.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, a rapid melting and collapse of large segments of the Greenland or Antarctic ice sheets would produce a much more rapid rise that would be devastating to coastal areas near or below sea level. The melting of the Greenland ice sheet would produce a twenty-foot rise in sea level, while that of the Antarctic ice sheet would produce a sixty-foot rise.<sup>34</sup> Most scientists believe that such effects will not be seen until into the next century.

Somehow, few think of a century as a comprehensible time span that has practical, concrete relevance. Even in relation to a three-hundred year old city. One might learn something from the ancient Hebrews, who posed the possibility that “the iniquity of the fathers” might be “visited on the children, to the third and the fourth generation.”<sup>35</sup> Or from the Vedic Sages, who in the *Rig Veda* suggested that “the older shares the mistake of the younger”<sup>36</sup> Or from the Native Americans, who suggest that we consider the effects of our actions on the seventh generation. Or from the ancient Buddhist doctrine of karma, which, in literal terms, means taking responsibility for the way in which all the causes and conditions in which we are implicated have enduring consequences.

Kemp and others point out that if we can rebuild wetlands, to a certain degree the land will rise with sea level rise. And it is indeed true that in many ways our coastal wetlands are more ecologically adaptable than other kinds of coastline. However, such restorative approaches can only offer long term hope if global climate change is addressed much more effectively than nation-states and corporations have done or are indeed structurally capable of doing. If the worst scenarios

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<sup>32</sup> “On Point” (August 26, 2015); online at <http://onpoint.wbur.org/2015/08/26/new-orleans-10-years-after-katrina>.

<sup>33</sup> J. Hansen et al, “Ice melt, sea level rise and superstorms: evidence from paleoclimate data, climate modeling, and modern observations that 2 °C global warming is highly dangerous,” in *Atmos. Chem. Phys. Discuss.*, 15, 20059–20179, 2015; abstract online at <http://www.atmos-chem-phys-discuss.net/15/20059/2015/acpd-15-20059-2015.html>.

<sup>34</sup> National Snow and Ice Data Center, “Quick Facts on Ice Sheets”; online at <https://nsidc.org/cryosphere/quick-facts/icesheets.html>

<sup>35</sup> Numbers 14:18.

<sup>36</sup> Thanks to Quincy Saul for this reference, and many other helpful suggestions concerning this discussion.

occur, as they are likely to, given the persistence of the dominant global economic and political order, such projects will be no more than futile gestures in the long run.

Kemp concedes that “In a very large storm we are not going to be able to keep all the water out,” but explained after evacuation there will be “teams” that will “make sure that the property will be protected. The host, Tom Ashbrook, asks the incisive question: “Is New Orleans going to be around as we get higher sea levels?” But Kemp evades this question. In a conspicuously off-point response, he explains that the city’s “original defenses” were vegetation and that “the marshes and swamps provided protection against surge and waves.” He notes that “we have a big river to work with,” implying that these traditional defenses will once again protect the city in the same manner that they once did, if we work diligently on coastal restoration.

But the current threats are of a different order from those faced when our “original defenses” did their job so well. In 2002, the *Bill Moyers’ Now* program did a piece that outlined starkly the dangers to New Orleans posed by what has long been called “The Big One.”<sup>37</sup> In the segment, Emergency Manager Walter Maestri points out that a direct hit from a major hurricane that stalled over the city could fill up the natural bowl between the levees and put twenty-two feet of water even in the relatively high ground of the French Quarter. Maestri also remarks that when his office participated in a mock Hurricane emergency<sup>38</sup> and saw projections of the effects of a major hurricane, model storm “Hurricane Delaney,” on the city “we changed the name of the storm from Delaney to K-Y-A-G-B ... kiss your ass goodbye ... because anybody who was here as that Category Five storm came across ... was gone.”

An exchange from the interview is instructive. Daniel Zwerdling asks, “Do you think that the President of the United States and Congress understand that people like you and the scientists studying this think the city of New Orleans could very possibly disappear?” This is basically the same question that Tom Ashbrooke posed thirteen years later. But note the difference in the answer. Walter Maestri replies, “I think they know that, I think that they’ve been told that. I don’t know that anybody, though, psychologically, you know has come to grips with that as — as a — a potential real situation.” They know, but they cannot *act* as if they know. In other words, they respond to the situation through disavowal.

This kind of brutal realism is refreshing, and quite necessary, since our response needs to be proportional to the true magnitude of the problem, and we have cope with the fact that we are normally unable to respond in this manner. The documentary also included discussion of a proposal to build a large wall around the older parts of the city that are above sea level (more or less the quarter of the city nearest the river that didn’t flood after Katrina), with huge gates that would be closed in times of heavy flooding, abandoning most of the city to destruction. This rather dramatic scenario may not be the correct approach, but at least has the merit of taking the long-term threats seriously. Taking possibly catastrophic future sea level rise seriously would require an even more ruthless sense of reality.

There is a fundamental obstacle to clear recognition of our true ecological predicament. If one really grasps the problem, one is forced to admit that the only sane, rational and humane response to such a problem is to take action that gets to its roots. This means becoming part

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<sup>37</sup> “The City in a Bowl” (Nov. 20, 2002); transcript online at [http://www.pbs.org/nova/transcript/transcript\\_neworleans.html](http://www.pbs.org/nova/transcript/transcript_neworleans.html). Excerpts from the original documentary are included in NOVA scienceNOW, “Hurricanes”; online at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/education/earth/hurricanes-new-orleans-threat.html>.

<sup>38</sup> Louisiana Office of Emergency Preparedness exercise on 18 June 2002; see GlobalSecurity.org, “Hurricane Delaney”; online at <http://www.globalsecurity.org/security/ops/hurricane-delaney.htm>.

of a local and global movement to destroy the system that is producing the catastrophe. Faced with this crisis of conscience and crisis of action, most who are not already lost in denial will succumb to the path of disavowal and try strategically to disremember what they have learned about the crisis. Fortunately for them, their path of bad faith will be supported an entire world of systematically distorted discourse and practice.

## RESILENCING: DISSIDENT VOICES & THE BELOVED COMMUNITY

The final important thing that has been denied and disavowed, silenced and resilenced is in fact the most positive thing that came out of the disaster. This is the story of the community self-determination, collective creativity, mutual aid, compassion, and solidarity that arose out of the devastated city. This story is perhaps told best in scott crow's book *Black Flags and Windmills* and in Francisco DiSantis and LouLou Latta's *Post-Katrina Portraits*.<sup>39</sup> It is a history that is obscured, minimized and even negated by the ideology of resilience.

Resilience is in itself merely an objective quality of a being, usually an organism or an ecosystem, and, by extension, a person or a community. It is not a moral virtue deserving of praise, though it is absurdly treated as one according to the resilientist ideology. The actual moral qualities related to resilience include diligence, perseverance, dedication, determination, and courage. Diligence or determination, which implies steadfastness and fortitude in the face of adversity, is in the Christian tradition one of the "seven Heavenly Virtues" that are counterposed to the "Seven Deadly Sins. Similarly, both *Adhiṭṭhāna* or resolute determination, and *Vīrya* or diligence, are among the *pāramitās*, or "perfections" in Buddhist ethics. And courage has been one of the cardinal virtues since the time of the ancient Greek philosophers.

A community needs a measure of resilience merely to survive. However, it needs *resolute courage* in order to break the chains of illusion and domination so that it can become free and self-determining, so that it can flourish and realize itself. The Katrina catastrophe loosened those chains for a moment, and the spectacle of the abject failure of the dominant political and economic system, and the flowering of grassroots mutual aid and solidarity inspired the beginnings of a movement to shake them off entirely.

In the wake of the Katrina disaster, Common Ground Collective volunteers talked about "a crack in history" or "a system crack" that had opened up, so that something new could emerge. A new world was emerging out of this fissure in the old, a new world based on values such as community and solidarity, care for one another, and care for the earth. If one reflects on these basic values, it is apparent this "new" world is in many ways a return to the very ancient idea of the beloved community.<sup>40</sup> It is a return to the commons, a world in which all our ancestors

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<sup>39</sup> scott crow, *Black Flags and Windmills: Hope, Anarchy, and the Common Ground Collective* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2014). *The Post-Katrina Portraits* consists of images of survivors and volunteers sketched by artist Francesco di Santis and accounts of their experiences written by the subjects. A collection was published as a large format art book, *The Post-Katrina Portraits, Written and Narrated by Hundreds, Drawn by Francesco di Santis* (New Orleans: Francesco di Santis and Loulou Latta, 2007) and can also be found online at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/postkatrinaportraits/show/>. See also Part V: "New Orleans: Common Grounds and Killers," in Rebecca Solnit, *A Paradise Built in Hell: The Extraordinary Communities that Arise in Disaster* (New York: Penguin Books, 2009), pp. 231–303.

<sup>40</sup> This idea goes back two and a half millennia to the Buddhist concept of the *sangha* and two millennia to the Christian idea of the community of *agape*. In American history, it had its explicit roots in the thought of idealist



once lived. Just as the Peoples Hurricane Relief Fund and others fought in the name of a “Right of Return” to New Orleans, we need to be inspired by a “Right to Return” to the freedom of the commons. It was this spirit of the commons and the common that inflamed tens of thousands of (primarily) young people who came to New Orleans as volunteers, and sustained many thousands of local citizens who refused to leave or who returned quickly in order to serve and to save their own beloved communities.

The ideology of “resilience” is part of the process of paving over the crack, silencing the voice of insurgency. But not everyone looked to the Katrina anniversary as an opportunity to forget this history. In addition to the Tenth Annual Katrina March and Second-line<sup>41</sup>, there was the Common Ground Collective Ten Year Reunion<sup>42</sup> and the Fifth Annual Southern Movement Assembly.<sup>43</sup> All of these dissident commemorations carried on the spirit of the post-Katrina radicalism, looking back to a history of grassroots struggle and communal creativity and forward to a future that will not only remember but also continue that history.

Almost ten years ago, reflecting on the scenes of post-Katrina destruction and on the recovery communities that were also emerging as communities of liberation and solidarity, I made the following hopeful observation:

“At the same time that the state and corporate capitalism have shown their ineptitude in confronting our fundamental social and ecological problems, the grassroots recovery movement has continued to show its strength, its effectiveness, and its positive vision for the future. Most importantly, within this large and diverse movement, some have begun to lay the foundation for a participatory, democratically self-managed community based on mutual aid and solidarity.”<sup>44</sup>

I took as the prime example of this communitarian creativity the work of the Common Ground Collective, which, I said,

“operates several distribution centers, two media centers, a women’s center, a community kitchen, several clinics, and various sites for housing volunteers. Its current projects include house gutting, mold abatement, roof tarping, tree removal, temporary housing, safety and health training, a community newspaper, community radio, bioremediation, a biodiesel program, computer classes, childcare co-ops, worker co-ops, legal assistance, eviction defense, prisoner support, after-school and summer programs, anti-racism training, and wetlands restoration work.”<sup>45</sup>

Fragments of this emerging community of liberation and solidarity have endured and some have even grown and developed. True, this transformative vision has remained, as of today, largely unrealized in the face of the forces of normalization, cooptation and resilencing. Yet, many

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communitarian philosopher Josiah Royce, and came to fruition and concrete actualization, as is well known, in the communitarian liberation theology of Martin Luther King. Before any of this history started, it was already implicit in the way of life of indigenous peoples everywhere.

<sup>41</sup> “New Orleans Katrina Commemoration” Facebook page; online at <https://www.facebook.com/thekatrinacommemoration>

<sup>42</sup> “Common Ground Collective 10 Year Reunion” Facebook page; online at <https://www.facebook.com/events/774116122702802/>

<sup>43</sup> Anna Simonton, “Amid Katrina Commemoration Spectacle, a Southern Freedom Movement Takes Shape” in *Truthout* (Sept. 1, 2015); online at <http://www.truth-out.org/news/item/32590-amid-katrina-commemoration-spectacle-a-southern-freedom-movement-takes-shape>

<sup>44</sup> John P. Clark, *The Impossible Community: Realizing Communitarian Anarchism* (New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 210.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 211.

in New Orleans, indeed a growing number, still strive to realize this vision, and seek to learn from our traumatic history a way beyond the chains of illusion and domination to communal freedom.

Perhaps the solution to our impasse is simply a matter of recognizing the obvious and acting accordingly. We need to admit that the disaster is permanent, and that it is of world-historical, indeed, earth-historical proportions. It seemed like a miracle that ten years ago, in the midst of devastation and abandonment, tens of thousands of volunteers could come together in post-Katrina New Orleans in a spirit of communal solidarity. Can there be a miracle today that is proportional to the magnitude of our challenge? The Earth itself, the *Oikos*, is our Common Ground. Our Time in History, the *Kairos*, is our Common Ground.

In a sense, I must ask today exactly the same question that I asked myself and others in the months after the Katrina disaster. In the Spring of 2006, I wrote an article that probed the psychological and ontological depths of devastation, and posed the political, and ultimately existential, question, “Do You Know What It Means?”<sup>46</sup> This is still the question. Will we put the disaster behind us, even as it continues and indeed intensifies at its deepest levels, or will we finally learn its lessons? Will we finally learn how to think and act: for ourselves, for the community, and for the Earth?

The rest is resilience.

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<sup>46</sup> John Clark, “New Orleans: Do You Know What It Means?” in *New: Translating Cultures/Cultures Traduites 2* (2006); online at [https://www.academia.edu/2559184/\\_New\\_Orleans\\_Do\\_You\\_Know\\_What\\_It\\_Means](https://www.academia.edu/2559184/_New_Orleans_Do_You_Know_What_It_Means).

# The Planet Attacks!

*The condition of the biosphere continues to erode. Human society continues to expand, leaving devastation in its wake. Climate crisis is no longer a fringe idea and yet the vast majority of humanity turn their backs on what it has wrought. There will be no ghost from the machine that will magically restore what has been lost. Extinction is not a metaphor. We will not rip out our eyes, like Oedipus in horror of what he has done. We will be strong, staring unblinking into the abyss, until we see the monster looking back at us.*

## **An Ocean of Bones**

The terminal condition of the Great Barrier Reef has been well-documented. It is now becoming clear that coral reefs all over the world are in a similar state of collapse. Over 70 percent of the world's reefs are now threatened due to bleaching, the process by which rising ocean temperatures cause the protective algae that covers the reefs to disappear. Exposed and unprotected, the reefs quickly die. There is no solution to this problem. It is not caused by direct human interference, it is no longer a matter of reducing pollution or carbon. The planet has moved into a hot phase and we have to confront what that means.

## **Salmon Boy Eats the Stars**

Half of the species of salmon in California are on track to become extinct within the next fifty years, according to the UC Davis Center for Watershed Sciences. California has one of the most diverse salmon populations in the US. The future of California's salmon is largely threatened by the state's vast water infrastructure, required to sustain the enormous human population in a region with limited access to water. Because of these dams and levees, 95 percent of migratory salmon species are no longer able to travel to their ancestral spawning grounds, which they have been traveling to for 50 million years.

## **Doomsday is Not Enough**

The Global Seed Vault, buried deep inside a mountain on an island in the arctic circle, was designed to protect some of the most valuable food crop seeds for human use in case of massive global disaster. The Vault, which opened in 2008, was built to be protected by the deep permafrost but scientists are now reporting that staggeringly high arctic temperatures have jeopardized the project's success by melting much of the permafrost and flooding the vault. The catastrophe, it appears, has already arrived.

## **The Wasteland**

As the mainstream news and politicians continue to fan the flames of fear and paranoia around North Korea's desire to develop nuclear weapons, the Western Hemisphere's biggest nuclear waste site at Hanford in Eastern Washington is currently leaking highly radioactive chemicals due to a collapsed tunnel containing waste from its plutonium extraction program. For decades officials have been warning about weakening infrastructure at Hanford, which produced the nuclear material used in the atomic bomb dropped on Nagasaki at the end of World War II. The tunnel, which collapsed on August 9<sup>th</sup>, contains some of the site's most powerful radioactive material, was being held up by rotting wooden beams more than 40 years old. As it is, damage from the leak

to the surrounding area appears to be minimal, though officials have said that if it had happened to be a windy day, radioactive particles would have been blown over all of Eastern Washington. This demonstrates how precarious our position is, all it takes is for the wind to blow the wrong way, and its all over.

### **Methane is the new CO2**

The appearance of hundreds of mysterious bright blue lakes in Siberia is a potent reminder that CO2 may not be the most dangerous contributor to global warming for much longer. Siberian permafrost currently keeps billions of tons of methane, 30 times more effective than CO2 at storing heat in the atmosphere, locked up and frozen. For years scientists have feared that as global temperatures rise, the permafrost would melt and release these gases. These blue lakes, caused by algae attracted to the methane, are evidence that this has in fact already occurred.

### **An End to Hope**

While the vast majority of the human race refuses to engage with the idea of climate catastrophe in any meaningful way at all, even some of the attempted solutions that have been proposed have now been determined to be ineffective. More and more scientists are arguing that none of the “large-scale land-use and technical solutions” that have been proposed would not succeed in mitigating the effects of climate change. For years there have been theories that global warming could be ameliorated by constructing biomass energy systems that would suck carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere. Central to that plan would be the establishment and maintenance of massive forest plantations that would capture and store the extra carbon and could be later used for fuel in facilities that would filter out the carbon and store it deep underground. This plan has been proposed by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), despite the fact that scientists agree that there is no way to successfully implement such a plan and that it is doubtful that it would solve the problem in any case. The resources and materials required to plant such massive amounts of trees would put an enormous toll on the ecosystem and without the technology to burn biomass without rereleasing the carbon into the atmosphere, which currently does not exist, the plan is meaningless.

### **Fear of – Black Snake**

Indigenous communities and environmentalists, who have expressed concern over the construction of the massive Dakota Access Pipeline for years, have had their worst fears confirmed as a leak in the pipeline has already been reported at a pipe station in South Dakota in April. While the leak was modest, construction of the pipeline has not even been completed yet and it is impossible not to see this leak as the first of many. One of the attorneys fighting against the pipeline stated: “Pipelines leak and they spill. It’s just what happens.” There is no satisfaction for the anti-DAPL activists in saying ‘I told you so’ but it confirms how dire this situation is for the Standing Rock Sioux tribe and the millions of people whose drinking water is at risk.

# Against Self-Sufficiency, the Gift by Sever

## The Blank Slate

Going toe to toe with the forces of law and order... grappling with the exhausting necessity of destroying civilization... hungering for something more as the diet of riots and insurrections proves to be a shrinking buffet of diminishing returns... sooner or later, all of us pose to ourselves the question of opening up a wild space, where we can be nourished through a healthy relationship with the earth, creating a community that might serve as some kind of anti-civilization.

Maybe we reach this point after years of bruising our knuckles banging on a brick wall. Maybe we come to a strategic analysis of the shortcomings of the big social revolts around us. Maybe when we make our first conscious acts of rebellion, we take one look at what's called "struggle," based as it is in protests, acts of propaganda, and illegal confrontation, and decide it's not for us. Or maybe the attempt to create some kind of community or build a material self-sufficiency is the first step in our radicalization, to be followed later by acts of confrontation and sabotage.

Those of us who do not come from colonized communities—or more precisely from those who were colonized so long ago and so completely that we no longer have any living memory of it—often admire the struggles of indigenous people. From our outsider's perspective, which is generally exoticizing and maybe just as frequently annoying, it seems that indigenous communities fighting to regain their lands and their autonomous existence have something that we lack: ground to stand on, a certain relationship with the world, perhaps.

It's very possible that I'm wrong, but what is certain, in any case, is that we "rootless ones" feel this absence, and it defines much of what we do. We suffer the predilection not only for abstraction that is widespread in Western culture, but also the material and the historical need to start from scratch if we aim to break with the festering civilization that created us.

The Blank Slate is an old and perilous myth in our culture. It is the God born of a Word, the freedom that means being unencumbered by relations with the world, the mathematical equality from which good things supposedly arise.

The suffering caused by the Blank Slate can be seen in Year Zero revolutions,<sup>1</sup> in utopias founded on stolen land, in perfect ideas imposed at gunpoint.

## The Community

Forming free communities is one of the most common methods people from the West use to break with capitalism and create a new world. The Anabaptists took this path to escape religious domination and break the stranglehold of feudalism and a nascent capitalism. The early socialists did it with their utopian communes. Jewish anticapitalists did it with the kibbutzim. The hippies did it with the Back-to-the-Land movement. A variety of groups, from MOVE to the Autonomes, did it with urban communes. Anticapitalists are doing it today in manifestations as diverse as

squatted villages in the Pyrenees and the Alps, or Tarnac in France. And there is also the steady stream of radical retirement to the countryside.

Such a longstanding, multifaceted tradition of struggle cannot be lightly dismissed, whatever criticisms we might have. The failure, so far, of all these many attempts—to “leave capitalism behind” or to serve as a springboard for attacks on the infrastructure of domination or to plant a seed for a new world or whatever their specific pretensions were—is mirrored by nothing less than the failure of all the other methods we have tried out to liberate ourselves. Failure is our common heritage, so ubiquitous that it hardly constitutes a big deal or a mark against us. Understanding the relationship between what we do and our failures: therein lies the gem.

The varied attempts to create liberated communities cannot all be measured with the same ruler, but one failing that crops up pervasively in our present context is worth mentioning. Nowadays, most people who have grown up with Western cultural values don’t even know what a community is. For example, it is not a subculture or a scene (see: “activist community” or “community accountability process”), nor is it a real estate zone or municipal power structure (see: “gated community” or “community leaders”).

If you will not starve to death without the other people who make up the group, it is not a community. If you don’t know even a tenth of them since the day either you or they were born, it is not a community. If you can pack up and join another such group as easily as changing jobs or transferring to a different university, if the move does not change all the terms with which you might understand who you are in this world, it is not a community.

A community cannot be created in a single generation, and it cannot be created by an affinity group. In fact, you are not supposed to have affinity with most of the other people in your community. If you do not have neighbors who you despise, it is not a healthy community. In fact, it is the very existence of human bonds stronger than affinity or personal preference that make a community. And such bonds will mean there will always be people who prefer to live at the margins. Whether the community allows this distinguishes the anti-authoritarian one from the authoritarian one.

A group of anarchists or socialists or hippies who go off into the mountains to live together will end up hating one another. It is the very presence of disagreeable neighbors that teaches us to appreciate the people we have affinity with. An “anarchist community” is an odious proposition.

## **Circled Wagons**

Today, the rural community as an anticapitalist project is often motivated by the search for self-sufficiency. People who hate this civilization want to recover their power to feed themselves, to heal themselves, to relearn the skills necessary for sustaining life. A worthy proposition, on the face of it.

Self-sufficiency might take on individualistic or isolationist tones—as when a single tiny community tries to meet its own needs—or it might constitute a more collective project—as when a network of communities try to meet their needs together. It may contain the absurd belief that we can get rid of capitalism by creating an alternative to it, turning our backs on it, or it may be a modest attempt to live better and more deliberately as we participate in multifaceted struggles against civilization. In any case, the very construct of the idea will tend to push us in a direction that, even if it does not represent a fiasco, at the least constitutes a missed opportunity.

Every course of action we take comes back to us as representation, when we talk about it and reflect on it. This representation often exists as a visual metaphor that in turn suggests a strategy.

Self-sufficiency is a circling of the wagons. We imagine it as a breaking off of relationships, the end of a dependency, the bearing of our own weight, the closing of a circle. Some of these visual metaphors and the strategies they encourage are benign, an average mix of advantages and disadvantages. Others feed directly into a pioneer machismo. But in both cases, they have too much in common with a puritan idea of productivity and independence, and with the myth of the Blank Slate.

A community based on self-sufficiency might get “walled in together,” true to the original meaning of the term (see: *munis*). Etymology is not deterministic, since meaning is alive: contextual, fluctuating, and resourceful. In this case, community’s etymology can come to us as a gift, a warning of what might come to pass if we are not careful.

We never bear our own weight, and to speak truthfully, we never feed ourselves. It is the earth that feeds us and bears us up. Everything we have that makes life possible is the result of a gift.

## The Gift

What we truly need in this war against civilization, this war for our lives, is not to break off relationships but to create more abundant relationships. We do not need communities with pretensions of self-sufficiency, living off the product of their own labor, hacking their means of subsistence out of the womb of an inert and passive earth with the sweat of their own brow. We need communities that ridicule the very ideas of labor and property by reviving reciprocity, cultivating the gift, and opening our eyes to the worldview that these practices create.

The earth gives us the gifts we need to survive, if we go looking for them, and we can give back to the earth, with our waste, with our love, and when we die with our very bodies. Wanting to live reciprocally is an admirable purpose, and a project that can give us strength in our struggles. In order to cultivate these gifts, we will have to relearn many traditional skills that capitalism has stolen from us. In this regard, the practice of the gift seems equal to the practice of self-sufficiency. But instead of a miserly self-nourishment calculated to close off dependencies, we can foster a rich web of interdependence through an active generosity that erodes capitalist scarcity and alienation.

When you have a garden, you have abundance. The same is true if you have a skill that enables you to perform acts of art and creation. The moment you start to sell this abundance, or to limit it in order to divert energy to meet all your other needs within a closed circle, scarcity is born.

Instead of a closed circle, the gift is a subversive invitation to abandon capitalism and the worldview it inculcates. This is true whether the gift is a basket of tomatoes from your garden, mushrooms or calendula you have gathered, a day spent measuring and cutting door frames for a neighbor’s new house, or an afternoon taking care of a friend’s children. Reciprocating gives us pleasure, and through the open circle of the gift we form an expansive web of complicities and relationships through which we can nourish and support ourselves. Rather than fleeing the cities, going back to the land in a mutiny destined to isolation and failure, the practice of the gift allows us to return to capitalism’s terrain—and all the people held captive there—with forms of abundance and sharing that encourage further struggle.

Finally, the fundamental idea of reciprocity and bounty is incompatible with the exploitation of nature, whereas projects animated by self-sufficiency often give rise to pioneering and productivist attitudes.

In the city, in the country, and in the mountains, wild nature and struggle against civilization are ever-present possibilities. In those inevitable moments when we seek some respite, when we try to nourish ourselves as a form of struggle, and when we attempt to find a niche that could allow us to form a healthy part of a web of living things, the way we understand our goal and the vision it fits into will have a great effect on what we reap.

The sharing of gifts seems like a simple gesture, but in truth it is a rebellious practice and a kind of relationship with the world that, if followed to its conclusions, will spell the abolition of property, the throwing down of walls and fences, the destruction of every law, and the liberation of every slave. All it requires is the boundless daring, desire, and generosity to break with the isolation, the insecurity, the misery, the loneliness, the addiction, and the fear that constitute our culture.



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