said, the main point here was the idea that nature was an object, something to manipulate, subdued to the will of humans. The point is not only harvesting. It is forcing, pushing production through chemicals, through an human intervention aimed to have more and more… as a matter of fact, you must give more (chemicals, water) to have more… and you must move water from river and lakes into the fields. And you must produce chemical fertilizer to artificially enrich soils. Moreover, you have to spray pesticides so plants won't be killed by germs, germs that grow stronger and stronger because of pollution. And again you must pollute to produce new chemicals in order to kill new diseases produced by your pollution. This is meaningless.

Farming was the first stage of a process of distortion of the environment that has led to today's soil erosion and water shortages. As reported by Jeremy Rifkin, "fresh water, a once seemingly inexhaustible resource, is now becoming scarce in many regions of the world. Between 1940 and 1980, worldwide water use doubled".[67] Seventy percent of all the water used goes to agriculture, to the needs of food production and to animals.

In the meanwhile, soils are turned in deserts, deprived of organic materials, and forests are cut to provide new and productive lands. "The few areas safe from deforestation are where agriculture doesn't want to go",[68] writes Zerzan. Soil deterioration (erosion, desertification) is as old as agriculture. "Vast regions have changed their aspect completely," estimates Zeuner, "always to quasi-drier condition, since the beginnings of the Neolithic." Deserts now occupy most of the areas where the high civilizations once flourished, and there is much historical evidence that these early formations inevitably ruined

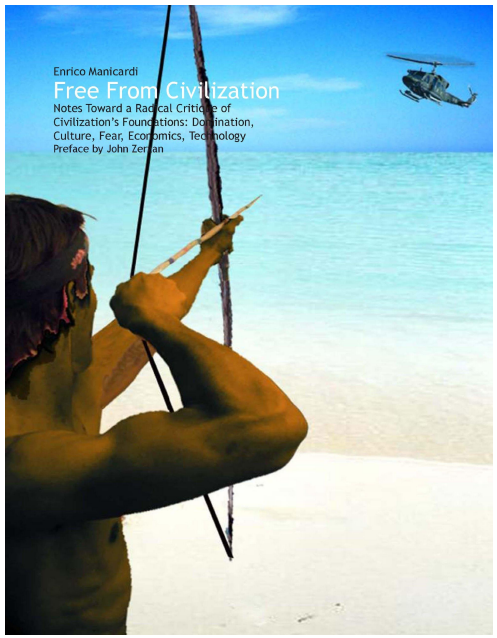
[67] Rifkin, Jeremy, *Beyond Beef: the Rise and Fall of Cattle Culture*, Plume, p. 218.

[68] Zerzan, John, *Elements of Refusal.*

Free From Civilization

Notes Toward a Radical Critique of Civilization's Foundations: Domination, Culture, Fear, Economics, Technology

Enrico Manicardi



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that continually demands time, effort, fatigue, yesterday as today, in a mechanized era. As political philosopher Hannah Arendt points out, "the word for 'tilling' later came to mean 'laboring' and this association implies servitude"[63] on the part of humans. The link between first agriculture and modern factories is underlined by John Zerzan: "The early factories literally mimicked the agricultural model, indicating again that at base all mass production is farming. The natural world is to be broken and forced to work."[64]

With agriculture,

> the human capacity of being shackled to crops and herds devolved rather quickly. Food production overcame the common absence or paucity of ritual and hierarchy in society and introduced civilized activities like the forced labor of temple-building.[65]

In practice, work took the place of life. It is significant that even today in several Italian dialects the physical fatigue for working is described with the Italian term "vita", life, as an alienated equation between life and work. At the same time as life was replaced by labor, nature became something to manipulate: "nature became merely something to be 'worked.' On this capacity for a sedentary and servile existence rests the entire superstructure of civilization with its increasing weight of repression."[66]

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Relationships between humans and the environment changed with the shift from foraging to farming. As already

Marshall, *Stone Age Economics*, p. 64.

[63] Arendt, Hannah, quoted in Broswimmer, Franz, *Ecocide*, p. 32.

[64] Zerzan, John, *Elements of Refusal.*

[65] Zerzan, John, *Elements of Refusal.*

[66] Zerzan, John, *Elements of Refusal*, Ibid.

the Amazon, and—as reported by Clastres—he measured their daily work activity as slightly more than three hours. Marshall Sahlins comments:

> Reports on hunters and gatherers of the ethnological present—specifically on those in marginal environments—suggest a mean of three to five hours per adult worker per day in food production. Hunters keep banker's hours, notably less then modern industrial workers (unionized), who would surely settle for a 21-35 hour week.[60]

Moreover hunters-gatherers worked these few hours not in a factory, near chemicals or closed in a office: they worked in the open air, with their friends. Of course, that at least is a form of working much more satisfying than the boring and mechanized alienation we experienced nowadays. Many other scholars and researchers bring such evidence. According to Margaret McArthur, they do not consider the task of subsistence onerous. "They certainly did not approach it as an unpleasant job to be got over as soon as possible, nor as a necessary evil to be postponed as long as possible".[61] As noted by Lauriston Sharp, the Australian Yir-Yiront "do not discriminate between 'work' and 'play'".[62] Richard Lee observed that Bushmen spend the greatest part of their time (four to five days per week) in other activities then hunting or foraging: visiting other camps, resting, talking, playing, having fun with guests, dancing and so on.

On the contrary, the rise of agriculture means that all of one's time is spent working. Working the land is an activity

[60] Sahlins, Marshall, *Stone Age Economics*, pp. 34-35.

[61] McArthur, Margaret, (1960):Food consumption and dietary levels of groups of Aborigines living on naturally occurring foods, quoted in Sahlins Marshall, *Stone Age Economics*, p. 18.

[62] Sharp, Lauriston (1958): *People without Politics*, quoted in Sahalins

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happened in India, where the new farmers, from the Indus Valley to the Ganga Valley, were exposed to malaria, due to high temperature and heavy rains.

Moreover, after sedentism and cities, the new moment of fame of contagious sicknesses was the onset of trade in agricultural surplus. Using a metaphor from Diamond, we can say that commerce transformed the people of Europe, Asia, and North Africa into a huge feast for microbes. In this way

> smallpox finally reached Rome, as the Plague of Antoninus, which killed millions of Roman citizens between AD 165 and 180. Similarly, bubonic plague first appeared in Europe as the Plague of Justinian (AD 542-43). But plague didn't begin to hit Europe with full force as the Black Death epidemics until AD 1346, when a new route for overland trade with China provided rapid transit, along Efrasia's east-west axis, or flea-infested furs from plague-ridden areas of Central Asia to Europe.[59]

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The turning point of a process that destroyed a life style, agriculture introduced work into the life of neolithic humans. Labor, as a regulated activity, as a process separated from life, was unknown to hunters and gatherers. Their days were free from duties and production goals. Even sustaining oneself was not a duty.

Canadian anthropologist Richard Lee measured in the field the amount of time used by !Kung San foragers to satisfy their sustenance needs: in order to gain a diet rich in proteins, they have to work no more than three hours per day. Jacques Lizot lived with the Yanomani Indians, in the Venezuelan part of

[59] Diamond. Jared, *Guns, Germs, and Steel.*

ideal living conditions for the snails carrying schistosomiasis and for flukes that burrow through our skin as we wade through the feces-laden water."[55] And Goldsmith remarks:

> Large-scale irrigation projects have also provided an ideal habitat for water-borne diseases. The result is the spread of schistosomiasis and malaria which even the World Health Organization (WHO) acknowledges to be our doing. "As he constructs damns, irrigation ditches to alleviate the world's hunger, he sets up the ideal conditions for the spread of disease.[56]

In order to push farming, humans begun to deforest large tracts of wilderness and this practice brought new and disastrous effects on human health. In the early days of agriculture, farming caused an increase of rodents and worms. As suggested by Ralph Audy, these invertebrates are responsible for the spreading of scrub typhus in many places of Asia: when farmers began to cultivate lands that were once wild, they were exposed to the bite of insects and got infected.[57]

Therefore agriculture improved the odds that new diseases would spread, as pointed out by English historian Clive Pointing: "In West Africa forest clearance caused by the spread of swidden or 'slash and burn' agriculture created new environments for the mosquito that carries malaria and attacks humans. In China the spread of settlement southwards from the Yellow River Valley into the rice growing areas of the Yangtze also exposed the population to new diseases, in particular malaria and schistosomiasis".[58] Something like this

[55] Diamond Jared, *Guns, Germs and Steel.*

[56] Goldsmith, Edward, *The Great U-turn*, p. 81.

[57] R.J. Audy, *The Ecology of the Scrub Typhus*, (1961)

[58] Ponting, Clive, *A Green History of the World: the environment and the collapse of great civilizations*, p. 245?

happens with plague or typhoid fever, transmitted by lice among people living in overcrowded places.

Hunter-gatherers lived in groups that were too small for them to develop severe infections: according to English environmentalist Edward Goldsmith, "…a population of five hundred thousand people, for instance, is required for the measles virus to survive and propagate itself".[52] Moreover, as noted by Polgar, the urban population required more food and water and removed more garbage. Supplying a community with water and disposing wastes without mixing them is a problem even today. The mix of water and waste can produce cholera.

> The Roman Cloaca Maxima [writes Broswimmer] or main drain discharged pollutants into the Tiber River that threatened not only those living downstream but the city itself—especially when the river flooded and untreated sewage spilled into the streets. Typically, toilet and garbage pails were emptied out of windows, rotting into sludge so deep that, in place like Pompeii, stepping stones were provided for pedestrians. Such wastes attracted vermin and provided breeding grounds for epidemics […]"[53]

Moreover, city infrastructures and farming activities provided an artificial environment in which viruses could proliferate. Polgar reminds us that a mosquito living "in manmade receptacles, is mainly responsible for the transmission of the viruses of yellow fever and dengue".[54] The point is underlined by Diamond: "Irrigation agriculture and fish farming provide

[52] Goldsmith, Edward (1989): *The Great U-Turn*, p. 80

[53] Broswimmer, *Ecocide*, p. 43.

[54] Polgar Steven, quoted in Brothwell Don, Sandison A.t.: *Diseases in Antiquity: a Survey of the Diseases, Injuries and Surgery of Early Populations*, p. 63.

ten thousand years ago. Agriculture brought a demographic explosion. By 1000 BC, the population had increased tenfold (fifty million) and in 200 AD was estimated at two hundred million. Human communities were now organized in cities: in the fifth millennium BC Mehrgarth, in the Indus valley, had twenty five thousand inhabitants. Such an agglomeration could be managed only with a strong bureaucracy, with a hierarchy and state officials. Of course there was a worsening of health conditions. As we have seen, the rise of agriculture brought infections and microbes.[50] With the rise of towns, the situation was even worse, as there were more residents living in worse health conditions. As suggested by environmental sociologist Franz Broswimmer, in Athens three thousand years ago

> streets were a jumble of narrow passages yielding only to the Sacred Way, a wide ceremonial road, as well as to the open space of the Agora, where trade and political affairs were conducted. Within the walls resided some 100.000 people, including a large number of resident aliens. City-dwelling Athenians had little space, and Athens suffered from crowding, noise, air and water pollution, the accumulation of wastes, plague [...].[51]

According to Steven Polgar, a huge number of people gathered in a small area such a city brought two factors, affecting the health of the group: contact due to over-crowding and trade.

About the contact: chickenpox, parotitis and measles spread through contact. The higher the population density, the higher the chances of an epidemic spreading. The same

[50] Diamond Jared, *Guns, Germs and Steel.*

[51] Broswimmer, Franz, *Ecocide: a Short History of the Mass Extinctions of Species*, p. 40

Preface

Enrico Manicardi has given us a book of great importance. It is, to my knowledge, the most comprehensive treatment of civilization critique in any language. In Italy, *Liberi Dalla Civilta* joins the work of such scholars and writers as Stefano Boni and Alberto Prunetti. This book is an in-depth introduction to a new movement, and shows why a growing number of people are calling civilization itself into question.

A further strength, which I find quite moving, is the voice and tone Enrico has used to write this book. Starting with his introduction, he expresses what it means to be living within civilization, and how it feels. This reminds me of the best of Derrick Jensen's work. I am profoundly struck by this combination of passion and analysis, and I predict that many readers will be equally moved.

As the crisis deepens, spreading into every part of our planet, it replicates the anti-life trajectory of civilization's domesticating, controlling, smothering force. At the same time, this unfolding reality is awakening a desire for fundamental change, for a paradigm shift. Faced with intolerable, unhealthy threats, we open up to new ways of thinking. These new thoughts must be profound and creative enough to match the dire forces now overtaking us. I am encouraged by signs of such new thinking and new approaches in many countries ––not recognized officially, but developing rapidly, and transcending both Right and Left.

Mass society, industrial life, the end of nature, the technoculture... we can use various terms for this barren reality. It is all turning out badly. Very badly. We are here, and we need to be somewhere else. *Free From Civilization* is an invaluable guide. Thank you, Enrico!

John Zerzan

Introduction

Why write an essay that critiques civilization today, when civilization is presented everywhere as the only means of escape from a world that is drifting away? Why stigmatize, down to its foundations, the mix of values that distinguish civil life when these values are elevated on the basis of high-sounding propaganda as promises of future welfare and happiness? It would be too easy to answer that we cannot believe such promises anymore, that they are mere propaganda; that a "Better Future" has been pompously heralded for a long time without any celebration following the many announcements. But the problem is certainly more complex.

If we look closely at the conditions of the modern world, we see not only a medley of broken promises of happiness, but also a series of perfectly kept promises of unhappiness. When we are told that in order to live better someone else must be worse off, when we are asked to be patient a while longer, to tighten our belts, grit our teeth and accept those sacrifices that will make the sun shine again, we are facing just those sorts of kept promises. Which is exactly what happens when we are asked to work even more, hurry up even more, consume everything and everybody in order to sustain Economy, Progress, Development, Democracy, etc.

In the world there are no absolutely negative or positive situations. Even something that makes us extremely happy can cause some suffering (romantic love is perhaps the most illustrative example); on the other hand, what we consider negative can help us grow up and may not be totally unfavorable. Like any human condition, civilization is distinguished

colonization". Humans refused to continue sharing the fruits of the Earth and declared themselves "owners of the Earth". And Nature, once a living part of a continuum, became a tool in the hand of humanity. A transformation described in a famous passage of Thoreau's *Walden*:

> The very simplicity and nakedness of man's life in the primitive ages imply this advantage, at least, that they left him still but a sojourner in nature. When he was refreshed with food and sleep, he contemplated his journey again. He dwelt, as it were, in a tent in this world, and was either threading the valleys, or crossing the plains, or climbing the mountain-tops. But lo! men have become the tools of their tools. The man who independently plucked the fruits when he was hungry is become a farmer; and he who stood under a tree for shelter, a housekeeper. We now no longer camp as for a night, but have settled down on earth and forgotten heaven.[49]

The withdrawal from nomadism shattered an age-old system of relationship between humans and nature and opened the path to a worsening of life and environmental conditions. People had to live close to their fields: there was no way to go elsewhere and a demographic growth resulted. In a nomadic context, it is difficult to have many children to move around. Even today, in the few communities of hunter-gatherers left, rarely does a woman give birth to more than two or three children during her life. On the contrary, farming demands a higher number of children to be employed later in the fields.

It seems that for a few million years the human population could be counted in no more than four million. At least, this is the number of men, women and children living on the Earth

[49] Thoreau, Henry David: *Walden, or, Life in the Woods*, p. 46

tion infectious diseases were unknown to humans, as documented by biologists Marston Bates, J.B.S Haldane, Frank Livingstone, and Thomas Cockburn since the middle of the last century.

The reasons for this effect of farming have been scrutinized. Diamond asks:

> Did [...] agriculture launch the evolution of our crowd of infectious diseases? One reason just mentioned is that agriculture sustains much higher human population densities than does the hunting-gathering lifestyle—on the average, 10 to 100 times higher. In addition, hunter-gatherers frequently shift camp and leave behind their own piles of feces with accumulated microbes and worm larvae. But farmers are sedentary and live amid their own sewage, thus providing microbes with a short path from one person's body into another's drinking water.[47]

One other point is the loss of biodiversity brought by agriculture. As historian William H. McNeill noted, hoarding of surplus food meant farmers were more exposed then foragers to rats and mice, agents of plague and other contagious sicknesses.[48]

The artificial environment defined by agriculture not only changed the nutritional habits and health of humans, but also affected their style of life. Before farming, women and men had a free life in touch with nature, with no need of a settlement. The neolithic domestication of lands imposed a fixed settlement on humans, as nomadism was incompatible with land cultivation. Environmental sociologist Marina Fisher-Kowalsky refers to agriculture as a form of "terrestrial

[47] Diamond, Jared, *Ibid*

[48] McNeill, William, *Plague and People.*

by these mixed features. The point is not to judge it as totally disadvantageous (or absolutely free of inconveniences), but to try and understand it in terms of its entrenched patterns, principles, developments and effects, so as to look at civilization from a vantage point that allows us to establish if it can still be worthwhile to follow its path or if it is better to change our route. There is a price we pay everyday to safeguard civilization and to permit it to spread further: this price should be the stake of the game revolving around our willingness to accept all this.

Here is a simple example: all of us can acknowledge that a cell phone is a very useful tool. It undoubtedly is, but at what price? We just don't have to think about the damage it causes to our health due to the noxious waves it emits (by using it, by not using it and even when it is on stand-by). We just don't have to think about the damage it inflicts on the environment—by spreading cell phone towers all over the Earth's landscape; by favoring a massive production of the super-polluting materials it is made of (plastic, paints, batteries); by becoming toxic waste when it is not used anymore. We also don't have to think about the relational isolation where it imprisons us all, making face-to-face communication less and less likely as well as, for many young people, the ability to express their opinions (and even their feelings) in person. And we don't have to think about the financial interests of the entire cell phone industry, about the financial speculation it encourages, about the environmental and human exploitation it brings about (some of the materials cell phones are made of are unearthed from deep mines where still today many enslaved people work and die). Finally, we don't have to think about the technological and military development programs that are nourished by the mobile phone phenomenon, making social control more and more invasive and wars even crueler. In short, we don't have to think about all this (and much, much more) if our cell phone is to appear *only* as a very useful tool.

Civilization—just like cell phones—has a really high price, and even if this price is usually carefully concealed and underestimated, it is there nevertheless. Acknowledging this is a first important step towards the evaluation of its acceptibility.

In this civilized world we have a bad life, and it is getting even worse. Not just because of hunger, or of the excruciating death of children exterminated by disease, famine or lack of drinking water. Our life is bad even in the opulent regions of this planet, in what is generally presented as the land of plenty. Multiplying forms of addiction: tobacco addiction and alcoholism are spreading among the young, together with any kind of more or less legal psychotropic drugs, medications, video games, sex industry, and gambling; the spreading of nervous diseases—anorexia, bulimia, panic attacks, chronic fatigue, sleep disorders; the various obsessive compulsions—to run faster, buy everything, collect anything, to hygienize and sanitize every single item; the exponential increase in violent episodes, from bullying to serial killers; all tell us that where the "national welfare state" has been officially proclaimed, civilization spares no one. Irreparably articulated in the routine on which our dismal everyday life is based, accompanied by a continuous distress and by the isolation that derives from a growing object- and service-mediated existence, this sense of inner emptiness becomes more urgent and looming and submerges us all—whether dissidents, faithful supporters of civilization, or opinionless people. The feeling of stress connected with the agonizing industriousness in which we try to drown our pain, and the boredom that overwhelms us as soon as we come out of these wearing cycles of hyperactivity convey an unmistakable truth: when life is domesticated and subdued to the System, its quality does not improve—whatever the GDP indexes, institutional statistics or parliamentary reports may tell us. More and more vehement and contrasting fundamentalisms, and the rise in self-destructive acts in the

On the amazing sensibility of primitives, Levi-Strauss (1979) was astounded to learn of a particular [South American] tribe which was able to "see the planet Venus in full daylight," a feat comparable to that of the North African Dogon who consider Sirius B the most important star; somehow aware, without instruments, of a star that can only be found with the most powerful telescopes (Temple 1976). In this vein, Boyden (1970) recounted the Bushman ability to see four of the moons of Jupiter with the naked eye".[43] The same Bushman, according to R.H. Post, able to "see four moons of Jupiter with the unaided eye and can hear a single-engine light plane seventy miles away".[44]

The philosopher J.S. Collis is fascinated by Native Americans and describes in an inspiring way their physical and psychological attitudes: "How they could see in the dark, how they could run swifter than wild horses, how they could wrestle with the eagle on equal terms, how they could hear over immense distances, how they could run naked in the snow and frost without feeling cold".[45] According to Marvin Harris and Eric Ross, the summary judgment of "'an overall decline in the quality—and probably in the length—of human life among farmers as compared with earlier hunter-gatherer groups,' is understated."

Agriculture invaded and destroyed the world of hunters and gatherers, introducing features of degeneration on a world scale, such as infectious diseases. A side effect of farmed fields, infectious diseases were a blow to the core of human life. As Jared Diamond pointed out, epidemic disease appeared with the rise of highly populated societies, born with the rise of farming, ten thousand years ago. Intensified urban settlement gave a new rapidity to epidemics.[46] Before the rise of civiliza-

[43] John Zerzan, *Future Primitive*.

[44] John Zerzan, *Running on Emptiness*.

[45] Quoted in Wilson, James, *The Earth Shell Sweep: A History of Native America*, pp.17-18.

[46] Diamond, Jared, *Guns, Germs and Steel*.

> with civilization.[38] [Zerzan adds] Nutritional and degenerative diseases in general appear with the reign of domestication and culture. Cancer, coronary thrombosis, anaemia, dental caries, and mental disorders are but a few of the hallmarks of agriculture; previously women gave birth with no difficulty and little or no pain. People were far more alive in all their senses.[39]

Elman Service provides an example of the sturdiness of limb of the Yaghan, a native population of hunters-gatherers living in the Tierra del Fuego (Patagonia). The southern climate is extreme and terrific: "Much of the rugged, forbidding landscape is drenched in cold rain or sleet and shrouded with clouds and fogs. The outer shoreline of the islands is pounded by the surf of the world's stormiest ocean".[40] But Yaghan people lived naked with no other shelter than a wooden hut. Even in extreme cold, Yaghan women would dive into the freezing water to catch some shellfish. The same was true for their neighbors the Ono, hunters living in the inner part of Tierra del Fuego, and the fisher-gatherers *Halakwùlup* (Alakaluf) in the north-west cost of the same island. Moreover, Darwin described people at the southernmost tip of South America who went about almost naked in frigid conditions, while Peasley (1983) observed Aborigines who were renowned for their ability to live through bitterly cold desert nights "without any form of clothing.[41]

And Kropotkin notes the ability of the Aleuts to face the coldness: "Endurance is their chief feature. It is simply colossal. […] They bathe every morning in the frozen sea, and stand naked on the beach, inhaling the icy wind."[42]

[38] John Zerzan, *Agriculture.*
[39] *Ibid.*
[40] Service, Elman (1978): *Profiles in Ethnology.*
[41] Zerzan, John (1994), *Future Primitive.*
[42] Kropotkin, Peter (1987): *The Mutual Aid: A factor of Evolution*, pp.?

developed world, seal this bitter statement in a most dramatic way.

However, humans are not the only subjects who suffer because of the civilized world. The whole planet is groaning with us. Floods, downpours, typhoons, tropical storms, more and more violent hailstorms, acid rain, nano-particles, a growing number of endangered species, global warming, drought, desertification, deforestation, and overbuilding are turning the Earth into a dead zone—a toxic, inhospitable wasteland whose existence is doomed by the same devastating trajectory guiding the attack on human life.

The price we pay for civilization to keep trampling on the planet's—and its inhabitants'—destinies finds its ideal expression in our increasing "detachment" from life and from the sense of life. In the civilized world, the natural foundations of our existence—our genetic constitution, our multi-sensuousness, the free perception of reality, direct experiences, autonomy, sharing, sympathy, mutual help—are continuously attacked by a techno-mechanized, competitive and calculating universe that is making these aspects unknown even to ourselves—when they are not explicitly suppressed in a laboratory. In our world there are actually categories which we have learned to deem hugely important and that civilization has taught us to consider absolute and neutral. Authority and Bureaucracy, Science and Technology, Economics and Overpopulation, Property and Work, Education and the symbolic forms of culture (Art, Ritual, Myth, Religion, Language, Writing, Number, Time, Money, Law, Social Role) are not universal or unbiased loci. They are conceptual categories that were established together with civilization and have become untouchable. Starting to look critically at these categories means looking without too much awe at our way of living (and of thinking); it means trying to understand what constitutes the high price we are forced to pay for civilization to keep expanding. And it also means

trying to trace the causes of the widespread malaise that none of the services marketed by civilization is able to "heal".

Generally, when we try to investigate the causes of the current degradation, we tend to go back just a few decades or centuries at most: back to the rise of consumer society, of mass organization and of successful industrialization. All these phenomena have undoubtedly contributed to the current situation. But should we really stop at the beginning of the nineteenth century and at the date of birth of industrial capitalism to identify the sources of today's crisis? The traditional antagonist movement's answer to this question has always been positive. Personally, I think the opposite is true.

While it is a fact that the world's commodification, an extraordinary consumerist mentality, and a celebration of absolute utilitarianism that turns everybody into downright speculators are all direct products of the capitalistic ideology (it was Adam Smith, the ideologist of modern capitalism, who promoted the crazy idea that if we follow our personal interest, we will indirectly favor everybody else), it is also true that the abolition introduction of this cynical ideology alone would not suffice to restore a free and satisfying lifestyle. After all, the mindset of domination was established much earlier than in the nineteenth century, just like authoritarianism, chauvinism, and patriarchal society. Economics already existed before the rise of the industrial society, exactly like politics, with its demagogic flatteries; social control, with its invasive teachings of forced cohesion; science, with its totalitarian warnings; and technology, based on exploitation of wildlife and the environment, and the source of pollution. To say nothing of war and slavery, invented long before capitalistic society.

If we want to try to go back to the roots of our current crisis, if we want to try to understand what is happening to our present world that is becoming hollower and more elusive by the day, we cannot simply consider the damage that was set

> Using such indices as average height and the number of teeth missing at time of death, J. Lawrence Angel has developed a profile of changing health standards during the last thirty thousand years. Angel found that at the beginning of this period adult males averaged 177 centimetres (5' 11") and adult females about 165 centimeters (5' 6"). [...] Only in very recent times have populations once again attained statures characteristic of the old stone age peoples. American males, for example, averaged 175 centimetres (5' 9") in 1960. Tooth loss shows a similar trend. In 30000 BC adults died with an average of 2-2 teeth missing; in 6500 BC, with 3-5 missing; during Roman times, with 6-6 missing.[37]

The same happened to human lifespan:

> Although eyewitness Spanish accounts of the sixteenth century tell of Florida Indian fathers seeing their fifth generation before passing away, it was long believed that primitive people died in their 30s and 40s. Robson, Boyden and others have dispelled the confusion of longevity with life expectancy and discovered that current hunter-gatherers, barring injury and severe infection, often outlive their civilized contemporaries. During the industrial age only fairly recently did life span lengthen for the species, and it is now widely recognized that in Paleolithic times humans were long-lived animals, once certain risks were passed. DeVries is correct in his judgment that duration of life dropped sharply upon contact

[37] Harris, Marvin, *Cannibals and Kings*.

In between the critics of a subsistence based on agriculture production, we find Steven Polgar, social anthropologist: according to him, the transition from foraging to farming brought to a new diet based on cereals that produced an higher rate of diseases like rickets.[33] Jared Diamond wrote:

> Archaeologists have demonstrated that the first farmers in many areas were smaller and less well nourished, suffered from more serious diseases, and died on the average at a younger age than the hunter-gatherers they replaced.[34]

In other words, our primitive ancestors lived in an ecologically diversified world and had a variegated and healthy diet. Marvin Harris points out that it is difficult to reconcile the idea that foragers had a mere subsistence life with the prehistoric findings: "the skeletal remains of the hunters themselves bear witness to the fact that they were unusually well nourished".[35] Focusing on pre-agricultural people still living, Frederick McCarthy and Margaret McArthur can write that

> it is noteworthy that the Arnhem Land hunters seem not to have been content with a 'bare existence.' Like other Australians they become dissatisfied with an unvarying diet; some of their time appears to have gone into the provision of diversity.[36]

And the latest palaeopathology recognizes the worsening of health of the groups that began to practise agriculture. In Harris' words:

[33] Cfr Steven Polgar, *Evolution and the ills of Mankind.*

[34] Diamonds Jared, *Guns, Germs and Steel: A Short History of Everybody for the last 13,000 Years.*

[35] Harris, Marvin (1977) *Cannibals and king: the Origins of Culture*

[36] Sahlins, Marshall, *Stone Age Economics*, p. 18.

in motion two hundred years ago; we need to go back much further. To what period exactly?

This discussion seems to raise very precise questions: has an age ever occurred when human beings lived in an utterly peaceful, playful, respectful way? Was there an age when people did not fight, dominate or exploit each other, when they did not confine themselves in hierarchically structured social organizations that regulated relationships according to a fixed and compulsory set of rules? Has an age ever occurred, when humanity could live basically free from forms of social control, from the logic of economic exchange and production, from rubrics of ideological efficiency, performance and power? Have we ever ascertained the existence of a time when men, women and children enjoyed a profound communion with nature, without any prospects of pollution or environmental consumption, and were immune from the condition of alienation in which our current existence is confined? Starting half a century ago, several studies have been carried out on this subject, offering surprisingly positive answers: according to them, the passage from a free and satisfying human life to an ever increasing regimentation into the values of the modern world coincides with the birth of civilization.

When discussing civilization, we first need to clear up a misunderstanding. Too often the term "civilization" is supposed to overlap with "humanity," so that human beings are thought to have been civilized since they appeared on this planet. This is not true. Civilization was not born together with the human race. In fact, if we consider the history of the ancient past, civilization is a quite recent phenomenon. The famous American physiologist and bio-geographer Jared Diamond estimates that the human species split from the anthropomorphous apes approximately 7 million years ago; 3 million years ago humans assumed an erect posture, and around 2.5 million years ago they entered the so-called Paleolithic age and acquired all the abilities and skills (also at a mental and intellectual level) of a

modern individual. However, civilization is commonly thought to have begun with the introduction of agriculture (at the beginning of the Neolithic age) and is dated back to just 10,000 years ago. Two and a half million years of human life against just ten thousand years of civilized life. If we use the example of monetary units, this difference is even more striking: two and a half million euros, ten thousand euros…

Actually, for a hundred and fifty thousand generations, our human ancestors lived in a non-civilized world, as nomadic gatherer-hunters. This means that they were individuals with no fixed abode, no possessive mentality or conquering obsessions, and they lived free from restrictions, immersed in a pristine nature and far from the overwhelming preoccupations of the developed world. They were not suffocated by bureaucracy, money or hierarchies because there were no centralized sociopolitical entities that had to be managed (be they kingdoms, nations, states, or empires); they formed small communities (bands) consisting of a few dozen people, that were profoundly co-operative and egalitarian and where anybody could express their personality, to the point of being free to leave the group at any moment.

Comparing the length of time in which the human race has existed with a 24 hour day, we have lived outside of civilization for over 99.6% of our lives—from midnight to 11.55 p.m.—and then submitted to civilization in the last five minutes of the day. But in these five minutes we have destroyed, devastated, jeopardized everything, until we endangered our own and the whole world's existence.

In that long uncivilized past we can find many suggestions for our present. This is what this essay will try to do, through continuous reference to the origins of civilization and to our pre-Neolithic ancestors' lives, considered especially through the experience of the communities of gatherer-hunters who still inhabit this planet—though besieged, contaminated, exterminated by the civilized world and always confined to the most

> comfort, freedom from starvation, and a longer expected lifetime. Most peasant farmers and herders, who constitute the great majority of the world's actual food producers, aren't necessarily better off than hunter-gatherers."[27]

On the other hand, the idea that farming produces a more diversified diet has been was challenged quite a long time ago. Lee and Devore's researches show that "the diet of gathering peoples was far better than that of cultivators, that starvation is rare, that their health status was generally superior, and that there is a lower incidence of chronic disease."[28] Conversely, Farb summarized, "Production provides an inferior diet based on a limited number of foods, is much less reliable because of blights and the vagaries of weather, and is much more costly in terms of human labor expended."[29]

Moreover, "according to Rooney, prehistoric peoples found sustenance in over 1500 species of wild plants, whereas "All civilizations," Wenke reminds us," have been based on the cultivation of one or more of just six plant species: wheat, barley, millet, rice, maize, and potatoes."[30] The world's population now depends for most of its subsistence "on about ten genera of cultivated plants (soya bean, sugar cane, potatoes, sweet potatoes, millet, wheat, rice, corn and sorghum"[31] and more then 60 percent of vegetable calories derived from only three cereals: rice, corn and wheat".[32] Furthermore, natural strains are replaced by artificial hybrids and the genetic pool of these plants becomes far less varied.

[27] Diamond, Jared (2005): *Guns, Germs and Steel: A Short History of Everybody for the last 13,000 Years.*

[28] Quoted in John Zerzan, *Elements of Refusal.*

[29] Quoted in John Zerzan, *Elements of Refusal.*

[30] John Zerzan, *Elements of Refusal*, Ibid.

[31] AAVV (1999), *Quel che resta del mondo*, p. 261

[32] AAVV, *Quel che resta del mondo*, Ibid.

what they want, to find it around their settlements, to produce some surplus. But prospects are not so rosy as they seem.

First, it is not accurate to describe the beginning of agriculture as a comfortable and easy life. In Vaneigem's words:

> The idea that a supply of cereals, fish, game could fall into your mouth ready to eat is a sarcastic and thoughtful vision of satiety, a caricature called on to justify the rape and brutal exploitation of nature by work.)[25]

Land is heavy, challenging, difficult to dig up. Even Dwight D. Eisenhower had to admit, "farming looks mighty easy when your plow is a pencil, and you're a thousand miles from the corn field".

Looking at the lifestyle of several non-civilized people, anthropologist Marshall Sahlins describes the Hazda, an African group of hunters-gatherers, living in the Great Rift Valley, near Eyasi Lake, Tanzania: "Although surrounded by cultivators, they have until recently refused to take up agriculture themselves, 'mainly on the grounds that this would involve too much hard work'. In this they are like the Bushmen, who respond to the neolithic question with another: 'Why should we plant, when there are so many mongomongo nuts in the world?'"[26]

Farming is demanding and tiring work. Jared Diamond wrote:

> In reality, only for today's affluent First World citizens, who don't actually do the work of raising food themselves, does food production (by remote agribusinesses) mean less physical work, more

[25] Vaneigem, *Aux Vivants*, in http://bibliolibertaire.org/Textes/adresse_aux_vivants_corrige.pdf

[26] Sahlins, Marshall (1972), *Stone Age Economics*, p. 27.

impenetrable regions of the Earth. A very long uncivilized past has existed and its lively presence has been preserved up to the present day; an attentive gaze to the experiences of these indigenous people will not only be the leitmotif, but also a frequent reference of this work. This is not because such an investigation can be a an excuse to present a world view which must be necessarily projected towards a "return to the origins," but because we can thus learn from the existence of our primitive ancestors and counter today's degraded life experience with ideas and practices from an uncivilized life. The aim is the same as always: trying to enrich the analysis of our own time with any element which may be worth considering; not in order to idealize a certain past, but to try to make our present livable. This partly explains the reason why we will also find guidance in the wisdom of children, whenever possible. In the end, if what we want is an opportunity to live in a playful, free, responsible way, in an environmentally healthy and relationally vital world, then observing the experience of those who, in the past as well as in the present, can give us good advice can only be helpful.

Some will find this book too theoretical, aimless as regards practical action. If we look at things from the perspective dictated by our mentality, it seems clear that any introduction spirit of transformation must start from ideas in order to spread into our bodies and into our hearts. But in today's society there is no freedom of thought. As Jerry Mander denounced, much earlier than Latouche, our lives are suffocated by an imagination that is completely colonized by the values of the dominant culture. So what we need to do first is try to free ourselves from this conditioning as much (and as long) as possible. *Free from Civilization* does not contain any magical recipes, instructions or precepts, decrees, or commandments. The libertarian pedagogist Marcello Bernardi believed that the solutions to our problems can never be found in someone else's dogmatic prescriptions but only inside ourselves, and everybody needs to

search, imagine and apply her own solutions. Other people's opinions can at most serve as a foundation for the development of one's own ideas; it is in this interactive dimension that this text is situated. The following argumentations will not aim therefore at gathering converts, but rather at raising doubts and questions, at spurring reflection. This essay, in short, will never try to imbue its readers with absolute truths, but rather to question the false claims on which the civilized world is based. If we don't accept that civilization may be *the* problem of the world we live in, no current paradigm will be ever seriously questioned, and the process of destruction that started with the introduction of agriculture will keep expanding—progressively, unavoidably, relentlessly. The first revolution against civilization must therefore start from within ourselves, in the form of an openness to criticize the ideological foundations of this annihilating universe.

This essay is not meant as an accusation against someone in particular (against farmers or against the puppet-stars of this age of entertainment), but rather as a collection of critical considerations aimed at questioning the entire pervasive and creeping system we call civilization. This system has curbed us, turning us into addicts and leaving us at our own mercy, to the point that we, starting from myself, are now unable to honestly admit it.

The content of this volume is indeed the product of fingers ticking away at a keybord, documentary researches (also on the Internet), the usage of the grammar and syntactic structures of a language that was learned in a family, perfected at school and used in all the contexts where the author's social and personal life unfolds. The author of this book has a working life as most other people; he uses a car, heals himself through medicine (a natural medicine whenever possible, but medicine nonetheless), composes and listens to music, and "loves" cinema. This author carries an ID card in his pocket as any other Italian cit-

> That which took the name of "Neolithic revolution" marks the passage from nomadic gatherer-hunters to a sedentary peasant society. A subsistence mode that was symbiotic with nature was replaced by a system of social relations determined by the appropriation of a territory, cultivation of the land and the exchange of products or merchandise….. This is the history of merchandise and the men who deny their humanity in producing it. The history of the separation of the individual from society, of the individual from himself.[22]

In Zerzan's words, "Agriculture is the birth of production, complete with its essential features and deformation of life and consciousness. The land itself becomes an instrument of production and the planet's species its objects."[23] Sam Lilley, a noted historian of science and technology, had the same intuition when he termed the agricultural revolution as "the first industrial revolution of human history."[24]

The typical feature of agriculture is reduction of land to a factor of production and work. While the forager tries to adapt its/her way of livelihood to the availability of the land, the farmer does the opposite, adapting the soil to his/her own needs.

At first sight, this overturning of perspectives seems advantageous; people seem freed from food gathering, able to choose

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Childe introduced the expression "Neolithic Revolution", widely used nowadays. The Author is going to use this expression, even if, as suggested by Lewis Binford, using of "Neolithic Crisis" would be more appropriate.

[22] Vaneigem Raoul, *Adresse aux Vivants*, http://www.situationist.net/library/auxvivants/display/103/index.php

[23] Zerzan J., *Agriculture.*

[24] Lilley Sam (1966), *Men, Machines and History: a Short History of Tools and Machines in Relation to Social Progress.*

there were no perspectives in that project of replacing order with harmony. Freedom, stolen from animals, plants and from the planet, has been stolen from humans as well (through urbanization, hierarchy, patriarchy, work, enslavement,).

Even the way in which we think and see the world is changed. We have lost the holistic view, replaced by a fragmentation of glances. We know reality though the mediation of symbols: units of time (hours, months, years), units of communication (words), units of measure (numbers), units of value (money). Without the mediation of those units, reality is meaningless to us.

So, if civilization looks like a journey into decline with no way back, it is time to look at those humans who have never begun this journey. Perhaps it is the only way to find that feeling of empathy with the earth, that confidence in ourselves and in Nature, that we have lost.

4. Agriculture

> *As the earth in its primitive state is not adopted to our expansion, man must shackle it to fulfill human destiny.*
> — Jean Vorst, quoted in *Elements of Refusal*

Civilization has found its consecration in agriculture. The "Neolithic Revolution", emphatically named by Gordon Childe, is the final point of a cultural phenomenon that, overturning a lifestyle that had lasted a million years, culminated ten thousand years ago in the appearance of agriculture. Its dimensions were overwhelming. Childe described this transformation as a new "aggressive attitude to surrounding nature" not understandable only with the "active exploitation of the organic world".[21] According to Vaneigem,

[21] Childe, Vere Gordon, *The Dawn of European Civilization*, pp? Gordon

izen; he travels around the world by using trains, ferries and planes and shows his passport to the border authorities.

A critique of the world we live in must not find its legitimation in an unattainable absolute consistency, otherwise there could be no space for critiques. Each one of us has his own skeletons in the closet, as well as some weaknesses; each one of us is pushed into a corner by this generalizing universe, and we often do what we can instead of what we wish. Pure coherence does not exist in the civilized world, unless you absolutely and passively accept it; or perhaps not even then.

Nobody's words, least of all mine, should be taken as unquestionable truth. Nobody, least of all me, can claim to act as humanity's judge. No word in this book is meant to imply that someone can walk on water. But there is a way of thinking, feeling and acting that justifies and supports the set of principles on which this declining world rests, and another way that tries instead to understand what is wrong and to radically overcome every prejudice. The *radical* critique of the foundations of civilization contained in this volume is meant to be a further small contribution to everybody's consciousness: to a consciousness of what we are and of what we might become. Here is, in short, a further small contribution for everybody's minds, bodies and hearts, so that our thoughts, our feelings and our everyday actions (however small), really start to turn *against* the support of this unlivable world instead of *favoring* it.

Prologue: What is civilization?

Civilization leads to death.
Nikolai Berdyaev

What would we think if someone invited us to take part, as legitimate children, in a family's life in which parents force their young offspring to live in inhuman conditions? What if parents forced them, for instance, to live in hardship, confined in crowded spaces with polluted air and the odor of noxious fumes? Or if they kept them from moving freely, forcing them—even during their childhood, and for their whole existence—to sacrifice their lives to activities that are more or less alien to their need to move, play, sustain themselves, and are always uselessly repetitive, exhausting, damaging, and stressful? What if these parents educated their children to accept these sacrifices as an effect of a setup that requires people to acquire a certain quantity of "participation tokens" as the only way to reach, as expected, an otherwise unattainable minimum survival condition—meaning: clothes, a shelter against bad weather, sunlight to feed our body cells, affection, care, daily nutrition? And what if even this costly survival license could be questioned by parents at any time, and at their sole discretion? And if one's shelter could be seized overnight, if sunlight could be overwhelmed by artificial light, if affection and care were made inaccessible and denied, if daily meals were poisoned and those participation tokens could be confiscated or their conventional value could be eroded?

save the forest to give us a setting for our picnics, we need to preserve animals to use them in medicine, or like machines, pets or food. Harmony is destroyed and we go on imposing our order: we turned the sky into our "airspace",[19] the earth into an "operating theater", the human body into "biological material". Wilderness is only an impediment in our path of civilization and colonization.

The idea of a natural environment destined for our exploitation engenders a vision of reality in which the planet must be used until exhaustion. Humans are not unrelated with processes involving air, earth, stones… Nevertheless, we developed an egocentric system that replaced an eco-centric view, and we call this civilization: a system that is bringing the planet to collapse and is leaving to us with an expectation of disintegration.

A painful process affecting everything. The devastation of the wild nature outside us proceeds at the same speed as the devastation of the wild nature inside us.

We look at nature as something to mould, forgetting that everything is interconnected. In Arne Naess's words: "To distance oneself from nature and the 'natural' is to distance oneself from a part of that which the 'I' is built up with."[20] Reducing nature to a tool is reducing ourselves to a tool. Manipulating and killing nature is manipulating and killing ourselves.

We should empower a vision of the world in which Nature, the Earth is the focus point. It is the only way to bring to the world (and therefore to us) the freedom and dignity that 10,000 years of domestication have stolen. These days, when every feature of life is "cultivated", we can reconstruct the path of our alienation. When plants, animals, minerals, energies and humans are subjugated to civilization, we can understand that

[19] McKibben Bill, *The End of Nature*, Ibidem.

[20] Naess, Arne (1989): *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle: Outline of an Ecosophy*, p. 164.

order drains any participation: it wants individuals that merely carry out orders and asks for more order to consolidate reality.

When energy is not aimed at pleasure, it will subjugate both ruled and ruler. It is not a matter of power, because we know that power exists in itself. No need to disturb Foucault and his microphysics of power to remind us that power is everywhere, where there is more force, creativity, cleverness, where there are more skills. Following the direction of Foucault, Miller and Tilley make a distinction between between power to and power over. "Power to is the capacity to act in the world and is an integral component of all social practice. Power over refers to social control and domination".[17] The essence of civilization has to do with the process of power over. According to this, humans have not the same right to exist as other beings, they have the power to exist over them, to enslave them, to manipulate them in any way.

Oriented to anthropocentrism, the mentality of a civilized human refuses everything that is not useful to people. We do not need flies, spiders, fogs and uncultivated lands. We have a despotic manner with nature. To us nature is something merely passive, existing to serve our needs. Nature serves us, belongs to us, is at our service.

The image of a world under management control (as suggested by McKibben[18]) is not new. The planet seen as a company is not a discovery of a postmodern-liberal think-thank: it is a development of a perspective that began to work ten thousand years ago. A point of view shared by those devastating the planet and by those pretending to "save" it with "new" economy, "green" agriculture, "friendly" technology. Even the point of view of many environmentalists follows this perspective: the environment is part of our human "heritage" we must

[17] Hodder, Ian (2003): *Reading the Past: Current Approaches to Interpretation in Archaeology*, p. 85.

[18] McKibben Bill (1990), *The End of Nature.*

What would we then think if we learned that, in the face of these poor kids' manifest distress, their parents tried to deceive them, pushing them to a passive acceptance of their fate? Or, in fact, if they preemptively acted to ensure a most effective suppression of any potential manifestation of this discontent, and accustomed their children to the use of narcotic and psychotropic agents to distract them from their pain, to avert their minds from their discomfort, to blur their analyzing skills, filling their tormented souls with the belief that this is how it has always been and that therefore this is how it will be forever?

Would we accept life in such a family?

The likeliest answer is: no. All of us, however compliant, would eventually judge this existence unacceptable and persecutory. Even if we were forced to consider it the most desirable (or the most common) existing condition in this world, it would still be what it is: a tremendous plot against life. In the face of this ferocious imperiousness, our body and our spirit would soon end up rebelling, perhaps letting out their suppressed suffering through a disease or an aggressive thrust (against ourselves or others).

With all the limits of this simplification, the metaphor of the "unconscious family" adequately describes the reality of the modern world—of the great and ever more globalized and standardized family that is embodied by today's techno-industrial society dominating the Earth. This is the reality we live in now: this is civilization.

Of course, comparing human life with a family life where the parents' (or the dominating elites') responsibilities are formally separated from the children's (or the governed people's) responsibilities is quite a contrast with a vision of humans capable of autonomous control over their own existence. Yet such a distribution of tasks is not only the framework that sustains the institutions of the civilized world (which is, by default, based on delegation and representation), but also the main pillar of its structure. In the modern world,

everything is organized so as to distinguish between those who do something professionally—from the management of private disputes to the care of souls, from education to information—and those who should simply use the relevant services while carefully adhering to their instructions—taxpayers, users, believers, clients, patients, voters, spectators… And while any substantial critique of this strict organizational scheme is scorned, everyone is formally accorded freedom to play this role game, so that this model can be officially approved. With the possibility that everyone will someday play a crucial role for someone (as parent, spouse, teacher, technician, artist, specialist, senior clerk or leading politician), the system assumes a democratizing appearance and is eventually perpetuated by those same people who have been induced to accept it with servile obedience. Naturally, this call to submissive approval does not favor harmonious social participation, let alone deep self-fulfillment. Sooner or later, every individual living in the domesticated world will end up suffering from it. Reaching the breaking point is only a matter of time. Nervous disorders, disease, violence, apathy, general dismay, the urge to command and to be commanded, to own and to be owned eventually reveal the heavy implications of this crisis.

The greater the impulse towards existential distress, the greater the force applied by civilization to preserve itself. Causing us to lose our bearings, giving us deceiving targets, channeling the best energies toward the consolidation of the status quo, deflecting any critical acknowledgment. And the more civilization pushes us off the track, the more insistently it refuses to recognize the symptoms of the discontent it forces upon us. As though it were possible to keep a bottomless boat afloat, we are all called on to a meticulous maintenance of its sides by filling up, with the most innovative artificial resins, every tiny crack and dent; which will not result at all in the boat floating, of course. Since the boat is deprived of

atric hospitals, schools, nursery schools, churches, neighborhoods looking like ghettos. And we are so enslaved to this logic of enforced solitude that we go on demanding more: more tiring work, more drugs, more machines, heavier, faster and more stressful. More police, more authority. More.

Since we were reduced to domesticated animals, we have not enjoyed life: we suffer life. Freedom has been replaced by global enslavement and subjection. Everything has been reduced to personal interest, suborned to the necessity of productivity.

3. Order or Harmony: Egocentric mentality or egocentric perspectives?

> *It is not nature-as-chaos which threatens us (for nature is orderly) but ignorance of the real natural world, the myth of progress, and the presumption of the State that it has created order…*
> — Gary Snyder, *Good Wild Sacred*

Within this mechanism of alienation we are asked to participate in order to help the Leviathan to subdue the natural world. We think that Nature is not able to function on its own, that our "order" is inevitable. That harmony is impossible without order, because according to us, harmony is order.

We confuse order and harmony because we think according to an authoritarian pattern. Our life is ruled by order. Order organizes our behaviour, our biological rhythm. Order puts together our thoughts. But order is not harmony. Obliged to respect the orders of an imposed stability, order is the negation of harmony. Harmony relies on union, while order is grounded in separation and forcible reconnection. Order wants passivity, harmony activity; order asks for command; harmony demands listening. You do not find harmony where order reigns, because

dicted to the services of civilization: objects, jobs, power, symbols, bureaucracy, amusement. It's not an accident that this addiction is encouraged:

> the disconnecting of the ability to care for ourselves and provide for our own needs is a technique of separation and disempowerment perpetuated by civilization. We are more useful to the system, and less useful to ourselves, if we are alienated from our own desires and each other through division of labor and specialization. We are no longer able to go out into the world and provide for ourselves and our loved ones the necessary nourishment and provisions for survival. Instead, we are forced into the production/consumption commodity system to which we are always indebted.[16]

In order to dominate you must divide someone from his/her context, needs, desires, skills. Dividing, breaking, spacing out: basic steps to attain dominion and power. *Divide et impera*, in Latin words.

The control we think we have over the world is actually control that civilization practices on us. And we have so interiorized this control that we can no longer see it. We even ask for more control: we cry out for censorship, medicalization of life, authoritarian laws, we ask to be enclosed in factories, assembly lines, hospitals, malls, offices and departments. We demand the surveillance of private life (cameras, video-surveillance and so on). And we feel safe only inside our house-fortress, alone, with no social life, surrounded by high tech devices. And those excluded from our fortress have to stay enclosed even more: prisons, immigrant detention centres, mental hospitals, geri-

[16] *Green Anarchy*, in http://www.anarchism.net/schools_greenanarchy.htm

its basic structure, water will keep flowing into it, and the unwillingness to look at the original causes of this disaster explains why we keep looking somewhere else for the causes of this wreckage. The problem does not lie, someone has started theorizing, in the construction we designed—a bottomless boat—but in a mischievous and uncontrollable sea. So it is on this element that we should focus our efforts, in order to subdue it even more to our techniques, inventions, and power. According to this view, the existential anxiety that devours us is not due to the unbearable sadness and bottomlessness of the world that we have superimposed on a natural and free existence, but rather to that same spontaneous existence, which has to learn to bend even more to the requirements of the social system. In this perspective, it was easy to turn the crisis of our time not into a symptom of an underlying problem (civilization), but into an independent degenerative effect that must therefore be further suppressed.

In the world we live in, every manifestation of suffering is divested of its symptomatic character. It is simply "purged" through the most common methods applied to preserve this model: preemptively, devising whatever may be needed to *let* this distress *out* or to *suppress* it; and repressively, treating distress as a matter of *law and order*. In concrete terms: (1) entertaining people so as to distract their attention from their existential suffering (the logic of leisure, the ideology of competition, the obsession of celebrities, the longing towards possession); (2) comforting them with Hope when distractive activities become ineffective (Religion, the myths of Progress, of Development, of a Better Future); (3) punishing or "healing" them if they cannot fit in otherwise.

The results of this process aimed at concealing the actual causes of the crisis that is consuming us—as well as the effects of the suppression of any sign of distress—are clearly inscribed in the expansion of this crisis. While the rhetoric of "good governance" keeps reassuring everyone that everything

is getting better is moving forward smoothly, we witness every day the complete devastation of this planet, the sterilization of any form of human relationship, and the reduction of individuals to factors in production and to objects in Politics, Bureaucracy, Science and Technique.

Life does not consist anymore in what we *are*, but in what we represent for the civilized world—in the function we must learn to perform through the years. Of course, in such a context there is no chance of asserting the prevalence of the living over what is built (or organized, structured, superimposed), and it is only possible to speed up the degeneration process that is excluding us (as well as the natural world) from modern preoccupations. The overwhelming impacts of this particular world view are plain for all to see. Today toxic agents are faithful allies of civilized life: those we are forced to breathe are not very different from those we are accustomed to drink, or the ones that enrich the industrial food we have learned to eat. Meant as an activity that is separated from life, work takes up most of our time and influences every moment of our existence—from the hours wasted within the shrines of the "sacred" economic production to the time we are allowed to spend away from them. Money, a monetary symbol of things, has been raised to the object of worship in any human relationship. Without money's intercession, it is almost impossible to establish any kind of relation, and without money there can be no expectation of protection—from bad weather, disease or isolation. Even the fruits of the Earth are subjected to the laws of the market, and the establishment of civilization gradually implied that a price had to be paid to obtain them.

Likewise, the places where our modern existence takes place are increasingly unnatural—from the little boxes where we live far from any direct contact with the Earth, to the unhealthy sites of industrial production. The dullness of urban concrete overwhelms the fragrance of nature, and the roar of engines has invaded our homes in the form of fans, saws, drills

world became "a field of objects open to manipulation".[15] The same happens to us.

Our life, once domesticated, has lost the capacity to stand on its own legs. In order to survive we depend on the food industry, fashion brands and work supervisors. We have developed a slave mentality: what is not allowed is forbidden. Without the help of specialized professionals, we do not know how we feel, who are we, even how to find a lover. We are not able to orient ourselves without a compass or a satellite navigator; when the Internet is not working, we do not know how to communicate with friends. We can no longer distinguish a tree from a flower, one flower from another, one paw print from another. Without a chemical test we are not able to understand whether a spring is drinkable or not; without a lighter we are not able to light a fire; we are not able to recognize the plants we have eaten for millions of years, lost in a meadow that looks like a green sea. Stars and clouds have nothing to say to us. We fear the darkness. Wind and rain matter only when they wreck our holiday.

Without words we do not know how to communicate. Gestures, glances, intonations do not make sense to us. We do not have conviviality without a holiday scheduled in the calendar; we do not enjoy life without a television that makes us laugh; we do not have opinions without the news. Without poetry we do not know how to give relief to our spirit; without music we would be lost in the noise of the city; art brings colours in our grey lives and religion assures us that one day we will know the fulfilment we do not know now. And when this is not enough, we can take some pills of joy so chemistry can help us to sleep or to work.

We do things, like machines, only because we have to. We are switched on in the morning and we operate, morning until evening, addicted to artificiality. We are more and more ad-

[15] Zerzan John, *Running on Emptiness*.

Through reification, on the contrary, our feelings, our thoughts (not only the world "outside") are levelled, set as the "same for everyone". Every feature of life is now under the control of culture, which operates through logic and calculus to reduce that life feature to a thing: "Objectification"—Zerzan summarizes—"is the take-off point for culture, in that it is makes domestication possible".[13] And domestication is the ultimate goal of relations of control because it promotes the value of subjugation. As pointed out by Digard with reference to animals, domestication causes the domesticated being to participate in his own domestication.[14] There is no dissent in the process of domestication: either you are a rebel, free, wild and feral, or domesticated, not willing to rebel anymore, to oppose anymore. Being domesticated means being subdued, tamed.

Domestication seems not to involve coercion. It is a good strategy for the ideology of control. A control seemingly carried out with no violence. Yet at the same time absolute, total, unconditioned. You can leave the gate open: the domesticated being will not run away. The same happens with civilization. Leave the cage door open, the civilized individual will stay inside.

From a social point of view, live beings (feelings, relationships, energies, plants, animals, individuals) are placed under the control of a mechanism of subordination that allows the Machine to work. Life outside, in Nature, is no longer important. The outcome is a run towards alienation calling for more alienation. Let's think about gardening: the more a natural environment is transformed by civilization, the more it asks to be modified, controlled, shaped. Effectively, in our universe the

Emptiness.

[13] Zerzan, John, *Ibid*.

[14] Fiorani, Elisabetta (1993), *Selvaggio e domestico*, p. 38.

or lemon squeezers. This noise vies for primacy against the hubbub of traffic, building sites, and trade and manufacturing activities that had already wiped out the experience of silence a long time ago.

Today everything around us is adulterated. Food is potentially an entity that can be recreated in a laboratory through genetic recombination or through systematic procedures of electronic calculation; pleasure is ready-made; time is scheduled. Even air has been artificially reproduced, and we call this process "conditioned". "What we call 'natural' today", Raoul Vaneigem noted, "is about as natural as Nature Girl lipstick"[(1)]. Besides, human contacts are increasingly mediated by machines, our personal isolation is continuously exalted by IT and even our biological life is becoming a lifeless wasteland that will soon be entirely colonized by science and technology. "The absolute pleasure associated with an everyday contact with nature", observes the ethnobotanist Michele Vignodelli[(2)], "has been replaced through over-stimulation by artificial, coarse, mechanical inputs, through fashions, revivals, disco music, roaring toys, cult actors, events… a whole flamboyant, uproarious and desperately hollow world. A rising wave of fleeting inputs, a multitude of fake interests and fake needs where our emotional energies are swept away, drowning us into nothingness … This sumptuous parade seems to consist substantially in the stream of toxic, hidden grudges that flows beneath a surface of politeness, in the corridors of industrial hives; it consists in the snarling defense of one's own niche, to protect 'freedoms' and 'rights' that are sanctioned by law, in a deep loneliness which is increasingly hidden in mass rituals, in a universal inauthenticity of relationships and experiences". Could we ever think that such an existential situation leads

[(1)] See R. Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life* (1967), Ch. 9, http://library.nothingness.org/articles/SI/en/display/39.

[(2)] See M. Vignodelli, *Signori della Terra?*, Cesena, Anima Mundi, 2002, p. 75.

to happiness? In fact, sadness and depression desperation [no-one ever killed themselves because of a bad temper. Maybe they broke a few dishes. dominate the civilized world. In the U.S., two million teenagers try to commit suicide every year. And the recent alarm raised by the impressive number of American children who manage to kill themselves on a yearly basis (about 300 among 10- to 14-year-old children, amounting to nearly one child a day!)[3] confirms that desperation is not a prerogative of marginal regions at the outskirts of civilization, but is a common reality in the whole modern world. While in those marginal regions people die from hunger and thirst, here we die from an incurable sickness called *mal de vivre*. Lately a "soul sickness" and a "civilization sickness" have also been openly discussed.

It has been recently noted that "People in industrialized countries may prefer to drown and die in the opulence of welfare and cell phones—but some figures seem to show a different truth. In the United States 600 people out of 1,000 use psychoactive drugs regularly. This means that in the richest and best-off nations in the world, in a country at the forefront of today's model of development, one person out of two is not at ease in her own existence. And in Europe, suicides have nearly had a tenfold increase starting from the middle of the seventeenth century, growing from 2.6 in a population of 100,000 to the current ratio of 20 out of 100,000 inhabitants"[4].

Even for Émile Durkheim, a relentless champion of the primacy of society over individuals, the huge increase of suicide rates that was observed as early as the late nineteenth century had to be considered "the ransom-money of civilization"[5],

[3] These data are drawn from several articles. The original alarm was given here: http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/calltoaction/calltoaction.htm

[4] See M. Fini, "È un progresso da fine del mondo", in *Il Tempo*, 15th January 2001.

[5] See E. Durkheim, *Suicide* (1897), transl. by John A. Spaulding and

is "sustainable", the more we cannot sustain autonomously and must entrust our survival to the blackmail of capitalism (labor, productivity, monetary system, and so on).The more Science is "friendly", the more change in our life (genetic manipulation, cloning, nanotechnology, nano-biotechnology); the more Technology has a low environmental impact, the more it runs roughshod over us. We are not comfortable with this world, yet "the literature on society raises ever fewer basic questions about society, and the suffering of the individual is now rarely related to even this unquestioned society. Emotional desolation is seen as almost entirely a matter of freely-occurring 'natural' brain or chemical abnormalities, having nothing to do with the destructive context the individual is generally left to blindly endure in a drugged condition"[12] and addicted to things and services. What would we be today without a car, a television set, without money, without the advice of a doctor, a lawyer, a Secretary of the Environment?

We regard as indispensable everything built in ten thousand years of civilization. On the other hand, nature has nothing that we need. We do not have time to understand this alienation, we are not interested in discussing this point. Avoiding the problem looks like the quickest solution but as pointed out, the attitude of avoiding the problem is part of the problem.

When civilization had not yet influenced the life of a free and feral humanity, men and women were able to feel, to perceive, to communicate directly, by instinct, without intermediaries. Individuals knew how to protect themselves from a cold weather, how to feed themselves, how to take care of their health, to relax and to enjoy life, with no help from a state apparatus. They needed no instructions or abstract conceptualization to understand the world. They felt no impotence or daily uneasiness from an unfulfilled life. And there was no need to be afraid of others.

[12] Zerzan John. "That Thing We Do", in Zerzan John, *Running on*

forming the actor into a subject. We can call this transformation civilization. We need reification to control the world, but in this control we increase the distance between ourselves and the world. The more we are separated from a feral life connected with nature, the stronger grows our addiction to a mechanical and artificial life. The more we are driven by external forces, the weaker we feel, the more we surrender to a pathological urge toward omnipotence. So we increase the reification, the control of nature turned into a "thing", accomplishing a devastating project called "civilization".

In our time we are "captives of so much that is not only instrumental, fodder for the functioning of other manipulable things, but also ever more simulated. We are exiles from immediacy, in a fading and flattening landscape where thought struggles to unlearn its alienated conditioning".[11] Moreover, our universe has been modified so much that we fail to conceive a life in an unmodified world. And our world is so deprived of life that it blocks all the people that would put it in question. Actions, feelings, thoughts, everything must contribute to supporting the alienated world in which we live. Woe betide those who question the Society of Control; woe betide those who accuse Politics, Economy, Science and Technology as a whole. At most we can suggest a "responsible" control, a "green" economy, a "friendly" science, a "light" technology and "democratic" politics. Small corrections to an aberrant system that is getting more and more difficult to refuse as a whole. In this world, opposition and newness are dangers to deny: pleasure is sublimated by duty; criticism is replaced by devotion and illusion takes the place of dream.

A world that is understandable to those having eyes to see: the more Control is responsible, the more irresponsibility reigns; the more Politics is declared to be "democratic", the more the Power is in the hand of a few; the more an Economy

[11] Zerzan, *Ibid.*

a result of "the general unrest of contemporary societies"(6). According to the French sociologist, "The exceptionally high number of voluntary deaths manifests the state of deep disturbance from which civilized societies are suffering, and bears witness to its gravity. It may even be said that this measures it"(7). Indeed, the massive use of antidepressants, the rampant anorexia/bulimia cases, the establishment of a culture of "anesthetizing numbness" that leads individuals to seek comfort in the use of narcotics, noises, crowds, myths, religions, extreme physical performances, and deathly challenges, or imprisons them in an addiction to pornography, to the possession of technological palliatives and to the mysticism of appearance, point to the fact that "modernity has managed to inflict suffering even on those who are healthy"(8).

Things, services, titles, rank, status symbols—the material opulence the developed world pours on us, with a claim to keep spirits high, cannot fill the void that has been created inside and outside us by that same abundance. The detachment with which we lead our lives within the strict boundaries of a world of objects suggests that our existence is drifting away instead of pulsating with life. Activities, thoughts, feelings and relationships are increasingly separated from their actors, taking place far away from us, as though they were something alien. Even happiness does not belong to our present anymore—it is a myth we should tend to, something untouchable that is projected toward an ever yet to be future: tonight after work, next weekend, next summer, when I buy a home, as soon as my son graduates, the day I retire…

How often have we exultingly looked forwards to our coming holidays? "Just imagine, my child", a young grandmother said once to her granddaughter before they left for their sum-

George Simpson, New York, The Free Press, 1979, p. 367.

(6) *Ibid.*, p. 391.

(7) *Ibid.*

(8) M. Fini, "È un progresso da fine del mondo".

mer vacation, "in a few days we'll go to the seaside and we'll have two whole weeks to have fun!" It is so: two weeks to have fun. If we consider the length of human life, being forced to rejoice for one peaceful fortnight a year means that we have really learned to be satisfied with little. We are all aware of this, and it makes us suffer. And we suffer even when we manage not to show it. Even when we pretend that this is the right way to live. Even when we remind ourselves that in the amazing world we live in many people don't even have this rare opportunity. But this is the problem. A life that could be lived with intensity but is constantly set aside, suffocated by an unending series of urgent tasks, of duties that cannot be postponed, of conventions that must be accepted, of all-round commodification, of bloodshed that has turned into routine, of flattering and grudges, hypocrisy and humiliation, coercion and indifference that exclude the possibility of ever being happy, is not a proper life. All the more if we consider that the first prospect offered by the civilized world to tackle the distress it generates is always one of forbearance—suggesting *not to think about it too much*. Escapist activities, escapist shows, pills to escape: there is a whole range of them, for every taste and for every age. If the world we live in were not a huge cage, we would not have to wish to *escape*.

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We have become a product of the cultural and moral patterns that draw the boundaries of our existence, to the point that for centuries even viewing civilization as the cause of our problems has seemed dangerous. However, a critical acknowledgment of our distinctive way of looking at things has eventually breached this bias for some. Also in this sense, considering the past—the existence of those people who lived as uncivilized individuals for million of years and then vigorously resisted the invasion of the civil world—is inevitable.

make us as masters and possessors of nature"[7], the process of subduing of nature was virtually complete after thousands of years of exploitation. The philosopher was only claiming an accomplished fact.

Nowadays thousands of years of civilization make us accustomed to owning. Our way of being does not exist anymore, replaced by an idea of having. Erich Fromm, perhaps the first to discuss this topic, put it with irony. According to the German analyst, "To have, so it would seem, is a normal function of our life: in order to live we must have. Moreover, we must have things in order to enjoy them, in a culture in which the supreme goal is to have— and to have more and more—[…] it would seem that the very essence of being is having: that if one has nothing, one is nothing"[8]. Actually, in the modern world owning is an evidence of someone's presence. It is a sign of status, an expression of social position, it can even be an indication of human kindness. From this point of view, civilization leaves us a strange heritage: primitive humans had nothing but were all; we have all and we are nothing.

Surviving Native Americans asked, "Sell the Earth? Why not sell the air, the clouds, the great sea?" They were warning us. Now we buy drinking water and we look for pure air and clean seas. We have put everything inside the mechanism of reification, a machine we built for others, and even for ourselves. In Zerzan's words, "reification subordinates us to our own objectified creations."[9]

Moreover, "things are in the saddle and ride mankind," as Emerson observed in the mid-19th century).[10] From a psychological point of view, dividing between actor and subject involves a distance between them: the next step will be trans-

[7] Quoted in Zerzan, John,(1999): *Elements of Refusal.*

[8] Fromm. Erich (1997): *To have or to be?* (1997), p. 13.

[9] Zerzan, John (2002), *Running on Emptiness. The Pathology of Civilization.*

[10] Zerzan, John, *Elements of Refusal.*

for the impossible. Everything has to be "orderly", "foreseen", "set".

On the path of control, alienation is not the only landmark. To be a conquered country, nature has to be divided from us and then transformed into a "thing". Because things can be used and consumed. Reification means perceiving the living features of the universe (nature, relationships, human practices, experiences, feelings, actions) as lifeless objects. In a world transformed into a market, men and women have to be turned into objects, to be used as tools in order to achieve goals. Therefore every living feature is converted into a resource: land, animals, plants, minerals, energies, men, women, children, cleverness, strength. In the civilized world, everything is exploitable, manageable, manoeuvrable, consumable. That we don't shudder at the thought of expressions such as "human resources" or "human capital" is indicative of what we have lost: a feeling of dignity that makes us humans.

The process of civilization turned nature into a passive wasteland subject to human control, and at the same time shifted women and men from being to having, from the loss of being (alienation) to the conquest of having (reification). When civilization was established, the mental disposition of greed was transformed into a project: dominion over land (agriculture) and animals (breeding). Obviously the full understanding of this dominion was not developed immediately. Only with monotheist religions (Judaism and then Christianity) was the principle established that nature does not belong to nature: nature belongs to humankind (as a gift of God). This legitimation came after the farming revolution, when the idea of the universe as something to own was already evident. And when the philosopher René Descartes declared in the 17th Century that the world is nothing but a fully understandable mechanical entity and the aim of science is "to

Today, the idea that our pre-Neolithic ancestors lived in hardship and that their lifespan was considerably shortened by the threat of most atrocious diseases and most terrible forms of violence is only still to be found in the field of propaganda that was exploited for centuries by a certain colonialist ethnocentrism and finally yielded to its obvious unsustainability. Even scientific orthodoxy tends now to deny that the existence of our uncivilized ancestors was characterized by raging, unstoppable misery and by fierce attacks of wild animals, and influenced by a human leaning to mutual aggression within a social background where abuse and oppression prevailed. Anthropologists as well as ethnologists and archaeologists have developed a view of the primitive world that actually clashes with what is envisioned by those who tend to conceive of the past as a calamity we are gradually getting rid of.

Thanks to "field studies" of peoples who still today embrace a lifestyle consisting in gathering the spontaneous fruits of the Earth and in hunting wild animals—the so-called gatherer-hunters[9]—it could be ascertained that they can enjoy a relatively free, simple and joyous life. Joined together in a harmonious context of profound communion with nature, these people could and can benefit from privileges that are perfectly unknown to developed beings; peaceful and respectful, responsible and thoughtful, sensitive and indulgent (especially with the young), they lack any hierarchical or politically centralized organization, as well as social control devices; they don't know what private property, discrimination or poverty are, and they

[9] Coined by anthropologists, the term *gatherer-hunters* refers to the nomadic Paleolithic populations as distinguished from the farmer-breeders who appeared around 100,000 years ago, at the beginning of the Neolithic Age, when land cultivation and animal breeding practices started to spread around the world. It has been recently suggested to switch from the term "hunter-gatherers" to "gatherer-hunters" (as for instance in Nancy Tanner, Maria Arioti, John Zerzan, Paul Ehrlich), considering the fact that the prevailing means of subsistence for uncivilized peoples was (and still is) far more the gathering of wild fruit than hunting.

are often also immune from suicide, crime and war; adult community members (both men and women) usually participate in an egalitarian and informal way in the group's decisions, turning co-operation into a "social strength" and choosing a nomadic lifestyle. Furthermore, they rarely face diseases and lead a life whose duration is basically similar to the First World's lifespan, but which is incomparable in terms of satisfaction—free from stress, from the unnerving burdens and duties of the civilized universe, they spend a great amount of time playing (also with children) and devote themselves to recreational activities, company (including paying visits to other camps and entertaining guests), relax, sleep, and even indulging in idleness since the search for food does not take more than three or four hours a day.

In fact, these people are fully satisfied by the pleasure of a present totally their own. Kevin Duffy, a researcher who spent some time with the Mbuti Pygmies (a gathering-hunting community living in the Ituri Rainforest, in the northeast Democratic Republic of the Congo, formerly called Zaire), offers concise and emblematic considerations on the subject: "Try to imagine a way of life where land, shelter, and food are free, and where there are no leaders, bosses, politics, organized crime, taxes, or laws. Add to this the benefits of being part of a society where everything is shared, where there are no rich people and no poor people, and where happiness does not mean the accumulation of material possessions"[10].

While we should refrain from idealizing prehistory and from raising it to a symbol of a (nonexistent) ultimate perfection, and while, as a consequence, we should not go back to the furthest past of humanity to look for a mythical "Golden Age" and duplicate it, neither should we turn our gaze away

[10] K. Duffy, *Children of the Forest* (1984), Long Grove, IL, Waveland Press, 1996, p. vii; quoted in J. Zerzan, *Future Primitive and Other Essays*, New York, Autonomedia, 1994, http://www.primitivism.com/future-primitive.htm.

the conversion of the living and autonomous into things, into objects, is the foundation of civilization. Domestication is its pronounced realization.
— John Zerzan, *Running on Emptiness*

Undoubtedly there are different degrees of distance from unmediated participation in life: the first neolithic sedentary groups that appeared with agriculture were not living in the same state of detachment we experience nowadays in a techno-industrial society. Nevertheless, when the humankind begun to live according to this experience of separation from nature, a new path was traced: natural reality was turned in something "else", something alien.

By convention we use the term "alienation" to refer to estrangement caused by modern life: work duties, urban life and its claustrophobia, mass media conditioning, opportunism of social relationships, repression of inner life and accommodation to hegemonic values. Aliens to ourselves, we have lost the need be part of living world and we do not condemn what puts the world in danger: we are not worried about the felling of a tree, a river dredged of sand or a mountain knocked down. And this same distance between us and the natural world divides us from one another. Cynicism, unscrupulousness, duplicitous behaviour, political Machiavellianism describe the deterioration of "human" connections. There is no space for spontaneity in a society full of orders and instructions. Life flows anonymously, deprived of meaning: work, production, consumption. Nothing else.

But we are something more then part of a mechanism of a Social Machine. The interaction between us and the world has nothing to do with opportunism or broadband access to the Internet. The connection with the world has to do with the world: participation with Nature, genuineness, relationships with others, responsibility for the equilibrium of biosphere. Aliens to ourselves, we have forgotten our desires, our dreams, our thirst

longer feel ourselves connected with the earth. We feel linked with culture and ideology, the superstructure used to master nature, and we need them because we have lost the consciousness of our oneness with the living earth. We do not think of ourselves as subject to Nature but as hegemonic individuals. Concepts like "inferior" or "lowest", no longer considered correct when applied to humans, are welcomed as labels for non-humans (animals, or a tree or a forest). And when the civilized world tries to respect nature, an equality gap is evident: it is a false respect based on a hierarchy that puts humans on top: humans, then animals, then plants, and finally minerals.

Ruling asks for subjection, and with subjection you have no equality: soon the exploitation of the subject will appear. The force of primitive life was the refusal to rule the world. Our paleolithic ancestors, as part of nature, refused to dominate the world. Symbols like doves for peace, flowers for marriage, rice for fertility, or rites such as decorating a Christmas tree or burying a dead person in the earth, can be read as a memory of this lost oneness of humans and nature, the psychological and material environment of our ancestors during millions of years. Robinson Jeffers wrote in *The Answer*, "The greatest beauty is organic wholeness, the wholeness of life and things, the divine beauty of the universe. Love that, not man apart from that."[6] To forget that precept means forgetting ourselves, going away from ourselves, disavowing ourselves.

2. Alienation, Reification, Domestication

> *Terms like reification and alienation, in a world more and more comprised of the starkest forms of estrangement, are no longer to be found in the literature that supposedly deals with this world. […]*

[6] Jeffers, Robinson: *The Answer*, quoted in Sale, Kirkpatrick: *Dwellers in the Land*, p. 1.

from the evidences of a primitive past that found outside civilization its most successful and long-lasting form, in complete harmony with the surrounding world. If we did, we would just give credit to a similarly biased attitude. Undeniably, a "nature-friendly" universe should not find its legitimation only in a faithful reproduction of the past, but in a process that starts from our present and does not need historical proofs or scientific-institutional acknowledgments to be turned into practice; but on the other hand, it is also undeniable that an analysis of civilization aimed at investigating its fundamental features implies a careful observation of those life experiences which, free from the fury of civilization, could offer, for millions of years, a free, peaceful and satisfying existence. If we open up to primitive experiences the reflection on the condition of today's world, a critical enrichment will surely ensue; trying to reach a synthesis between that past wisdom and the motivations that make us dream a world free from our current torments is the challenge we have to face with our creativity, as men and women of the present time.

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Far from the values that sustain civilization, human beings lived in tune with nature, refusing to bend it overbearingly to their needs and co-existing with it without doing harm. When humanity ceased to feel entirely intertwined with nature and then separated from it—when we conceived of humans as a distinct entity—that respectful and peaceful co-existence stopped. That primeval sense of strong union with the world found its expression in a collective, not only human consciousness, that led to a complete identification with the energies, elements and creatures of the Earth (in what the French paleontologist F.M. Bergounioux called "cosmomorphism"[(11)]); when it was inter-

[(11)] As quoted in S.L. Washburn, *Social Life of Early Man*, New York, Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, 1961, pp. 115-6.

rupted individuals began to subjugate their world, manipulating it to submit it to their needs. That day civilization was born. Even if it has given rise to diverse socio-cultural models, civilization is the essence of this separation. Whatever customs it assumed in time and space—from the Sumerian to the Babylonian, Egyptian, Semitic, Chinese, Greek, Roman, Viking, Arab, Maya, Aztec, Inca, or modern Western society—civilization has always had, whenever and wherever, one identical feature: the detachment of individuals from nature and the establishment of domination over nature.

It is no coincidence that the birth of civilization overlapped, historically, with the advent of agriculture. This practice arose around ten thousand years ago[12] in the so-called Fertile Crescent[13], forcing Earth to serve human beings according to rules, schedules, cycles, yields, planting regulations– wheat here, corn there, rice over there—that were never in keeping with nature as an "inseparable whole," but bypassed it in order to please the very people who had separated from nature to become its self-proclaimed owners. With agriculture, the frame of reference changed radically: instead of enjoying the spontaneous fruits of the Earth, humans began to submit nature to a forced, ever-increasing productivity. Instead of nature freely giving, people claim its fruits as masters of nature.

Of course, this transformation of Earth into a productive zone had a huge and lasting impact. As individuals ceased to participate in the living world and started to use it, the world turned into an object. And if its self-proclaimed masters wanted to keep subjugating it, this object had to be tamed. So everything was domesticated, from the surrounding reality

[12] See J. Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies*, W.W. Norton, New York, 1997, Ch. 5.

[13] The Fertile Crescent, a vast strip of land comprised between today's Israel, Lebanon and Nort-Western Iraq to the North, and Syria and Turkey to the South, was the harbor of Mesopotamian cultures.

"home": the term ôikos, "eco-" (from the Greek "home") is the first element of all the composed words referring in a scientific language to "nature": *eco*logy (science of the nature), *eco*nomy (administration of nature), *eco*cide (the killing of nature).

In Nature humans and non-humans can develop their lives, make experiments, express their personalities, arrange relationships. But Nature is not a uniform framework, *a priori* determined by reason. *Nature is alive*, and humans knew it, until the moment in which they were trapped by the ruling dynamics of civilization.

For our early primitive ancestors, the world around and all its features—springs, rivers, clouds, mountains—were regarded as alive, endowed "with the spirit and sensibility every bit as real as those of humans, and in fact of exactly the same type and quality as a human's"[4]. For children, women and men living in the Planet Earth for 99.6 percent of the duration of human life, "there was no separation of the self from the world as we have come to learn, no division between the human (willed, thinking, superior) and the non-human (conditioned, insensate, inferior)."[5] Before civilization taught us to develop an individual "self" in order to built walls against the external world, there was no hostility against nature. Life was flowing with no need of determining it or controlling it. Living was only living. Today our life follows the rules of order and discipline. We live according to a script. From dawn to dusk our life is scheduled, organized, determined.

We are part of a mechanism that separates us from the natural world and we are more and more addicted to this mechanism. Science and Technology make us dependent on their devices. Education teaches us to follow instructions. Economics pretend that we cannot live without economy. Power makes us subjects of authority and Money greedy for dollars. We no

[4] Sale, Kirkpatrick: *Dwellers in the Land*, p. 5.

[5] Sale, Kirkpatrick: *Dwellers in the Land*, p. 6.

cation, Schooling, Ethics and the Defense of Values: Homeland, Family, Law, Order. The free spirit of our ancestry, according to Marcello Bernardi, "has been replaced by an unpleasant state of being: alienated labor, competition, an obsessive hunt for success, the need to mask our real personality, to lie, to simulate, in order to look different, better, stronger, more important… and so minding carefully about what we say and what we do. What a hell of life. But society wants that and usually we adapt. We come to think that accommodating to the needs of economy and society is the only way to survive."[2]

In other words, we are upset with free life and indulgent with alienation; aggressive with nature and tame with law. We oblige our children to turn their activity into "labor", their desire into a "duty", their playing into a "challenge". We are reassured to put them in a line, stuffed with notions, still on their school bench (for the same 8 hours that we suffer). We love our children, but control (of nature, of our nature) makes us insensible to the pain of authority. That's how alienated we are from our true selves. Culture, not nature, is beyond criticism, in a civilized world.

In the beginning, the oneness of the human and the natural world was a safe landmark of our identity. In the words of Kirkpatrick Sale, one of the founders of the North American Bioregional Congress, "the Indo-European word for earth, dhghem, is the root of the Latin humanus, the Old German *guman*, and the Old English *guman*, all of which meant 'human', The only remnant of this sensibility I can think of today in our everyday language is *humus*, the rich, organic soil in which things grow best".[3] Humans find the roots of their identity in the land, even before that in their name, language, local traditions and customs. The living ecosystem we call "Nature" is our

[2] Bernardi, Marcello (2002): *Educazione e libertà* (1980), p. 47.

[3] Sale, Kirkpatrick (2000): *Dwellers in the Land: the Bioregional Vision*, p. 7.

(the fields, as well as vegetables, animals, minerals, and the energies of Earth), to people, human imagination, mind, perception, vitality, and relationships (with oneself, with others, with nature). Everything had to be gradually brought under control and changed, manipulated, and shaped to the purpose of this control.

In this sense, civilization meant from the start not only that we had to become numb to the world around us, but also that each aspect of nature had to be controlled.

To look critically at this ambition is to reconsider the roots of how we understand the world. For civilization is first of all a precise conception of the world, which is based on and defends certain values. These include not only the principle of domination, but also the logical-rational abstract way of thinking that leads to knowledge-as-power (culture, science, technology); a utilitarian world view, based on the practice of equivalent exchange and on the transformation of any existing entity into a production factor; and the notion of a centralized, bureaucratic organization of social life, founded on the irreplaceable roles of terror and of the cult of Future. To critique the origins of this world view we must try to unveil the falsity and oppression of life in our modern world. We must, in short, look for questions that address the causes of our ever-growing misery.

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The term "civilization" derives from the Latin word civis, "citizen"[(14)], so its root hides an undeniable truth—that civilization rests on the principle of separation between humans and nature. Indeed, even without dwelling on the definitions by noted Western thinkers who emphasized this separation (from

[(14)] See also: C. Kluckhohn E A.L. Kroeber, *Culture, a Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions*, Cambridge, Ma., The Museum, 1952.

Rousseau[15] to Kant[16]; from the authors of the Encyclopédie Française[17] to Alfred Weber[18]; from the American sociologist Lester Ward[19] to Robert MacIver[20]), civilizing means, according to its origin, turning someone into a citizen. And isn't a citizen someone who leaves the countryside, the land, nature as an organic entity, to enclose herself in a city—a falsely protective fortress where everything is artificially reproduced or mediated?

Cities, unlike nature, do not offer any food, which must be bought in shops. Cities, unlike nature, do not offer access to the landscape, which is overshadowed by a planned architecture of overpopulation. Nor do cities redeem the human sense of vitality, since they are but a wasteland: from the barren asphalt that covers their streets to the pollution that engulfs them; from their congealed, standardized form to their cold bargaining, apathy and suspicion dominate among the city's inhabitants.

[15] I refer here to the well-known *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*. Cfr. J.J. ROUSSEAU, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* (1754), transl. by Donald A. Cress, Indianapolis, Hackett Pub. Co., 1992.

[16] In his *Anthropology*, Kant writes about the "transition from nature to culture", maintaining that "All cultural progress … has the goal of applying this acquired knowledge and skill for the world's use". See I. KANT, *Antropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (1798), in *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*, "Anthropology, History and Education", ed. by Günter Zöller and Robert B. Louden, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 231.

[17] According to G. Arciniegas, one entry of the *Encyclopédie* reads: "Civiliser une nation, c'est la faire passer de l'état primitif, naturel, à un état plus évolué de culture morale, intellectuelle, sociale". Quoted in C. KLUCKHOHN, A. KROEBER, *Culture*, p. 10.

[18] Alfred Weber suggested the following definition: "Civilization is simply a body of practical and intellectual knowledge and a collection of technical means for controlling nature". Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 98.

[19] In 1903 Ward wrote: "that term in itself [civilization] denotes a stage of advancement higher than savagery or barbarism". Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 13.

[20] "By civilization", MacIver wrote, "we mean the whole mechanism and organization which man has devised in his endeavor to control the conditions of life". Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 14.

In the civilized world being natural is not natural—it is an eccentricity/oddity. For instance, a couple of parents have been defined as "hard-bitten" by a pediatrician because their 3-year-old daughter, who was absolutely healthy, was born in a private house, and had had no religious consecration or medical initiation (vaccines, antibiotics, repression of her liveliness through drugs). Being born and living according to nature nowadays makes you "strange", "excessive", "extremist". Even pleasure has lost its natural connotation, becoming a cultural process, a taboo: something to hide, to turn into a sacrifice (work, social roles, orders to be performed). We don't feel comfortable when talking about a lazy day; we are proud to talk about a life marked by labor, by mechanical repetition of the same gestures. Masochism towards ourselves; sadism against the others. People around us must learn to suffer as we suffer; to slog away as we labor; to accept the unbearable as we do. Obviously children are the first victims of our frustrations: it seems unnatural to leave them alone, without teachers, sport trainers, educators; it seems harmful to leave them in their living universe, in tune with the energies of the land; it seems unproductive to leave them free to explore the world, only to jump, to climb, to run in the open air from morning till evening. There's nothing bad in playing, we say, but don't forget the real world, we add to justify our repressive behaviour. Only the real, serious world makes sense to us: the serious things of a serious world in which there is no place for joy.

Nothing to laugh about where power prevails: go to a church or to a monastery, and you get it. Supremacy asks for darkness and austerity. As Umberto Eco suggests in *The Name of the Rose*, laughter has nothing to do with ruling, with command. No jokes in the civilized world. Yes, seemingly it looks shining, sparkling, like a party, but there are no jokes. No jokes with Power. No jokes with Duty. No jokes with Religion, with Money. Not even with Busi-

which no digression is permitted. Things must be constantly organized, structured, transformed, shaped according to our will. If something is not "right", it has to be "right", whatever the cost. Life, to a civilized person, is never a creative openness to existence. It is a busy activity of world subjugation, initiation into a system of rigid rules to be respected and imposed upon others.

We are so distant from natural life that disorganization is frightening to us, spontaneity does not belong to us and genuineness make us feel uneasy. Terms such as "improvisation", "naivete", "instinct" now have a negative connotation. The same has happened to adjectives referring to a natural way of life as "feral" or "wild". A "wild" place is thought to be inhospitable, scary, inaccessible. A "feral" person has to be irritable, shy, a misanthrope. In a few words, nature has been "intellectualized" (Lévy-Bruhl's term[1])—brought from the soul to the head, and thence pushed out to be scrutinized. Then nature can be used, exploited, dismantled and assembled at will. Method, procedure, logical and rational thinking are the only way to connect with life. Obviously, if you keep the world at distance, you don't get closer to it. Under the weight of prejudice and ideology—the only tools to think about ecology and environment—we set nature apart. Unknown and misunderstood, nature comes back only after eluding our sovereignty with unexpected, unrestrainable forces.

In this mastery/subjection framework, you are either subject to the authority or an enemy. So, far from being an element of inspiration, nature has turned into a threat. A vindictive and oppressive power, not a harmonic set of elements linked with the human world. Nature always looks obscure and brutish. The natural world seems distant to us; it is threatening, not fascinating. Our environment is hostile.

[1] Lévy-Bruhl, Lucien, *Primitive Mentality*.

Urbanization created a growing population density in a habitat built over forests that were razed to the ground. Planned in every aspect, paved, built, sterilized to expunge any contact with life, the city was offered to people who grew less and less humane and could gradually forget the ability to look after their own subsistence processes (gathering genuine food, finding shelter from bad weather, making tools, moving in a totally free and unconditioned way). Social anthropologist Jack Goody summed it up: "No one in the towns is self-sufficient"[(21)], acknowledging that urbanization forces us into a state of dependency. Forbidding any direct relationship with nature, cities only allow relationships mediated by the inventions of civilization (culture, science, technology, politics, economics). And as Aldous Huxley pointed out, in cities "People are related to one another, not as total personalities, but as the embodiments of economic functions"[(22)].

While the race towards the civilizing of the whole universe is presented today as an urgent need (and escape from nature is promoted as a logic effect that should be casually accepted), a growing number of people are realizing that the self-destructive competition underlying our social existence can be stopped.

Despite the propaganda spread by (supposed) vested interests to safeguard the monstrous artifact known as civilization, it is undeniable that an uncivilized lifestyle can ensure a harmonious co-existence of every part of the Earth—whether human or not—far more than the environmental destruction produced by the civilized world. This holds true not only when there is a "peaceful" relationship among the natural forces, but also when calamities are inflicted on the Earth by nature itself. One example is the tsunami that hit South-East Asia on

[(21)] G. Goody, *Capitalism and Modernity: The Great Debate*, Cambridge - Malden, MA, Polity, 2004, p. 129.

[(22)] A. Huxley, *Brave New World Revisited*, 1958, http://www.huxley.net/bnw-revisited/index.html.

December 26, 2004, spotlighting the weaknesses of a civilized system that was unable to cope. Death and devastation were inevitable along the Asian shorelines which had been devastated by the culture of holiday pillage. Room-with-a-view resorts have swept away protection by the natural vegetation (especially mangroves) to make room for palatial comforts for powerful Westerners, in contrast with set-apart, discreet, and usually viewless fishing communities that barely manage to survive at the edges of this sumptuous society.

Yet, not far from these marvelous lands that have been unscrupulously looted by this devastating progress, in a tropical paradise which is luckily rather unknown, uncivilized peoples live in the remotest atolls of the Andaman Islands (West from Thailand, in the middle of the Indian Ocean). These populations (Sentinelese, Jarawa, Onge, Akabea, Akakede, Aka-bo, Aka-ciari, Oka-giuvoi, etc) have no leaders, ignore most kinds of symbolic representation of reality (art, mathematics, writing, money, law, religion), do not breed domestic animals, and do not practice agriculture. They eat wild fruits, hunt land animals and fish along the shores, using bows and arrows and other simple tools. Although geographically closer to the seismic epicenter than some of the most devastated nations (Thailand, India, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, the Republic of Maldives), these communities of gatherer-hunters did not suffer any casualties due to the sea-quake.

In fact, despite a decline that began some 150 years ago with British and Indian colonization (genocide, deforestation, road building, poaching, overfishing and enforced sedentism were the gifts offered by civilization to these indigenous peoples) native people of the Andaman Islands have preserved a primeval harmony with the living world. The Andamanese enjoy that vision of life which has stopped elsewhere with civilization, consisting in a deep-felt union with nature. This union allowed them to simply find a safe place during the sea-quake, as did every free animal living in the areas hit

I. Dominion over Being

1. Abomination of Domination

> *To exert power in every form was the essence of civilization.*
> — Lewis Mumford, *The City in History: its origins, its transformations, and its prospects*

Dominating means subjugating, owning, submitting to one's own super vision; in sum, it means regulating according to one's command. Imbued with a perspective that is irreducibly linked to the will to submit, thereality of the civilized world is fully permeated by relationships of mastery and subjection. In the modern world, everything can be explained by the practice of power of somebody over somebody or something: of parents over children, of teachers over pupils, of employers over employees, of rulers over citizens, of humans over nature. Instead of trying to get in touch with the reality around us, we are used to looking at everything from top to bottom (or from bottom to top): the goal is never to "get closer" but to "stay on top", to master, to determine. To control, as Italians say "to keep in one's power", defines our relationships with the world, starting from the way we perceive the world (to know something, you must master it). There is no place in civilization for disorder, dynamism, astonishment, wonder, for the ineluctability of life. Only what looks manageable (even mentally) is allowed: the predictability of events, the groundwork and arrangement of things, their exact understanding through fixed patterns of a logical-scientific rationality from

Part 1: The Mentality of Domination *(A critique of domination)*

by the tsunami. What helped the Andamanese natives save themselves, reported Francesca Casella from the Italian branch of Survival International, was "their sophisticated and profound knowledge of the ocean and its movements, gathered in thousands of years of life on those islands and passed from one generation to the other. We know, for instance, that the Onge escaped to the hills as soon as they saw the waves retreating, as they were aware of the risk of flooding. Apparently, some groups were alarmed by the wind, the flight of birds and the movements of animals"[23]. Geologist Mario Tozzi, a well-known Italian anchorman, recently wrote in his book *Catastrofi* that, during the 2004 tsunami, "luckily no 'savage' got extinct. How so? These are tribes who live at close contact with nature… they don't practice agriculture, and lead their existence much as our ancestors from ten thousand years ago. They have no technology… always acted simply according to the laws of nature, keeping in mind Earth's memory more than any expert or commentator ever could… Many indigenous people who were on the shores immediately fled to the bush as soon as they realized that the tide was out of tune with the usual tidal rhythm… Aren't perhaps the 'primitives' right? Isn't someone else wrong somewhere?"[24].

Tozzi's question seems quite relevant. In fact, while these natives simply grasped the warning signals that nature always sends before a cataclysm and saved themselves, civilized people were not able to do so. Even those who lived in those very islands but had adapted to a modern lifestyle did not survive. Having become deaf to the warnings of their environment, they were unable to understand what was happening and tragedy was inevitable for them too: "in the civilized part of the Andaman islands—where a 'Tourism

[23] Interview by Franco "il Daddo" Scarpino, in: http://www.daddo.it/survival.htm.

[24] M. Tozzi, *Catastrofi*, Milano, Rizzoli, 2005, pp. 27-8.

Festival' should have taken place on the 7th January—there were 9,571 casualties and 5,801 missing people"[25]. The same situation was observed not far away in the Nicobar Islands: while the 380 natives of the Shompèn community who live from gathering and hunting in a remote area of Great Nicobar were completely safe, the rest of the Nicobarese, who "are not hunter-gatherers but small farmers… who have mostly been converted to Christianism… were swept away by the waves and suffered many casualties"[26]. Meanwhile, a sophisticated tsunami detection system created by the United States, based in Hawai'i, registered the tsunami without grasping its power, or warning the region of oncoming danger.

What is perhaps most remarkable about this disastrous event is that most people in the civilized world never stopped to think about what had happened. Of course there was general distress, unanimous mourning and wide solidarity, but there was no willingness to look into the causes of that disaster (or those that followed). Rather than try to understand what has happened, people in the civilized world prefers to close our eyes: it is nature's fault, calamities are inevitable, it was an act of God. Having dismissed the tsunami as a "natural" disaster, civilization, numb and self-important, continues on a straight line toward its dead end. Mario Tozzi's questions do not undermine the developed world's certainties, and as Giuseppe Castiglia noted while observing the aftermath of this tragedy that swept away 230,000 people in few hours, and left more than two million homeless, we can all see that "the great machine of international, global donations is mainly anxious to restore the existing situation, to rebuild and re-create those artificial paradises, as though we wished to erase and suppress a nightmare without wondering too long

[25] G. Castiglia, *Lo tsunami e la globalizzazione*, in: http://www.girodivite.it/article.php3?id_article=1550.

[26] S. Bussani, *Popoli sconosciuti. Le tribù che vivono nelle Andamane e Nicobare, travolte dallo tsunami*, in: http://www.peacereporter.net.

The acknowledgement that civilized existence is fundamentally a total defeat of life flows through us in form of discouragement. Everybody has felt that sense of disappointment that stems from our realization of the low quality of our accustomed existence. If we don't want this graveyard of civilization to imprison us forever, we must try to regain control of our lives. We must unveil the root cause of our everyday distress: the wretched process we call "civilization". After all, if terror is to blame, we know what generates it; if war is to blame, we know what theorizes it; if exploitation is to blame, we know what desperately needs it for its very existence—civilization.

how come we experienced it"[27]. What civilized humanity has ceased to understand, namely the living world, is subjected to its logic-rational knowledge and thus fails; what civilized humanity has ceased to feel, namely the language of the Universe, is deciphered through machines and thus fails; what civilized humanity has ceased to respect, namely the harmonious progress of nature, is transformed according to her will and thus fails.

The ghost of the arrogant ideology we call civilization looms more and more over people's fates. It has turned human beings into caricatures, leaving them to the mercy of nature, which they forgot how to understand but over which they claim to be masters—the strongest, most intelligent masters. The more humanity wears the tragic cloak of anthropocentrism, the more we estrange ourselves from nature, and see nature as hostile, adverse and brutal. In the end, the only way to combat nature's hostility is to impose an implacable formal order.

This process has already reached an advanced state of degradation. Having turned nature into a foe, we see only enemies all around. The sun burns our skin accustomed to closed spaces, diseases become incomprehensible threats to our health, physical pain is a curse that must be averted at all costs. Even death is not viewed as a natural event anymore. In the Dionysiac sphere of people drunk on civilization, the end of life is simply banned, cancelled, eliminated. Death is materially hidden from our gaze (through compulsory hospitalization and burial in secluded places outside human settlements). Death has been even ideologically suppressed inside our hearts (through the religious myths of resurrection, reincarnation, rebirth, eternal return, transmigration of the soul, or metempsychosis; or through the secular myths of civil immortality: glory, fame, prestige, celebrity).

[27] G. Castiglia, *Lo tsunami*, pp. 27-8.

air. Letting the pervasive system where we are domesticated and set aside from the others dominate our lives will not help us restore meaning to our lives. Failing to oppose the pervasive system that uproots us from the living world and puts us to work for civilization will not help us assert the dignity of a life that wants to live, not simply to "be lived". "The world must be remade", Vaneigem protested[28]: patches, buffers, expedients will lead us nowhere. Pursuing the target of an "acceptable" decay will not set us free from decay. Making civilization more just will not free us from its deceptions, dependencies and cages.

To replace the consoling expectation of a better tomorrow with an alive and kicking present, we must invigorate the will of an all-pervasive life—a life to be felt on our skin, to be led with creativity, independence and desire. A life that thoroughly heals the fracture which kept us too long separated from the Earth, in a union of co-operation instead of competition, of freedom rather than of discipline, of respect rather than of reverence, of sympathy rather than of apathy, of communication rather than of confrontation, of interaction rather than of exchange, of real contacts rather than of simulation, of pleasure rather than of boredom. In a phrase: a life to be lived rather than managed.

Making civilization seem natural was civilization's first strategy to perpetuate itself. Civilization's paradigms, comforts and alleged truths are all means to this end. We must expose the reality behind these measures, drawing everybody's attention to them, confronting their role in perpetuating the toxic wasteland that imprisons us. We must try to look at civilization without its scepter, without the aura of solemn venerability that makes it mythical—and therefore inviolable and inevitable—to our eyes.

[28] R. Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, Introduction, http://library.nothingness.org/articles/SI/en/display/34.

Seen through the eyes of someone who has lost any contact with their balance, gloomy autumn days turn into an unbearable downpour, fog becomes a senseless hindrance to traffic and wind is a challenge to our costly party hairdo. In the civilized world, we always blame natural conditions, not the circumstances which have been generated by the altered superimposed context that has compressed and disrupted them. Asphalt is made slippery by rain, not rain that cannot drain through asphalt. Age is at risk of disease (heart attacks, diabetes, osteoporosis), not diseases that are a consequence of our unhealthy lifestyle. Forests are dark and treacherous, not our disaffection towards a natural life. The Andamanese gatherer-hunters—just as any other primitive community—know perfectly well that their existence is not menaced by nature but by civilization, and showed this also after the tsunami. After that sweeping wave, the Indian government sent its helicopters to the islands to gather corpses and provide the survivors with "help" (canned food, medicines and whatever could make the natives dependent on the remedies of the modern world). However, far from finding any dead natives, or a frightened or needy people, they encountered a united and solid community that was not enthralled by those flying machines (or by the fake support offered by their passengers). The Andamanese people launched a shower of arrows to discourage the pilots from landing—as if to say: "Keep your civilization to yourselves and go away!"

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We have ceased to understand nature, and this ignorance is turning against us. An increasingly militarized domination of the world will not be sufficient to reassure us; a stricter and more formal order will not be sufficient to restore a peaceful existence in this environment. Instead, the more austere and universal this order becomes, the more we will be exposed to

new disasters that we will keep calling "natural", denying our responsibility as exterminators of the balance in our ecosystem. The devastation carried out by civilization against our planet with increasingly sophisticated and invasive means will not be limited by new safety rules, more sophisticated devices or seismic upgrades.

As though it were possible to protect public health by limiting air toxicity—instead of rebelling against the logic that lies behind this pollution—we focus on limits, benchmarks, acceptability comparisons, formal references (in terms of regulations, scientific criteria and economic production). As though it were possible to win freedom back by painting the walls of our prison, we are seduced by the guards/painters' flatteries, promising us a more colorfully decorated cell. However cleaned up and whitened, a jail is a jail, just as a lawfully poisoned world is poisoned. Indeed, a beautiful jail is even more difficult to demolish, since its beauty hides its restrictive function. The same applies to the pollution of our planet, which, once legalized, becomes untouchable.

Civilized society knows how to regenerate itself even without overt brutality; the subliminal weapons of persuasion are sometimes much more effective. Drawing its strength from the passivity it creates, civilization is able to expand, fortify, and get established in our minds, hearts and bodies even before it gets established in everyday life. And after it has neutralized the "dreams of freedom" dreamed by an unshakable part of the youth's imagination in the face of such a clearly unbearable reality, civilization teaches us that adults don't protest and are not ashamed or outraged by the conditions in which we must live day after day. We learn that the only feasible response to the devastation of everything and everyone is to fight for a "sustainable" devastation.

We shouldn't aim for a lawfully polluted world, but a non polluted world. What will make us feel liberated is not a life contained in a newly painted cell, but a life enjoyed in the open

of burdens for slavers. Feeding and "maintaining" hordes of people to give them the hardest work certainly had an important practical and economic counterbalance—if slaves were not "cured", they risked illness or death, thus jeopardizing the productivity their masters had generously paid for. Furthermore, they had to be continuously ruled, supervised, organized, led, and physically inspected. Finally, like any other "object", slaves brought with them all the typical uncertainties of purchase—they could prove lucrative and convenient, or less lucrative and "faulty".

When, having launched the mechanization of production, the industrial "revolution" forced its accelerated order upon the world, slaves appeared somehow as an uneconomical burden. The world of factories needed an ever-ready, ever-efficient, ever-present workforce—people who never got sick and who didn't need to be sustained. A paid workforce became thus preferable to an enslaved manpower—it was more versatile in terms of market availability, handier in terms of organization and less costly for entrepreneurs. Workers who were not efficient enough could be immediately fired and replaced with more vigorous ones, while slaves remained "in service" for their whole life, even when their efficiency was reduced by disease or old age. Besides, paid workers didn't have to be maintained economically, and a tiny money reward, their wage, freed their "master" for good from the slaver's necessity to sustain them throughout their lives. Finally, employees intervened in the production process only with what the employer needed, namely their workforce, whereas slaves needed to be controlled, maintained and managed by their masters; managing a slave community meant not only having to feed them every day, but also setting up a shelter where they could sleep, supervising them while they had their rest, taking care of them in case they got sick, managing the annoyance of their sale and possibly handling their physical

their environments."[69] According to Kai Curry-Lindhall, many contemporary deserts are silent monuments of former civilizations. For instance, the desert of Thar, in India, once was a river with fertile shores: the Sarasvati. And the region of Sahara is a desert nowadays, but in the past civilizations rose and fell there. French scholar Pierre Bertaux reminds us that the Teneré desert once was a lake with a rich fishery, its shores inhabited by fishermen.[70] We can give a name to the cataclysm that dried up rivers and lakes and turned meadows into deserts: agriculture.

Ponting explains,

> Agriculture involves clearing the natural ecosystem in order to create an artificial habitat where humans can grow the plants and stock the animals they want. The natural balance and inherent stability of the original ecosystem are thereby destroyed [...]. The soil is exposed to the wind and rain to a far greater extent then before [...] leading to much higher rates of soil erosion [...]. Nutrient recycling processes are also disrupted and extra inputs in the form of manures and fertilizers are required. [...] The adoption of irrigation is even more disruptive since it creates an environment that is even more artificial then dry farming.[71]

As we can see, the impact of farming on the environment is widely known to scholars, but we insist on demanding more and more in order to improve production. A bigger output is provided today by mixing chemicals and genetics.

Zerzan summarizes:

[69] Zerzan, John, *Elements of Refusal.*
[70] Bertaux, Pierre, Africa. *Dalla preistoria agli stati attuali*, p. 20.
[71] Ponting, *A Green History of the World*, p. 68.

> Today the organic, what is left of it, is fully mechanized under the aegis of a few petrochemical corporations. Their artificial fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides and near-monopoly of the world's seed stock define a total environment that integrates food production from planting to consumption.[72]

In this adulterated environment the richness of natural earth is replaced by inert material provided by technology: (in vitro production, techno-culture, etc).

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With human subsistence based on farming, the skills required for foraging were soon forgotten and humans had no other choice but to rely on agriculture. When adversities (floods, wars, frost or drought) destroyed the harvest, people had to starve. Conversely, ethnologists, archaeologists, modern anthropologists, scholars and simple observers who have lived in contact with bands of foragers agree on their evidence: hunters and gatherers know how to survive these adversities. Zerzan reports "the Kalahari Desert !Kung San-who were seen by Richard Lee as easily surviving a serious, several years' drought while neighbouring farmers starved".[73] The same idea is expressed by Michael Finkel in his reportage on Hazda People published in Italian *National Geographic*: "Hazda never suffered famine. Contrarily, several farmers went to live with them during a drought".[74] Lewis Binford, one of the bestknown living archaeologists, explains why foraging is a strategy much more apt to lead to survival than farming or pastoralism. Writing about Alaskan Inuit people, Binford

[72] Zerzan John, *Elements of Refusal*, p. 84.

[73] Zerzan, John, *Elements of Refusal*, p. 76-77.

[74] Finkel, Michael (2009): *Gli Hazda*, in "National Geographic Italia", December 2009, p. 28.

of Seville, even praised its social control function: "through fear", the last western Church Father announced, slavery "is indispensable to harness the bad inclinations of some people".[274] The evangelist Paul was not less brutal. Considered "the most influential adversary of slave liberation", he went much further than simply celebrating this atrocity: not only did he encourage Christians to "force subaltern people to obedience towards their masters", but he also made sure that the Christian message of redemption was not misinterpreted as an acceptance of slaves' liberation, clarifying that "the 'teaching of Christian freedom' did not apply… to the 'social aspect of slave-master relationships'".[275]

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Once the moral and economic basis of human exploitation was set, it was very difficult to reverse this course without challenging the very foundations of the dominating mentality that had produced it. The vision that had made slavery possible was never abandoned—not even in the nineteenth century, when slavery proved less profitable than industrial machines and was thus gradually abolished by governments.

The time frame in which slavery's abolition was officially proclaimed is not at all accidental. With the industrial "revolution", civilization was introduced into a new, dynamic and accelerated dimension of work relationships, which needed adequate forms or exploitation, ie more flexible than the monolithic system of slavery. Besides, a more sensitive group of people started to take courage and to turn the issue of slavery into a "social question". A plan to replace the traffic in men and women with less visible forms of subjugation—though equally useful for the logic of exploitation that had made it possible—was gradually developed. After all, slavery was not totally free

[274] Quoted in Ibid.

[275] Quoted in Ibid.

1866, Pope Pius IX—who had already introduced the dogma of papal infallibility—decreed that

> Slavery itself, considered as such in its essential nature, is not at all contrary to the natural and divine law, and there can be several just titles of slavery and these are referred to by approved theologians and commentators of the sacred canons… It is not contrary to the natural and divine law for a slave to be sold, bought, exchanged or given.[268]

For the church, as historian Karlheinz Deschner describes in detail, "slavery was an indispensable, most useful institution, which appeared as obvious as State or family".[269] As in every regime, clerics and religious leaders had servants and maids. "Even monasteries had their slaves, both to accomplish the general services of the convent and to take care of the monks".[270]

And while theologian Ernst Troeltsch pointed out that "not only does the Church participate in slave property, but it even inflicts enslavement as a punishment for several deeds",[271] it is beyond doubt that the most orthodox Church Fathers wrote many despicable treaties in favor of slavery. To Tertullian, just to name one of the most authoritarian authors, "slavery belongs to the natural order of the world".[272] Saint Augustine strongly defended it, and Saint Ambrose maintained that "slavery is perfectly suitable to the Christian society, where everything is hierarchically articulated, and, for instance, woman is unmistakably submitted to man".[273] Saint Isidore, Archbishop

[268] Pope Pius IX, *Instruction*, 20 June 1866 AD , quoted in J.F. Maxwell, "The Developing Slavery", in *World Jurist*, 11, 1969-70, pp. 306-7, in: *The Errors of Pope Pius IX*, http://www.womenpriests.org/teaching/piusix.asp.

[269] Karlheinz Deschner, *Kriminalgeschichte des Christentums*, vol. 3

[270] Ibid.

[271] Quoted in Ibid.

[272] Quoted in Ibid.

[273] Quoted in Ibid.

demonstrates the value of mobility as an ecological strategy offering much more opportunity: the bigger the territory you live in, the higher the odds of survival and the more fallback plans you can adopt if your main resources fail.

> For instance, in north-central Alaska in 1910 the caribou population crashed. Outsiders involved in Yukon gold mining operation started forest fires which burned off the winter range (an area the Eskimo never saw themselves), contributing to a catastrophic decline in the population density of caribou. But the caribou hunters were not at all at a loss when they found that their primary source of food was gone.: they had several other options, all involving mobility, and they knew exactly what they were. Some moved to the Upper Colville River and began putting up stores of fish; others began the seasonal hunting of mountain sheep in the Dietrich Valley, a part of their range in which they had not actually been living; others began to compete with Athapaskan Indians for access to another caribou herd with a different breeding territory and winter range; yet others moved to the coast and started hunting seals. […] But the means to their knowledge of these other options was through mobility— mobility which lead to the accumulation of an information bank, on the basis of which alternatives could be selected.[75]

This knowledge of alternatives is an expression of autonomy—opposed to eteronomy (dependence on agriculture). Eteronomy also means having no chance to decide on

[75] Binford, Lewis, *In Pursuit of the Past: Decoding the Archaeological Record*, pp. 207-208.

something. Or it can be expressed by the impotence we could feel if we found our supermarkets empty of goods.

Producing an agriculture surplus seemed the best solution for human subsistence. But a crop is always under the threat of parasites, insects or hail. Moreover, what humans could do with this surplus? Eating all the surplus was impossible. Storing was not always possible, as some goods turned rotten. Exchange was the only way to give meaning to backbreaking work in the fields. In this way pushing the productivity of farming established the ground for the emergence of a new mentality unknown to Palaeolithic humans: the economic motive. A utilitarian ideology, spread everywhere today, based on profits and competition, was born out of agriculture.

Our primitive ancestors were accustomed to offering something (food, help) to someone else without asking for repayment: they give it as a gift. The shift from a disinterested gift to an interested trade, then to the speculative manoeuvres of money—unit of value of everything, "general equivalent" of everything—is an obligatory landmark on the path of civilization.

In the mind of a hunter-gatherer there was no place for accumulating food surplus. That become a goal only for neolithic farmers. They supported the production of a surplus of farm goods and their exchange, providing a profit to those interested in gain. Exchange and commerce became the ground of human relationships and soon humankind became prisoners of this new cage called "economy".

A new point of view, a new ideology that brought a new concept to primitive women and men: the future. In the preneolithic world there is only present time. According to social anthropologist James Woodburn, even today traditional communities of huntersgatherers live within a frame of relationships described with the label of "immediate return." This means a system in which the actions of people are naturally oriented to the here and now, refusing every delay. People liv-

was even regulated by laws. The Code of Hammurabi, clearly denying that slaves were "human", distinguished them according to their origin: slaves by descent, by purchase on the part of free persons, by insolvency, by captivity in war. These nonhumans could have possessions, trade with others, live with a concubine and obtain their liberation through ransom, adoption or falsification. Around the fifth century BC, slavery was so widespread in Greek citystates that enslaved people often amounted to half the population of the *pólis*.

Indispensable support for a system that had turned every natural element into a production factor, for thousands of years slavery served as an essential economic and moral pillar of the advanced world. No original religion, no dominating philosophy, no ancestral cosmogony ever openly contrasted with the filthy and shameful phenomenon of slavery—it was so useful for a society's productive processes, that it became indispensable even to divinities.

In the first millennium BC, slavery was regularly accepted and carefully regulated in the whole Semitic world. Far from having ever been openly condemned, it was legitimated even by the almighty and all-knowing God of the Jewish-Christian religion, who clearly acknowledged it in his famous Decalogue, in the very heart, that is, of his moral order: "You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male or female *servant*, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor", orders the Tenth Commandment.[267]

Judging this sanctioning of slavery as a divine blunder (perhaps the Almighty had been fascinated by the enslaving frenzy of the time) could seem disrespectful, just as assuming that God may have unconsciously championed those past customs. All the same, the Church of Rome, faithful to its Lord's explicit will, has always refrained from opposing slavery. As late as

[267] *Holy Bible*, Exodus, 20.17 (italics added by the author).

Wall of China, and the ceremonial shrines of the Mayan and Teotihuacan civilizations in the Americas". Mighty buildings, superbly dripping human sweat and blood, helped to glorify the values of power, efficiency and prestige that have always been celebrated by the mentality of domination. "The Great Wall in China required the labor of more than a million slaves, half of whom perished in the effort",[266] and the same applies to the pharaonic Egyptian pyramids, the Babylonian and Elamite pyramids in the Near East, the South American pyramids of El Tajín and of the Toltec culture and all the majestic "cathedrals" of the ancient and modern world (temples, royal palaces, towers, castles, dams, as well as tunnels, mines and deep drilling holes). These works exemplify in a perfect way how unrealistic the civilized world can be—however large these delusions of grandeur are, human martyrdom is always the rule.

Having taken the route that leads to civilization, the control over nature that had made humanity grow more and more insensible to the playful meaning of life started turning against those who had invoked it. The human sphere that had split from its world in an effort to own it was now mostly besieged and "owned". Increasingly centralized and authoritarian structures had started to sanction as lawful and legitimate a distinction between the ruled and the rulers that applied to everything and everyone. This pitiless form of organization became so entrenched that every process, reflex or mode of relationship had to adjust to it. Most cultures born from the agricultural "revolution", and all the structured societies they gave rise to, included slavery. Its first signs are visible from the end of the fourth millennium BC in the Sumerian society, followed by Pharaonic Egypt (third millennium BC), the Hittite Kingdom (whose law code sanctioned the legitimacy of slavery), ancient China starting from the Shang Dynasty (second millennium BC), and the castes of Vedic India. In Babylon, slavery

[266] *Ibid.*, pp. 40-1.

ing according to this framework do not stock food, they eat it straightaway; they do not keep huge containers; they use easy and simple tools, provided by nature or built immediately in the context in which they are needed, easily moved or replaced. Moreover, they do not have a right of ownership of their things; instead they are freely shared in the group. Zerzan adds:

> The non-domesticated know that, as Vaneigem put it, only the present can be total. This by itself means that they live life with incomparably greater immediacy, density and passion than we do.[76]

The idea of the future endangered the sensual and enthusiastic direct link with life in the present. No longer was human existence rooted in the here and now; it was based on the productive circles of agriculture, closed in by agricultural schedules, dependent on agriculture. The routines of agriculture imposed themselves on the spontaneous rhythm of living; agriculture projected human kind into the hopeful expectation of "tomorrow". Soon time began to take a more linear direction, from the past to the future, controlled as an object. As suggested by Mircea Eliade, because of agriculture, time was not only split in seasons, but also cut into perfectly closed units: the "new year" is something thoroughly different from the "old year". The eternal (timeless) time of the present, in which the humankind had lived for millennia, was replaced by a repetitive, homogeneous time running toward the future. Work, surplus goods, exchange, commerce, progress: concepts referring not to an immediate present but to a future to organize, realize, achieve. So while the hunter-gatherer lives, the farmer waits. The former enjoys his/her time, the latter looks forward. With agriculture, fear of future became the ground for a frenetic and anxious view of life.

[76] Zerzan, John, *Future Primitive.*

Looking forward to the future implies faith and hope. The present exists only as a function of the future. But the future can also be a threat. Sickness, disasters, troubles are just around the corner. Soon it became important to win the favour of nature, seen as a power external to humanity, as a Goddess. The first goods produced were offered to the Gods of Agriculture. Again commerce: I am giving to you, then you will give to me. The idea of exchange: while hunter-gatherers were just having fun and pleasure in sharing, the farmers were exchanging goods with a purpose, with an economic interest. The end of a vision of life seen as a ludic experience: now owning matters more then being, and everything is available on the market. Nature is not only a resource, it is a good. This "revolution" starts with agriculture.

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Food surplus gave birth to a new vision of life and led to population growth and the development of hierarchy and social classes: human relationships were now authoritarian. In pre-agricultural life there was no need for division of labor, nor for a centralized and institutional organization. The "structure" of forager societies is based, even today, on sharing, informality, egalitarianism, personal autonomy. The most important decisions in the community are taken by mutual consent and life goes on free from formalities. We have a literature of missionaries that recorded the antiauthoritarian and egalitarian spirit of these populations, sentenced to be brutally Christianized. Father Charlevoix wrote: "As they are not slaves to ambition and self-interest, inequality of conditions is not necessary to uphold their society. […] In this country, all men are considered as equals, and what is esteemed most in a man is his humanity".[77]

[77] Quoted in Sorel, Georges, *The Illusion of Progress*, p.108

such thing as the imprisonment of slaves in primitive gatherer-hunter groups—a respectful approach to life and to personal independence (of every subject, whether human or not) makes it simply impossible to conceive of a state of subjugation. A mentality focused on a frantic appropriation of everything is needed to overcome this resistance and to imagine that a person, her family and her descent can be enslaved to someone else's absolute will. This is the endpoint of the route that started with civilization—the domination of everything and everyone. "The history of man's efforts to subjugate nature is also the history of man's subjugation by man", Max Horkheimer exemplarily argued.[263]

With the development of ever denser settlements that extended over a vast territory and were managed from above, life changed radically. The emergence of these social formations (cities, city-states, princedoms, empires) led to the "hierarchical control exercised by powerful ruling elites".[264] The intense social conflicts that developed in these conglomerations needed to be tackled, commercial transactions and speculations had to be defended, and it was necessary to train and reward bureaucrats, to plan taxation of property and agricultural production, to materially serve the advantaged classes, to preserve the social order, to arrange a continuous outward military expansion and to send military directions to the furthest strongholds of the kingdom. This gigantic structure needed strong shoulders to rely upon—persons who had been qualified as "non-human" and were soon employed without rest in the hardest and most humiliating chores.

Historically, observed Rifkin,[265] our civilized forebears "captured and 'harnessed' one another as energy-producing power plants… Slave labor built the great pyramids of Egypt, the Great

[263] M. Horkheimer, *Eclipse of Reason* (1947), p. 105.
[264] J. Rifkin, *The Hydrogen Economy*, p. 54.
[265] *Ibid.*, p. 41.

mother or whore, demon or saint, vampire-wife or perennial doll who will find redemption in a womanly sphere, woman is relegated to an imagination which eliminates her individual traits and manipulates her personality, so that she cannot ignore her body, her mater-ial background, or the restrictive role she has been prescribed by a civil society born with agriculture. In the processes of social adjustment dictated by civilization, the modern woman faces a legacy of subjugation that has ignobly marked her as a subaltern, so she has no value as a "human being" and becomes a "product": those who like commercial culture can expect an ideal service experience.

8. Human Slavery and Productive Work

Land enclosure, animal confinement, women's seclusion, everybody's imprisonment—it seems ridiculous that a state of universal lockdown may be the endpoint of a supremacist mentality, yet, with its conquering frenzy, civilized humanity ended up even subjugating itself. If land could be put to service and animals could be classified in a hierarchical list of living creatures, all sorts of differences could arise even within humanity at all levels—not only as regards classes, castes or gender, but also with reference to "race". When the painful metamorphosis from gatherer-hunters to farmer-breeders took place, those who had proclaimed themselves the masters of an oppressive social environment customized for human needs easily found the way that led to the trafficking of men, women and children. Still today, the institution of slavery is the unarguable height of the brutalization that civilized humanity has inflicted on itself.

Economic engine of a world sustained by the myth of production (agricultural, military, industrial, tertiary, advanced, or high-tech production), slavery is to cultivating societies what freedom is to pre-agricultural cultures. In general, there is no

The utilitarianism brought by agriculture destroyed the egalitarianism of huntergatherers. Zerzan comments: "Only with the appearance of wealth in the shape of storable grains do the gradations of labor and social classes proceed."[78] Even slavery appeared: adapting huge portions of land to the needs of farming required a great number of people to be transformed into slaves––something possible only in societies divided by hierarchy and militarism. Robert Forbes, author of an "epic" of the conquest of nature, admits that breaking up the valleys of the Nile, Euphrates, Tigris and Indus was a challenge to be faced with a formidable amount of labor, impossible for a few farmers. Marshes had to be drained, and people had to cut down trees, hunt wild game, domesticate wild rivers and channel waters in order to irrigate fields at seed time. Irrigation farming supplemented dry farming and can be considered a factor of development of the State: to carry out such a huge construction project, reconfiguring the landscape of a large area, the most important element was a state with military forces. Perhaps for this reason in Ancient Egypt the hieroglyphic referring to "province" (*nomos*, in ancient Greek) is an ideogram showing a device used to irrigate and drain water. Such devices can be considered, according to Forbes, as the ground of a city-state in Ancient Mesopotamia.

Once conquered, nature became something private. In order to cultivate it, to own its products, it was necessary to remove it from public use. War was the fastest way to own more and more land. Many historians have underscored the links among farming, private property and war. Zerzan comments: "Primal peoples did not fight over areas in which separate groups might converge in their gathering and hunting. At least 'territorial' struggles are not part of the ethnographic literature and they would seem even less likely to have occurred in pre-history when resources were greater and contact with

[78] Zerzan, John, *Elements of Refusal.*

civilization non-existent."[79] Private property deprived people of the free use of nature's gifts, opening the path to war and violence. Enclosures spread at the same pace as agriculture and farming went hand in hand with defending private land, often through violence.

Protecting land and conquering new lands: agriculture led to a new occupation: warrior. Warfare became part of everyday life and soldiers gained importance as the values of militarism spread. Society demanded that some people work the land, while others defend and conquer land. And others reaped the benefits of their work. William McNeill defined this form of social exploitation carried out by agricultural societies as "macro parasitism"; he associated it with the viral micro-parasitism also developed by farming. As micro-parasitism struck, infected, and killed the humans who had stopped eating the spontaneous fruit of Earth, at the same time macro-parasitism spread, devastating the human community, bringing division of labor, war, slavery, population growth and exploitation. And today things are no better. Rousseau's rallying cry against private ownership of lands make sense today:

> The first man who, after enclosing a plot of land, saw fit to say: 'This is mine,' and found people who were simple enough to believe him, was the true founder of civil society. How many crimes, wars, murders, sufferings, and horrors mankind would have been spared if someone had torn up the stakes or filled up the moat and cried to his fellows: 'Don't listen to this impostor; you are lost if you forget that the earth belongs to no one, and that its fruits are for all!'[80]

[79] Zerzan, John, *Elements of Refusal.*

[80] Rousseau Jean-Jacques, *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality*

countries where physical punishments have been abandoned, women who don't accept the role of "beauty ambassadors" are treated with the same contempt and reproofs as in the past. Banishment and social marginalization are as degrading as physical punishment, and they can inflict deep psychic wounds. In this sense, even for those who do not dream of becoming next month's playmate or of being portrayed in a calendar, not being perfect as a model, not using make-up, not dressing up, not shaving with care, not being perfectly fit, not turning into the image every woman should turn into, means being forced to a social existence marginalized from human relationships. Western women's burqa is the urge to wear size 8, Moroccan sociologist Fatema Mernissi complained some years ago.[260] From chador to showgirls, woman's seclusion in the cage of her body seals her admission to the world exclusively in masculine terms.

Covered up or totally naked, hidden as a precious "object" or exhibited as a trophy, woman has always been taken hostage by the patriarchal mentality, forcing her to be a "sex" and to serve an idealized masculine need of domination. She is thus forced to invoke the usual clichés—as a pure mother or as a fiendish seducer. Which is but the dichotomous description celebrated in the misogynous tradition of folktales, where an automaton-like princess—lacking personality, unconscious of her beauty and "idiotically good"—is countered by an equally disquieting feminine figure—the Ugly Witch, the Old Harpy, the Evil Sorceress. Orvieto[261] has described this as the "Cinderella Paradigm", where "the ghost of male imagination is concentrated",[262] with its obsessive need to enslave and a millennial tradition that was capable of reducing a boundless femininity to the infamous narrowness of a function. Whether

[260] F. Mernissi, *Scheherazade Goes West: Different Cultures, Different Harems,*

[261] P. Orvieto, *Misoginie*, p. 17.

[262] *Ibid.*, p. 33.

Woman perfumes herself "to spread an aroma of the lily and the rose… She paints her mouth and her cheeks to give them the solid fixity of a mask",[258] and all the while she pays homage to her imposed status of "prey" (it is known, for instance, that lipstick highlights, often as a caricature, the condition of sexual arousal, which reddens women's lips when they approach orgasm). Women frame their gaze with mascara to highlight their seductive potential; they get rid of body hair reminding them (and especially men) of their animal nature; they try to contrast the imperfections of cellulitis to become smoother and more attractive; their hair, braided, curled, shaped, loses its disquieting plantlike mystery. "In woman dressed and adorned", de Beauvoir concluded, "nature is present but under restraint, by human will remolded nearer to man's desire".[259]

Today the female body parts that are on view everywhere to advertise cars, watches and candies that make life "sweeter", are a further sign of an environment totally inspired by a triumphant male chauvinist imagination. The explicit messages evoking feminine curves and genitals are part of our everyday life and many women accept them without outrage, in a welcoming and complacent way—some of them even develop an ambition to become stars of this commodification—with or without their lingerie. The tempting image of the sex object of the third millennium, glad to show her genitals to a camera in the hope of becoming famous, or satisfied to be turned into a number and to participate in the national beauty pageant, is no less humiliating just because men are learning to adapt to those roles too.

Standardizing and compulsory for everybody, the patriarchal mentality does not allow any form of mutiny. Once open opposition led to the burning of witches, to pillories and stoning. Those who rebel today fare no better. Even in those

[258] *Ibid.*, p. 179.
[259] *Ibid.*

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The rise of agriculture fostered violence and warfare. People were no longer part of a community, but citizens of a State, subjects of those in Power. Bureaucracy replaced informal relationships. French sociologist Emile Durkheim explains the feeling solidarity and communication between the members of a small community: "The whole tribe, provided it is not too extensive, enjoys or suffers equally the advantages and inconveniences of sun and rain, heat and cold, or of a particular river or spring, etc."[81] In mass society, this feeling of sharing and intimacy is lost:

> Because they are spread over a much vaster area, the common consciousness is itself forced to rise above all local diversities, to dominate more the space available, and consequently to become more abstract. For few save general things can be common to all these various environments. There is no longer a question of such and such an animal, but of such and such a species; not this spring, but these springs; not this forest, but forest in abstracto.[82]

Everything takes an abstract turn: brotherhood is converted into a feeling of national unity; cooperation is now division of social labor; mutual aid is charity. Harmony is replaced by order and the feeling of Nature is more and more spiritual, but empty. While primitive people dance with the moon, expressing love for the sun, mountains and stones, civilized individuals worship ideas, such as the Almighty God who will judge and punish them. Sensibility is turned into religiosity.

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[81] Durkheim, Èmile, *The Division of Labor in Society*, p. 230.
[82] Durkheim, Èmile, Ibidem.

The world of the hunter-gatherers had been destroyed by agriculture, and the primal vision of the world was replaced by the ideology of the market. The Earth, once a source of inspiration, soon became a source of energy to exploit. Using nature to produce energy was something the foragers were not interested in. They understood what wind or cows could do. But their life style had no use for them. With agriculture a human being become a "power generator", an "energy factor" able to express his/her efficiency working the land. As American ethnologist Leslie White put it, "the amount of power that an average adult man can generate is small, about one tenth of one horsepower".[83] To increase their power, humans began to use animals. Later, water was used to achieve human goals of production, then wind and finally steam. Every shred of living energy on the planet had to be employed to satisfy human needs and ambitions for exploitation. Rifkin points out in "The Hydrogen Economy" that only with the transition from hunting-gathering to farming and pastoralism, did humans choose to exploit the energy of the planet.

As the fruits of Earth were transformed into products, the energies of the Land were to be exploited. First with the power of the human muscles, then with the strength of a donkey, then with the vanes of a windmill. More power means more corn grain milled, more production, more money. Victims of the imperative to push to maximum production, humankind chose a direction with no way back. Following this path, there was no choice but to enter the age of combustibles. No other option: the quest for more energy and power was an imperative. At first, pollution caused by civilization was mainly produced by urban litter and metallurgy waste (for instance, in Roman times, extraction and processing of lead, begun 6,000 years ear-

[83] White, Leslie, *The Science of Culture: a Study of Man and Civilization*, p. 349.

agree to review your social role and all its effects (privileges as well as duties). There can be no jailers without jails, no judges without judgments, no rulers without rules, no businessmen without fired people. World masculinization also needs women to embrace it, through the preservation and defense of sexist values by everyone, including women.

> To demand equality as women is, it seems to me, a mistaken expression of a real objective", Irigaray objected, "The demand to be equal presupposes a point of comparison. To whom or to what do women want to be equalized? To men? To a wage? To a public office? To what standard? Why not to themselves?[256]

Ironically, the more a woman becomes like a man, the more she remains confined within the usual patriarchal realms: the "body" (the Latin word mater, "mother", originates from the same root as materia, "matter"), the "object" (mainly sexual, and anyway libidinal), the "trophy", or conquered element. In her insightful analysis, Simone de Beauvoir summed up: "when woman is given over to a man as his property, he demands that she represents the flesh purely for its own sake… Chinese women with bound feet could scarcely walk, the polished fingernails of the Hollywood star deprive her of her hands; high heels, corsets, panniers, farthingales, crinolines were intended less to accentuate the curves of the feminine body than to augment its incapacity. Weighted down with fat, or on the contrary so thin as to forbid all effort, paralyzed by inconvenient clothing and by the rules of propriety—then woman's body seems to man to be his property, his thing. Make-up and jewelry also further this petrification of face and body.[257]

[256] L. Irigaray, Je, Tu, Nous: Toward a Culture of Difference (1990), transl. Alison Martin, p. 12.

[257] S. De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, pp. 178-9.

women now depend ideologically, French philosopher Luce Irigaray has maintained, meaning that woman has learned to see herself "as man sees, thinks, and represents her".[255]

In fact, in the sexist universe of "equal opportunities", if a woman wants to be accepted, she must learn to be like a man—to dress like a man, think like a man, act like a man. While a man who wears a skirt and panty hose will raise suspicion and derision (you cannot mess with masculinity in the civilized world!), a woman with a jacket and a tie is a respected specialist, regardless of her sexual orientation. In the same way, while a "motherly" man is still considered out of place, a businesswoman is viewed as an emancipated woman with a strong personality.

Far from evidencing any true condition of women's liberation, the fact that an increasing number of women occupy important social roles that were once reserved to men makes even more explicit the underlying project of worldwide "masculinization". Female managers, police officers, party leaders, ministers, premiers, and army officials signal that the other half of the sky can be just like this one, or even more authoritarian, crude, cunning, strict, rigid, and merciless. Women's integration in a patriarchal society will not change the society, but rather women. And there is no reason why it should be otherwise—planning to throw down monarchy by becoming an unshakable monarch would seem ludicrous to anybody, like trying to fight racism by learning to lead the Ku Klux Klan. Trying to abolish patriarchy by turning into patriarchs with skirts and high heels means first of all turning into patriarchs, getting used to patriarchy and embracing, legitimizing, and championing it. The mechanism that allows an individual to reach the top of a hierarchy implies a role appropriation—an appropriation that does not allow you to change your mind unless you

[255] As quoted in A. Savio, *Senza famiglia? Le donne contro il patriarcato*, p. 108.

lier, reached levels of high environmental risk[84]); later the situation worsened, with the use of fossil fuels. After the pressure exerted by agriculture, animal husbandry, urban expansion, warfare and economic growth, we can add another source of pollution: energy production.

The first victims were the forests, required for wood and heat. Soon forest destruction became so intensive as to endanger the survival of some civilizations. Around 1400 AD the Vikings—who had arrived in Greenland several centuries earlier, attempting to introduce agriculture—disappeared due to the indiscriminate destruction of forests. The same happened to the Anasazi of the American Southwest, once they started to intensively log the woods in their region. The same was true for the Polynesian people living in several Pacific islands, for the farming societies of the Hindu Valley, and for many others. In Europe, around the sixth century BC the Etruscans, settled along the Tyrrhenian coast of Central Italy, destroyed woods of old-growth holly in order to make fire, forge swords and expand their power over neighbouring populations.

Broswimmer comments:

> By the mid-fifth century BCE, the land surrounding Athens was largely deforested. Erosion depleted the mountain soils, deposited silt along the coastlines, and dried up many springs.[85]

The shortage of wood pushed Athens into an aggressive expansionism:

[84] The main component of many metallic leagues, lead was extracted everywhere in the ancient civilized world. Lead production improved during the Copper, Bronze and Iron Ages, "stimulated by the introduction of silver coinage and the development of Greek Civilization. A maximum of about 80.000 metric tons per year—approximately the rate at time of the Industrial Revolution was produced during the flourishing of Roman Power […]" (Broswimmer F., *Ecocide*, p. 157.) Lead pollution is one of the best documented case of eco-toxic pollution in pre-industrial ages.

[85] Broswimmer Franz, *Ecocide*, p. 41.

> […] As a major argument in favour of the ill-fated military expedition to Sicily, the Athenian general Alcibiades specifically mentioned access to the forests of the island.[86]

Fifteen hundred years later the situation was unbearable in Europe: the thick mantle of forests that once covered the continent was nearly deforested. Other sources of fuel had to be found. Fossil coal became an other option in order to produce thermic energy.

Fossil coal was a new energy milestone that pushed humankind to greater depths of slavery and environmental degradation. Coal had to be extracted from mines where slave workers were compelled to labor. Now not only the soil was available to human exploitation. The same fate would affect the depths of the earth. And going down into those depths, millions have lost their lives.

Nor was coal enough. More and more energy was always required. Other sources have been found: gas and then oil. This quest for energy became a race with no finish line, starting with the rise of agriculture. Only the immediate goal (energy) matters. Nobody cared about the long-term problems connected with energy production (eg atomic energy).

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We have tried to demonstrate that agriculture has been a disruption of human history. Subduing nature, dominating its forces, putting its cycles under the power of men and women had pernicious effects.

In the most ancient religious books farming is seen as a calamity, the result of God's punishment. In the Garden of Eden, as imagined by the Christian-Jewish cosmology, there is no place for farming. According to the tradition, Adam and

[86] Broswimmer Franz, Ibidem.

suitor (who is usually passively accepted by his victim in order not to suffer even more). If women are afraid of walking alone at night, of glancing too long at a stranger, of living far from the city, or of enjoying the sun naked, this is just a less considered effect of an actual "culture of rape" that is spread in every society founded on gender discrimination and sexual repression. After all, sexual assaults don't exist only when they are perpetrated by criminals, but also in an indirect, creeping way, which is officially justified by current ethics or is associated with a commercial price. "It would be a mistake to think that rape is reducible to the physical act of a few men who are rapists", Mary Daly has pointed out. "This ignores the existence of the countless 'armchair' rapists who vicariously enjoy the act through reading pornography or news stories about it".[254] Whether real or represented, whether material or symbolic, forced or bought, rape is always rape.

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But patriarchal mentality does not just impose masculine power with the possibility of boycotting it if one is not willing to accept it—it requires instead consent by the victims, their willingness to embrace this prospect.

As a modern conditioning form insisting on masculine modes of relationship and thought, today patriarchy finds its expression in the need to push women to a full adherence to its values—domination, exploitation, competition, standardization, social climbing, unscrupulous activism. Similarly, one of its manifestations is the fixed idea—in both the public and private spheres—of a feminine image in line with men's tastes and needs. If with the advent of civilization woman was forcibly made dependent from man at a social and economic level, in the modern world of women's working "liberation", that dependence has become even fiercer and more disabling;

[254] M. Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, p. 117.

of the possibility of terminating pregnancy (which can be limited or even banned, but is in any case independent from the pregnant woman's desires), to the introduction of artificial insemination where the process of alienation from maternity is extended to the stage of conception.

Even fear, an unmistakable feature of patriarchy, has always loomed over men-women relationships. For instance sexual assault as a form of domination usually practiced by men has not vanished in the free democracies of this "fair" world. In the past, women who could not be bought or exchanged with animals (oxen, camels, horses) could be raped, an ancient term (from the Latin word raptus) which referred to an abduction including rape in the modern sense, to signal the possession of the kidnapped woman. The punishment inflicted on the perpetrator was often revoked if he agreed to marry the raped woman, which made sexual assault one of the most reliable "seduction" tactics for a man.[253] Today, in the advanced world of paid performances, abduction is not widely practiced anymore, but the same mentality that allows us to buy women in shop windows (or in the streets, or on the Internet) has not solved the problem of rape—indeed, it has spread it all over (so that now its victims are not just women, young or old. but also girls and even toddlers and babies). In our civil wasteland, where life is fragmented and relationships wither, in a society that has been turned into a commercial service and in which every vital urge is suppressed, sex assaults are obviously multiplying, as if to counterbalance the so-called "decline of sexual desire" which is equally increasing in our blurred family lives.

The identification of women with their sex organs is very common in modern everyday language. Insulting a woman if she refuses someone's advances is nearly mandatory for her

[253] "Forcible seizure was a perfectly acceptable way… of acquiring women, and it existed in England as late as the fifteenth century". See S. Brownmiller, *Against Our Will*, p. 17.

Eve were free to enjoy the fruits of Eden, a garden in which "the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food."[87] The punishment of God exiled the first humans from Eden. And God said: "cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; eighteen thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you; and you shall eat the plants of the field."[88]

The curse of agriculture can be found in other religions and mythologies. All representations of heaven described by religions refer to a past in which humanity lived free from the duties of farming. The Heaven of Sumerians, the Tilmun, was a land of fertility and richness. And also in the Koran, heaven is free from duties connected with agriculture: "Therein are rivers of water that does not alter, and rivers of milk the taste whereof does not change, and rivers of drink delicious to those who drink, and rivers of honey clarified and for them therein are all fruits and protection from their Lord."[89] But no need to cultivate land to produce food. Similar descriptions can be found in the Irani heaven of King Yima, known as Yama in Indian mythology, or in the Hindu Cveta-Dvipa, in the Persian Airyana Vaejo, in the Tibetan Sham-bhala, in the Scandinavian Asgrad, and in many other mythologies. There were similar images even in Ancient Greek or in the secular philosophy of Tao. Anthropologist Edmund Leach reminds us that the Greek myth of Cronos is inspired by "a golden age of bliss and plenty, when the fields yielded harvests without being tilled."[90] Sinologist Joseph Needham reports a description of Taoist heaven, written by Lieh Tzu, in the book of the Master Lieh:

> The people were gentle, following Nature without wrangling and strife; their hearts were soft and

[87] Genesis, 2.9
[88] Genesis, 3.17
[89] Koran, 47.15
[90] Leach Edmund, *Rethinking Anthropology*, p.128

> their bodies delicate; arrogance and envy were far from them. Old and young lived pleasantly together, and there were no princes nor lords. Men and women wondered freely about in company; marriage-plans and betrothals were unknown. Living on the banks of the rivers, they never ploughed nor harvested, and since the chhi of the hearth was warm, they had no need of woven staffs with which to clothe themselves. Not till the age of a hundred they die, and disease and premature death were unknown. Thus they lived in joy and bliss, having no private property; in goodness and happiness, having no decay and old age, no sadness or bitterness.[91]

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All that said, should be enough to call into question the idea that farming is the best solution for human sustenance. Organic material taken from soil by agriculture is greater than the production. The damage caused by farming is consistent. Agriculture can only provide food to humanity with the aid of huge amounts of external energy. Energy that is more and more polluting and has brought the soil of our Earth to a catastrophic situation. "We can no longer afford the true cost of agriculture."[92] A chance to survive the negative effects of the turn to agriculture, dating from ten thousand years ago, can be found in the local dimension of self sustenance, of independence from the processes of this artificial world that has replaced Nature. Agriculture has given us a "joyless, sickly world of chronic maladjustment [...], prey of the manufacturers of medicine, cosmetics, and fabricated food."[93] A world of unfulfilment that drives

[91] Needham, Joseph, *Science and Civilisation in China: History of Scientific Thought*, p.142

[92] Mollison, Bill, *Introduction to Permaculture*, p. 2

[93] Zerzan, John, *Elements of Refusal.*

those fake critics who, far from challenging its existence and its ideological foundations, insist on extending it to non-married, gay and lesbian couples.

Without the support of family, patriarchy would lack a fundamental pillar. Fathers', husbands' and men's authority has certainly been significantly challenged in its original form. In Western countries (elsewhere things are unchanged) there is no longer a head of the family who rules over the life and death of his family "possessions", and women are not forced into total exclusion from social life and relationships as in the past. Nevertheless, patriarchal ideology has not been uprooted. Indeed, its millennial assumptions have remained unchanged and widespread even if they are often dimly lit to hide its harshness. The need to grant a legitimate paternity to children within the marriage bond, for instance, is strictly disciplined in every current civilized social system. Likewise, just as in the past, women are arbitrarily expropriated from their natural ability to procreate by means of practices and norms operating at several different levels—not only symbolically (by giving children their father's surname), but also psychologically, by separating a woman in labor from the "elder" women of her group (and thus from the community experience), and materially, through a systematic tendency of power to rule over any aspect of maternity. What Suzanne Arms defined as "a gradual attempt by man to extricate the process of birth from women and call it his own"[252] is still today an integral element of patriarchal society, in the most diverse forms—from the imposition of medical-gynecological childbirth techniques excluding women from any active participation to the labor process (birth hospitalization, the use of forceps, epidural injections, C-section), to the spread of contraceptive medications that equally stop them from experiencing fertility cycles (making them passive in this sense); from the state regulation

[252] Quoted in A. Rich, *Of Woman Born*, p. 102.

ing *as* wives, husbands, daughters, and sons *should be*. For, being an institution, family primarily corresponds to a principle of order and authority—it is the yardstick of any hierarchical society, the basic unit of civilization, as conformists, whether conservative or progressive, still maintain today. To sum up with Marcuse's words: "The family is the basic image of all social domination".[251]

This closed institution consisting of a father, a mother and one or more children is not only a masculine institution that arose from a background of masculine power among patterns of masculine oppression which forced women (and the nature they were supposed to represent) into the subaltern status of an "element" to be controlled and dominated; first of all, family is the core of patriarchy and its ideology. And even if today women have the opportunity to undermine the ancient power of men at the top of this institution (at least in the Western world), this does not change the patriarchal nature of family: children are still considered their parents' property, roles are still strictly determined, conjugal love is still sexual intercourse to be *carried out*. If homosexuality, common-law couples, "fatherless" children, and collective love cannot be certified by the "sacred bond of marriage" yet, it is only because of their alleged disorderly and unreliable connotation. Therefore, they will not be certified as long as the process that reduces diversity to the civilized logic of "sameness" does not characterize these choices (that are free and spontaneous still today) as "normal"—as was the case of mini-skirts, topless sunbathing, boots, men with long hair or earrings, piercings and any other trend that lost its original non-conformist character when it was assimilated by fashion, market, and consumerism. Family-as-an-institution is not defended only by those who want to preserve its authoritarian nature, but also and especially by

[251] H. Marcuse, "A Study on Authority" (1936), in *Studies in Critical Philosophy*, transl. Joris de Bres, p. 120.

us to warfare, to exploitation, to environmental devastation. Land, human relationships and all life on the planet are experiencing desolation. Japanese agrophilosopher Fukuoka wrote: "To believe that by research and invention humanity can create something better than nature is an illusion."[94] Agriculture must finally be considered according to its real essence: "a declaration of virtual War on local ecosystems,"[95] a trauma "devastating to human psyche, society and the Earth."[96] If we want to try to recover, we must be conscious and begin to look at the world around us with a different mentality.

5. The Use and Consumption of Animals

With the advent of civilization, animals were soon just as doomed as vegetables. Predestined victims of the will of subjugation that is typical of the mindset of command, animals shifted from "vital subjects" in an organic and balanced universe to "inanimate objects" at the service of the human race. The idea that breeding arose from agriculture (and was born from the same mentality) is now taken for granted, as Elman Service notes.[97] After Earth was turned into a factory of vegetable production, animals were reduced to a similar role, becoming producers of power, meat, milk, eggs, leather, fur, and more animals to be subdued to the same cycle of exploitation. It wasn't a matter of taking from animals what they could offer as food, clothing, shelter, etc, but forcing free animals to endure the effects of total confinement aimed at producing an

[94] Fukuoka Masanobu, *The One-Straw Revolution: An Introduction to Natural Farming*

[95] Eldredge, Niles, *Life in Balance: Humanity and the biodiversity crisis*, p.176

[96] Glendinning, Chellis, *My name is Chellis and I am recovering from Western Civilizations*, p. 69.

[97] E. Service, *Profiles in Ethnology*.

increasing quantity of food, clothes, and energy. And this confinement would end only with the animal's death.

The original identification between humans and animals that made up the sensibility of gatherer-hunters disappeared in farmer-breeders, making room for the need to exploit "beasts" with the purpose of obtaining a surplus. If we consider the ability of primitive peoples to identify with Earth's living parts, to sympathize with them, and even to understand their point of view, we immediately realize how the civilized world's mentality opened an unbridgeable gap in the relationship between human beings and natural world. SouthAfrican anthropologist Laurens Van der Post extensively reflected on the !Kung community's relationship with nature. He described it as a level of experience that

> could almost be called mystical. For instance, he seemed to know what it actually felt like to be an elephant, a lion, an antelope, a steenbuck, a lizard, a striped mouse, mantis, baobab tree, yellow-crested cobra, or starry-eyed amaryllis, to mention only a few of the brilliant multitudes through which he so nimbly moved.[98]

This sensibility, of course, has disappeared among civilized humans, having at best turned into an urge for wildlife protection, or animal rights defense—which are admirable engagements to be sure, but are based on an anthropocentric vision that is never challenged. Trying to make up for the ideology of human superiority through an effort of legal protection will never do enough to hide the built-in inequality of this approach. Even today, we cannot see animals as peers. Even when we live close to them, we often don't understand them, and cannot comprehend their needs. So when we don't abuse them directly, we "humanize" them, transferring

[98] L. Van Der Post, *The Lost World of the Kalahari*, p. 15.

"samurai was entitled, and in the face of public knowledge, even obliged, to execute an adulterous wife".[248] And in many Muslim countries this "custom" has been famously preserved: "the adulteress is still stoned to death with a mullah presiding at the execution".[249]

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The institution of the family pursues the same ideological aim as monogamy— strengthening men's domination of women.

Based on marriage as a contract of woman's submission, the patriarchal, patrilinear, and patrilocal family arose together with civilization, which defined its members' roles, proclaimed the father as king (the "father of the family" is endowed with "paternal authority"), and allowed him to exert an absolute power over any *thing* which legitimately counted among his possessions: goods, children, and wives. The very root of the term "family" is indicative: "Famulus means domestic slave, and *familia* is the total number of slaves belonging to one man".[250]

Meant as an institution—a steady and privatized formation that could reproduce within itself outbound power relationships rather than a sphere of affection focused on sharing and mutual help—family was bound to become a model for the subsequent U.S. Constitution. The sense of community that had characterized human life for millions of years, allowing everyone to be a free member of free collectivities, faded away with the institution of family. Inside a family, individuals disappear just as in private companies, in audience measurements, and in consumption indexes. Being a wife, a husband, a daughter, or a son means giving up one's exclusive individuality and becom-

[248] K. Millett, *Sexual Politics*, p. 43.
[249] *Ibid.*
[250] F. Engels, *The Origin of the Family*, p. 121.

interfere with open or concealed polygamy on the part of the man".[244] It is well-known that law, an expression of patriarchy from its birth, has always been very permissive towards husbands' extra-conjugal affairs (when it did not explicitly allow man's polygyny), but never tolerated any violation of the contract by women, nor any behavioral deviation that could raise doubts about her children's paternity. In this sense, "the first known codified laws, those of the Sumerian king Ur-Namu, prescribed death to any woman satisfying desires outside of marriage";[245] just as the Babylonian Code of Hammurabi had made female adultery a crime punishable by death.

Recounting this in her celebrated history of rape, Susan Brownmiller found an even cruder element. In ancient times legitimate child paternity was protected by law to the point that even for women who had been raped, a libertine will was assumed: "A *married* woman who had the misfortune to get raped in Babylon had to share the blame equally with her attacker. Regardless of how the incident occurred, the crime was labeled adultery and both *participants* were bound and thrown into the river… Influenced by Hammurabi's code but lacking the glorious Tigris and Euphrates, the ancient Hebrews substituted death by stoning for a watery grave".[246] However, in every society where men were punished with death for having committed adultery, they were killed "only for having usurped another man's property—his wife—not for having sex with women other than their own wives". As late as in Roman times, with the definitive establishment of a firm patrilineality and an undiscussed patrilocality, men "killed or enslaved women for losing virginity…and killed them for abortion or extra-marital sex".[247] Until recently, in Japan, a

[244] F. Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State, in the Light of the Researches of Lewis H. Morgan*, trans. Alec West, p. 138.

[245] J. Zerzan, *Elements of Refusal*, p. 78.

[246] S. Brownmiller, *Against Our Will. Men, Women and Rape*, p. 19.

[247] M. French, *The War Against Women*, p. 105.

onto them all our obsessions generated by frustration. We take them to hairdressers, we dress them up, we confine them in homes and, believing it is for their good, we do not hesitate to devastate their (and our) health with abundant supplies of industrial food. Considered as "things" also by the law, animals are objects, belongings, and our relationship with them is always utilitarian (from obvious exploitation to companionship).

On the other hand, the common features of animal life have been suppressed, manipulated, and put to the greatest use since the onset of civilization. In domestic species, even the instinct of reproduction has been turned into an industrial activity and a human "skill". Cross- and interbreeding, race selection, pedigrees, genetic manipulation, and artificial insemination are not considered aberrant practices in the sophisticated world of civilization.

Can we describe today the courting ritual between a bull and a cow? Even if cattle have invaded planet Earth (around 1.5 billion cows are estimated to live in this world), we have never managed to observe them courting. And this is only because we do not allow them to. In fact, the mating of bulls and cows has become very unromantic since human beings intervened in their lives. Jeremy Rifkin points out that the birth of bred calves often

> begins with 'teaser bulls', also called 'sidewinders'. These animals are used to identify cows in estrus (heat). A teaser bull has undergone a surgical operation that reroutes his penis so that it comes out through his side. The bull becomes aroused in the presence of cows in heat and attempts to mount the females. Because his erect penis is off to the side, he can't penetrate the cow's vagina, but he does leave a colored dye on her rump from a marker that's been hung around his chin.

> Ranchers use the marker to identify the cows in heat so they can be sequestered and artificially inseminated.[99]

But also in the rest of battery animals' life there is nothing that can be envied. Castrating newborn calves is for instance a common practice to make animals "more docile and to improve the quality of the beef".[100] There are several methods of castration. In one procedure, "the scrotum is grasped and stretched out tightly, a knife is stuck up through the scrotum and then used to cut open the sack, and each testicle is pulled out with the long cord attached. In another procedure, a device called an emasculator is used to crush the cord".[101] Since in the civilized world what counts is not animals' feelings (let alone their suffering), but only their ability to benefit their owners, when the purpose is making money everything is allowed.

Besides castration, the amputation of horns is also a common practice among cattle breeders. Yet these body parts "are not merely insensitive bone. Arteries and other tissues have to be cut when the horn is removed, and blood spurts out".[102] Ear cutting, skin branding, imprisonment in tiny cages, unhealthy food, antibiotic prophylaxis to stimulate growth, vaccines that damage the immune system, disinfectants and parasiticides sprayed all over high-tech sheds are some of the most common forms of abuse cows are legally subjected to. And when these poor beasts reach their "ideal" weight (1,100 pounds), they "are herded into giant truck trailers"[103] and carried to the most convenient slaughterhouse. Cramped together like cheap wares, the cattle "are transported for hours or days along interstate highways without rest or

[99] J. Rifkin, *Beyond Beef*, p. 11.
[100] Ibid.
[101] Ibid.
[102] P. Singer, *Animal Liberation*, p. 145.
[103] J. Rifkin, *Beyond Beef*, p. 14.

Starting from the first agricultural societies, marriage (as a patriarchal institution) aimed at ensuring that wealth was transmitted from a father to his son and excluded women even from its arrangement—a woman could not decide who, when, or where she wanted to marry, and she had to accept her father's choice of an imposed husband, as well as the whole series of conjugal duties that ensued (faithfulness, seclusion, submission to her spouse). Her "value" as a person was so low that she had to be accompanied by a *dowry*—objects her father offered to her groom (together with his daughter) to make the bargain more acceptable. Furthermore, since marriage had a hereditary purpose, when a wife could not give birth to the expected offspring (since, of course, women were blamed for millennia for couple sterility…), she could be legitimately repudiated by her husband, who could throw her out of "his" home or force her to find a "capable" woman for his needs. "When they will put a collar on her neck to mark her married status, the process will come to its end: she is already like oxen. The collar will be then followed by a ring (as the iron ring used by Romans), which reminds her more gently the 'bond' she must submit to".[242]

Branded as impure, treated as an object, tied to man's absolute power, woman is denied even the tiniest freedom, especially in the erotic sphere. In the patriarchal world, Maria Anna Rosei argues, "many customs and institutions—virginity, marriage, family—have been set up so as to inhibit women's sexual freedom. Only women had indissoluble marriage bonds, mandatory duties, impossible actions, unspeakable words".[243] Monogamy, just to quote another one-way custom, is a brilliant example. In order to ensure husbands that their children were legitimate, "the monogamy of the woman, not of the man, was required so this monogamy of the woman did not in any way

[242] S. Morace, *Origine donna*, p. 80.
[243] M.A. Rosei, "La parabola del patriarcato. Dall'invenzione della téchne alla restituzione dei panieri," in *I quaderni di Via Dogana*, p. 7.

suggests that when "children are social members rather than private heirs, menstruation and pregnancy are not surrounded by any… restrictions".[241]

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With the establishment of an agricultural society, in practice, woman is not considered a human being anymore—like an "animal" (and an underdeveloped one), she must submit to her master's power; as a re-production "object", she must be owned. Marriage, which becomes established along with the patriarchal framework of the emerging civilization, pursues this social aim—granting men a legalized ownership over women, and ensuring an equally legitimate lineage. With marriage, woman (who is by now relevant only because of her acknowledged reproductive function, and therefore is not even a woman, but just a "mother") is directly "handed over" by her father to her husband (the term "matrimonial" originates from the Latin words mater and munus, literally "mother gift"). She thus becomes effectively part of her fecundator's patrimonial wealth (from pater-munus: "father's gift"). According to the laws that sustain his power, the father of the family can be sure that the son born by his wife is his own—that the son is the legitimate heir of his whole wealth.

The contractual (ie formalized and binding) nature of marriage in all civilized societies—whether archaic or modern—legally reinforces this power: what was one of women's natural abilities, the possibility of giving birth, is officially submitted to men's control and "jurisdiction". Even today, the father's surname given to newborn babies symbolically confirms this supremacy.

[241] K. Sacks, "Engels Revisited: Women, the Organization of Production, and Private Property", in R. Reiter (ed.), *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, p. 226.

nourishment and frequently without water",[104] and when they reach their destination this Cowpocalypse will take place as planned—with a pneumatic gun that will end the animals' "lives."[105]

The mammals we have learned to consider as no more than loins, rumps, tenderloins, and sirloins, perfectly put together uniquely to delight our palate, can thus be turned into what they have been "produced" for—coveted steaks, glamorous cutlets, more popular marrowbones, convivial chops, and quick hamburgers. We have lost any connection, even emotional, with the animals we eat. As long as they are cheap and ready to serve, we accept anything—even that they are abused before they are killed. The civilized mindset with which we have learned to relate to the living components of the world does not include any relationship that is not inspired by a precise will of unscrupulous subjugation. In the civilized universe, everything must serve the master, his practical purposes and whims, whatever the cost.

If we think once again about the sensibility of the men and women who refuse agriculture, the coldness of the opposed civilized universe explains why we are so distant from the world we live in. "In gatherer-hunter societies… no strict hierarchy exists between the human and the non-human species", Barbara Noske states.[106] As it is nonexistent within the community, hierarchy is also unknown in non-civilized humans' relationships with animals, plants, Earth, wind, or rocks. Examining this subject, English ethnologist Alfred Radcliffe-Brown reported that at the beginning of his Australian research, in

[104] Ibid.

[105] Of course, these terrible "death journeys" don't affect only cattle. Thanks to the laws of the market, every year tens of millions of cows and calves, but also pigs, sheep, lambs, horses, donkeys, chickens, and rabbits travel for thousands of miles from their breeding plants to slaughterhouses.

[106] B. Noske, *Humans and Other Animals*, quoted in J. Zerzan, *Future Primitive*.

1910, a native explained to him that "Bungurdi (kangaroo) [is] my kadja (elder brother)."[107]

Van der Post also noted that uncivilized peoples' respect towards animals often translates into them being viewed similarly to human beings. The Kalahari Bushmen describe baboons as "the people who sit on their heels",[108] and the "honey-diviner", a little bird that helped them find beehives, is considered a "person with wings".[109] This form of respect is not limited, of course, to a mere outer manifestation. Once the Bushman, helped by the honeydiviner, had put his hands on "his amber ration", Van der Post goes on,[110] "he would never fail to reward the bird with honey and, on a point of mutual honour, share with it the royal portion of the harvest: a comb as creamy as the milk of Devon".

The spirit of brotherhood/sisterhood, the deep respect toward what exists, the harmonious co-existence with every part of nature are so present in the primitive lifestyle, that they can be even seen when hunting animals: "The non-domesticated typically view the animals they hunt as equals", John Zerzan reminds us: "this essentially egalitarian relationship is ended by the advent of domestication".[111] The feeling in the hunters' hearts is often one of regret, and in any case they lack any sadistic inclination or celebration of suffering. There are even primitive bands, such as the Warray in Venezuela, that do not go hunting even if they are able to.

The utilitarian system of the civilized world turned animals into "manipulative matter whose worth is measured exclusively in market terms".[112] And this dramatic process of reducing every living being to economically valued items

[107] A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, *Structure and Function in Primitive Society*.
[108] L. Van Der Post, *The Lost World of the Kalahari*, p. 17.
[109] Ibid., p. 18.
[110] Ibid., p. 19.
[111] J. Zerzan, *Future Primitive*.
[112] J. Rifkin, *Beyond Beef*, p. 273.

including her husband. Nor may she touch a man, for this would defile him".[236] But even for those who do not worship Yahweh, the menstrual taboo often marks the complex of modern anti-feminine obsessions—among the main "menstrual disasters" filling the misogynist imagination of contemporary men, we must count "the belief that menstrual flux sours wine, kills young plants, dims mirrors, breaks a horse's back and curdles mayonnaise—the latter a fairly modern tabu".[237] In any case, the idea that women are "intractable" during "their monthlies"[238] is widespread. Therefore, when, having observed Native agricultural populations, Margaret Mead reported that even in the archaic world the menstrual taboo is widely known, she said nothing new:[239] her findings simply stated, once again, that the oppressive and discriminating attitude of agricultural populations towards menstruating women has no correspondence in the joyful atmosphere with which gatherer-hunter communities generally welcome their young women's menarche (and therefore their move into adulthood).[240] Tending towards the same conclusions, after a wide comparative investigation anthropologist Karen Sacks

[236] *Ibid.*
[237] *Ibid.*, p. 29.
[238] Writing on this subject, American author Adrienne Rich recalled that psychic factors and thousands of years of cultural conditioning cannot be simply ignored in the name of the alleged equality in gender relationships celebrated today by civilization. Even if we acknowledge, Rich writes, that "the menstrual and premenstrual periods can be characterized by depression, anxiety, flashes of anger", and even if we take for granted that "Water retention and hormonal fluctuation may contribute their share", a certain "ambivalence of pride and shame (and fear) have marked, under patriarchy, the onset of the menses". See A. Rich, Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution, p. 106.
[239] See M. Mead, *Male and Female, a Study of the Sexes in a Changing World*
[240] Among the BaMbuti Pygmies, for instance, the ceremony for a girl's first menstruation is called *elima*, and is considered one of the merriest occasions of her life. During this event the whole community celebrates.

to lust and whom the Jews appropriated, turning her into Adam's first wife, later to be replaced by Eve. She embodied Hathor-Sekhmet, an Egyptian goddess "whose heart rejoiced when she slew men, and who almost exterminated humanity",[233] or the godlike sorceress Circe (Greece), the goddess of voluptuousness and sin Cicomecoalt (Mexico), or the killing goddess Hine-nuite-po (Polynesia). She also embodied Izanimi, the Japanese goddess "of the underworld and of putrefaction, [who] undertook to kill as many people as her brother, Izanagi, could cause to be born".[234]

As she had been turned into the embodiment of Evil, her very flesh was the object of persecution. Her body changed into something "dirty", "fearful" and "impure"—into something contaminated and contaminating. The monthly bleeding was shown as a proof of this alleged impurity and became its emblem. Every culture that has gone through an agricultural "revolution" has covered women with the shame of their bodies, and of the blood that flows once a month from their genitals. As the Austrian psychoanalyst Wolfgang Lederer reported with reference to the menstrual taboo, in every part of the civilized world girls "were, and sometimes still are, relegated to a sort of prophylactic retreat; they were thrust out into the wilderness and forbidden to look upon any man, nor to be seen, on pain of death; they were hidden in dark huts, or locked in suspended cages; they were fumigated and roasted; and they must on no account touch anything belonging to a man, nor to a man's work; lest they destroy his abilities… or his performance in any male way whatever".[235] Still today, the unwritten religious laws of the Talmud dictate that an "orthodox Jewish woman… during the time of her menstruation, may not hand any object directly to any man,

[233] *Ibid.*, p. 126.
[234] *Ibid.*
[235] *Ibid.*, p. 26.

to be used and consumed has spared nobody. Chickens, for instance, have no significance as individuals, but only as producers of meat and eggs. Ruth Harrison points this out by quoting an old British farming magazine: "The modern layer is, after all, only a very efficient converting machine, changing the raw material—feedingstuffs—into the finished product—the egg".[113] And when these birds are not perceived as "egg machines", it is only because they are treated as "meat chicken". Their growth is only functional to the economic income they can ensure, so that, just like cattle, for "industrial chickens" life is but a short existence marked by daily torment. In order to be turned into "marketable items", these free birds must be imprisoned in tiny, overcrowded cages (with a wire bottom to facilitate the gathering of manure), where they are forced to total immobility; and when they are not caged, they live segregated in sheds with cement floors (which they cannot scratch), where they "never see daylight, until the day they are taken out to be killed".[114] To prevent the cannibalism produced by overcrowding, battery chicken undergo painful mutilations too, especially in form of "debeaking". After all, for centuries chicken have been grown with "their feet cut off, because it was believed that it made their meat more tender".[115] Likewise, geese were traditionally bred with their legs nailed to the floor, and still today they are force-fed to produce *pâté de foie gras*.[116] Pigs are often tied to a wall, or anyway locked in pens that are so narrow as to stop many of their spontaneous movements (which would strengthen their muscles making their meat less tender and lean). These mammals have often their tails cut, because they tend to bite them when kept in overcrowded spaces. Even fish are

[113] Quoted in R. Harrison, *Animal Machines*, as quoted in P. Singer, *Animal Liberation*, p. 107.
[114] P. Singer, *Animal Liberation*, p. 103.
[115] C. Ponting, *A Green History of the World*, p. 248.
[116] Ibid.

enclosed in utterly unnatural habitats (tanks, artificial ponds) that are artificially disinfected and oxygenized and customized in order to subject animals to the artificial processes of fry production, pre-fattening, and fattening, based on techniques meant to minimize food supply, maximize growth rate, and spare as much water and electricity as possible. Of course, while nobody cares about the freedom fish lose thereby, the loss in genuineness and nutrition of their meat is made up for by chemistry: "For example, salmon, deprived of their natural diet, have to be given a dye in their food to ensure that their flesh turns pink".[117]

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The transformation of wild animals into domesticated caricatures that are immediately tamed and "ready to be consumed" is so despicable that often the universe that brings it about tends to carefully hide its heavy ramifications. Through the adoption of "tactical" measures such as misinformation or the right to privacy (whose privacy?) hindrances of all sorts are used to stop individuals from acknowledging the most brutal effects of animal imprisonment. Propaganda, especially for children (as in the messages that creep from animation films like *The Wild* or, even before, *Madagascar*[118]), caps it all, accustoming future adults not to ask themselves too many questions about the potential suffering of captive animals. When nature is blamed as unfair because it allows the suppression of the weaker by the stronger, it should be kept in mind that civilization—which makes us read natural balances in such Darwinist terms—has brought about far worse developments; in the civilized world, not only is this

[117] Ibid.

[118] As many will know, both movies are stories of animals who flee from a zoo and, with the perspective of a free, wild life perceived as unbearable, decide to go back to their cages to "enjoy" the comforts of seclusion.

of years of civilized male spite, he created the most biting and malicious misogynous maxim ever: "The greatest, the one enemy of the emancipation of women is woman herself".[231]

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Reduced by patriarchal mentality to the most humiliating passivity, vituperated and marginalized from social life, woman finally became the scapegoat of masculine arrogance. If, on one hand, she had to preserve her chastity (virginity was a "first hand" seal of sorts for her future husband, that is the anatomic certification of his legitimate paternity over her children), on the other hand her very mind, constrained by shame, fear, and submission, and directly associated with transgression, was, from ancient times, considered sinful, lascivious, and provocative. We all know that if a comparison must be made between men's and women's sexuality, it is men, not women, who have a generally more materialistic approach—who are still today the main users of prostitution, pornography, and sex tourism. Yet, in the civilized world, women are blamed even for the effects produced on men by the repression of carnal impulses—it is women who tempt and seduce men with their "witchcraft". Like Eve, it is women who enchant and corrupt. (It should be noted that, according to this curious vision, children should be considered responsible for pedophilia…)

In a reflection of the personal annihilation they suffered with the advent of civilization, women were equated with Evil, Hell, or Death. Woman became the embodiment of the goddess Kali in India, the Black One, the blood-thirsty Queen of the Netherworld: "adorned with the blood-dripping hands and heads of her victims".[232] She embodied the demon Lilith (a Sumerian, later Babylonian creature), who instigated men

[231] *Ibid.*

[232] W. Lederer, *The Fear of Women*, p. 133.

considerations by Freud on "penis envy" and by Jung on the "mother complex" (including the danger of an excessive development of the feminine nature), the highest point of science's attack to women was touched by Paul Julius Möbius' poisonous words. In an essay significantly entitled *On Women's Physiologic Feeble-Mindedness*, Möbius, a neurologist, wrote the following pearls of wisdom: "if we give a close look at women's life, we must admit that Nature was really tough with them. In fact, not only did Nature give them poorer mental gifts, but she also arranged things so that women lost these faculties sooner than men".[225] In women, individual thinking "is not able to proceed on its own and must rely upon any external judgment… the morals that come with reasoning are inaccessible to them, and reflection only worsens them".[226] Women, "fundamentally, lack taste", and "simulation, or lying, is [their] natural and more than indispensable weapon".[227] To conclude, "If women were not physically and mentally weak… they would be highly dangerous beings",[228] so that "women's feeble-mindedness does not only exist, but is all the more necessary; not only is it a physiologic fact, but it is also a physiologic postulate".[229] When, after depriving woman of her subjectivity, personality, conscience, character, thoughts, will, and even soul, Otto Weininger, the ideologist of phallocracy,[230] resolved to synthesize in a sentence thousand

and organically monogamous and frigid" and "therefore, thinks less, just as she feels less". See C. Lombroso, G. Ferrero, *Criminal Woman, the Prostitute, and the Normal Woman* (1893), transl. Nicole Hahn Rafter, Mary Gibson, pp. 60-1, 64.

[225] P.J. Möbius, *Über den physiologischen Schwachsinn des Weibes*, Halle,

[226] *Ibid.*

[227] *Ibid.*

[228] *Ibid.*

[229] *Ibid.*

[230] "Woman… is under the sway of the phallus, and irretrievably succumbs to her destiny". See O. Weininger, *Sex & Character*, in: http://www.theabsolute.net/ottow/sexcharh.html.

logic of suppression of the weaker by the stronger elevated to a moral system and defended by law, but this same logic is always carried out after the stronger has appropriated the weaker, forcing them to fulfill their wishes for the rest of their lives, uprooting them from their habitat and from the call of the wild, exploiting them and wearing out their strength by treating them as objects. Degradation cannot be justified in ways that are not despicable. The torment inflicted on animals by the civilized world cannot change its nature just by calling it "service", "benefit", "entertainment" or "public use". But as is well known, in the advanced world everything is possible in the name of usefulness, and anything is legitimate if it is celebrated as the best relationship possible.

The reduction of free animals to useful "objects" is as shameful as it is, at times, even weird, if we consider how self-defeating it is for the responsible "race". To get an idea of the havoc the transformation of wild animals into domestic products has caused in the fate of the human race, we just need to look through the works of economist Frances Moore Lappé analyzing the connection between breeding and global hunger. Examining data that are as simple as they are shocking, Lappé notes:

> 145 million tons of grain and soybeans were fed to livestock in 1979—cattle, poultry, and hogs. Of that feed only 21 million tons were available to human beings after the energy conversion, in the form of meat, poultry, and eggs. 'The rest, about 124 million tons of grain and soybeans, became inaccessible to human consumption'. Lappé calculated that if the 124 million tons of wasted grain and soy were… converted to human use [it] could provide 'the equivalent of one cup of grain for every single human being on earth every day for a year'.[119]

[119] Rifkin, *Beyond Beef*, p. 161.

To keep viewing the breeding of animals as an activity that can help sustain humanity is to keep looking away. Domestication, apart from being ethically questionable, impoverishes the world—both the world suffering it and the world that is supposed to benefit from it. And if we consider the devastating impacts of animal enslavement on people's health, these doubts are further reinforced.

In fact, when farming is not directly implied in the development of most serious contagious diseases, the reduction of animals to objects at the service of humanity is a causal factor. Jared Diamond[120] writes: "The major killers of humanity throughout our recent history—smallpox, flu, tuberculosis, malaria, plague, measles, and cholera—are infectious diseases that evolved from diseases of animals". And McNeill maintains that "Most and probably all of the distinctive infectious diseases of civilization transferred to human populations from animal herds".[121]

Among the lethal gifts we received from animals segregated by humans there certainly is pertussis, which we got from pigs and dogs,[122] leprosy, which came from water buffalo,[123] and diphtheria from cattle.[124] Also "measles and tuberculosis have originated from cattle diseases, while flu is an adaptation of a virus of hogs and ducks to humans. The origin of smallpox remains obscure—it is unclear whether it reached humans from camels or cattle".[125] Even the common cold has been passed to us by animals we had domesticated, in this case

[120] J. Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel*, pp. 196-7.

[121] W.H. McNeill, *Plagues and Peoples*, p. 69.

[122] These data are drawn from J. Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel*, tab. 11.1, p. 207.

[123] C. Ponting, *A Green History of the World*, p. 226.

[124] Ibid.

[125] See http://www.animalionline.net/newsletter/no3.asp. This article quotes a thorough study of animals' and plants' domestication by Jared Diamond published in *Nature* magazine. Similar considerations have been made in W.H. Mcneill, *Plagues and Peoples*, pp. 196-7.

path of scientific demonstration—once there, the "official consecration" by psychoanalysis (Freud and Jung among others) was a stone's throw away. So while Comte attested that "the social mission of Woman in the Positive system follows as a natural consequence from the qualities peculiar to her nature", and that "in every phase of human society… women's life is essentially domestic, public life being confined to men",[220] Darwin established an axiomatic sexual hierarchy, maintaining that: "Man is more courageous, pugnacious, and energetic than woman, and has a more inventive genius".[221] Even more decidedly, Herbert Spencer led the most powerful misogynous raid into biology by claiming that the mental development of women is "arrested", "necessitated by the reservation of vital power to meet the cost of reproduction".[222] Gustave Le Bon, the esteemed father of social psychology, a Positivist and illuminated champion of the liberating and antidogmatic function of science, completed this effort by introducing the attack on women deep inside psychology: "All psychologists who have studied the intelligence of women", he stated in 1879, "recognize today that they represent the most inferior forms of human evolution".[223]

As soon as the human soul was broken up by the tools of science, the urge to submit the feminine universe to the masculine one was charged with a new grudging zeal. Even if we overlook Cesare Lombroso's appalling musings on an inherently "delinquent woman",[224] or the equally emblematic

[220] A. Comte, *System of Positive Polity*, transl. John Henry Bridges, pp. 169-70.

[221] C. Darwin, *Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1871), p. 505.

[222] H. Spencer, *The Study of Sociology*, p. 373.

[223] Gustave Le Bon, "Recherches anatomiques et mathematiques sur les lois des variations du volume du cerveau et sur leurs relations avec l'intelligence", in: *Revue d'Anthropologie*, 2, Vol. 2, pp 27-104, quoted in in S.J. Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man*, p. 62.

[224] According to the eminent 19th century scientist, "woman is naturally

when the difference between laymen and clerics was not as it is today; it flourished also in the nineteenth century, in the middle of the modern age, among celebrated illuminated personalities. For instance, Honoré de Balzac advised French husbands to "choose weapons fit to employ against the terrible genius of evil, which is always ready to rise up in the soul of a wife".[212] Simultaneously, the author did not miss any opportunity to praise "genuine" madams, "who seek no other glory than that of playing their part well; who adapt themselves with amazing pliancy to the will and pleasure of those whom nature has given them for masters".[213] A sour and less cryptic Schopenauer accused: "When the laws granted woman the same rights as man, they should also have given her a masculine power of reason".[214] To Max Nordau, a woman "is a mental automaton… which must go till it runs down, the same way it was wound up—with no power in itself to alter the mechanism of its works".[215] Even an unrecognizable Proudhon extolled a "new patriarchy or patriciate",[216] announcing that women are "devoid of any invention and initiative",[217] and that "by calling a woman man's partner, we elevate her too much",[218] as "women are slaves who must just obey".[219]

But it wasn't until the pathetic celebrations of woman as the "perfect housewife" by the founder of Positivism, Auguste Comte, and the theories of the biological superiority of males formulated by Evolutionism (Darwin, Spencer, Mantegazza) that the argument of woman's inferiority took the terrible

[212] H. de Balzac, *The Physiology of Marriage*, ed. Sharon Marcus, p. 149.

[213] *Ibid*., p. 150.

[214] A. Schopenhauer, *On Women*, in: http://www.theabsolute.net/misogyny/onwomen.html

[215] M. Nordau, *Paradoxes*, p. 53.

[216] P.-J. Proudhon, *La pornocratie, ou Les femmes dans les temps modernes* in: http://www.archive.org/stream/lapornocratieoul00prouuoft, p. 255.

[217] *Ibid*., p. 95.

[218] *Ibid*., p. 158.

[219] *Ibid*., p. 36.

by horses.[126] In such circumstances, it does not surprise that Michael Greger, Director of Public Health at the Humane Society of the United States, said: "Animal agriculture is not just a public health hazard for those that consume meat".[127] Quoting a Stanford University study, the veterinary expert reminds us that "the single worst epidemic in recorded world history, the 1918 influenza pandemic, has been blamed on the livestock industry. In that case, the unnatural density and proximity of ducks and pigs raised for slaughter probably led to the deaths of 20 to 40 million people across the world".[128] However, even the World Bank lately warned that "extraordinary proximate concentration of people and livestock poses probably one of the most serious environmental and public health challenges for the coming decades".[129] And our everyday life perfectly confirms that concern.

The direct link between human diseases and animal breeding has been acknowledged as a notorious fact. The effects of bird flu, of the so-called "mad cow" disease (Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy, BSE), as well as of SARS, Nipah virus infections and the most recent swine flu (promptly renamed "influenza A" so as not to deter TV-citizens from their holy meat consumption), are just few examples of a wider phenomenon as old as civilization. Salmonella, rabies, scabies, boils, and measles show how large is the underwater part of the iceberg formed through the millennia by humanity by living together with domesticated animals. "After living for some ten thousand years in close proximity to animals", Clive Ponting reminds us, "humans now share sixty-five diseases with dogs, fifty with cattle, forty-six with sheep and goats

[126] C. Ponting, *A Green History of the World*, p. 226.

[127] M. Greger, *SARS: Another Deadly Virus from the Meat Industry*, in: http://www.earthsave.org/news/03summer/sars.htm

[128] Ibid.

[129] Quoted in B. Halweil, D. Nierenberg, *Farming the Cities*, in AA.VV., *State of the World 2007*, p. 58.

and forty-two with pigs".[130] A note by the Pew Commission on Industrial Farm Animal Production (an independent board that has studied for years the effects of intensive breeding on public health) reports: "64% of the over 1,400 documented human pathogens has an animal origin".[131]

And if we consider that the modern meat factories have made the confinement of farm animals even worse, any hygienic measure to tackle the contamination caused by this violence cannot eliminate the risk of humans being forced to eat what is provided by the industrial system and animals treated like machines. According to Hans-Gerhard Wagner, an officer of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, the "intensive industrial farming of livestock" is "an opportunity for emerging diseases".[132] With a wider analysis, U.S. paleoanthropologist Mark Nathan Cohen explains: "Almost all studies that attempt to reconstruct the history of infectious diseases indicate that the burden of infection has tended to increase, rather than decrease, as human beings adopted civilized life styles".[133] In fact, the transmission of viruses from animals to humans does not take place only in farms similar to concentration camps, but also outside, in the altered, artificial environment with which civilization is replacing nature. As explained by Goldsmith,[134] for instance, the destruction of rain forests exposed humans to Leishmaniasis, a disease that used to affect sloths. Likewise, Lyme disease is caused by a Spirochetes bacterium whose carrier is the tick of deer torn from their habitat, and typhus can be

[130] C. Ponting, *A Green History of the World*, p. 226.

[131] Quoted in D. Condorelli, "Virus d'allevamento", in *L'Espresso*, 27 August 2009, p. 138.

[132] J. Vidal, "Flying in the Face of Nature", in *The Guardian*, 22 February 2006, http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2006/feb/22/health.birdflu

[133] Quoted in E. Goldsmith, "Hell On Earth—Man's Natural Environment", in *The Ecologist*, October 2000, http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2465/is_7_30/ai_66457051.

[134] Quoted in S. Latouche, *La mégamachine: raison technoscientifique, raison économique et mythe du progrès.*

is the head of the church".[205] In tune with God's precept according to which woman must be absolutely inferior to man (as she was created from his body in order to serve his needs), the wise men of the Church of Rome vied one against the other to express their highest contempt towards the other sex: Saint Thomas considered woman "an imperfect man", an "occasional" being;[206] Saint Augustin listed women among the legitimate war spoils; John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, judged that "Among all savage beasts none is found so harmful as woman";[207] Saint Odo, abbot of Cluny, gave vent to his gynophobic grudge in the indoctrination of monks: "Physical beauty is only skin deep", he taught. "If *men* could see beneath the skin, the sight of *women* would make them nauseous… Since we are loath to touch spittle or dung even with our fingertips, how can we desire to embrace such a sack of dung?".[208] The *Ecclesiastes* follows the same line: "A man who wishes you ill is better than a woman who wishes you well".[209]

While the Koran did not withdraw from this solicitous line—"Men are superior to women on account of the qualities with which God has gifted the one above the other, and on account of the outlay they make from their substance for them"[210]—while a daily orthodox Jewish prayer still declaims: "I thank thee, O Lord, that thou has not created me a woman",[211] and the Hindu code of Manu teaches that: "A woman must never be free of subjugation", misogyny was also widespread among laymen—not only in the Middle Ages and in the Renaissance,

[205] *Holy Bible*, "Epistle to the Ephesians", 5, 22-5,23.

[206] Quoted in S. De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 110.

[207] Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 110.

[208] Quoted in G. Duby, M. Perrot, A History of Women in the West: Silences of the Middle Ages, p. 20.

[209] Quoted in S. De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 226.

[210] *Koran*, 4:34.

[211] Quoted in M. Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, p. 132.

man, and then the woman, from your rib… A sole male God unilaterally claims the right to judge and punish, and the first thing he does is changing the magical ability of women to give birth into a sentence of suffering. But the worst punishment is the vengeance he takes against the feminine creator of brotherhood, making her morally responsible for the killing of one of her sons by his own brother".[202] The symbolic meaning of this "lesson" is very clear: the fraternal bonds, co-operation, and life communion that accompanied the co-existence of men and women for millions of years have disappeared. Now differences are regulated and disparities are imposed by a power: now authorities rule, and fear, arbitrary will, and permanent abuse reign.

What did not exist before patriarchy, namely religion, gained ground with patriarchy; what did not exist before patriarchy, namely sexual discrimination, became established with patriarchy. Considered as a secondary "element", woman is confined to the role of a vile creature. According to Pythagoras, "There is a good principle which has created order, light, and man; and a bad principle which has created chaos, darkness, and woman"; and according to Aristotle, "woman is woman through the lack of virility".[203] True to the biblical tale of the Genesis, the Christian apologist Tertullian addresses women in the following terms: "You are the devil's gateway… how easily you destroyed man, the image of God. Because of the death which you brought upon us, even the Son of God had to die".[204]

The Scriptures were utterly explicit in attributing a subordinate role to women: "Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands", the Epistle to the Ephesians reads in the New Testament, "For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ

[202] *Ibid.*, pp. 90-1.
[203] S. De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 227-8.
[204] Quoted in M. Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, p. 44.

transmitted by flying squirrels who settle in the attics of American houses (because woods are razed in order to make room for civilized life). And the same can be said of the pathologies disseminated throughout Europe by ticks and parasites infesting rats, pigeons, dogs, cats, and even roe and fallow deer (which are pushed down to the valleys or near human settlements by the destruction of their natural habitat).

Whether domesticated or not, animals suffer continuous attacks by a civilized universe that devastates the whole ecosystem on a daily basis, favoring the spreading of genetic mutations, climate change, and continuous environmental interferences whose lethal effects are impossible to forecast. But unfortunately, the only response to these concerns is indifference—Development, Progress, Welfare cannot be challenged, and most of all they cannot be stopped! So as the unnatural environment shaped by civilization disrupted the original balance of a healthy life, trade routes, political domination, war, mass tourism tirelessly spread this disruption, making it global. Today, in the world of global ideology, ethics, justice and profit, it is no coincidence that we also experience the tragedy of global disease.

The foolish human ambition to reduce living forms to objects to be used and consumed must be abandoned. This practice is not only unhygienic, damaging both the environment and life itself, but is also "misguiding", in that it accustoms people to a disrespectful attitude towards nature. In fact, as trite as it is to mention this, the very idea of submitting animals to human purposes is not limited to the mere satisfaction of dietary needs. In fact, since the outbreak of civilization, in an apparently endless escalation, men and women have also imprisoned and killed animals to obtain goods that are not absolutely necessary for their sustenance—fur coats to be flaunted at gala evenings; silk to show one's social status; ivory and coral for useless ornaments; leather for smart young fashion, trendy shoes and other items that could be

easily manufactured without any breeding (handbags, gloves, jackets, car upholstery, armchairs, sofas). With the alibi of necessity (especially as regards food), the oppressive will that civilized humans have inflicted on animals has always manifested as exploitation. Today the abuse scenario has become incredible. Without mentioning the extreme practice of killing animals to obtain trophies (taxidermy, stuffing, the exhibition of horns, fangs, tusks, etc), the range of suffering imposed on animals worldwide is striking—from the humiliating subjugation aimed at public entertainment (the taming of wild beasts for circus shows, TV ads, movies, TV series and so on) to the senseless imprisonment aimed at exhibition (zoos, theme parks, aquariums); from the enslavement for competition (races, fights) to the sad use in lab experiments (vivisection, implants of new races, crossbreeding, cloning, xenotransplantation).

If we only allowed ourselves to think about the endless number of living creatures that are segregated, exploited, mutilated, tortured, senselessly killed by civilized humanity, we would really begin to smell the acrid tang of the scorched earth policy we have imposed on nature. The apathy filling this modern existence characterized by human domination urges a radical break—with the unhappy context built by an unhappy humanity; with the desperate context created by a desperate, soulless humankind whose total subjugation ended up including itself among its victims.

6. Social Stratification and the End of Equality among Humans

Characterized by a natural lifestyle (that could therefore be afforded by ev- eryone), the world of gatherer-hunters did not need a structured organization. In a universe that is not bent by brutality towards the environment, far from the manic need to

not just a matter of thanking the earth, but a duty to respectfully acknowledge the authority. And every behavior takes on a dutiful form: it has become necessary to win the favor of what is now a proper divinity. "Capricious, luxurious", de Beauvoir says about the Goddess Mother,[199] "she reigns over all the Aegean Archipelago, over Phrygia, Syria, Anatolia, over all western Asia. She is called Ishtar in Babylonia, Astarte among Semitic peoples, and Gaea, Rhea, or Cybele by the Greeks. In Egypt we come upon her under the form of Isis", and we find her in many other places—from India to Japan, from Mexico to the Celtic world.

Transferred to a divine sphere, in her new authoritarian clothes, having abolished her love for her children in favor of terror, the Goddess Mother will soon be flanked by a son (symbolizing fertility) or a lover (owner of her fertility), "appearing as a bull, the Minotaur, the Nile fertilizing the Egyptian lowlands… We see this couple first appearing in Crete, and we find it again on every Mediterranean shore: in Egypt it is Isis and Horus, Astarte and Adonis in Phoenicia, Cybele and Attis in Asia Minor, and in Hellenic Greece it is Rhea and Zeus. And then the Great Mother was dethroned".[200] The throne, an explicit symbol of arrogance, belongs to the Great Father, to the inexorable, pitiless, vindictive Man God of monotheist religions—Jehovah, Yahweh, God, Allah.

"God and the human male have a similar problem", Morace observes with due sarcasm:[201] "The former has a crowd of female divinities who dispute his power and tradition; the latter has a crowd of mothers and mothers' siblings who stop him from asserting himself in his individual uniqueness. The agreement among both of them, their alliance, is exemplary—I will be your God, you will be my chosen people. I created you, the

[199] S. De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 78.
[200] *Ibid.*, p. 86.
[201] S. Morace, *Origine donna*, p. 90.

the afore-mentioned historian of religions, "from that revelation sprang… the most advanced intellectual syntheses".[198]

A certain archaic cosmology denotes it actually rather clearly—in the origin Earth was a mother (Mother Earth). She, the mother, gave nutrition to her children, who were one with her. The gratitude toward this concession of the universe is what inspires all forms of thanks-giving by the gatherer-hunters to Earth or the hunted beasts. There is nothing sacred to express, nothing to reconcile with: Earth, as a mother, loves without asking any rewards; thanking her is just a profound manifestation of affection and gratitude. With the advent of agricultural societies, this relationship was turned upside-down—Earth was not a mother anymore, and mothers became earth (Earth Mother), they became earth-like. The patriarchal landscape was completed by a radical change in the role of mothers, who, exactly like the soil, generated (instead of nourishing) and produced (instead of giving). The inversion of the Mother-Earth association into an Earth-Mother association disrupted the sense of gift-giving that had characterized the original feeling of respect towards nature. And since soil could be made productive, controlled, dominated by man, women would be too. Producing their fruits just like Earth, women must be, just like the Earth, "owned" and "made profitable".

Wherever there is a pervasive agriculture, Mother Earth (Earth as a nourishing mother) turns into an Earth-Mother (a mother as productive soil) and is introduced into a patriarchal context invoking fertility in a utilitarian sense: there is a virtually compulsive transformation of Mother Earth into the Great Mother, and of the Great Mother into the Goddess Mother. Everything is filled with a holy and religious character; everything becomes atonement (especially of the offense made by those who use and exploit Earth as well as the Mother). It is

[198] *Ibid.*, p. 361.

endlessly expand the power of one's social system, not only did the idea of a hierarchical regulation of human relationships not make sense, but it also endangered the co-operative balances that guided everybody's life. Every individual was naturally perceived as equal to everyone else, and the force of the community lay in this very equality—mutual co-operation, social participation and sharing always require a condition of equality. With social inequality, hierarchies, or domination by someone else, co-operation becomes impossible—there are only prescriptions on one side, and accomplishments on the other. With an authority empowered to force its will on others, and a subject who is forced to carry out her task, the latter's contribution cannot be called co-operation—it should be rather called duty, service, debt.

The egalitarian past of Paleolithic humanity is so apparent that in anthropology the distinction between *egalitarian* (primitive foragers), rank (the first Neolithic farmers) and class societies is generally accepted.[135] "Archaeological sites until about 7500 years ago do not show any evidence of inequality", ethnographer Carol Ember attested together with her husband Melvin Ember in their handbook on cultural anthropology.[136] "Houses do not appear to vary much in size and content, and burials seem to be more or less the same, suggesting that their occupants were treated more or less the same in life and death."

In fact, everyday life in gatherer-hunter communities always followed principles of egalitarianism, respect for personal autonomy, and sharing of natural wealth. Richard Lee "cited 'an absolute aversion to rank distinctions' among 'simple foraging peoples around the world'. Leacock and Lee… specified that 'any assumption of authority' within the group 'leads to

[135] "Anthropologists conventionally distinguish three types of society in terms of the degree to which different social groups have unequal access to advantages; the three types are called egalitarian, rank, and class societies". Cfr. C.R. Ember, M. Ember, *Cultural Anthropology*, p 138.

[136] Ibid., p 148.

ridicule or anger among the !Kung, as has been recorded for the Mbuti (Turnbull), the Hazda (Woodburn) and the Montagnais-Naskapi (Thwaites), among others'".[137] "The Hadza recognize no official leaders", Finkel[138] reminded us recently. "Individual autonomy is the hallmark of the Hadza. No Hadza adult has authority over any other". And usually, Lee confirmed, authority is not even exerted on children.[139] The relationship between non-domesticated adults and their children is usually indulgent, people tend to pay attention to the needs of the youngest and to understand them, and they are free to express themselves and are thus deeply respected. Tim Ingold states that "'in most hunting and gathering societies, a supreme value is placed upon the principle of individual autonomy', similar to Wilson's finding of 'an ethic of independence' that is 'common to the focused open societies'".[140]

Furthermore, non-civilized groups do not lead a dull existence; on the contrary, the community pulsates with life and respect towards everyone. "The esteemed field anthropologist Radin went so far as to say: 'Free scope is allowed for every conceivable kind of personality outlet or expression in primitive society. No moral judgment is passed on any aspect of human personality as such'".[141] The opposite condition we know so well from our modern world only generates suffering, whether conscious or unconscious. Which in turn generates even more conscious and unconscious suffering (with the effect that new tools of repression and distraction are needed to try to control the most dramatic manifestations).

[137] J. Zerzan, *Future Primitive*.

[138] M. Finkel, "The Hadza", in *National Geographic*, December 2009, http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2009/12/hadza/finkel-text

[139] Among the !Kung of Botswana, for instance, "Not even the father of an extended family can tell his sons and daughters what to do". Quoted in J. Zerzan, *Future Primitive*.

[140] J. Zerzan, *Future Primitive*.

[141] Ibid.

from any dominating impulse. As Friedl, Leacock, and others maintain, "The structure (non-structure?) of egalitarian bands, even those most oriented toward hunting, includes a guarantee of autonomy to both sexes. This guarantee is the fact that the materials of subsistence are equally available to women and men and that, further, the success of the band is dependent on cooperation based on that autonomy".[196]

With the advent of agriculture, this equal co-operation is broken. The subsistence offered by cultivation is not equally available as that which can be freely obtained from nature—in the former, those who produce can eat, while those who don't must starve, and those who own something are *rich*, while those who don't are *poor*. In order for people to own something, land has to be privatized, which implies that others must be excluded from any opportunity of enjoying that land.

So thanks to agriculture, people's inclination to sharing was bent to the (proprietary) logic of exclusion; co-operation was replaced by competition, and any activity was directed towards the achievement of privileged positions. Just as a farmer who tills the earth in order to harvest its fruits claims to be their sole owner (property is in fact an *erga omnes* right, ie it is enforceable against anybody infringing on that right), a man who impregnates a woman suddenly claims an ownership over the "fruit" of her womb. In Mircea Eliade's words, "as agriculture became more developed, it tended to give man a more and more important role. If woman was identified with the soil, man felt himself to be one with the seeds which make it fertile".[197] Heralding the religious reduction of female beings to a mere receptacle for the masculine seed, the identification of women with the fields and of men with the act of sowing took shape with the advent of agriculture, and, according to

ture Primitive.

[196] *Ibid.*

[197] M. Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, p. 334.

that of others who groan over field labor"[191] After all, the male chauvinist imagination depicting women as incapable of hunting is discredited even by the mythic memory of Latin populations, who gave to a feminine idol, Diana, the role of goddess of the hunt—thus perpetuating the cult of Artemis, the wild hunting goddess from ancient Greece.

What emerges from the examination of a less recent past, as well as from direct contact with contemporary gatherer-hunter communities, is that "an overall behavioral flexibility"—rather than a rigid and binding task division—"may have been the primary ingredient in early human existence".[192] Joan Gero "has demonstrated that stone tools were as likely to have been made by women as by men",[193] strengthening the widely confirmed hypothesis (by Goodall, among others) that woman hunters made the tools they needed for catching animals.[194] It is no surprise that Frank Poirier points out the absence of any "archaeological evidence supporting the contention that early humans exhibited a sexual division of labor".[195]

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We know that in nature lionesses, cow elephants, she cats, or female eagles are as perfectly equipped to find food and shelter (for themselves as well as for their offspring) as their male mates. The argument of the separation between male and female, and the consequent supremacy of the first over the latter, is a key feature distinguishing human societies based on cultivation, which aim at taming nature, from primitive societies, which are deeply connected with nature, and therefore alien

[191] *Ibid.*

[192] A. Zihlman, *Woman as Shapers of the Human Adaptation*, in F. Dahlberg (ed.), *Woman the Gatherer*, as quoted in J. Zerzan, *Future Primitive.*

[193] Quoted in *Ibid.*

[194] See for instance J. Goodall, *Tiwi Wives*, p. 55.

[195] A.F. Poirier, *Understanding Human Evolution*, quoted in J. Zerzan, *Fu-*

Conscious of the devastating effects of this degenerative spiral, foragers worldwide keep refusing the domestication of nature, preserving the free and egalitarian lifestyle humanity enjoyed for millions of years. Kevin Duffy reminds us that "'the Mbuti are naturally acephalous—they do not have leaders or rulers, and decisions concerning the band are made by consensus'. There is an enormous qualitative difference between foragers and farmers in this regard, as in so many others. For instance, agricultural Bantu tribes (eg the Saga) surround the San, and are organized by kingship, hierarchy and work; the San exhibit egalitarianism, autonomy, and sharing. Domestication is [indeed] the principle which accounts for this drastic distinction".[142]

Forced assimilation of gatherer-hunter bands into societies that had arisen from an agricultural "revolution" has frequently been the reason why Natives have been uniformly seen as embracing the cause of sovereignty and hierarchical organization. But as ethnologist Maria Arioti maintains in her cross-section study of forms of social relationship in worldwide foraging communities, in non-civilized groups differences in individual intelligence and skills never lead to social inequality.[143] Especially wise persons can be considered moral leaders, their opinion can be highly appreciated and influence the group's decisions, but they will never have the power to force someone to do something. Likewise, someone who is particularly skilled in hunting can lead the hunt and organize the group's march; an old woman can become a resource for young expectant mothers and during childbirth; and a highly witty person can receive much attention during the community's convivial occasions. But everybody is considered equal to the rest of the group. Relationships among non-domesticated people are therefore al-

[142] Ibid.

[143] M. Arioti, *Produzione e riproduzione nelle società di caccia-raccolta*, p. 75.

ways inspired by the friendly and generous principle of authoritativeness, rather than by authority's cold power. Unlike "leaders", authoritative individuals have no enforcing power. Their "significance" is only recognized on a spontaneous basis and freely accepted; as such, it can be also freely rejected by any one at any given time.

From a primitive point of view, the notion of "leaders" is totally unjustified; it makes sense only if one looks for an extreme reassurance in the extension of the civilized mentality's authoritarian features to include these free people's lifestyle. But individuals who can be categorized as "political representatives" (leaders) can be generally found only in farming societies or in some non-traditional communities that had already been blackmailed by civilization (eg some North American ethno-linguistic groups living today in the Indian reservations). Arioti[144] states that "The widespread presence of proper leaders among the Northern Athapaskan and North-Eastern Algonquian" is not traditional. And various scholars (especially Helm McNeish[145] and Rogers[146])

> have shown, by analyzing historical sources, that among these populations, leading figures are the result of pressures exerted by non-Natives, in the attempt to simplify their relationship with the Natives engaged in the fur trade by dealing with official representatives of these groups. This authority had no roots in the traditional culture and was caused by the post-contact situation. Instead, as stated by Helm, the dominant values in Northern Athapaskan culture were contempt towards any

[144] Ibid., pp. 74-5.

[145] J. Helm Mcneish, *Leadership among the Northern Athapaskan*, in "Anthropologica", 2, pp. 131-63.

[146] E.S. Rogers, *Leadership among the Indians of the Eastern Subarctic Canada*, in "Anthropologica", VII, 2, 1965, pp. 263-84.

line Goodman, John Grove et al[184]). "Among the Tasmanians," Maria Arioti writes, "women hunted opossums, which were a staple food in that people's diet".[185]

As for the Carrier, Ona, Yaghan, and Andaman women, they have always fished for their whole community.[186] Still today, in primitive groups living far from the coastline, women go hunting and catch big animals together with men. In the BaMbuti community, for instance, "There is relatively little specialization according to sex. Even the hunt is a joint effort".[187] The same applies to the Paiutes, Chippewas, Shoshonis, and Northern Athapaskans—in these collectivities, the hunt is always a joint effort involving both sexes.[188]

In her study on the origins of task division according to sex, Lila Leibowitz explains that during the Paleolithic men and women were always involved in common gathering and hunting activities.[189] In ancient times, this consciousness was still alive. In the 6th Century AD, for instance, Procopius knew that the Serithifinni of what is now Finland "neither till the land themselves, nor do their women work it for them, but the women regularly join the men in hunting".[190] The Roman historian Publius Cornelius Tacitus (AD 56—AD 117) wrote of the Fenni of the Baltic region: "the women support themselves by hunting, exactly like the men… and count their lot happier than

[184] See M.J. Goodman, J.S. Grove, P.B. Griffith, A. Estioko-Griffen, "The Compatibility of Hunting and Mothering among the Agta Hunter-Gatherers of the Philippines", in: *Sex Roles*, 26, 1985, pp. 125-142.

[185] M. Arioti, *Produzione e riproduzione nelle società di caccia-raccolta*, p. 123.

[186] See *Ibid.*, pp. 129, 136-7.

[187] C.M. Turnbull, *The Forest People*, p. 154.

[188] M. Arioti, *Produzione e riproduzione nelle società di caccia-raccolta*, p. 123.

[189] L. Leibowitz, "In the Beginning… The Origins of the Sexual Divison of Labour and the Development of the First Human Societies", in S. Coontz, P. Henderson (eds.), *Women's Work, Men's Property*, pp. 43-75.

[190] Quoted in J. Zerzan, *Future Primitive*.

any other activity. Even when mostly women worked in the harvest, gathering was never their particular task. Among the Hadza, Woodburn recalls, "Men do not rely on the women to supply them with all the vegetable food that they need".[179] This also applies to Pygmies and to the majority of primitive communities: "There are just few peoples, as the Guayaki in the Amazon, where men never gather food".[180] Significantly, as Elman Service has insisted (while referring to the Inuit), "the tasks of one sex are not rigidly tabooed to the other. If necessary, it is not beneath the dignity of a man to sew or cook, and conversely, women help out in the game drives in subsidiary roles and also do some of the fishing".[181] So while men are not excluded from the activities of gathering and helping the family, women are not banned from the hunt.

The idea that during the Paleolithic women spent their existence in their family hut, doing their housework as they waited for their masculine mate to bring back meat to sustain them, belongs to the repertoire of comic strips, and this image has been repeatedly refuted and ridiculed by the evidence that in several primitive communities women were personally involved in hunting. Lewis Cotlow, Elman Service, and others have witnessed this in Eskimo women. Kay Martin, Barbara Voorhies, Jane Goodall observed it among Tiwi women (an Australian aboriginal population living in the Melville Islands).[182] These women hunted on a regular basis just as do Agta women in the Philippines (Agnes Estioko-Griffen and Bion Griffith,[183] Made-

[179] J. Woodburn, *An Introduction to Hadza Ecology*, in by R.B. Lee, I. Devore (eds.), *Man the Hunter*, p. 51.

[180] M. Arioti, *Produzione e riproduzione nelle società di caccia-raccolta*, cit., p. 118.

[181] E.R. Service, *Profiles in Ethnology*, p. 75.

[182] M.K. Martin, B. Voorheis, *Female of the Species*, New York, See also J. Goodall, *Tiwi Wives*

[183] See A. Estioko-Griffin, P.B. Griffith, "Woman the Hunter: The Agta", in F. Dahlberg (ed.), *Woman the Gatherer*

> form of authority and a strong urge towards individual autonomy.[147]

This push to independence is often so rooted in these populations, that it resists even civilization's mechanisms of cooption. Such is the case of Amazonian Yanomami (or Yanonami). Reported by well-known anthropologist Pierre Clastres, as quoted by Alberto Prunetti, their conflict with the Brazilian government, which wanted to organize them around a leading figure, deserves remembering because it is a symptom of the unconscious anti-authoritarian will of the natives. The Brazilian government was trying to force the Yanonami to elect a representative

> for their negotiations related to the planned exploitation of this native population's territory. Brazil wants a head, a representative, someone who speaks in the name of all, a politician actually. This is how the Yanonami react—they send in either the most foolish person in the village, or someone who is interested in playing the leader. But those who are willing to enact the representative's role become everybody's fools, they are mocked and laughed at… Through irony and mocking, authority is trampled upon.[148]

While the social life of primitive communities is characterized by a conscious rejection of any form of authoritarianism, hierarchical relationship, political representation or bureaucracy, relationships among the members of the group are based on equally communitarian feelings, rejecting the privatization of the natural wealth and favoring a harmonious communion

[147] M. Arioti, *Produzione e riproduzione*, p. 75.

[148] A. Prunetti, *Perché il primitivismo?*, in J. Zerzan, *Primitivo attuale*, Introduction, pp. 7-8.

made of sharing, selflessness, and mutual support. Diamond recalls for instance that among the Moriori,[149] "decisions were reached by general discussion, and landownership rested with the community as a whole rather than with the chiefs".[150] The same applies to the Malaysian Batek, as reported by Kirk and Karen Endicott,[151] to the Semang of the Malay Peninsula (John Hajek), to the Malapantaram in Southern India (Brian Morris) and to every other gathererhunter group in the world—among the Birhor in the forests of the North Koel River (India), the Negritos in the Philippines (Aeta in Luzon, Ati in Panay, Mamanwa in Mindanao), the Tapiro Pygmies in New Guinea, the MlaBri in Thailand, the Penan in Borneo, the Australian Dieri, the Yámana Indians in Tierra del Fuego, the Guayaki in Paraguay, the Guaja in Brazil, and the Micmac, Washo, Ingalik, Chipewyan, and Waswanipi Indians, only to name a few of the least known primitive communities. Ruby Rohrlich-Leavitt noted: "The data show that gatherer-hunters are generally nonterritorial and bilocal; reject group aggression and competition; share their resources freely; value egalitarianism and personal autonomy in the context of group cooperation; and are indulgent and loving with children".[152] Likewise, Bear "listed 'egalitarianism, democracy, personalism, individuation, nurturance' as key virtues of the noncivilized".[153] In practice, "Dozens of studies stress communal sharing and egalitarianism as perhaps the defining traits of such groups (eg Marshall, Sahlins, Pilbeam, Damas, Diamond, Lafitau, Tanaka, Wiessner, Morris, Riches, Smith, Mithen). Lee referred to the 'universal-

[149] The Moriori were a nomadic gatherer-hunter population who lived in the Chatham Islands (in Polynesia) and was exterminated in the mid-nineteenth century by the neighboring Maori farmers. See J. Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel*, pp. 53-7.

[150] Ibid., p. 63.

[151] K. Endicott, K. Endicott, *The Headman Was a Woman: The Gender Egalitarian Batek of Malaysia*.

[152] Quoted in J. Zerzan, *Future Primitive*.

[153] Ibid.

agricultural society.[173] It has similarly been observed that primitive communities tend to also avoid the opposite power: matriarchy. In practice, "Their social organization is based on equality between individuals and between the sexes. Everyone has equal opportunity to put forward suggestions and have them listened to, and every individual has the right to make her or his own decision about what to do in any particular instance".[174] According to Stephanie Coontz and Peta Henderson, "relations between the sexes seem to be most egalitarian in the simplest foraging societies and women's position worsens with the emergence of social stratification, private property, and the state".[175] Nicole Chevillard and Sébastien Leconte suggest that "female subordination actually preceded and established the basis for the emergence of true private property and the state"[176]—a hypothesis that reinforces the insights reached on this patriarchy/property connection by Lewis Henry Morgan[177], followed by Friedrich Engels.[178]

Before agriculture appeared in this world, the question of sexual separation among humans—and the idea of giving women a secondary role—was simply nonexistent. Both women and men helped gather the wild plants, roots, bulbs, seeds, berries, fruits, and vegetables that generally provided sustenance to the primitive group, just as they helped with

[173] M. Ehrenberg, *Women in Prehistory*, p. 65.

[174] Ibid.

[175] N. Chevillard, S. Leconte, *Property Forms, Political Power and Female Labour in the Origins of Class and State Societies*, in: S. Coontz, P. Henderson (eds.), *Women's Work, Men's Property: The Origins of Gender and Class*, p. 108.

[176] N. Chevillard, S. Leconte, *Introduction*, in: S. Coontz, P. Henderson (eds.), *Women's Work, Men's Property*, p. 37.

[177] See *Ancient Society* (1877), where the famous American anthropologist wrote that a certain matrilineal pattern (which he had observed in the Iroquois social structure) had been originally ousted by a patrilineal model when human groups had become sedentary and wealth accumulation had started to become habitual.

[178] A follower of Morgan's theories, Engels developed them in his well-known *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*.

As long as human life remained what it is fundamentally, namely an existence to be shared and enjoyed, children were a marvelous gift of joy, an extension of love, of joining into the pleasure of one's own and others' presence in the world. They were not a precious good, an economic value, or an investment. When life, having been turned by agriculture into an aspect of economic production, changed its course, our attitude toward babies yet unborn changed too—they became a potential workforce, "future" richness to send to work in (or defend) the fields. It was no accident that before the advent of civilization sexual discrimination was quite unknown. There is "no reason in nature" for gender divisions, argues Bender.[166] "No evidence points to women's submission in any field", confirms Sara Morace.[167] In fact, as many disciplines have repeatedly reaffirmed, until the late Paleolithic and through the Mesolithic, "women enjoyed equality with men".[168] English archaeologist Margaret Ehrenberg has observed that today "social equality between women and men is a key feature of modern forager societies"[169] and that this status of equality and independence is greater than in agricultural civilizations.

Anthropologists like Eleonore Leacock,[170] Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban,[171] Ruby Rohrlich-Leavitt, Barbara Sykes, and Elizabeth Weatherford[172] have widely examined traditional societies, concluding that: "the status of women is regularly higher in forager groups than in any other type" of

[166] Quoted in J. Zerzan, *Future Primitive*.

[167] S. Morace, *Origine donna*, p. 63.

[168] M. Ehrenberg, *Women in Prehistory*, p. 77.

[169] Ibid., p. 61.

[170] See E. Leacock, "Women's Status in Egalitarian Society: Implications for Social Evolution", in *Current Anthropology*, 19, 1978, pp. 247-75.

[171] See C. Fluehr-Lobban, *A Marxist Reappraisal of the Matriarchate*, in "Current anthropology", 20, 1979, pp. 341-53.

[172] See R. Rohrlich-Leavitt, B. Sykes, E. Weatherford, "Aboriginal Women: Male-Female Anthropological Perspectives", Reiter, 1975.

ity among foragers' of sharing, while Marshall's classic 1961 work spoke of the 'ethic of generosity and humility' informing a 'strongly egalitarian' gatherer-hunter orientation".[154]

Just as those who lived in the name of co-operation always viewed structured social groupings as absurd, for those who lived within the perspective of work and the justification of work, social division and inequality were absolutely possible. If humans had separated from Earth to dominate it, if they had separated from other living creatures to use and exploit them, what could stop them from also establishing classes and other divisions among people? The disparities originating from land privatization aimed at surplus production, as well as those that had arisen from the subsequent population density in the new human settlements, perfectly implemented this plan, leading to the formation of organized, pyramidal societies that were "united" by an institutional power ruling over the multiplicity of conflicts thus generated. Regulating and defending the property rights created by land occupation, enforcing and permitting the trade born from exploitation of the soil, continuously trying to settle the endless fratricidal wars breaking out in an increasingly self-interested world, became the obsessions of a world view that aimed at establishing the power of the strongest instead of preserving the ecological and social balances of the group's environment.

Every human community made up of more than 100 to 150 members tends to be based on an authoritarian form of governance, but highly populated social groupings only appeared a few thousand years ago, and they have been prevalent in the world for a much shorter period of time. During the long existence of the human race (at least 2.5 million years), over 600 billion people have led their existence on Earth with no government or authority. Actually, primitive groups have always willingly kept their numbers low (30 to 50 members, including

[154] Ibid.

children). A limited quantity of people living in open and cooperative nomadic communities not only turns into an ideal relationship between humans and the environment (also in terms of the humans' ecological footprint), but it allows what Michele Vignodelli described as a "liquid process of fission-fusion". In practice, when these communities face "a serious conflict, the group just splits, with some members possibly joining related bands. This system of flexible and loose relationships reflects the typical, healthy human social ecology that is fundamental for a full development of our intelligence and internal well-being".[155] When

> the total density rises over a certain level, social species cannot maintain the ideal group size by splitting, as they would do in their original habitat; if this density is unchanging, they will soon show pathological signs. In our case, these unusual localized concentrations [of people] lead to an abrupt regression to a structured hierarchical model… which naturally implies chronic psycho-social stress. Individuals live in a state of eternal stress, in a self-defense position towards everybody else; conflict is so widespread that it makes unavoidable, as the 'lesser evil', a coercive ruling power to which humans have hardly adapted.[156]

With the advent of authority, the cheerfulness of coexistence vanishes; with the advent of a structured society, communality vanishes. Everyone competes with everyone else, learning to wage their personal war against the rest of the world. Enticing, exploiting, following one's personal interest, celebrating oneself, making virtuous inventions to obtain acclamations

[155] M. Vignodelli, *Signori della Terra?*, p. 32.

[156] Ibid., p. 10.

As human beings, we are not separated by nature: we are different, unique, but not separated. Following the reasoning of the author of *The Second Sex*, "the child would hardly be able to think of himself as sexually differentiated. In girls as in boys the body is first of all the radiation of a subjectivity, the instrument that makes possible the comprehension of the world: it is through the eyes, the hands, that children apprehend the universe, and not through the sexual parts".[162] This is one of the reasons why any sexual (or other) differentiation is simply instrumental. Yet, it is on instrumental claims that civilization based its realm. "By creating false gender distinctions and divisions between men and women, civilization, again, creates an 'other' that can be objectified, controlled, dominated, utilized, and commodified. This runs parallel to the domestication of plants for agriculture and animals for herding".[163]

Just as the Earth was subjected to the powerful blows of agriculture and had become a productive resource, just as animals were subjected to that same law and turned into meat-producing machines and working tools, so women, reduced to child producers, became the object of a more and more brutal fight to control their fertility "power". "Owning women's offspring was the first preoccupation of emerging patriarchy", Sara Morace states with reference to the origins of civilization.[164] "To ensure their possession of male children, they had to ensure their possession of mothers, of the women who were able to bear those children, by imprisoning and controlling them".[165] So women became their husbands' means of production.

[162] Ibid., p. 301.

[163] Green Anarchy Collective, *What Is Green Anarchy? An Introduction to Anti-Civilization Anarchist Thought and Practice*, in: http://www.greenanarchy.info/GA17_what_is_ga_primer.pdf, p. 3.

[164] S. Morace, *Origine donna*, p. 63.

[165] Ibid.

and acknowledgments and to increase one's power, become the springboard for acquiring privileges. As we have seen, in the context of primitive communities every individual who shows this centralizing attitude is exposed to "mocking and banned by peers, but in the chronic and unsolvable crisis condition of urban societies, authoritarian leaders are not only positively looked for: they become even the object of a proper cult".[157]

Having turned life into a routine based on the celebration of total war, the shrewdness, cunning, and cynicism of those who managed to lay claim to the power of decision (as regards collective pacification, for instance, or mediation with natural forces already perceived as hostile) began to prevail over a co-operative, happy, and spontaneous existence. The castes that had managed to proclaim themselves bearers of these powers of settlement strengthened more and more, until their members—who had by now perfectly distinguished themselves from common people through their ranks and reputation (rank society)—started forcing people to acknowledge their power. Shamans, sorcerers, psychics, priests and then priest kings, rulers, emperors, army officers gradually imposed an authority which, whether borne with difficulty or cheered by the crowds, became increasingly undisputed. What did not exist until the agricultural "revolution", namely the distinction between first- and second-class human beings, became a widely accepted practice, the unfailing ideological base of the civilized world. Ancient egalitarian communities founded on the communion of their members were gradually swept away, conquered, exterminated or pushed into marginality by the brutality of these strict farming and warring apparatuses that were more and more obsessed by the frantic need to endlessly expand their territorial control.

In fact, the more social organizations became structured, with bureaucratic centralization and expansion, the more they

[157] Ibid., pp. 18-9.

from human beings, and as subjects are different from their king, women are different from men and vice versa. With the advent of domestication, the establishment of male domination over women and the development of ad hoc institutions set up to strengthen and celebrate this domination became an accomplished fact.

Actually, the division between "male" and "female" is not natural but purely cultural.[158] While it is obvious that there are some biological differences between men and women, similar differences can be found between those who live at the equator and in the Arctic, between taller and shorter, or bald and hairy people. These differences do not imply any division: they can only become its cultural motif. "Biology is not destiny" feminist author Anne Koedt[159] has maintained, specifying that: "male and female roles are learned". The same statement had been made by Simone de Beauvoir in 1949: "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society".[160] In the same way, we can say that one is not born, but rather becomes, a "man", just as in the story this French intellectual told about a three-year-old boy who sat to urinate. "Surrounded with sisters and girl cousins, he was a timid and sad child. One day his father took him to the toilet, saying: 'I am going to show you how men do it'. Thereafter the child, proud of urinating while standing, scorned girls 'who urinate through a hole'".[161]

[158] Kate Millett, a well-known student of men-women relationships and of the ideological implications which imposed on them a social separation, wrote: "sex is a status category with political implications". See K. Millett, *Sexual Politics*, p. 24.

[159] A. Koedt, *Lesbianism and Feminism*, in: http://www.uic.edu/orgs/cwluherstory/CWLUArchive/lesbianfeminism.html. Quoted in M. Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation.*

[160] S. De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, translated and edited by H.M. Parshley, p. 301.

[161] Ibid., p. 306.

needed to be fed—with more land to be turned to profit, more raw materials to be transformed, new wealth, energy sources, manpower, and "cannon fodder". The invention of increasingly sophisticated tools that could sustain the effort of an infinite war aimed at colonizing new territories (and new peoples) was the toll imposed by the system to preserve itself, while dependence on this loop of devastation destroyed any prospect of liberation from it. If we look at the history of the last ten thousand years in Asia, Africa, Europe and Central America, we can clearly identify the birth and rise of cities, city-states, and empires that developed according to more and more aggressive hierarchic and military organization models (the Sumerians, Assyrians, Babylonians, and Egyptians; city-states in the Indus Valley, Polynesia, China, and Greece; the Romans, Mayans, Toltecs, Aztecs, and Incas). These kingdoms were so voracious that they ended up devouring themselves, leaving other structures, based on their same premises and developed along their borders, with the task of supplanting them in a new cycle of total devastation that continues unabated.

On the other hand, the more the power of these structures grew externally aggressive the more it became fragmented internally, among the members of the same nation, widening even more the gap between individuals belonging to what had become clearly separated classes. The separation of people into several groups with different economic and social importance dismembered the original cohesive community by instilling jealousy, malevolence and spite in the members of opposed classes. To obtain an artificial union that could make up for the disunion of this new form of co-existence, instruments of forced cohesion had to be used, and social control techniques (from religious rituals to the severe celebrations of law) began to rage, becoming more and more authoritarian. As these methods of control became more invasive, the controllers became separated from the controlled, which fragmented the group even further, leading to a larger production of even

more effective forms of control. In farming societies, the need to "manage" others, which nomadic populations couldn't even conceive of, became the common characteristic of that antagonistic socialization that was kept together by the power of coercion. Co-operation was not a value anymore, nor the pleasure of giving (replaced by greed) or sharing (turned into competition)—what counted was domination over the greatest number of people. And when someone dominates, there is always someone who is dominated. Strengthening the bonds of subordination within the social body thus became the most important purpose for those who pursued an artificial civic peace; so the world gradually turned into a hierarchical network of skills that were selected and introduced into a vertically structured context where authority was the only moral reference of social life. Of course, forcing those who put up with authority to eventually accept it was the first indispensable step in the process of taming people to the new world's social life. Women, workers, common citizens, children of both sexes were thus subjected to a training process that pushed the most devastating effects of domination (ie the logic of separation from everything else) deep into each person's identity and inner self. To be horrified by the birth of patriarchal society, human slavery, and productive work, as well as by the rise of the techniques of personal adjustment to the prevailing necessities of the System (education, specialization, socialization), is to be horrified by the very roots of our current world.

7. Male Supremacy and Patriarchal Society

Having conceived as acceptable a relationship of command towards Earth, plants, animals and individuals belonging to assumed inferior social classes, the precedent was established to look at human life in the same way. As animals are "different"

Not surprisingly, the Hadza possess the same skill in navigating the savannah. They always know where they are and in what direction they are headed, even when they are traveling through the pitch-black night. In fact, this indigenous people often hunt at night, when "navigation seems impossible. There are no trails and few landmarks. To walk confidently in the bush, in the dark, without a flashlight, requires the sort of familiarity one has with, say, one's own bedroom. Except this is a thousand-square-mile bedroom…"[38]

Observing, sensing, hearing, smelling, intuiting, discerning—these are the real practices of undomesticated receptivity. As Hallpike illustrates, indigenous peoples, rather than classify the world taxonomically, use a system based on concrete and contextual association. Therefore their world is chiefly organized into natural realms, like the "jungle, sea, sky, earth."[39] A similar, non-cultural approach to comprehending the world deters the creation of a general system of representation that, while taking physical attributes into consideration, excludes them from their context. At the same time, the primitive method encourages people to know every little detail about their environment in a way that is wholly unimaginable to us. Even though, as Hallpike explains, the ability to navigate, whether by land or sea, is an "elementary cognitive process" that can be observed in animals, such a skill has become so clearly diminished in civilized men and women as to be wholly absent. Without a map (drawn by others), without a compass (manufactured by others), without a street sign (erected by others), those of us in the world of culture would not be able to wander away from our homes farther than a few hundred feet. Our system of orientation no longer depends upon the natural world (a fact due in part to our having wiped most of it out). Instead, we rely on tools, cars and symbols that we

[38] Cf. M. Finkel, *The Hadza*.

[39] Cf. Hallpike, *The Foundations of Primitive Thought*.

elimination—thanks to wages, entrepreneurs had got rid of all these necessities in one shot.

With the advent of civilization, therefore, the civilized world evolved once more, and it was now required that "free" slaves be replaced with "rented" slaves. So it happened—having abolished slavery, this form was replaced at once by subordinate work, a form of servitude that was more "acceptable" but equally binding and limiting. In 1826 Langton Byllesby, a printer from Philadelphia who opposed the industrialization of handicrafts, said that wage labor, which destroyed the "option whether to labor or not", was "the very essence of slavery".[276] At any rate, terms like "subordinate" or "employed", that are still associated with the notion of paid work, are hardly associated with images of freedom and autonomy.

Alienated from the knowledge of all the stages of production, banned by default from an organic manufacturing process, and unconditionally forced to obey orders, wage workers, just like slaves, do not take part in what they do. They just carry out orders. Like machines, they perform the tasks they have been assigned and nothing more.

Assimilating wage workers to slaves in view of their common estrangement from their economic activity, Max Weber also highlighted the exploitative nature of subordinate work. For the purpose of organization for production, the celebrated sociologist's theory goes, both slaves and employed workers are mere production tools: they don't participate in production actively, but only carry out orders, ie work. As slaves are their masters' worktools, employed workers are their employers' worktools. In his study on the devastating effects of civilization on nature and human life, Franz Broswimmer was clear

[276] Quoted in C. Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven: Progress and its Critics*, p. 203.

and unmistakable: "In feudal societies", he wrote in *Ecocide*,[277] "exploitation is still direct and visible. Serfs were not only required to render services to a lord, but they were also attached to the lord's land. Profit extraction under capitalism, by contrast, occurs by economic means and is ideologically concealed in seemingly 'free' relations of exchange. This novel mode of social production, its relations based on capital and labor, came to define a whole epoch and represented an altogether more efficient and more veiled form of exploitation."

Actually, the warped mechanism which, starting from childhood, forces people to devote their whole existence to continuous productive work has not been expunged from today's world and, what's more, "employed" occupation having a more acceptable appearance, it keeps alight the zealous, industrious and tireless course of civilization. Indeed, as Vaneigem rightly pointed out, "since the obligation to produce extended to become a persuasion to buy, work has turned from an object of horror to a subject of satisfaction",[278] and we ended up priding ourselves on the restrictive system this implies.

With a total effort subordinating our whole existence (and not only our working hours) to a job, work conquers our life when we are very young (school being its unavoidable premonition) and never leaves us alone. If we look at work in terms of the time span it absorbs, the result is ridiculous—eight to ten hours a day out of the twelve that are left available by sleep, nutrition, and hygienic needs; five or six days in a week; eleven months out of a year; 40 springs in an average lifespan. With such a schedule, it is not surprising that work has been defined as a sort of modern slavery. Even without asking what activities our specific jobs consist, having to sell nearly all the time

[277] F.J. Broswimmer, *Ecocide*, p. 55.

[278] "Depuis que l'obligation de produire s'est prolongée en persuasion de consommer, le travail s'est fait, d'objet d'horreur, sujet de satisfaction". See R. Vaneigem, *Adresse aux vivants sur la mort qui les gouverne et l'opportunité de s'en défaire*, in: http://bit.ly/hmkLbC, p. 55.

> like fingerprints to a Scotland Yard sleuth, were distinct and individual. They would pick out one from fifty, and deduce accurately the size, sex, build and mood of the great antelope that had just made it.[35]

The anthropologist recounts how Vyan, a member of the community, once tracked down a particular springbuck.

> He immediately set out after it with Bauxhau and myself. At first we ourselves had no difficulty in following the spoor because of the occasional smear of blood on the grass beside it. Soon, however, the wounded animal joined his herd, also fleeing from us. The spoor became one of hundreds, the grass to trampled and dusty for any show of blood. But Bauxhau never wavered. His eyes picked out the one spoor in the maze of hundreds and held fast to it. Two miles further on he turned aside from the main stream of hoof-prints to show us again the solitary spoor and before long great splashes of blood led us to where the animal lay in the shade of a thorn-tree, where Vyan quickly put it out of pain.[36]

Direct knowledge of the environment is a fact of life for a primitive person, and he uses it for purposes other than hunting. "They were always centred," writes Van der Post. "Once indeed, more than a hundred and fifty miles from home, when asked where it lay they had instantly turned and pointed out the direction. I had taken a compass bearing of our course and checked it. Nxou's pointing arm might have been the magnetic needle of the instrument itself so truly did it register."[37]

[35] *The Lost World of the Kalahari.*

[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid.

mal and plant according to species, subspecies, physical property and use. But in the Bushman's knowing, no matter how practical, there was a dimension that I miss in the life of my own time. He knew these things in the full context and commitment of his life.[33]

From a primitive perspective, clarified Cassirer, the formal divisions so typical of our detached way of interpreting the world do not exist. "Life is not divided into classes and subclasses," he writes, "It is felt as an unbroken continuous whole which does not admit of any clean-cut and trenchant distinctions."[34] Given this continuousness, what emerges is the value of diversity rather than the grouping of things into categories. Accustomed as we are to generalizing, classifying, placing everything into neat categories, we stop paying attention to detail—we can neither see nor hear nor grasp it. The outcome of this process becomes clear if we keep in mind the way civilized individuals relate to the external and interior world. Every boar, for example, is distinct from another boar; nonetheless, what we generally see when we run across one is always and only "boar." At most, we might distinguish an adult boar from a baby boar. That holds true for every category we invent: "a turtle-dove," "a spruce tree," "a poppy," "an African."

A mentality hell-bent on pinpointing the similarities in order to wedge it into a category based on common elements (ie classification) is as narrow and arbitrary a practice as observing all of the different details is free and open. Van der Post, who greatly admired the San people, tried to explain in words the deep perceptual capacity of indigenous people:

> They could tell very quickly how long it was since the buck, lion, leopard, bird, reptile or insect had signed his timesheet in the sand. No two hoof-prints were alike to them, for all spoor,

[33] Cf. L. Van Der Post, *The Lost World of the Kalahari* (2010).

[34] Cf. E. Cassirer, *An Essay on Man* (1944).

of our life in order to survive automatically turns work into a form of slavery. Cicero shared this view, and was even less meticulous in defining the main features of servitude, which he identified simply in any work sold, whatever the necessary time involved: "whoever gives his labor for money sells himself and puts himself in the rank of slaves".[279]

After all, work isolates humanity not only when it physically engages her with its necessities, but also when it concedes her some leisure outside factories, offices, shops and parlors. Don't we decide when and how long to go on holiday based on the prevailing work? Don't we plan our leisure time—as opposed to working time—according to the prevailing work? Don't we arrange the convivial aspects of our private (dinners with friends, parties, visits) and social life (public events, demonstrations, meetings) basing on what is happening at work? The list of our priorities is dominated by work duties, and work becomes more important than any opportunity of entertainment and pleasure. Even when we devote some time to ourselves, we can only do it in the spare moments that are free from work, and our work rules over our daytime—or even nighttime—hours of rest, our meals (how long, how much, and where we eat) and our everyday purchases—both as regards when we can buy things (of course outside from our working time) and the reasons why we buy them: elegant clothes to be presentable at work, a new car to comfortably reach our workplace, gadgets to show to our colleagues, etc.

We are so conditioned by our work that even our partner can only be given the time left over from our professional activities—woe to her who feels like making love during her work time! Woe to him who wishes to spend some time with his partner! We cannot even "waste" too much time with

[279] Quoted in B. Black, *The Abolition of Work*, http://www.primitivism.com/abolition.htm.

our affections and feelings—when we work, we must take care of work and we cannot think about anything else. When our prevailing work necessities stop us even from spending time with our children—which is very common, since work prevails over life—there is no reason to be afraid, as the farsighted civil world has already commercialized useful solutions to strengthen parents/children relationships, as we can see in full-time "public parking lots" for kids. So public schools, kindergartens and even nurseries are all perfectly in tune—even with 8-month-old children—with their busy parents' most binding work urgencies from dawn to dusk; and even when school schedules do not overlap with more important working schedules, there is always a chance to turn to customized public or private institutions offering to place these "little disturbers of production" in adequately equipped places so that they don't miss mommy or daddy too much. To justify this shameful system which does not step back even in the face of children's needs, some say that in the civilized world working rhythms are so tiring that they must be "learned" starting from childhood, so that they can be assimilated and easily accepted by adults. This is what was once said of slaves.

9. Socialization and Robbed Identities

Having to work all day long, madly running without a reason, always worrying for the future, submitting even our deepest affections to the perverse logic of the Reason of State (or of the Economic Reason) makes us unsatisfied. Carrying out orders like many obedient soldiers robs us of any opportunity to actively participate in what we do. Competing with everybody at every level, working our way to the top, accumulating money, privileges, high-rank positions, does not make us feel better—every time we win a battle there is a new one to be

Today, the recourse to symbols is "widely considered the hallmark of human cognition"[31] and yet, as Zerzan continues, most of us fail to recognize that we once lived "in cognitive communion with the world." In *Neanderthal Enigma*, James Shreve reveals the extraordinary richness of this kind of communion.

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

Traditional hunter-gatherers still live this way today, getting sustenance from the natural world and entirely free of the desire to set themselves apart from it or capture it in symbolic forms. As Michael Finkel points out, describing the daily routines of the Hadza people in Tanzania, every day experiences are esteemed and enjoyed more than artificial experience. In the Hadza camps, "[t]here are no televisions or board games or books…but there is entertainment. The women sing. And the men tell campfire stories."[32]

After living in close quarters with the hunter-gatherer bush people in South Africa, Laurens Van der Post also testified to the richness of such an existence. His descriptions underscore the sense of detachment we have grown accustomed to in the world of culture.

Today we tend to know statistically and in the abstract. We classify, catalogue and subdivide the flame-like variety of ani-

[31] Cf. J. Zerzan, *No Way Out?*

[32] Cf. M. Finkel. "The Hadza", *National Geographic* (2009).

It requires, for us, a concentrated act of imagination to think of the world around us without the conceptual structures developed in the course of our education in a literate, technological society.[30]
— Christopher Robert Hallpike

Is it possible to think of human existence outside of culture's intellectualizing precepts? Can we be made to understand that human life was intended to be led in close proximity to nature and not from a remove?

The trouble with allowing ourselves to imagine a symbol-free world is chiefly due to the conditioning power symbols have over our ability to relate to reality. We are so used to the dictates of conceptuality that we now believe without concepts life would slow to a flat, colorless crawl. Ironically, that is a good description of our experience in the world of culture today, where we plod forward in a purely mechanical way, increasingly desire-less, so standardized that we continuously grope for the teat of external, artificial stimulation (television, movies, art, newspapers, commercials, drugs, fights, success, money, power). We think that without the help of culture, life wouldn't have any meaning, yet meanwhile we lead a life which we have more and more trouble assigning a meaning to. We can no longer do things on our own nor cultivate our own opinions nor fully express ourselves. Trapped in the meanderings of represented life, we have grown to believe that being deprived of external stimulation would mean being deprived of all stimulation. And yet all that remains to us of the marvelous comes from inside us and has nothing to do with the artificial fantasies of culture: our inclination to be with others, the pleasure of joking with friends, playing timeless games, lovemaking, touching, feeling, empathizing—these are not cultural exercises. They are life experiences.

[30] Cf. C. R. Hillpike, *The Foundations of Primitive Thought* (1979).

fought; every job promotion anticipates a new one to pursue; every item we buy soon becomes old and obsolete. Our acquiescence to an increasingly inflexible and persecuting system makes our lives empty: what remains full is just those hurried days we hardly control, that reject pleasure more and more and dry us up inside.

As the iron hand of domination becomes increasingly overwhelming, we realize that this same hand is inside us and forces us to a material as well as a psychic surrender. The institutions of the civilized world have always imposed the same behavior—adjustment, submission, endurance. From educational practices for children to behavioral control techniques for adults, everything points to a pattern of absolute adjustment to the values, models, ways, discourses and visions that are typical of a structured society. What matters in the civilized world is not sticking to one's own nature, but being well-adjusted individuals. And we all know how seriously condemning it is to be described as a "maladjusted" person.

A mindset that originally aimed at dominating everything and everyone is now subjugating even its own masters. What is considered important out there is not what we feel we are, but only what we are supposed to be. We don't matter anymore as much as social order, decency, propriety, welfare, and social peace—such abstractions don't pay attention to Individuals (or to their relationships with the Other and with the World) but to the System, and are aimed at reinforcing a (self-)control of sorts rather than responsible participation in personal relationships. Foucault believed that in modern society this is precisely how power is exerted: not only through a prevailing external coercion, but also in the form of self-surveillance and self-subjection, and through a spontaneous acceptation of our roles as gears of the System.

Since human existence was based upon power mechanisms (power over the Earth, animals, women, men, and the whole universe), rather than individuals giving form to communities,

it was communities that gave form to individuals. And as Bernardi has maintained in his brilliant pages on the topic, "giving form" always implies "deforming". Shaping a person means trying to give her a new form, molding and forging her. It means assuming her incapacity as a "natural subject" and the need to redefine her as a "cultural subject". "Giving form to a person", he writes in *Educatione e libertàd*, is "like taking away her idiosyncrasies and replacing them with someone else's idiosyncrasies". In practice, as everything was reified and manipulated ever more, human beings also lost their identity as subjects and became "goods"—something generic to be changed into a reverent and deferential Common Man, an Honest Worker, a Model Citizen.

Every individual who is born within a civilized context, be it the officially amazing techno-capitalism or a less flashy denominational or proletarian orthodoxy, must learn how to comply with the System. From our birth, we are not welcomed by an emotional context of happiness, peace, sympathy, and autonomy, where we can freely express our inclinations— we are instead introduced into a planned world that will force on each of us a very precise purpose: becoming "like the others".

Anthropological studies on cultural diversity in educational practices have explained that every society which is formally ruled by bodies that control the political, economic and social spheres tends to "produce" individuals who are adequate for their political, economic and social models. Societies derived from the agricultural "revolution" are different from "informal" gatherer-hunters' communities, in that they are entirely built around political, economic and social institutions. Bound to the productive cycles of work, to the unnerving outcomes of work and to the defense (even violent) of work, farming and breeding societies were characterized by a gradual suppression of nature through reconstructed artifacts, of reality through representation, of directness through a mediated world, of union through

tive reality. It is no wonder the "ultimate in representation is the 'society of the spectacle' described so vividly by Guy Debord. We now consume the image of living; life has passed into the stage of its representation, as spectacle."[28] Our addiction to reality shows is a case in point. There is no longer any need for talented actors to attract viewers; all that is needed now is to air other peoples' everyday lives, since our own, unmediated lives have ceased to be of any interest to us.

When life veers off the empathetic byways of existence, emptiness is all the rage. We all know that we switch on the TV or Play Station to shirk the oppressive weight of our existence in a society where we no longer have a neighbor, nor a steady love life, nor a natural environment in which to roam. Nor do we have sensory-motor experiences, free inclinations, pleasures to seek, desires, encounters, or something to identify with. In short, we have no more meaning.

Cyberculture, the techno-logical evolution of culture, intensifies and applauds these instances of tuning-out. The connections it provides in the form of multi-media entertainment are a reminder that *absence* is the tragic destiny of all perception systems based on symbolic representation. Ever since culture dropped us in a maze of info-space, our interior universe (exactly like our exterior universe) has become even more vulnerable and vacuous. In the era of global interconnection, we are not so much surfing the Internet as we are ensnared in it. Instead of swimming freely, we have chosen to "navigate" from the cargo of a large trawler as it carries us to market everyday. In the aphoristic rhetoric of techno-dissidents (duly reported by Federico Casalegno), we are ever "more connected to the Internet and less connected to the world."[29]

3. Life Without Culture?

[28] Cf. J. Zerzan, *No Way Out?*

[29] F. Casalegno, *Cybersocialità. Nuovi media e nuove estetitche communitarie* (2007).

To give an idea of just how distorted things have become, Oscar Wilde famously said, "Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life." On the same note, Benedetto Croce believed, "speaking of a beautiful river or a beautiful tree was nothing more than rhetoric. Next to art, nature appeared insipid to him; it would remain silent if man didn't make it speak." And John Passmore recalls that Hegel thought natural beauty was inferior to artistic beauty, an idea that fit Hegel's general philosophy that men could perfect nature and increase its splendor.[26] The same opinion dates back to the Greeks and Romans.

In a universe weaned on cultural values, the ways in which individuals interact with the real world is to suppress the reality they find there, and weed out any authentic experience from the field of existence. "Reality" is no longer nature but rather its artistic representation; it is no longer human personality but the language that translates that personality; it is no longer the object but the image of the object; it is no longer life but the chronicle of the life.

By now, symbols of life are replacing real life in an increasingly brazen manner. Think of videogames, chatrooms, special effects, avatars, cyberspace, 3-D. Today, every aspect of our existence has a hint of the virtual: friends, lovers, objects, sensations, even labor strikes have become virtual.[27] Symbols are pushing everything that is real and immediate to the far fringe of existence, including our strength of vision to combat this confinement.

High-definition images, home theater surround sound systems, "odorama" and every other form of virtual reality we have become dependent upon, point toward an increasingly technological (post)modern world in which we are accustomed to live "second-hand," in a mediated, reproduced and retrospec-

[26] Cf. J. Passmore, *Man's Responsibility for Nature* (1974).

[27] "Virtual strikes" are a form of protest in which unions keep working and a businesses stay open, yet neither workers or company make any profit.

separation. Their main relational reference is no longer nature, but institutional organization—which assigns tasks to each individual, preserves a social cohesion of sorts among group members and provides for the accumulation of wealth and its redistribution "from above". The commitment everyone must learn to undertake in order for the organizational machine to work encloses this society in a framework of dependencies that ignore individual will. People are always pre-empted by Society, Apparatus, Kingdom, Nation, State, Market, Economy, and Technology. While a life surrounded by nature assimilates people into nature, an institutionalized life assimilates people into the set of values imposed by the institution. This is why, as has been demonstrated in transcultural studies by Herbert Barry, Irvin Childe and Margaret Bacon, a life surrounded by nature generates "independent" individuals (ie self-confident, resolute and able to have relationships both with and in the world), whereas an institutionalized life aims at shaping "compliant" people (ie obedient and ready to cooperate with the institutions).[280]

So every individual who is born in civilization must learn to accept civilization, with all its horrible things, its inequalities, its forms of oppression, its calls to mobilize in defense of civilization. We must learn to accept that our community will never be a united group of people connected together by mutual benevolence, but a battlefield where everyone competes with everybody else at all levels. We must learn to accept that the essence of life is not joy but sacrifice, that nature is not our "mother" but a cruel stepmother and that freedom must always be "accorded", permitted, and earned. We must learn to believe that rules do not originate from our heart, as an effect of our respect towards the existing world and of the pleasure of pro-

[280] "According to a study by Barry, Child, and Bacon, "agricultural societies are apt to stress obedience in their child training, whereas hunting and fishing societies tend to emphasize independence and self-reliance". See C.R. Ember, M. Ember, *Cultural Anthropology*, p. 39

moting them together with others on an equal basis, but that they are ruled from above, as a result of inaccessible decisions that a bureaucratic system must force on everybody with every means. Summing up this question, Bernardi says that every individual who is born in civilization must learn that "in order to live, we have to bend, bow, submit, to respectfully accept the will of anybody who is in the position of giving orders".[281] And what is tragic, the noted pedagogue concluded, is that "we have adapted so well to our customs, that we ourselves cast an attractive and virtuous projection of them".[282]

In fact, the passage from a life within nature to a life based on the control of nature marks a historical breaking point that carries humanity away from community toward socialization. The human being thus turns from a "social individual" to a "socialized individual", ie from a subject innately tending towards social coexistence and co-operation (community) to a subject who "believes in and obeys the moral code of his society and fits in well as a functioning part of that society"[283] (socialization). The consciousness of group relationships is replaced by a forceful respect of abstract values disciplining these relationships; the responsibility implied by any personal relationship is countered by a passive execution of social duties that are posited as unchangeable; the instinct and sensibility matured through direct participation in relational life is overwhelmed by a process of strict social taming.

The result cannot but prove degenerative. Jeopardizing the possibility of *active interaction* among the subjects of the world to favor a simple *passive integration* into the dominating values not only reduces any chance of consciously participating in one's own growing-up process (at the individual, social, and human levels), but also undermines participation in terms of

[281] M. Bernardi, *Educazione e libertà*, p. 176.

[282] Ibid., p. 156.

[283] T. Kaczynski, *The Unabomber Manifesto. Industrial Society & Its Future*, pp. 12-3.

these adaptations of our own free will. Symbols are not ends in themselves; they serve something else. In the words of social anthropologist Abner Cohen, "symbols are essential for the development and maintenance of social order."[24] And culture has this very aim in mind: to create social homogeneity, legitimate world domination and make intellectual discipline common law.

In the words of celebrated ethnologist Bronislaw Malinowski, "symbolism represents the soul of civilization, chiefly in the form of language as a means of coordinating action or of standardizing technique, and providing rules for social, ritual, and industrial behavior."[25] Put another way, without words there would be no order to respect; without numbers, there would be no debts to pay; without time, there would be no way to conceive of the future and all its subsequent, consoling expectations (hope, heaven, evolution, progress, development). To be blunt, without culture there would be no civilization. That's why each of us is asked to rely on it. No questions asked.

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Civilization has long been teaching us to conflate direct experience with experience mediated by symbols, ever since the first words were syntactically arranged to replace all other means of communication. All cultural expression hides a deep disrespect for the natural world: the natural (that which is born) must be tamed by the artificial (that which is built, organized, symbolically ordered). This feeling persists today. Do we not live in a world in which we are constantly asked to appreciate art more than the natural world art intends to represent?

[24] As cited in J. Zerzan, *No Way Out?*

[25] As cited in Ibid.

us believe certain things are "natural" when they are anything but. Being separated from your children all day becomes natural. Buying food becomes natural. Greeting our superiors with a smile, after they have publicly humiliated us, becomes natural. It becomes natural to live in a crowded concrete patch of earth or breathe contaminated air because some public welfare company is running the economy. Obviously, all of these restrictions placed on human nature are very upsetting to us, which explains why we need palliatives to make the unacceptable acceptable. So culture takes care of the sublimation rituals too: art, music, poetry, fiction, the laundry list of group rituals (sports, military, religion). All of these amenities help distract us from this empty hole culture has dropped us in, and they push us to accept the world as it is.

How many times have we heard career politicians, social climbers and other hucksters say culture will lift us out of our degraded state? Culture, which has helped toss us into this degraded state (and keeps us there by exhorting us to steer clear of nature) will not save us from anything; it will simply aid world governments in making us accept, generation after generation, the intellectualized universe we are currently confined to inhabiting. That is, it will lead us to progressively lose sight of the meaning of wisdom. It will teach us to perpetuate cultural dominion.

Little would change if the persuasive spokespersons of modernity were to invite us to reflect on the variety of intellectualized life, given the fact that it is only thanks to culture that we can imagine the world in a different light. The idea that we can lead a libertarian, communist, ecologist, pacifist, Buddhist, Islamic or Christian existence is exactly what ensures that the current state of things, at its core, will remain unchanged, by perpetuating the values and recondite ideological meaning that makes it civilization.

Culture forces us to make the necessary social adaptations brought about by civilization, and convinces us that we make

personal fulfillment, of opening up to one's existence and of the very pleasure of life. "One thing that always struck explorers and anthropologists", Vignodelli noted, "is the peaceful, open, friendly and joyous character shared by all nomadic gatherers from the Arctic to the Equator, from Argentina to Tasmania, from Cameroon to the Philippines".[284] This character distinguishes them "clearly from farmers, even if primitive, and from nomadic breeders, who are nearly always suspicious, rigid and morally repressive, and lack a real sense of humor as only people living in fear can, in order to survive in the oppressive physical and cultural cage they are forced to fit into".[285]

"The character structure of modern man", Wilhelm Reich stated with reference to this conditioning process of the civilized world,[286] "is typified by characterological armoring against his inner nature and against the social misery which surrounds him. This characterological armoring is the basis of isolation, indigence, craving for authority, fear of responsibility, mystic longing, sexual misery, and neurotically impotent rebelliousness, as well as pathological tolerance. Man has alienated himself from, and has grown hostile toward, life"; and "People who are brought up with a negative attitude toward life… acquire a pleasure anxiety".[287] After all, Vaneigem judged after an analysis of the influential Austrian psychoanalyst,

> Oppression reigns because men are divided, not only among themselves, but also inside themselves. What separates them from themselves and weakens them is the false bond that unites them with power, reinforcing this power and

[284] M. Vignodelli, *Signori della Terra?*, p. 29.
[285] Ibid.
[286] W. Reich, *The Function of the Orgasm*, transl. by Vincent R. Carfagno, p. 7.
[287] Ibid.

making them choose it as their protector, as their father.[288]

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Separated from the natural context in which we are born, set one against the other and alienated even from ourselves, we are continuously pushed to believe that our "well being" depends on our ability to bend even further to the divisions and divinations of the civil world—our ability to compete must be exasperated; our human nature must adapt better to the mechanic models of technology; our vision of things must be made more uniform and recognizable from outside. Actually, the more we comply with all this (adjusting ourselves to compulsory precepts of "normality"), the more we become unable to recognize ourselves as individuals distinguished from others. Our uniqueness, our idiosyncrasy, our exclusiveness and subjectivity melt into a generic vagueness. As we turn into undifferentiated elements, we become more and more insignificant. Every aspect of the civilized world is more important than us. We are nothing but interchangeable parts of a tremendous Social Machine that devours us and vomits us as waste as soon as we are not useful anymore.

Within the great melting pot where our personal identities are fused into one social collectivity defined by claims of uniformity, anything goes and anything is justified—from ads turning kids into a "marketing target" to the Technicolor barrage that nourishes our anxieties of democratic conquest, the individual is deprived of her significance. Our identity can only be found in documents—in our passport, driver's license, diploma, health insurance card, highway toll card, ATM card, ID card… Much more than persons, we are common citizens, voters, taxpayers, students, patients, consumers, spectators, tourists. We

[288] Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, Ch. 11.

this "nature" we all have in common not only exists, but is constantly appealed to, whenever we eat, sleep, laugh, cry, react, walk, lend a hand, converse, touch, love, etc. It is so deeply ingrained in all of us that we have dubbed it Human Nature. Those of us accustomed to perceiving the world through a series of notions and instructions find it almost inconceivable to think that there exists an innate relational foundation perfectly in sync with our ecological surroundings and which may fill anyone with happiness without following some set of prescriptions. Yet suffocated as it is by education, pedagogical models, authoritarian rules, ideologies, innumerable manifestations of medical conditioning and state administered social programs, human nature has simply become obscured. Newspapers don't mention it. Encyclopedias don't explain it. It is not taken into account. Nevertheless, as Michele Vignodelli maintains, "there is a profound, absolute code of ethics inscribed in our brains that primitive populations understand as wisdom without revelations and without coercive laws."[23]

And it is this very wisdom, this profound code of ethics inscribed in our hearts (more than our brains) that culture tries to rob us of.

We are not really superior to anything. But as long as we allow ourselves to be taken in by culture's theories of human separateness, which herald the human mind as queen of the universe, we will continue to look down on the rest of existence. The more we separate ourselves from everything that resides outside the realm of culture, the more human nature will appear strange and unrecognizable to us.

Deep down, each of us knows that human beings were not meant to live in an oppressive and gray cityscape, cut off from family, confined to a cubical or basement office to work twelve hours a day for the profit of who knows what multinational. Such privations are the trademark of modern life, which makes

[23] Cf. M. Vignodelli, *La Civiltà Contro L'uomo.*

way, with no exceptions. As Zerzan sums up, this operation is "ideological in a primary and original sense; every subsequent ideology is an echo of this one."[21]

Just as agriculture presupposes that nature is incapable of providing for us on its own, culture claims that human beings cannot survive on their own because they are cruel, aggressive, unscrupulous, incapable of establishing relationships not based on oppression and abuse. Only culture can save them from this chaotic state. As if the modern world was free of cruelty, exploitation, abuse, hate, rancor, murder, massacre, war! Yet the tremendous violence that exists today did not exist before, and it has only gotten worse. Dramatic events our primitive ancestors could not even conceive of (just think of nuclear fallout) have become ordinary in our culture.

We are convinced that human beings cannot live without culture, but in reality only those who have been brought up with culture fail to imagine living without it. We look at humanity today and judge the entire race incapable of self-determination, when what we are really seeing is not the human race but civilized humanity. "You cannot study canine psychology by observing the retriever on a chain," writes A.S. Neill, the founder of Summerhill, the least repressive school in the world, "nor can you dogmatically theorize about human psychology when humanity is on a very strong chain—one fashioned by generations of life haters."[22]

The fact of the matter is we do not need culture to love, or gain self-awareness or become available to everything under the sun (plants, animals, people, stones, the scent of flowers, the colors in the sky). All we need is to be in touch with ourselves.

The expression "getting in touch with oneself" is rarely mentioned in the world of culture and scholarship. And yet

[21] Cf. J. Zerzan, *No Way Out?*

[22] Cf. A.S. Neill, *Summerhill* (1960).

have turned our active intimacy with others into lawful solidarity, our generosity into charity, our human involvement into telethon donations, our sense of fairness into law codes, our knowledge into abstract intellectualism, our respect into good manners. Our personal identity—our personal-ity—is no longer based on ourselves, but on others—on mainstream opinions and trends, on possessions and status symbols, on scientific results and on what the powerful think. And the more we get rid of our inclination to feel, the more we will depend on what we are told to do (or not to do) in order to be acceptable and, eventually, on those who rule these adjustment devices and therefore lead our *hetero-identity*— school grades, technical opinions, diagnoses, medical reports, norms, convictions, acquittals, prizes, prohibitions, taboos, instructions.

What is more, the divided identities outside us have been complemented by a self-inflicted identity division associated with the use of the new IT technologies—with an "online identity" pushing towards a continuous (de)construction of a person's unique characteristics, as a reaction to the annihilation of the "Self" suffered in real life. In the same way as outside our monitors, in the imaginary world of electronic simulation the Self is not granted and only derives from our ability to adjust to the right situation, circumstances and moment (whereby "right" should be obviously read as a synonym of "conventional"). "What matters more now", the obliging MIT sociologist specializing in personality psychology Sherry Turkle points out, is not the notion of "stability" but the notion of "fluidity": it is "the ability to adapt and change—to new jobs, new career directions, new gender roles, new technologies".[289] Zygmunt Bauman uses the metaphor of "liquidity" (liquid society) to describe the precarious and insubstantial state of the postmodern world, as well as the protean attitude it forces

[289] S. Turkle, *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet*, p. 255.

us to adopt,[290] while social psychologist Kenneth Gergen talks about a "saturated self" to prove that the identity collapse which has been brought about by IT—with its information superhighways and the huge amount of news, languages, codes, avatars, icons, guided tours and dependencies—has led to the paradox of the "ecstasy of multiple being", whereby "persons exist in a state of continuous construction and reconstruction; it is a world where anything goes that can be negotiated",[291] but only what can be negotiated, people included!

The route that leads us to *take ourselves out of ourselves* reaches places where we never like getting lost, and where it is compulsory to believe that we are there because these places suit the requirements of adjustment programs, as has been maintained by the critic of post-modernism Fredric Jameson. Studying the atomization of Self produced by current society, Jameson described it even as a further—and even more degraded—stage which comes after the alienation caused by modernity. "In a postmodern world, the subject is not alienated but fragmented", Jameson wrote: "the notion of alienation presumes a centralized, unitary self who could become lost to himself or herself. But if, as a postmodernist sees it, the self is decentered and multiple, the concept of alienation breaks down".[292]

A fulfilling existence that was harmoniously immersed in nature was countered by the agricultural society with a modern existence based on the alienating archetypes of civilization and doomed to flow into the courses of an even more disorientating and disrupting post-modernity. Modernity replaced nature, as a key reference of primitive life, with logic-computational rationality, power, and fantasies of domination and control—with weapons that divide, subjugate, categorize,

[290] See Z. Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, Id., *Liquid Life*,

[291] K. Gergen, *The Saturated Self: Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life*, p. 7.

[292] As quoted in S. Turkle, *Life on the Screen*, p. 49.

notes, it is "likely that already during the Paleolithic era certain forms or names were attached to objects or ideas, in a symbolizing manner but in a shifting, impermanent, perhaps playful sense. The will to sameness and security found in agriculture means that the symbols became as static and constant as farming life."370 In fact, in order to work effectively, symbols must adopt an imperative (ie, forced connections) as well as a lasting and stable character. And this process of a symbol's "crystallization" in a stable framework (such as a number, language, icon, time) constitutes the main phase of transition from a purely mental representation of the natural domain (culture) to its practical implementation (cultivation). As previously mentioned, effective dominion over the earth, animals and other human beings cannot be achieved before first gaining dominion over ideas. Cultural symbols are a perfect reflection of this power. They lure humanity away from a rich, simple, genuine existence to a civilized existence based above all on intellectual dominion.

The need for culture is therefore not an innate need. It arises from the will to dominate, intended to fill the void left over by the steady depletion of a life intimately and harmoniously connected to the natural environment. Insofar as it exerts intellectual authority over everything, culture creates several tiers of power (psychological, social and political) that only develop within a community already uprooted from its primitive nature. In short, it emerges as an effect of the same process of domestication that animates civilization as a *conditio sine qua non*.

Although it may appear singular to us, accustomed as we are to learning by using symbols, the phenomenon we call culture, which has subordinated our senses to our intellects, is an initiatory phenomenon. Rejecting all cognitive perspectives that do not follow symbolic logic is a system that the civilized world must rally behind and defend with every means at its disposal. From infancy on, individuals are trained to react this

The extremely long gap (over two million years) between the time human beings began representing the world with symbols and the time this transition became firmly entrenched—with the development of language, art, mythology, writing, numbers, time, money, laws and social roles—would seem to refute the idea that culture is innate to human needs. Furthermore, there still exists a part of humanity that rejects civilization and lives without symbols.

Obviously, when we talk about symbols and symbology, we are not merely alluding to abstract thought. Humans have always been able to use their imaginations, to represent and be represented. Let's say whistling means that the water has frozen over. Whenever I hear a whistle, I will know that the water has frozen over without having to see it personally. Using abstract thought while fully aware that the abstraction is a stand-in for the reality referred to is a far cry from considering the representation of a real thing to be the equivalent of the thing itself. Culture leads to such a process of substitution. It does not use symbols as signs (a name, an engraving, a sound) but rather as substitutes for reality. When we speak of a "nation," we are alluding to a purely abstract concept: nations do not really exist; only individuals that populate a nation exist. But now that numbers are the perceptual medium de rigeur, numbers are what we take into consideration. So now we talk of nations as if they truly existed. We take pride in a nation. We see it materialize in a given territory. We even shield its identity (which may, alas, be written into the DNA of its members).

While the sign, with its fluid, mutable meaning, remains detached from the reality it intends to remake, the cultural process of reducing reality to a symbol tends, on the other hand, to make us incapable of distinguishing between the two. Primitive peoples have not, by and large, shunned using symbols as signs, yet they always regard them with suspicion. As Zerzan

(1993).

and manipulate everything and everyone, including human beings. That is why today individuals are increasingly targeted by a global society that has no fear of walking over their dead bodies.

Taking Max Weber's and Jürgen Habermas' insights on the advent of modernity back to the advent of agriculture and examining the investigations on post-modernity by Koslowski, Steven Lash and Maffesoli, among others, we can draw a very clear conclusion— when the eco-centric vision of primitive life is replaced by an egocentric mentality which objectifies nature by subduing it to human (and modernity's) domination, this vision becomes "invisible", opening the way to a systematic and generalized subjugation that overwhelms any living expression, persons included. This is dictated by a vision that gets rid of individuals in any relevant place and replaces them with masses, collective identity, telecommunication anonymity, instability, and the liquid inconsistency of today's fake relationships (post-modernity). This happens within a technological globalism that transforms every form of power into an artistic event and turns us into "the public".

Marc Augé's "non-places" have been populated by the "non-persons" living in this world without subjectivity—a world consisting of a well-disciplined group of non-persons inhabiting the non-places of the artificial and degraded universe we call civilization. Not individuals, but people—non-existing people in a non-existing world.

The data files of bureaucratic organizations contain, archive and arrange our whole formal existence, which is the only one that matters. Registers of births, marriages and deaths document our life. The history of our actions does not consist in our actions anymore, but in notarized deeds, pending suits, registered commercial contracts, credit card transactions and browsing logs. Our introspective dimension only exists as a function of the psychological profiles that will be exposed to the media pillory whenever necessary. Everything leads to the function

assumed by individuals within the social fabric, as simple figures or efficient gears. Even our fate does not belong to us anymore, marked by the burden of forced industriousness, visits to the mall during our spare time, spring-cleaning, and the mortgages needed to buy a roof over our heads, eat, and accept as much home pollution as possible, disconsolately watching TV.

This state of subjugation is so pervasive that we faithfully reproduce it in our children, who are continuously selected, fragmented, and separated from their instincts, natural needs, and inclinations. Conditioning, adjusting and persuading are the keywords of any educational program (at school as well as elsewhere). The explicitly coercive authority of traditional correction has been combined with what Fromm described as an "anonymous authority" based on psychic manipulation (guilt, merit, judgment, moral condemnation, marginalization, expulsion). The aim of socialization is unchanging—standardization, normalization, adjustment and suppression of any non-conform manifestation.

Bernardi rightly writes: "Adjustment to the system and its laws… is probably the cause of the social disease that is devastating our world".[293] How we got stuck in the meat-grinder of domestication is hard to realize, but not to understand. The more we suffer, the more we are stopped from seriously asking why; the more we wish to understand, the more we are turned aside, diverted, fragmented, intoxicated, healed, reintegrated, and persuaded to accept that this is how life has always been and will forever be.

Like monkeys locked up in zoo cages and unable to show their true nature (the ensuing frustration generates discomfort, disease, uncontrollable aggressive responses, and a numb need to submit and be controlled), human beings, when behind the bars of a captive life, have shown similar pathological symptoms. In fact, the race to power that distinguishes our lifestyle

[293] M. Bernardi, *Educazione e libertà*, p. 172.

writes in his classic *An Essay on Man*, "can no longer confront reality immediately; he cannot see it, as it were, face to face… He has so enveloped himself in linguistic forms, in artistic images, in mythical symbols or religious rites that he cannot see or know anything except by the interposition of this artificial medium."[19]

One is reminded of Gianni Rodari's fairy tale about the old librarian mouse who boasts he has eaten a cat after having swallowed its image in a book. When faced with a fleshandblood feline, the librarian mouse is paralyzed with fear. His friends, who know a thing or two about the real world, flee immediately, while the librarian mouse finds himself at the mercy of the cat and is taught a severe lesson. "Wouldn't it have been wise to study a bit of truth?" asks the cat. "You might have learned that not all cats are made of paper."[20]

If we are used to cats made of paper, we no longer know how to react to a real cat. And the truly tragic element is that, instead of worrying about the deterioration of our perception, we flaunt it.

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Given its design to drastically limit our senses and depriving us of a genuine existence, culture leaves little room for free will. Language either exists or it doesn't, and if it does exist, all of us are engaged in and conditioned by it. The same goes for numbers, literature, art, time. So we must ask ourselves another question: is culture, this process of intellectualizing life, natural to human beings, or is it a "guided" phenomenon with a specific objective? Could it be possible that culture is a purely inhibitive tool that is inessential to men and women's lives?

are Connected (1976).

[19] Cf. E. Cassirer, *Essay on Man: An Introduction to Philosophy of Human Culture* (1962).

[20] Cf. G. Rodari, *"The Mouse that Ate Cats" in Fairy Tales by Telephone*

ing eye contact, blushes, sweats, or whether his voice cracked, or if or he twitched involuntarily, etc).

Symbols do not expand our perception, they narrow it down to one kind that furthers their own agenda. What's more, knowing reality through symbols, which are unreal referents (ie, an idea, in the mind only), means that we filter reality through "unreality" and convince ourselves that the result of this fictitious process is authentic. To return to the panorama example, seeing the uniformity of plants in the same genus or observing the horizon line is really to see something that is not there, because plants are never exactly identical, not even if they belong to the same variety, and no line separates the earth from the sky. Edmund Leach pointed out this very contradiction when he wrote that the "contrast between Culture and Nature is very striking. Visible, wild Nature is a jumble of random curves; it contains no straight lines and few regular geometrical shapes of any kind. But the tamed, man-made world of Culture is full of straight lines, rectangles, triangles, and so on."[18]

Culture does not care for reality as it is, nor does it aspire to grasp it in any direct way. Instead, it uses a conceptual figure (the symbol) as an intermediary. A figure, it should be added, that winds up becoming the principle reference point for perception. Molded into an abstract shape that purports to lend it meaning, reality ends up losing meaning every time it is not perceived through that symbolic intermediary. Direct experience no longer counts; only symbolic mediation counts. As a result, culture grows exponentially in relation to experience, and is nurtured by the diminishment of experience. Hence we are constantly detaching ourselves from reality rather than immersing ourselves in it.

Ernst Cassirer, the famous German philosopher, described this detachment in even starker terms. "Today's individual," he

[18] Cf. E. Leach, *Culture and Communication: The Logic by which Symbols*

really fulfills pathological needs—it sublimates an unbearable lack of freedom, our inability to show our nature in an unhindered way, to be ourselves. The desire for power, Fromm warned, is like sadism: it is a desire of "*transformation of impotence into the experience of omnipotence*".[294]

Each of us can read in bullying behaviors a morbid need to vent suppressed anxieties, and it is only because being powerful makes people untouchable that we are not allowed to read in this sense the same commanding frenzy we see in heads of governments, party leaders, industrialists, religious hierarchies and army officials. "Psychologically healthy people have no need to indulge fantasies of absolute power", Lewis Mumford maintained.[295] "But the critical weakness of an over-regimented institutional structure", the well-known American urban planner went on, "is that it does not tend to produce psychologically healthy people. The rigid division of labor and the segregation of castes produce unbalanced characters, while the mechanical routine normalizes—and rewards—those compulsive personalities who are afraid to cope with the embarrassing riches of life".

Instead of being free to express our scorn for a world defined by the ethics of social adjustment, we are continuously pushed to accept it, share its basic values and put our life in the hands of present and future rulers. The social universe where we live has not been always there. Alienation, depersonalization, atomization, domestication are not unavoidable conditions, but if we allow the program for a complete suppression of natural life to get the upper hand, even against ourselves, they probably soon will be.

10. A Free and Natural Life Without Power

In origin, life must not have been the painful expression of the impossibility of being what we really are. At that time, no-

[294] E. Fromm, *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*, p. 323.

[295] L. Mumford, *The Myth of the Machine: Technics and Human Develop-*

tions like "social adjustment", "training", or "discipline" did not mark the insuperable borders of an existence ruled by orders and accomplishments. Personal respect did not depend on a school certificate, or on money or career, nor was it governed by the taming logic of prizes and punishments. When human life naturally thrives, and the warmth of parental feelings is joined with the equally comfortable embrace of a trusted, protective, and selfless environment, human existence does not degenerate into a morbid need to dominate, subjugate, and force other people to carry out one's orders. Domination, which makes us its prey, can never expand when the path of life follows its natural course. Likewise, mind controllers' decisions aimed at manipulation and control—education, school, religion, entertainment—lose their attraction.

Before civilization entrapped the planet's destinies, imposing its gloomy adjustment to the needs of the System, what was relevant was the needs of the people and their world. Nature was not a "useful" or "useless" object, but a subject, and life flowed among egalitarian relationships and within a mutual respect that responded to ecological needs of stability. When Murray Bookchin tried to draw a sketch of the open character of organic societies, he did not ignore the deep implications of the intimate communion between individuals, communities, Earth and nature as a whole. "Nature begins as life", we read in his *The Ecology of Freedom*. "From the very outset of human consciousness, it enters directly into consociation with humanity—not merely harmonization or even balance. Nature as life eats at every repast, succors every new birth, grows with every child, aids every hand that throws a spear or plucks a plant, warms itself at the hearth in the dancing shadows, and sits amidst the councils of the community just as the rustle of the leaves and grasses is part of the air itself— not merely a

ment, p. 226

nor living; the conceptual scheme of reality is something we have imposed on it. Numbers, letters and hours are mere conventions that do not exist in nature. They are nothing more than the abstract representations that we invent in order to decipher what is happening around us. Which begs the question, does the mediation of symbols really paint a picture of reality for us?

Thanks to the cult of numbers, for example, reality is depicted quantitatively and phenomena are described in terms of lines and measurements. When we observe a panorama with a "numerical mindset," essentially all we grasp is the regularity of geometric lines, or how many plants of the same species there are, or where exactly the horizon separates the sky from the earth. Thus we ignore the infinite effluvia wafting up, the chorus of sounds that accompany the view, the energy, shadows, mysteries, the exhilarating feeling of breathing in the air and all the other details that make that particular view uncanny and irreproducible.

That the pervasiveness of symbols is a cognitive deviation becomes even clearer if we substitute numbers with images or words. When we look at a photograph of a landscape, we're not looking at *the* landscape but rather a static reproduction of it. In a cultural context, the filter between what we intend to see (a landscape) and what we're actually seeing (a photograph) swaps realities, and we may go so far as to convince ourselves we know that place because we have already seen it. Similarly, after listening to Tom speak, we think we've understood his intentions, yet we forget that what we have understood is not Tom's intentions but merely the literal significance of his words, which he may be using to hide his true intentions. By binding the perception of the world to mere symbolic-rational data, we have conditioned ourselves to interpret reality exclusively through that empire of data, and thus, from the outset, ignored any other kind of interpretation (how Tom avoids mak-

different vision of the world by looking at culture with fresh eyes—eyes that belong neither to the common citizen nor the true believer.

2. Culture as an Ideology of Civilization

> *[Culture] appears as man's emancipation from the organically prescribed cycle of natural life. For this very reason, culture's every step forward seems condemned to lead to an ever more devastating senselessness.*
> — Max Weber

When we talk about culture, we generally endow it with two features to justify its existence: its openness to the world around us and its inevitability, which is to say its natural link to the process of human evolution.

The question that immediately follows is: does culture enhance human potential for understanding the world?

Culture has been called a phenomenon organized by symbols. In Bain's words, "Culture is all behavior mediated by symbols."[16] Leslie White, without a doubt the most ardent supporter of the universal valence of symbols, is even more didactic: "Culture is a traditional organization of objects (tools and things made with tools), ideas (knowledge, lore, belief) sentiments (attitudes toward milk, homicide, mothers-in-law, etc) and acts (customs, institutions, rituals, etc) that is dependent upon the use of symbols."[17] Given White's definition, it appears possible to say that becoming cultured means learning and interpreting reality by filtering it through the evocative power of symbols. Yet symbols are neither concrete

[16] Cf. R. Bain, *A Definition of Culture* (1942).

[17] Cf. L. White, *Evolutionism and Anti-Evolutionism in American Anthropology* (1947).

sound borne on the wind".[296] Nature, the American theoretician goes on, "is not merely a habitat; it is a participant that advises the community with its omens, secures it with its camouflage, leaves it telltale messages in broken twigs and footprints, whispers warnings to it in the wind's voice, nourishes it with a largesse of plants and animals".[297]

This participation has disappeared from our universe, together with most of the egalitarian relationships that had been associated for millions of years with the social life of women and men. Replaced by goals of utilitarianism and domination, civilized life is not conceived in its vital force anymore. Having given up its mere purpose of existence, it has become a pure shadow—the anguished ghost of an anonymous presence which is becoming more and more contentious, bewildering, unbearable and drips more fury, vengefulness, prostration and humiliation every day.

The mentality of domination that brought about a vicious circle of power-as-an-end-in-itself within humanity, seems to take over everything, every process, every subject. It has transformed our way of being, of living, our living conditions, the sense of our relationships with others and with the world. And it has changed us. We all know how the suppression of vital natural impulses makes a person frustrated, leading her to spread suffering, fear, and resignation. We all know how an existence based on the possession of things favors cold, calculating, insensitive and inhumane relationships. We all know how a forced co-existence in an overcrowded urban environment leads to a quarrelsome life lacking any joy and needing an authority to suppress the urge towards retaliation that is engendered by any constriction. Civilization did not free humanity from barbarism; it built a wall of barbarism all around her. And Vignodelli documented it in a brilliant way: every

[296] Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom*, p. 113.

[297] Ibid., pp. 113-4.

time the "transformation of a gatherer-hunter population happened in front of anthropologists", the author writes in *Signori della Terra?*, "it has been observed that this shift, which always takes place as an effect of powerful external pressures, is a huge trauma—the wide social and psychic harmony typical of gatherers is shattered; all their marked human qualities, which they do not consider as 'virtues', but as an everyday expression of life… become fragmented. Conflicts, both within and outside the group, become extremely frequent. Affection, kindness, relaxation, irony, and an extreme sensitivity toward others' feelings are replaced by a selfish race to possession and power".[298]

On the other hand, when life conditions allow for a substantial refusal of a mindset inspired by global domination, social organization tends to lose the arbitrary features that shaped people's lifestyle, and the relevant population recovers that social and ecological optimum that is made of egalitarianism, demographic containment, co-operation and autonomy. Vignodelli[299] adds that "When Polynesian farmers colonized the Chatham Islands, East of New Zealand, they had to immediately go back to gathering and hunting, since their tropical crops could not grow at that latitude. As a consequence, their hierarchic social organization soon became egalitarian, as it is shown by archaeological documentation, where the rich graves of the aristocrats—which are a typical status symbol—tend to gradually disappear; their traditional expansionist bellicosity, associated with impressive face tattoos and brutal ferocity, was completely abolished; their theistic religion, based on rituals of worship, sacrifice and heroic glorification inspired by their relationships of power, threat and violence, returned to be a ritualization of the connection with natural resources (perceived as living forces) and of social harmony, which was not considered separated from everyday life. There were no more clerics,

[298] M. Vignodelli, *Signori della Terra?*, pp. 16-7.
[299] Ibid., p. 28.

Is mother's milk better or worse than brand milk? Does fruit picked from a tree have the same nutritional value as fruit picked prematurely, chemically treated and shipped halfway around the world to arrive on our tables out of season?

Of course, not everyone has lost the ability to distinguish between facts and gobbledygook. Yet culture has an uncanny capacity to make people doubt their own eyes, and it tends to diminish any inclination we may have to learn something through non-cultural channels. The more widespread this process becomes, the more our convictions will fall into step with cultural dictates and the artifice culture continues to construct over our immediate (or unmediated) perception. Who should we trust to tell us the temperature has dropped, a thermometer that reads twenty degrees or our own teeth chattering? The thermometer. (Maybe we have a fever, we tell ourselves, or we're not dressed warmly enough, or maybe we haven't digested lunch properly…). Should we trust a certified doctor who says we're the picture of health, or that persistent pain we feel that won't go away? Obviously, doctor knows best.

We have lived in a world run by culture for just a few hundred generations, and yet we can no longer trust our own feelings. Without official confirmation from a certified institution, even what's plain-as-day becomes murky, and the most obvious situations need to be verified by the culture's oracles: teachers, priests, scientists, experts. Even when our instincts coincide perfectly with the opinions of these "knowledge museums," we always have to weigh our opinions against theirs; the distance that culture has placed between the world and ourselves has a profoundly detrimental impact on our self-confidence, on how we trust in our own abilities.

Culture elevates us from nature, it pushes us to *evolve* from nature. The monotheistic cult that it promotes drives us to see culture as an emancipating god; without culture, we are told, humans would not exist, our feelings of kinship would wane, feelings themselves would disappear. We can only cultivate a

we can understand an elephant's existence, or what the trade winds are, or how Native Americans behaved, and we are convinced we are experiencing these things.

It is no coincidence that the more we rely on our intellect, the farther forests, meadows, wind, rain, birdsong and the wide open sky are pushed to the fringe. And the more our knowledge is linked to the dictates of culture, the more likely we are to perceive other living creatures as a threat. If we are cut off from the physical world, the entire flow of our emotions is altered irrevocably. A prime example is how we relate to the dark. To return once again to Mander, the "stars are obscured by the city glow. The moon is washed out by a filter of light. It becomes a semimoon and our awareness of it inevitably dims."[14] We are obviously capable of recognizing that it is "night, but darkness, moods and feelings lie dormant in us. Faced with real darkness, we become frightened, overreact, like a child whose parents have always left the light on."[15]

Civilization constantly forces us inside sterilized boxes that cut us off from direct contact with the natural world. We spend our entire lives in houses, cars, offices, restaurants, supermarkets, cities, conference rooms, museums, computer programs and virtual chatrooms. The more accustomed to living in these boxes we grow, the more frightened we are of the wilderness. Who isn't scared of spending the night alone in the middle of the woods these days? Culture is turning the world we live in into an alien place, which explains why we fear it so much. We have no deep connection to the real world anymore. Instead we live in a world created by culture. We prefer sweetened poison to natural nutrition.

As we lose the ability to really live life (for real), everything becomes disputable within the cultural framework. Is pollution deadly? Does kissing on the mouth pose a health risk?

[14] Cf. J. Mander, *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television.*
[15] Ibid.

no formal cults or punishing law superstructures, consecrated by the showy, menacing and hypnotic pompousness of temples and stone idols".

Since civilization pushed us towards a total control of the world, all our actions ended up valorizing the self-destructive process invoked by this control; and the brutality we inflict on every part of nature is a clear sign of the insensibility that feeds our "lifestyle". From forcefully canalized rivers to the bombardment of clouds aimed at "preventing" hailstorms, from the valleys we deface with our infrastructures to the trees we fell or miniaturize, from the animals we subjugate or torture in labs to the human beings we treat as commodities, we have long ceased to participate in a viable ecosystem. We exploit the living world instead of taking part in it; we use it instead of feeling it as part of us. Being able to sympathize with a fawn, knowing what a snake feels or what it means to be blown by the wind like a leaf, to flow like a brook, to shine like a star, are abilities we consider more and more unthinkable and undesirable when not even ridiculous. However, despite the practical and martial urgencies of civilization trampling on it continuously, the flame of sensitive life still burns inside us. When we open our eyes in the morning, Vignodelli points out, we are all "bright" like stars. Unfortunately, this idyllic feeling "does not last more than a minute; after that, our thoughts focus on dates, duties, and petty anxieties—on the unending distracting and alienating lures that rob us the intensity and fullness of the present. Wearing a mask of ascetic and specialized severity, our gaze becomes empty, we don't look anymore at what is in front of us, and life starts drifting apart like a stranger, maneuvering us like puppets. In a frantic effort to be true to our mask in order to attain a transcendent, and imaginary, ascetic perfection—or whatever egoistic 'success'—we become even more alienated, and withdraw into our shells".[300]

[300] Ibid., p. 44.

It is only this unending race to isolate ourselves from everything and everybody that makes life appear today so unattainable, hard, and empty. But life is not unbearable in itself— it is the mindset with which we have led it for ten thousand years that torments us. The world is not insupportable, but the authoritarian and toxic device we have been overlapping on a free and wild existence is.

Civilization has always taught us that the only remedies to the existential suffering it generates are endurance, distraction, and unconsciousness, or giving vent to one's urges. But fully enjoying our existence is the opposite of being confined with a need to let out one's frustrations. What we need is not more power, more money, more prestige, more things, more services, or an indefinite horsepower in our engines. What we need is our world, the sphere of affections, feelings and desire. We need the ability to feel and to be self-sufficient in life, and not to be at the mercy of a plug that can be pulled out of its socket. We need the passion of a deeply-felt existence that makes us wish to dive into someone else's warmth, or else to idle away our time, contemplating the sky, the sea, the mountains and the woods. We need the ability to have an intense relationship with Earth, to joyfully feel it, touch it, smell it, and be inside it as her partners rather than as "masters". We need our subjectivity, the possibility of feeling human and not just simple useful elements; of feeling that we are human, not biological matter to be studied, controlled and aggregated within a fixed framework of social assignments. We need, in sum, the freedom to be what we feel we are, to do what fulfills us and to live in a universe of spontaneous relationships that is not founded on subjugation and abuse. "Having more never compensates for being less", John Zerzan reminds us.[301] When a member of the high aristocracy commits suicide, we always tend to think that her gesture did not make sense. "She had everything!" the

[301] J. Zerzan, *The Nihilist's Dictionary*

ing models and values (values which, not coincidentally, we call "our" *culture*). Deprived of any sensory (and sentimental) cohesion with the environment, we are unable to pass this union on to our children, who, from the day they are born, live in this world as if it were natural. We teach them to do well in school, as if school were the only important thing to us. Every other basic activity for children (jumping, running, playing with friends, exploring) is sacrificed in the name of intellectual pursuits, even if the point of such pursuits remains obscure to them, even if, to receive a good grade that satisfies our competitive spirit, they lose sight—when they are as young as five or six—of the enchantment of a rainbow, a tree in a forest, a running brook. To be entranced by the world outside the classroom window is considered a sign of inattentiveness and a mark of misconduct. The more distance a child puts between herself and nature, the more civilization celebrates her, until her nature is completely abnegated in high school. Abnegation means self-negation, the complete annihilation of one's self, freedom and willpower, for some ideal purpose.

Obediently aping manners, excelling at competitive sports, or learning the proper dance steps for children means becoming a "phenomenon," not becoming oneself. And that distancing effect that culture *cultivates* through the appearance of an ideological knowledge becomes crippling when it is transformed into a social obligation, and requires conformists to mutilate the genitalia of their children before branding someone a witch, slave, stranger, outsider.

Life does not follow separatist (and extremist) cultural agendas; it is not even separated from knowledge of life, which cannot be learned by continuously attending a teacher's lessons or receiving a diploma. Unfortunately, however, we are so thoroughly committed to this alienating course we call culture that, when we take stock of it (a more and more frequent occurrence), we can't even seem to tell life from life. Sitting comfortably with our multimedia encyclopedia in our lap, we think

> climb…Your legs would become two useless, spindly, atrophied appendages slated to wither away.[12]

The effect of culture is equivalent to that of the wheelchair. Books teach us what buttons to push, and our imagination shuts down. Our thoughts, our curiosity, our initiative are no longer exercised and become useless appendages destined to decay.

The world, on the other hand, is not an absolute entity that stands still for us to absorb it. The world is what our thoughts and actions contribute to it. The "sensory and motor processes, perception and action, are fundamentally inseparable in lived cognition, and not merely contingently linked as input/output pairs," explains the neurobiologist Francisco J. Valera. They are the basis for cognition itself. "According to the dominant computationalist tradition," continues Valera, director of CNRS, the Institute of Neurobiology in Paris, "the point of departure for understanding perception is typically abstract." And yet, perception is not merely an act of recording "a pre-given world" but, as Merleau-Ponty understood it, "is perceiver-dependent, not because the perceiver 'constructs' it as he or she pleases, but because what *counts* as a relevant world is inseparable from the structure of the perceiver."[13]

Organisms and the environment are mutually bound together, just like the mind and body. By separating the mind from the rest of our organs, and confining it to a kind of instruction outside any natural context, we have spoiled our ability to interpret the world with all of our senses.

Victims of this "immuno-experiential" progress, we are driven by culture to learn "what there is to know" by making a series of compromises that lead us to identify with the prevail-

[12] Ibid.

[13] Cf. F.J. Valera, "The Re-enchantment of the Concrete" in *The Artificial Life route to Intelligence: Building Embodied, Situated Agents* (1995).

reasoning goes. Money, power, influence—she didn't need anything else! That's right: she had everything, apart from what is absolutely necessary for living…

II. Dominion over Being

1. Conscious Domination, Unconscious Ideology: knowledge as power

> *Modern natural science is the creation of the practical will to conquest*
> — Werner Sombart

The image of the world as a huge orderly whole, perfectly knowable and controlled by humans, is the theoretical basis on which civilization's dominating spirit relies. The implementation of this ideological vision has been the challenge assigned to modern science by the ancient philosophies of the civilized world. The progressive rhetorics celebrating the ability of science—and technology—to give rise to an ever "people-friendlier" world originates from this absurd dream of turning the universe into an occupied territory—a place entirely shaped by the human race and doomed to *serve* only human interests.

In the world we live in it is not possible to acquire knowledge for its own sake. "Modern science originates from the *will of power*", Karl Jaspers wrote (though with the intent of criticizing this premise).[1] "Domination of nature, ability, usefulness, 'knowledge as power'—these are the keywords". Such a vision of knowledge leads of course to a very aggressive attitude which, though concealed by an alleged need of clarity and reliability, definitely deviates from the loving observation of what

[1] K. Jaspers, *The Origin and Goal of History*, transl. by Michael Bullock

lacing up our shoes. Culture, which grows out of the spoils of a "dead" experience, can never be anything more than "dead." Or, as Vaneigem writes, "there are more truths in 24 hours of a man's life than there are in all the philosophies."[10]

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Every time experience and the imagination are removed from knowledge, the latter is deprived of its animated nature and becomes *culture*, or rather, a simple mechanical process that can be acquired through directives and instructions. We, too, lose our animated spirit along the way; sitting silently in front of a teacher or a computer or television screen, we swallow our dose of instruction, convinced it will help us understand the world around us. In the meantime, however, the real world remains outside: outside the window, off-screen, beyond the imaginary world we knew in our hearts when we were children and which, the more entangled it becomes with culture, the more we abandon our innate ability to think, dream, desire and take flight.

"The imagination is an indispensable gift,"[11] writes Sonia Savioli in her essay on the damaging effects of television on children.

> [It] develops as we grow and, naturally, as we imagine things, just as our legs develop the more we use them to walk…[What happens then] if you are spoon-fed premade, standardized images from the time you turn one year old? How can your imagination ever develop? It's as if when you turned one you were placed in a wheelchair and taught to move around by pressing buttons instead of learning how to walk, run, jump,

[10] Cf. R. Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, 2001
[11] Cf. S. Savioli. *Slow Life: Del Vivere Lento, Sereno e Contento* (2006)

the books say. What the books say is what the authors of the books learned from 'experts' who, from time to time, turn out to be wrong."[7]

Objectified by culture, nature has acquired an intellectual definition; instead of opening a path to awareness, what we know of the world around us is merely an acknowledgment of a final outcome. We depend on opinions espoused by television programs, arguments made by accredited intellectuals, discoveries made by scientists, the instruction of teachers, the theories of economists, the decisions of politicians, the inventions of technicians and corporations. These figureheads are the ones who "tell us what nature is, what we are, how we relate to the cosmos, what we need for survival and happiness, and what are the appropriate ways to organize our existence."[8] We have grown so removed from life and knowledge of its daily flow that we have turned into utter spectators; we watch things unfold instead of having a hand in how they unfold. And we are incapable of feeling the special, beating pulse of life.

Once we have subscribed to the idea that culture can provide us with the same knowledge that nature lets us experience firsthand, we cease to need nature. Replacing experiential knowledge with what Mander calls "mediated experience" becomes as logical as it is indispensable. Nevertheless, however much we may be schooled to think the contrary (as we in civilization are), *there is no such thing as effective awareness without direct experience.*

Heidegger provides a good example of this point. "We shall never learn what 'is called' swimming…by reading a treatise on swimming. Only the leap into the river tells us what is called swimming."[9] The same may be said for most of the things we have learned in our lives: from riding a bike to making love to

[7] Ibid. (Italics author's)

[8] Ibid.

[9] Cf. M. Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?* (1968)

is investigated, since it aims at interfering with the examined processes, instead of simply trying to understand them. This *manipulative* approach is not a "communication" of knowledge, but a war aimed at subjugation—the purpose is not understanding *per se*, but rather understanding in order to forge things, to put them to service, to make them useful. Worse still, such an approach leads us to think that this is the only possible way to know things. When Lévi-Strauss admitted that the natives' "extreme familiarity with their biological environment, the passionate attention which they pay to it and their precise knowledge of it has often struck inquirers",[2] he emphasized two important aspects—that it is possible to approach an *unknown* world without arrogance; and that arrogance makes us numb, to the point of being amazed by any other mode of inquiry that rejects those same aggressive premises.

The dominating perspective that shapes the way we think is well rooted in the solid ground of civilization—a project having at its heart the symbolic thought that abstracts an ideal form of knowledge from reality, turning this abstraction into an objective and universal model of knowledge. The central position occupied in the modern world by any "ideal" element of this abstract thought—space, time, language, art, etc—suggests that the perspective chosen by the civilized mentality must not be "real", but rather efficient and functioning. The advent of the notion and science of "numbers", ie mathematics, is perfectly inscribed in this world view. The attempt to give an *objective* (and thus mathematical) justification to knowledge whose sole purpose is to bend nature to humanity's rule fulfills the same need of control and subjugation that had been born with the rise of the farming/breeding system. And while this mindset was to be fully realized only several centuries after its original appearance, this claimed "objectivity" in our world view has

[p. 121 Italian].

[2] C. Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (1962), p. 5.

preserved all its initial premises. The numerical rule that served as a privileged key to a consciousness that had lost any interest in knowledge as such, will soon become the universal justification of a language which is potentially unquestionable and which will be widely known as "rational science". Knowledge, in the civilized world, must be aimed at controlling the universe, otherwise it can be considered useless—pure (and pointless) contemplation.

In a quick survey of the milestones of this overpowering race of knowledge turned into power, we should not forget that in Europe, it was in archaic and classic Greece that the way was opened to the elevation of the mathematical system to the role of "objective" key for the interpretation of the world. In fact, while a practical conscious mentality is a fairly new stage—which has been reached in the last five hundred years—the theories of Greek mathematicians—Pythagoras, Euclid, Archimedes, Apollonius—assigned to the science of numbers, in the form of arithmetic and geometry—the role of keen revealer of "all the things in the world", a role which would be sidelined, however, by the advent of Christianity. Far from denying the power of humanity over nature (the Jewish-Christian imposition of a God assigning to human beings a dominion over the universe openly justifies the existence of a system founded on the human exploitation of the world), Christianity simply introduced an authority shift from human beings to God. And while this intervention hindered the mechanistic ambitions of a science which did not yet need to impose itself as a supreme source of knowledge, it actually fully justified the purposes of this conquest. So it was that, in an environment filled with the mindset of domination, modern science got the upper hand. Gradually ousting God from his role of bestowing power over the world, and putting mathematics in his place, science could appear as a hegemonic bearer of universal welfare—a role it has claimed ever since. Thus science established the rules of a domination that was

American essayist Jerry Mander, a former adman and later critic of the processes that lead individuals away from the natural world, has outlined the ways in which culture blocks people from directly experiencing nature. Everyone knows apples grow on trees, writes Mander. In fact, in school books,

> We see pictures of fruit growing, but when we live in cities, confined to the walls and floors of our concrete environments, we don't actually see the slow process of a blossom appearing on a tree, then becoming a bud that grows into an apple. We learn this, but we can't really 'know' what it means, or that a whole cycle is operating: sky to ground to root through tree to bud ripening into fruit that we can eat. Nor do we see particular value in this knowledge. It remains an idea to us, an abstraction that is difficult to integrate into our consciousness without direct experience of the process. Therefore we don't develop a feeling about it, a caring.[6]

The same holds true for the majority of knowledge we're convinced we possess. We press a button and the television turns on; we apply pressure to a pedal and the car accelerates; we turn the sink handle and water trickles out; we enter a supermarket and walk out with our lunch already made; we remedy a headache with a pill. In the world of culture, a lot of what we "know" we never learned from direct, actual experience. Often we possess knowledge unconsciously from continuous routine and repetition. Or, we know it "through vicarious instruction," and, to quote Mander again, always and only thanks to "knowledge museums: schools, textbooks. We study to know. *What we know is what we have studied.* We know what

[6] Cf. J. Mander, *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television* (1978) (italics author's)

and secrets has gradually diminished, to the point where we are drowning in what Jacques Derrida called "the scandal of thought separated from life".[3]

"I don't believe in any thinking independent of reality,"[4] Bertolt Brecht once told Walter Benjamin and Herbert Ihering.

> Thought, [writes Raoul Vaneigem in his famous *Z*] was never free to know anything other than thought and abstract man, an empty form the individual does not enter unless he empties himself…A thought that excludes and denies life only progresses by denying and excluding itself.[5]

And yet a purely conceptual thought that negates and excludes life is exactly what establishes (and confers prestige upon) the lock step of a civilized ethic. We need look no further than at the way young children acquire knowledge in the modern world. In the best of cases, children are torn from direct experience—touch, smell, sound—they have known ever since they were growing in the womb, taken out of contact with their parents' bodies— with the earth, stones, grass, flowers—and told not to play in puddles or chase after animals or climb trees or somersault in the yard. Instead they are shut into an aseptic classroom where, bent over their desks, they learn to become tomorrow's citizens—immobilized and indoctrinated to intellectualize those very experiences their bodies have been denied. They *study* (rather than experience) the smell of flowers. They *study* (rather than feel) the temperature of the water. They *study* (rather than observe) the pliant force of trunks and branches.

[3] Cf. J. Derrida, *Writing and Difference* (1967)

[4] Cf. W. Benjamin, *On the Concept of History* (1966-1974)

[5] Cf. R. Vaneigem, *Adresse aux vivants sur la mort qui les gouverne et l'opportunité de s'en défaire* (1990)

no longer an end in itself—as was the rule assigned by God to humanity—but was explicitly oriented towards a concrete purpose—fulfilling the fantasies of the "superior" race.

Actually, it was only after modern scientific thought was established that the idea of controlling whatever exists in order to satisfy the needs of the strongest was elevated to a "secular" value and became a conscious and premeditated attempt. Fritjof Capra noted that at the dawn of history "people lived in small, cohesive communities and experienced nature in terms of organic relationships",[3] ie respecting as much as possible the balance among the different parts of the world (human or non-human). When approaching their environment, the goal of non-civilized men and women was "to understand the meaning and significance of things, rather than prediction and control".[4] They were fully immersed in this holistic dimension, thus managing to grasp every possible nuance of their sensual universe. As long as the Earth was considered a living creature, a "Mother", any act that could potentially damage her was unthinkable: "One does not readily slay a mother, dig into her entrails for gold or mutilate her body", Carolyn Merchant points out, giving voice to the world view of our primitive forebears.[5] Filled with this feeling of profound union with every natural element, the sensibility of non-domesticated peoples rejected violence toward the earth: "You ask me to plow the ground. Shall I take a knife and tear my mother's bosom?", wondered Smohalla, a Native American ghost-dance prophet of the Wanapum tribe, thus summing up the reasons of ancestral human resistance to cultivation.[6] If

[3] F. Capra, *The Turning Point: Science, Society, and the Rising Culture*, p. 33.

[4] Ibid.

[5] C. Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution*, p. 3.

[6] Quoted in J. Monney, *The Ghost-Dance religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890*, p. 721.

today the world is not an organic, living and amazing reality anymore, but a cold mathematical mechanism to be discovered and subdued to humanity's domination, we should thank the efforts of the main ideologues of modern scientific thought. Bacon, Galileo and Descartes were the tireless pioneers of this endeavor.

Francis Bacon (1561-1626), a pre-Enlightenment thinker credited as the father of modern science and forerunner of the industrial age, though underestimating the role of mathematics as a method of scientific investigation, laid the foundations of a knowledge based on the application of the experimental method to every known discipline, and set clear and factual goals for the study of natural phenomena. For him, the task of science was to investigate nature in order to know it objectively and to submit it entirely to human domination. "Bacon believed it possible to use man's rational faculties to gain 'objective knowledge' of God's order and by using that knowledge 'enlarge the bounds of human empire to the effecting of all things possible'. Using the scientific method, Bacon argued that nature could be 'forced out of her natural state and squeezed and molded'".[7] Bacon even called nature "a common little harlot [that] we must tame, squeeze, mold and shape".[8] In the heyday of the Inquisition, nature could not avoid a fate of oppression, and ended up serving the masters of the world. Nature, Merchant writes quoting Bacon, "must be 'bound into service' and made a 'slave', 'put in constraint' and 'molded' by the mechanical arts. The 'searchers and spies of nature' are to discover her plots and secrets".[9]

In his utopian novel *New Atlantis*, Bacon imagined a technological society ruled by a scientific elite, devoted to experi-

[7] J. Rifkin, *Beyond Beef*, p. 253.

[8] Quoted in A. Otchet, "Interview with Jeremy Rifkin: Fears of a Brave New World", in *The UNESCO Courier: A Window Open on the World*, 51, 9, Sept. 1998, p. 48.

[9] C. Merchant, *The Death of Nature*, p. 169.

nature. Culture, the ideological incarnation of such control, always entails sacrificing, subjugating and manipulating nature. Without culture, the domestication of the world would be inconceivable; without culture, there would be no agriculture.

The connection between the words *culture* and *cultivation* is all too obvious. Just as *cultivation* refers to the cultivation of the earth, ie tending soil in the hope it will bear fruit, *culture* implies an identical attitude toward the brain, ie "cultivating" one's intellect. Separated from the rest of the body, from the physical and emotional feelings that our entire organisms are capable of generating, the brain takes precedence and turns into a "factory of production." The intellect, like land, can be plowed and planted to yield the desired crop. The natural bond between the mind and body that men and women had enjoyed for millions of years was irrevocably broken by civilization.[2]

In a culturally saturated environment, the intellectualization of our senses gains in importance at the expense of our physical faculties. Direct experience, the kind we perceive via our senses which animates each of us and stimulates our emotions, feelings, moods, memories and expectations, winds up retreating into the background, while analytical, abstract thought that takes the fore. The more we interpret the world through culture (and not directly through nature), the more distance we put between ourselves and nature, hindering our ability to recognize its energy, sensuality, odors, tastes and song. Although the universe appears to fall under our intellectual domain, in reality it drifts farther and farther away from us; our understanding of nature's dynamics, laws, signs

[2] It is interesting to note how once again the separation of mind and body attributed to Cartesian ideas actually precedes the discoveries of the 16th-17th century scientific revolution. Just as Cartesian thought showed how the birth of agriculture led to a divide between human beings and the world, the split between the id/person's mind and body, while evolving out of the advent of culture, did not find a philosophical framework until the 17th century.

III. Emancipation from Abstract Knowledge

1. Culture as Programmatic Separation and Isolation

> *Trends in communications toward acts of symbolic representation have obstructed human beings' ability to directly experience one another socially, and alienated us from the rest of the natural world.*
> — Teresa Kintz

Reducing wilderness to a conceptual order based on symbols was the first step toward separating humans from everything else. Even before land cultivation caused a rift between humans and the planet, culture—with all its early forms (language, rituals, art) appearing at the end of the Upper Paleolithic—had long been "programmatically" chipping away at their union. In fact, besides the idea that "nature" represents a product of culture, there remains an unambiguous distinction between that which we call "nature" and that which we call "culture." "Culture," writes Zerzan, "requires the firm subjugation of instincts, freedom and sexuality. All dis-order must be banished, the elemental and spontaneous taken firmly in hand."[1] Education, order, law, bureaucracy, work, religion, science, economics and technology are all manifestations of culture and explicit expressions of human beings' control over

[1] Cf. J. Zerzan, *Future Primitive*, pg. 47.

mentation and investigation of nature with the sole purpose of establishing human domination over it. After all, what distinguished this philosopher of science, Lord Chancellor of England and champion of the king, was that, to him, knowledge could not be reduced to mere sophisms and theoretical quibbles and had to be practical in a modern sense. In short, Bacon split human reason from nature, for the first time in history at a conscious level. He thus conferred on reason the ability to subjugate nature. A nature which in the Renaissance was still thought of as an orderly whole (created by God), became with Francis Bacon a reality that was consciously "external" with regard to humanity and had to be reduced to a resource. According to Bacon, knowledge was not a sort of awed participation in the knowledge of what exists, but a concrete tool, necessary to establish the uncontested power of human beings over the world (*regnum hominis*, "kingdom of man"). So with Bacon, knowledge officially stopped being "knowledge" and consciously turned into "power".

From Bacon onwards, Adorno and Horkheimer wrote, scientific thought, both in the West and in the East, "aims to produce neither concepts nor images, nor the joy of understanding, but method",[10] And this "development of science as a methodology for manipulating nature", Merchant continues,[11], soon turned into a fearsome program; "Bacon's followers realized even more clearly than Bacon himself the connections between mechanics, the trades, middle-class commercial interests, and the domination of nature".[12] Hence, the attack on nature gradually lost all hesitation, and became the brazen expression of an acclaimed human hegemony over the world: "We can, if need be, ransack the whole globe", the English naturalist and theologian William Derham (1657-1735) declared without any re-

[10] T.W. Adorno, M. Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*. (1947), transl. by Edmund Jephcott, p. 2.
[11] C. Merchant, *The Death of Nature*, p. 186.
[12] Ibid., pp. 186-7.

serve, "penetrate into the bowels of the earth, descend to the bottom of the deep, travel to the farthest regions of this world, to acquire wealth, to increase our knowledge, or even only to please our eye and fancy".[13]

Galileo Galilei (1564-1642), contemporary of Francis Bacon, established the reign of mathematicized knowledge, assigning to Bacon's experimental method—which only relied on inductive observation—the dogmatic force of numerical science. Galileo believed that the "Book of Nature" is written in the language of mathematics and can only be read through it.[14] More concretely, Galileo thought that the essence of the world can only be expressed by the metric-quantitative aspects of matter, so students' attention must only focus on these "measurable" aspects. Any connection not based on these properties is simply a subjective projection which cannot possibly give us an *objective description of nature*; as such, it is irrelevant to knowledge. British psychiatrist Ronald Laing wrote about these premises in 1982, maintaining that with Galileo "out go sight, sound, taste, touch and smell and along with them has since gone aesthetics and ethical sensibility, values, quality, form; all feelings, motives, intentions, soul, conscience, spirit. Experience as such is cast out of the realm of scientific discourse".[15] As early as 1964, Mumford had described this Galilean expulsion of subjectivity from the realm of existence as a "crime"[16]—a crime identical, in reverse, to "the error of the early Christian Fathers who had suppressed any interest in the natural world in order to concentrate upon the fate of the human soul in eternity".[17]

[13] Quoted in Ibid., p. 249.

[14] See G. Galilei, "The Assayer" (1623), in *Discoveries and Opinions of Galileo*, trans. by Stillman Drake

[15] R.D. Laing, *The Voice of Experience* (1982), quoted in F. Capra, **The Turning Point**, p. 35.

[16] See L. Mumford, *The Pentagon of Power*

[17] Ibid., p. 57.

CULTURE = AN INITIATIC ORDER MANIPULATING AND DOMESTICATING PERCEPTION
(civilization versus sensuality)

> *The emphasis on the symbolic is a movement from direct experience into mediated experience in the form of language, art, number, time, etc. Symbolic culture filters our entire perception through formal and informal symbols. It's beyond just giving things names, but having an entire relationship to the world that comes through the lens of representation.*
> — From *Green Anarchy*
> "Against Civilization"

Part 2: The Primacy of Symbolic Culture *(A critique of culture)*

So with Galileo experience was turned into experiment, and only experiments qualified experiences. So experience lost its subjective connotation and became a revelation of certain, undisputed truths. Galileo made science a dogma. And although the ideological disagreement with the other absolute and monolithic holder of alleged truth—the Roman Church, with its truth revealed by God—would never grow into a polemic clash—Galileo's profound religious faith led him to bear all the drawbacks of this challenge—it was thanks to the work of the most famous Italian astronomer that mathematics was elevated to an unchallenged foundation of science, becoming its universal language. And while it would be the Enlightenment's task to launch a campaign against religion and to oust God from the altar of faith, replacing him with Science and Progress, Galileo's work—which had turned the system of knowledge into a "practice of exactitude"—made this (and not only this) endeavor possible. This way of looking at things—which was already so rationalist that direct observation of mechanical evidences assumes a primary role in its methodological revolution— would give way to the vision of the world as a Great Machine developed to its extreme consequences by René Descartes.

René Descartes (1596-1650) built up the third intellectual bulwark of the analysis that consecrated the mindset of domination as a pillar of civilized knowledge. Descartes simply drew the logical conclusions of his forerunners' ideas. If nature is separated from human knowledge and can be subjected to it, and if this separation/subjection stands up to a mathematical analysis that sustains it in terms of truth, then nature has no significance in itself—it is just raw matter serving human beings; a *thing* that human knowledge can freely reduce to its own instrument. In sum, only the human "ego" is a "subject", while nature is an "object" that can be used at will by humanity for the accomplishment of its goals.

The well-known Cartesian axiom *cogito ergo sum* ("I think, therefore I am") officially proclaims this dissociation: a human being, in that he is capable of picturing a reality separate from himself ("I think") is the only creature in the world that can adorn itself with the title of "subject" ("therefore I am"). The rest of the world is an *object*, which thinking beings can use to attain what they need. Summing this up in Jeremy Rifkin's words,[18] Descartes stripped nature of its inherent "aliveness, reducing… the creatures to mathematical and mechanical analogues", and even "described animals as 'soulless automata' whose movements were little different from those of the automated puppetry that danced upon the Strasbourg clock".

Thus, the separation between Human and Nature that civilization had brought about from its very beginning, became, with modern scientific thought, a conscious statement. With Descartes, the path that had led civilized humanity to affirm the ideology of human domination over a totally objectified world was completed. The "insane Cartesian project", as Clastres called it,[19] had clearly established roles and hierarchies, and the world was now ready to be scientifically used, exploited, and shaped; it was ready to be reduced to a ware commodity, capitalized and commercialized. In short: the world was ready to become a modern world—a world made of science without conscience.

2. The Rebellion Against the Rule of Science

Generally, when we think of science, we think about something universally valid, absolute, and objectively irreplaceable. We have been accustomed to perceive science as an integral

[18] J. Rifkin, *Beyond Beef*, p. 254.

[19] P. Clastres, *Society against the State*, http://www.primitivism.com/society-state.htm

the status symbols they have been fighting for a year long are suppressed or limited, up to the sheer nudity of people on the beach… Seen from an objective point of view, there is something bizarrely ironic in a trip of thousands kilometers, driving a car which cost tens of millions and boasts incredible comforts, just to sleep uncomfortably in a tent, eat canned food and spend a few days looking for seashells in a sandy cove".[48]

In few words, not everything is under the final control of civilization; not everything has been regimented by its power. Until the modern world completes its civilizing mission, putting even the stars in line, we can be sure that civilization's domesticating battle will not come to its end; until then, all free (and alive) individuals who want to stop the devastating civilization of the entire world will be able to do so by crying out their outrage.

[48] M. Vignodelli, *La civiltà contro l'uomo*, in: http://www.users.libero.it/michele.vignodelli/dapoalmi.html, p. 13.

unyielding nature. And there are free spirits, the souls of so many people who relentlessly fight against civilization's disciplined imprisonment and who, despite the blackmail of its forms of dependency (from work policies to money and technology), refuse the dominance of the civilized society's values—and although official statistics declare the opposite, these people are increasing, both in terms of consciousness and of proactive forces.

In this universe that civilization is trying to annihilate, there is still room for life. There is still room for us to be fascinated by life, to feel its atmosphere and its magical pulse. And there is still room for the endless manifestations of a direct relationship with what lives inside and outside us to prevail. The pure physiological desire—to love, to enjoy our life, to eat, to drink, to sleep, to cry and to joke—the need to lead a full existence—instead of wasting it by going shopping or devoting ourselves to fashionable glamour—the enchantment of the unknown, curiosity, sympathy, as well as expressions of merriness, embarrassment or pain, are still *genuine* manifestations of our inner self; they have not been completely smothered. The artificial planning of nature set up by techno-science has not conquered the world irreparably, and often our insight and our instinct still talk to us. Vignodelli grasps this brilliantly: even those who live in the coldest of "cities, however deeply influenced and hypnotized by the accomplishments of abstraction and tool construction, still find their greatest pleasures in the simplest and most ancestral activities—eating, making love, and taking part in feasts where they can laugh, dance, make faces and gossip. When they are on holiday, they get in their cars and, tearing themselves away for some days from the world of the most incredible and formidable artifacts, they look for forests and mountains or for the seaside, where they can relive their past searching for simple, basic activities like walking, climbing, or swimming in cold water; this often happens in an egalitarian context where

part of life, something without which we could understand nothing about ourselves and our environment. For civilization, science is the only way to comprehend reality, and, as a consequence, it is considered absolutely necessary. Thinking of science as a "problem of the world"—rather than as something that can solve the problems of the world— actually means making a huge effort for those who, like us, have been continually immersed in it from their very birth. Yet, the critique of science— meant as a way of accessing knowledge—belongs to human experience as much as the celebration of its claimed irreplaceability, and is well rooted in that "sensitive" thought for which the data of pure logic are not enough, in a vision that lives in the hearts, bodies and experiences of those who want to maintain an organic relationship with the whole world.

Far from being the only way to understand what exists, science is what makes us most distant from it. Science never submits knowledge to reality, but only to an idealized representation of reality derived from a cerebral method of investigation that bans senses, emotions, and feelings from its process. Medicine does not take care of persons, but of an abstract person, just as biology explores abstract nature, law rules over abstract litigations, and economics focuses on statistics. All that is alive, indefinite, unclassifiable and immeasurable does not attract the interest of science, which sees nature as "no more than a storehouse of raw materials for man's ingenuity", as Adam Smith used to repeat,[20] or as what is needed to "provide for man's ambitions" according to Malthus' teachings.[21]

We see science as something undisputed, absolute, and impartial. Though it's difficult to admit this, the set of organizational models adopted by science, its canons, categories, and general approach to reality are by no means absolute, or neu-

[20] As quoted in D. Worster, *Nature's Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas*, 2nd ed., p. 53.

[21] As quoted in Ibid.

tral. In fact, they are the very result of the ideology that generated and spread science, and which still supports it with its accredited authority. Science does not belong to the world, but aims at owning it; it does not take part in the world, but alienates it in order to subjugate it. In one word, science *is* not *in* the world, but *over* it, and every scientific field is a battlefield that must be conquered.

If we take a person and ask her what her first and second names are, inquiring about her parents' and siblings' identity, about her age, the amount of money she has in her bank account, and finally identifying her as a female subject who is tall, thin, white-skinned, and elegantly dressed, would we get to know her? Wouldn't we rather insert her into a preset framework that only allows us to develop a very shallow idea about her? How many serial killers have an absolutely unrecognizable semblance and behavior?

What we obtain when we claim to know a person whom we have just categorized through an analysis of "scientific" data is not proper knowledge, but a form of control. Beyond a bunch of abstract data, we don't know anything about her, and only believe the opposite because those data correspond to the standards of touchable (or untouchable) people—a very comforting vision.

Science, in short, does not aim at *comprehending* the word, but at *apprehending* it, and this hegemonic attitude is sufficient to explain the need of science to continuously reduce nature to a set of elements that must be separated and governed in isolation. Just as individuals must be isolated from each other—as well as from themselves and from their needs—in order to dominate them, the world must be stripped of its wholeness, violated in its integrity, and breached in its uniqueness in order to master the knowledge of it. Of course, the world will never be understood, but it will be firmly in our grip—we will dominate it. "Scientific specialization consists in this ability", philosopher

suppressed by the belligerent purposes of civilization. "I can also see something else", Kortright adds.[46]

> I can see millions of cracks in the sidewalk produced by the movement of the earth surface. The static nature of reinforced concrete is not compatible with the spontaneous movements of the Earth. Streets, sidewalks, buildings that seem so resistant will not stand up to the planet's evolutionary movement… Grass grows creeping into the cracked asphalt and keeps company to the trees that men would like to isolate. Mushrooms sprout from the cracked walls of flats, forcing people to interact with nature even in their little lonely boxes. Both mushrooms and weeds are great examples of the lack of human control over the natural world. Whatever chemical and toxic agents humans use, they will never get rid of these 'pests' abounding in our cities.[47]

If we see the civilized techno-world as a planned and neutralized island of unhappiness, nature's spirit of resistance is dear to us. Caught in a trap of egotism that numbs us with comforting certainties, we fail too often to realize that the world does not bend to our knowledge at all, nor to our arrogant belief of having dominated it completely. The living world that civilization is trying to kill has not yet been entirely suppressed. The wind is still blowing, uncontrolled and uncontrollable; the sun is still emitting its endless heat; the universe is still tirelessly moving, the bowels of the Earth still have their power to disrupt, and the chaotic, indomitable and borderless living waters of the oceans still have their eclectic force. There still exist wildlife, wild fruits, and the wild processes of an ever-

[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid.

role centralization, meritocracy, media conditioning—things will eventually get fixed on their own. But what we see in reality is that violence is increasing everywhere, impatience is spreading, and torment is worsening, and reaching those regions, countries and social classes that used to be been surrounded by wealth. The pills they sell to make us numb don't work anymore—they are not enough to get us to smile through clenched teeth or to distract us from our malaise in other ways. Inside this devitalized and constrained world, though remastered for digital supports, the air is becoming unbreathable.

Experiencing every day the devastating effects of a lifestyle which manipulates everything by default, that part of humanity which has considered itself so advanced as to proclaim itself creator of the destiny of the universe, has long lived with no future. As Chris Kortright soberly observes, "As I walk down the road, in this toxic asphalt jungle [San Francisco], with cars and people hurrying around me to work, to buy, to consume and to die, I feel estranged from the natural world. Trees are planted one after the other in small dirt spaces, surrounded by reinforced concrete and set in perfect rows, like any other thing in a city. In cities, everything is arranged in grids and lines, nothing is spontaneous and non linear. Every decision in the construction of this city is meant to contain the greatest number of people in the smallest space, offering them the greatest quantity of products to be consumed. Cities are the cement crust over what once was the beauty of the wild. Most of the planet's surface is covered by nearly identical crusts".[45]

However, if we ignore for a moment the pathological evidence of the modern world and carefully look at what is still alive, more or less hiding around us, it is easy to realize that there is also a universe which, whatever we may do, cannot be

[45] C. Kortright, *Essays Towards a New-Eco-Anarchism.*

Emanuele Severino said,[22] namely the ability "to abstract from the contexts and from the totality of reality. Things can be actually dominated only if they are isolated from their context", separated from one another and from the whole. "In modern science", the Italian academic concluded, "specialization, isolating a part of reality and tending to make it totally controllable, becomes an attitude which is methodically pursued. And isolation is radical".[23]

As though life could be reduced to a simple set of biologically categorized parts, science mechanically proceeds to distinguish, divide, set apart, isolate the living from itself; and our inability to enjoy a deep relationship with the dynamic processes of the universe is its clearest failure. The idea that the facts of life can be reduced to scientifically measurable phenomena, which can be reproduced as such based on rationally fixed parameters, does not consider life itself, which is by its nature impossible to grasp, free and unresponsive to any claim of submission to conceptual and symbolic categories. As Bakunin wrote in the nineteenth century, "Science comprehends the thought of the reality, not reality itself; the thought of life, not life. That is its limit… Upon this nature are based… its vital impotence and even its mischievous action whenever, through its official licensed representatives, it arrogantly claims the right to govern life".[24]

Having lost our power to understand reality, we are in the hands of the "wise", ie of those who only know the notion of reality, not reality itself, and base their power on this notion. Today they are called scientists, specialists, in the past they were clerics or, even before, sorcerers or shamans, but the effect is unchanging—what these "priests" of science profess to decode is not reality, but a purely theoretical representation of reality.

[22] E. Severino, *Il destino della tecnica*, p. 258.

[23] Ibid.

[24] M. Bakunin, *God and the State* (1871), Ch. 2, http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/bakunin/works/godstate/ch02.htm.

And as much credit, public reverence and authority they may enjoy, they will nevertheless be estranged from life by a simple fact—their belief that life is not the living life.

That indivisible whole that shelters inside and around us is ever more unknown to us. Thanks to science, which sets us further and further apart from the whole, leaving us at the mercy of those who professionally study it, we are estranged from ourselves and subdued to the power of specialists. Forced into such a dependency, we are asked to trust physicists, biologists, chemists, agronomists, engineers, and environmental scientists—to trust them, just as believers trust their priests. We entrust our faith to the expert and at the same time we believe that science is different from religion. We rely on science with pious worship, but do not grasp its transcendent character.

Especially in a Western world that apparently originated from progressive liberation from the clerical knowledge that had been forced on it for centuries, Science still seems "opposed" to Faith. Yet they both have a deep common root; religion, as a set of rules, beliefs, and rituals through which people express a status of dependence on the relevant divinity—and on the "specialists of the sacred" who mediate these relationships—set the ideological bases that led to the establishment of science: a set of rules, beliefs, and rituals that makes us dependent on the "specialists of the secular". "Religion is the mother of the sciences", Tobias Dantzig insisted, focusing on the heart of the matter.[25]

In fact, science relies on the same theoretical bases as magic, which chronologically preceded the advent of religion and was its necessary antecedent. James G. Frazer, one of the founders of anthropology, made it clear as early as 1890. Magic, he wrote,

> "assumes that in nature one event follows another necessarily and invariably without the intervention of any spiritual or personal agency. Thus its

[25] T. Dantzig, *Number: The Language of Science*, p. 241.

The system of knowledge-as-power is distancing us from nature and from our nature; it is distancing us from life and its advantages. And if this may be worthwhile for certain highly-paid white coats, the rest of us who are called to passively accept the effects has no other choice but to believe in Science—the consolation of a myth of false redemption. After all, believing in Science and suffering from it are just two sides of the same coin.

3. Will Civilization Eventually Manage to Put the Stars in Line?

The sublime wholeness of the universe is pervaded and invaded by that knowing and rationalistic way of looking at things which bans surprise, enchantment and the sensual dimension of existence, and fears the wild nature that resists its control—a reality which has not been categorized yet in the encyclopedic registers of the official academic knowledge or in the satellite TV schedules of nature-videos. In the civilized world, everything is order, form, structure; everything is measure, number, series, model, methodology; everything must be adjusted, arranged, organized, foreseen. Everything, in short, must be inscribed in a logic of regularity that is typical of a normalized reality that always displays a virtual setup in the attempt to exorcise the fear of chaos.

We see everywhere signs of intolerance towards the domesticated world; we see everywhere nature's unrestrainable opposition to the order that has been forced on her—we find it in our existential estrangement, in our bulimic race to well-being, in the daily extinction of living species; we find it in typhoons, in floods, in the melting of glaciers.

We may keep pretending that this is not true, that everything is perfect, that if we use even stricter methods of unaccountability—authority, representation, specialization,

has led us to rely on the alleged power of modernity's "products". In the implacable and actual civilized world, there is no room for the individual even in everyday existence, and we are led to harbor a precise and basic belief—in the advanced world there will always be someone who is more skilled than us in understanding our life and can take care of our health, security, conflicts, needs, and interests, of our ever narrower living space, of our relationships, and even of our freedom. "Without science", John Bernal rightly wrote more than fifty years ago, "civilization… would be unconceivable".[40]

The main character in this process that disempowers the individual, Science forces its domination onto us all. Promising to improve the understanding of nature in order to better subdue it to our will, it has subdued us all to its teachings. Deprived of the possibility of turning to our instinctual abilities, we wander aimlessly at the mercy of specialists' decisions and fees, and our trust in the obsession of grandeur of the magical-scientific thought, far from letting us understand nature, "has had the very opposite effect of making nature incomprehensible".[41] In Monod's words, "power founded on reason has failed in its attempt to find reason".[42]

It is "the world we should change, not 'nature'", the French ethnologist insisted, "it is the uniform and totalitarian world in which… civilization… tends to confine the human kind".[43] To ban the primacy of the mechanic, computing, logical-rational sphere from our living world means giving ourselves a new chance to try to "get to know this world once and for all in all its richness and universality, not just in order to know it, but to finally be able to *inhabit* it".[44]

[40] J.D. Bernal, *Science in History*, London, Watts, 1954, [p. 3 in Italian].
[41] M. Fukuoka, *The Natural Way of Farming*, p. 44.
[42] J. Monod, Vive l'ethnologie!, in R. Jaulin (ed.), *L'ethnocide à travers les Amériques*, Paris, Fayard, 1972.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid.

> fundamental conception is identical with that of modern science; underlying the whole system is a faith, implicit but real and firm, in the order and uniformity of nature. The magician does not doubt that the same causes will always produce the same effects,[26]

and the same can be said of the scientist (and of all of us who believe in science).

> Thus the analogy between the magical and the scientific conceptions of the world is close. In both of them the succession of events is assumed to be perfectly regular and certain, being determined by immutable laws, the operation of which can be foreseen and calculated precisely; the elements of caprice, of chance, and of accident are banished from the course of nature.[27]

The ideological force with which science claims today the power to establish itself as the only acceptable form of knowledge of the world is not opposed at all to the absolutism of religious dogmas. As the Italian Committee for the Control of Declarations on the Paranormal (C.i.c.a.p.) rightly maintains in its website, "discourses on pluralism in science only show a wide ignorance as to what is science. By its nature, science is not democratic. If there exist two contrasting positions on a certain issue, they cannot be considered equally legitimate and the choice cannot be entrusted to the public. In the scientific field just one position can be true… The existence of more than one science does not make sense. Science arose from the necessity of overcoming individual opinions, so there is only one science".[28]

[26] J.G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough* (1890), p. 49.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Quoted in C. Benatti, *Sanità obbligata, Diegaro di Cesena*, p. 13.

In a world where relationships are increasingly estranged from the actual context in which they take place, where form dominates over substance and arbitrary acts can turn into "revealed truths" whenever they are inflicted with the arrogance of brutality—whether military or ideological—there is no room left for amazement, for the unexpected, for surprises. Everything must be measured, calculated, foreseen. The truth derived from ever absolute, consistent, perfect numerical data—which can exactly answer any question and is totally deprived of the typical unpredictability of reality—must be inarguable, or else the entire artificial construct upon which our false knowledge system relies will be doomed to collapse.

Based on pure abstractions (eg numbers and mathematics), the system of knowledge-as-power does not introduce us into the context of the world, but divides us from it more than ever. Indeed, just like religion, it adopts this division as its ideological foundation and as the operating basis of its actions. Science, actually,

> assumes detachment. This is built into the very word "observation". To observe something is to perceive it while distancing oneself emotionally and physically, to have a one-way channel of 'information' moving from the observed thing to the self, which is defined as not a part of that thing. This death-based or mechanistic view is a religion, the dominant religion of our time. The method of science deals only with the quantitative. It does not admit values or emotions, or the way the air smells when it's starting to rain—or if it deals with these things, it does so by transforming them into numbers, by turning oneness with the smell of the rain into abstract preoccupation with the chemical formula for ozone, turning the way

"And so, stoic and unafraid, departed the last wild Indian of America. He closes a chapter in history. He looked upon us as sophisticated children—smart, but not wise. We knew many things, and much that is false. He knew nature, which is always true".[39]

Understanding of ourselves, of our body, of the natural environment where we live, are not part of our knowledge. We can learn by heart the names of the organs in the circulatory system, we can follow without mistakes the daily trend of the American currency, or explain to everybody how the latest graphics software works, but if somebody faints, we don't know what to do. Shall we leave her lying on the ground? Shall we put her feet in a raised position? How does a heart massage work? Would a "kiss of life" work better?

As we distance ourselves from the living world of direct experiences and get into the intellectualized world of numbers and books, we gradually loose every contact with our human nature. Our ability to listen is neutralized, destroying our ability to autonomously interpret our needs. Unable to look inside ourselves, we are at the mercy of external lures. Today, even the most personal, the dearest aspects of individual life are delegated to experts—sexuality is abandoned to therapists' and priests' prescriptions, or to videos with penetration professionals of all sorts; natural procreation is replaced by an ever more efficient and effective service of artificial insemination; child rearing is entrusted to the skills of teachers, professors, trainers, pediatricians, psychiatrists, video-entertainers and TV shows. Even burying a relative would be impossible without the paid mediation of a certified undertaker.

In a tragic scenario of dispossession, magical-scientific thought has made us unable to live, and this imprinting, whereby we always look outside of ourselves for a reference,

[39] Quoted in T. Kroeber, *Ishi in Two Worlds: A Biography of the Last Wild Indian in North America*, 248.

it makes you feel into the intellectual idea that emotions are only an illusion of firing neurons.[29]

Unaccustomed to understanding the nature of the "broadly changing phenomena of the universe", Fukuoka mused, the civilized human being "isolates these from nature and examines them… like dead tissue under a microscope".[30] Breaking down and assembling together, fragmenting and reconstructing, "from these processes of destruction and reconstruction arose the natural sciences".[31] But nature, the Japanese wise man went on, "is a living, organic whole that cannot be divided and subdivided. When it is separated into two complementary halves and these divided again into four, when research becomes fragmented and specialized, the unity of nature is lost".[32] In the same way as "the pieces of a broken mirror can never be reassembled into a mirror more perfect than the original",[33] fragmented into a multitude of specialized disciplines, the pieces of scientific knowledge can never be reassembled into an organic knowledge. What has been broken cannot be reconstructed as perfectly, and what can be understood through a single fragment that has been separated from its context may be misleading.

> Just as in the tale of the blind men and the elephant in which one blind man touches the elephant's trunk and believes it to be a snake and another touches one of the elephant's legs and calls it a tree, [civilized] man believes himself capable of knowing the whole of nature by touching

[29] *Green Anarchy* Collective, "What Is Green Anarchy?", p. 4.
[30] M. Fukuoka, *The Natural Way of Farming*, transl. by Frederic P. Metreaud, p. 70.
[31] Ibid., p. 39.
[32] Ibid., p. 40.
[33] Ibid., p. 58.

don't think that this may be just an "occasional" circumstance, belonging to the free life of these people and to their spontaneous affections.

In order to live in (and understand) nature, we don't need analytical (or moralistic) rules; nor are ideological interventions or factual manipulations required for nature to maintain its balance. Indeed, it is our interventions that often disrupt nature in irrecoverable ways. Let us think for example about how we are accustomed to look at ourselves and at the world—we believe that plants cannot live without human intervention, that childbirth competes with gynecologists, and that animals are the "subject matter" of zoology. In fact, plants had existed for billions of years before civilized humanity forced on them the production and reproduction cycles dictated by cultivation techniques—ploughing, weeding, pruning, watering, grafting, manuring… Humans had been born naturally for millions of years before medicine turned childbirth into a "condition" and enclosed pregnant women in aseptic clinics, forcing on them all the anxieties, drugs and even physical positions that are typical of a passively suffered medical experience. Likewise, animals had lived and procreated for a long time before human beings invented zoology, animal breeding, veterinary sciences and genetics.

Actually, we have observed the world from a scientific point of view until we have totally distanced ourselves from it and no longer feel ourselves part of it. Nature is not inside ourselves anymore, it is not a part of us. We may talk about it, watch it from outside, and even touch it or pierce it mercilessly, but we cannot feel it anymore—which is why we can keep piercing it mercilessly. This was acknowledged even by Saxton Pope, the University of California School of Medicine professor who 100 years ago treated the last Yahi Indian who had survived the extermination of his people. What the eminent scientist learned from the contacts with this Native is written in the eloquent words he wrote upon the Yahi's death:

> a part of it".[34] And he fails, because in nature the sum of all parts is never the whole. And when the science of diseases teaches us to conceive of our body not as an inseparable whole, but as a sum of parts which are perfectly separated from one another (the liver, heart, lungs, bones, skin, brain…), and submits this "abstract" sum of parts to the logical-rational investigation of an endless quantity of disciplines, fields, and academic branches that are just as separated from one another—to the point that a cardiological visit cannot reveal the presence of a serious stomach cancer—it is no wonder that it leads to disasters. Concluding with Fukuoka, a human being who has consecrated his life to science "believes that he has succeeded in knowing and understanding nature and its laws, but what he has understood is nothing more than the elephant as seen by the blind men.[35]

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That intellectualizing thought that sets people apart from their passion towards life and feelings, putting the living into boxes and distilling it in a lab, dismembering and reassembling it as though it was an engine with its spare parts, emblematically reflects the pathologic need to constantly *dominate* our world—a need uttered by civilization in all its manifestations. Spread in the modern West in the form of the so-called "analytic" (or "scientific") knowledge, and in the East as the "yin and yang" or "I Ching" philosophy, this intellectualizing thought has survived elsewhere in its most rudimentary forms of magic

[34] Ibid., p. 52.
[35] Ibid.

and clerical power. Wherever, it casts on the civilized world a narrow vision that is passed off as axiomatic.

The same separation of "social" knowledge into the various spheres of anthropology, ethnology, sociology, social psychology, etc, perfectly fits in this program of control and ideological manipulation. As Lévi-Strauss conceded, anthropology, as the "study of the human being", "reflects, on the epistemological level, a state of affairs in which one part of mankind treats the other as an object".[36] And having to treat the native as objects, Stanley Diamond reflects, the social scientist "may define himself as relatively free, but that is an illusion. For in order to objectify the other, one is, at the same time, compelled to objectify the self".[37] In fact, the American anthropologist concluded, "primitive peoples do not study man. It is unnecessary; the subject is given".[38]

A huge critical consciousness and a continuous and open-minded, sensitive reflection are therefore needed if we are to free ourselves from the paradigms imposed by this mentality, from the schematic patterns in which our mentality is ideologically constrained, and from their millennial scientific fossilization, and to find in publications a positive support to our understanding of the world. To us, the loving union of groups of young male teenagers sleeping hugged together are a certain sign of homosexuality, or of orgiastic or initiatory rites; but to the BaMbuti Pygmies, they are just a loving, habitual and relaxed way to keep company during the night and to enjoy life together. Likewise, if a gatherer woman who has lost her partner joins another couple becoming part of their family, we are immediately led to categorize this as a polygamous custom of that people, as a feminine ritual aimed at reproduction, or as an institutional requirement of patriarchal marriage; we

[36] Quoted in S. Diamond, *In Search of the Primitive: A Critique of Civilization*, p. 93.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid., p. 100.

lating machine that is modern humankind has become, paradoxically, "unnatural." Instinct included. The distortions of civilization startle. While intuition is gradually supplanted by a more comforting faith in mathematical probability, and our ability to "trust our gut" has given way to medical and statistical data, and inspiration is dismissed as art or other "frivolous" endeavors, subjective experience loses any "realistic" feature it may have once possessed. And yet, as Lorenz argued, everything that animals know about the external world is exact, without their having to appeal to scientific rationality or numerical data. Just as newborns, from their very conception, know exactly what they need to do (to be fed, for example, to play, to come toward the light) without being schooled.

Perfumes, tastes, sounds, vibrations—these things no longer tell us anything. We are no longer able to *feel inside* knowledge. Everything is limited to purely "external" and exterior perception. We can no longer identify with others, or the way the wind blows, or how the current is flowing. We are losing contact with our ability to understand the world with our bodies, with our emotions, by emulating life. Air, water, smells, sounds and food pass through us every day yet we regard them as if they bore no relation to us since they do not stimulate our minds (as far as science is concerned, they merely satisfy physiological functions). Physical contact, by now limited to handshakes and pleasantries, is even withdrawing from the bedroom, as it becomes more and more divorced from coupling for procreation or the exhilarating performance of its actors (the word actors is not unintentional). All that is not logical, that is not immaculately rational or scientifically coded either elicits our indifference or scares us to death.

We are so whipped by the machinations of reason that even our "notions of reality are the products of an artificially constructed symbol system, whose components have hardened into reifications or objectifications over time, as division of labor coalesced into domination of nature and domestication

have developed to represent reality. So, when these "means" break down or are in short supply, we lose our way.

The more attached we become to cultural symbols, the more nature appears unfamiliar to us, even as it lies underfoot; the more the world looks incomprehensible, the more we have to rely on culture and abstraction. In a world defined by culture, culture defines us, and the result of such dependence exposes the limitations of our modern, domesticated condition. We no longer know *who* we are, *what* we are, *where* we are. We know a lot of things, yet we know nothing. More and more often we talk of cultural "barriers" to overcome, "borders" to surmount. The need to "get beyond" our narrow viewpoint and retrace a path toward universal meaning is a sign that, if we want to stop the world from self-destructing, we need to explore alternate routes from the one we've been led down by culture.

IV. Symbolic Forms of Culture

1. The Symbolic Foundations of Social Control: ritual, art, myth, religions

> *No psychoanalyst would be likely to contradict Freud's famous threefold comparison of paranoia to philosophy, of compulsion neurosis to religion (ritual) and of hysteria to art.*
> — Géza Ròheim

The separation of individuals from nature poses a practical problem: what ties people together when they live in a world divided by culture? What bonds men and women in a "dog eat dog" world? If free creative expression is no longer the means by which individuals interact with their environment, what besides a sense of duty might unite them? A universe shattered by culture looks to culture to glue the pieces back together; in a world governed by symbols, people-objects that live in place-objects can only be united by a shared set of desires, thoughts and actions imposed upon them by symbols.

Ever since the rise of the first farming collectives, rituals, art, myth and religion aided in the process of cohesion made necessary by culture. As people grew farther removed from that cosmo-morphic union with the world, they showed a need for artificial forms of unity, which symbols were prepared to lavish on them. "Symbols are the instruments par excellence of social integration," writes the French sociologist Pierre Bour-

of Pennsylvania's Society for the Scientific Study of Sexuality, who surveyed 300 male responses to sexual stimulation (hooking them up to a machine rechristened Orgasmatron),[155] we can now be certain that sexual pleasure is not the effect of incomparable and ecstatic intimacy, but rather the mere function of the "man machine," recordable, quantifiable and, above all, scientifically proven.

From IQs to polygraphs to more common tactics to quantify opinion (tests, exams, questionnaires, public opinion polls, market research surveys, exit polls, consumer reports, data sharing), the modern world explains how the total domination of the number has drained humans of their ability to perceive how much occurs via sensibilities that are not exclusively logical rational. "We have devalued the singular human capacity to see things whole in all their psychic, emotional and moral dimensions, and we have replaced this with faith in the powers of technical calculation."[156]

The absoluteness of abstract analytic thought that intervenes in the living element, conferring (mathematical) certainty and credibility on every manifestation of being, is the irrefutable expression of the rigidity of a system of perception that allows for no divergence. For the modern person, pure reason, and the logical order that comes with it, is the single, *true*, universal way to understand the world. To paraphrase Konrad Lorenz, the mentality of the civilized world insists that all that is real can be weighed and measured or, at least, all that cannot be weighed or measured is, as a matter of principle, unknowable.[157] As a consequence, being unknowable is equivalent to being unnatural.

If we follow this notion to its logical conclusion, we find that everything that is still profoundly natural about the calcu-

[155] Cf. *Men's Health* (August 2006).
[156] Cf. N. Postman, *Technopoly*.
[157] Cf. K. Lorenz, *The Waning of Humaneness* (1987).

of subjugation,"[150] the contorted significance of a world completely mathematized has never lost sight of its main principle: the immutability of numerical data always triumphs over the mutability of nature. Spinoza insisted he wanted to "consider human actions and desires in exactly the same manner, as though I were concerned with lines, planes, and solids."[151] Leibniz was so convinced "that calculus was rooted in our intellect that, to resolve all disputes—whether scientific or moral, cultural or political—he proposed a method based on algebra: *calculemus*!"[152] In the 18th century, August Comte arrived at the thought that one could reduce all human behavior down to something rationally predictable and knowable in absolute terms; he would go on to invent "positive philosophy" (positivism) to access this knowledge and "social science" (sociology) to apply it to everyday life. Meanwhile, as early as the end of the 18th century they were quantifying the intelligence of students at Cambridge University using numerical data: the grade. A suggestion of William Farish, a professor at the university, the idea "that a quantitative value should be assigned to human thoughts was a major step toward constructing a mathematical concept of reality. If a number can be given to the quality of a thought, then a number can be given to the qualities of mercy, love, hate, beauty, creativity, intelligence, even sanity itself."[153]

In fact, a little over one hundred years ago, the founder of eugenics Francis Galton imagined it was possible to objectively measure female beauty, "invented a method for quantifying boredom (by counting the number of fidgets) and even proposed a statistical inquiry for determining the efficacy of prayer."[154] Today, thanks to Dr. William Hartman, president

[150] Cf. T. W. Adorno & M. Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment.*

[151] Cf. B. Spinoza, *The Ethics* (1883).

[152] Cf. G.O. Longo, *Homo Technologicus* (2001).

[153] Cf. N. Postman, *Technopoly* (1993).

[154] Ibid.

dieu, because "they make possible the consensus on the sense of the social world."[1] A world that has lost all sense seeks the value of unity in consensus.

RITUALS. In terms of social cohesion, the compelling nature of rites has proved capable of rousing people, evidence of which can be found in the way that people perceive rites as unavoidable duties. That is, rites establish the need for a code of social etiquette people must submit to. Furthermore, they relegate individuals to specific social roles (husband/wife, mother/father, soldier/shaman, priest/politician), thus lending order to the group by forcing individuals to follow the "institutional" rules of any given rite, as well as promulgating different statuses that depersonalize individuals and make it easier for those in power to wield control over the community.

According to Walter Goldschmidt, "the invention of ritual in the upper Paleolithic may well have been the keystone in the structure of culture that gave it its great impetus."[2] Essential to consolidating a sense of wholeness after culture had fractured it, rites prod people into accepting their subjugated state and serve, as has been said, a clear "political function" for integration. Ritual, after all, has never made a secret of its homogenizing properties. There is no part of a ritual that does not scream conformity. "[The] performance of rites serves to cultivate in the individual sentiments on whose existence the social order itself depends,"[3] wrote English ethnologist Radcliffe Brown in 1952. Edmund Leach, Audrey Richards, Victor Turner, Raymond Firth and others have expressed the same sentiment in different words. Rituals inevitably stir up feelings of loyalty, devotion, and the conscious or subconscious acceptance of the institutional order the rite is meant to celebrate. By fixing the

[1] Cf. Pierre Bourdieu, *The Language of Symbolic Power* (1977).

[2] Cf. W. Goldschmidt, *The Human Career: The Self in the Symbolic World* (1990).

[3] Cf. A.R. Radcliffe Brown, *Structure and Function in Primitive Society* (1965).

terms of a deep-rooted consonance between individual desire and public morale, they manifest the ideological imperative of adaptation.

Official celebrations function in such a logic-controlled way that the ultimate aim is to "institutionally recover" all forms of dissent, even when such celebrations assume an apparently revolutionary form, as in "rituals of rebellion." Enacted to publicly recognize the very social and moral order that they appear, at first sight, to subvert, rituals of rebellion prevent all possible "deviations" from the hierarchy of values set up by the establishment. In Europe, the best-known example of such rites is without a doubt Carnival.

Initially conceived of as a time for uninhibited, public displays of joy before the obsequious, penitent behavior that typifies Lent, Carnival draws up rules—precisely because it's a ritual—for permissible protest. As has been noted, the buffoonery, confusion and disobedience of the parade actually further perpetuate the official acknowledgment of order that pervades non-Carnival time. The temporary disorder of Carnival not only anticipates the time for order (represented by Lent), it also restores that order; Carnival merely represents a necessary chapter for order to be more deeply accepted. Anything goes during Carnival! Or rather: anything goes *only* during Carnival.

Borne out of individual frustration and the repression of people's natural propensities, civilization relies on such artificial respites in order to contain the aggression that normally results from discipline. Rituals of rebellion are one means of producing this *indispensable lightening*. From nocturnal celebrations (think Halloween) to April Fools' (originally a day that completely upset authority by allowing children to play "all kinds of tricks…on the adults, who had to accept them in good humor"[4]) to New Year's Eve (which traditionally heralded such

[4] Cf. B. Bettelheim, *A Good Enough Parent* (1988).

6. From Numerical Absolutism to the Absolutism of Reason: Abstract Analytic Thought as Dogma

> *When we tell one another to "be reasonable," to "talk sense," to "get down to brass tacks," to "keep one's feet on the ground," to "stick to the facts," to "be realistic," we mean that one should avoid talking about one's "inner" feelings and look at the world rather in the way an engineer looks at a construction project or a physicist views the behavior of atomic particles.*
> — Theodore Roszak

Accounting is the same system that founded the principles of logical rational thought that have absorbed us since the outset of civilization. That utilitarian attitude which has been programmed into our brains, which has suffocated our creative afflatus and become the sole justification for thinking, was born with mathematics and its theories of measuring and controlling. Cold and calculating are the most common adjectives to describe rational thought, and they are valued above sentiment. The trajectory of a vibrant humanity that has strayed into the icy world of calculation and interests, begins with the number, which imposes principles of truth from within us and intentionally gives rise to the quantitative disparities (social, economic, intellectual) without. To bear iron clad absolutes from the "interior" of perception to the "exterior" of relation is, in fact, the obvious aim of a system that no longer seeks to communicate; all it does is count and exact.

As regards the proclamations of Adorno and Horkheimer, for whom "[r]eason is the organ of calculation [that] recognizes no function other than the preparation of the object from mere sensory material in order to make it the material

beyond; the same can be said for the French *très*, "very," and *trois*, three."[147]

If we were to check our usual utilitarian approach to things for a moment, it would not be hard to see why a life—once rid of the need for control—places little value in numbers. We would understand the number "one" (ie, singularity), the number "two" (ie, duality) and the number "three" (ie, plurality), but any number above these is worth the same, since the difference between 7 and 9 or 14 and 66 can only have relevance for those who seek to reduce the world to measurable phenomena. After all, Mario Pei's studies have shown that in the life of primitive people numbers have little importance: "In the language of the Andaman Islands, there are numerals only for one and two. Further numerals up to nine are indicated by raising the required number of fingers, ten by showing both hands with the word 'all.' No counting is possible over ten."[148]

Those convinced that these populations have not developed a numerical system simply because they don't need to count, and that, if they lived in the civilized world they would count just as we do, have grasped the purely cultural (not natural) significance attached to the ideology of numbers. Probably, where an authentic connection to nature and its (human and inhuman) elements has been preserved, counting isn't necessary. As Hallowell remarks, if a member of the Saulteaux tribe were asked how many babies s/he had, s/he would never answer with a number, but by reciting the children's names.[149]

[147] Cf. In T. Dantzig, *Number: The Language of Science*.

[148] Cf. M. Pei, *The Story of Language*.

[149] Cf. A. I. Hallowell, "Temporal Orientation in Western Civilization and in a Preliterate Society" (1937). In C. Hallpike, *Foundations of Primitive Thought*.

a break from the cosmic-political order of the old time cycle as to allow for laws to be reversed or sovereigns to be jeered at and taunted), the calendar of the modern world is constellated with similar "relief valves." Just like calendars in the ancient world. Dionysian festivals in Greece, for example, were understood to celebrate chaos against (political and social) order in the world; Athenian Kronia festivals consisted of rites and carnivalesque parties that evoked the lost paradise of Cronus; Ancient Roman Saturnalia were ceremonies for the temporary suspension of order (during which masters might even serve their slaves[5]); the Feast of Fools,[6] observed in Europe until the 18th Century, gave people license to mock leaders (especially religious leaders) and allowed them to act out after a year of repression under the rigid social and moral code. Jewish culture also has its rituals of rebellion, the Festival of Purim being perhaps the most significant example.[7]

Such localized, planned ceremonies for people to release their frustration are popular among populations arising from the agricultural "revolution," such as Pueblo Natives' rituals along the Rio Grande involving clowns or Women's Festivals (which, in various societies, sees the inversion of masculine rule once a year) or the Incwala (a "first fruits" ceremony observed by the Swazi people). In the words of Peter Farb, who has studied such phenomena for a long time, rituals organized to counter conventional behavior "release the audience emotionally by permitting it to tread forbidden ground, without the

[5] It is interesting to note that during the feasts of Saturnalia (December 17-23 on the ancient Roman calendar) Zeus, the god of order, ceded all authority, and Saturn, in whose honor the festival is held, was believed to represent primitiveness, or nature before it was shackled by culture.

[6] In England, Henry VIII formally abolished the Feast of Fools in 1541, but the feast continued to be observed in France and elsewhere at least until the French Revolution. Cf. J.G. Bourke, *Scatalogic Rites of all Nations*.

[7] In *Des divinités génératrices*, Jacques-Antoine Dulaure provides a complete account of this pagan festival and describes the irreverence of the rite. Bourke also cites it in *Scatalogic Rites of all Nations*.

usual consequences."[8] However, as Farb concludes, such deviations only serve to underscore how well those present at the ceremony know the *proper* way to behave.

Vittorio Lanternari, an ethnologist and religious historian, discovered that rites involving orgies, partner swapping and group masturbation had an analogous outcome. Organized licentiousness "'backwardly' builds on and ratifies or counterverifies the institution of family. An orgy is the basis and condition of its exact cultural opposite, a normal marriage."[9]

While they aspire to "managing" the violent effects produced by an unbearably disciplined life, rituals of rebellion actually protect the social order from true subversion. For all its sacrilegious revelry, sexual debauchery, obscenity and profanity, The Feast of Fools, states John Brand in *Popular Antiquities,* "had its designed effect, and contributed perhaps more to the extermination of these heathens than all the collateral aids of fire and swords, neither of which were spared in the persecution of them."[10]

The artificial code rituals succeed in searing into our brains ultimately ends up making us feel we possess things we cannot possess, just as today we feel we possess a national identity, a home team, a currency, a Ferrari, and so on. Whether rebellious or conventional, rituals always have the same goal: to tout the established order and ensure its acceptance. It is no coincidence that in today's world everything tends to be rigidly structured, starting with school and work schedules. Ritualizing the obligatory entrance into the modern world means making sacrifice familiar, predictable, normal. It means planting it into our psyche as if it were a given fact.

[8] Cf. P. Farb, *Man's Rise to Civilization: the Cultural Ascent of the Indians of North America* (1978).

[9] Cf. V. Lanternari, *La grande festa. Vita ritual e sistemi di produzione nelle società tradizionali* (1959).

[10] Cf. J. Brand, *Popular Antiquities* (1872).

Obviously, they are not too stupid to count further; they simply have a different relationship with the world."[142] The act of counting, in this case, is felt to be an integral part of the process of domestication, and domination an act teeming with sad portents. Dominating means, in fact, turning someone into some*thing*. Due in part to this widespread notion, many pre-Neolithic communities are estranged from number systems. Various "anthropological studies on primitive peoples corroborate" the fact that many groups "are almost completely deprived of all perception of number. Such is the case among numerous tribes in Australia, the South Sea Islands, South America, and Africa." One author of "extensive [studies] of primitive Australia, holds that but few of the natives are able to discern four…The Bushmen of South Africa have no number words beyond one, two and many."[143] Exactly like the Hadza of Tanzania, whose language has no terms for numbers higher than three or four.[144] Referring to the field studies of Spix and Martiu, the founder of Britain's school of anthropology Edward B. Tylor also recorded how the low tribes of Brazil "commonly count by their finger joints, so up to three only."[145] By the same token, Swedish linguist John Sören Pettersson, referencing the works of Dagmar Neuman, Jean Paul Fischer and George Ifrah, remarked that if one were to look at the history of numerical notation and so-called primitives around the world, we would realize that counting over three is by no means a given.[146] Even "European languages bear traces of such early limitations. The English *thrice*, just like the Latin *ter*, has the double meaning: three times, and many. There is a plausible connection between the Latin *tres*, three, and *trans*,

[142] Ibid.

[143] Cf. T. Dantzig, *Number: The Language of Science* (1930).

[144] Cf. M. Finkel, "The Hadza".

[145] Cf. E. B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture* (1871).

[146] Cf. J. S. Pettersson, *Numerical Notation* (1996).

came to full fruition, going so far as to unveil math's imperative dimension. Pythagoras (6th century BC), considered the godfather of Greek mathematics and the founder of an initiatic school, asserted that numbers are the key to understanding the universe and therefore, the tool to taming the universe. Pythagoreans, as members of a school, believed that reality was structured mathematically, that it could be broken down into numbers, or rather purely theoretical relations that could be calculated. According to one Pythagorean text, "Number is the guide and master of human thought. Without its power everything would remain obscure and confused."[139] In fact, the power of the number quickly reveals its striking perceptive power. Only three centuries after Pythagoras, Euclid (3rd century BC) "developed geometry—literally, 'land measuring'—to measure fields for reasons of ownership, taxation and slave labor."[140]

Just as religion created a class of specialists dedicated to putting new values into practice (shamans, oracles, priests), just as writing gave rise to a caste of experts that served under the emperors and monarchs of the time (scribes, scriveners, amanuenses), the art of calculation produced a class of "computational professionals" who, it goes without saying, worked for the ruling elite.[141] Mathematicians, astronomers, treasurers, accountants, bookkeepers, government functionaries, legal executors set down the principles of the division of labor that paved the road for humanity to distinguish between chosen workers and privileged thinkers, multiplied perfectly in the mathematized world of taxes, property disputes, territorial control and loan sharking.

Yet contrary to popular belief "[n]ot all peoples use number systems. The Yanomamo, for example, do not count past two.

[139] Cf. E. Cassirer, *An Essay on Man.*

[140] Cf. J. Zerzan, *Running on Emptiness: the Pathology of Civilization.*

[141] One famous example is the work *Archimedes* (287-212 B.C) did for Hiero II of Syracuse.

ART. In its most intimate manifestations, art gives substance to the oldest ceremonial models; painting, music, chants, mystical hymns, etc, are the primogenitors that led to humanity's distancing itself from the real world in an attempt to unify feelings and values for other members of the tribe. Without going too far back in time, we can observe how Confucian philosophy considered music and rituals "as means for the establishment and preservation of the social order, and regarded as superior to laws and punishments as means to this end."[11] As stated in the *Yüeh Chi* (the first section of the *Book of Rites*), "the end to which ceremonies, music, punishments and laws conduct is one; they are the instruments by which the minds of the people are assimilated and good order in government is made to appear."[12] Art, then, is not only the means of esthetic expression to instill in us the wonder of the natural world that no longer instills wonder in us; it is also, as John Zerzan points out

> a necessary device for holding together a community based on the first symptoms of unequal life. Tolstoy's statement that "art is a means of union among men, joining them together in the same feeling," elucidates art's contribution to social cohesion at the dawn of culture… As the need for solidarity accelerated, so did the need for ceremony; art also played a role in its mnemonic function. Art, with myth closely following, served as the semblance of real memory. In the recesses of the caves, earliest indoctrination proceeded via the paintings and other symbols, intended to inscribe rules in depersonalized, collective memory.[13]

[11] Cf. A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, *Structure and Function in Primitive Society.*

[12] As cited in Ibid.

[13] Cf. J. Zerzan, "The Case Against Art".

In the present day, which has seen not only the depersonalization of collective memory but of the nature of men and women itself, art's social "evangelical" role has become all the more glaring because it assumes the function of an irreplaceable entity that the Situationists have already criticized with fierce acumen. Art is, at bottom, a device for prettifying the world, or rather, for rendering the inhuman world of humans "more humane."

MYTH. As with art, so with the "myth" that holds art up as the ideal form of representation and fulfills that ideal. When the Polish ethnologist Bronislaw Malinowski attempts to clarify the function of myth by calling it "a story that revives original reality," and whose aim is therefore to provide an ideological response "to moral aspirations, to constraints and imperatives of social order," what he is alluding to is the institutional objective of "unification."[14] "In fact, he goes on to explain that "myth plays an indispensable function: it expresses, constructs and encodes belief; it safeguards the moral principles and imposes them."[15]

Like art, religion, epic history and nationalism, myth manufactures a sense of belonging, a stratagem for social control. In fact, through the repetition of mythological events, events themselves turn into absolute "truths." Therefore, given its apodictic perspective, myth makes everything that exists universal. It makes it categorical and inevitable, starting with social order and its attitude of dominion. "Myths," as Eliade reminds us, "narrate not only the origin of the World…but also all the primordial events in consequence of which man became what he is today—mortal, sexed, organized in a society, obliged to work in order to live, and working in accordance with certain rules."[16] Via the custodians of mythological

[14] Cf. B. Malinowski, *Myth in Primitive Psychology* (1926).

[15] Ibid.

[16] Cf. M. Eliade, *Myth and Reality* (1975).

the use of mathematics was developed in order to facilitate business affairs. The ancient system of bookkeeping practiced in Mesopotamia from 8000 to 4000 BC was closely linked to commerce and trade. Among the Sumerians, "the first mathematical computations appeared, between 3500 and 3000 BC, in the form of inventories, deeds of sale, contracts, and the attendant unit prices, units purchased, interest payments, etc."[135] In Egypt, the science of numbers, assuming the physiognomy of rudimentary measurements of the earth, arose from "the requirements of political economy."[136]

As it became more and more clear that mathematics served the purposes of the bureaucratic system in early societies with economic hierarchies, commerce, with the charting of mercantile routes, helped propagate this model along with its incumbent features: numbers, calculation and measurement. "In Babylon, merchant-mathematicians contrived a comprehensive arithmetic between 3000 and 2500 BC, which system 'was fully articulated as an abstract computational science by about 2000 BC'"[137] In India, records show that the country was making use of calculation by the 3rd millennium BC, having perfected sophisticated credit and commercial systems. According to one study, "Measurements were principally based on a decimal system, reminding one of the fact that the decimal numerals we use today came from India."[138] Furthermore, notions of "simple math" made it possible to construct altars and demarcate holy lands. In Ancient Greece, the cradle of classic science, the process of abstract numerical studies

"There is little doubt that [numerical accounts] originated in man's desire to keep a record of his flocks and other goods." Cf. T. Dantzig, *Number, The Language of Science.*

[135] Cf. J. Zerzan, *Number: Its Origin and Evolution.*

[136] Ibid.

[137] Ibid. Cross-Reference: C.J. Brainerd, *The Origin of the Number Concept* (1973).

[138] Cf. G. Feuerstein et. al, *In Search of the Cradle of Civilization: New Light on Ancient India* (1995).

> To subject the individual to majority decision through the fact that others—not superior, but equal—hold a different opinion is not as natural as it may appear to us today. It is unknown in ancient German law, which states that whoever does not agree with the decision of the community is not bound by it; outvoting did not exist in the tribal councils of the Iroquois, in the Cortes of Aragon up to the sixteenth century, or in the parliament of Poland and other communities; decisions that were not unanimous were not valid. The principle that the minority has to conform to the majority indicates that the absolute or qualitative value of the individual voice is reduced to an entity of purely quantitative significance.[133]

In the world of numbers, everything must be translated into numbers, even convictions, ways of seeing things, motivations that lead us to express an opinion.

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Numbers have ushered humankind into the symbolic, unreal, and dogmatically intellectual realm of civilization, a realm so artificial that it requires formal order to appear understandable. Numbers, like art, religion and language, seem capable of guaranteeing this order, redefining, in the guise of intellectual control, a reality that is naturally wild, free, erratic. Bryan Morgan, Tobias Dantzig and others have referred to this process, explaining that "'man's first use for a number system' was certainly as a control of domesticated flock animals, as wild creatures became products to be harvested.)"[134] Later,

[133] Cf. G. Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money* (1978).

[134] Cf. B. Morgan, *Men and Discoveries in Mathematics* (1972). As cited in: J. Zerzan, *Number: Its Origin and Evolution.* According to Tobias Dantzig,

knowledge (shamans, witch-doctors, medicine men, mediums, priests, prophets), the world sends the message that dominion and supremacy *have always existed and will never change*, and that this order of things is actually the best method for protecting humanity from what it already perceives as a malevolent and threatening nature.

Cassirer, working with the theories of Durkheim and the school of French sociology, also had occasion to highlight the homogenizing function of myth. "Not nature but society is the true model of myth," he writes, "for all its fundamental motives are projections of man's social life,"[17] above all his projections of civilized relations, which means a progressively more hostile attitude toward the outside world.

RELIGION. The kind of social homogenization that myth achieves through the special effects of storytelling (ie, the same methods as art) religion attains by means of terror. Nature, violently detached from the individual since the origins of culture, reappears in the lineaments of an anthropomorphic God to punish those who caused the split—expelling Adam and Eve from Eden and creating toil, suffering, hardship, disgrace, war. Creating, in a word, civilization. In the face of such misfortune, humans have no recourse but to try to stitch up the wound by way of penitence, prayer, and sacrifice, attempts at placating the pestilent fury of Nature (first a Goddess, then a God). And the more vicious these acts of immolation, the closer they will come to relieving individuals of responsibility (since everything gets placed onto the scale of sacrifice), automatically clearing the conscience of those who are faithful and assuring them that they are on the right side. "Abraham!" cries out God, "Take now your son, your only son whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah; and offer him there as a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of."[18] On

[17] Cf. E. Cassirer, *An Essay on Man.*

[18] CF. *The King James Bible*, "Genesis 22:1-22:2".

those desolate shores where a believer can shirk responsibility, he might go so far as to accept slaughtering his own child to please a higher power.

Having fallen into the vortex of culture, humans end up turning to culture to find meaning in their lives. And when this "superior reason" forces its subjects to violently mutilate themselves, physically or psychologically, they have no option but to acquiesce. Bodily mutilation (amputation, disfigurement, self-flagellation, sexual abstinence) that accompanies and exacerbates spiritual mutilation (subservience, reverence, conformism, depersonalization) completes the symbolic distancing between the self and the world, and in return for their loss (self-abnegation, submission, personal sacrifice) they are awarded a sense of belonging to a group, but a group that is not centered around relationships, common experience or affection, but rather on rules to be followed. Religion, like myth, consecrates these mutilations by definitively subjugating the faithful; like rituals, it builds an insurmountable border around its subjects; like art, it binds its subject to others possessed by the same "feeling." In a universe completely shorn of primordial unity, religion "contributed to a common symbolic grammar needed by the new social order and its fissures and anxieties. The word is based on the Latin 'religare,' to tie or bind, and a Greek verbal stem denoting attentiveness to ritual, faithfulness to rules."[19]

When life advances agreeably and of its own accord, there is no need for imposing faithfulness to rules. Communities closest to the land do not worship divinities, follow cults or profess religious faith. For the Hadza, as Michael Finkel discovered, "There is not much room…for mysticism, for spirits, for pondering the unknown. There is no specific belief in an afterlife—every Hadza I spoke with said he had no idea what might happen after he died. There are no Hadza priests,

[19] Cf. J. Zerzan, *Running on Emptiness: The Failure of Symbolic Thought.*

The human community that came out of the agricultural revolution wound up becoming a set model that towers not only over nature but over the individual as well. Deprived of his uniqueness, the civilized individual cannot justify his importance as a subjective entity, but rather sees himself as a classified and quantified element, as a numbered cog in the great Social Machine.

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By now life has become a constant tally, and as we do our counting we more firmly participate in the mechanized world we've built. We count the calories we eat, the days until that longed for vacation, years, money, or the score our team needs to win the title. Faced with uncertainty, we rely on calculations of probability. If we happen to balance our checkbook, we calculate debit and credit. Even in figurative language, counting is a customary means of describing how things stand. If we place our trust in someone, we *count* on him. If something appears relevant to us, we take it into *account*. And as we evaluate the pros and cons of a situation, we always know how to *do the math*.

The principle of "majority rule" that governs democratic societies falls into step with this pattern of pure accounting. The logic behind the (majority) vote, at this point the most common practice of gauging opinion everywhere in the world, serves no other purpose than to transform individual human expressions into group decisions using objective and static data subject to a count. Debating, consulting, casting doubt, these are considered distracting practices compared with the mathematical calculation for what is right. And "being in the right" has become the effect of strength in numbers. More votes = more right. George Simmel, a leading exponent of bourgeois sociological thought in the early 20th century, courageously denounced the progressive decline of the meaning of collective participation to a mere administrative-accounting practice.

is made up of a generic number of soldiers. A nation is not formed by individuals (not even Ali, Ah Kow, and Ramasamy), it is formed by a generic number of inhabitants. The same goes for members of a political party, worshippers of a sect, the class of '68.

Only the civilized world can hold the bureaucratic method up as a model. Erich Fromm described the system as "(a) administer[ing] human beings as if they were things and (b) administer[ing] things in quantitative rather than qualitative terms, in order to make quantification easier and cheaper."[131] Underscoring the iciness of such a reductive existence, the exponent of the Frankfurt School continues:

> The bureaucratic method is controlled by statistical data: the bureaucrats base their decisions on fixed rules arrived at from statistical data, rather than on response to the living beings who stand before them…Bureaucrats fear personal responsibility and seek refuge behind their rules; their security and pride lie in their loyalty to rules, not in their loyalty to the laws of the human heart.

The overwhelming, indefatigable mechanism of civilization is, at bottom, a continuous and jagged path toward the total bureaucratization of life. Far from the "laws of the heart," civilization can in no way lose itself in the details, uphold nuance, pause to make distinctions, consider everyone, keep track of individuals or value individual contributions, because what counts is always and only the final result, the universal principle, general data, collective interest. In Francois Simiand's terrifying prediction at the dawn of sociology, he writes: "Eliminate the individual, to study the social."[132]

[131] Cf. E. Fromm, *To Have or To Be?*

[132] Cf. F. Simian, *Méthode historique et science sociale. Etude critique d'après les ouvrages récents de M. Lacombe et de M. Seignobos* (1903).

shaman or medicine men."[20] Exactly like the Veddas in Sri Lanka, the Tasmanians in Australia, the Fore people in New Guinea, the Amazonian Hup people, the Zo'è of Brazil, the Birhor tribes in India, the Tasaday in the Philippines, the Shompen that inhabit the Nicobar islands, the Andamanese, the Mbuti Pygmies, the !Kung San, the Yamanas (referred to as "atheists") and the numerous other populations, living or extinct, that never needed to invent stories to lend meaning to their lives.

As a matter of fact, primitive people do not believe in an omnipresent, omniscient, eternal and perfect supreme being who created the universe and whom they should worship obediently. Nor are they enticed by the appeals of those who claim to be representatives, intermediaries, emissaries or simple mouthpieces of such an abstract entity. Primitive people far more willingly enjoy a profound rapport with all that exists, interacting with the forces of nature, which they need not fear. On the contrary, they consider nature their protector and equal. Primitive communities love nature—they see no point in venerating it like a terrifying Deity. They thank Mother Earth but are not forced to appease her, or captivate her benevolence, or woo her with prayers to win her favor. Unlike any religious credo, in fact, their love for nature is not rooted in "faith" but "trust." This is not just a difference of semantics. Faith and trust emblematically reveal the true contrast between authority and freedom. Being free means to have trust, not faith. Trust is something we build with others, on an equal footing, with mutual regard, through give-and-take. Faith is the exact opposite. It is based on inequality, subordination, fear (the fear of God) and noncommunication.

Faith is never a path but a direction, a "zip code," a conduit. Where trust is seeing, faith is blind. Where trust explores, faith implores. Where trust comprehends, faith reprimands. "No one

[20] Cf. M. Finkel, "The Hadza".

should *believe*," says Luce Irigaray. "This psychic and sociological phenomenon generates dangerous artificial powers. Belief destroys identity and responsibility and goes against what experience teaches."[21]

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Thinking of culture as a lens on life is the same as thinking of life as an exercise in indoctrination. Culture is a lens through which to view culture, not life. And ever since culture stripped us of spontaneity, common sense, and an intuitive empathy with the world, we no longer grasp life's pleasures through the lives we lead. In fact, life's pleasures no longer even define us as people. Not only because we have lost the ability to enjoy our existence directly, but because we can no longer recognize such empathy, not even in those who have retained it (or in those who have yet to be instructed to give it up), whether they be wild animals, trees, uncivilized adults or young children.

Examining the "cultural" point of view with which she tried to interpret the dance of hunter-gatherers and attribute a propitiatory meaning to it that does not exist, Susanne Langer assays our bewilderment when it comes to understanding what it means to take pleasure in contact with the earth, with life, with nature.

> White observers of Indian rain-dances, [she writes,] have often commented on the fact that in an extraordinary number of instances the downpour really 'results.' Others, of a more cynical turn, remark that the leaders of the dance know the weather so well that they time their dance to meet its approaching changes and simulate 'rain-making.'[22]

[21] Cf. L. Irigaray, *Je, Tu, Nous: Toward a Culture of Difference* (1992).

[22] Cf. S. Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of*

ing borderlines, property laws or hierarchies, numbers become suddenly in demand. In the same vein, feelings, desires and delights have no compulsion to measure. Businesses do.

In the case of a civilization such as ours, based entirely as it is on formal relations instead of animated substantive relations, numbers (and the dull relations they prompt) are king. It is much more efficient to deal with numbers than it is to deal with people in the flesh, and examples of this continuous confinement to the impersonal are the essence of civil life, or what we call bureaucracy. Certainly it is much more practical to tax a taxpayer number than it is to personally convince everyone to pay into an institution founded on privilege and aimed at protecting the interests of those in power; it is without a doubt more practical to ticket a license plate number than to confront a driver about how he handles his car;[130] it's even easier to kill a number. This explains why those deported to Nazi concentration camps were tattooed. When the time came to execute a prisoner, the victim was a number, not an individual.

If superimposing a fictitious name onto someone detracts from that person's uniqueness, transforming someone into a number takes this process of standardization a step further. It denies someone even that fictitious identity in favor of absolute depersonalization. Naming someone "Lorenzo" means, in a way, to confuse that person with the thousands of others with the same name. But Lorenzo will always be *that* Lorenzo. On the other hand, turn Lorenzo into one of many voters for a certain elected official, or one of the millions of Italians on the social security list, and Lorenzo vanishes altogether. The numerical mindset plunges us into this depersonalized and arid universe on a daily basis. A military contingent is not made up of certain individuals (not even Tom, Dick and Harry), it

[130] NB: In Italy traffic violations are monitored by roadside camera systems (called Autovelox), which photograph the car license plate and record the speed and location of the car, thus eliminating the need for police to stop drivers.

Yet taking measurements makes no sense in nature; it is a purely cultural activity with a purely cultural aim: to force diversity into a homogenous order. When we say that a tree is twenty feet tall, we conceive of it as a straight vertical line, which it is not. Not only do we overlook its roots and curves, we completely wipe out the qualities that make that tree one of a kind so that we can mentally possess it. The process of reducing the world to sizes, where the idea of size itself is a conceptual entity abstracted from its living context and made universal (unlike, for example, relatively individual referents like "footprint," "forearm," "palm," etc), can only be explained by the utilitarian finality that such a process pursues, or rather, by the necessity of making the principle *knowledge-as-power* accessible to everyone.

What we lose is a will to engage with the multiform, protean aspects of life. And the more we smooth over complexity, the more desensitized we are to diversity. Numbering objects and considering their unique qualities are polar opposite activities. When you tally things up, numbered elements are always considered identical, interchangeable, fungible. Everything put into numbers loses its specific properties and is seen as merely a generic quantity (a kilo of rice, a hundred horses, ten years, a majority in the senate). To treat matters as if they were numbers means to eradicate their differences or deprive them of their intrinsic individuality. As John Zerzan so illuminatingly puts it, "You count objects. You don't count subjects. When members of a large family sit down to dinner, they know immediately without counting whether someone is missing without counting. Counting becomes necessary only when things become homogenized."[129]

Obviously, what goes for individual references also goes for one's relation to things. Whereas communal existence has no need for calculations or numbers, as soon as we start establish-

[129] Cf. J. Zerzan, *Running on Emptiness.*

No one realized that the Indians dance *with* the rain, not *for* it, as do the Mbuti Pygmies observed by Colin Trumbull. The British anthropologist describes one particular incident, late at night after a dance, that revealed "just how far away we civilized human beings have drifted from reality."

> [I]n the tiny clearing, splashed with silver, the sophisticated Kenge, clad in bark cloth, adorned with leaves, with a flower stuck in his hair. He was all alone, dancing around and singing softly to himself as he gazed up at the treetops…I came into the clearing and asked, jokingly, why he was dancing alone. He stopped, turned slowly around and looked at me as though I was the biggest fool he had ever seen…
> 'But I'm not dancing alone," he said. 'I'm dancing with the forest, dancing with the moon.' Then, with the utmost unconcern, he ignored me and continued his dance of life.[23]

Free of all symbolic meaning, undomesticated peoples still know how to express their enthusiasm for life, their uncontainable happiness, their attendance *to* and *in* nature. They have no need of making forced forms of social cohesion because the strength of their bond lies in their way of life and not in the symbolic evocation of manifestations of power, ability or status. Dance is not an art for them, nor is it an act of sacred devotion or a display of virtuosity; it is life, or, better yet, joy of life. Exactly like the three year-old French-Italian child who, during an alfresco party, turned to his worried parents as a strong wind picked up and said, "Great! Now I finally get to dance with the wind!"

Reason, Rite, and Art (1942).

[23] Cf. C. M. Turnbull, *The Forest People* (1962).

2. Take Up Art and Place the World Apart: Art as a Substitute Effect

> *Art offers substitute satisfactions for the oldest and still most deeply felt cultural renunciations, and for that reason it serves as nothing else to reconcile a man to the sacrifices he has made on behalf of civilization.*
> — Sigmund Freud

The whole idea of art as a source of revealing an emotional reality other wise inaccessible to us via immediate experience proves that art acts as an intermediary, which is to say a means of serving people who are incapable of being fulfilled by the world and therefore yearn for an artificial experience to understand themselves. Art, in fact, symbolizes human emotion, or rather turns human emotion into an element that can be standardized, measured, common. Its function is to transform its subject into an object for consumption. Objectify reality to objectify human beings—that is the initiatic course art has paved. Where there is art, the subjective is pushed aside to make room for an objectified representation of reality. As Adorno writes,"Anyone who…has ever subjected himself in earnest to [a work of art's] discipline…will find that objections to the merely subjective quality of his experience vanish like a pitiful illusion."[24] More explicitly, John Zerzan reminds us that "the primary function of art is to objectify feeling, by which one's own motivations and identity are transformed into symbol and metaphor. All art, as symbolization, is rooted in the creation of substitutes…"[25]

The process of rationalizing our emotional awareness, of reducing our "I" to an orderly and potentially quantifiable phenomenon, significantly impacts the way we relate to the world.

[24] Cf. Adorn, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life* (1951).
[25] Cf. J. Zerzan, "The Case Against Art".

What makes mathematics a universally accepted doctrine, considered by everyone to be an irreplaceable form of knowledge, is its aim to *absolutize*. At the same time it is a fortress erected on the logic of control and, as mentioned earlier, deceptively reassuring. Mathematics is seductive because it purports to represent the world as a fixed, inclusive and logical entity. Even though the natural world cannot be reduced to abstract analytical reasoning and therefore cannot be called fixed, logical or least of all inclusive, numerical ideology succeeds in representing itself as all of the above, masquerading as though it were in command. As was earlier remarked, "mathematics is not merely a tool but a goal of scientific knowledge: to be perfectly exact, perfectly self-consistent and perfectly general. Never mind that the world is inexact, interrelated and specific, that no one has ever seen leaves, trees, clouds, animals, that are two the same, just as no two moments are identical."[127]

As rational support for the concept of exactitude, mathematics finds its most typical arrangement in the result of its function: measurement. Measuring means assigning numbers to the qualities of real elements, which is to say it turns *quality* into *quantity*. From a perspective under the sway of numerical data, everything can be measured, even "truth" and "justice." Galileo's famous principle, "to measure all that is measurable and make measurable that which is not"[128] perfectly sums up the "colonizing" nature of mathematics. In this civilized universe that controls everything because it counts everything, all must be maniacally translated into its measurement. Weight, height, strength, depth, speed, cost, waistline, IQ—these are just a few of many examples of "unreal" referents used to explain the real world we live in. "Man is the measure of all things," Pythagoras taught us in the 5th century BC, transforming even humanity into a numerical unit.

[127] Cf. J. Zerzan, *Number: Its Origin and Evolution.*
[128] As cited in J. Zerzan, *Time and Its Discontents.*

obliterates it. Just as eliminating singularity in the name of homogeneity proves disadvantageous to human understanding. Instead, the sense of incommunicability typical of the modern world is heightened; the more we speak, write and communicate with stock phrases, the less we understand. Civilization—not free human beings— has an insuppressible need for words, grammatical structures and rules. Naturally, as we have already seen with language, in today's world we would be lost without words.

5. Mathematics is Not an Opinion: the Concept of "Numbers" and its Absolutizing Valence

> *Indeed, everything that is known has a number, for nothing is either understood or known without this.*
> — Philolaus

Powerful and consolatory, the idea of numbers resumes the same grueling metamorphosis that pushed civilized humanity to translate feeling into a formula. As language reifies thoughts and writing reifies language, numbers are meant to confer unidirectionality to the process of objectifying graphically crystallized words. Although writing has indeed reduced the experience of speech to a closed structure of signs, lines, directions to follow and orthography, it is still unable to soar to the heights of truth. Certainly it conditions a reader without offering him or her the possibility to directly intervene, yet it still remains open to opinions. No writing is absolute truth. Even God's Commandments are up for interpretation. Numbers, on the other hand, tear down the barrier of "questionability" and transform the experience of communication into the utterance of truth. Who can deny two plus two equals four?

Fiction, the form and essence of symbolic culture, finds in art its key utterance. Surely we don't need a linguist to point out the semantic assonance between the word art and *artifice*. Art is always *artifice*, a carefully studied means of achieving a desired effect. In the civilized world, where each of us is constantly trying to throw off the burden of frustration, every aspect of the real must be covered up and made presentable through artifice; every object must be traced back to the representation that has replaced it. Art is one of the touchstone forms of fiction. Without art, the world would be real. With art, the world merely colors in art's self-portrait. As with myth, the narrow perspective of art transforms the world into an event, in this case, a spectacle.

The aesthetic flourish that accompanies each civilized individual's life (often the passive observer, rarely the performer) is an affect that moves, excites, pains, prods, exalts, in a world in which the only way these feelings are accessible is through a window. To give a contemporary example, you could say that art is the television of our interior universe, the same universe we have lost and can only regain by switching on the TV set. Art, what John Keats called "the false beauty,"[26] is, in short, the *mise-en-scène* of what is no longer here or, better yet, of what we are no longer able to grasp without a *mise-en-scène*.

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Faced with an increasingly deteriorated and decadent present, art sets about producing a new, more acceptable present. What the civilized world has to offer won't suffice. It needs to be continuously modified and manipulated to adapt to our degraded spiritual life.

It's no coincidence that art has only been around for a few tens of thousands of years. It hasn't always been around, nor is it an inborn product of human nature. Looking back in time

[26] Cf. J. Keats, "Endymion".

to the origins of our life on earth, we find proof that for millions of years humans, "as reflective beings…seem to have created no art. As Jameson put it, art had no place in that 'unfallen social reality' because there [was] no need for it."[27] On the other hand, the comparison between the real and the represented has often diminished artistic endeavors from a purely aesthetic point of view. As Zerzan reminds us, the inability of art to "rival nature sensuously has evoked many unfavorable comparisons. 'Moonlight is sculpture,' wrote Hawthorne; Shelley praised the 'unpremeditated art' of the skylark; Verlain pronounced the sea more beautiful than all cathedrals."[28] And yet, when the comedian Beppe Grillo ironically comments on the fact that audiences at his live shows tend to be more interested in the image of him projected on a large screen on stage than in his actual physical presence in the aisles, we realize that we are becoming more and more accustomed to substituting fiction for reality, that we have grown to prefer the "truth" of fiction to the "truth" of reality.

The meaning of this extraordinary blow to reality at the hands of artifice can be charted in the DNA of art. "The oldest enduring works of art," Zerzan writes, "are handprints, produced by pressure or blown pigment—a dramatic token of direct impress on nature."[29]

The fact remains that when, roughly thirty thousand years ago, a few stylized representations of life (depictions of hunting scenes or animals) gave rise to the first cave paintings, there appears to have been the urge to turn existence into something *spectacular*. Authenticity was beginning to dissipate, and there was a need to attach a scenic representation to everything lest things vanish from memory altogether. "The veritable explosion of art at this time bespeaks an anxiety not felt before,"

[27] Cf. J. Zerzan, "The Case Against Art".
[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid.

> "This invention, O King," said Theuth, "will make the Egyptians wiser and will improve their memories; for it is an elixir of wisdom and memory that I have discovered." And the King replied: "O most ingenious Theuth, the parent or inventor of an art is not always the best judge of the utility or inutility of his own inventions to the users of them. And in this instance, you who are the father of letters, from a paternal love of your own children have been led to attribute to them a quality which they cannot have; for this discovery of yours will create forgetfulness in the learners' souls, because they will not use their memories; they will trust to the external written characters and not remember of themselves. The specific which you have discovered is an aid not to memory, but to reminiscence…"[125]

Rather than open minds, writing shuts them behind the insurmountable walls of a structurally configured, arbitrary, and symbolic datum. Once it has supplanted the real thing, this datum makes it impossible for us to express ourselves freely. Rather than liberate creativity, it suffocates it under the weight of reification that commands our interior world. In its downward spiral from mobile thoughts to inflexible words to fixed writing, the process of reducing sentiment to a static and standardized phenomenon flows painfully and impetuously onward with no chance of being dammed, running as far as the gaping mouth of "print," which, as Roy Harris notes, "eliminates the personal expressiveness of handwriting in favor of automatic uniformity."[126]

Reducing that which is naturally various to a single given datum does not increase the potential for interaction, it

[125] Cf. Plato, *Phaedrus* (translation B. Jowett).
[126] Cf. R. Harris, *The Origin of Writing* (1986).

unthinkable then, we could look at the question from the point of view of what we have lost in the process, and just as easily say that, since the appearance of writing, most thoughts that we once took for granted are unfortunately unthinkable today.

Nevertheless, the objectifying power of writing abounds. With the written word there are no more aspects of life we can call spontaneous; even individual experience can be reified by the power of writing. Zerzan has asserted as much, attributing civilization's propensity to adulterate life to the power of the graph. Objectifying personal experiences is a benchmark of such a propensity. As the American anarchist writes, "Civilization is often thought of not as a forgetting but as a remembering, wherein language enables accumulated knowledge to be transmitted forward, allowing us to profit from other's experiences as though they were our own. Perhaps what is forgotten is simply that other's experiences are *not* our own, that the civilizing process is thus a vicarious and inauthentic one."[124]

Even worse, the memory that is supposedly preserved by the signs of writing (ideographs, alphabets) actually begins to dissolve the moment it is replaced by them. Once "safe inside" the written text, in fact, we let the memory sink into oblivion, confident that we'll always be able to retrieve it. Of course, when the written account is lost, the system for "reviving" the memory is lost with it.

By way of a famous legend, Plato explored the question of what stimulates human beings to preserve an event in their memory. One day, Thamus, king of all Egypt, invited the god Theuth to his court in the great city of Upper Egypt. Theuth was the inventor of many arts, including calculation, geometry, astronomy and letters, and Thamus wanted him to show off his inventions. When the god came around to showing Thamus his letters, he praised his own invention.

[124] Cf. J. Zerzan, *Language: Origin and Meaning*.

Zerzan writes, "in Worringer's words, 'creation in order to subdue the torment of perception.' Here is the appearance of the symbolic, as a moment of discontent. It was a social anxiety; people felt something precious slipping away. Pictorial representation roused the belief in controlling loss, the belief in coercion itself,"[30] and, one might add, firmly established transference, identification with artistic fact and a clean cut from nature.

Not even modern art could escape this fate. Modern art is never expressivity. It's an expression (of something). It is never emotionality, but a translation of emotion. It is never reality, but art. As early as the end of the 19th century, the affirmations of the "art pour art" movement (with the Parnassians proclaiming art's supremacy over life) evinced the significance of an aesthetic approach that has never ceased regarding itself, and which risks credibility by celebrating itself.[31] And when figurative art was replaced with abstract, distorted, provocative or oneiric images by the avant-garde movements of the early 20th Century, the symbolic meaning of art became even more alarming, definitively unleashing art from all factual connections and swapping sense for a kind of non-sense, to the point of becoming an explicitly industrial expression (as in the paintings of Pinòt Gallizio, sold by the inch as if they were bolts of fabric). To the point that all autonomous content that did not serve the frenzy of modern times withered away (as in the kinetic art of Jean Tinguely[32]). To the point that Pop Art fully embraced mass media branding. In Zerzan's words:

[30] Ibid.

[31] Walter Benjamin considered the art pour art doctrine to be a "theology of art." Cf. W. Benjamin, *Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1955).

[32] Jean Tinguely (1925-1991) Swiss sculptor and painter, and founder of kinetic art. According to Jacques Ellul, the artist once remarked proudly: "Artists attune themselves to the rhythm of the times, they get in touch with their age, and most of all, with permanent and perpetual motion." Cf. J. Ellul, *Metamorphose du Bourgeois*.

"Banal, morally weightless, depersonalized images, cynically manipulated by a fashion-conscious marketing stratagem: the nothingness of modern art and its word revealed."[33]

So it comes as no surprise that art wound up putting its own alienated, senseless nature on display, exalting more and more its initiatic meaning as one of the fundamental methods for enforcing social cohesion. In 1984, "The Giant," an illogical cut-up of images recorded with a security camera, earned German director Michael Klier the Grand Prix at the "Second International Video Festival in Montbéliard." In its brazen way, the film points out how art serves an aesthetic tool for social surveillance.

Postmodern iterations of art (conceptual art, minimalist art, hyperrealism, performance art, theater of cruelty), with their hybridization of old styles and inability to revive the worn out mechanisms of symbolism, increasingly expose the regressive symptoms of art as it exists inside its own bubble. The process of unremitting degeneration has ended up turning art into an act of self-annihilation. Art not as art but as a political tool, a commercial phenomenon or nothing. Where art has succeeded in avoiding utter commodification and escaped merging with business (painting, sculpture, architecture…) or the industry (music, film, theater, literature), it has not been able to do so without proclaiming its own death to the world. This process has been evident in every form of art—the visual arts, plastic arts, sound arts, multisensory arts and multimedia art. As Guy Debord was dismantling film into non-film with the screening of *Howlings in Favor of Sade* (a film with almost no images, and long periods of silence during which the screen is totally dark); as Robert Rauschenberg was picturing how he would dismantle painting with non-painting by famously exhibiting his "White Paintings"; as Julian Beck and Judith Malina were preparing their Living Theatre off-Broadway, which would dis-

[33] Cf. J. Zerzan, "The Case Against Art".

As much as language represents the reification of thought, writing—meaning the transposition of language onto tangible material (stone, clay, wax, terracotta, wood, parchment, papyrus, paper)—represents the reification of reification. The relation between writing and the interior universe always involves reducing the latter to an *object*. As Goody points out in "The Domestication of the Savage Mind," "One of the features of the graphic mode is the tendency to arrange terms in (linear) rows and (hierarchical) columns in such a way that each item is allocated a single position, where it stands in a definite, permanent and unambiguous relationship to others."[122]

Favoring a static systematization of verbalized forms of thought, the apprehension of writing makes a schematic mental approach possible, where the sum of represented concepts finds its logical correspondent in the creation of formal systems of classification that accustom a person to assemble everything into lists and layouts (thoughts, events, things, people), until she has completely relinquished the kind of freedom to act that animates a sensitive life.

Put another way, written language traps thoughts—already chained to words—in a prearranged (and pre-structured) cage and bolts the door behind them.

As Hallpike, Bruner, Goody and others have shown, along with literacy comes an increased capacity to adopt methods of general and taxonomic classification that train the mind to classify things generically.[123] Which is to say that, just as the acquisition of verbal language dominates our perception, the laws of the written word become etched into the mind's formation process, making it even more perfunctory, rigid, uniform. To reverse Walter Ong's assertion that at the advent of writing most of the thoughts we take for granted today were simply

[122] Cf. J. Goody, *The Domestication of the Savage Mind*.

[123] See R. Hallpike, *The Foundations of Primitive Thought*.

as opposed to "analytic writing," or words) reinforces all that has been noted about the real graph: writing is an instrument of authoritarianism. Authors such as Jaynes, Pei and Auroux, who recognized in the early forms of writing not the need to convey purely conversational exigencies in static signs, but rather the desire to carve a path for initiation rituals, which is to say for the controlled order of the collective community (ritual paintings, religious ceremonies, necromancy), do not dramatically differ from linguists like Saussure, Sapir, Hockett and Bloomfield who insisted that writing merely constituted an evolution of language. Whether descended from the common exigencies of conformity imposed by ritual arts or from language's standardizing *modus operandi*, writing is still an institutional tool, the universal heir of the will to oppress. "The earliest writings are records of taxes, laws, terms of labor servitude,"[120] remarks Zerzan. Perhaps it's a coincidence, but the first executors of this complex system of semiotics that we call writing were "full time" scribes, specialists who worked for the leaders of the time and were "nourished by stored food surpluses grown by food-producing peasants."[121]

Today, the stringent needs of political economics still pay the most reverence to the power of the written word; without writing there would be no codes, no laws, no proscription lists, no scholastic grades or export prices or schedules to follow or statistics to believe in, no electronic surveillance, no draft cards. And even if we cannot deny the fact that writing also allows us to reveal our feelings from a distance (love letters), help us learn (class notes) and make certain matters more concise (slogans, catchphrases, aphorisms), it is just as clear that writing enormously benefits state control, political conditioning and repression.

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[120] Cf. J. Zerzan, Language: *Origin and Meaning*.
[121] Cf. J. Diamond, *Guns, Germs and Steel*.

mantle theater and replace it with non-theater, break down the divide between actor and spectator, and elevate personal freedom over dramatic motivation, the socially active international punk movement was aiming to do the very same thing—turning music into non-music (their famous "chaos not music" mantra was evoked by an Italian musical precursor) and rejecting any possible artistic consideration of their performances in order to affirm an anti-authoritarian counter-culture.

One could go on listing such examples. When Antonin Artuad confessed, "I began in literature by writing books to say that I could not write anything at all," he had in mind this same sense of "nothing artistic." An expression, all told, of that well known "nothing for nothing" perfectly echoed by Jacques Vaché when he said, "Art is a stupidity."

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Nothing has succeeded in counteracting the homologizing value of art: neither its claims to be a liberating energy (presumed above all by those who make art) nor its invocations of a playful spirit. Art, for all intents and purposes, achieves neither liberation nor playfulness.

As for the supposedly enfranchising attribute of art, the gap between artist and consumer (or public, or spectator, if you prefer) testifies to the fact that art builds more walls than it breaks down. This gap reflects the logic behind the division of labors. Artists are assigned the role of emancipators on the backs of the consumers (ie, those who do not actively participate in the artistic process and access it only as passive subjects), thus disproving any possibility for emancipation. Which is to say that the relationship between the artist and consumer is never one of equal participation, in which both parties work toward realizing a shared experience, but rather a passive (on the part of the consumer) or authoritarian (on the part of the artist) relationship. Even with *arte povera*, which sought to involve

the public in the artistic process, those being addressed remain passive, having bought into an artistic edifice that has already been planned, built and buttressed by the artist.[34]

Furthermore, far from allowing artists to boundlessly express their creativity, art reproduces itself within predetermined cultural and structural boundaries (unless it refuses to be art). For example, music, which reveals its reliance on a series of rigid rules and formal structures more than any other artistic medium, demonstrates rather clearly that the artistic phenomenon is never free of pre-established connotations. It comes with its own semantics, structure and grammatical armature that express a repeated ritual. Musical content only pretends to follow free form, when in fact its phrases, articulations, inflections, pauses, jokes and pacing actually describe a premeditated language. In other words, the art of sounds (like all other forms of art) cannot free itself of an intellectualized intent. It adapts to the mechanical rhythm of the metronome that guides it.[35]

In short, art frees no one. As artifice, it can only give the illusion of being free or being capable of freeing (and how well it knows how!). As representation, it can only represent… To illustrate this, one could say that art frees people the way prisoners are free when a group of them acts out a prison break story—through make-believe! During the show, each remains a convict, and at the end of the show, it's back to the cell with them.

[34] Michelangelo Pistoletto's famous "mirror paintings," in which spectators are invited to use their own reflections to "make" the painting, may render a dynamic idea of artistic representation, but they cannot transform it into an experience for spectators to stand on an equal footing with the artist or participate directly with him. Everything has already been put there for the spectator to access. Spectators only have two choices, to join in (by mirroring themselves) or not. Pistoletto's "mirror paintings" remain Pistoletto's.

[35] Michael Polanyi supported this claim by observing, "Among the abstract arts music

of the monarchs and merchants who organized colonizing fleets were conveyed in writing. The fleets set their courses by maps and written sailing directions prepared by the previous expeditions. Written accounts of earlier expeditions motivated later ones, by describing the wealth and fertile lands awaiting the conquerors."[117]

Invented by Sumerians around five thousand years ago, writing appeared so late in the history of humankind precisely because the utilitarian designs it extolled were only useful to a world already perfectly transformed into "socially stratified societies with complex and centralized political institutions."[118] Lévi-Strauss was also clear on this point: "the only phenomenon which, always and in all parts of the world, seems to be linked with the appearance of writing…is the establishment of hierarchical societies, consisting of masters and slaves, and where one part of the population is made to work for the other part."[119] One need only think of how written records typically order and arrange past events in order to fully understand the intrinsic significance of this statement. Writing transmits *knowledge-as-power* in space and time, preserves it in the recesses of the brain and ensures that it will be ritually perpetuated.

Today, there is not one scholar hasn't associated the birth of writing with the launch of civilization and all that civil society values. Bureaucracies, social classes, taxes, property goods, commerce, redistribution of wealth, exploitation of the land (and those who till it)—these are the political and economic seeds from which writing sprouted. The study of what Roy Harris called "pre-writing," what Marcel Cohen referred to as "proto-writing," Ignace Gelb "semasiography" and James Fevrier "synthetic writing" (the writing of ideas

[117] Cf. J. Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel.*

[118] Ibid.

[119] Cf. C. Levi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (1971).

tests, that is, written examinations, which are ways of assessing the applicants' skill."[114] But the relationship between ruler and ruled also draws a typical picture of a relation based on anonymity, where essentially "abstract 'rules' [are] listed in a written code."[115]

In its drive to be efficient and calculating, writing destroys everything that exists outside of itself. In fact, writing never aspires to the "unspoken." It does not know the meaning of silence and, by reducing the entire vital process of the world to a predetermined set of rules, it establishes "the necessity of a boundary, the necessity of a beginning and an end,"[116] which is, first and foremost, spatial order (linear and direct) for its visible features from which verbal expression is proudly exempt. In fact, what the spoken word imprisons, transforming thought into a static word, writing structures in an even more sterile and rigidly determined form.

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To the extent that language still dupes us into believing it is an impartial mode of expression, writing shows itself for what it is: not a form of participation in which thoughts are exchanged reciprocally, but rather a method aimed at sowing "truth" and reaping "loyalty." Jared Diamond, in his famous history of civilization, counted writing among the indispensable "apparatuses" for military aggression in the modern world; like all weapons, writing is efficient and methodical; like all wars, writing is strategic and well organized; like all forms of suppression, writing annihilates diversity and imposes its own system of beliefs unilaterally. In every conquest, "[w]riting marched together with weapons, microbes and centralized political organization," Diamond concludes. "The commands

[114] Ibid.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Ibid.

If art is incapable of positing a liberating design, it can in no way be compared to play, nor confused with it. The unlikely comparison between artistic endeavors and play only holds up if you strip art of both its social function and its intent to objectify emotions, which means ceasing to see art for what it is, or, in the same vein, if you strip play of its identity, conceiving of it as a structured, competitive activity (sports games, quizzes, racing animals) or a distraction to pass the time (hobbies, pastimes, an onanistic-cerebral video game workout—calling it a game is the only thing "game" about it).

Not only is art not play, it is, to a certain degree, the exact opposite of play. While art aims to transform the world in order to reify emotions, play could not be further removed from speculations of that nature. While art wistfully dreams about freedom, play trains participants to live in their physical environment (hunting, hiding, darting about, using their brain, reacting strategically). While art separates the actors from the acted upon, play brings people together in a common endeavor. While art lays out impersonal objectives, play sets such objectives aside.

The passion for play, writes Vaneigem, "[H]as by now taken on the task of social subversion and established…a society of true participation. Ludic practice implies rejecting leaders, rejecting sacrifice, rejecting roles, freedom for self-realization, transparency for social relations."[36] The rules of play, constantly modeled and remodeled by the participants, are available to play, in a process of continuous invention, concrete (and equal) participation for all, and liberation from fixed,

[36] stands out by its precise and complex articulation, subject to a grammar of its own. In profundity and scope it may compare with pure mathematics." And later, "[the] design [of painting] bears the same kinship to geometry as music does to arithmetic. Witness the theories of cubism or the attempts made ever since Vitruvius to formulate geometrical rules for the appreciation of harmonious pictorial and architectural composition. Cf. M. Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (1958).

schematic structures. In play, Vaneigem continues, "the rules, along with the ways of playing with them, are an integral part of the game,"[37] and as soon as an authority figure steps in to set them straight again, the game fails. Art, therefore, is never play. It is a ritual exercise eager to accept an evermore homogenous and gilded universe. Civilization did not assign opposite roles for art and play by sheer happenstance; while

play is banned from entering the park for adults, warped as adults are by their sense of duty and the pre-eminence accorded to work and sacrifice, art on the other hand is consistently celebrated and enlisted in the official ranks of displays of "liberty," that tired, shriveled up, unreal liberty that the modern world loves to concede to, contenting itself to look upon its image alone.

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Given that it is the insufficient, threadbare expression of our unnatural universe, you would think art would only make us miserable. Then how is it possible that, on the contrary, art generates so much attention and interest? We are attracted to art because it consoles us, assuring each of us that the broken universe we've inherited need not all be written off. Or, as Zerzan puts it, art elicits positive reactions because it is a "compensation and palliative, because our relationship to nature and life is so deficient and disallows an authentic one."[38]

Freud's theory, that art is a substitute remedy to relieve people of the angst caused by living in the civilized world, helps explain art's great success. In the ailing world in which we live, our need to identify with art attests to the sad state of our relationship with reality, and underscores—once again—our existential unease that art intends to cure. This also explains the therapeutic value art enjoys in modern society. The fact that

[37] Ibid.

[38] Cf. J. Zerzan, "The Case Against Art".

At the same time, disdaining the natural fluency of words, writing "can escape from the problem of the succession of events in time, by backtracking, skipping, looking to see who-done-it before we know what it is they did"[113] and upsetting the fluidity inherent in the *flow* of conversation. Additionally, given its unilateral dress, those who adopt writing are confined to transfer all the ingredients of interaction that the spoken word leaves to non-discursive forms of expression (gestures, looks, poses) into grammatical action. For this reason, if it takes significant effort to learn how to speak, this effort is at least made by interacting with others (a child learns to speak by listening and imitating adults with whom she intends to converse). While writing, precisely because it leaves no room for debate and gets straight to the point, must be learned through a set course that is more austere and demanding, a course that requires solitary, constant and continued application.

Knowing how to write, after all, comes in handy. It is handy for offending, defending, defending oneself, accounting for one's reasons, putting one's objections on record (*verba volant, scripta manent*). Whereas one may be motivated to speak simply to make conversation, one writes with more pointed objectives: to calculate other people's actions, to convince, to acknowledge, to formalize, to express a final opinion. And seeing as the expository organization of writing addresses such objectives, writing unfailingly fulfills the process of expressing oneself without varying connotations. Writing always lacks gradation. It only has style, preventative organization, structure. It is no accident that the impersonal quality of writing enjoys an extremely privileged position in the dehumanized society of the modern world. Goody underscores this point when he writes that the process of recruiting bureaucrats "often involves the use of 'objective'

[113] Cf. J. Goody, *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* (1977).

precludes all discursive interaction. Not only is it born as a solitary act (writers work alone, even when they collaborate), it also lacks all typical traits of conversation—pauses, interruptions, lapses in memory, minor contradictions, inapt comments, shifts in subject matter. The stuff of all spoken conversations is dispensed with in writing, which, naturally aspiring to be incisive, tends to synthesize the most salient points of discourse, argue logically, develop efficacious interpretations to bring readers over "to its side." Thus an ulterior "anti-interaction" feature of writing comes to light; the subject is definitively divested of his/her communicative aspect.

In fact, in writing, language becomes totally shorn of human presence, and "acts in the absence of speaking subjects."[109] And this absence ends up making the written word an instrument to mediate consciousness, seeing as "with writing there appears a consciousness which is no longer carried and transmitted directly among the living."[110] You could say, in essence, that given the superfluity of human presence, writing is more an instrument of *information* than a means of communication. Writing, Jack Goody insisted, "puts a distance between man and his verbal acts."[111] In this distance it sets up a completely passive relationship—passive for the one who receives it (prepared and packaged), for the one who examines it (without being able to interact with it), for the one who may be preparing a rebuttal. Further, this passivity will only make writing more fixed and resolute. In fact, the absence of all dialogue permits the recipient to return to the text and relentlessly analyze it, studying its logical "strategies, pronouncements and weaknesses,"[112] so that writing, as a measure of prevention against this, "arms itself" by becoming more rigid and assertive.

[109] Cf. J. Kristeva, *Language: The Unknown* (1989).
[110] G. Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (1994).
[111] Cf. J. Goody, *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* (1977).
[112] Cf. S. Auroux, *La philosophie de langage* (2008).

art is an "antidote to life" should tell us something about the frustration of modern life, if life is to be perceived as a disease.

Usually, calling the value of art into question provokes a response of this nature: art is not a substitute imitation of reality but a human creation, the result of someone's genius, of an inimitable and unique spirit. To all intents and purposes, the old dispute over whether art is purely imitative or purely creative has been resolved in favor of the latter. The classic view (put forth by Aristotle and Plato), which conceived of the aesthetic act as pure representation of nature (where the artist was essentially barred from changing the natural phenomena he depicted), has progressively given way to a romantic attitude, which elevates the creative and malleable side of art and cancels out the idea that an artist passively absorbs the phenomena s/he witnesses. Art, as it is commonly perceived today, is an innovative act of interpreting, beautifying and recreating the world, rather than faithfully copying it. Seen in this light, the senselessness of art's mimetic function becomes irrefutable—if art is nothing but a slavish imitation of nature, why do we feel the need to copy down what already exists around us? But art intended as the creation of an artist begs a more disturbing question: if art is an improvement on the model that inspires it, why do we feel the need to beautify that model?

Just as religion yearns for additional experiences projected into an improved afterlife, art serves a similarly illusory purpose to compensate for an unsatisfying present. To beautify means to not accept things for what they are. As Michaelis, the anarchist in Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent*, makes crystal clear: "To beautify [life] is to take away its character of complexity—it is to destroy it."[39]

Art and religion act according to the same psychological suppositions, and the latter may be seen as a subcategory of the former. As art claims to be irreplaceable, so religion declares

[39] Cf. J. Conrad, The Secret Agent (1907).

its irreplaceability is absolute. As art distances itself from reality, retreating into its seductive, imaginary universe, religion takes the same sentiment to its extreme conclusion— disdaining all "earthly" things, reducing life to a "vale of tears," and finally hammering home its most disturbing admonishment—"Remember thou shalt die!" Replacing memento vivere with memento mori (to cite Neitzsche) is a characteristic feature of all religions. Death is the leitmotif for every concept that sacrifices life on the altar of faith, knowledge and ritual representation.

Art's success, like religion's, is due to civilized life's lack of success, the constant degradation and brutalization life suffers at the hands of the civilized world. Revealing, without false reticence, the "persuasive" goals of religion, the creationist Matt Brady (Fredric March), one of the protagonists in Stanley Kramer's court drama *Inherit the Wind*, explains why faith is considered irreplaceable. The people of this town, he says, referring to the inhabitants of a small American village in the 1920s, "are simple people…poor people…seeking something more perfect than what they have."

In the modern age, even a staunch believer in cultural evolution like Paul Erlich has admitted that people are constantly pressured to "believe in stories that help them make sense of the world."[40] And why do we seek substitutes to make sense of the world we live in? There appears to be only one answer—that the civilized world makes no sense. Surely the meaning of our existence is not to be found in economic productivity, just as it is not to be found in military might, in the humiliation of surrender, in the frantic and precarious race to survive (via labor) or in the equally competitive and unstable race to acquire the cultural tools for so-called survival (via education). The loss of meaning life has suffered in the modern age is so

[40] Cf. P. Ehrlich, *Human Natures: Genes, Cultures and the Human Prospect* (2000).

If language represents a *defeat* compared to the expressive versatility of human beings, the transposition of speech into its fixed form (ie, writing) makes this defeat all the more bitter. What spoken language leaves open in terms of discursive "color" (screams, exclamations, whispers, intonations, modulations, timers, vocal nuances), writing—cold, static, defenseless writing—definitively fences in with the graph. If language still preserves a certain dynamism crossed as it is with the needs of interaction, the crystallized sign jettisons this need, forcing its way into the territory of "total utility," "total efficiency."

If one examines writing for what it is, one easily grasps how it incorporates all the problems of language and adds a few more significant problems of its own. Modern linguists have studied them for a long time. First and foremost, posited Auroux, while discourse bears the mark of an exclusive exchange between two speakers, "writing is much more universalizing…Dialectical variation is frequent (if not systemic) in oral practices in every human community. There is no such equivalent in writing."[108]

Second, the writing process establishes what we call "faith to the letter." Which is to say that in the case of writing the process of standardizing thoughts through language becomes absolute and irrevocable. "The stories of oral societies," continues the director of the École normale supérieure de Fontenay-Saint Cloud, "consist of fixed themes around which each narrator improvises his variation; the literary institution, on the other hand, considers it necessary to have one definitive text for everyone."499 As we all know, telling a child a story is an infinitely warmer and more engrossing experience (for the teller as for the child) than reading a story to a child.

Third, writing represents a form of expression that "does not admit immediate replica: the reader (receptor) cannot interrupt the message and take over as the speaker." Writing

[108] Cf. S. Auroux, *La philosophie de langage* (2008).

the same time, as far as concerns its power to divide, language consumes all other means of communication by facilitating the success and conservation of forms that are based on language.

Because of this, and despite all else, in today's world we cannot do without words. Without words it would be impossible to make the arguments this book makes (arguments that, after all, stem from other words, and the grammatical structure that makes them comprehensible). There's no doubt about it: today we need words even to say words are a waste. We need words to denounce the fact that words tear us apart, oppress us, drive us from our surroundings. And yet "there is a silent communication," as Vaneigem writes, "well known to lovers. At this stage language seems to lose its importance as essential meditation, thought is no longer a distraction (in the sense of leading us away from ourselves), words and signs become a luxury."[106] The same is true of the speechless intimacy that exists between children and parents in the first months of the child's life, or the intimacy between animal lovers and their pets.

Probably, when communication has no agenda to convince, dazzle, repress, sell, confront, judge, punish, offend or revere, and it moves straight toward the experiential horizons of love and respect, then words cease to matter. As Rousseau knew, love has livelier ways of expressing itself.[107]

4. Civilization as graphocentric society

> *[T]he primary function of written communication is to facilitate slavery.*
> — Claude Lévi Strauss

[106] Cf. R. Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life* (translation D. Nicholson-Smith).

[107] Cf. J. Rousseau, *Essay on the Origin of Language* (1781).

widespread and dire that only "relief" and "hope" seem capable of lending it the appearance of meaning. Art, along with its homogenizing, ritual displays of community (from religion to rituals of rebellion), perfectly incarnates these false expectations of meaning.

What would our world be without the comfort of music, without films, without poetry, stories, painting, fashion? What would our existence be without following football season, or celebrating the nation or the distracting adventures on TV? Nothing, simply nothing. A radical critique of art inevitably leads to the bitter, dispiriting awareness that without the fairytale "Park of Amusements and Consolations" that civilization has replaced the natural world with, this same world would no longer exist.

"If pleasure were somehow release from every restraint," writes Zerzan, "the result would be the antithesis of art. In dominated life freedom does not exist outside art, however, and so even a tiny, deformed fraction of the riches of being is welcomed. 'I create in order not to cry,' revealed Klee."[41]

3. In the Shadow of Babel: the birth of language and its meaning

> *Perhaps the most marked trend in paranoia is that towards a complete seizing of the world through words, as though language were a fist and the world lay in it.*
> — Elias Canetti

The fact that language is considered by many to be one of the most characteristic features of the process that transformed primordial humanity into modern humanity forces us to carefully examine this system of symbols and the rules of grammar.

[41] Cf. J. Zerzan, "The Case Against Art".

What does language intend to lend order? What does it seek to fine tune, trim, systematize according to a certain pattern? Well, thought.

As art eschews reality in favor of a purely aesthetic experience (and in the process reifies human emotions, making them superficial and equal for all), language—or the faculty of expressing oneself with words—transforms thought into an element just as reified. Thought, which is not an object in and of itself, can be reified through language so that it becomes a standard attribute, an identical, one-size-fits all "dress." The endless variety of forms of communication disappears and language appears, the one point of entry for thinking and its only "body." Once more, the order imposed by culture bars us from gaining free access to the forms of perception (communication being one such form)—the systematization of multiple forms of communication must prevail over all other means of comprehending what is around us. Thought, which gave birth to language, becomes something that cannot exist without language.

The idea that thinking cannot exist without words has for centuries fortified the anthropocentric attitude that places humans (the one talking and thinking species) at the top of the hierarchy of living beings, and thus, naturally, the species with dominion over all others. In a world like the one we live in, characterized by anxiety and remoteness, the word would appear to illuminate our dim incomprehension, both of other people and of life's meaning. Here, where all relationships are built around a set group of symbols that explain reality, words tend to look like gilded emancipators to us. We do not simply sense that the word is a correlative to thought, but consider it the originating root of thought itself, which idea led renowned language philosopher Karl Wilhelm von Humboldt to call language "the formative organ of thought."[42] When Plato affirms that thinking "is the conversation the

[42] "Just as no idea is possible without words, so also there can be no ob-

What passes for conquest—and thus the possibility of dividing the world up according to a symbolic pattern that makes it all the more malleable—turns out to be a defeat. In an existence less and less illuminated by sensuality, every time human beings confide in the Word, venerate Art, sacrifice their lives to God, Science, the Economy and Technology, that light grows dimmer. If we consider that language has done away with the spontaneous world and replaced it with one typified by mendacity, ideological conditioning, illusion, discipline and an inability to understand the inner feelings of our friends and neighbors, then it is by no means a coincidence that there are still unmistakable signs of primordial resistance to the power of the word. As the indefatigable John Zerzan writes:

> Looking at the problem of origin on a figurative plane, it is interesting to consider the myth of the Tower of Babel. The story of the confounding of language, like the other story in Genesis, the Fall from the grace of the Garden, is an attempt to come to terms with the origin of evil. The splintering of an 'original language' into mutually unintelligible may best be understood as the emergence of symbolic language, the eclipse of an earlier state of more total and authentic communication.[103]

If words possess some precision, it is only the profile of a superficial, impoverished universe unable to look deep down inside itself. Language is a "means of reining in desire."[104] It puts up barriers between people and the world, and acts, to quote von Humboldt once again, as "an autonomous, external identity and being which does violence to man himself."[105] At

[103] Cf. J. Zerzan, *Language: Origin and Meaning*.
[104] Ibid.
[105] Cf. G. Steiner, *After Babel*.

frightens me because, by never saying enough, I also say too much."[99]

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Language is born of, lives by and grows old with culture. "Cultural takeoff is also linguistic takeoff,"[100] writes Marvin Harris. And John Zerzan says, "It is reasonable to assume that the symbolic world originated in the formulation of language." Certainly words prefer a universe constellated with symbols, and this tendency has, since the first glimpse of culture, contributed substantially toward homogeneity and culminated in the expulsion of any vivid connection to the world.

To hear Paul Gaeng, language should be "the most significant and colossal work that human spirit has evolved."[101] Vainglorious as we are, we continue to magnify the "great works" of men and women as if they embodied "the human spirit" we no longer even recognize. Deaf to the lessons civilized life has taught us over tens of thousands of years of devastation, division, conflict, bloodshed and suppression, which we dare to compare to the "laws of nature," we continue to applaud ourselves for our colossal works without ever thinking of what we may be losing in return. We listen to this summer's latest pop song drivel and plug our ears to the roar of a river. Reflecting on the idea that language elevates humans above animals, the heretical Christian mystic Jakob Böhme observed, "Now no people do anymore understand the language of the sense, and yet the birds in the air and the beasts in the fields understand it according their property."[102]

[99] Cf. J. Derrida, *Writing and Difference.*

[100] Cf. M. Harris, Our Kind: *Who We Are, Where We Came From, Where We Are Going.*

[101] Cf. P. Gaeng, *Introduction to the Principles of Language* (1971).

[102] 492 Cf. J. Bohme, *Mysterium Magnum* (1623).

soul has with itself," he seems to suggest that language and thought are one and the same. And yet equating words with thoughts not only indicates an extremely limited view of thinking, it is also unfounded conjecture. Saying language is the prodigious means that makes thinking possible does not account for the infinite manifestations of thinking without words, such as flashes of memory in sleep; our ability to compose music or play strategy board games in silence, like chess, checkers, poker or other card games. And we cannot forget that there are people who are physically incapable of speaking yet are not closed off from critical thinking. After all, to regard language as the sole faculty that constitutes and creates thought unjustly dismisses primitive humans who lived (and thought) for millions of years without the aid of verbal, codified language.

In his book *Language and Speech*, George A. Miller points out that despite some squabbles, scientists have come to agree that language, as we know it today, formed relatively late in the Prehistorical period. Approximately 100,000 years ago, according to anthropologist Joseph Greenberg,[43] Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin[44] and Italian linguist Giorgio Cadorna,[45] among others. Georges Mounin, a linguist and language historian, remarks that, apropos of the birth of oral communication, "Walkhoff and Heilborn date it to the Neanderthal Period (circa 100,000 BC), Boklen the Mousterian (circa 50,000 years BC) and Hauser the Aurignacian (circa 30,000 years before our

ject that presents itself to the soul. Language is an essential activity of the spirit. It is something immediately human and becomes completely inexplicable if you consider it as just a construction of the intellect." Cf. K. *Von Humboldt, Über die vergleichenden Sprachstudien* (1903)

[43] Cf. J. Greenberg, *Anthropological Linguistics: An Introduction* (1968).

[44] Cf. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (1982).

[45] Cf. G. Cadorna, *Antropologia della scrittura* (1981).

era)."[46] Paul Mellars,[47] William Noble and Iain Davidson[48] are also convinced that our system of discourse evolved no earlier than 50,000 years ago, while Jerrold Cooper, a professor of Near Asian Studies at Johns Hopkins University, argues that speech arose even later. Human beings, he recently concluded, have only been using language for five to ten thousand years.438 Whatever the case may be, the studies of Philip Lieberman,[49] Jeffrey Laitman[50] and other scientists have shown that there are anatomical factors (the development of throat and mouth) that make it impossible to date the birth of language to a period later than 100,000 years ago.

Spoken language is an invention closely tied to the rise of agriculture. And this theory, widely embraced by linguists and anthropologists, has yet to be disavowed by modern theses, least of all the theory that draws a correlation between the origin of speech and the first human tools. The theory that speech developed in direct connection with the use of manual tools has met with little success. In fact, in the late 1960s, the observations of naturalist Jane Goodall proved that despite the fact that animals can also make rudimentary tools, they do not verbally communicate with one another the way humans do. It goes without saying, then, that not even the pedantic distinction between "language" and "speech" can prove a similar correlation. Whatsoever distinction one wants to posit between the ability to communicate with words (language) and the diverse assem-

[46] Cf. G. Mounin, *Histoire de la linguistique des origins au XXe siècle* (1967).

[47] Cf. P. Mellars, "Cognitive Changes and the Emergence of Modern Humans in Europe" in *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* (1991).

[48] Cf. W. Noble & I. Davidson, "The Evolutionary Emergence of Modern Human Behavior: Language and its Archaeology" in *Man* (1991).

[49] Cf. P. Lieberman, "Uniquely Human: the Evolution of Speech, Thought ad Selfless Behavior" (1991) in C.R. Ember—M. Ember, *Cultural Anthropology*.

[50] Cf. J. Laitman, "The Anatomy of Human Speech" (1984) in in C.R. Ember—M. Ember, *Cultural Anthropology*.

in which the explicit purpose of language (neo-language) is to control people's thoughts and behavior unambiguously reveals the wave of tyranny words are able to engender. "Speech and power maintain relations such that the desire for one is fulfilled in the conquest of the other," writes the French sociologist Pierre Clastres, "whether prince, despot or commander in chief, the man of power is always not only the man who speaks but the sole source of legitimate speech."[96]

However you look at it, language always acquires the peculiar meaning Hagège assigned to it, which is to say that language is "a clandestine power…The enterprise of language is the enterprise, not explicitly declared, of a supremacy."[97] As early as the 1950s, the renowned Danish linguist Louis Hjelmslev observed the same thing while examining the relationship between mass media and governance. In a Vice Rectorial address on the content-form as a social factor, he notes, "sign systems, language and content-form have become a power that no ruler can or wants to neglect. Hitler remarked that he would have moved the masses by manipulating their will, and neither he nor any one else animated by similar desires could remain indifferent to the importance of signs and symbols in order to achieve his goals."[98]

Hard as it is to admit, words bear a large portion of the blame for subjugating the civilized world. It is impossible to ignore the crushing force of words on modern day life; we slog through each day obeying every order in earshot. We purchase and consume the most useless products. No need to crack the whip in order to make us yield—words will suffice. At the same time, every syllable we utter can easily be turned into an instrument to discredit, blackmail, offend. We must choose our words more carefully, and heed Derrida's remark: "Speaking

[96] Cf. P. Clastres, *Society Against the State* (1989).

[97] Cf. C. Hagege, *L'Homme de Paroles*.

[98] Cf. L. Hjemslev, *The Content-form as a Social Factor* (1953).

is constructed with quite another object than to let the form of the body be recognized."[94]

Camouflaging thoughts and insinuating itself in the minds of believers, language has the power to tame people, to "form" their audience, to tell them what to purchase, to distract them from important matters, to provide them with a palatable image of reality (especially when reality appears bleak). By now it is clear that the fields of advertising, economics and politics are the preferred stomping grounds of language, since language lends itself perfectly to being *used*, given how much it estranges us from expressing our feelings, divides our emotions and bars us from actually participating in the natural world.

A study on language's capacity to subdue its listeners would make a worthwhile project. For example, the term *datore di lavoro* (employer; literally "giver of work") does not stand for a person who *gives* work, but rather someone who *gets* work and exploits it for a profit. Similarly, in Italy we no longer call metropolitan areas where discarded materials are trashed *discariche* (dumps). We call them *isole ecologiche* (ecological islands) and *inceneritori termovalorizzatori* (waste-energy plants). "Welcoming Centers" are actually holding (and deporting) cells for immigrants; "natural aromas" are chemical products that poison our food, and "credit cards" are the means by which we go into debt. Thanks to words, civilized democracies have witnessed the disappearance of advertising firms' occult powers of persuasion, and the rise of "brand loyalty."

In a universe in which force is considered order, zoos are called "bioparks" and war bears the name "mission of peace," the power of words to deceive cannot be denied. "Words serve power better than they do men,"[95] writes Vaneigem. The nightmare George Orwell envisioned of a totalitarian society

[94] Cf. L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus* (1921).

[95] Cf. R. Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life*.

bly of words used to such an aim (speech or idiom), the fact remains that humans, for an indefinite period of time, communicated with one another without translating their thoughts into words.

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The fact that language developed during a time when symbolic thought was beginning to penetrate the human psyche hints at the advanced stage of the process of civilization that, in the millennia immediately preceding agriculture, had begun to undermine the psychological foundations of a lifestyle in which "the communication with all of existence must have been an exquisite play of all the senses, reflecting the numberless, nameless varieties of pleasure and emotion once accessible within us." The difficulty we have even imagining such an intimate and integrated union of all the world's natural components, which renders insignificant all of civilization's reproductions of that original coalition (words, myths, ritual, art, gods, as well as concepts like "solidarity," "peace," "rights," "wellbeing"), explains why it costs us such a great effort to understand a world built on communication without language.

If we think about it, however, the word we all revere as an irreplaceable instrument of communication does not possess the basic valence we have been taught it does. How often have we felt something we could not put into words? How often do our sentences fail to express what's on our mind? How many times has complicity proved that there's no need for words? With the "convivial" rapport with the world shattered, we have confined ourselves to a universe made up only of words, the universe we always invoke, even when we know perfectly well that words tell us nothing. But it is this nothingness that the civilized world celebrates and protects, relegating us to an artificial, compulsory dimension. In a certain sense, speech expresses the limited movement of this artificial dimension; it is

always incapable of fully penetrating the meaning of things, actions, feelings, and is irremediably hostile to an ungrammatical reality.

Alluding to the idea that words insufficiently express and are incapable of transmitting all that "the soul means," Bakhtin[51] speaks of "the torments of dialogue." Wittgenstein formulated an analogous distrust of language when he explained that ethics could never be illustrated with words, since "words will only express facts."[52] And, one might add, without even *guaranteeing* that they will achieve that minor objective.

Examining the question for what it is, one must admit that the problem with words arises from the fact that they are words, and therefore symbolic elements that, however they may be officially charged with providing a framework to interpret existence, need to be interpreted themselves. Whereas Homeric laughter, a mortified look, a jump for joy or a blush do not need to be decoded, what words intend to reveal must be interpreted, and the numberless external circumstances surrounding them taken into account. Words by themselves are never enough. One always has to gauge the actions and gestures of the speaker, her tone of voice, character, sensibility, her opinions on the particular subject, even her psychological approach to the discussion. Furthermore, one should have a clear understanding of the situation surrounding the conversation, and its (past and present) developments.

Words (and the sentences made with them) can be very ambiguous. For example, the word "ruin" can stand for the cause of destruction ("insolvency was the ruin of him") as well as the effect ("insolvency caused his reputation to be ruined"). Or take the question "Who do you want to choose?" Depending on the context, it can mean either which person do you want

[51] [footnote missing in original]

[52] Cf. L. Wittgenstein, *Lecture on Ethics* (1921-49).

the answer seems simple and clear: "Since all real intentions and emotions, he says, get themselves involuntarily expressed by gesture, look, or sound, voluntary communication, such as language, must have been invented for the purposes of lying or deceiving."[90]

Two hundred years prior to that, Talleyrand wrote, "We were given speech to hide our thoughts."[91] And George Steiner echoed: "The human capacity to utter falsehood, to lie, to negate what is the case, stands at the heart of speech and of the reciprocities between words and world." Agreeing that verbal communication is among the centerpieces of the civilized world is easy if one keeps these reflections in mind. On the same token, it is all too clear that the civilized universe could never be preserved without the aid of a system as expedient at concealing reality, supporting falsehoods, outfoxing, misleading, convincing, deceiving and keeping people in line. As the English statesman Benjamin Disraeli admitted, "With words we govern men."[92]

Words are not only at the root of rhetoric, the art of speaking without saying anything. They also give way to what French linguist Sylvain Auroux called the "shameless cynicism" of dialectics "that consists in trying to convince others of something they do not believe."[93] The power to mislead is a potent power, which is one reason language can be a crucial tool for those who use it scrupulously. Although language has the potential to condition thought, it also succeeds in disguising it, so that, as Wittgenstein wisely intuits, "from the external form of the clothes one cannot infer the form of the thought they clothe, because the external form of the clothes

[90] As cited in: M. Pei, *The Story of Language*.

[91] As cited in: G. Steiner, *After Babel*.

[92] As cited in: M. Pei, *The Story of Language*.

[93] Cf. S. Auroux, *La philosophie du langage* (2008).

own and creates false expectations that there is such a thing as absolute communication. As a fixed reference model, language "effects the original split between wisdom and method."[85] Not least, language—like all ideologies—divides rather than unites people. As George Bernard Shaw sarcastically remarked, "England and America are two countries separated by the same language."[86] If one considers that "language is the foremost symbol of nationality" and "pride in language is probably the most distinctive mark of national intolerance,"[87] there is no need to dredge up an example from our current moment in history in order to understand how linguistic diversity plays such a crucial factor in fomenting hatred among different people. The ancient Greeks, to cite one example, defined barbarians (ie, "babblers") as all those who did not speak Hellenic. The word must have had a certain amount of cache for it to have insinuated itself into so many modern languages.[88]

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Anarcho-primitivist John Zerzan summarizes the dilemma thus: "The arbitrary, self-contained nature of language's symbolic organization creates growing areas of false certainty where wonder, multiplicity and non-equivalence should prevail. Barthes' depiction of language as "absolutely terrorist is much to the point here."[89] But others have cast language in an even more devastating (and destabilizing) light. The question then is: how does this all-powerful ideological product physically exert its strength on a world in decay? Keeping in mind linguist E.H. Sturtevant's conclusions about the practical motivations that led to the invention of language,

[85] Cf. J. Zerzan, "Language: Origin and Meaning".
[86] As cited in M. Pei, *The Story of Language* (1968, English translation).
[87] Ibid.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Cf. J. Zerzan, *Language: Origin and Meaning*.

to *be* chosen, or which person do you want to *do* the choosing. If someone says, "I've met a friend," his interlocutor will not know if he has met a male or female friend. If, at the statement "I walked over ten miles today," someone responds by saying "Good for you!" the response could be either congratulatory or disapproving. The word "earth" has a different meaning for a geologist, an astronaut, and a native. But that's not all. Nouns like "anti-conformist" or "revolutionary" can be praising or damning, depending on the speaker's intentions. Adjectives like "tall," "short," "strong," "weak," "ugly," "pretty" have no objective meaning. As the linguist Benjamin Lee Whorf reminds us, "A 'few' kings, battleships, or diamonds might be only three or four, a 'few' peas, raindrops, or tea leaves might be thirty or forty."[53] As we all know, a "huge" mushroom can never grow to be the size of a "tiny" city.

Even common words like "cat," "house" and "boat" always refer to "a class with elastic limits. The limits of such classes are different in different languages…The Polish word that means 'tree' also includes the meaning 'wood'…In Hopi, an American Indian language of Arizona, the word for 'dog,' *pohko*, includes pet animal or domestic animal of all kinds. Thus 'pet-eagle' is literally "eagle-dog."[54]

The same polysemy, ie a word's capacity to have more than one meaning, clearly exposes the innately murky nature of language. In Italian the verb *venire* (to come) has no less than twenty five different meanings. What are we alluding to when we say "hand"? The extremity of a person's arm? An intention to come to someone's aid? An artist's signature style?

The equivocal character of language is so irrefragable that every language contains words with contradictory meanings. In Arabic, for example, the word *tahanafa* means "to feel spir-

[53] Cf. B.L. Whorf, *Language, Thought and Reality: Selected Writings* (1956).
[54] Ibid.

itually moved," which, depending on the context, can either mean "to burst into tears" or "to burst out laughing." The word *tagasmara* ("to act of one's own accord") can mean either "to be just" or "to be unjust." In Aramaic, *sababbara* is used to express both the concept of "shattering in pieces" or "slightly breaking." In Latin, *altus* refers to something tall as well as to something deep, while *sacer* means either sacred or cursed. All in all, Whorf wisely concludes, "We are all mistaken in our common belief that any word has an 'exact meaning.'"[55]

Examining things without timid reverence, it appears as though the system of language complicates rather than facilitates communication. If the opposite seems true to us, that may be because the world we live in has so relentlessly initiated us in the forced structure of language that we regard it as absolute, neutral and singularly capable of allowing others access to our thoughts. But that is only an artificial method for seeing things. All we need to do is describe the steps it takes to make Chinese shadow puppets, origami or a slipknot in order for us to realize how limited and inconclusive verbal communication is. Each of us communicates every instant of our lives using innumerable modes of expression. Language—even if it is the most esteemed, the most conscious mode—is still only one mode.

On the other hand, skepticism about language's capacity as a vehicle for communication is neither an original nor surprising position, but rather the point of departure for all modern theories of language with frequent crosscurrents in other fields. In *Linguistic Incomprehension: Scepticism and the Theorization of Language and Interpretation*, Talbot J. Taylor provides a compelling account of this when he calls language a "normative activity" and, as such, always "relative" or subject to constant, endless interpretation.[56] "N*eque enim disputare sine reprehen-*

[55] Ibid.

[56] The idea that the written law is not fixed or immutable but subject to

fitting those who use it into a forced social framework, a power so considerable aspiring rulers in early societies could not have underestimated it. "When language first entered history," Adorno and Horkheimer write, "its masters were already priests and sorcerers." Bakhtin came to the same conclusion: "The first philologists and the first linguists were always and everywhere priests."[84] The modern word "oratory" (the art of speech) comes from *orationis*, which essentially referred to prayers spoken by the priests during funeral rites. In Latin, *orare* means both to "speak" and "pray."

Despite its current image as a universal instrument, language has, since its origins, actually been the domain of specialists who used it to establish the codes of the new intellectualized world they sped along (mythic, ritual, religious codes), and to enforce public acknowledgment of their power. A myth is always a spoken account; rites employ verbal refrains; religion, in general, is founded on the word of God ("In the beginning was the Word!"). At the same time, the division of labor that began to pit "thinking practitioners" against manual laborers, found in the word, in the power of the word, means of legitimizing itself. To paraphrase Bakhtin: at the dawn of human civilization, language helped divide society into classes and ranks. And, later on, the advent of private property and the formation of the state gave rise to the need for an official language to legally outline the rules of proprietorship. Thus "judicial formulae," still closely linked to religious formulae, is born. With its old sorcery-wisdom, language, according to Bakhtin, "sacralizes" laws to the advantage of the few. The entire judicial system, from the Sumerians on down, would be unthinkable without language.

Language thus functions like any other religious or political credo; while it claims to guarantee personal freedom, it actually disables humans from perceiving the world on their

[84] Cf. M. Bakhtin, *Language and Writing* (1982, English translation).

> personal and impersonal, superior and inferior, intelligent and unintelligent.[81] As for articles [Kroeber goes on to remark] Latin is without while its Romance daughter tongues have developed them…The growth [of articles] in Romance is significant because of its historicity. That is, French developed its articles independently and secondarily.[82]

So not all languages are built the same way. All, however, force speakers to "read" reality according to its conceptual, psychological, cultural, and ideological paradigms. The thought our words give shape to is the result of a certain way of seeing things, a way that the language has already semantically filtered, constructed with official interpretations, standardized with its rules of grammar to make the thought accessible. People adapt to language; language does not adapt to people. Human beings, warned Heidegger, are not "the creators and masters of language, since in fact [language] remains the mistress of human beings."[83] Language masters, seduces, deludes and estranges people from the profundity of life.

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At the dawn of culture, perception was certainly not the exercise in intellectual detachment that is has become today, but rather a spontaneous way of being in harmony with everything. Once it was funneled through language, cognition ceased to be the result of personal development and became an effect of cultural conditioning that served a specific function in the first societies. Defining the forms of language implies

[81] Cf. A. Kroeber, *Anthropology: Race, Language, Culture, Psychology, Prehistory* (1923).

[82] Ibid.

[83] Cf. M. Heidegger, *Being and Time* (1962).

sione potest,"[57] said Cicero. In philosophy, myriad examples exist concerning the distrust of loquacity's power to embrace, explain and understand the "truth," and T.S. Eliot's description of the "intolerable wrestle with words and meanings"[58] closes the circle, extending the serious skepticism of words to the field of literature.

As much as educated people can religiously place their trust in the power of words, in the world of verbal communication we can never be certain we've been fully understood, and even if there are, on occasion, "succesful performatives" (to use Derrida's words), that does not take away the fact that, as far as expressing and understanding a state of being is concerned, language is an imperfect and limited means. To converse only means that the speakers are convinced they have expressed themselves and been understood, yet there is no external proof such communication took place. In fact, as with all other apparently ordered and linear symbolic structures, language often triggers completely unsatisfying expectations. "Human speech" said George Steiner, "conceals far more than it confides; it blurs much more than it defines; it distances more than it connects. The terrain between speaker and hearer…is unstable, full of mirage and pitfalls."[59]

The relativity of linguistic systems are manifest in their literal untranslateability. In order to make a text understood in another language, it is not enough to merely swap every word with a word from the target language. A translator has to analyze the entire text in order to understand the content before

interpretation is a well-known fact. You do not have to be a lawyer to know that, where laws exist, institutional authorities exist whose job it is to interpret the law. What is perhaps less common knowledge is that judicial interpretation of the law is never absolute. One judge may see things differently from another.

[57] "There can be no discussion without contradiction."

[58] Cf. T.S. Eliot, *The Four Quartets*.

[59] Cf. G. Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (1998).

she can replace it with a translated version. The fact that oral translation is referred to as "interpreting" says a lot about the subjectivity of translation.

Despite the promises of hermeneutics and contrary to the assurances of civilization, given their "spatiality," languages always leave room for misunderstandings and equivocations. The American government's mistranslation of Japan's response to its military ultimatum in July 1945 remains a testament to how linguistic incommunicability can have devastating repercussions. Because of the mistranslation of the word *mokusatsu*, which can mean either "to ignore" or "to refrain from comment," the Americans thought that the Japanese government had "ignored" the ultimatum, "contrary to their real intention of *reserving comment* on it, with all the dire aftermath of Hiroshima and Nagasaki that we know."[60]

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Zerzan remarks that, in an era prior to civilization, communication "involved all the senses, a condition linked to the key gatherer-hunter traits of openness and sharing. Literacy ushered us into the society of divided and reduced senses, and we take this sensory deprivation for granted as if it were a natural state."[61] We are convinced that language represents an instinctively human form of expression rather than a cultural phenomenon that has depleted our primitive assets and continues to impair our powers of perception. Distinguished scholars who have taken scientifically reactionary positions (not least Noam Chomsky) relentlessly argue the case of "innatist" beliefs, and in doing so have trampled on decades of linguistic and—most often—radical social studies (starting with the work

[60] Cf. J. Singh, *Great Ideas in Information Theory, Language and Cybernetics* (1966).

[61] Cf. J. Zerzan, *Running on Emptiness: The Failure of Symbolic Thought.*

cations. On a similar note, it is also possible to see that, given the civilized world's reliance on cars and machines, our language teaches us to worship them. Indeed, it pushes us to think of ourselves as machines. When we're excited we feel "revved up," "the wheels are turning," and if we're in a hurry "we burn rubber." When we're out of practice we feel "rusty," need to "refuel" and, every once and awhile, "unplug."

But Erich Fromm spotlighted an even subtler aspect of ideological conditioning wrought by language: our *possessive* vision of the world. The noted German psychoanalyst, referring to the work of Du Marais, observes a "certain change in the emphasis on having and being is apparent in the growing use of nouns and the decreasing use of verbs in Western languages in the past few centuries."[79] So, for example, instead of saying *I can't sleep*, today we say *I have trouble sleeping*. *I am upset* has become *I have a problem*. And, in the same vein, instead of *being happily married* we tend to *have a happy marriage*. Instead of *desiring* we have a *longing*. Instead of *thinking* we say *I have an idea*.[80]

We think that all languages are made up of verbs, meaning (depending on our linguistic structure) that part of discourse that expresses action. But that is not the case. Not all languages are based on a linguistic system like that of the Indo-European system, which is, moreover, a completely inadequate system for describing the infinitely complex reality of the many various languages that exist in the world. Likewise, explains Alfred Kroeber, languages that emphasize sex gender (masculine, feminine, neuter) only belong to a few language families (the Indo-European, Semitic, Hamitic, Hottentot, Chinook Coast Salish and Pomo of the North American Pacific Coast languages),

> although a number of languages make other 'gender' classifications, as of animate and inanimate,

[79] Cf. Fromm, *To Have or To Be?* (2005).

[80] Cited in Ibid.

expressions are used to refer to a female plumber, a female intellectual or a female scientist, and, as in other parts of the civilized world, the term "man" is used to refer to the entire human race.[76] Oppositely, there is a "clear negative connotation in many expressions used to refer to women. '…A *wise woman* is ridiculous, a *wise man* worthy of respect. A *light woman* is easy of virtue. A man, if he happens to be light, can only be so in spirit. We speak of *easy women*, not of easy men."[77] Likewise, we talk of housewives, not househusbands, and a woman given to sentiment has her "head in the clouds" while the same kind of man is called "romantic." A woman who expresses strong sexual urges is a "whore," while a man who does the same is considered "a libertine." A mother who does not suitably look after her children is always unnatural. A father, at most, is "absent."

Without having to resort to a laundry list of the more offensive expressions found in proverbs ("*donne e buoi dei paesi tuoi*," "*donna al volante pericolo costante*," "*chi dice donna dice danno*,"[78] etc), it is still quite clear that by masculizing words (and verbal concepts), we forge and perpetuate a particular mentality, a mentality that we adopt by learning how to speak.

"Political" interventions that language employs to shape a vision of the world are numberless, after all, and certainly not limited to the battle of the sexes. However much an oversimplification, you cannot ignore the fact that the West's association with the color white—as a symbol of cleanliness, purity, honesty (including moral honesty)—is hardly free of racist impli-

[76] As Chris Brazier notes, the noun Homo (homo sapiens, homo habilis, homo erectus) is a chauvinist term. It would be more appropriate to speak of homo erectus and foemina erecta.

[77] Cf. K. W. von Humboldt (1795-1827).

[78] Italian proverbs: *donne e buoi* means, roughly, "stick to chicks and oxen from your hometown"; *donna al volante*, "a woman at the wheel is an accident waiting to happen"; *chi dice donna dice danno*, "women spell trouble."

of the International Situationist) that strove to illuminate the ideological and partial side of language.

Precisely because language is a form of objectifying thought, it is not difficult to understand why the first spoken languages were much more complex than modern languages, possessed of larger vocabularies and more various tonal shifts, inflections, modulations, aspirations and so forth. To match the wide range of thoughts, feelings and manifestations of becoming, an equally wide range of verbal expressions was required. Linguist David Lorimer spent years studying the intricacies of Burushaski, the language used by the Burusho people in the Hunza, Nagar valley. As Ralph Bircher (who recently surveyed Lorimer's studies in an essay on the life of this indigenous people) notes, the Burusho had several names for things. They did not have just one word for "field," or "goat," or "sister." There might be a dozen different words for "field," depending on the size, soil or lay of the land.[62]

Our thoughts and emotions about the world are not fixed, and by objectifying them we stifle the intrinsic complexity and vast assortment of details and nuances. Offspring of a progressive mindset that assigns culture the task of elevating us to a position above nature, we regard the whole as something always in the state of becoming, aided by erudition in order to make up for a primitive lack. Yet on the contrary, it is culture that impoverishes, flattens, exhausts. In fact, the more language reifies the world, the more it suppresses the lush primitive ability to transmit states of being, since language has to reduce them to fixed and uniform concepts (words), and to that end must prune the expositive forms of communication, ushering in a process of increasing simplification. English—with its basic grammar, its dearth of verbs (which make up 10% of all words) and scarcity of synonyms—is perhaps the most extreme case of just how efficient modern languages have become. As Zerzan writes, "The

[62] Cf. R. Bircher, Gli Hunza. *Un popolo che ignorava la malattia* (1961).

logic of ideology, from active to passive, from unity to separation, is similarly reflected in the decay of the verb form in general."[63]

Given that speech represents a form of communication built entirely on symbols, all that we can expect for human perception is that it will meet the same inauspicious fate. Our perception is increasingly marginalized and managed by language. To go back to Zerzan, "the more the machinery of language…subjects existence to itself, the more blind its role in reproducing a society of subjugation." Reducing life to the grunts of language will always lead to a reduction in our openness to the world and our willingness to freely, actively engage in it. By thinking that assembling words syntactically is a natural process (and not a device of culture), one ultimately turns her back on any authentic relationship to the very life that makes us alive. Such a perspective is, furthermore, contradicted by a number of factors that reveal how language dramatically diminishes the spontaneity of being.

Firstly, learning an idiom significantly conditions the candor with which an individual absorbs the universe pulsating inside and outside of us. As one mother put it, objecting to the pressure put on her son to learn to read, "Once a child is literate, there is no turning back."[64] When we observe how our children are perfectly capable of distinguishing which napkin ring belongs to which member of the family without having to read the initials on the ring, we realize that they still possess that limitless and liberated capacity to understand the world without the aid of words. "Walk through an art museum," suggests Zerzan,

> Watch the literate students read the title cards before viewing the paintings to be sure that they

[63] Cf. J. Zerzan, *Language: Origin and Meaning*.

[64] Cf. Ibid.

to them an (ideo)logical and formal organization of the same culture that devised it, assembled it, and turned it into *the* method for accessing cognition. With its imperceptible powers, language establishes which sensations, connections and ways of seeing things are deemed "official," and in this way "unconsciously categorizes experience."[73] Far from impartially translating thoughts outwardly, language influences it, monitors it, walks it up to the gallows where it will be parsed by arbitrary rules. And there are no escape routes from this pre-established system. "The child learns what he can and cannot say, depending on the language he speaks," explains linguist Claude Hagège, "So the world he discovers is already categorized [by language], and the signs are firmly organized. By this measure language molds representation."[74] "*Parler n'est jamais neuter*,"[75] warns Luce Irgaray. To speak is never neutral.

The fact that Romance languages, for example, reflect the principles of male supremacy that still thrives in the West, makes it abundantly clear how much speech influences our way of seeing things. In French, *homme sage* means "wise man," while *sage femme* refers to a "midwife." The *lingua franca* of the "Bel Paese" is no exception. In Italian, feminine

[73] Following the Hopi of Arizona, whose language does not limit itself to one way of saying "water," but possesses many different words depending on the volume, and revealing how English, on the contrary, distinguishes between lakes, rivers, puddles, downpours, waterfalls and fountains, Peter Farb writes, "Each culture defines the categories in terms of similarities detected; multitudes of ideas are channeled into a few categories that are considered important. Speakers of American English grow up in a culture in which it seems important between oceans, lakes, rivers, fountains, and waterfalls—but relatively unimportant to make the distinction between the water contained in a canteen lying in a canoe and the body of water underneath the same canoe. In each culture, experience has been categorized through language in ways that offer commentaries on the differences and similarities between societies." Cf. P. Farb, *Man's Rise to Civilization*.

[74] Cf. C. Hagège, *L'Homme de Paroles* (1985).

[75] Cf. L. Irigaray, *To Speak is Never Neutral* (2002).

> know what to see. Or watch them read the cards and ignore the paintings entirely… As the primers point out, reading opens doors. But once those doors are open it is very difficult to see the world without looking through them.

Secondly, language aspires to possess reality, not come into contact with it. Attributing names to things (proper names, brand names, generic names, names without any individual significance) is perhaps the most obvious demonstration of this. An unfailing element of speech, the idea of affixing names to everything that exists goes back to the process of objectifying reality in order to control it. "Nominate" means "dominate"; Hegel made this clear two hundred years ago, writing, "The first act, by which Adam established his lordship over the animals, is this, that he gave them a name, ie, he nullified them as beings on their own account."[65] Hegel was seconded by Husserl, who affirms, "Everything has its name, or is namable in the broadest sense, ie linguistically expressible."[66] Which is another way of saying that everything which exists, being namable, is a "thing."

Whatever symbolic form it takes, culture's objective is always to subjugate. In order to be recognized by our "rational" perception the elements of the physical world must be named, or rather nominated and dominated. Only by reducing the entire existence of an element to an object is it possible for a civilized mind to establish a connection to it. In that light, it is just as telling that the freedom with which a child relates to others never follows the same steps as the norm dictates. Unlike civilized adults, two children can play for hours on end without feeling the need to know each other's names. Play, evidently, doesn't entail subjugation.

[65] Cf. G.W.F. Hegel, *The First Philosophy of Spirit* (1803-04).

[66] As cited in J. Derrida, *Edmund Husserl's Origin of Geometry: An Introduction* (1962).

So why do we accept this "limitation"? Why do we glorify it as if it were a panacea? For the same reason we glorify art, religion, agriculture, economic exchange, speculation, production, politics, science, technology. The more civilization sterilizes our pluri-sensory universe, the more we're forced to trust those surrogates that put increasingly greater distance between us and the unmediated world of lived experience. Language is one of the key methods for conditioning people. In fact, by suppressing the infinite features of communication in favor of a single, almighty phonetic, semiotic, syntactical (ie, structured and symbolic) apparatus, language controls the way we access reality. As Rousseau revealed long ago, "in changing the signs, languages also modify the ideas which these signs represent. Minds are formed by languages; the thoughts take on the color of the idioms."[70]

When Edward Sapir, at the dawn of linguistic studies, argued that "the 'real world' is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group" and we "see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do *because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation*,"[71] he espoused a definition of language as a system able to *warp the vision of the world for the person looking at it*. This view would later be taken up by his student, Whorf, who wrote "Every language is a vast pattern-system, different from others, in which are culturally ordained the forms and categories by which the personality not only communicates, but also analyzes nature, notices or neglects types of relationships and phenomena, channels his reasoning, and builds the house of his consciousness."[72]

The ideological function of language is clear: it makes thinking impossible; it conditions our thoughts by applying

[70] Cf. J. Rousseau, *Emile or On Education* (1762).

[71] As cited in B. Whorf, *Language, Thought and Reality* (italics mine).

[72] Ibid.

As a consequence, no one ever learns language spontaneously. It does not lend well to immediate acquisition. Unlike eating, drinking, sleeping or relieving oneself, speech has to be learned. Language is a typically metaphorical construct, meaning words that make up a language have no material relation with what they represent: they are merely conventions, symbols. The word "home" means "home" only because that is what the law dictates. As a metaphorical system, language assumes that there is a certain predetermined agreement about the (conventional) meaning of every word. It is not enough to define "pebble" as a small piece of stone; everyone must adopt a purely mnemonic association with it. And in order to speak, one not only has to study, s/he has to follow a rigid, preestablished set of rules. Rules that have been handed down, by the way, not created by the speakers themselves. Apropos of this, renowned Swiss chemist Ferdinand de Saussure famously argued that the "entire linguistic system is founded upon the irrational principle that the sign is arbitrary."[67]

Learning to speak is therefore neither spontaneous nor easy. The common verbal performances of spoken language are released by people's cognitive development, further confirmation that language is a cultural experience and not an instinctual act. Just like agriculture, religion, mathematics or law, language is not a requisite step to being human.

Sapir, Whorf, Voegelin, Harris, Hoijer, Silva-Fuenzalinda, Hockett—they have all expressed the same sentiment in every which way it is possible to express.[68] The school of Jian Piaget,

[67] Cf. F. de Saussure, *Course on General Linguistics* (1916).

[68] It is worth quoting Edward Sapir on this point: "Speech is so familiar a feature of daily life that we rarely pause to define it. It seems as natural to man as walking, and only less so than breathing. Yet it needs but a moment's reflection to convince us that this naturalness of speech is but an illusory feeling. The process of acquiring speech is, in sober fact, an utterly different sort of thing from the process of learning to walk. In the case of the latter function, culture, in other words, the traditional body of social usage, is not seriously brought into play. The child is individually equipped…to make all

a psychologist who studied the age of development, clearly demonstrates that "the deepest intellectual roots are by nature sensory motor and can be found in an increasingly rich and complex system of responses that the subject develops while coming into contact with the objects he perceives and manipulates"; our intellect is not programmed to learn a systematically ordered lexicon.[69] "Through his interactions with his environment, the child slowly builds a model of reality, not intellectual but practical, not represented but lived," and in this way enters into an engrossing relationship with the world around him. Only an early (and compulsory) abandonment of this experience, replaced by the merely symbolic world of culture, makes the process of verbalization the topmost mode of human communication.

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Inability to penetrate the meaning of things and emotions, remove from the living world, expositive narrowness, ambiguity, relativity—rather than liberate our innate expressiveness, the word transforms communicative plurivocality into a univocality commensurate to the meaning of words and conditions us enormously. We are not even ashamed to admit it; in Latin, *definire* literally means "to limit."

the needed muscular and nervous adjustments that result in walking…To put it concisely, walking is an inherent, biological function of the man. Not so language….Eliminate society and there is every reason to believe that [the child] will learn to walk, if, indeed, he survives at all. But it is just as certain that he will never learn to talk, that is, to communicate ideas according to the traditional system of a particular society. Or, again, remove the newborn individual from the social environment into which he has come and transplant him to an utterly alien one. He will develop the art of walking in his new environment very much as he would have developed it in the old. But his speech will be completely at variance with the speech of his native environment… speech is a non-instinctive, acquired, 'cultural' function." Cf. E. Sapir, *Language: An Introduction to the Study of Speech* (1921).

[69] Cf. S. Auroux, *La philosophie de langage* (2008).

appeals of television, the lure of the web—*anything* to avoid being alone with the thought of how miserable civilized existence has become. Drained of vitality, we take refuge where life does not exist, where there is only entertainment, social fantasies, fleeting adventures, bogus excitements, trade-offs and habits. "Life is what happens while we're busy doing something else," remarked Lennart Haggerfors laconically. "To compensate for the lack of a rich life," adds Swedish psychologist Owe Wikström. People live "'vicariously through others…They sit back in their armchairs and follow the intrigues of soap operas. They know the characters better than their own friends. Newspapers report on pseudo-events with headlines in all-caps: 'Jack falls for Jill.'[6]

If we take a good look at the ailing world civilization has created, it's not hard to understand why the entertainment industry has flourished. Unhappiness sells! Of course, if the goal is to make people forget, everything sells. And civilization is the master of making people forget. Isn't it civilization that distracts us, diverts our attention, finds ways to "kill" time? Isn't it civilization that impresses upon us the need to avoid reality and turn the other way when we talk of serious things? "Pleasure always means not to think about anything," write Adorno and Horkheimer, "to forget suffering even where it is shown…It is helplessness. It is flight; not, as is asserted, flight from a wretched reality, but from the last remaining thought of resistance."[7]

Relegated to an unreal reality, the civilized individual is at a crossroads where in either direction lurks despair. On the one hand, if he accepts the artificial universe, which offers him goods and services in exchange for the freedom to experience a joyful and dignified life, he will suffer. On the other, if he "wisely blinds himself," wrote Elémire Zolla, "he will live satis-

[6] O. Wikström, *La dolce indifferenza dell'attimo* (2001)

[7] Cf. T. W. Adorno & M. Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*

of the individual."[158] The time has come to start dismantling the foundations of this framework. The time has come to turn this paralyzing computational habit on its head, to recover gestalt, to once again open ourselves up to a life based around sense perception, desires, sensory motor skills, ludic and participatory action. We founded the present world on the power to rationalize. Now that ten thousand years of civilized life have shown the kind of decline this way of thinking leads to, we can choose to change tack. "If you're trying to improve your mind," wrote Henry Miller, "stop it! There's no improving the mind. Look to your mind and gizzard—the brain is in the heart."[159]

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At the root of the mathematic mentality is the idea, mentioned above (and stressed by Dantzig), that the "man of science will act as if this world were an absolute whole controlled by laws independent of his own thoughts or acts."[160] Laws, furthermore, nullify the particularities of every person's lived experience in favor of a regular, objectified, "true" reality for all. While the real world may not yet be relegated to a mere "collection of frozen images" (if anything, they are like a 'living, growing organism"[161]), mathematical procedures institute analytical logic in the hopes that we will accept this artificial stagnancy. Such sclerotization, however, divorces us from life and leads us down a blind alley. Measuring the world may appear an objective way to understand reality, but it is not absolute. It is based on numbers, which is to say on a totally abstract entity. And measuring, as Nietzsche put it, is "the perpetual counterfeiting of the universe by number."[162]

[158] Cf. J. Zerzan, *Running on Emptiness: the Pathology of Civilization.*

[159] Cf. H. Miller, *Tropic of Capricorn* (1938).

[160] Cf. T. Dantzig, *Number: the Language of Science.*

[161] Ibid.

[162] As cited in Ibid.

Be that as it may, the mystified perspective of rationality must be considered axiomatic and universal. Science, that ultimate expression of logical computation, stands out as the great beacon in the panorama created by number. Science is always truth. Science never goes wrong. Science is unparalleled and indisputable (with the exception of other scientific laws).

Spatial order, social order, political order—there is no turning back from the progress of civilization. And if we consider the despotic value that numbers have acquired in our daily lives, there me be no turning back from the progress that has led us to believe local rational perception is the only possible way of interpreting reality either. By now, our ability to interact with it is not only filtered through symbols, it is also domesticated by means of the same principles that make the world an object.

Beyond the rationalist vision we have learned to apply to everything, the world seems to have lost all meaning; without calculations and measurements we are unable to understand life. In the absence of logic, even thinking appears to us impossible. The world, however, continues to exist outside the scientific laws that purport to understand it. People are similarly irreducible. Elias Canetti has demonstrated this by citing several concrete cases that attest to how much humans who have yet to be sterilized by the atrophying practices of mathematical logic rely upon their senses and vital functions. Bushmen, for example, commonly avail themselves of their intuitive premonitions. By honing this non-rational aptitude, they can "feel the distant approach of people whom they can neither hear nor see. They also feel when game is near and will describe the signs on their own bodies by which they recognize its approach."[163]

Naturally, opening up our perception to a felicitous chain of senses does not automatically entail abandoning the ability to reason logically, strategically or preventively. It merely entails

[163] Cf. E. Canetti, *Crowds and Power* (1960).

communication, cyberspace has created distance in the way we communicate.[3]

Reduced to flimsy avatars floating around "who-knows-where," in some ethernet that can be altered at the click of a button, we are slowly turning into "Internauts." No longer individuals (*individuus*, inseparable), we have become separate navigators of the Web, or navigators *separated* by a screen that, naturally, screens us! We have replaced our flesh and blood selves with "alternate identities" (in Howard Rheingold's words[4]). As we are shorn of every tactile function (besides the touch-screen), stripped of all sensory skills (beside a dimsense of sight) and uprooted from the earth (transformed into digital interface), we draw nearer to realizing French sociologist Philippe Breton's heartening promise that "we are never alone when we have a computer."[5]

Right. No longer alone but on the same screen. No longer alone but isolated from everyone and everything. A "collective" isolation, grown so crowded we cannot even look ourselves in the eye. And a human race that fails to actively engage in face-to-face relationships is not simply alone, but profoundly extricated from its ability to establish relations, identify with others, give and receive help. Sometimes the painful determination of a suicide and the suffering of an obsessive porn-watcher are separated by the slightest partition, linked to the same pain yet cut off from understanding one another.

Cut off from ourselves, cut off from others, we have long gathered under that carnival tent whose motto (hailed by Freud) is "Don't think about it!" And removed as we are from the desire to actively do something about our boredom, we revert to being distracted by the mantras of conformity, the

[3] Cf. F. Casalegno, On *Cybersocialities: Networked Communication and Social Interaction in the Wired City of Blacksburg, Virginia, USA*" (2001)

[4] Cf. H. Rheingold, *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier* (2000)

[5] Cf. P. Breton, *La tribu informatique* (1990)

of the worst effects of haste, or of the fear engendered by it," writes Lorenz, "is the apparent inability of modern man to spend even the shortest time alone. He anxiously avoids every possibility of self-communion or meditation."[2] The laboriousness that typifies the modern rat race, the impatience we have come to nurture and our constant need for new stimuli to break up the monotony of our meaningless lives go a long way toward explaining how the impassive nature of this universe stems from our own lack of enthusiasm for life. Relationships no longer matter. Personal experience is continuously filtered through both the media and our intellectualized frame of mind, which regards such experience with open hostility. Feelings are valid only if officially approved.

Our need to drown out the world at deafening volumes, our 24-hour regime under artificial light, the frightening spike in our reliance on technology, the need to throw ourselves headlong into televised entertainment—at this point we have grown scared of our very own selves. We are both scared of *being with* ourselves and scared of *being* ourselves. Civilization has trained us to be afraid of silence, the dark, idle time, our natural instincts and our presence. And while dreading solitude as if it were an unbearable tragedy, civilization actually lures us into absolute isolation. Everyone is locked up in his or her imaginary tower, physically cut off from the world, barricaded in a modern cell, a robotic burial niche. As we extoll the virtues of online communication for enabling us to talk with people halfway across the globe, in the meantime we have stopped communicating with those closest to us. We have stopped spending time with them, stopped relishing their affection, stopped enjoying their physical presence. To paraphrase Federico Casalegno, rather than enabling long-distance

[2] Cf. K. Lorenz, *Civilized Man's Eight Deadly Sins* (1974)

not narrowing our thoughts down to a single component. And, most of all, not making that component the one and only key with which to access the world. Primitives also know how to be tactical, deliberate, operational. But their existence is not governed by these mechanics. Being human means above all else knowing how to listen to your heart, and it is no accident that despite being accustomed to processing the real world with logic, civilization has not succeeded in totally extracting that organ from humanity. The thrill of emotion, the tingle of energy and the spark of clarity we experience now and then exist *a priori* of our ability to calculate or foresee them.

There is something striking and at the same time undeniably ironic that contradicts the peremptoriness of our rigid intellectual approach to existence. Even Descartes, who fervently championed transforming the world into a purely logical and calculable entity, proved this to be true. As Sally Pryor recounts

> In his early twenties, Descartes had a series of three dreams that changed the course of both his life and of modern thought. While asleep, Descartes was visited by the 'Angel of Truth' who, in a blinding revelation, revealed a secret that would 'lay the foundations of a new method of understanding and a new and marvelous science.' Descartes embarked on a quest to understand how the mind works, inventing analytical geometry in order to derive a mathematical model.[164]

In other words, the idea that the world can be understood solely through cold rational logical thinking was conceived intuitively, in a dream, in a nocturnal *premonition*. In short, by accessing reality outside the realm of rational logic. Descartes "never returned to the source of his inspiration. His writings do not mention the role of dreams, revelations, insights as the

[164] Cf. S. Prior, *Thinking of Oneself as a Computer* (1990).

foundations of thought. Instead he gave all his attention to formal, logical procedures that supposedly begin with zero."[165]

7. Chronocracy: The Tyranny of Time in the Civilized World

> Kiss me. Kiss me now. Later, it will be too later. Our life, it's now.
> — Jacques Prévert

Before men and women parted ways with the living world and entered upon the alienating and reifying process that we call civilization, there was no such concept as time. Every moment, qualitatively distinct from every other moment, adapts poorly to temporal standardization. And even less so to a numerical formation in a linear pattern that runs from the past to the future. It is the demand to impose a certain finalized progression to the natural rhythms of life (from seed to harvest) that incites the need for regular and continuous time, for a chronological space intended as a limitless succession of equal instants that mark the flow of events.

Just as every moment is naturally distinct from another, every day is unique and unrepeatable. Not only in quality but in quantity (more or less extended). Only by assimilating to an entity composed of abstract and uniform temporal units (hours) are the days made equal.

The process of reducing natural diversity to a uniform paradigm is always a cultural process. As Edmund Leach writes, "[t]he regularity of time is not an intrinsic part of nature; it is a man made notion which we have projected into our environment for our own particular purposes."[166] In other

[165] Ibid.

[166] Cf. E. Leach, "Two Essays Concerning the Symbolic Representation of Time" in *Rethinking Anthropology* (1971).

VII. Ethics Of Fear, Ethics Of Unhappiness

1. Fear of Death, Fear of Life: Unhappiness in Civil Society

> *The pleasures of contemporary society produce different degrees of excitements. But they are not conducive to joy. In fact, the lack of joy makes it necessary to seek ever new, ever more exciting pleasures.*
> — Erich Fromm

In a world conditioned by fear, bombarded into submission, dolled up and remodeled to please others, our only respite appears to come from escaping the present. In Freud's words, "Life, as we find it, is too hard for us; it brings us too many pains, disappointments and impossible tasks. In order to bear it we cannot dispense with palliative measures.…There are perhaps three such measures: powerful deflections, which cause us to make light of our misery; substitutive satisfaction, which diminish it; and intoxicating substances, which make us insensitive to it."[1] Avoid reality, intones the father of psychoanalysis. Yet will running from ourselves really set us free?

Running from problems, as we know, only leads us farther from their solutions. When we run from ourselves we abandon our ability to discover ourselves, make sense of ourselves, understand one another. And fear feeds off that inability. "One

[1] Cf. S. Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*

iosyncrasy in exchange for admission to the "Grand Club of the Right World." "Standard men and women; in uniform batches," wrote Aldous Huxley, predicting this chilling world based on the "principal of mass production at last applied to biology."[27]

[27] Cf. A. Huxley, *Brave New World* (1932)

words, "natural time" has nothing in common with "cultural time." It differs from the idea of time that we in civilization have constructed and imposed on people's lives.

Unlike its cultural avatar, time is not a repetitive phenomenon, nor is it constant. The recurrence of mechanical time is an unreal dimension contrived by the first agricultural societies to dominate the indomitable, free spirit in the course of life that is instead based on the uniqueness of its instants and their property of *no return*. Time never turns back in on itself. It is not a cyclical entity. The fact that you turn 40, 41, 42, 43 and so on, tells us that from the point of view of its cold numerical representation, time denotes moments which are absolutely different from one another and never reoccur (you turn forty once; the day of November 3, 1936 will never come back; last summer will always be last summer). And yet we are led to believe that time is recurrent, which is to say something destined to reappear every year.

But "natural time" not only does not repeat, it also resists all attempts at scientific classification, in particular the attempt to make it cohere to one constant speed. Time is never an *inalterable and unvarying* going-forward. The idea that time flows constantly the way hours do is pure invention. Nature provides no proof for that claim.

> There is good evidence that the biological individual ages at a pace that is ever slowing down in relation to the sequence of stellar time. The feeling that most of us have that the first ten years of childhood 'lasted much longer' than the hectic decade 30-40 is no illusion. Biological processes, such as wound healing, operate much faster (in terms of stellar time) during childhood than in old age…Plant growth is much faster at the beginning than at the end of the life cycle; the ripening of the

> grain and the sprouting of the sown grain proceed at quite different rates of development.[167]

Similarly, the heartbeat continually changes the speed of our pulse, proving if anything that it is connected to a rhythm (subject to acceleration and deceleration) that does not have a regular and predictable score. Exactly the same thing is true of our breathing, blinking, and all other biological modulations. As the North American Pawnee said, "Life has a rhythm but not a progression."[168]

Having curbed any inclination to participate in the living world, the objectifying reign of civilization imposes its divisive cast of mind on the path that helps us grasp the particulars of life's passage. Where there's civilization, everything is transformed into static, uniform material. Separating the idea of time from rhythmic experience, civilized humanity saddles this abstract notion (time) with a systematic procession. Then it develops this structure by providing an objectified representation of ideal time. In fact, civilized humankind has not stopped at inventing time, it has even "materialized" it. In the world in which we live, time has become a real, self-sustaining *thing*. Even aware as we are of the fact that time does not exist as a tangible entity, we still believe in it blindly; we have all learned how to read the minute hands on the watch we wear and never question its existence. To paraphrase David S. Landes' Revolution in Time, without even realizing it, every time we cast a distracted glance at our watch we fulfill an act of faith, minor yet absolute. We turn to our tiny, portable oracle and, trusting we'll be heard, we ask it to give us an exact, true measure of that infinite, continuous, uniform line we call time.[169]

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[167] Ibid.

[168] Cf. J. Zerzan, *Running on Emptiness: the Pathology of Civilization.*

[169] Cf. D.S. Landes, *Revolution in Time: Clocks and the Making of the Mod-*

> is primary. The key words in this Social Ethic are 'adjustment,' 'adaptation,' 'socially orientated behavior,' 'belongingness, 'acquisition of social skills,' 'team work,' 'group living' 'group loyalty,' 'group dynamics,' 'group thinking,' 'group creativity.' Its basic assumption is that the social whole has greater worth and significance than its individual parts, that inborn biological differences should be sacrificed to cultural uniformity…[25]

In the age of technology, notes Umberto Galimberti, a human being, "like a machine, performs actions that are predefined and prescribed. The system makes no exceptions. Conformity is a strategy for social management. And conforming to ideas is not enough. We must also conform to feelings."[26]

Even transgression is no longer transgression but rather a phase that arises from circumstance. Funneled through the proper anti-conformist channels, transgression has grown to represent a mere symptom that can be controlled and tolerated like any other "customary" phenomenon. By transgress we mean no more than reaching a certain age, youthful folly, with its attendant showy outbursts. In short, *transgression* is *trans-silence*, and thinking autonomously is no longer in our safeguarding toolkit. Living life, exploring it in the flesh, discovering it, experiencing it, keeping our heads held high—these are no longer relevant. They no longer animate our actions and intentions. Everything is pre-prepared, prepackaged, perfected, made to conform, homogenized. All we are supposed to do is accept it, vote for it, wear it, buy it, push the button.

Silent, submissive, identical. The bloodcurdling image of an increasingly conformist life shows a global and luminescent world of indistinct cattle, devoid of any specialness, busy taking orders from the top floor, willing to give up every last id-

[25] As cited in A. Huxley, *Brave New World Revisited* (1958)

[26] S. Minardi, "I neoconformisti," in *L'Espresso*, November 24, 2005

the prevailing aesthetic and cultural strictures. The uniformity of the civilized world upsets everything, even our biological forms, and has led to the accepted adulteration of the human face, the particular profiles of our bodies. Anti-aging creams, facial rejuvenation injections, emulsions, laser treatment, touch-ups, surgical operations large and small. Remodeling our physical aspects is by now such a commonly accepted phenomenon that it makes no distinction between social class or sex or even age. Francesco D'Andrea, secretary of the Italian Society of Plastic, Reconstructive and Aesthetic Surgeons, recently reported that "20-25% of operations are for boys and girls under nineteen. At twelve, if they have protruding ears, they go to the otologist. And at 18 girls come in, their mom and dad in tow, to have their breasts redone for their birthday."[24]

With those perfectly redesigned noses, that permanently thick head of hair and high cheekbones, the civilized world not only defines what is normal, it attempts to establish tighter restrictions on what should be considered normal. And if for some people beauty still remains subjective, there is no doubt that pretty soon such an intolerably wrongheaded notion will be smoothed out and allure, like attractiveness or repulsion, will become measurable and correctible.

Nature is no longer a model. It's a burden, a dispenser of biological and perceptible diversity that the culture must steamroll and suppress as much as possible. In fact, seeking harmony with nature is looked upon as immaterial in the modern world. If anything what matters is how we perceive ourselves as a socially integrated entity within the system, framed by the institutional complex, at all costs and whatever that system may be. As William White has shown in *The Organization Man*:

> a new Social Ethic is replacing our traditional ethical system—the system in which the individual

[24] Cf. B. Stancanelli, "Figlio Perfetto," in *Panorama*, November 3, 2005

Thanks to how the idea of "time" has been conceptualized, we have evolved to think that an existence without time could not be possible and that the idea of linear time is a natural—not cultural—construct. Anthropologist Levy-Bruhl, who studied this argument at length, concluded: "Our idea of time seems to be a natural attribute of the human mind, but that is a delusion. Such an idea scarcely exists where primitive mentality is concerned."[170]

The hypothesis that humans have been informed by a similar idea since the beginning of time is, in fact, a hypothesis, and one completely unfounded at that, which merely strives to preserve an absolutist way of seeing things. According to archaeologist Henri Frankfort, primeval thought "does not know time as uniform duration or as a succession of qualitatively indifferent moments."[171] An existence outside of time is an existence submerged in a continuous present, explain Gunnel and Eliad, a present unencumbered by the past and free of obsessive worry over the future; a present engaged in the immediacy of the senses; an abundant, limitless present that acknowledges the fact that each instant is precious and unrepeatable. As Zerzan states sublimely, "'[p]rimitive' people do not live in time, they live in the present, as we all do when we're having fun."[172]

In order to shatter a life that basks in the present, our minds had to be enslaved by the pretense of temporality. And in order to impose such a pretense, there needed to be an instrument that made visible the idea of a serial, replicable time. In short, there needed to be a calendar.

A mathematical invention conceived of by stargazers, the calendar was not only the first instrument that manifest the

ern World (1983)

[170] As cited in an interview between J. Zerzan and D. Jensen, *Modesto Anarcho* #3.

[171] As Cited in J. Zerzan, *Elements of Refusal.*

[172] Ibid.

concept of "time" but also, in the words of Zerzan, "the first symbolic artifact that regulated social behavior by keeping track of time [which] involved [not] the control of time but its opposite: enclosure by time in a world of very real alienation."[173] In fact, the principal activities of civilized society began to depend upon the calendar deadlines they adopted—farming most of all, and later religious rituals, mercantile activities, all the way up to affairs of the military. To paraphrase Jack Goody, the calendar is both a secular instrument and a liturgical program.[174] The calendar's function as a means to institute social control can be found, furthermore, in its etymological root. *Calendarium* was the Latin word for "account book," since monthly interests were due on the first day of the month (*calende*).

Chinese society was probably the first to adopt a calendar. Every year was divided into 10 months and every month had thirty-six days. Very soon, and over the centuries, every administration in the civilized world availed itself of this extremely powerful instrument—Egypt, Assyrian-Babylonian empires, India, Persia, the Mayans and Aztecs, Greco-Roman society, Judeo-Christian society, Pre-Islamic Arab society and Muslim society. The calendar helped spread the ideology of time, transforming life from an immeasurable present to a controlled, cyclical, composite unit. That "the first document known to have been printed on Gutenberg's press was a calendar (not a bible)"[175] is a very telling fact.

Yet calendars could not singlehandedly collapse a way of thinking so deeply immersed in natural periodicity and the rhythmic coursing of life. Calendar time had split an eternal present, attaching to it the idea of a time in movement. Yet in the process temporality became associated with the notion of

[173] Cf. J. Zerzan, *Running on Emptiness: the Pathology of Civilization.*
[174] Cf. J. Goody, *The Power of the Written Tradition.*
[175] Cf. J. Zerzan, *Elements of Refusal.*

Helena Norberg-Hodge, the world in which we live is being reduced to having to check the label of our shoes to make sure they are the right brand. Such a though, humiliating in and of itself, becomes even more dramatic "when it is our sex, skin color, or age that is not the right brand."[22]

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Little by little we have replaced an organic, multiform, free dimension of reality with an inorganic, uniform, programmatic image of it. While the logic of conformity has conducted us toward total incomprehension of all that is "different," this same logic becomes more and more aggressive and penetrates each of us with greater puissance. Everything that pertains to and describes us must cohere to the officially legitimized and customary values of the prevailing social system. Only under these conditions can there be room for everyone. And everyone, in this case, clearly signifies no one.

What makes us stand out as individuals must be substituted according to whether or not we meet the standards of collective approval. Nothing can be what it is. Even our natural odor must be covered up with perfumes and colognes sold all over the planet online.[23]

Ever since the abundance of made-up, must-have products has been carefully championed, advertised and put on sale, people have been obligated to sacrifice personal attributes and tastes to meet the needs of something increasingly evanescent and unreal: the majority, social order, national identity, wealth, appearance, beauty. The sacrifice is no longer limited to the easily replaceable (a hairstyle, a cell phone brand). It affects our very bodies. Today, we are forced to physically conform to

[22] Cf. H. Norberg-Hodge, "Ancient Futures" (2000)
[23] The process is so rampant that natural odors have turned into a problem, and the world of fashion and cosmetics is teaching us to swap old fragrances for modern deodorants.

ment, rather than being welcomed as an alternative of equal merit, is regarded as outrageous and deviant. It is deemed a problem of public concern that should be treated as such. It goes without saying that this condemnation tends to narrowly circumscribe the will to uniformity and reinforces the drive to conform. Nowadays, our identities are based around our belonging to an officially recognized group. We're Italians (or French or American) first and foremost; we are engineers (or lawyers or doctors) above all else. The price of admittance is no less than our freedom. In the civilized world, everything enters the realm of "inclusion/marginalization." This tenet is even deeply ingrained in reality shows, which uphold the "flock" as a model "where the only rule is: 'don't be excluded, stay with the group.'"[21]

Moreover, homogenization of the social environment reflects homogenization of the natural environment, which has been geometrically and linearly redrawn so as to appear recognizably modern. Our acceptance of uniformity and our analytical vision of things are embodied in the neat avenues of trees, in the square stacks of land property, in the perfectly symmetrical furrows we dig with our ploughs, in our paved roads, even in the invisible border that separates the shoreline from the ranks of hotel beach umbrellas. Linear, to us, is synonymous with clarity.

Irregularity and regularity are irreconcilable concepts, just like *being* and *should be*. And civilization is the world of "regularity," of "should be." Those who are not as they should be are excluded from the club. An exclusion that goes for everything from an "odd" person to a "bastard" animal; from plants on the outlawed list (cannabis, coca, etc) to apples that are too big, too small, too irregular precisely because they were grown outside the planned margins of industrial harvesting. In the words of

[21] Cf. M. Ferraris, "E Nietzsche anticipò il Grande Fratello," in *Il Sole-24 Ore*, November 28, 2004.

a cyclical nature and was merged with those cycles. Hence the fierce reluctance to traceable time even in antiquity. During the classical era, for example, Aristotle wondered aloud whether time corresponds "to the number of things that exist or things that do not exist," which led him to make a series of considerations that persuade one to believe "that it does not exist or that its existence is obscure and barely discernible."[176] Stoics, on the other hand, group it with the "disembodied." According to Proco, very near to non-being. Landes cites an important example in verse of how the idea of time was even resisted in the Roman Empire:

> The gods confound the man who first found out
> How to distinguish hours. Confound him, too,
> Who in his place set up a sun-dial,
> To cut and hack my days so wretchedly
> Into small portions. When I was a boy,
> My belly was my sun-dial; one more sure,
> Truer, and more exact than any of them.
> This Dial told me when 'twas proper time
> To go to dinner, when I had aught to eat.
> But now-a-days, why, even when I have,
> I can't fall-to, unless the sun give leave.
> The town's so full of these confounded dials…[177]

Similarly, when Judeo-Christians celebrate the idea of an original earthly paradise, they are hearkening back to a mythological past that views time as the punitive effect of early civilization. The biblical story begins with Adam and Eve being cast out of Eden. Before that, there is no story to tell, there is no time.

[176] As cited in K. Pomian, *L'Ordre du temps* (1984).

[177] As cited in D. Landes, *Revolution in Time: Clocks and the Making of the Modern World.*

Because time definitively broke with nature and operated independently of nature, the calendar had to be upheld by a widespread ideology that gave recurring time a meaning all its own. It was necessary to turn time into an *object* that could be recognized, considered and obeyed. Christianity was the principal architect, converting cyclical calendar time into a reference point to be observed.

One could say, as Mircea Eliade does, that "Christian time is real because it has a definite meaning: redemption."[178] In other words, to cite Puech, in the Christian perspective time is a "straight line [that] marks the march of humanity from the initial Fall to the final redemption."[179] Taking up the theories of Christianity's conception of time drafted in the 2nd century BC by Irenaeus of Lyon and later by Basil the Great, Saint Augustine definitively buried all doubts about the existence of time. Time, according to Augustine, not only exists, it must be considered on an equal footing with all other creatures. The celebrated theologian "attacked cyclical time, portraying a unitary mankind that advances irreversibly through time; appearing at about 400 AD, it is the first notable theory of history."[180]

After the calendar had visualized, divided and transformed time into a recurring entity, time was now being molded into an autonomous being organized in a linear fashion that ran, as we know, from the past to the present and the present to the future. The eternity of the present was irreparably broken. As for eternity, it belonged only to God and was distinct from *successive* time. St. Thomas Aquinas was the leading theo-philosopher of this philosophy. Thus, while time was being readied to "flow," there was also a demand to fit it into a measurable framework. Its specific current was gaining acceptance. "As if to emphasize the Christian stamp

[178] Cf. M. Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return* (1949).
[179] Cf. H. Ch. Puech, *La gnose et le temps* (1951).
[180] Cf. J. Zerzan, *Elements of Refusal.*

shocked all together (by an unpopular dictator's tirades against out government, perhaps), or that everyone should panic all together (because a pandemic is on its way), just watch how we will join the chorus of good citizenry *all together.*

Political fear has gone so far as to render brute force obsolete; psychological conditioning is usually much more effective and, most importantly, sounds more democratic. It requires neither nightsticks nor tear gas and leaves no sign of a scuffle. In fact, today the multitudes of young people forced to wear a uniform and march in step have disappeared. Instead, they don designer "uniforms" that they've seen in advertisements. Even the youngest kids wear them with apparent ease. Monarchs are also in drastic decline today, since political submission is much more efficiently achieved by electoral mandate. The press, too, has stopped being a bold tool for mobilization. Once again journalistic deference is voluntarily given, on behalf of powerful lobbies that control the most important news outlets and deploy their "news troops" (can they really call themselves journalists still?) to relay the regime's message.

We live in a political and social context not only dominated by a *single overarching philosophy* (as is admitted everywhere now) but, more importantly, by a *single overarching sentiment* that does not distinguish between pain and disapproval, and drowns independent feelings in the muddy waters of forbearance or resignation. In the modern world, when a soldier dies in battle it is always fated ("a fatality"), never because of the war. When a nuclear reactor explodes it is always due to an unfortunate glitch, not because nuclear plants exist. And when a thousand square miles of water is contaminated with cyanide because of a leak in an industrial mill, it is always the image of the disaster that disconcerts us, not the terrible fact that we are surrounded by contaminants that lead to such disasters. The Economy, Politics, Technology—they never enter the picture.

As if that were not enough, in our state of maximum homogenization, every reaction that departs from the common senti-

their neatly lined up desks, the churches and their hassocks, the unvarying chain of housing projects, the parallel rows of granite stones in South African police mortuaries. Most of all they resemble the mentality with which consumers are treated. Nowadays there are no more children but class X, no more individuals but the staff in Department Y, believers in religion Z, the deceased members of the class of 1931, the faceless constituents of a qualified majority.

Where civilizations appear, individuals disappear. All that is detectable is the community, race, population, multitude and nation. And as long as human relations (between people and the entire world) conform to the principles of civilization, anyone that strays from the herd will be beaten back. The more efficient the technology to carry out this agenda, the more resolute the forms of aggression will be and the less conspicuous they will seem. Julius Caesar used to rely on imperial propaganda to make the masses yield to the throne. The ferocious Aztec rulers took recourse to rituals of sacrifice. The Catholic Church employed terror during the Spanish Inquisition. Hitler appealed to nationalism while Communist dictators appealed to the proletarian spirit. Now that technology has managed to enter people's homes, people's lives, people's hearts and minds, authorities can loosen the reins of regulations in the assurance that people will be willingly conditioned for them. Today everyone tunes into the television to be told how to think, how to dress, how to eat, where to go on vacation, how to treat disease, how to get ahead, even how to make love. Everyone is eager to follow the experts' advice, to absorb all the information media outlets have to offer them, to the point where we take orders like foot soldiers when the world demands that we finance it (donations for scientific research, government charities, religious charities, aid for national and international currencies). And when, between one commercial and a teenager in undies, we're told that the hour has come to get excited all together (for the Super Bowl or World Cup, say), or that now is the time to be

on triumphant linear time," writes Zerzan, "one soon finds, in feudal Europe, the first instance of daily life ruled by a strict timetable: the monastery."[181]

Judaism obligates its constituents to pray three times a day, yet at no predetermined hour. Islam has five daily prayers, yet at no such hour that would "require a timepiece." Christian prayer times, on the other hand, are less flexible. As early as the 3rd century AD, St. Tertullian "recommended daily prayers at set times."[182] However, local customs and habits had different practices. Thanks to its orderly and disciplined organization, monasticism ensured the most punctual observation of the laws of prayer in regular hours, establishing a chronological criterion (well defined and homogenous) for the respect of religious functions. The Rule of Saint Benedict, the book of precepts written by St. Benedict of Nursia (480 AD—547 AD), became the model par excellence for monastic living. The Rule, Marcello Archetti writes, represented "an attempt to cultivate a normative temporal model and rationalize monastic activity via a shared life of totally binding, unvarying discipline and routine."[183]

The vocation in Benedictine monasteries was the result of absolute devotion through the "concrete fulfillment of specific duties" such as "obedience, humility, labor"[184] within a strict, uniform, mechanical temporal system that precluded individual initiative. Landes explains that within the monasteries

> everything was part of a larger process of depersonalization, deindividuation. Monastic space was closed space— areas and corridors of collective oc-

[181] Ibid.

[182] Cf. D.S. Landes, *Revolution in Time: Clocks and the Making of the Modern World.*

[183] Cf. M. Archetti, *Ordine, ritmo, misura. Le rappresentazioni culturali del tempo* (1992).

[184] Ibid.

> cupancy and movement— so arranged that everyone could be seen at all times. So with time: there was 'only one time, that of the group, that of the community. Time of rest, of prayer, of work, of meditation, of reading: signaled by the bell, measured and kept by the sacristan, excluding individual and autonomous time.[185]

The tolling of a bell signaled the hour of prayer (canonical hour). The obligation to devote certain hours to prayer represented veneration of God, the sole defender of time and its supreme benefactor, which explains why monks had to immediately stop whatever they were doing (even if they happened to be sleeping) and fulfill their duty. It was adhered to so strictly that "within each house, the abbot or his representative was personally responsible for the accuracy and enforcement of temporal discipline."[186] Every day, seven times a day, forever, monks were called to prayer. And latecomers were severely sanctioned. Thus a never-before-seen demand began to speed up the flow of time: punctuality.

But the monastery was not only a model of religious rectitude. It was also a model of efficiency.

> Monasteries, [writes Landes] were beehives of varied activity, the largest productive enterprises of medieval Europe. Brothers, lay brothers and servants were busy everywhere—in the chapel, the library, the writing room (scriptorium), in the fields, the mill, the mines, the workshops, the laundry, the kitchen. They lived and worked to bells.[187]

[185] Cf. D.S. Landes, *Revolution in Time: Clocks and the Making of the Modern World.*

[186] Ibid.

[187] Ibid.

clan. "Aggregate" comes from the Latin word *adgregare*, meaning "to come into the fold."

So, at the dawn of civilization individual identity started to give way to collective identity, and people's uniqueness began to slowly disappear. In effect, differentiation does not in the least accommodate civilization's standardization *modus operandi*. But the process of standardization comes at no small price: the death of the individual. If in fact differentiation constitutes a characteristic aspect of subjectivity, a world that aims at suppressing differences is a world that tends to annul subjectivity.

Out toward the horizon, social uniformity reveals its terrifying ramifications. Under the aegis of authority, the controlling political machine demands that uniqueness be sacrificed in favor of the generic majority. Taking up the studies of Gustave Le Bon, William McDougall, Gabriel Tarde and others, Freud explained very clearly why it is simpler to govern a crowd than an individual; in the anonymity of crowds, individuals tend to be more willing to accept giving up their freedom, critical capacity and independent judgment. In Andrew Niccol's *S1m0ne*, Victor Taransky (played by Al Pacino) sums up the same concept as he discusses the power of mass media. "It's easier to make one hundred thousand believe," he says, "than just one!"

In a world that legitimates the psychological manipulation of individuals to serve its purpose, it is clear that muzzling individuality as much as possible becomes a *social* objective, not an unfortunate deviation from the system. Every hierarchical government, organization (commercial or not) and human consortium forces us to accept its flag, its coat-of-arms, its colors, its label. Whether a stylized wing on a shirt, a three-pointed star on the hood of a car or the Tricolore flapping in your heart, the ethics of subjugation are founded upon homogenization, and that is always where the logic of fear resides.

The cages trained animals are kept in all too closely resemble the workspaces of the modern world, the schoolrooms with

outrage against man's biological nature.
— Aldous Huxley

Authorities with their harsh punishments, symbolic culture with their deep rifts, the will to dominate others that is part and parcel of social control—these things don't leave much room for people to be themselves. On the contrary, they all lead to un-discovery, to masquerades. Fashion, which is just the most sophisticated outcrop of social imitation, derives all of its sap from fear. To be fashionable is most of all to be like others, which is to say not immediately recognizable as an individual. Having the same dress or the same way of thinking means being indistinguishable. Still today we say that people who share the same traditions have the same "customs" (which comes from the Old French word "costume," meaning "practices" *or* "clothes"). And it is no coincidence that a uniform describes clothes that answer to our need to conform. A uniform, after all, makes us uniform.

Ever since the first proto-agricultural societies began to organize, forced social cohesion became a key component for groups to garner the strength to combat other factions. From that moment on, the sense of belonging to a community morphed into social conformity. Whether brought together by the same totemic symbol or shared customs, societies born out of the agricultural "revolution" all developed a clear need to eradicate individual idiosyncrasies in order for members to identify with the established symbols of the group (religion, flag, clothes). For example, tattoos, often obligatory in initiatic rites in early farming societies, fulfilled this need. The decorations of the Maori people in New Zealand (all the rage today), scarification, permanent deformations of the body (lips, earlobes, neck) or the myriad other physical mutilations invented by early farming societies (from circumcision to infibulation) attest to the large amount of pressure that existed in organized societies to eliminate individuality in favor of the aggregate

In the 12th and 13th centuries the Cistercians' farming system "was the most advanced in Europe; their factories and mines the most efficient."[188] It is no wonder that the strict hours observed by monks (the 60-minute hour in lieu of the workday) were considered by medieval scholar Jacques Le Goff to be the essential antecedent of the industrial age.[189] Nor should it seem strange that Coulton, Sombart, Mumford and others believed you could locate the underpinnings of modern day capitalism in the Benedictine Order. Monasteries, the famous author of *Technics and Civilization* writes, "helped to give human enterprise the regular collective beat and rhythm of the machine."[190]

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The abbey bells not only struck the hour for the monks to pray, dine, gather and work, they also "carried far and wide, not only within the convent domain but as far as the wind could take it"[191] and thus, slowly but surely, began to tap out the rhythm of life in nearby towns and cities. Stirred by the kind of discipline convent bells could enforce, medieval rulers set about amassing these precious timekeepers. Laic bells were mounted on cathedrals and local towers, and began to mark the flow of time which grew more and more *productive*. Pretty soon these same bells were commanding the entire "life and rhythm of the medieval city reborn."[192]

[188] Ibid.

[189] "Monks, especially… were masters in the use of schedules… From Normandy to Lombardy, the sixty-minute hour was firmly established, at the dawn of the preindustrial era it replaced the day as the fundamental unit of labor time." Cf. J. Le Goff, *Time, Work & Culture in the Middle Ages* (1982).

[190] Cf. L. Mumford, *Technics and Civilization* (1934).

[191] Cf. D.S. Landes, *Revolution in Time: Clocks and the Making of the Modern World.*

[192] Cf. M. Archetti, *Ordine, ritmo, misura. Le rappresentazioni culturali del tempo.*

In fact, as Landes highlights, the more urban centers expanded—and commerce, industry and military conflict with it—the more "the complexity of life and work required an ever larger array of time signals. These were given, as in the monasteries, by bells: the urban commune in this sense was the heir and imitator of the religious community. Bells sounded for start of work, meal breaks, end of work, closing of gates, start of market, close of market, assembly, emergencies, council meetings, end of drink service, time for street cleaning, curfew, and so on."[193] Progressive, operational Christian time breached the levies of the religious community to become "the time of the State."[194]

Given its intrinsic power to make people obey, time served the system of exploitation well in the late Middle Ages, and cities, under the same coercive spell as monasteries, were transformed into mills with the nascent production mentality we know today. The law-abiding, disciplined masses fell into line. They had to produce efficiently, produce quickly, produce more. Time became "a resource, a precious, conspicuous commodity."[195] Its quantification definitively replaced its qualitative aspect. "Merchants, money-changers, banks and their entourage of notaries, accountants, copyists, etc"[196] represented the diamond-point of this process. Their activities set out "to quantify time even before they had begun to

[193] Cf. D.S. Landes, *Revolution in Time: Clocks and the Making of the Modern World.*

[194] "An instrument of domination, it was also an object of amusement as well as a symbol of power for lords and princes. It might become even more. In a capital city, for instance, it could become an effective symbol of government. In 1370, Charles V ordered that all the bells of Paris be regulated by the clock at the Palais-Royal, which tolled the hours and the quarter-hours. The new time thus became the time of the state." Cf. J. Le Goff, *Time, Work, and Culture in the Middle Ages.*

[195] Cf. M. Archetti, *Ordine, ritmo, misura.*

[196] Cf. K. Pomian, *L'Ordre du temps* (1984).

We have developed such an intense relationship of dependence that the sheer thought of living freely appears almost impossible to us. Over a hundred years ago Errico Malatesta remarked that it is always a question of a person who, being bound from birth, "attribute[s] his ability to move to those very bonds."[19] This is the lugubrious direction of every road to domestication: to make people think that they live thanks to their bonds and not despite them. "We like to think we're in command of our work, of love-making, of having fun, of taking a stroll, of expressing our opinions, of living and dying," writes Bernardi. "We think we are in command of all this, but it's not true…Work [which the economy obliges us to pursue] is decided for us from up above and depends on the needs of the system, our sex life is dictated by law and custom…We can't even decide how we will die, given that the dominant moral, mass medicalized and (also mass) psychotherapeutic trends oblige us to stay alive, even against our wishes, and await to be killed by the system or cut down by cancer or a heart attack."[20]

Civilization, not freedom, commands the arbitrary mores of the day, with its dismal and conformist values, its estrangement from life, the cruelties and defeats it cultivates, how it forces us to accept the inacceptable night and day. If there is a battle that needs to be waged against something, it certainly is not against freedom but against civilization. It's true that it is a colossal challenge, but that does not make it any less legitimate or urgent.

3. Fear of Diversity

Any culture which, in the interests of efficiency or in the name of some political or religious dogma, seeks to standardize the human individual, commits an

[19] Cf. E. Malatesta, *Anarchy* (1891)

[20] Cf. M. Bernardi, *Educazione e libertà* (2002)

shielded us from intolerance, racism, rampant prejudice, chauvinism, totalitarianism, nepotism, exploitation, war or genocide, just as it does not protect us from the existential desolation that comprises the current phase of developed civilization. These values are the modern, socialized embodiments of that desolation.

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New limits on freedom will not liberate us from the world of fear. The only thing that will permit us to rediscover ourselves (and the pleasure in our freedom and the freedom of others) will be a radical, robust individual drive aimed at subverting the values that have plagued us for thousands of years, and recovering a fulsome, organic relationship with the world that resides both inside and outside of us. Once again becoming capable of *being capable*.

The forces that fuel our dependency on models, objects, machines and amenities have restrained us so much that they have become all consuming. From a very young age our self-reliance is thwarted and repressed. There's no point in running or jumping around when we have cartoons and video game characters to do that for us. There's no point in making up the rules of the game with our peers when there is always an adult around to dictate the rules to us (whether mother, father, priest, teacher or coach). We are even frequently robbed of the experience of being born and, instead of coming into the world, we are plucked out of the womb by a surgical operation (the alarm over the steady rise in caesarians is not only over our physical health, but also our mental health and the medicalization of our lives). By thwarting the natural processes that lead us to be self-reliant the world educates us to be incapable. And the fear of freedom, which year after year grows more and more resilient in our heats and minds, stems in part from our inability to be self-reliant.

regularly measure it with watches."[197] Interest loans, credit deposits, economic speculation, duration of the workday: time had transformed into a "value that could not be squandered or dissolved."[198] The numerous forms of "revolts against the bells" that spread like wildfire across Europe were the first portents that people were critically aware of time. Landers recalls how public bells used to mark the hours of the workday gave rise to heated conflicts, whether due to "the effort to impose time discipline on home workers"[199] or the drive to control time itself. To hedge work with predetermined hours meant revoking a worker's autonomy to manage his or her own work (and life). Furthermore, the "the worker was paid by the day, and the day was bounded by these time signals [yet] how could the worker know whether bell time was honest time? How could he trust even the municipal bells when the town council was dominated by representatives of the employers?"[200] The tolling of the bell may have marked time but it did not show how time moved. People had to trust it.

Zerzan recalls that the most radical movements against time were "chiliast, or millenarian, movements, which appeared in various parts of Europe from the 14th into the 17th centuries. These generally took the form of peasant risings which aimed at recreating the primal egalitarian state of nature and were explicitly opposed to historical time. These utopian explosions were quelled, but remnants of earlier time concepts persisted as a "lower" stratum of folk consciousness in many areas." An old German proverb still in use today

[197] Ibid.

[198] Cf. M. Archetti, *Ordine, ritmo, misura.*

[199] Cf. D.S. Landes, *Revolution in Time: Clocks and the Making of the Modern World.*

[200] Ibid.

warns us "No clock strikes for the happy one." And a Balkan proverb: "A clock is a lock."[201]

Worker opposition to the coordinated workday hours were no less important. Insurrections were often so vehement and pervasive that they achieved major results. After an uprising in Ghent in 1349 "the aldermen issued a proclamation ordering the weavers to return to the city within a week, but thereafter allowed them to start and stop work at the hours of their choosing." Two decades later at Thérouanne "the dean and chapter had to promise the 'workers, fullers, and other mechanics' to silence 'forever the workers' bell in order that no scandal or conflict be born in city and church as a result of the ringing of a bell of this type."[202]

However, the resistance movements were negatively affected by their willingness to let radical opposition to time devolve into mere distrust of how time was measured. The worry over whether the bell tolls "deceived" workers transformed the argument against time (which is to say against the fact that authorities were imposing hours on workers in the first place) into an insignificant trade dispute about how municipal bells marked the duration of time. The dispute over the regular control of time ultimately led rebellions on the path to defeat. In fact, not only did authorities possess the bells with which to officially dictate time, they possessed a far more sophisticated and efficient weapon: technology. When the clock first appeared in the 14th century, replacing the bell, its system of regular hours envisaged by the hour hand (there was only one initially) squashed all debate over the reliability of mechanical time. High up on the tower, in its implicit totemic role, people began to regard time with fresh eyes. The clock tower was the most evolved technology of the time. It

[201] Cf. J. Zerzan, *Running on Emptiness.*

[202] Cf. J. Le Goff, *Time, Work, and Culture in the Middle Ages.*

does the modern world really have too few checks, hierarchies, policemen, sanctions, prisons?

Sure, the fact that today free trade is teaching us to think of freedom as a license to swindle breeds a certain distrust in human self-determination, and it isn't hard to find people who have been so frightened by global power that they demand new limits be placed on freedom instead of definitively unleashing it. But freedom to buy is not freedom, just as freedom to exploit or kill isn't freedom. It is only called freedom in order to give it some semblance of respectability, but it is clearly a semantic ruse.

Freedom is the ability to *act* (in the sense that British anthropologist Tim Ingold uses the term, as *being-in-the-world*). And acting is always attached to assuming responsibility for those actions and respecting others (human and non-human alike). There is no freedom in free trade for the simple reason that free trade neither takes responsibility for its actions nor respects others. And without responsibility or respect, all initiatives, whether individual or collective, fall under one category: abuse of power. Put plainly, freedom is not the problem with free trade, because free trade is not founded on freedom but willpower (exercised by the strongest economy), bullying and legalized abuse (exercised on the weakest economy), dispersion of dissent, affirmation of personal interests and therefore personal cynicism, and social and ecological irresponsibility. In short, free trade is founded on the exact opposite principles that freedom is founded on—closeness to others, mutual support, comprehension, consideration, equality and freewill.

The idea that traditional values can set everything straight represents the very thing that preserves and protects this superimposed world. Did family not exist in the slave society of Egypt? Did it not exist during the Crusades or the Spanish Inquisition when dissidents were burned in the squares? When has family ever protected us from the brutalities of the modern world? Family, like authority, school and culture, has never

on up to jingoism) or conformism (that forces us to become what fashions dictate) or the indiscriminate exploitation of nature. We are afraid of freedom but not prostration or the humiliation of a life in which we are forced to beg. We beg for work in order to live. We beg for respect in order to be considered. We beg for shelter, time, peace, safety, permission. We are afraid of freedom yet proud of being confined to the contrary, of being dependent on machines, experts, licensed swindlers and unlicensed swindlers, teachers, journalists, industrial magnates, advertisers, professional *distractors*, social rehabilitators and demagogues.

As long as the fear of freedom resides in our hearts, and is engraved there as a fundamental ideology, civilization will be able to count on the moral, psychological and practical support of its scared citizenry. And if that is the way things work today, it is no accident. When for example we tell ourselves that the decline of civilization is a result of the demise of traditional values, we are giving concrete proof of our intolerance for freedom. Believing our affliction is due to the fact that there is no such thing as family anymore, that schools are in decline or the authorities have been supplanted by reckless freedom, means we no longer desire a free world for the future, preferring instead that artificial world that suffocates us with its need to be preserved. So, while we assure ourselves that this rancorous and toxic world is inevitable, we preclude reflecting on just how irreconcilable the values of this oppressive existence are with real life. Isn't it the family that teaches children to think in terms of bartering and profit? Doesn't the family unit teach them to revere power and aspire to obedience and conformity? Isn't it the family that encourages them to outcompete others? Aren't parents the first to make their children learn by rote the same ideas they learned from their teachers instead of forming opinions independently? Isn't it at school that children's natural tendencies are erased, and the children turned into blank slates to be etched with lessons? As for authority,

lent prestige to the city and honor to the nation. Accepting its direction became the norm.

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The communal clock towers operated as mercilessly efficient means to bamboozle people into accepting time. "The instrument of a class," writes Le Goff, "the communal clock was an instrument of economic, social, and political domination."[203] Domination that could penetrate the minds, consciousness and lives of people, shaping the spirit until its authority was received unconditionally. The passkey of this incursion was, once again, the number.

Time itself has no basis in reality. In order for it to be reduced to an object it must be quantified, translated into numbers. What for Aristotle stood for nothing more than the "number of movement" was fast becoming a "movement of numbers" for economic, social and political control. "Measuring time," writes Archetti, "meant, in effect, calculating the useful hours of daylight and, as far as possible, attempting to make the night similar to and temporally integrated with daytime."[204] It meant definitively turning the attention and aim of human activity away from eternity and toward the fractions of repetitive time. It meant irrevocably rupturing "the rhythms of nature and dismantling harmony" in favor of "applying symbolic methods and models of quantitative—and purely abstract—thought."[205]

If the story of time is the story of establishing a concrete way of making humans depend on instruments of measuring time, then the clock towers that appeared in the late Middle Ages embody the crowning achievement of that process. Evolved from the old technology of weights and wheels (that did not mark time but "were only rung at the discretion of

[203] Ibid.
[204] Cf. M. Archetti, *Ordine, ritmo, misura.*
[205] Ibid.

bell-ringers and sextons"[206]), the mechanical clock was no less than the perfect materialization of an automatic instrument. Given its ability to "function even when there is no sun (unlike the sundial) and when it is cold out (unlike the clepsydra, which could freeze in certain climates),"[207] the mechanical clock not only guaranteed precision, it guaranteed precision for the entire day (the sandglass, for example, could not).

After the "revolution" of punctuality, time became *exact*. In homage to this new precision, the minute hand was added to the clock in the 15th century. Now the minutes passed alongside the hours. Pretty soon one could read the seconds. "During the Renaissance," writes Zerzan, "domination by time reached a new level as public clocks now tolled all twenty-four hours of the day and added new hands to mark the passing seconds."[208] Greater precision meant greater opportunity for the authorities to oppress the masses. Arbiters of time, they could let their power rain down on the people. Meanwhile, in fact, time climbed down from the towers and infiltrated courts, banks, public areas, local houses, even peoples' pockets. As Lynn White Jr. explained, thanks to the miniaturization of mechanics, as early as the 14th century portable clocks were being manufactured[209] that guaranteed the most incisive propagation of quantitative time in individuals' lives.

Yet because wearing time became fashionable, people of all social strata demanded that time be made more accessible. With the arrival of the watch (established after 1930[210]), quartz timekeepers (electronically powered since the 1950s) and then, most recently, the diffusion of cell phones, civilized people have become the universal bearers of time. Time, that is, which is programmed and dominated by work. Time that is

[206] Ibid.
[207] Cf. R. Bodei, Introduction to M. Archetti's *Ordine, ritmo, misura*
[208] Cf. J. Zerzan *Running on Emptiness: the Pathology of Civilization*
[209] Cf. Cf. L.T. White, *Medieval Technology and Social Change* (1966)
[210] Cf. K. Pomian, *L'Ordre du temps*

Nevertheless, we know from experience that freedom has never been an exclusive phenomenon, but rather inclusive and communal. Freedom, insisted the anarchist Bakunin, is "a feature not of isolation but of interaction, not of exclusion but rather of connection." As a consequence, continues the Russian philosopher, "I am truly free only when all human beings surrounding me, men and women, are equally free. The freedom of others, far from negating or limiting my freedom, is, on the contrary, its necessary premise and confirmation."[18]

What are we to do in such a narrow market, which only creates unhappy, strained relations between people, which makes people try to hoodwink us every chance they get, beat us in every possible way, unload their bitterness and pain onto us? Either there is freedom for everyone or there is freedom for no one. In a world brutalized by segregation, freedom is only a *privilege*. It is not *free*.

True freedom is never brutal and pathological, only privation is. And if, in the world we live in, we are constantly instructed to fear freedom it is because such psychological manipulation can be very useful for those in a position to command. Accustoming us to fear freedom is in fact accustoming us to not feel indignant at the prospect of its being denied us, proscribed and sold off. While we live in fear of our neighbors' freedom, we have ceased to be afraid of everything that truly makes us suffer. We are afraid of freedom but not of the authorities that limit and restrict freedom. We are afraid of freedom but not of the domineering mentality that is all-subjugating and all-consuming. We are afraid of freedom but not politics or power or war for power or global exploitation in the marketplace or the blackmailing properties of money or the false victories of competition or the impersonal reduction of everything to an interchangeable object by the mega-machine. We are afraid of freedom but not indoctrination (from catechism

[18] Cf. Bakunin, *God and the State* (1873)

Fear of freedom is not born out of free life—it's a fear that has been cultivated with professional accuracy. It needs to be instilled in us in order to perpetuate civilization, which, nourished by the tension built around this fear, constantly works to disseminate it. There is a reason for this. The idea that freedom is disorderly, uncontrolled and immeasurable makes it perfectly incompatible with order and discipline. And a world founded on order and discipline can do nothing but regard freedom as a problem.

We believe we desire freedom, but in reality we are deeply afraid of it, since we have been raised with this fear. For the modern individual, writes Marcello Bernardi, "nothing can be freely enjoyed. Everything must be controlled. The notion of not being perennially governed and guided by a superior and superhuman Law in everything we do and under all circumstances arouses… anguished terror."[16] The condition each civilized individual fears most is that of freedom (his own and that of others). The image of people living unfettered by authoritarian statutes and institutional limitations sounds horrifying to him. And then to consider the mere possibility of such a situation means being continuously "persecuted by horrible nightmares, apocalyptic visions of ruin, chaos… devastation, disorder and the decline of human society."[17] Indeed one of the civilized world's most common refrains is "Your freedom ends where mine begins." Regarding freedom as a "space" to hedge at all costs means seeing freedom as a threat. In fact, from this perspective freedom does not exist as a condition without borders, margins or government control. Like property, freedom has its limits too, its borders, *its end*. Like property, freedom must be "private," which is to say it must *deprive*, it must *keep out*.

[16] Cf. M. Bernardi, *Educazione e libertà* (2002)
[17] Ibid.

uniform, productive, and "by definition knows neither day nor night, neither season nor holiday."[211]

In a world that depends more and more on time and has learned to recognize itself as existing within time, the popular saying "Never put off until tomorrow what you can do today" signals that we've taken the obsession as far as it will go. Today we bend our entire lives to adapt to time,

> a single giant clock hangs over the world and dominates. It pervades all; in its court there is no appeal. The standardization of world time marks a victory for the efficient/machine society, a universalism that undoes particularity as surely as computers lead to homogenization of thought.[212]

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The clock, moreover, also possesses a formidable power to mold lifestyles and mindsets. The centuries-old process of assimilating time reveals just how instrumental the evolution of watchmaking was to molding human behavior. "The factory system was initiated by clockmakers and the clock was the symbol and fountainhead of the order, discipline and repression required to create an industrial proletariat."[213] Marx was well aware of this. Writing to Engels in 1863, he declares, "The clock was the first automatic device to be used for practical purposes, and from it the whole theory of the production of regular motion evolved."[214]

The clock tells us when to come and when to go. It tells us when to do and when to not do. The clock moves, removes, stops, confirms, directs. After all, the clock marks the passage

[211] Ibid.
[212] Cf. J. Zerzan *Running on Emptiness: the Pathology of Civilization*
[213] Ibid.
[214] As cited in Ibid.

of time that defines us as socially evolved human beings today. It distinguishes us as children, adults, seniors. It splits us up in school by age. It dictates who works and who goes on pension. It gives us free time. Every morning it puts us to work for the very system that upholds civilization, molding our minds so that they align perfectly with its values.

"Truth is the daughter of time,"[215] Francis Bacon wrote to the proponents of modern science. In 13th century Europe wasting time was considered to be one of the gravest mortal sins.[216] "Time is money," Benjamin Franklin quipped in the 18th century, further fueling an opinion that had been around since the 1st century AD when the Roman philosopher Seneca regarded time as "the most precious thing in the world."[217] And when, at the end of the 18th century, Adam Smith rationalized the routines of industrial production and attached to it the idea of progress and the inevitable movement of time toward the mechanisms of depersonalized labor division, he merely glorified the concept.

We may do nothing but nod at Krzyszt of Pomian's assertion that:

> the discipline of work in the industrial age…engraved quantitative time on people's bodies. Draconian laws, lay-offs, fines and awards, threats and moral exhortations, inculcated a new attitude toward time to the point of turning farmers and indepen-

[215] As cited in Ibid.

[216] Le Goff provides a full analysis on this point. "From the first half of the fourteenth century on," he writes, "the theme became more specific and dramatic. Wasting one's time became a serious sin, a spiritual scandal." Cf. J. Le Goff, Time, Work and Culture in the Middle Ages. The17th century Protestant ethic heavily influenced the moral rhetoric about preserving time religiously. Cf. E.P. Thompson, *Patrician Society, Plebian Culture, Journal of Social History* (1974)

[217] Cf. Seneca, De brevitate vitae. For further reading, see H. Weinrich, *On Borrowed Time: The Art and Economy of Living with Deadlines* (2008)

for no holds barred wars and set about erecting barricades between the *haves* and *have nots*, the *cans* and *cannots*, the *visible* and the *no longer visible*. The centralized resolve of a culture that defines itself by constantly dominating others has zero correlation with the ludic spirit of freedom.

We do not live in a free world but in a civilized world, and the doctrine of fear is above all else a doctrine of fearing freedom. In nature, the fear of freedom simply does not exist. It has no place in life. If anything, it is attributed to death. No living creature naturally fears freedom, only tamed creatures do. Just look at how indifferent wild animals are to our "creature comforts" and it should become immediately clear how unnatural is our modern existence leashed to electronic toys and routine jobs. No falcon, monkey or fawn would ever consider someone who locked them up and barked orders at them to be their benefactor. Even if you offered them as much food and water as they could consume, a comfortable shelter out of harm's way, and the chance to indulge in every other pleasure under the sun (from sleep to sex), the first time they catch sight of a hole in the fence, those animals would immediately hightail it out of there.

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In order for us to accept a life in captivity, we must be made afraid of the free life. We must be made to believe that the human spirit and the natural world are dangerous, dirty, uninhabitable, that if it were not for Civilization's protecting us from outside aggression with its hierarchical institutions (governments, armies, prisons, nuthouses); that if it were not for Science's defending us from nature's daily attacks (disease, famine, catastrophes); that if it were not for Culture's shielding us from ignorance; and that if it were not for the Economy's sheltering us from poverty, we would all fall victim to violence and criminality. Meanwhile we live in a world where we are overwhelmed by violence and crime.

the contrary, civilization openly admits to dreading it. From day one fear of freedom is imprinted on our hearts in block letters, and it grows up with us, marries us, ages alongside us. Who was not raised to think the other was a possible danger that we needed to be protected from by imprisonment, quarantine, ghettoization, if necessary, institutionalization in the psych ward?

But fear of the other is first and foremost fear of ourselves. Following the logic of political fear mongering, human beings left to their own devices are naturally aggressive, contentious and egotistical. In the world of ideologies, every ideology is born from this indoctrinated fear of human self-determination. Seeing as the individual is domineering by nature—so follows the logic—we need Christianity, Islamism, Buddhism or some Divine Spirit to restore balance to what cannot stand on its own.[15] By the same token, we seek out socialism, communism, libertarianism and every other "ism." Ever since our faith in ideology replaced a life spent in harmony with nature, people's social instincts have strayed farther and farther, sensual experience has become evanescent and wars, feuds and conflicts have grown more numerous and cruel.

Relegated to the role of passive consumers, we can no longer see that the arbitrariness we have been taught to attribute to nature is, in reality, the effect of a culture that disavows and oppresses nature. A culture, that is, grounded not in Nature but in Law, Authority, Politics, Culture. Freedom does not lead us to favor the strong over the weak. If anything, it is the combative, exploitative, utilitarian nature of the civilized world that does. Just as corrupt ethics leads to exploitation, conditioning, subjection of everyone and everything; just as the expansionist aims of civilization create the conditions

[15] As late as 1991 John Paul II could write: "Ignorance of the fact that man has a wounded nature inclined to evil gives rise to serious errors in the areas of education, politics, social action and morals. CF. John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus* (1991)

> dent artisans into laborers. They were trained to sit in an office at a specific hour–indicated by the clock—and not interrupt or stop working until a break was called or the workday was over. They were forced to follow a work regimen for the entire week and allowed to rest on Sunday so as to regain the energy for the coming week. A constant rhythm was maintained during the day—sometimes lasting more than twelve hours—by instating a surveillance system or forcing workers to match the speed of the machines.[218]

Once it had been made *useful*, time reared its other face: *useless* (because unproductive) time. Even today, when one isn't doing anything in particular we say he is "wasting time." Considered a resource, time that was divorced from production wound up being categorized as "wasteful." The entrepreneurial obsession with "wasted time" and "down time" drove humans to seek more efficient solutions to take advantage of this new resource. Artificial light, which allowed us to eliminate unproductive time, fit snugly into the framework of this great project of economizing time, just as did communications, sped up forms of transportation and scientifically engineered surveillance of worker productivity. In fact, measuring time erected parameters for work performance. Regulations were adopted to make the workday more productive. If time was to be measured and paid, then "the quality of time used [had to be assured]: constant supervision, the pressure of supervisors, the elimination of anything that might disturb or distract; it is a question of constituting a totally useful time."[219] This culminated in Frederick Winslow Taylor's "scientific organization of work" around 1880, in which each task was dissected in order to eliminate every gesture deemed superfluous and

[218] Cf. K. Pomian, *L'Ordre du temps*

[219] Cf. M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (1975)

economize fractions of seconds to significantly shorten production time.[220] In essence, the meaning of time altered once again. It was no longer merely "passed but spent."[221]

Employing time to maximize production encapsulates the meaning of what is, even today, a basic function of time: to regulate aspects of simultaneity. Mumford was perhaps the first to perceive that "the clock is not merely a means of keeping track of the hours but of synchronizing the actions of men."[222] This circumstance has proved useful not only for the economy, but also for enforcing social control and waging war. In fact, the clock ensured governments—through education—a disciplined, industrious and orderly population of young people. (As we all know, students must wake up early, do their homework and be extremely punctual.) Moreover, the clock allowed militaries to better organize their troops so that they could launch more lethal attacks.

With the emergence of a time that lent order to individual actions, a collective conscious began to spread which was more inclined to accept the values of precision and order. In this way, while the entire civilized universe became subject to the *efficient* thrusts of time, people's bodies (and not just their minds) were absorbing time. Impatience, haste, the sudden spasms that attend our modern style of life define the essence of being human in time.

Today we are well aware how much worrying about time affects us from dawn to dusk. Hurry and haste sum up the temporal climes of civilized society. Speed is the undemocratic object of admiration, whether in sports or any other competition. Fast and accelerated are considered the most appropriate adjectives for things in our world, the prized attributes of the products we buy and sell. Computer processers, like food, must be fast.

[220] Cf. K. Pomian, *L'Ordre du temps*
[221] Cf. E.P. Thompson, *Patrician Society, Plebian Culture*
[222] Cf. L. Mumford, *Technics and Civilization*

us), we now appeal to the latter (License) and forget about the former (Freedom). Nowadays what we consider freedom is nothing but the faculty "to choose between fabric softener X or fabric softener Y, soap opera A or soap opera B,"[14] vacation C or vacation D, telephone company E or telephone company F, right party or left party.

The further we continue to confide in the power of politics, the further we corroborate changing a free world into a universe based on license. And the more freedom is translated into permission (keeping our imaginary legal claims to a minimum), the more freedom itself becomes something to fear.

2. Fear of Freedom

> *[Civilization] not only reduces the environment of freedom...but also the "longing," the need for such an environment.*
> — Herbert Marcuse

If culture divides consciousness in favor of knowledge that can be quickly converted to power, if the Domination mentality implements this power in a concrete way so as to shatter the organic harmony between individuals (considered as subjects) and the living world (considered as an object), terror penetrates the human spirit and creates rifts between individuals. The civilized world is a world built on fearing others, on the fear of oneself projected onto others. However you call it—suspicious mind, nasty neighbor syndrome—in civilization we are afraid of everything that is strange, unknown, unfamiliar or not officially under our control. And freedom of the unknown is always seen as a potential threat.

Flaunted to the four winds for obvious demagogic reasons, freedom has never been a solid foothold for civilization. On

[14] Ibid.

knows that laws *drug us*, they inject the cattle with hormones. Even the dim entrance of a slaughterhouse can be made to look like a fun fair."[11]

Believing that liberty is code sealed on a sheet of paper indeed means "believing," or rather being content with the illusion. Rights, insists Vignodelli, are only "drugs to keep on working harder, guaranteeing a steady supply so that we have every type of fruit year round and an endless stream of films, music and poisonous legal vendettas that are more and more insignificant and unsatisfying."[12] In fact, while our conscience slumbers peacefully in the world of the Rights of Man, the Geneva Convention, and the United Nations treaties, our peaceable temperament is increasingly restrictive. We sit still in traffic on our way to work; we sit still at our office desk; we sit still and keep quiet while banks *legally* rob us blind, while mega-industries *legally* pollute our air, while mass tourism *legally* devastates country after country. It's easy to see what rights are for: they keep us in our seats.

The very fact that rights exist makes it extremely easy to restrict, suspend and freeze them on occasion. It is even possible to do so with the public's consent—all one needs to do is up the level of fear. The events of September 2011, like the massacre in Italy's Piazza Fontana and other similar incidents, helped usher in the *Legge Reale*[13], the Patriot Act, Homeland Security, Total Information Awareness System and so on down: new judicial bans, new prohibitions, new interdictions. Every restriction on our freedom becomes acceptable once freedom is transformed into an "article of the law" and authorized by a sovereign (whether ordained by popular sovereignty or not). Educated as we are to confuse Freedom with License (ie, with something that, like our rights, is benignly handed down to

[11] As reported in ibid.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Legge Reale was a bill passed during the 1970s to crack down on acts of terrorism taking place in Italy. The law violated several civil liberties.

Internet connections should be high-speed. Cars can be nothing short of aerodynamic. Motorbikes must be speed demons. Aircrafts, supersonic. We expect service to be prompt, drugs to provide instant relief, diets to last ten days, mail to be "express," wit to be "quick" and people to move at a "brisk" pace.

The very idea of losing time denotes the fact that time is programmed to slip through our fingers, leaving us no clear prospects. Whether it be time for work or time off, *time lost* is always unenjoyable, vanishing, absent, predictably worrisome in a world that has submitted time to the logic of calculation and business interests.

Embracing its sacred quantitative surveys, time—incomplete, ever fleeting –marks civilization's march forward and revels in the individual's absolute dependence on a universe built over the vestiges of nature, a universe just as fleeting, wretched and mercenary as time itself. Given the brisk onslaught of civilized life, we are all held hostage to time. Rather than seconds, today we count tenths of a second, hundredths of seconds, milliseconds, and this maximization of time in increasingly infinitesimal units seriously accelerates the rhythm of our lives. Furthermore, there appears to be nothing to expect but the bitter and distressing prospect of more acceleration. In the words of Heidegger, the fact that today we even calculate "millionths of seconds does not mean that we have a keener grasp of time…such reckoning is on the contrary the surest way to lose essential time, and so to "have" always less time."[223]

It comes as no surprise that, subjected as we are to the daily constrictions of time, we end up eking out a more alienated and meaningless existence. The one meaning seems to be to keep up the pace, yet the modern world's pace grows more incompatible with that of men and women every day. "How are you?" Tom asked an acquaintance on his way to work. "In a rush, as

[223] Cf. M. Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?* (1968)

always!" the man replied as he hurried off to an appointment, adding, "Seeing as the world is in such a hurry, thank God we still have legs to run with!" In a world regimented by busy schedules, all we have left is the privilege to hustle quickly enough so that we don't fall behind; to move as fast as lightning; to withstand the absurd cadence of this mad and madder world. Forty years have passed since that famous phrase "Stop the world, I want to get off!" was coined. Now that the frantic pace of that bygone universe has multiplied exponentially and we have fully entered the era of "quick" drinks, "ready-made" sauce and "flash frying," that statement of protest has lost all its theatrical irony.

The economy cannot stop or slow down. It can't be distracted for even a second. Its "balances," its results, its tricks all reside in its speed, and therefore it has to spin faster and faster lest it come crashing down to earth. The more able it is to accelerate the methods that sustain it (production, servitude, exploitation of the environment, consumption of everything and everyone), the more it succeeds in occluding the fact that it is sustained by such methods. And that is how it whets the appetite of those who still trust it. Everything, naturally, all the way, till total breakdown. In fact, as Jeremy Rifkin observed a few years ago:

> The introduction of steam power and later electrical power vastly increased the pace of transforming, processing, and producing goods and services, creating an economic grid whose operating speed was increasingly at odds with the slower biological rhythms of the human body. Today's computer culture operates on a nanosecond time gradient–a unit of duration that is so small that it cannot even be experienced by the human senses.[224]

[224] Cf. J. Rifkin, *The End of Work* (1995)

gering with chilling professionalism. They know how to cover up concrete dangers and funnel specific ones that can be useful to terrorizing people. Only by this means is the world continuously cleared of all responsibility. Only by this foul trick does everything remain the same, even when it changes. While the death of a hundred people caused by a virus is enough to make us all run for our lives to the nearest multi-national healthcare corporation, the one million two hundred thousand individuals killed every year driving on civilization's highways and byways (plus the 50 million men, women and children who are irremediably injured in such accidents) will never compel us to fear cars. Otherwise, what would happen to our grand and glorious car industry?

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Politics and Terror are essentially two ways of defining the same instrument of power. Without terror it would be impossible to exert control with any elegance. Without terror it would be impossible to keep everyone in line, silent and willing to *do what needs to be done*. Without terror it would be impossible to be applauded for putting people in chains. Substitute the noun Terror with the noun Politics and you get the same thing. Without politics it would be impossible to rule with any elegance. Without politics it would be impossible to keep everyone in line. Without politics it would be impossible to put people in chains to the cheers of the crowd.

We live in a world of Rights and we have ended up believing in Rights exclusively. But freedom is not a bunch of words written down on paper. As Michele Vignodelli observes, "rights and profits have nothing to do with the one true freedom: being oneself."[10] That is, being in harmony with life for life. "Rights are irresistibly charming," writes Guido Ceronetti. "It's not hard to keep creating more, since he who bestows them

[10] Cf. M. Vignodelli, *La civiltà contro l'uomo*

more these threats embody our very way of life, the more politics covers them up. "The enemy is a great invention," remarked the novelist Carlo Cassola in a 1978 essay. "People no longer notice that the enemy is in their house."[8]

In an age of corporate societies and technology, we are told to regard such inventions as nuclear plants, incinerators, biopharmaceuticals and genetic engineering as if they were our salvation. "The corporation, too, is a powerful and permanent institution," writes John Passmore in *Man's Responsibility for Nature*[9]. And therefore the tragedies caused by corporations are simply covered up, transformed by politics into a spectacle, or else completely absorbed by the oratory of Progress and accepted by everyone as inevitable facts, as *incidents*.

Methods for pacifying the public (which politics enacts by offering social stability founded on the principles of civilization) do not fear the disasters of the modern world. Politics knows how to exploit every inconvenience, difficulty and failure to the advantage of its model of the world. Whoever saw deaths on the job as a direct consequence of economics? Whoever even thought of calling into question this degenerating universe we inhabit? Every workplace death serves the cause of an increasingly narrow group of values. It serves to spur on production, incentivize surveillance and put more trust in the economy, progress, technology and civilization. In Italy workplace deaths are called "white deaths" in order to evoke the image of purity, of blamelessness, and to distract us from seeing them for what they are, ie social homicides. On the other hand, would a world where atomic bombs, torture, child exploitation, sex slaves and human organ trafficking are rampant ever be shaken because someone died on the job?

Civilization has always known how to protect itself. And its administrators know how to "manage" political fear mon-

[8] Cf. C. Cassola, *La lezione della storia* (1978)

[9] Cf. J. Passmore, *Man's Responsibility for Nature* (1974)

Citing psychologist Craig Brod, Rifkin highlights how the rhythm of work has been sped up even more by computers and astronomically increased the amount of stress and impatience at the workplace.

> Brod recalls the experience of Karen, a typist. Before the shift from typewriters to word processors. Karen would "use the physical cue of removing the paper from her typewriter to remind her to take a break. Now sitting in front of the computer display terminal, Karen processes an unending stream of information. There is never a natural point to signal an end and a break.[225]

To be crystal clear, the increasingly fast pace of work brought about by a "hyperefficient, high-tech economy" amounts to a threat to people's physical and mental wellbeing.

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In Mary Collier's dramatic lament (Collier was a young washerwoman in the 18th century who found a way to give voice to her resentment of a universe already run on productive time), the vacuity that presides over the repressive order of the bustling world becomes emblematic of what she gleans every day. "Toil and Labour's daily so extreme," she writes, "That we have hardly ever Time to Dream."[226]

Time to do has now obliterated *time to live*. In the world in which we live, time that drives our busy existences precludes dreaming, thinking, rejoicing, living. It is a time for production, conquest, command, organization. And as we produce, conquer, command and obey, hurtling ahead toward who knows

[225] Ibid.

[226] Cf. M. Collier, "The Woman's Labour: an Epistle to Mr. Stephen Duck." Reprinted in *The Longman Anthology of Poetry* (2006)

where, we lose contact with our sensitive selves. Even our physiological functions are by now completely conditioned by the orderly arrangement of time. We eat when it's time to eat, not when we're hungry. We go to bed when it's late, not when we're tired. We wake when the alarm goes off, not when we're fully rested. The technocratic regime, wrote Mumford last century, "could do without coal and iron and steam easier than it could do without the clock."[227]

"Social order identifies with temporal order," insists Archetti. "Its prescriptive and shape-shifting powers are such that it looks like autonomous "reality" fit for any environment."[228] In effect, our entire civil existence is constantly patrolled by time. Time has turned into our life's common environment. An environment not only constricting in terms of how we physically maneuver (time conditions all our activities) but also how we maneuver mentally and perceptually, seeing that, as Archetti continues, "the temporal system of clocks adopt—and engender—specific social and cultural values and connotations: order, severity, punctuality, precision, economy."[229] Time helps make this universe and its narrow, rigid form acceptable. Canetti spoke lucidly to this point when he declared that the ordering of time is the main feature of every kind of sovereignty.[230] Landes was even more explicit: "Knowledge of the time must be combined with obedience…The indications are in effect commands, for responsiveness to these cues is imprinted on us and we ignore them at our peril. Punctuality (the quality of being on the point) is a virtue, lateness a sin, and repeated lateness may be grounds for dismissal."[231]

[227] Cf. L. Mumford, *Technics and Culture*

[228] Cf. M. Archetti, *Ordine, ritmo, misura*

[229] Ibid.

[230] Cf. E. Canetti, *Crowds and Power*

[231] Cf. D.S. Landes, *Revolution in Time: Clocks and the Making of the Modern World*

on the part of another invasive high-tech structure (nuclear plants, incinerators, power stations, relay stations…). Hundreds of thousands perish every year due to unhealthy and unnatural diets thanks to industrial food production, or as a result of the collapse of the stock exchange, or the aftereffects of pharmaceuticals prescribed by doctors whose sole aim is to keep the wheels of the healthcare business turning.

As for the latter, by now the fact that pharmaceuticals are the leading cause of sickness and death in advanced societies is well known. At the same time, hospitals, which used to be considered safe havens for the treatment of pathologies, have been found to often exacerbate or cause fatal infections. For example, in Italy alone approximately 5,000 patients a year contract infections in hospitals; between 14,000 and 50,000 people pass away every year due to causes linked to healthcare clinics. In 1998 alone, almost 80,000 people died in Italy because of delayed treatment or misdiagnoses. And then there are the complications, side effects and deaths caused by conventional drug use. Of the "8 million people hospitalized every year in Italy, 320,000 (ie, 1 in every 25) fall 'victim' to medical errors or diseases caused by pharmaceuticals."[5] In France, hyper-consumption of pharmaceuticals leads to "1,300,000 hospitalizations (10% of the total!) and 18,000 deaths a year."[6] In the United States, the numbers are even more dramatic. Someone dies every six minutes in a hospital due to nosocomial infections (ie, hospital-acquired infections). Nearly 800,000 Americans "die every year due to prescription drugs."[7]

Psychologically chewed up by totally fantastic (or exaggerated) dangers, we end up underestimating the real threats hanging over our heads. And that is where politics steps in. The

[5] These statistics were published a few years ago in Il Sole-24 Ore and re-printed by Claudia Benatti. Cf. C. Benatti, *Virus letali e terrorismo mediatico*

[6] Cf. Gruppo M.A.R.C.U.S.E , *Miseria umana della pubblicità* (2004)

[7] Cf. G. Null, et al., *Death by Medicine* (2010)

b) it places the authorities who have invented it into the role of moral guide on the crusade to safety

c) it allows the same authorities to close ranks and squash dissent. In effect, when we have a hard time feeling protected we tend to doubt our protector.

But fear-mongering politics has a fourth objective in mind too: to distract people from focusing on real danger. In short, the art of good governance not only foments make-believe dangers, it conceals real and concrete ones.

Millions of people die every year due to our frenetic, frustrating, toxic way of life. Practically no one dies of "natural causes" any more. Distracted by the daily barrage of media coverage of the latest crisis, we are forgetting that millions of people who live in the industrialized world, however luxuriant their creature comforts, continue to die of tumors, heart attacks, diabetes and depression. We derive no pleasure from what we do anymore. We no longer find happiness in the facts of life because the adventure fails to absorb us. We no longer wake up thinking I *want* to do, but rather I *have* to do. And when, in the clutches of despair, we throw ourselves into work, take pills, join a mystical cult, sit around watching sitcoms, surf for online porn or exercise obsessively, there is no doubt death appears liberating to us. Civilization has made suicide a tempting remedy, and that says it all.

In the world in which we live civilization is the killer—anthrax, botulism and crime, my foot! We are victims of a wrathful universe that only permits a handful of people to live the dream its news and propaganda organs thunder on about. The decimation of human life is not mere words. Hundreds of thousands perish every year because some safety device in a factory breaks down and pollutes the air. Or some toxic industrial smokestack springs a leak. Or for some failure

Without time, there would be no past to glorify nor future to look forward to; for a world that stakes its credibility on the pomp of military campaigns (History) and religious hope for a better future (Progress), to take away the past and future means to take away everything. It means removing that instrument which so efficiently diverts our attention from the present, or rather from the unbearable weight of the world. Just as with words, numbers or icons, it is not human beings who have need of time but time that needs human beings to gobble up.

In order to rally against a mechanical life-death reality, we must figure out how to jettison time. Disowning its ascendancy over our sense perception could be one way. In the end, if we take a good look at it, time is nothing more than what Capek called "a huge and chronic hallucination of the human mind;"[232] or what Bergson defines as "the ghost of space haunting the reflective consciousness;"[233] or, in Zerzan's distilled version, "the first lie of social life."[234] Such a lie is not essential for us. Joy has no need of time and does not live in time. Ditto desire. Play goes so far as to erase it.

Time can't even find acceptance with the overbearing construction that, more than anything else, wipes out desire, passion and immediacy of feeling, ie science. "The fundamental physical laws are completely neutral with regard to the direction of time," explain Mehlberg, Landsberg, Squires, Morris, Mallove, d'Espegnat and others.[235] The same holds true for the laws of chemistry, mathematics, biology, cosmology, engineering and all other branches in which knowledge of the world has splintered. Even psychoanalysis must add up

[232] As cited in J. Zerzan, *Running on Emptiness: the Pathology of Civilization*

[233] Cf. H. Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness* (1910)

[234] Cf. J. Zerzan, *Elements of Refusal*

[235] As cited in J. Zerzan, *Running on Emptiness: the Pathology of Civilization*

its bills with a similar necessity. In our unconscious, Freud pointed out, "there is nothing…that corresponds to the idea of time; and there is no recognition of the passage of time."[236] And Stephen Hawking writes, "The laws of science do not distinguish between the past and the future."[237] The Newtonian idea of an absolute and mathematical time was replaced with the concept of relative time (the theory of relativity), which was in turn replaced by imaginary time (a concept contemporary physics had to introduce when it attempted to combine gravity and quantum mechanics.)[238]

Nevertheless, even if science refuted the notion of a singular real time, such a notion has remained relevant to culture. Culture has always valued and legitimized the concept of singular time, finding a means of legitimizing itself in the process. "Relative" time that currently relies on specific conditions and varies depending on factors of speed and gravity, is no less invasive than the absolute and mathematical time of Newton's mechanical universe. Fixed and immutable or dependent upon various conditions, time (even in science) is still time, with its unrelenting accelerations, its constrictions, its dictates.

Moreover, by favoring a temporal model where everything proceeds from the ignorance of phenomena to the "progressive" acquisition of knowledge-as-power, science takes part in the cultural affirmation of time at an even more profound and pervasive level. Pedagogy provides a clear example of this. There is no theory of education that refuses to teach children about time or that criticizes the superstructure of time. According to pedagogy, children's hostility to the logic of time must be repressed and transformed. As Zerzan says, "In the world of alienation no adult can contrive or decree the freedom from time that the child habitually enjoys—and must

[236] As cited in Ibid.
[237] Cf. S. Hawking, *A Brief History of Time* (1998)
[238] Ibid.

Politics, which arose out of the need for social control and management, came to light quite late in the history of humankind. Bertrand Louart remarks that in its current form, politics was born "in the cities of ancient Greece out of the need to *hold together that which seemed to need to be kept apart*, that is, to build a city despite opposing individual interests and the struggle between social classes."[4]

The irreconcilable presence of both rich and poor, wise and uncouth, lord and slave, man and woman that had been invented by societies after the agricultural "revolution" needed to be steamrolled. So, out of all the primeval tools that forced social cohesion upon us (art, myth, rituals, religion, social roles, language, writing, number, time, money), one was perfected which incorporated some of the characteristics of those mentioned above and displayed the entire span of society's deadly reach: demagogy. Founded on two staunch conditions—perfect dialectic and power to coerce—Politics entered people's lives to great applause. Even today a specialist in the art is called "Honorable."

Politics is nothing more than the ability to debate well and the power to impose. Both skills perform their synchronized routine in the sea of fear. They bless it, spread it, feed off it and constantly serve it up for the public. Thanks to fear, the adroit salesman can more readily subjugate others. And thanks to political sanctions (judged to be morals), s/he can confer executive power upon him or herself.

The notion of danger or enemies at the gate constitutes the motive force behind politics. Psychologically overwhelming and capable of sounding all alarms, the notion of enemies at the gate fulfills a three-pronged mission:

> a) it embodies all of society's woes so as to shoot to the top of the list of evils to be overcome;

[4] Cf. B. Louart, *L'ennemi, c'est l'homme* (1993) (Italics mine)

in an increasingly professional manner. Vandalism, attacks on human life, homicides, ugly accidents, disease can be artfully exaggerated to make us all feel personally under attack, vulnerable and in need of protection. But being protected is like being cured; the relationship is always one of total passivity on the part of the recipient. The authoritarian model's method of stripping individuals of responsibility, favoring respect for the law over the collective creation of it, finds its apex in the passive need to be treated by someone, governed, served, fed, freed, and protected.

We build entire areas over manmade dams. We construct buildings and neighborhoods next to rivers. We build houses and hotels underneath volcanoes, on the seashore, in seismically active areas, ready to mourn the victims of such "land politics" abuse, and later pile the blame onto nature. Hostile rhetoric, after all, is not a modern rearguard action. Ever since this plan to model the world on the images and likenesses of its biped rulers disrupted human life, originally immune to the art of "good governance," rhetoric has also served to put the civilization project into action. Politics, which is the very embodiment of the art of speech, has made a particular arrangement with Terror. Indeed, Politics and Terror are the body and soul of the same crippling cancer. There is no politics without the threat of some evil (even if that evil is exploitation or pollution). And there is no threat that is not justifiable in the eyes of Politics. As Corey Robin writes in his book-length study of the role of fear in civil society, political fear "is so closely linked to society's various hierarchies—and to the rule and submission such hierarchies entail—that it qualifies as a basic mode of social and political control."[3]

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[3] Cf. C. Robin, *Fear: The History of a Political Idea* (2004)

be made to lose. Time training, the essence of schooling, is vitally important to society."[239]

Looking over Piaget's long studies of psychological development, one "could detect no innate sense of time. Rather, the abstract notion of 'time' is of considerable difficulty to the young. It is not something they learn automatically."[240] Time must be taught, impressed on the mind, embedded in the deep ravines of the soul. In the opinion of Gilbert Voyat,[241] Beate Hermelin, and Neil O'Connor,[242] "there is no spontaneous orientation toward time"[243] and initiating young people to understand such a thought is akin to an act of violence. Learning the concept of "time" connotes all of those dramatic effects that ensue a similar act of violence. As Raoul Vaneigem movingly writes:

> The child's days escape adult time; their time is swollen by subjectivity, passion, dreams haunted by reality. Outside, the educators look on, waiting, watch in hand, till the child joins and fits the cycle of the hours. It's they who have time. At first, the child feels strongly the imposition of adult time as a foreign intrusion; he ends up succumbing, and agrees to grow old. Not knowing conditioning's subtle ways, he allows himself to be snared, like a young animal. When finally he possesses the weapons of criticism and wants to aim them at time, the years have carried him far from the

[239] Cf. J. Zerzan, *Running on Emptiness: the Pathology of Civilization*

[240] Ibid.

[241] Cf. G. Voyat, *Cognitive Development among Sioux Children* (1983)

[242] Cf. B. Hermelin & N. O'Connor, *Psychological Experiments with Autistic Children* (1970)

[243] As cited in J. Zerzan, *Running on Emptiness: the Pathology of Civilization*

target. In his heart his childhood lies an open wound.[244]

Faced with a humanity unhappily imprisoned in time, there seems to be only one prospect for disarming this indispensable feature of the civilized world. We must rediscover a life "outside" of time. The intellectual dismantling of temporal order is perhaps the necessary premise to lead a life free from the threat of measuring, from the threat of cataloging, from the threat of being trapped in the narrow spiral of routine. A life felt is not timed, and a life timed is not felt. "Only the present can be total," writes Vaneigem. "*We must learn to slow down time and live the permanent passion of immediate experience.*"[245]

The idea of temporality dominates life precisely because the mechanical representation of life aims at dominating us. Vaneigem recounts the story of a tennis player who "during a very tense match…suddenly [saw a difficult ball's] approach slowed down, so slowly that he had time to judge the situation, make a reasonable decision and return it with masterful brilliance." Vaneigem concludes, "In the space of creation, time dilates. In the realm of inauthenticity, by contrast, it accelerates."[246]

Only the present can call itself perennial, flourishing, insuppressible. The present is what we have to live in, is what *we are* to live for. If we ignore it by placing all our faith in the future, or if we rush by it so fast it simply becomes part of the past, the present will vanish along with the possibility of living a fully conscious life. Pastimes, amusements, recreation—they are only distractions for those of us who look to elude the present. Even from a lexical point of view, the concept of "the present" recalls lucidity, self-cognizance and awareness of one's actions. Being *present* (present to oneself, present in life's

[244] Cf. R. Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life*

[245] Ibid. (Italics mine)

[246] Ibid.

Not only that. Besides being unable to protect us from physical harm, it cannot even shield us from the fear of another disaster. Rather, it makes us unconscious of it so that our fear of nature will continue to imperceptibly destabilize us, just one more fear piled on top of all the other underlying fears that civilization has injected into our human hearts.

Civilization is responsible for reducing us to nature's shrinking violets. And it uses every suitable means of causing further psychological instability to do so. Mass media, the agency assigned to this particular task, performs its daily duty with touching generosity. "Killer Ice!" inveigled one national news broadcast[2] after a poor old woman with serious memory problems hazarded to walk out on the terrace of her nursing home on a winter night, slipped on ice, hit her head and died a few hours later from overexposure to the cold.

Trees can also be killers (when an unfortunate driver runs into one while exiting the highway), as can fog, rain, wind. If a mountain climber perishes while attempting to scale an impossibly steep cliff, it is always the mountain that killed him. Just as rapids murder those who risk venturing out on a boat, or the bowels of the earth swallow miners. Even tragedies that bear no relation to nature are turned into unlucky days and ill-starred nights. And if bad weather blows through the last weekend in August, the news already has its headline ready: "Gray Skies Thwart Tourists."

Naturally, the idea that the ecological environment responds to all human enterprise not only reinforces our apprehension of nature, it also makes every platform for public terrorization unimpeachable. All the improbable invasions of lethal viruses, bacteria infections, economic downturns blend perfectly with this organized *fearification*. By carefully selecting what news to report, mass intimidation is carried out

[2] The broadcast in question was aired at 1 pm on January 14, 2009 on Rai2.

preserving citizens' psychological confusion. In the civilized world danger never resides within civilization but rather *outside it.* In viruses rather than economic recessions. In natural catastrophes rather than world hunger. An enemy armed to the teeth rather than the dramatic decline in fertility…Everything in the civilized world seems to drop down on us from the sky, as if it were bad luck, a curse, something deliberately picking on us. Our lifestyle, our mindset, our tendency to invade and subjugate others is never our own doing.

Who's to blame if a river rises up and floods a town? Of course the source of the problem cannot be our having deviated, dammed and obstructed it. Of course it has nothing to do with our having poured cement all over the meadow and dismantled everything (trees, roots, rocks, cliffs) that nature had arranged so as to contain the river. And certainly the fact that the surrounding area has been so totally urbanized as to hinder every moment of the river and the earth is not to blame. No, if a river rises up and wipes out the surrounding houses it is only because nature is dangerous and untrustworthy. Similarly, if tremors shake up the earth below a city, and hundreds of people are trapped under the rubble, we would never say the victims were killed by human debris. We would say an earthquake killed them. The fact that it is just as much a risk to live boxed up one on top of the other in concrete buildings will not matter. The fact that the local government ignored citizens' warnings about earlier tremors will not count. Disasters that afflict the luminous world in which we live are never caused by civilization's destruction of nature (or how deaf we are to nature), but rather by nature itself. Which is to say that we have not properly defeated it yet. Our buildings are not tall enough, powerful enough, sufficiently resistant to the lash of the wind or the pull of the tide. We entrust the latter, in fact, to keep things under control. Obviously, like all types of control, the kind of control technology exerts over reality will remain a purely theoretical footbrake.

events, present to one's responsibilities) explicitly alludes to the need to be in the *present.* A conscious life is a life lived in full awareness of the present. There is no time for those who run themselves ragged through time. There is no life for those who try to let it pass instead of pitching into it headlong.

Part 3: The Doctrine of Fear *(A critique of fear)*

VI. Civil Terror

1. The Politics of Terror, Politics as Terror

> *The whole aim of practical politics is to keep the populace alarmed (and hence clamorous to be led to safety) by menacing it with an endless series of hobgoblins, all of them imaginary.*
> — H.L. Mencken

In a world thread with terror, it is terror that guides people's thoughts and actions, hovering around the edges and fueling people's desire for a guardian. The ultimate end of civilization is to match the funereal beat of insecurity with political design, thus betraying the ambitions of its fear machine. "If we are psychologically conditioned to submit," writes Claudia Benatti, "we become open to accepting whatsoever rule or regulation in exchange for a (more or less realistic) promise of safety and protection."[1]

Terror is a non-exchangeable currency in the civilized world. It serves and preserves. It serves the cause of those who control it and guarantees their propagation. It supports the logic behind a "fight for your life" universe and the ethics of conflict. It serves as justification for the ideology of total power and upholding the authoritarian organization of said power.

In a social context characterized by terror, fomenting hatred for an outside enemy is one of the most effective tricks for

[1] Cf. C. Benatti, *Virus letali e terrorismo mediatico* (2002)

only superficially different, to the one chasm that awaits the entire species."[12]

On the other hand, in the world of political fear, all one needs to do is get in line. And the lords of terror have for a long time been goading us to be modern, ie, not dissent, be patient, keep our spirits up. In short, to adopt that civil mindset that views social precariousness as a merit and the loss of autonomy as a right. The fact that we believe the institutions of the modern world can protect us from the very fear that those same institutions are in charge of spreading shows just how far we've traveled away from the exit door. Most blood is shed in and around these institutions: armies usually stage coup d'état; governments declare war; mafias continue to enjoy close ties to politicians; the leading causes of death in the modern world are perfectly legal: accidents at work or on the road, tobacco-use, alcohol-use, toxins in the environment. We should know by now that the only security civilization is capable of ensuring is insecurity, and that a civil world without terror could never exist.

[12] S. Ghirardi, *Lettera aperta ai sopravissuti. Dall'economia della catastrophe all società del dono* (2007)

FEAR = AN EMOTIONAL ORDER MANIPULATING AND DOMESTICATING THE UNCONSCIOUS
(civilization versus the ethics of happiness)

> *Political fear...is instead a political tool, an instrument of elite rule or insurgent advance, created and sustained by political leaders or activists who stand to gain something from it either because fear helps them pursue a specific political goal, or because it reflects or lends support to their moral and political beliefs—or both.*
> — Corey Robin

V. Fear as the Psychological Foundation of Civilization

1. Fear as Fear, Fear as Terror

> *The thing I fear most is fear.*
> — Michel de Montaigne

When we look at civil existence we are looking at a world built over the bones of nature, a nature that has been swept aside, plucked apart and ultimately silenced. Such a world does not operate autonomously. It must be constantly organized, patrolled and championed so as to seem real. And fear, like culture and domination, helps solidify it. Whatever disquiet someone experiences at the threat of danger, fear empowers the source of the threat as much as it weakens the target. Since the dawn of civilization, this attribute has hardly been novel to the interests of those who incite fear to show off their power. Even today *reverential fear* stands for the psychological subjection of an individual by his superior. Power, after all, is maintained with fear.

Being afraid means not being able to act of one's own free will. When someone screams, "Your money or your life!" there is no third option. We must accept the lesser evil. But being afraid also means accepting our dependence on everything—outside ourselves—that appears to offer protection (a uniform, a title, a sovereign). By no means is this a minor aspect of the inner workings of civilization, if it's true that modern authority is sustained by coercion and people's dependence on artifi-

"I think we miss that touch so much, that we crash into each other, just so we can feel something."

By now the common exhortation of modern existence is *take shelter*. Traps—visible and invisible, psychological and material—have been set to break up our peace, turning peace into something mythic and elusive. The natural escape routes from terror have been closed. There is no more point in fleeing from danger or confronting it, since we are the danger: our minds, our deteriorated values, our insensitivity, the mercenary lifestyle we have learned to adopt. Civilization is scientifically based on terror. And while every day our tension level rises, while the social alarm is perpetually tripped and criminals invade our living rooms, someone is benefitting from this. "A lot of commercial capital can be garnered from insecurity and fear," writes Zygmunt Bauman, "and it is."[10]

In short, the terror racket is a racket that pays big. It pays in cash, proceeds and jobs. It pays in terms of conditioning and subordination. In self-subordination. What after all is that sad and resigned spectacle known as "going to the polls" if not an invitation to exercise—in the most self-repressive way possible—the right to strip oneself of all rights and fearfully place them in the hands of sundry career politicians? The right to vote is a "sample" right, a "prototype right," an inspirational right in a system of rights. As far back as the late 18th century, Errico Malatesta defined it as "the right to give up your rights."[11] In a world plagued by civil fear, we are all called upon to become our own jailers and, as Sergio Ghirardi saw clearly, that calling does not discriminate on the basis of gender, class or political belief. We have come to a point where "herds of volunteer servants merely bear the cross of voting for the leaders that will lead them one by one, step by step, up paths that are

[10] Cf. Z. Bauman, *City of Fears, City of Hopes* (2003)

[11] Cf. E. Malatesta & F.S. Merlino, *Gli anarchici e la questione elettorale* (1897-98)

Terror lives with us, inside us. It accompanies our syncopated, absentminded gestures every day and suffuses our mood so much that we feel perpetually mad: mad at ourselves, at others, mad for no reason. "I just thought that I would wake up today and I would feel better. But I was still mad," says Sandra Bullock's character in *Crash*, Paul Higgis' disturbing portrait of modern city life. "I wake up like this every morning and I don't know why."

"Irritation," Baudrillard would answer. "In the past, we would have asked what excites you, what outrages you? But we are no longer excited or outraged; things get on our nerves, we are irritated."[8]

And Freud, the most famous neuropsychologist, found the etiology of frustration lies in the inevitable contrast between people's exigencies and the exigencies of civilization. "We've all become neurotic," writes Freud, "because we wanted to be something better than what, with our origin, we are capable of being."[9] Our life, in short, is no longer what we would like it to be. It is always too flimsy, frivolous, empty. And without a doubt emptiness makes us scared.

To hurt, to hurt others: the anguish of the former condition mirrors the false promise of being saved by the latter condition. It's a trick. Hurting and causing hurt are exactly the same thing. Just as authority deprives those who endure it as well as those who wield it, suffering cannot be eradicated by making others suffer. Hurting others alienates, drives away, builds up walls of hate and incommunicability. Underneath the daily torment that defines our fearful existence, director Paul Haggis senses the implications of an aimless life in which we fail to come into close contact with others. "We're always behind this metal and glass," says Don Cheadle's inconsolable Detective Waters.

[8] Cf. J. Baudrillard, *The Perfect Crime* (1996)

[9] Cf. S. Freud, *Civilized Sexual Morality and Modern Nervous Illness* (1908)

cial remedies. In order to remain popular the debased reality in which we live not only needs to bring everyone over to its side, it also needs humans to feel profoundly frightened, insecure, hesitant, fragile. It needs humans who believe all sorts of dangers are pursuing them (often imaginary, always exaggerated) and who are therefore willing to be housebroken in exchange for protection. Without fear there would be no civilization.

However, we must be clear if we are to talk about fear, lest there be misunderstandings and misrepresentations. There is fear and then there is fear. There is a fear we might call "natural" (related to the turn of events) which is usually referred to as fear or pure and simple fear. Then there is "acquired' fear (deliberately incited) which is usually defined as terror or political fear. Fear and terror are profoundly different things.

While both are characterized by grave psychological turmoil on the part of the subject, fear and terror are not caused by the same circumstances. Fear is a natural condition of life. It is a spontaneous, uncontrolled reaction to imminent danger in the form of basically occasional facts. Terror, on the other hand, is an emotional state deliberately implanted in an individual by the prospect of danger. What for fear is concrete and actual, in terror is orchestrated and provoked.

Face to face with a cobra in striking position, it is completely natural to feel afraid. We fear its attack, its highly poisonous bite. Danger plays a role in our existence and our natural reflex is fear. Terror instead transcends any direct connection to life's "accidents." Terror unfolds by a calculated process that exploits fear in order to achieve a particular result: a brandished knife, an intimidating pat on the back, a word spoken in a certain context, laws to punish transgressors. "The Law is Terror put into words," writes British psychiatrist David Cooper.[1] When punishments are authorized in order to breed a certain kind of human behavior, we are not stumbling upon fear—we

[1] Cf. D. Cooper, *Death of the Family* (2000)

are cultivating it. Which is to say we are striking terror into people.

If fear is an irrational fact (in its grip, our natural defensive instincts kick in), political fear, on the other hand, is a "rational" fact—calculated, fomented, deliberately carried out. The former is as linked to the unforeseen as the latter is to the foreseen. Whereas fear is a symptom of an individual state of being, terror is never a symptom but rather a means to keep people in a state of subjection. When we talk about fear as the essential psychological condition for the process of civilization, we are referring to political fear, not pure and simple fear. Every time practical fear (ie common, natural fear) is replaced by the practice of fear, terror enters the picture. The apprehension that pervades civil existence is not to be found in fear, but in terror. That is, in the ideology of fear.

2. The Security of Insecurity

> *The security of power is based on the insecurity of citizens.*
> — Leonardo Sciascia

Primitive humans know fear, not political fear. Nature does not seek to subordinate. Nor does it exploit fear in order to enslave. Culture, on the other hand, is born precisely as a means of subjection and a form of control. In the face of natural danger, no individual is totally disarmed. He can confront it or try to escape. Yet met with terror, we are all impotent. What can a person do knowing a bomb may explode in a crowded square? Or with the knowledge that a government may intend to expropriate her land because it has decided to build a highway over it? If fear provoked by natural alarm activates our will to protect, terror, on the contrary, incapacitates us so that we cannot resist it, amplifying our sense of insecurity that derives from our dependence on unattainable safeguarding measures.

ous alarm but also requires us to adjust and be willing to make a virtue of necessity.

There is no end to the scripts and stage acts of trepidation in civil society. In fact, fear feeds off the infinite forms of intimidation that we have learned to legitimize over the centuries (economic sanctions, punishments, imprisonment, sin, shame, threats of cold war, hot war, just war) as well as the multitude of impending duties and obligations that accompany the lugubrious days of our bustling existence: the obligation to appear productive; the obligation to dress properly; the obligation to choose our words carefully and restrain our feelings. To be seen as kind. To be accepted by others. That is to say nothing of the obligation to fight in order to gain the respect of others. In a world in which consideration no longer pertains to the common sphere of human relations but takes the form of uncritical acceptance of the rules, respect has nothing to do with *who one* is but with *who one appears to be*. Smiling at all times, being polite, putting a happy face on hard luck, selling oneself. It all means that we are constantly forced to act unnaturally and hypocritically. Pettiness, guile and duplicity are qualities we come up against every day in the world we live in. Tricks, betrayals and resentment are old hat by now. We do not even consider them to be sources of tension and attrition. Terror indeed has always come in all shapes and sizes in the civilized world, and worn many iron masks.

In addition, personal relationships, diminished by our tendency to suspect one another, are no longer defined by close interaction but by reciprocal diffidence, where skin color, physical appearance and dress alone establish how dangerous we presume someone may be. Fear therefore drives each of us to isolate ourselves, and isolation fuels fear. By now people are moved by desperation, victims of a world in free-fall in which the point is to defend oneself –from others, from others' intentions, from others' actions which we assume are inspired by ulterior motives.

The insecurity permeating modern life affects everyone. It makes no distinctions based on kind, faith, social class. It knocks on our door, threatening to beat us up or damage our property. It breathes contagion down our neck. It walks the streets of our cities in the guise of a mugger, a rapist, a stray bullet. It enters our community in the form of "fear of the other," infiltrating our unconscious mind and provoking endless anxiety.

If what scares us is that which is *other than us*, then being educated to perceive everything as *other* (the earth, other living creatures, "different" feelings, instincts, colors, winds, seas) inevitably locks us in a state of constant terror. From fear for our safety to fear of being judged by someone in a position of greater power (a father, a professor, a superior, a court, public opinion, God), the potential for a universe that we no longer sense is "ours" hinges on mass panic, utter fear and infinite phobias. To the extent that the primitive universe thinks of fear as an episodic expression of our relations in life, in the civilized world—to paraphrase Emil Cioran[7]—we are not afraid some of the time, we are afraid all the time.

Worry colors every moment of our tormented existence and often, for a little relief, we console ourselves by recalling that our tension is derived from hypothetical, not real, danger. The fact that millions die of cancer every year does not automatically mean that we will die of cancer. The fact that a homicidal lunatic can gun-down shoppers in a mall does not mean that we will be at the mall when it happens. The fact that there can be nuclear meltdown does not mean that it will actually happen. And yet, as they say, it is precisely this unrelenting probability looming over us that slyly empowers the ideology of fear. Once it has been defined in terms of "eventual possibility," the threat sounds even more ghastly, and creates not only continu-

[7] Cf. E.M. Cioran, *The Fall into Time* (1970)

Sabine Kuegler, raised in the jungle of West Papua until moving to Europe at seventeen, illustrates with exemplary lucidity the difference between fear caused by natural events and the frustration generated by aggressions of the civilized world. "The dangers are clear in the jungle," she recently said in an interview. "No one lies to you in order to steal something, trick you or get ahead of you…It's only since I was seventeen that I encountered the egoism [of civilized relations] and lack of comprehension. In the forest I was untouchable. Here I feel very vulnerable."[2]

As Ted Kaczynski noted in *Industrial Society and its Future*, the pressure that animates human beings to act can be divided into three categories:

> (1) those drives that can be satisfied with minimal effort; (2) those that can be satisfied but only at the cost of serious effort; 3) those that cannot be satisfied with any amount of effort.…The more drives there are in the third group, the more there is frustration, anger, eventually defeatism, depression, etc."[3]

The need to be protected represents one of the most typical drives of the third group. In fact, in the civilized world:

> Our lives depend on decisions made by other people…and usually we do not even know the people who make them…Our lives depend on whether safety standards at a nuclear power plant are properly maintained; on how much pesticide is allowed to get into our food or how much pollution is in the air; on how skillful (or incompetent) our doctor is; whether we lose or get a job may depend

[2] Interview with Irene Merli. Cf. I. Merli, "Ho vissuto nell'età della pietra" in *Geo* no. 1/06, January 2006

[3] Cf. Theodore Kaczynski, *Industrial Society and Its Future*

> on decisions made by government economists or corporation executives; and so forth.[4]

Met with such impotence, we can do nothing but hope, hope and despair. Hope in a "Better Future," in a Benign God to right every wrong, in the decisions made by a new President, a new local Government, a new Secretary of Education, a new Health Inspector. And despair every time these figureheads prove, as usual, inadequate.

Stripped of the ability to impact our living conditions first-hand, we are left to wait and hope—more and more passive, more and more patient, and more and more obsequious to those in a position to protect us. At the same time, we grow increasingly scared to act on our own, and thus become averse to questioning the very thing that makes our lives impossible. The fear that everything gets worse further increases our resistance to radical change. We even grow disdainful of others who work to enact such change. The more we place our trust in other people (and in the power of others), the less able we are to act on our own. The greater our sense of impotence becomes, the more anxious we feel about everyone and everything. Our sense of helplessness sets in.

Not even the knowledge that primitive people were more exposed to danger than we are permits us to relax, since

> psychological security does not closely correspond with physical security. What makes us FEEL secure is not so much objective security as a sense of confidence in our ability to take care of ourselves. Primitive man, threatened by a fierce animal or by hunger, can fight in self defense or travel in search of food. He has no certainty of success in these efforts, but he is by no means helpless against the things that threaten him. The modern individual on the other hand is threatened by many things against which he helpless: nuclear accidents, carcinogens in food, environmental pollution, war, increasing taxes, invasion of his privacy by large organizations, nationwide social or economic phenomena that may disrupt his way of life.[5]

Even if it is true primitive man perceives his impotence when faced with particular adversities (wounds, infections and so on), it is also true that, after doing everything in his ability to prevent them, he "stoically" accepts the risk as belonging to the natural order of things. "But the threats to the modern individual tend to be MAN-MADE. They are not the results of chance but are IMPOSED on him by other persons whose decisions he, as an individual, is unable to influence. Consequently he feels frustrated, humiliated and angry."[6]

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Modern society could not exist without fear, vital as it is to enlisting humans in the ranks of civilization. We may tell ourselves that the artificial environment we have erected has rid the world of things to fear, but in reality we only live in total fear in this substitute universe. We fear not surviving economically. We fear not being at the head of the pack. We fear being punished for what we did not do (and are supposed to) or what we did do (and are prohibited from doing). The innumerable forms of public terrorization accumulate. We may not have to fear lions or bears, but we are afraid of everything else, even harmless cockroaches, clouds or the worried look of our neighbor.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

privatization of wealth and as the antithesis of such exclusivity. Only when people begin to have do others begin to not-have. When we share, there is no division between those who have and those who do not have, because everyone is and therefore works together for their specific needs as life unfolds. Brotherhood-sisterhood, mutual care and support are common endeavors if there is no money to separate individual ambitions from group ambitions. In any case, as Latouche would have it, scarcity is not natural; it is unknown to traditional societies. As long as access to communal land and natural resources is not limited or prohibited by private property, nature is not stingy.

The words of a Garo woman from Bangladesh provide perhaps the clearest example of the relationship between money and poverty. "Now we live with money," said the old Garo woman in an interview on Italian television. "Before, we had rice to spare in our barns. We had rice and millet. But now we need money to buy rice. Now we live with money and are poor." The Garos are a semi-nomadic tribal people from the Assam hills in India who hunt and farm.

> They live surrounded by India, that industrialized, poor, modern country. The Garos do not know the meaning of private property. Till the age of twelve, the boys live in the "village bachelor dormitory," where they learn how to cook, hunt and sing. After getting married, they move into their wives' houses and work in the fields. Traditionally, they burned firewood, planted several varieties of rice and waited for the rainy season. Now the Garos go to the market to buy fish, soap, clothes. They earn their money by selling wood… Traditionally… they used ash and coal as fertilizer, and harvested enough food from the land to feed the entire village. Now that they sell off

fied in his unhappiness."[8] Suffering for those who keep silent, desolation for those who applaud. However you look at civilization, there is no way out up ahead. Theodore Roszak remarks that happiness in the civilized world is never of lasting value but "whatever transient relief or exuberant diversion we can sandwich in between atrocities: 'the pause that refreshes' before the next calamity.'"[9] Whatever its name—"the pause that refreshes," an "interval," "recreational time"—happiness in the civilized world only attenuates the indispensable fact of unhappiness for a while. A prisoner doesn't dream of getting to stand outside for an hour; he dreams of freedom. A breath of air is small relief for someone with her head under water. Recovering for a moment before diving back into the mud is only appealing to those resigned to a life of mud. And for those who cover the world in mud.

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From the outset of civilization, societies have tendered recreational activities. Bread and circuses is neither a postmodern invention nor a product of industrial capitalism. Just as Sumerians took pleasure in boxing matches, and Romans reveled in the violent games of gladiators, and the Spanish baited (and still bait) bulls in the bullring, we too have our not-to-be-missed "bullfights." We too rely on bloodshed and brutality to momentarily lift the weight of the world from off our shoulders. And when it's not the sight of blood that gives us a rush of adrenaline, we seek such respite elsewhere given our deep-seeded need to be transported far from our sad condition. Just as Ancient Greeks delighted in tragedies and

[8] As cited in *Il Sole-24 Ore*, Domenica, April 30 2006. The sentence is taken from Zolla's essay "Invito all'esodo," which appeared in 1963 in the magazine Rivista di estetica and was recently quoted in G. Marchiano's *Il conoscitore di segreti. Una biografia intellettuale* (2006)

[9] Cf. T. Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Tech-*

medieval kings took pleasure in clowns and court jesters, we too have our comedians and clowns to keep our eyes on. With proverbial irony, Sabina Guzzanti dubbed these media tactics "instruments of mass distraction."

In place of reality looms unreality, where everything seems splendid and everyone appears happy, where a livelier script or a little digital editing can brighten things up. That unreality rains down on our city roofs and makes us laugh, captures our attention, helps us pass the time, while the enchantment of the world steadily wanes, inundated by the excitement brought about by this constant, artificial stimulation. Mediocrity, Violence and Novelty become the indispensable ingredients to stir into the pot—the most efficient remedies to keep lit that wavering flame for life of ours, without which we might sink into utter apathy. Yet were one to recall how the spontaneous contemplation of nature fulfills our existence, s/he would soon see just how appalling our excitement over pixels is. A thirty-year-old Brazilian girl, born and raised in a small off-the-beaten-path fishing village, reminds us of this with moving genuineness: "Ever since I was born, every day I watch outside my little hut and see the same sunrise, the same beach, the same sea, the same sky, the same people. And every day is the same marvelous enchantment!" Hearing how serene and satisfying the simple life can be—with no diversions, relished moment by moment—should give us pause.

Outside our window there are no sunrises and sunsets, just endless pavement, roads, warehouses, garbage dumps, cars and partition walls. Clearly, we are confined to a life of sedation rather than enchantment. The difference is not only emotional. Mario Perniola shed light on the great divide between authentic felt joy and the passive consumption of thrills, amusements and diversions dished out by the industry of "guaranteed entertainment." Remarking on the culture of performance (sports

nocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition (1976)

cannot tolerate is the one that seriously questions our need for it.

Without economic consensus, the economy collapses. Without consensus concerning the dollar god, the dollar god can be taken down off its throne. The non-economic ways of our primitive ancestors, which had pervaded their lives from time immemorial, is part of our being human too. Lobbying against meaninglessness and for vitality may be one essential means of recuperating our harmonious existence and countering an existence governed by stock values, price lists, market fluctuations and business affairs.

Money has bathed and continues to bathe the world in blood, and floods it with sadness, desperation and objectification. It has forced each of us to abandon the pleasures of life and instead chase after them, possess them, show them off. Money has taught us to believe that it holds the key to wealth. "They have convinced us that wealth is about acquiring things that can only be obtained with money," writes Sonia Savioli. "According to this logic, a turd in a can, bought for a million dollars, makes us wealthier than others and is to our advantage; whereas knowing how to cook, understanding the merits of medicinal herbs or simply passing the time, content to stir the pot, are undertakings for the poor."[38]

4. Poverty and Civilization: Money as the Architect of Poverty

> *As long as there is money, there will never be enough to go around.*
> — Anonymous

When life functions outside the logic of value-making, poverty ceases to exist. In fact, poverty was born out of the

[38] Cf. S. Savioli, *Slow Life* (translation Schutt)

resent, just like every other manifestation of symbolic culture. Money has gone from being a stand-in for the value of objects to being value itself. Not only has the concept of money transformed everything into commodities, fostering the illusion that everything from gadgets to happiness can be bought, it has also transformed monetary "means" into an "existential end."

Money, however, is not an absolute given. It is a condition of our willingness to endow it with that kind of meaning. Undoubtedly, that willingness is gained by coercion nowadays; nonetheless it remains willingness. If we start refusing to take part in profiteering, or un-yoke our actions from the burden of self-interest and gain, the financial sphere will be forced to reevaluate its empire. In the end, if we can procure our own carrots without walking into a supermarket, such experiences of self-reliance will immediately make money (at least as much as is needed to buy carrots) useless. If the world of money prompts us to turn every human deed into a business transaction, by beginning to free some of our initiatives from this logic (eg, refusing to put a price on something) money will become irrelevant. The economic sphere may teach us to consider our pockets empty if we don't have money in them, but by rediscovering the pleasures of un-financial interactions we will fill up the coffers of our hearts.

Because it is a symbol, money possesses all the strength *and* fragility of abstractions. Therefore, even something as enormously powerful as money can be called into question as long as we are willing to reject it as a governing element of our lives. It is not by happenstance that the modern world tolerates every psychological attitude toward money except the one that disputes its inevitability. In our world, money is accepted as the legitimate embodiment of the most vulgar human acts. Money is an explicit form of power, a substitute for feelings, a means of compensating for sexuality, a means of blackmail, a reason to go to war. The one attitude concerning money that civilization

and sports fan fever for all), the Italian philosopher observes, "The basic tonality of the culture of performance is not directed toward the fulfillment of pleasure but toward the preservation of excitement."[10] And, one might add, the resulting gratification is not derived from personal fulfillment achieved on a level playing field, but rather from a state of impersonal and fleeting intoxication "closer to an addiction than to a feeling of intimacy."[11]

High on the all-consuming power of techno-toys, confined to taking heart that the artist of the month will "revive" the dull walls of the catacombs we call home, besieged by this summer's hit jingle playing over the car horns and engines, we proceed down this straight and narrow road preyed upon by the latest salves that demand we pay for them even if they don't pay off. The comfort we take in the false proximity of computerized conversations point to the fact that we find refuge in absence nowadays. And the relief we derive from this season's sitcom gags (with their canned laughter tickling us into the mood) perpetuates this absence, turning it into an icon. Whatever provides similar "pleasures without joy" (to borrow an expression from Erich Fromm), it remains testament to the loss of deep, sentient, personal feeling.

Lorenz's eloquent description of the descent of humankind in accepting a flat, autopilot life leaves no room for misunderstanding: "The need to be 'entertained' by something is symptomatic of a state of being" riven by unhappiness, he writes in *The Waning of Humaneness*. "When I feel the desire to read a mystery or switch on the TV, it is because I am either so tired or else so listless, for whatever reason, that I am unable to do anything more intelligent. Allowing oneself to be passively entertained is the exact opposite of that play that is the

[10] Cf. M. Perniola, *Contro la Communicazione* (2004)
[11] Ibid.

quintessence of every creative act, without which there would be no real human nature."[12]

"It's not fair!" cried a three-year-old after having understood what attending a Juventus soccer match actually entails. "When we play, everyone plays!" Unfortunately, in serious-minded civilization, in which the painful functionality of the "productive and disciplined animal" takes greater precedence over his/her enjoyment of life, any chance of "everyone playing" is checked early on in childhood. Later, the games get downsized, eliminated, ejected from reality or drained of their creative force and refashioned in the systemic mold all ready to be scarfed. Or else they are transformed into a potent educational tool aimed at accustoming people to competition, spectator-ism or the kind of autistic "solipsism" that is typical of digital entertainment.[13]

"Man…is only completely a man when he plays," writes Shiller with typical romantic ardor.[14] In place of the explosive, irreverent, indomitable freedom of play civilization has put prefabricated illusions of play, phony participation from the bleachers or the still sneakier mirage of interactivity (following pre-established itineraries in front of an electronic screen). For those who settle for mere contentment, the latter suffices.

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As for pain? Where does this eventuality fit in, this fact of life that along with joy evinces a sentient presence in the

[12] Cf. K. Lorenz, *The Waning of Humaneness*

[13] "It is intriguing," writes Alexander Neill about his experience at Summerhill, "to assess the damage done to children who have not been allowed to play as much as they wanted to. I often wonder if the great masses who watch professional football are trying to live out their arrested play interest by identifying with the players, playing by proxy as it were. The majority of our Summerhill graduates does not attend football matches, nor is it interested in pageantry. I believe few of them would walk very far to see a royal procession. Cf. A.S. Neill, *Summerhill: A Radical Approach to Education*

[14] Cf. F. Shiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1967)

venerating it? The answer is the same as for every other component of symbolic culture (time, language, numbers, laws, myth, rites, art, God) that has succeeded in governing our actions—by becoming one of the most vaunted reference points of a world that, removed from life, pressures us into needing *what isn't* because we cannot enjoy *what is*. As long as life pulses with aspirations not subsumed by economics, money is meaningless. But when life begins to associate aspirations with standards of measurement, and continuously quantifies, calibrates, compares and affixes a value to aspirations, our need to establish objective criteria to understand their worth dupes us into thinking money is valuable.

Contrary to our natural way of thinking, money is not indispensable to human life. It was not for the millions of years in which our existence flowed with mirth and mutual support, and it is not indispensable today for those communities that have preserved their nonmonetary way of life. Neither should it be indispensable for us busy bees of the modern world, given our encounters with feelings that have not been corrupted by the tyranny of money: family, affection, love, manifestations of human dignity, respect, esteem, aid…

If money seems essential to us today it is only because money is essential to the system in which we live. Indeed, without money the regime of rivalry, opposition, speculation, blackmail and sanctions would cease to exist. The fact that we need to buy food in order to eat, work for a paycheck in order to live, possess capital in order to have a roof over our heads, clothes on our back, a beach to pass the day at, does not mean that those things exist because they come at a price. Life thrives above and beyond the money we are forced to purchase it with.

The problem is that, having accepted the calculation of every aspect of our existence, we have ultimately let money rule our lives. On top of that, money has so shaped our way of thinking that it has supplanted what it was initially intended to rep-

What becomes clear is that money is a completely inconsistent entity, a symbol that wafts in the imagination of those who have been instructed to weigh everything and think mostly about themselves. In his essay about money—whose title, "Money, the Devil's Dung," recalls Luther's eloquence—Fini warns, "We need to stop thinking of money as wealth or representative of wealth. That way, we'll see money is nothing, pure Nothing. At the turn of the 17th century, after having stolen all the gold and silver (the currency in Europe at the time) from the Native Americans that they could, the Spanish realized they were more impoverished than they had been before."[35]

You cannot eat gold, as King Midas discovered.

The value of money, then, does not actually exist. It is only in our heads. It exists only as much as civilized individuals believe that money can exist. Without such a belief—the result of our habit of measuring everything around us—money would not be considered valuable. It would be an insignificant cut of metal rounded off at the edges, an inky slip of paper, an irrelevant plastic card of no practical use. And the power of money would not condition us. Before the 1929 crash, writes Fini, "Americans who had invested in the New York Stock Exchange thought they were wealthy, but all it took was someone to question the value of their shares […] to drag everyone down with him, because that wealth showed itself for what it was—scrap paper."[36] The idea that money is made-up, a trick, a "pure Nothing" has been supported by innumerable studies in Western philosophy. Even Aristotle writes that money is "nonsense and nothing by nature but an entire convention."[37]

Yet if money does not exist (outside of our heads), how can it wield so much power? How can it continue to bewitch us into

[35] Cf. M. Fini, *Il denaro "sterco il demonio"* (1998) (trans. Schutt)
[36] Cf. Ibid.
[37] Cf. Aristotle, *Politics* (trans. H. Rackham)

world? As we might expect, there is no room for pain in a universe enthralled with distractions. Having "civilized" fun requires more than anything else the absence of pain, because a pain-free life seems like a happy life.

Epidurals, Aulin, babies' safety helmets, elbow pads, kneepads—such mechanisms have come to define the increasingly maniacal way we jettison physical pain and hold up this way of living as a model of our spurious "wellness." Less pain equals more pleasure, we think. And yet, as much as we try to hide it, modern life is no stranger to suffering. Pain has been merely replaced by suffering, a condition much more helpful to civilization. In fact, pain has an essential physiological advantage that suffering tries to assuage. If we whack our hand with a hammer, pain tells us we have not been paying enough attention. The next time around, we will be sure to move our hand out of the way. Suffering functions in a diametrically opposite way. Just as pain alerts us to move our hand out of the way, suffering teaches us to keep our hand still and endure the blow of the hammer as atonement, penitence or punishment for our sins. If pain is an integral part of existence and therefore has a specific meaning for our lives, suffering is instead a cultural expedient, part of the world of *laws and duties*. It serves no purpose in our lives but rather in the life of the System. Whereas pain insists we be fully present, suffering accustoms us to compliance. Whereas pain liberates us from pain, suffering shackles us to suffering.

The more suffering that exists, the more we feel driven to seek consolation rather than liberation. The more suffering exists the more easily we fall prey to admissible remedies that purport to mitigate it, and the more determinedly we will chase after the world of fleeting entertainments. It does not matter how hard a pill it is to swallow, how empty, frustrated or frightened it may leave us feeling, or how much suffering it continues to sow. What winds up mattering whether or not we can feel, if

only for a moment, that bland and ephemeral euphoria that domestic life holds out as bait for us to get by on.

Only in a situation as degraded as this would it be possible for the following, chilling passage from *1984* to come true:

> [Winston] took down from the shelf a bottle of colourless liquid with a plain white label marked VICTORY GIN. It gave off a sickly, oily smell, as of Chinese rice- spirit. Winston poured out nearly a teacupful, nerved himself for a shock, and gulped it down like a dose of medicine.
> Instantly his face turned scarlet and the water ran out of his eyes. The stuff was like nitric acid, and moreover, in swallowing it one had the sensation of being hit on the back of the head with a rubber club. The next moment, however, the burning in his belly died down and the world began to look more cheerful.[15]

In today's world our VICTORY GIN goes by the name of Prozac, Shot and a Beer, Bolivian Marching Powder, Pain Killers. Or else we know it as Celebrity Survivor, Fantasy Football, Night Club, One Night Stand, YouTube, Porno Hub. It is called Play Station, Role Play, Internet Addiction, Online Addiction, Virtual Reality, Never Never Land. It is called striving for fame, personal prestige, job promotion and high marks. It is called all-out competition for all ages, fighting for the medal, smiting one's competitors. It is called "serial" consumption (of things, individuals, "exotic" experiences) and masochistic taste for danger, risk, thrill. It is called "extreme experiences" to make us feel alive: gambles, games of chance, high-risk adventures, the need for speed. Practically everything in the civilized world that puts up a wall between our concrete lives and our ability to derive pleasure from this quotidian existence

[15] Cf. G. Orwell, *1984*

are tamed, we destroy and are destroyed, we kill and are killed. Like disembodied bodies, like uprooted elements, we grope at the teat of money and get caught in the stranglehold of its ideological proponents, hoping money will compensate us for our losses. We are willing to humiliate ourselves for money. We are willing to give up our present lives and, if need be, we will let ourselves be used—heart, mind and body—for it. Massimo Fini summed our situation up nicely when he wrote, "Money, with its extraordinary fluidity, spills over into every ravine of our existence. And the more immaterial and nearly invisible it becomes, the more it looms over us, shaping our lifestyle, becoming the primary end."[32] Karl Polanyi accurately described the origin of this invasiveness when he said that money is something that "adapts to every aspiration."[33] Money adapts to every aspiration because it represents the measuring unit of that *objective value* that we have learned to attach to our aspirations.

Money is not just any slip of colorful paper or metal card. It's a philosophy. It is a "countable" way of interpreting relationships in an abstract system that measures people's skills and efficiency. Money was not born out of the billfold or bankcard we associate it with today. It was born out of a conventional unit for measuring the value of exchanged goods: a sack of barley, for instance, allowed people to determine that a saddle was worth one sack and a horse worth ten. And it is precisely this idea germane to our conception of money, ie the idea of measuring the objective value of things, that has overwhelmed us. "No object is money per se, and any object in an appropriate field can function as money," writes Polanyi. "In truth, money is a system of symbols similar to language, writing, or weights and measures."[34]

[32] Cf. M. Fini, *Il denaro "sterco il demonio"* (1998) (trans. Schutt)

[33] Cf. K. Polanyi, *Primitive, Archaic and Modern Economies* (trans. Schutt)

[34] Cf. Ibid.

governs human affairs. In the empire of money, all *human interaction* tends to be transformed into a *trade relation*.

Whereas trade establishes the necessary parameters for regarding the parties in an economic relationship as opponents (since everyone is after his own "objective" personal interest) money, thanks to its uncanny ability to promote speculation, exacerbates the sense of rivalry and gives rise to its cruelest, most merciless facets. Exploitation, once achieved through deception, became blatant. Similarly, when exchange inculcated the idea of equality, it opened up the floodgates to feelings of resentment whenever that equality was violated. Given that financial economies deem violations of equality acceptable, such resentment has become the law of the land. Is the financial world not riddled with iniquity, social inequality and corruption? Isn't cunning the key to success?

Ever since the world became regulated by money, we ceased depending on our own wiles to exist, and placed our trust in an economic system that circulates or levies, bestows or refuses, upgrades or downgrades currency. Money has become our idol, and we let idols have their way with us. Shakespeare was less prophetic than realistic when he put these words into *Timon of Athens*'s mouth: "Thus much of this [gold] will make black white, foul fair, wrong right, base noble, old young, coward valiant [...] This yellow slave will knit and break religions, bless the accursed, make the hoar leprosy adored, place the thieves and give them title, knee and approbation with senators on the bench."[31]

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Now that everything is money, everything can be measured in terms of money and conditioned by money, while everyone worships at the altar of money. In the name of money, we buy, we sell, we sell ourselves. In the name of money we tame and

[31] Cf. W. Shakespeare, *Timon of Athens* Act IV, Scene 3

is unfailingly hunted down and cultivated, till the very soil is permanently stained: tattoos, scarification, piercings in the most intimate and sensitive parts of our bodies. The greater our suffering, the greater our threshold for suffering becomes. There is hardly any point in commenting on the latest American scarification practice; for a certain amount of money you can have someone shoot you in the shoulder with a .38 special, a 9mm handgun or even a Magnum revolver, so that you can show off the scar.

We might believe such pursuits have little to do with our respectable life style. And that may be true. But the kind of mutilation that civilized suffering engenders does not always leave a tangible mark. There are also invisible marks that stem from the spirit of sacrifice, from the so-called virtue of chastity, from the debilitating, difficult and endless grind of work. In the civilized world VICTORY GIN also comes in the form of self-immolation and its corollary, hope. In fact, no hope, whether religious or laic, comes for free. The price of self-immolation may appear more familiar than scarification, but it is equally devastating: abstinence, devotion, ascetic self-flagellation, careerism, patriotic fervor, nationalist fanaticism...By now we live outside of ourselves, detached from our very beings, since when we search for meaning outside of ourselves, we always wind up outside of ourselves.

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The endless race to nothing imposed by the restrictive machinations of civil society is powered by sorrow. It is tolerable only to the extent that it distracts us with amenities we have come to consider indispensable to "moving forward." But moving forward for the sake of moving forward is not living. Sooner or later, the problem with an existence whose sole objective is to move forward will become abundantly clear, and the one aspect of life that cannot be eluded will be

thrown into high relief: death. In the civilized world fear of death looms over us like a sword of Damocles, over the frenetic days that stream by impalpably, over the years that flit by imperceptibly, over our stupid preoccupations about making the time pass and subsequent clamoring for a bit of time to try to live. So aware are we of wasting time that we have deeply internalized a fear of running out of it. Removed from real experience, we have a harder and harder time accepting that life ends.

Maybe it's just another coincidence, but our primitive ancestors who led the most intense lives from the cradle to the grave were afraid neither of life nor death. The freedom they enjoyed permitted them to greet the day head-on, from dawn to dusk, and revel in the entire existential journey without today's brand of constant regret. Utilizing their time, space and energy to the fullest, they personally satisfied truly indispensable needs (finding food, healing the sick, taking shelter from bad weather, protecting themselves, building a relationship to the world, exercising personal respect, affection, love). In modern society such necessities are attainable without our having to make any personal contribution toward realizing them. All we need do is pay. Already harvested, washed, cooked and packaged, our food waits for us at the supermarket. The task of treating sickness is delegated to doctors (next to whom we are mere patients, passive components to be taken care of). For shelter from bad weather, we are provided with ready-to-wear clothes and pre-built houses (we need only choose from among those already made by others, approved by the market and authorized by law). Our safety is guaranteed by paying for an alarm system in forty-eight installments, and peace of mind attained with a heavy dose of tranquilizers. Status symbols and titles of office earn us respect. Even love is negotiable; from rampant prostitution to arranged marriages, intimacy can be bought in the civilized world for what amounts to nothing. Aside from their poor quality, these attainments have nothing

tionships into "possible revenue," and bolsters the rigid economic mindset by converting simple human prerogatives (intuition, personal talent) into economic initiatives. On top of that, while legitimating and enlarging the system of production, local money does not even free us from economic stagnation and inflation.[30] If it is circulated alongside legal currency, social currency does not even begin to question the privileges and powers of the financial oligarchy that governs the civilized world. On the contrary, just like legal currency, local currency relies on developing a hierarchic structure to police individual affairs, to ensure that new banknotes are properly issued to ensure money is properly printed, to suppress counterfeiting, speculation and fraud.

In fact, whether social or legal, money wheedles its way into people's lives and moral constitutions, becoming the most efficient vehicle to fuel their desire for regulation (of prices, markets, other people, the world); protection (of property owned, property for sale, relative interests) and judicial legislation (so as not to slide back into the chaos of unproductivity). Money leads people to regard the system of credit and debit as inevitable, further confirmation that wherever money exists, it

[30] Issuing a currency (whether local or legal) always implies the exploitation of nature, since without production, a currency stagnates or inflates. If the demand for goods remains constant or declines, the economic system does not develop; it stagnates. At the same time, a surfeit of money for a scarcity of goods and services makes prices rise because, based on the laws of supply and demand, there is too much money for too few commodities. While stagnation is an innate feature of economic systems that leads to the continuous production of goods and services, one of the hypothetical remedies for attenuating the effects of inflation is to issue social currency at maturity (a year, a month, a day) so as to force people to keep spending. It goes without saying that this system would multiply the exploitation of nature, with no guarantee that it would stabilize prices. In fact, it is all too clear that producers, knowing that people have to spend their money at maturity, could raise the price of their goods, creating a cost of living that consumers are helpless to control.

dismissing any connection that is not exclusively monetary. The moment an economic value is applied to something, that thing is divested of its non-economic import and becomes coldly predetermined. Money annuls the most tenuous affinity with the goods it buys. It wipes out any sentimental meaning attached to things by establishing standardized regulations to determine their value (price). We all know, for example, that to the civilized mind—trained to dominate everything—animals are considered property. Nevertheless, for "the early-period peasant, 'his' cow is, first of all, just what it is, a being, and only secondarily an object of exchange; but for the economic outlook of the true townsman the only thing that exists is an abstract money-value which at the moment happens to be in the shape of a cow that can always be transformed into that of, say, a bank-note."[28]

In short, the world of trade, refined by money, admits no room for non-monetary values, since the one appreciable value is money. The equalization and standardization of currency is absolute and unwavering, since everything is equal if it has a price. If we continue to subject every aspect of life to the psychology of financial exchange (buying and selling everything), the more life itself will become a commodity, even if the banknote we use is coined by a community group (so-called local or social currency) and not a Central Bank. However you cut it, local money will not liberate people from the logic of economic trade.

Even if motivated by a sense of social goodwill, money leads to one thing only: the total monetization of relationships.[29] Just like legal currency, social currency confines our quality of life to the circulation of money, viewing people as a potential "work force" or "resource," transforms individual rela-

[28] Cf. O. Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, Vol. 1-2 (1939)

[29] Not coincidentally, proponents of social currency, while proclaiming "Liberation from Money" on the one hand, on the other hand are forced to sanction the principle of monetizing human activities.

to do with us deep down. We only own a house because we possess the deed to it, not because we applied our own skills or worked hard or reaped the satisfaction of employing our personal strengths to realize it. Consider the difference between picking mushrooms on a hike through the mountains and buying a package of them at the supermarket, perhaps after having stood in an exasperatingly long line and walked through a metal detector, which proves to the whole world that we are respectable consumers and not thieves.

Meanwhile, life, continually cast to the sidelines, resorts to seeking out reassuring archetypes, ideal images that at least give us the illusion our lives are not a total waste since we don't experience them moment to moment. Hope for immortality is one such archetype. A life that never begins wishes it will never end. Fear of death always stems from a fear of life, a life that indeed we can no longer grapple with seriously.

"If death is a part of life, there is a peculiar morbidity in the human attitude toward death," writes Norman Brown. "Animals let death be a part of life, and use the death instinct to die; man aggressively builds immortal cultures and makes history in order to fight death."[16] Everything that civilization has invented to comfort humanity—History, Glory, Success, Religion—and help us avoid the fear it has created comes at the price of our freedom. Mystification, ritual, immolation and sacrifice lend support to the dramatic impact of this suggestion. And in seeking to exorcise collective death by sacrificing a "predestined" figure (a martyr, an initiate, a hero), they further the idea that the end of life is something unnatural and evil.

Many people today are literally terrified of death. Civil society has taught us to have a deep-rooted fear of it. The lengths we go to look well and keep in perfect shape are a faithful reflection of our preoccupation with death. Wikström highlighted the urgent nature of this unease. In today's world, he writes, it

[16] Cf. N. Brown, *Life Against Death*

seems "that we avoid or encapsulate death by routinely worrying about health…The self has turned into a project, the signs of the body's aging are seen as offenses. To avoid thinking about our dissolution, we fight to remain young, healthy and beautiful."[17] In fact, in the advanced world, even death "is beautified with expressions like 'pass away.' Rather than speak of dying, we say someone has 'left this world,' 'expired,' 'breathed his last,' even 'departed' or 'gone to a better place,' which allude even less to the fact that death is the end of existence."[18]

Death is understood to be an "evil" and therefore has no place in Toyland. Like pain, death must be expunged from civil thinking. And the more death is cancelled from our imagination, the more it appears to us in terrifying incarnations of demons. When anthropologist Colin Turnbull witnessed the death of a young Pygmy girl in a farming tribe in Central Africa, and just a little while later the death of an elderly woman from a Mbuti hunter-gatherer tribe, he learned a fundamental lesson. If for the farming Pygmies "no death is natural [and] some evil spirit, some witch or sorcerer, had cursed the girl with dysentery and made her die," the Mbuti's show of grief over the death of Belekimito (the name of the deceased) bore no trace of terror or acrimony. Whereas in the former community the prevailing mood was one of "fear of sorcery, of the power of evil that had been unleashed," which required prearranged, timetabled ceremonies, "the demonstration of grief that followed [Belekimito's death] was no mere formal expression ordained by custom; it was something very real and disturbing…It was not a feeling of fear, but a recognition of the completeness of a loss that could never be made good."[19] What attenuated the lacerating pain of

[17] O. Wikström, *La dolce indifferenza dell'attimo* (2001)
[18] Ibid
[19] Cf. M. Turnbull, *The Forest People*

thoughts from good unto evil.
— Sophocles

If exchange led to a premeditated way of thinking about how indivviduals interact with one another (and the world), money was a pragmatic consequence of that way of thinking, and consolidated it by pushing this distorted temperament to its extreme ends. If, to the benefit of recompense, the culture of exchange buried the tenets of selflessness, money transformed recompense into an end unto itself. If the culture of giving-to-get guided this "inversion of manners imposed by the power of economics," money worked tirelessly to hammer down that inversion. If "the preponderance of exchange imposed its market structure of manners, customs and ways of thinking on society,"[27] money glorified that structure, making it look like an emblematic inevitability.

The connection between an exchange mentality and economic relationships is therefore direct (given that without the psychology of exchange, money would not exist) as well as correlative, in the sense that, thanks to the versatile, dynamic, sneakily intrusive qualities of money, the practice of giving-to-get could brandish total hegemonic power.

Everything that exchange does to *sterilize* relationships, money endorses as legitimate, accelerating the process of distancing people from the real world. We have already mentioned the innate ability of exchange to transfer things from a subjective to an objective plane. In reality, the concept of "the value of things," which is at the root of this transformation, still preserves a slightly subjective component linked to human emotions, which the things themselves can elicit; an object of little economic value can have enormous emotional value. By its very nature, money severs this last personal link with things, completely objectifying the relationship by

[27] Cf. R. Vaneigem, *Aux vivant* (trans.)

iom of "due reward," or the more "evolved" species' invention of barter, or the still later principle of profit-making (the devastating pinnacle the economy aims for) the system of exchange capsized when people abandoned the idea that one person's fate is everyone's fate. "Every man for himself, and God for us all" as the moral code teaches.

The expectation of compensation paved the way for the new direction civilized humanity was heading in: the way of efficiency. Once it adopted the logic of economic efficiency, the limitations of remunerative giving became quickly apparent; the giver did not necessarily gain what she desired (having no say in the contents of the return gift, she can only accept it and judge its adequacy) nor did she receive the present owed her right away (so as not to seem mere repayment, the return gift is usually delivered after some time has passed). Thus, given its ability to make up for the limits of the system of gift exchange, the practice of bartering definitively supplanted the practice of gift giving in human affairs. Barter became the signet of a world in which human beings stopped trying to make their neighbors happy and thought merely of their own happiness.

Later, when the practice of bartering proved equally inefficient, especially given its own limitations as regards who could exchange what with whom (for example, a rice farmer looking for fruit could not exchange his goods with a cattle farmer) money burst on the scene, sweeping through the world of giving-to-get and wielding absolute power over every aspect of life.

3 Money's Silent Conspiracy

> *Surely there never was so evil a thing as money, which maketh cities into ruinous heaps, and banisheth men from their houses, and turneth their*

their loss was the fact that Belekimito had "died well," serenely, without suffering.

The human being who has fully satisfied her biological and emotional needs is without a doubt better prepared to accept the end of life than someone who has constantly been trampled on and humiliated. If we reverse Freud's leaden adage "*si vis vitam, para mortem*" (if you want to endure life, prepare for death) we might extract from death all the warm energy of life: "*si para mortem, vis vitam*," (if you want to prepare for death, live life). The instinct to live is not the same as the instinct to die, but if we take joy in life even death becomes acceptable. Just as it does for those wild animals that, once their time for eternal sleep has come, welcome the idea by going off to find a quiet place to die.

It is no accident that the most convincing "political" agenda of all religions is summed up in the idea that we can be saved from death. The crafty words Christian priests employ at funeral sermons, in the presence of the living, confirm this. "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live; and whosoever lives and believes in me shall never die." Once again, it is enough to believe, to be cowed, to bow our heads to a higher power in order to achieve "salvation' as if by magic. The fear of death that even the faithful experience demonstrates the utter failure of this counterfeit concept of rebirth. Death cannot be braved by the scared. Death cannot be braved by the unhappy. Death can only be braved with the kind of serenity and courage possessed by those who have led a full, satisfying life and felt it pulsate to the very last.

2. Fear, Aggression, Violence: Birth of War, Disavowal of War

> *[The topic of war] brings me to that worst outcrop of the herd nature, the military system, which I abhor.*

That a man can take pleasure in marching in formation to the strains of a band is enough to make me despise him…War seems to me a mean, contemptible thing: I would rather be hacked to pieces than take part in such an abominable business.
— Albert Einstein

To speak of war is to speak of violence on a grand scale. Yet seeing as violence is nothing if not the translation of aggressiveness into concrete action, to speak of war means to speak of political fear tactics that transform *aggressiveness into aggression*, and therefore we must also speak of the unhappiness that inspires fear. Just as with our fear of death, our need to kill stems from affliction, resides in affliction and is nourished by affliction. In the words of Alexander Neill, happy human beings never "preached a war …All crimes, all hatred, all wars can be reduced to unhappiness."[20] Hunter-gatherers have always clearly understood this axiom. "A happy person," a native Inuit told anthropology professor Jean Briggs, "is a safe person."[21]

The idea that war is an inevitable fact, the natural consequence of our human ancestors' domineering ambitions usually comes to our aid when we feel powerless amid the continual declarations of war. Prohibited from making even a slight impact on the decision to go to war or not, we console ourselves with the belief that war is inevitable. "War has been waged since time immemorial" is the pacifist's common lament. And yet there is little evidence in nature to support the theory that war is a natural phenomenon.

Hunter-gathers' general distaste for warfare is well known. "Any anthropologist can recite the names of a handful of 'primitive' peoples who are reported never to wage war," writes Marvin Harris. And he continues, "My favorite list includes *The Andaman Islanders*, who live off the coast of India,

[20] Cf. A.S. Neill, *Summerhill: A Radical Approach to Education*
[21] Cf. J. Briggs, *Never in Anger: Portrait of an Eskimo Family* (1970)

return) she is greatly enriched by the act, as is the recipient of her gift. She may have fewer things, but she is richer: she has less, but she is more.

The civilized world, however, does not define wealth in terms of goodwill, much less in terms of wisdom or critical awareness. The civilized, economic world tends to see life as one long game of giving and getting back, of winners and losers, of the lucky and unlucky, of the adept and the inept. In fact, the "quantitative" view of social being that delineates the ambitions of economic wealth also delineates the politics of justice and injustice, the ethics of good and evil, the appraisal of merit and blame, and thus sets the criteria for our laws of punishment and our paltry hope for equality. From this point of view, the doctrine of exchange overwhelmingly presupposes and imposes a formal, outward order of things over the substantive spontaneity of being. "Don't trust your instincts!" proclaim the ads for GPS navigation systems. Soon we will not even be able to find the bathroom without the aid of a little robotic voice guiding the way, and we will then be more willing to believe the lies of the modern world that disown instinct in favor of bizarre ornaments. Already, before setting off on our weekend get-away we consult that infallible scientific oracle—the weather report.

Planning, budgeting, calculating: the doctrine of exchange has taught us to turn life into a predictable reality, deadened by the empire of rational, accountable data. "Sharing and counting or exchange are, of course, relative opposites,"[26] writes Zerzan. Just as sharing belongs to the world of pleasure and feeling, counting hurls us into that other world of division, borders, state lines, social strata and business.

The doctrine of exchange led the human species away from the selfless psychology of *giving away* and down the pitted road of *taking away*. Thanks to our Neolithic forefathers' ax-

[26] Cf. J. Zerzan, *Elements of Refusal*

No longer reliant on mutual understanding, agreements, if they are made at all, are made thanks to the power of things to satisfy the agenda of compensation. That brand of satisfaction does not protect against eventual recrimination. Indeed, once we have gone down that road, the rise of personal resentment over inadequate compensation becomes a simply uncontrollable variable. Ill-will, equivocation, embarrassment and suspicion typically result from exchange-based relationships (even gift-exchange). And the more disparity between the contractual power each subject possesses, the more likely it is that the stronger of the two will serve his own interests and therefore offer something not perfectly adequate in exchange. In short, it breeds diffidence, dissatisfaction and disappointment. William H. McNeill's historic observation of the shift in early society from *purchasing* to *confiscating* (typical of the court system in Neolithic societies) could also apply to the unilateral power arrangement we live under now. What matters nowadays is serving one's own interests, and the clergy, sovereigns and functionaries of our increasingly urbanized societies know it. They serve their own interests.

Because we are educated from childhood to think in terms of exchange, our mate rial vision of the world is blind to the fact that the cult of *taking* always entails losing something irrevocably. And yet this state of deprivation is precisely the outcome exchange leads to. If my interest in interacting with Tom is based on getting the most I can from him, then surely Tom has the same stake in our relationship. Just as I am intent on taking as much as I can from him, he is intent on taking as much as he can from me, so that I will inevitably have to lose something. Whatever I gain from my wiles will be his loss, and whatever I lose will be his gain. The economic motivation behind exchange makes it impossible for both people to come away enriched; *that* outcome, on the other hand, is what the art of giving presupposes. The moment someone gives with her heart (and without expectations of gaining something in

the California-Nevada Shoshoni, The Yahgan of Patagonia, the California Mission Indians, the Semai of Malaysia, and the recently contacted Tasaday of the Philippines."[22] But the list could run on forever. Elman Service observed that among the Australian Arunta "warfare in the sense of organized intertribal struggle is unknown."[23] Richard Lee found that the "!Kung hate fighting, and think anybody who fought would be stupid."[24] Patricia Draper later confirmed Lee's assertion when she observed that "real anger frightens and sickens the !Kung, for it is so destructive of their web of relationships."[25] Likewise, the Mbuti, according to Kevin Duffy, "look on any form of violence between one person and another with great abhorrence and distaste."[26] Halfway across the globe, Laurens Van der Post recalls a story involving Eskimos told to him by Peter Scott. "After [Scott] had described some incident of the last war to them they had exclaimed with horror: 'But do you Europeans actually go out and kill people you've never met?'"[27]

The sheer absence of any bellicose action is, after all, one of the most notable features of traditional hunter-gatherer peoples around the planet. This absence is found in the Hadza of West Africa, the Vedda of Sri Lanka, the Moriori of the Chatham Islands, the Tasmanians of Australia, the Shompen tribes of the Nicobar Islands, the Yumbri of Laos, the Batek of Malaysia, the Malapantaram, Naiken and Paliyan of southern India and the Halakwulup and Yamana of Tierra del Fuego, just to name a few. Often, battles and skirmishes are not even present in primitive children's games. "Warfare is only an

[22] Cf. M. Harris, *Cannibals and Kings*

[23] Cf. E. Service, *Profiles in Ethnology*

[24] Cf. J. Zerzan, *Future Primitive*

[25] Cf. P. Draper, *The Learning Environment for Aggression and Anti-Social Behavior among the !Kung* (1978)

[26] Cf. J. Zerzan, *Future Primitive*

[27] Cf. L. Van der Post, *The Lost World of the Kalahari*

invention," wrote Margaret Mead, reasserting the fact that war is an ugly creation, not a biological necessity.[28]

And yet the idea that our propensity for military operations is innate in humans (and not an aberration caused by declining social conditions) has proved hard to overcome. We are so terrified of the infelicitous world we've built up over the last ten thousand years of civilization that we fail to assume responsibility for having constructed it in the first place. Apparently it is much easier to deny our role and reduce everything to a question of genetics. Recognizing the fact that other people, other communities and we ourselves lived peaceably side by side for millions of years strikes us an untenable, almost offensive claim. Occasionally, to deflect such charges, we rigidly deny any evidence that attests to the essential pacifism of non-civilized peoples. As Zerzan recounts, "the 'warlike' nature of Native American peoples was often fabricated to add legitimacy to European aims of conquest (Kroeber 1961); the foraging Comanche maintained their non-violent ways for centuries before the European invasion, becoming violent only upon contact with marauding civilization (Fried. 1973)."[29]

As previously mentioned, a doctrinaire, ethnocentric interpretation of native lifestyles remains widely accepted today, all the more so as regards the Native Americans. We persist in construing the social life of these people through the twisted lens of the very same culture that invaded their territory, denigrated them and wiped them off the face of the Earth. What results is a decisively consolatory image that suits our vision of the world yet continues to miss the essence of their way of thinking and habitus.

Regarding war as a fateful curse may keep our conscience clear, but like all subterfuge it skirts the issue without really trying to fully understand the reasons behind it. And if those

[28] Cf. M. Mead, *Warfare is only an Invention* (1940)
[29] Cf. J. Zerzan, *Future Primitive*

By the same token, just as worshippers' prayers are never disinterested, the relationship God established with them is perfectly motivated by the logic of exchange and not by the logic of gift giving. Whatever the head honcho of Vatican City may say, religious deities never give something for nothing. He grants his believers life, endows them with human and spiritual faculties and even lets them exploit nature for their own needs. But in return he asks their obedience, total submission and blind adherence to his ideological campaign. "Thou shalt have no other Gods before me" is the first commandment, and thus also the first mortal sin to tarnish those who fail to observe it.

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As humanity shifted toward a giving-to-get universe, it also rescinded both a sense of oneness with the world and our vital senses that do not function on the basis of equivalencies. The original spirit of "desire" animated by selflessness was not only transformed into a rigid principle of "duty" (the duty of restitution), it also increasingly became a duty calculated *a priori*. In a word: measurable. First measured by the simple "social" criterion of adequacy of response (gift-exchange), this duty was further honed by the mercantile practice of ascribing economic values to goods exchanged (barter, buy-and-sell).

The evaluation of *adequacy* in gift-exchange introduces an impersonal element that completely sterilizes the way people behave toward one another, severing the ties between them for good. If what I offer voluntarily must be adequately repaid, it means that what I offer does not have a *subjective* meaning but rather an *objective* value that can be pre-established; indeed, an objective value that must be pre-established. Whereas with gifts the relationship is based entirely on the subjects (the giver and receiver), with exchange that relationship becomes about objects (the thing offered and its due reward).

That gift-exchange and civilization have always marched in lock step appears irrefutable. Not only because, as mentioned earlier, this particular form of donation is clearly compensatory in nature, but also because the spread of this practice meets a specific "social" need to repair the dents and cracks to the primordial whole. In fact, the universally acknowledged meaning of gift-exchange as a tool to bolster relationships within a community (ie, amalgamating disparate social parties) suggests that the intimate bonds between people had already been broken, and that a formal, ceremonial device was called for to weld those bonds back together. If gifts (pure and simple) make friends, and suffice to content a jovial mind, gift-exchange requires something extra: it demands that there be a (formal) guarantee that attests to the veracity of the friendship. Such a demand is satisfied by compensation. Thus the practice of gift-exchange aims to ensure both parties involved that their relationship is amicable.

Essentially, while the world of gift giving has no major social hang-ups and its members live fully immersed in the pleasure of solid—because "solidified"—relationships, the world of gift-exchange stands on very shaky ground: social anxiety persisted because life, in agricultural societies, had already become a contest between opposing parties. The *modus operandi* of its members was to offset those anxieties, control them and make them as inoffensive as possible.

It is no coincidence that the first forms of gift-exchange humanity embarked upon were the very ones that connected them to the gods. Divinities do not receive gifts; if they are given anything (an object, a sacrifice) it is in order to get something in return (protection, good health, a miracle, intercession). The organizing principle of the relationship between individuals and God is economic, where the distancing effect that this model encourages justifies the alienating consequence of economics, like that equally "commodified" meaning of religion (any religion).

reasons have to do with our way of life, we become unwilling to closely examine them and treat them as if they were taboo. Hunter-gatherers have always been impassive to war not because they are biologically different from us but because they have preserved a natural way of life and not gone the way of regimented civilization. The more one preserve such a way of life, the less sense war makes to him.

Civilization trains people to employ the logic of conquest from childhood onward, which goes a long way toward explaining how we have become inclined to be aggressive with others (humans or not). "From the moment he is born, the [civil] human being is inundated with social customs that influence his development,"[30] argues Marcello Bernardi. And, as we know all too well, social customs in the civilized world ultimately channel *aggressiveness* into *aggression*. "What matters to us is not living in an environment built on love, trust and generosity, but possessing instead the means to overshadow our peers."[31] Is it so absurd then to think that our attitude toward life leads to violence and war? Antagonism, competition and rivalry are the central motifs of civilized existence. They invigorate our emotions, our day-to-day lives, our growth. We make constant reference to the *force* of law, the *strength* of words, the *power* of technology. We command and subdue. We reduce everything to a profit. Because in our adulterated universe it is all a matter of compare and contrast—an endless struggle, race, challenge. Everything, in a word, points to the fact that our world is one big battleground.

Violence, long considered a sign of powerlessness, is the product of fear—fear of being defeated, subsumed and annihilated. "Victory" culture—which results in the psychology of conflict—intensifies this fear as well as the aggressive energy that it secretes. Whether on the playing field, at the workplace

[30] Cf. M. Bernardi, *Educazione e libertà*

[31] Ibid.

or in the classroom, "what flashes before the citizens' eyes is the cry for victory. Victory, which is the annihilation of the other, is celebrated emphatically and identified with virtue, honor, skill, etc."[32]

Obsessed with triumph, civilization trains us think solely in terms of objectives, finishing lines and success. However, as Vaneigem recalls, an adults is exactly like a child, "he has no need of claiming victories over himself or others; if anything they defeat his ability to love and be loved, and instill in him the fear of pleasure."[33] But seeing as, "in the eyes of a society in which everything must be weighed, bought, sold, borrowed, owed, paid, pleasure is, for its inherent invaluableness, seen as a weakness and a fault," in the eyes of the civilized world the ability to love and be loved also represents a fruitless sentimental endeavor. Suffice it to observe our quotidian activities to realize how love is subsumed every day by aggression and utilitarianism. In democratic society we mainly act in the pursuit of doing good business, attaining a prestigious position, doing better than others, making money, being successful, accumulating wealth and showing off. "Love doesn't produce money or power," writes Bernardi, "and we are more interested in generating income and generally less enthusiastic about things that yield nothing, such as, precisely, love."[34]

Diametrically opposed to a conception of life that promotes responsibility and respect for others, the civilized world is motivated by both resentment of and praise for whoever comes in first place—people with fighting spirits, who know how to lift themselves up, knock down their adversaries and win fame. Individuals do not have to take an interest in earning self-respect. If anything, they are concerned with imposing their own egos on others: routing the competition,

[32] Ibid.

[33] Cf. R. Vaneigem, *Adresse aux vivants sur la mort qui les gouverne et l'opportunité de s'en défaire*

[34] Cf. M. Bernardi, *Educazione e libertà*

receive, the obligation to answer a gift with another, larger gift, says Mauss.[22]

While still non-lucrative in nature, donations in societies that arose out of the agricultural "revolution" later added a compensatory element to the practice; a gift had to be met with a counter gift (even if on purely moral grounds). Recognizing the compulsory nature of such reciprocity, Mauss categorized gift-exchange as an economic activity. In effect, whereas giving in its pure form is a munificent act that does not include reciprocity, donation makes it obligatory to repay all gifts. And if we cannot deny Karl Polanyi's assertion that reciprocity in gift-exchange is a form of "reciprocity [that] demands adequacy of response, not mathematical equality,"[23] the fact remains that it is precisely the burden of the adequacy of response that betrays the "contractual" nature of this relationship, so much so that if a gift is not adequately repaid, punishments must be exacted. "The punishment for failure to reciprocate is slavery for debt,"[24] writes Mauss, pointing out the fact that restitution—for remunerative gifts—always includes a tax (which is to say that whoever reciprocates must always take care to give back more than she received).

So the difference between giving and gift-exchange is clear. Pure and simple giving asks nothing in return and does not oblige someone to adequately respond. The respect, admiration or recognition that a recipient of a gift feels (which may prompt her to spontaneously give something in return) belongs, if anything, to the category of communal interactions between individuals and not to the preordained system of economic exchange. Marshall Sahilins captures perfectly the anti-economic character of prodigal gift-giving when he writes, "If friends make gifts, gifts make friends."[25]

[22] An obvious reference to *The Gift* (1926)

[23] Cf. K. Polanyi, *Primitive, Archaic and Modern Economies*

[24] Cf. M. Mauss, *The Gift*

[25] Cf. M. Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics*

"Giving is a way of being," Erich Fromm would have said. As humankind grew further removed from an autonomous, self-sufficient and mutually supportive way of life, and began relying on the practice of domesticating nature, exchange became a method for individuals to interact that was more in touch with the new dominant mentality. In the end, what began to matter was getting something in return. With the arrival of civilization, the transition from a non-economic vision of interacting with people to a vision based on profiting from others signaled a profound shift in perspective. The don't-do-anything-for-nothing ethic gradually became a decisive factor in people's relationships, agreements and quarrels. Obviously, as with all changes, the transition from giving (pure and simple) to exchanging (barter) did not take hold immediately. A few "intermediary" stages, and the dissipation of deeply rooted customs, scored the long path to come.[21] Gift-exchange, according to Marcel Mauss in his highly celebrated work *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, was the most important manifestation of this course.

Among the terms that cropped up, often irrelevantly, gift-exchange (or remunerative gift giving) is defined as a system of donations typical of farming societies, where the tender's gift makes the recipient (more often a social group rather than an individual) feel morally obliged to respond to offer something in return for the gift. The obligation to give, the obligation to

[21] Malinowski is crystal clear on this point: "[A]lthough there exist forms of barter pure and simple, there are so many transitions and gradations between that and simple gift, that it is impossible to draw any fixed line between trade on the one hand, and exchange of gifts on the other [...] In order to deal with these facts correctly it is necessary to give a complete survey of all forms of payment or present. In this survey there will be at one end the extreme case of pure gift, that is an offering for which nothing is given in return. Then, through many customary forms of gift or payment, partially or conditionally returned, which shade into each other, there come forms of exchange, where more or less strict equivalence is observed, arriving finally at real barter." Cf. B. Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*

rising above the pack, reaching "the peak of success" and staying there at all costs, even if it means being personally humiliated, selling your body, compromising your self-esteem and regarding those around us with an air of contempt. As the ex-porn star Sunshine Adams put it cynically: "Everybody's fucking somebody to get somewhere in life. We're just doing it on film."[35]

The bellicose spirit that denotes our way of life is not a natural but a cultural phenomenon. "Warfare," American anthropologist Ruth Benedict reasoned, "is not the expression of the instinct of pugnacity."[36] If anything it is written in the DNA of civilization, given the value civilization places on ferociousness and cynicism, the oppressive climate that it produces and exports throughout the world. The idea that aggression is a hereditary trait is a downright superstition that is being increasingly refuted. As anthropologist Rayna Rapp Reiter has pointed out, aggression, once considered an innate part of the male character, has increasingly proved to be a condition of particular situations.[37] The more distraught the situation, the more likely we are to act aggressively, till we wind up as we are now, where violence is carried out on an unprecedented scale, affecting people of all ages and every population (from stalking to bullying, from acts of racism to crimes of passion, from serial killers to weapons of mass destruction).

Repudiating the "instinctivist" position of Konrad Lorenz, Irenaus Eibl-Eibesfeldt, Robert Ardrey, Desmond Morris, Anthony Storr and others, Erich Fromm observed that theories about humankind's innate predisposition to warfare are nothing more than a smokescreen to cover up the reasons why our

[35] Adams' remark is made during "Thinking XXX," HBO's documentary about photographer Timothy GreenfieldSander's book "XXX: 30 Porn-Star Portraits."

[36] Cf. R. Benedict, *Patterns of Culture* (1934)

[37] Cf. R. Reiter, "The Search for Origins: Unraveling the Threads of Gender Hierarchy," *Critique of Anthropology* vol. 2, nos. 910 (1977)

social model is declining. Many people, writes the German psychologist, "prefer to believe that our drift toward violence…due to biological factors beyond our control, rather than to open their eyes and see that it is due to social, political, and economic circumstances of our own making."[38] Even Eibl-Eibesfeldt was forced to admit as much. The founder of human ethology, dogmatic advocate of the theory that every superstructure in civilization is innate to men and women (domination, intolerance, conformity, obedience, commerce, competition, propensity for environmental destruction, etc) and most famous student of Lorenz, Eibl-Eibesfeldt acknowledged that the !Kung San Bushmen of Kalahari are exempt from this general model, divested as they are of the social trappings of submission, personal aggression or warfare. The self-proclaimed militarist John Keegan also conceded their "exceptionality": "The San (Bushmen) of the South African Kalahari Desert are commonly held up as models of unassertive gentleness."[39]

Unless we willingly revert to the long dead ethnocentric rhetoric that marred Colonial and Victorian anthropology, we cannot disregard this fact, which has even been recognized—however reluctantly—by those who most ardently support the idea that humans are innately warlike. Not all communities of men and women have waged or wage warfare. Not everyone is inclined to convert their most extreme impulse (aggressiveness) into pathological violence again others (aggression). Barbara Ehrenreich remarks that even in modern societies the cultural imprinting of systematic aggression does not always take hold with the same intensity. "Individual men have gone to nearly suicidal lengths to avoid participating in wars…Men have fled their homelands, served lengthy prison terms, hacked off limbs, shot off feet or index fingers, feigned illness or insan-

[38] Cf. E. Fromm, *Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*
[39] Cf. J. Keegan, *A History of Warfare* (1993)

one another not for pleasure but for gain. It had to elevate the value of thinking for oneself over brotherhood and sisterhood. It had to invent the idea of "reciprocity" that characterizes "debts," "deficits" and "interest rates." Only if debt exists can creditors wield power over debtors. Only if deficit exists can there be dependence on active economic sources. Only if interest rates exist can those who offer them make money. Civilization has countered charity and generosity with the principals of economics—rivalry, recompense, distrust and only the occasional reprieve from the toil of work and the heavy burden of social inequality.

If we think back on Levi-Strauss' comparison of economic exchange to war, it appears as no coincidence that more and more frequently we resort to militaristic jargon to talk about economics: "sales strategies," "promotional campaigns," "conquering the market," "commercial warfare."

The vision of life as creative and playful (as opposed to standardized and perfectly calibrated) has been, slowly but surely, canceled out by economics. There is nothing playful about contracts. On the contrary, one must take every precaution and care to avoid being cheated, to maximize personal benefits, to "bring home" as much as one can. Thanks to economics and the model of utilitarianism it promotes, the world of play has been replaced by the world of plowshares. Perhaps the quickest way to recover the meaning of pleasure is to begin scrutinizing the psychology of exchange and its ideological premises.

2 The Doctrine of Exchange

> *Exchange as such is the primary and purest scheme for the quantitative enlargement of the economic spheres of life.*
> — Georg Simmel

living thing has been cut. The psychological make-up of those who swap and trade differs substantially from that which animates a cohesive, integrated universe. They care nothing for our common cause, but rather think of themselves as standing apart from one another. They do not live to *compare*; they live to *contrast*. As Lévi-Strauss writes, "Exchanges are peacefully resolved wars, and wars are the result of unsuccessful transactions."[20]

When we consider communal living, as opposed to life in society, we cannot help but think of the spirit of giving, that element we know makes up for our differences. The word "community" (from the Latin *cum-munus*, meaning "with gift") underscores the fact that people who live together forge bonds not through economics and utility, but by giving. Society, on the other hand, evokes a place based on the profit-seeking of its members, referring as it does to a solidarity between individuals built on the pursuit of economic interest. This is why, when we are asked to define the experience of primitive peoples, we usually speak of "communities" (Pre-Neolithic communities, hunter-gatherer communities, native communities), whereas the most apt word to describe the world in which we live is "society" (civil society, national society, modern society). And even if the term "community" is often bandied about erroneously (or, worse, used by corporations, advertisers and merchants to give a touch of radical chic to their economic endeavors), the fact remains that, historically speaking, the shift from community-living to society-living is still a shift from a non-economy to an economy, from giving to exchanging, from beneficence to benefit-seeking, from acts of love to laws of valuation.

In order to convince people to accept its laws of duty, order, authority and civility, society had to construct a whole new way of being. It had to teach individuals to interact with

[20] Cf. C. Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (1969)

ity…"[40] The swarm of young conscientious objectors (mostly anarchists and not always Italian) who, from the post war period to the abolition of compulsory military service, have refused to wear the uniform and risked harsh military sentences, are incontrovertible proof that this same attitude still exists today.

When we hear that fighting is a fundamental human trait, we should consider the fact that those repeating this commonplace are moved to do so in order to legitimize the political and cultural landscape of the civilized world, even if, more often than not, they do so unwittingly. War, Mumford writes, is a "permanent fixture of 'civilization.'"[41] Concocted by civilization, it develops and spreads with civilization. And war serves to keep civilization popular.

The earsplitting assonance of *arma* ("weapons") and *armento* (a large herd of domesticated animals) should alert us to the fact that war, rather than a natural tendency, is produced by the need to defend one's property. Without the myth of privatization, without the ethic of conquest or victory or glory or loyalty to command and rank, war would not exist, just as it did not exist for the several million years before civilization appeared.

Contextualizing this last assertion, Fromm concludes that war began at a specific point in the history of humankind, "in the Neolithic period from the moment when there were things worth taking away from someone else and when people had established their communal life in such a way that they could invent war as an institution and use it to attack others who had something they wanted."[42]

Chi ha terra ha guerra goes an old proverb that holds true today. He who has land has war on his hands. The same thought

[40] Cf. B. Ehrenreich, *Blood Rites: Origins and History of the Passions of War* (1996)

[41] Cf. L. Mumford, *The Myth of the Machine*

[42] Cf. Fromm, *For the Love of Life* (1986)

occurred to Konrad Lorenz when, toward the end of his life, he disavowed the "instinctivist" theories and identified the origins of warfare with the advent of farming society, the population surge, the formation of socially stratified communities and the hunger for conquest. As the father of ethnology argued, our brand of belligerence evolved out of a need to defend territory, contemporaneously with the formation of hierarchies, ie the division of humans into "servants and masters."[43]

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Richard Sorenson's in-depth study of the notorious decline of the Fore (an indigenous people of Papua New Guinea) provides the most concrete example of how civilization leads to the progressive deterioration of "free life," triggering the symbolic, material and social elements that propel people to commit acts of aggression, violence and war. The Fore transition from a hunter-gatherer way of life to a protoagrarian and, later, stable agrarian society (typical of the Fore inhabiting the Northern Highlands today) proves how war— generally absent from freedom and wildness—becomes viable only when life ceases to be ambulatory and spontaneous.

Originally, the social life of the Fore was based on freedom, cooperation and open frontiers, observes Sorenson. Their ecological and demographic conditions probably formed the basic way of life in the whole world before agrarian society took hold. The Fore had "no chiefs, patriarchs, medicine men, priests or the like. A striking personal freedom was enjoyed even by the very young, who could move about at will and be where or with whomever they wanted…A responsive sixth sense seemed to attune the Fore hamlet mates to each other's interests and needs." Aggression and conflict rarely occurred, and any sense of tribe, family and "homeland" was ambiguous, since the Fore

[43] Cf. K. Lorenz, *The Waning of Humaneness*

will purchase. Even if a cow leapt over the fence, landed in his arms and cried, "Eat me!"

In short, a world of gift giving is not just an economic world without price tags. Rather, it is a world fee from the ideology of exchange and the inhuman consequences such a cult entails. On the other hand, the weight of oppression, exploitation, pretense, "reckoning" that animates the economic world, like the humiliating effect of reducing everything to merchandise, is well-known to us; whatever economics touches quickly withers. How different is the warmth of a giving humanity compared with the cold interest of loan sharks? What swell of emotions distinguishes the sincere hospitality of a friend from the arid, fake, compulsory politeness of a hotel manager? How large is the chasm separating the joys and amours in a relationship with a partner from the demeaning aftermath of a sex tourism escapade in an exotic locale? The pattern of behaving out of self-interest translates into the tangible degradation of a world expropriated from humanity. Dominating, exploiting, profiteering, pursuing one's personal interests, deceiving, lying, cheating are, once again, the effect of understanding relationships as a showdown between two sides. We have shattered our primordial union with nature and replaced it with conflict and competition. Now, our condition is one of defending ourselves from the overwhelming effects of this endless, everyman-for-himself struggle.

The fact that the modern world has broken the eternal "communities of belonging," rallying instead behind unscrupulous personalism that calls for stricter laws of cohabitation, is not lost on Zygmunt Bauman. For all intents and purposes, writes Bauman, we have substituted "the spontaneous sociability of in-group-living[…] with *socialization*,"[19] legal claims and lawsuits. A solidarity of strangers succeeded brotherhood, thanks to which the thread connecting us intimately to every other

[19] Cf. Z. Bauman, *Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies* (1992)

against the fact that receiving a gift from a neighbor without having to repay them is an absolutely human gesture.

A simple gift, a present, or merely a heartfelt invitation to dinner sparks good feelings in both the giver and the receiver. The logic of profit, on the other hand, crushes any chance for empathy and triggers the competitive spirit—rivalry and struggle, envy and resentment, favoritism and exclusion. And the violent reactions to this process (quarrels, wars) must be continuously stemmed by outside forces (sanctions, social order, religious threats) or their ideological equivalent (justice, redistribution of wealth, charity). Whatever the case, reconciliation is only a formality.

Living as we do in a social environment riddled with the psychology of trade, we can see just how much power the economic superstructures of the civilized world possess when it comes to shaping our lives. Our dependence on laws to define the material value of things, on the principles of demand and supply, on the need to hunt for work, on government assistance or the rulings of a court, betray our belief that people are unable to provide for themselves, in the same way we depend on industries to feed us.

While the hungry primitive would set about looking for food, this natural process is inhibited in civilization. Not only because we are no longer able to provide sustenance for ourselves (or we no longer have the time to do so) but also because procuring one's own food is strictly outlawed: someone owns those fruit-bearing trees; hunting is a Sunday sport for frustrated citizens who need to obtain a permit; fishing is regulated; gathering mushrooms and herbs is prohibited without a state-issued license. In fact, the one option we have to sate our hunger is to buy food, which requires that one has money. Those without have no other recourse than to starve. Even if there is still fruit on the trees that the owner does not intend to pick. Even if there are vegetables in the market that no one

led an open, nomadic lifestyle in which everyone stuck close to those that they preferred to be with.[44]

The traditional social dynamic of the Fore was flexible and benevolent. Children developed a sense of themselves that had little to do with their name, birthplace, position or status. In the absence of abstract ideologies, challenging group beliefs and customs was not considered dangerous. Nor did the Fore suffer the kinds of social problems that normally exist in the West; there was no "generation gap" or sibling rivalry or bullying or teenage rebellion. Even the momentary outbursts of adults were rapidly mollified. And any dispute over the proprietorship of an object was typically resolved, given their proclivity to show mutual respect and cooperate with one another.

But this millennium-long nomadic way of life began to come apart with the emergence of geographically stable agriculture. Things started to change, says the Smithsonian researcher, especially in the northwest where population density and ecological transformations diminished the supply of new farmable land. As quarrels grew more frequent, communities became more strictly organized. In fact, notes Sorenson, the invention of agriculture ultimately exploded population growth and altered the ecology. The once limitless land began to dry up. The virgin richness was depleted. This put in place the demographic and ecological conditions that enable protoagrarian development. Land supplies shrank, people settled in one spot, and the occupied land needed to be defended. Especially in the Highlands, where destruction of virgin forests put a greater burden on nature, the Fore began to form more highly structured sociopolitical systems and larger bands of warriors.[45]

[44] Cf. E. R. Sorenson, *The Edge of the Forest: Land, Childhood, and Change in a New Guinea Protoagricultural Society*

[45] Ibid.

The sharp decline of the Fore people is paradigmatic. For non-civilized men and women, military action is virtually unknown precisely because the symbolic and social framework does not exist. When there is nothing to conquer (whether land or personal loyalty or other people's respect), there is nothing worth fighting for, especially not a vague ambition to dominate others. Wars have never been motivated by a sadistic instinct to wreak havoc for havoc's sake. They are born of a morbid need to unleash our frustration with civilization.

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Saying that war is a common pursuit of civilization is not the same as saying that primitive communities practice non-violence. Non-violence, which is to all intents and purposes a cultural phenomenon, refers more to a sense of blind terror at the thought of violence than to the repudiation of it. To return to Marcello Bernardi's study, there is "destructive" violence, which stems from an aggressive authoritarian ethos, and there is "nondestructive" violence, which opposes the violent practices of aggression. No cat would ever imagine locking us up in a cage, putting a collar around our necks and only allowing us out so that we could catch mice and wait on her hand and foot ("destructive" violence). Yet if we pull *her* tail or for that matter put her in a cage, she would not think twice about clawing our face or, if necessary, biting our hand ("non-destructive" violence). To be clear: the fact that there exists a kind of reactionary violence does not validate the old unacceptable distinction between unjust violence (offensive) and just violence (defensive). The extent to which late-capitalist rhetoric takes advantage of this supposed distinction is all too familiar: in modern nations ministers of war are called "Ministers of Defense." The more these ministers pay lip service to defense, the more they prepare for and declare war. Violence inflicted in order to impose one's power over others cannot be likened to

relations with others regardless of compensation. If gifts were merely the byproducts of bargaining (as all economies, including "green" ones, see them) they would not call up an image so different from market economics. The act of gift giving is not only a gesture of absolute selflessness; it is founded on a healthy stance toward life, generosity, candor, loyalty and sincerity. It is based on an openness to give pleasure. Gift giving means favoring community, union, brotherhood and sisterhood. It means bolstering a sense of fellowship, nurturing concord, strengthening bonds and encouraging harmony. It is no coincidence that the thing least likely to be given as a gift is money. As early as the beginning of last century, George Simmel noted that "a money present seems to be incompatible with the standards of the upper circles of society, and even servants, coachmen or messengers often appreciate a cigar more than a tip perhaps of three times its value. The decisive fact here is that the gift should not appear as economically significant…"[18]

We all know how generosity, cooperation, teamwork and sharing go a long way toward cementing bonds between humans, and how self-interest severs those bonds. We commonly agree that money poisons people's relationships. It doesn't cost us much effort to see how the idea of cheating others has been woven into civilization's psychological fabric, and the fact that it has even been used against children and the elderly proves just how devastating the utilitarian force can be. The bonds between human beings are most reinforced by typically anti-economic expressions, like hospitality, forgiveness, respect, love and, precisely, the giving of gifts. Despite the fact that we live in civilization, we are all so profoundly filled with the spirit of selflessness that the value we ascribe to gift giving knows no bounds: from simple gratitude to individual esteem, from altruistic care to psychological support. Few would argue

Emergence of Civilization (1971)

[18] Cf. G. Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*

pleasantries; we no longer shake hands, we exchange "a gesture of peace." As for giving gifts? We don't give anything away these days; we exchange gifts. In the not so distant future, we will probably stop loving one another and start exchanging affections and intimacies.

With a decidedly un-utilitarian way of life gone, human existence consists more and more of competition and compensation, toil, immolation, deceit, blackmail and fear of being swindled, with all the consequences these things entail: from the rise of income-based social classes to the practice of social governance to quell the anger between those classes. The formation of increasingly despotic governing bodies becomes the go-to answer for the social disintegration caused by the practice of trade. A not insignificant number of experts have recognized in commerce the basic features for the rise of societies born out of the agricultural "revolution." Archaeologist Colin Renfrew[15] found it true of Europe, Rathje observed it in the Maya,[16] and Parson and Price noted it throughout Mesoamerica.[17] In fact, it seems obvious that a group of people divided by social rank—consolidated by the burgeoning sale of products –would leave no room for individual free will. The will of the people had to be locked up, put under surveillance and brainwashed. Laws, levies, tithes and sacrifice were the inevitable results of this break with nature.

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Gift giving is a powerful model for human interaction. To make an offering without asking anything in exchange means more than just "giving"; it is a manner of understanding our

[15] Cf. C. Renfrew, "Trade and Culture Process in European Prehistory," *Current Anthropology*, 10 (2)

[16] Cf. W.L. Rathje, "The Origin and Development of Lowland Clasic Maya Civilization," *American Antiquity*, 36 (3)

[17] Cf. L.A. Parson—B.J. Price, *Mesoamerican Trade and its Role in the*

violence that combats aggression and has no interest in dominating others. As Bernardi puts it: "The violence of the exploiter is not akin to that of the exploited."[46]

This is another reason that the general approach of non-violent ideology, which puts all violent actions in the same category, clearly helps preserve a system based on dominance and submission rather than contradicting it. As Costanzo Preve summed up in his introduction to a recent Italian edition of the first volume of Günther Anders' *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen*, the "colorful rituals of non-violence and pacifism, the iconic images of which the media plays back for us, represents the modern, repressed form of tolerating the system."[47] In effect, as Bernardi points out, what seems to worry the proponents of non-violence "is the physical act: they have nothing to say against the most merciless verbal attacks, the most insulting allusions, the most heinous cultural tyranny…Yet the idea of a fistfight…fills them with dread."[48]

Warfare—the embodiment of institutional destructive violence—is no mere dust-up, nor should it be mistaken for one. Anger may have a purpose in life, but war, as André Breton put it, is a "cesspool of blood, mud and idiocy,"[49] and is very different from a dispute among individuals or even groups of individuals. There are, after all, apparatuses designed to ideate and prepare for war, military strategy schools, whole industries that manufacture weapons, tax codes aimed at continuously underwriting armies, human lives dedicated to and sacrificed in the name of war. War is never waged accidently; it is carefully planned and executed with the express intent to conquer. It is institutionally organized murder that pivots on coercion, segregation and

[46] Cf. M. Bernardi, *Educazione e libertà*

[47] Cf. C. Preve, "Un filosofo controvoglia" in G. Anders, *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen* (1956; Italian edition 2003)

[48] Cf. M. Bernardi, *Educazione e libertà*

[49] Cf. A. Breton, *Surrealism: A Brief History*

death, and its ultimate aim is to achieve hegemony—economic, political and religious hegemony. Getting mixed up in a scuffle, jumping into a brawl, reacting to a provocation or just taking your anger out on an emblem of techno-capitalism (an ATM, a luxury item, a store window, etc) can hardly be compared to the systematic suppression of human beings for the purpose of toppling their institutions and robbing them of their land and material wealth. War is not the same as a dispute between neighboring communities or a protest in a square. It is an operation to enslave people, arranged with all the appurtenances necessary to administer and enforce the subjugation of a people. Subjugation stands for the condition of those who have been subjugated (submission) as well as the state of frightened obedience (terror).

In fact, war (unlike the occasional diatribe or public protest) is designed as a political fear tactic. It helps create an atmosphere of fear and fear's consequent demands: fear of insecurity and the consequent demand for security; fear of disorder and the consequent demand for order; fear of poverty and the consequent demand for possessions; fear of freedom and the consequent demand for control; fear of diversity and the consequent demand for uniformity. Everyone knows the extent to which war rouses ancestral fears. As the ultimate means of swaying and subduing dissent, war sows discord not only outside the borders of the antagonistic State, but within them as well. There, inside the frontier, war serves just as important a purpose; it establishes public order. Laying the groundwork for the formation of a civil state of war is the task of all governments, whether they are dynastic, divine or popular sovereignties.

State of war, like state of peace, is a reflection of the same civilized demand that seeks to subjugate and rule; that transforms sensible, dignified, independent, well-meaning, critical-thinking human beings into anonymous, involuntary, easily duped and acquiescent creatures. Discipline, insofar as it de-

Leacock.[13] Examples of this nature are endless, and we may as well quote Maria Arioti, who succinctly and definitively summed up the tradition: "Generosity is the primary rule among hunters."[14]

When the communities of hunter-gatherers yielded to property-owning farmers (trafficking their surplus goods), the world that once placed no price on human relations was subsumed by the world of trade "values." The selfless logic of freely sharing gave way to the practice of calculating one's benefits and demanding one's "right" to be compensated. The very concept of personal interest, pros and cons and economic convenience presupposes the comparison of people's skills. Which is to say, human actions, now seen as skills, are measured in terms of how useful they are for one to be rewarded. The culture of trade introduced a completely new way of how people interact; to the pure and simple "giving" that had characterized primitive life, "having" was added, which soon turned into "must-have" or "demand." From the practice of "giving" to the concept of "giving to receive," the rules of trade subverted the age-old concords of being, and imposed the calculating logic of ambition, convenience, and the frenzy to have and always have more.

Today, ten thousand years after this transformation, the fundamentalism with which we put everything that exists in terms of trade (giving-to-get) is such a large part of our *modus operandi* as to appear irreversible. Everything in our civilization is quid pro quo, everything is subject to exchange: not only do we swap things, but we also swap jobs, favors, even partners. The idea of exchange has infiltrated the *lingua franca* to such a degree that now we no longer kiss, we exchange kisses; we no longer greet each other, we exchange

[13] Cf. E. Leacock, *The Montagnai 'Hunting Territory' and the Fur Trade* (1954)

[14] Cf. M. Arioti, *Produzione e riproduzione nelle società di caccia-raccolta*

a few of the Bushmen are good hunters, and yet even those who fail to capture big prey have a right to their share of all the meat that comes into camp. The desire to give something to someone does not entail reciprocity. Rather than on trade, the stress lies on sharing.[5]

Both Radcliffe-Brown[6] and Edward H. Man[7] found that the aboriginal inhabitants of the Andaman Islands gave food to the lazy and weak members of their communities, despite the likelihood that they would not receive anything in return. Biard observed how

Micmac Indians of Eastern Canada shared food with anyone who came across their camp, even when food was scarce.[8] Among the Ona tribes of the Sub-Antarctic, hunters would butcher their meat to give to others.[9] Speaking of the general habits of Australian aboriginals, Baldwin Spencer and F.J. Gillen[10] noted that during the lean season every member of the Arunta would share his or her available provisions, irrespective of age, sex or kinship, and Marshall Sahlins observed that "local communities of Walbiri or of friendly tribes could drop in on neighboring Walbiri when in need."[11] According to Vanoverbergh, "Large quantities of food are shared [among the Luzon Negritos]; whenever a good find is made neighbors are invited to partake until it is eaten up."[12] The same custom is practiced by the Naskapi, writes Eleanor

[5] Cf. J. Woodburn, *An Introduction to Hadza Ecology* (1968)

[6] Cf. A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, *The Andaman Islanders* (1948)

[7] Cf. E.H. Man, *On the Aboriginal Inhabitants of the Andaman Islands* (1932)

[8] Cf. W.D. Wallis—R. S. Wallis, *The Micmac Indians of Eastern Canada* (1955)

[9] Cf. M. Arioti, *Produzione e riproduzione nelle società di caccia-raccolta*

[10] Cf. B. Spencer—F.J. Gillen, *The Arunta: A Study of a Stone Age People* (1927)

[11] Cf. M. Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics*

[12] Cf. M. Vanoverbergh, *Negritos of Northern Luzon* (1925)

notes rigorous obedience training, is the same whether in times of peace or times of war. In its campaign to subsume natural behavior and instill in people the dictates of "good" manners, discipline makes no distinction between war and peace. It teaches us to toe the line, act obediently, pay heed. It teaches us to obey orders unquestioningly and legitimize injustices as long as they are the actions of those in a greater position of power.

Without discipline, restraining the most exuberant and independent among us, those with backbone and élan, would prove quite difficult. Without discipline, life could devolve into personal mobility, anti-utilitarian fervor, affection, empathy, mutual stimulation, joy, tenderness—conditions that civilization sees as utterly unacceptable. Sacrifice, domination and mute submission to commands from superiors are prized in the narrow world of military life, as they are outside the barracks. Since civilization, as was earlier said, does not distinguish between barracks and the rest of the world. Even in Arden, civilization shoehorns life into drills, order, and homogeneity. What does that oft-cited refrain, "the allure of men (and women) in uniform" represent if not the symbiotic union of civilization and the military?

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Whether war is perceived as a "necessary expedient" or tolerated as an "inevitable indignity," the fact of the matter is civilization would not exist without it. "All empires have been cemented in blood," wrote the 17th Century English philosopher Edmund Burke.[50] And Montesquieu warned: "An empire founded by arms has to maintain itself by arms."[51] To make matters worse, the person who declares war never takes up arms himself, while those who do enter into combat (risking their

[50] Cf. E. Burke, *A Vindication of Natural Society* (1956)

[51] As cited in C. Montesquieu—M. Richter, *The Political Theory of Montesquieu*

lives, naturally) are usually excluded from the advantages their actions are meant to procure. Much as military pomp tries to convince us that military conflict is a tragic reality that cannot be avoided, all those who sound the battle cry from their thrones leave it to their beloved people to sow the actual battleground with their lives. After all, the poet Valéry rightly observed, war is "a massacre of people who don't know each other for the profit of people who know each other but don't massacre each other."[52]

A triumph of values, the exportation of democracy, defense from international terrorism, freedom from barbarism: in the modern world war is never considered an act of oppression but rather an opportunity. "When the U.S. bombed Iraq back in 1991 the price of oil went from $13 to $40 a barrel," recalls an American Commodities Trader in Mark Achbar and Jennifer Abbot's documentary, *The Corporation*. "Now, we couldn't wait for the bombs to start raining down on Saddam Hussein," he admits.

> We were all excited. We wanted Saddam to really create problems. 'Do whatever you have to do, set fire to some more oil wells, because the price is going to go higher.' Every broker was chanting that. There was not a broker that I know of that wasn't excited about that. This was a disaster…In devastation there is opportunity.

After all is said and done, war spells big business for bureaucrats, intermediaries, politicos, captains of industry, multinational executives, wheeler dealers, stock jockeys and heads of state. More than anything it is the extreme outcome of corporate ideology, whose mechanisms follow the hellish logic that animates it. How can we deny the fact that the "reconstruction" of a war-ravaged country is lucrative for someone? How can

[52] As cited in *Manas*, Vol. 19 (1966)

> "the sharper, or the more cunning, is the more honest man, and the better merchant."[1]

Industrialists have always tried to incorporate gift giving into the realm of economics, with little success.[2] Gift giving cannot be absorbed by the market; it explicitly contradicts everything the market stands for, conceptually refutes it and numbers it among the corrupt processes animating civilization. In effect, the shift from gift giving to trading marks an unprecedented transformation in people's lives thanks to which an increasingly disenchanted and circumspect humankind has slowly replaced a community-based outlook with an economic one based on the laws of competition, conflict and duplicity.

Hunter-gatherers led a life of spontaneous teamwork and jettisoned the false machinations entailed by the need to earn one's keep. Given its antisocial implications, the practice of trade was abhorred. As Sahlins writes, "The !Kung do not trade among themselves. They consider the procedure undignified and avoid it because it is too likely to stir up bad feelings."[3] Normally, observed Elizabeth Marshall Thomas, the Bushmen possessed next to nothing, and gave away everything.[4] The practice of "giving away" undergirds the whole way of primitive life, and applies to all things, including food. James Woodburn documented this behavior in his studies of several different hunter-gatherer communities still in existence. Taking the Hadza as a paradigm, the English anthropologist noted how meat was divvied up evenly between everyone in a camp, independent of their family ties. Furthermore, the Hadza communities do not revolve around a system of trade and barter. Only

[1] P-J. Proudhon, *What is Property?*

[2] Recently, even Pope Benedict XVI has tried to yoke the spirit of giving to the logic of the market. Cf. Benedict XVI, Lett. Enc. Caritas in veritae (2009)

[3] Cf. M. Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics*

[4] Cf. E. M. Thomas, *The Harmless People* (1959)

IX. From Gift Exchange To Economic Rule

1. The Genesis of the Economic Model: From Giving Freely to Demanding Reward

> *The exchange of presents did not serve the same purpose as trade and barter... The purpose that it did serve was a moral one. The object of the exchange was to produce a friendly feeling...*
> — Alfred Reginald Radcliffe-Brown

As previously stated, giving freely and trading are two antipodal conceptions of life: the one motivated by a natural propensity to share (giving), the other by the principle of convenience (trade). One hinges on a sense of altruism, the other on ego. One is guided by cordiality and fellow feeling, the other, given its competitive spirit, by individualism. Proudhon's scenario is too true to not quote:

> Competition, sometimes called liberty of trade [is] a duel in a closed field, where arms are the test of right.
> "Who is the liar,—the accused or the accuser?" said our barbarous ancestors. "Let them fight it out," replied the still more barbarous judge; "the stronger is right."
> Which of us two shall sell spices to our neighbor? "Let each offer them for sale," cries the economist;

we even begin to think that the military-industrial complex and the business it traffics in will somehow be rejected in favor of a love of life when the world we live in is one long interrupted death rattle? Economic law in democratic states dictate that production is a function of consumption, which is to say that the objects it produces are meant to be purchased and used. The one way to make arms production solvent is to use them for the tasks they were built to perform.

A function of this aberrant logic, war must therefore become acceptable. And one of the best ways to make it acceptable is to refashion its grim features into something presentable. Presentable technological inventions that, spruced up in their civilian clothes, are refurbished into merchandise desired by the entire world; presentable recruitment agencies that, using the "career building" military jargon of the day, lure more and more "human material" (*menschenmaterial*,[53] as German soldiers in World War I were called) into their ranks; even presentable combat and extermination strategies—the kind that translate armed conflicts into "surgical strikes," explosives into "intelligent bombs," chemical airstrikes into "tactical initiatives" and civil massacres into "peace keeping missions."

This way, while military democracies galvanize an expanding business market, the utilitarian, speculative universe is glorified and gains the upper hand. It also unites, in Europe as elsewhere, now as then, right and left wing groups to rally passionately around national factory brands. War has never made distinctions between political parties; taking up the flag of the government in charge, it may wave right, left and center. A good example of this was the invasion of Iraq in March 2003. The governments of the three aggressor States—Bush Jr.'s conservative right administration, Blair's progressive left and Az-

[53] Cf. I. Brandauer *Menschenmaterial soldat, alltagleben an der dolomitenfront im erstern Weltkrieg 1915-1917* (2007)

nar's Christian Democrat—did not run into the slightest ideological difference when they launched their attack; nor did any conflict arise between the other States who rushed en masse to the aid of the powerful assailants.

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Were it possible to measure the cruelty of war throughout the evolution of military strategies, there is no doubt today's technological warfare would far outweigh strategies of the past. The latter oozed with real blood and scattered body parts in the streets; in hand to hand combat, soldiers' corpses accumulated on the battlefield over which the acrid stink of death lingered. The former, on the other hand, is neat and tidy; it often leaves no trace of actual bodies, seeing as it is capable of instantaneously vaporizing them. Even when not immediately extinguishing people, it is capable of striking with scientific ferocity: through starvation, famine or fatal diseases that develop years later, when everyone has long forgotten about it.

Warfare, you might say, has stopped killing. Instead it exterminates, devastates and wipes everything and everyone off the face of the earth.

Organized around *total mobilization*, as duly noted by Ernst Jünger while discussing how the television and radio made everyone—even those not in uniform—conscious of what the First World War felt like, war has gone global. To paraphrase Carlo Galli, war has become "cross-bordered," so that armies no longer advance and retreat. Instead, this global war consists of concentrated economic and technological actions that occur in real time in "exact" spaces.[54] Whereas classical warfare "was evocative of death, danger, suffering," writes Diego Lazzarich, today's brand of warfare "evokes cold, rational calculation and aseptic technical accuracy."[55] In this semi-virtual sce-

[54] Cf. C. Galli, *Political Spaces and Global War* (2010)

[55] Cf. D. Lazzarich (ed.), *Guerra e communicazione* (2008)

barter irremediably. And our primitive ancestors, who lived for millions of years with no ambitions to do business, still have much to teach us, especially if you consider that their modus vivendi constitutes the most enduring form of human existence with the world and in the world. To begin looking at the economy as a total estrangement from real human and environmental exigencies, and, furthermore, to begin seeing it for what it is—as a damaging force that disperses human relations—could help us to at least begin to question the dominant position that the modern world has granted it.

flourish, and the near total dependency on trade relations has taught us to favor utility above all else, even above lending a hand. Nevertheless, an awful lot of our relations, in particular the kind Caillé calls "primary sociality," continue to grow outside the realm of economics. "The state, market, science," says the French professor

> do not embody all of society as a matter of fact. Indeed they occupy that which we might call "secondary sociality," where relations between human beings are not relations between people but rather between functions in which people are subordinate to impersonal exigencies, whether that takes the form of equality in the eyes of the law or is the equivalent of market economics or scientific objectivity. But beneath this form of secondary sociality, hither and thither, there endures…another society: the "primary society," society based on relationships between people and, being such, one subject to personal exigencies. It is in the registry of this sociality that alliances, kinship, and families grow, and therefore also neighborly relations, friendships and a good part of community life.[15]

Try as the nagging mercantile propaganda may to convince us that every living thing can be computed into profits and losses, resistance to its brand of autocracy has hardly let up. And once again we should realize that people continue to turn their noses up whenever the usual windbags (be they political leaders, union organizers or the Pope) tell us to think of our children as "investments" for the future.

The economy has not wrested everything from us! Human relations have not been chained to the model of trade and

[15] Cf. As cited in S. Latouche, *Il ritorno del dono* (http://www.edscuola.it/archivio/interlinea/dono.html)

nario, carefully self-legitimized by politics and formally purged of the typical horrors of violence, even the victims of war—the flesh and blood victims—lose the appearance we normally associate with victims. As Bauman notes, they "are more like the uncomfortable side-effects of a potent medical drug: difficult to avoid, necessary to put up with for the sake of the therapy. 'Collateral casualties' lose their lives because the damage done to them counts less in the total balance of the actions' effects. They are disposable, 'a price worth paying.'"[56]

It has been a long time since war was fought as a sequence of aggressive actions taken by one army against another, equally manned army. Nowadays war is a sequence of aggressive actions taken by an army against an entire defenseless people.[57] And it is only thanks to this much-applauded strategy of decimation that no one can escape from war. Tormenting and killing unarmed people allows the powers-that-be to apply political pressure on governments, which is the single justification for military action. Seen from this perspective, the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki by the U.S. government, while not the first example of a premeditated act of war with an extra-military objective, have taught us a lesson; the bomb that hit Hiroshima landed on a hospital.

Unfortunately, however, not only is war unacceptable because of how much blood it sheds, but because of the way this bloodshed is met with tacit, widespread consent. Armies provide the breeding grounds for this consent, the stage and scaffolding that prop it up. With out the tangible presence of the Armed Forces in modern society (military bases, barracks, troops stationed in cities) and the constant promotion of the army outside the realm of warfare (in sports as in civil defense;

[56] Cf. Z. Bauman, *Society Under Siege* (2002)

[57] Of the more than 100,000 Iraqis killed in the Second Gulf War, only 5% were killed in direct combat with ground weapons. 95% of the victims were killed as a result of airstrikes.

in cultural events as in aid programs), the militarization of the world would sound more bleak and horrifying.

But civilization has not only trained us to tolerate the atrocities of war and justify them as the sole means to accomplish some ideological agenda. It has also trained us to overlook the criminality inherent in the institutions that wars invent, plan and subsidize. Every one of us participates in the war movement both directly, as taxpayers financing government military campaigns and most of all indirectly, as consumers, leading the lifestyle we have been told to lead, letting ourselves be brainwashed by news media outlets, fully acceding to military propaganda. We may still regard war with diffidence, but we have learned to turn a blind eye to everything that makes war physically possible. Even accepting, without the least bit of rancor, the military's most deplorable enterprise: the sacrifice of young lives.

Whether because they are poor, ignorant, seeking citizenship, obtusely patriotic or seduced by ubiquitous military propaganda, young people of both sexes enlist in armies around the world where they learn what goes by the wonderful name "a job like any other," ie, the soldier's métier. They learn to respect hierarchy and respond to commands with a "Yessir" while offering up their lives in return. They learn to replace love with the logic of terror, with brute force. Day and night they train to acquire the psychological and physical ability to attack people, raid homes, invade countries and put down populations. They are trained to control their feelings, shut out the voice of their conscience, ask no questions and react impassively to "enemy" appeals for help or cries of desperation or pleas for mercy. And they learn how to use weapons for the purpose of trapping, terrorizing, humiliating and cutting individuals they do not even know to pieces—a job like any other.

But this gross mystification is also what makes civilization tick. "Subjected to professional conditions of service," writes

> We are accustomed, because of the nature of our own economy, to think that human beings have a "natural propensity to truck and barter," and that economic relations among individuals or groups are characterized by "economizing," by "maximizing" the result of effort, by "selling dear and buying cheap." Primitive peoples do none of these things, however; in fact, most of the time it would seem that they do the opposite. They "give things away…"[14]

In effect, "giving" and "taking" are polar opposites, irreconcilable ways of seeing life. The former, ludic, disinterested vision of our Paleolithic ancestors is essentially motivated by a desire to offer; the latter, economic vision of the civilized world teaches us to snatch up, steal and do whatever we please. In the case of the latter, even when one admits the necessity to "give away," she does so only in order to gain something better in return.

And yet even in this cold, cynical, calculating world not everything is made for a profit. Selflessness still exists. Indeed, it represents our "better selves." The love we feel for someone, the passion with which we defend our ideas and sentiments, the profound respect we have for loved ones, friends, animals—these are all unequivocal signs that humans, by nature, are anti-economic. If we take a moment to consider the tenderness that exists between a child and parent, the idea that human beings live for nothing other than utilitarian gain seems ridiculous. Adoption, volunteer work, rescue work, and profuse efforts to help others are further testament to the fact that the ugly sphere of economics has not bent every vital part of our being to its will.

Sure, the merciless world that we have built over the ruins of nature leaves little room for anti-economic actions to

[14] Cf. E.R. Service, *The Hunters* (1966)

2. The Lie of Homo Economicus and the Give and Take Attitude

> *The fiction of homo economicus... is nothing more than a fiction.*
> — Alain Caillé

Economics is not germane to human nature. In American anthropologist Marshall Sahlins' words, the economy is a "category of culture, not behavior."[10]

For millions of years humankind existed in a state of freedom from the machinations of profit-turning; the need to measure one's existence on a scale of advantage-disadvantage is a recent phenomenon. The very concept of "Economic Man" is nothing more than a slogan, the ideological product of an era dominated by economics. The ethnologist Malinowski, leader of the school of functionalism, said as much in 1922: "Another notion that must be exploded, once and forever, is that of the Primitive Economic Man."[11] And Richard Thurnwald, founder of Economic Anthropology, echoed the same a few years later: "A characteristic feature of primitive economics is the absence of any desire to make profits."[12] Later still, in 1968, when Hungarian economist and sociologist Karl Polanyi wrote that "if so-called economic motives were natural to man, we would have to judge all early and primitive societies as thoroughly unnatural,"[13] he was merely giving an analytical account of the same thing Aristotle intuitively grasped 2,300 years prior: man is a social being, not an economic one.

Our belief that economics is a natural part of our existence is based on the simple fact that the civilized world makes it look that way. As Elman Service writes:

[10] Cf. M. Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics*
[11] Cf. B. Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922)
[12] Cf. R. Thurnwald, *Economics in Primitive Communities* (1932)
[13] Cf. K. Polanyi, *Primitive, Archaic, and Modern Economies* (1971)

Bauman, "the soldiers have gained the status of employees."[58] Soldiers no longer kill, they push buttons and pilot vehicles. Their eventual death in battle is considered an "industrial accident," and if they are mangled in an ambush they become victims of a terrorist attack. Within this falsely reassuring dynamic, the idea that war is slaughter is fast fading, and armies cease to be looked upon as death mills. We live in such a twisted world that even the paradox of all paradoxes is possible: to make a living one may go into the killing business. In a world where "might makes right" what matters is finding oneself on the right side of might. The fact that civilization has always regarded this aphorism as a moral truism hints at how far we are from merely considering war acceptable.

[58] Cf. Z. Bauman, *Society Under Siege* (2002)

Part 4: The Power of the Economy *(A critique of economics)*

"Saving" the economy, "saving" capitalism, "saving" this toxic way of life will not restore the dynamics that have been taken from us. And "administering" nature (ie, managing it for the profit of human interest = eco-nomy) is just another way of not understanding that *our interests are exactly the same as nature's interests*, and nature surely does not need us to intervene in order for it to exist. This explains why, talking "predatory economics" is a completely meaningless rhetorical gesture. The economy is always predatory—a little more, a little less, but it is still predatory. Turning the world into a "product," a "service," a *resource to exploit* is always predatory. And the science of utilitarianism is so rapacious that it plunders not only the outside world but also the world residing inside us, robbing us of our natural inclination to interact with others without calculating what we will gain from it, and making us cynical and insensitive. If we are no longer capable of seeing others in a non-competitive light, it is because we live in a world run completely on the criteria of economics. If we are no longer capable of relating to nature other than as consumers, it is because the world we live in is helmed by economics. If we are no long capable of being happy, sincere, slow, idle or disinterested—and are instead obsessive, operative, mercenary and productive—it is because the economy commands our lives, thoughts, feelings and actions. In short, if property is theft (as the famous philosopher Pierre-Joseph Proudhon believed[9]) then the economy is the heist of all heists!

[9] Cf. P-J. Proudhon, *What is Property?, Or, an Inquiry into the Principle of Right and of Government* (1840)

> predicated upon serviceability to economic interests: a human being is regarded merely as labor power, nature as an instrument of production, life as one grand commercial transaction, heaven and earth as a large business concern in which everything that lives and moves is registered in a gigantic ledger in terms of its money value.[7]

And a century before that, Edward Copleston wrote that economic science is "prone to usurp the rest."[8]

Naturally, like all of civilization's inventions, the economy can resolve some temporary contingent problems. But like war, it remains an invention that pits us *against* the world. While transforming the earth into a production factory may, in the immediate future, multiply crops (agricultural surplus), in the long run it has a negative effect on the earth, on those who work in it, and on the social system engendered by it. Allowing economic laws to determine our existence is a little like conceding to military tactics, occupations, brutal invasions, mass killings.

If we have now reached the point of labeling nature a "resource," it is because we have adopted a military mindset where everything comes down to power. To us, the earth, life and nature only exist in order that we may exploit them (they are resources). But nature is not a resource—it is nature! And the fact that everything has become a resource today (even men and women are considered human resources) speaks volumes about the power of the economy to make us serve it. Imagining "negative growth," fair trade and sustainable development is like imagining an army that kills while taking care not to make its victims suffer; it's certainly preferable to another, more ferocious army, but it remains an army whose mission is to kill.

[7] Cf. W. Sombart, *Economic Life in the Modern Age* (2001)
[8] Cf. As cited in E.F. Schumacher, *Small is Beautiful*

ECONOMY = A UTILITARIAN ORDER MANIPULATING AND DOMESTICATING INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

(civilization versus business ethics)

> *[In a world governed by economics] a specific individual is identified with the anonymous price of what he produces and what is produced in his name. With the exception of some passion that still links him to life…he is nothing more than a commodity; he has a usage value, which makes him a servile tool for a wide array of functions, and an exchange value, which means he can be bought and sold like a pair of boots.*
> — Raoul Vaneigem

VIII. Economics And Utilitarian Logic

1. What is Economics? Economics is Thievery!

> *The conversion of natural into artificial, inherent in our economic system, takes place as much inside human feeling and experience as it does in the landscape. [In economics] the human, like the environment, is redesigned into a form that fits the needs of the commercial format.*
> — Jerry Mander

Reflecting on the conditions of our time tends to produce little enthusiasm for the modern world. Few people are likely to willingly defend war, xenophobia, coercion, pollution and exploitation. And yet our faith in economics remains indissoluble.

A world that does not run on the laws of exchange and profit is almost inconceivable to us, at least as far as imagining a world that does not produce objects, jobs, even demand. The idea that in order to feel fulfilled one must acquire more things, or invent new gadgets, or turn the world on its head to make it more exciting, springs from the same civilized mentality that views human nature as insufficient, as lacking some indispensable element, and that this lack can only be filled by an outside force.

estation) and care still less about the enslavement of rivers (channeled for energy, contaminated, poached for sand and pebbles so that we can put up buildings) or mountains (tunneled through, paved over, mined for resources and defaced by ski lifts, resorts and hiking paths).

If land cultivation spelled the end of *free*, unbridled nature and the birth of an *obedient* nature, the economic mindset (made possible by farming) alienated it even further. Not only did nature, now a means for production, have to *obey*, it also had to *be useful*. The concept of surplus, unknown to primitive humans, flared up with its inexorable laws: produce in order to *have more*; have more in order to *trade*; trade in order to make a *profit*. Under the carefully arranged mandates of utilitarianism, a universe previously experienced as shared participation, joy and freedom, kowtowed to the imperious will of the economy, which resulted in market stands, moneychangers' tables and, finally, banks. Men and women—more and more spurned from the market table—ceased to share in life and began contending for it at the best price.

As Vaneigem neatly sums up, with the economy's "Neolithic revolution," "the proliferation of life gives way to the proliferation of market goods."[6] Werner Sombart also describes how the economy distorted our vision of the world with its precept of subjugating the universe, and, at the same time, explains the terrible absolutist inclination of such a vision. As Sombart wrote roughly a century ago:

> [Acquisition not] only [seizes] upon all phenomena within the economic realm, but it reaches over into other cultural fields and develops a tendency to proclaim the supremacy of business interests over all other values. Wherever acquisition is absolute the importance of everything else is

[6] Cf. R. Vaneigem, *Adresse aux vivants*

ests be met, even if those interests clashed with the way the world works. Owning nature was not enough for them; they also felt it necessary to impose a totally disenchanted and utilitarian vision of things. Which is to say, the world not only had to be dominated by human force, it also had to function according to the plans, will and whim of human beings.

To the extent that the culture is "governed by the imperative of reforming and subordinating nature,"[5] the economy (among the practical manifestations of culture) puts this plan into immediate action. Its very name suggests what it is intended for; economy comes from the Greek word *oikonomía*, which literally means "housekeeping" (ie, the house we all inhabit, or the world). The task of the economy, then, is to put the world in order, which is to say put nature at the service of humankind.

From the moment the planet was reduced to the role of serving humans, the harmonious union between individuals and nature that had permeated the life of hunter-gatherers got lost. And the wider the gap between individuals and nature, the more the former justified the exploitation of the latter. To witness the indifference, the insensitivity, the ease with which we exploit every corner of nature means to spy the subtlest effects of domination. Each of us is capable of becoming indignant over child labor, over human slavery, even over the mistreatment of animals. Yet few people become outraged over the enslavement of the earth, which we force into an intense system of production and endlessly torment with the inventions of agricultural science (plows compacting the earth and diminishing its porosity; sprinklers washing away the land's minerals; fertilizers suffocating microorganisms; pesticides poisoning the food on our table).

Equally, few people pay much mind to the enslavement of plants (bonsai, grafting, trimming, pruning, industrial defor-

[5] Cf. J. Zerzan, *Elements of Refusal*

Like ideology, which aims at filling the emotional voids we attribute to the human condition, the economy is supposed to complete individuals both psychologically and materially. In essence, while Christianity, Buddhism, socialism, etc are charged with the task of mending our "inability" to live together in harmony, the production of goods and services, their exchange and the economic profit gained by them, is supposed to alleviate our dissatisfaction with our material lives. Without economics, wealth does not exist (as we are often told) and because the economy only judges one's wealth by what one produces, exchanges, earns and consumes, anything that falls outside this professional realm is dismissed—neither affection, good-heartedness, the capacity to listen nor generosity ever increased the GDP.

Convinced that we lack the particular gene that dispenses happiness, we believe we can make up for this deficiency by acquiring things, money, social prestige, other devotions. In order to obtain the above, we make no scruples about "transforming" nature to our liking, subduing and manipulating everything around us: animals, rocks, energy resources, other people. For the economy, every living and non-living element must be made "productive," which is to say converted from a *natural* to an *economic* state. This conversion requires attaching a price tag to something that did not have one before. From an economic standpoint, everything that remains in its natural state, that has not been pressed into an economic mold, is worthless and *unproductive*. As Mander writes:

> An uninhabited desert is 'nonproductive' unless it can be mined for uranium or irrigated for farms or covered with tracts of homes.
> A forest of uncut trees is nonproductive.
> A piece of land which has not been built upon is nonproductive.
> Coal or oil that remains in the ground is nonpro-

ductive.

Animals living wildly are nonproductive.[1]

For those of us used to seeing the world through an economic viewfinder, nature and everything that exists in it has no standalone meaning. It only becomes significant as a potential product. Everything still in its original, unaltered form—even a physical distance, a pause in time or a particular attitude—remains *uselessly cut off* and therefore liable to be occupied and exploited.

Obviously, humanity has not always been swayed by the profiteering mentality; more importantly, it does not have to continue to venerate or perpetuate that mentality. Noting just how new the economic vision of the world is, Alain Caillé tried to encapsulate millions of years of non-civilized life in just a few words. It is certain, he writes in *Critique de la raison utilitaire*, "that primitive societies were more concerned with ensuring their own cohesion than they were with production, and that as long as they lived they favored prestige or idleness over the accumulation of material wealth."[2] Although we may disagree with the French sociologist's ideas about "prestige," and criticize his expressly "institutional" approach that holds up social control (social cohesion) as the antidote to economics, the essential message of the cofounder of the Anti-utilitarian Movement is relevant. For millions of years our ancestors took care not to transform the world into a product, were categorically disinterested in possessions, and sought to preserve their autonomy (self-sufficiency) without recourse to personal ideologies. To them, nature was an "indissoluble whole."

We generally think of the economy as being guided by a divine hand, while the alternative view (ie, that humans are the ones guiding the economy) appears almost insulting to us. And yet, given the disastrous effect it has had on the world,

[1] Cf. J. Mander, *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television*

[2] Cf. A. Caillé, *Critique de la raison utilitaire*

The very basic materials of our existence (from nutrition to physical wellbeing to social relations) are largely managed by "corporate bodies" whose enterprises—with the utmost respect for economic laws—are sold to us as opportunities, take 'em or leave 'em. The economy, which Ernst Schumacher called the "obsession of all modern societies,"[4] has become so all-consuming that we even use economic concepts to define aspects of our lives that do not involve the economy (love, play, human relations, care, solidarity).

At the core of this process of all-out commodification are the concepts of production, trade and profit. These are the heart and soul of the science of economics and translate civilization's will to dominate into *cost effectiveness*. In fact, thanks to economics, the idea that humankind is separate from the rest of nature and able to dominate it has evolved into the idea that humankind is separate from the rest of nature and able to *exploit* it. With the world transformed into a sort of gigantic, detached "industrial complex," everything—from the earth to human beings—is oriented toward creating goods and services (production) for sale (trade) at a specific price (profit). Life, the primordial expression of being that has no other reason to exist than the fact of being, becomes a mere "instrument of production" condemned to serve the vague desires of a humankind aimed at controlling and possessing everything. In this case, then, agriculture undoubtedly represents the first economic act carried out by humans.

As the antecedent form of material dominion, land cultivation seeded our ideas about management. At the same time, it also laid the groundwork for a new mode of understanding relations, which informs how we act to this day: self-interest. In fact, once human beings considered themselves separate from nature, they began demanding that their own, particular inter-

[4] Cf. E. F. Schumacher, *Small is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered* (1973)

us of the time and pleasure of doing so, shoehorning our inner exigencies into the mathematical logics of trade: I'll give you this if you give me that. Thanks to the ideology of trade, our existence is no longer determined by direct contact with the natural world (and our ability to rely on it) but is rather subjected to the rules of economics, in particular the ability to *produce revenue* or *manage capital*. One cannot live without money in this world.

Through this economics-conditioned lens, everything assumes an economic meaning: personal competencies cease to exist as such and become "specializations," things stop being things and become possessions, deeds stop being deeds and become professional services. Even individual creativity loses its natural human connotation and is reduced to the more practical "entrepreneurial skill." Personal gifts, actions, initiatives and imagination dissolve. They lose their carefree spirit and become "objects" to be exploited for a profit. We have always been able to provide for ourselves yet now, in the cul-de-sac of economics, life has grown so distant from us that it is easily repackaged before our very eyes and resold as the "latest model" without our even realizing it.

****

Today, a large part of civilized individuals' lives hinges on economic decisions. The world of economics determines whether we find a job or lose a job, whether we have the benefit of "free time" or not, whether we enjoy favorable environmental conditions (sun, clean air, greenery) or not. The question is: how much say do we as individuals have on these decisions? And the answer is, once again, simple: our will has no bearing on the machinations of our modern existence. Not in the slightest. We are no longer in charge of making the rules. Our opinions and personal goals as individual members of the civilized world do not get a hearing in these deliberations.

a doubt lingers in our mind: could it be that the economy is responsible for thwarting our ability to be self-sufficient and happy? Here is one answer to the question:

> There is the old story of the native living on a Pacific island, relaxing in a house on the beach, picking fruit from the tree and spearing fish in the water. A businessman arrives on the island, buys all the land, cuts down the trees and builds a factory. Then he hires the native to work in it for money so that someday the native can afford canned fruit and fish from the mainland, a nice little cinder-block house near the beach with a view of the water, and weekends off to enjoy it…[3]

There is no hiding the terrible, devastating power of the economy. The globalizing dynamics presently concluding their planetary takeover reveal the "colonialist" spirit of the science of utilitarianism. In order to introduce economics into virgin territory, dramatic changes need to be made to the environment, the community and people's habits. People must be separated from their natural surroundings, from all that links them to others, in order to be turned into *buyers*. At the same time, the landscape must be taken apart and reassembled in such a way that it may be sold back to each buyer. As we all know, expanding the world market always entails breaking a few eggs. Every initiative aimed at spreading economics continues to be justified. No matter if every forest in the world must be cut down, paved over and generally dismantled. No matter if men and women, girls and boys, other living creatures, minerals and natural resources must be exploited. No matter if people must disavow their independence and be forcefully integrated into the utilitarian system.

[3] Cf. J. Mander, *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television*

The prevailing idea that propels the grotesqueries of the economy would have us believe every human being has interests that are opposed to those of his or her fellow humans, and to nature. Once again, the civilized conception of a humanity that stands apart from the rest of the world, a humanity that competes with every other element on earth and is called upon to "save itself" at the expense of others, rears its head. Frenetic to the point of delirium, this perspective leaves little room for freedom: succeed in your own business to beat everyone else's, it suggests, defend your business from everyone else's attacks on it.

From this standpoint, "our" business means occupying uncultivated lands, turning them into factories and making them yield a profit. "Our" business means locking an animal in a cage and putting it on display or breeding it in order to sell its hide, milk or meat. "Our" business means exploiting workers to create worthless products that the public has been trained to want. "Our" business even means transforming ourselves into tradable stock, into a labor force to be sold to the highest bidder. And it is by dint of pursuing this business of "ours" that for centuries humans have stooped to the level of soldier, servant, lackey, usurer, torturer, cop, executioner.

Economics has become so widespread that it takes up all the space for public and private reflection, every manner of social institution and every square foot of nature. Today we are so influenced by this mindset that we cannot imagine anything that falls outside its absurd rules. So many centuries have passed since we gave into the demands of the pimp in the old story of the native that we have forgotten that we have no need of him or his destructive system in order to live our lives. Thus, while we delight in the fruit and fish shipped in from the continent, in the little house with a seaside view and the weekend during which to enjoy it, we forget what it means to live (not only on the weekend) what it means to eat (not only packaged, poisoned food) what it means to share in the life of a community

(not only in a confining urban setting, an impersonal bureaucracy, in the fake social life of online chat-rooms). At the same time, we are forced to spend all day fighting those who have been unable to obtain even this much, who we believe want to steal our food, our house, our weekend…

The idea that human belongings and affairs are only relevant insofar as they translate into "products" points to the extreme rigidity of the psychological environment in which we live. And the idea that these "products" must then be constantly traded with others to maximize profit completes the circle of civilization, elevating its ideological framework from a personal conviction to one that effects our relationships. Our attitude toward social relationships is always based on utilitarianism. And yet the ability to procure what we need to live (from food to love) does not necessarily pertain to economics; on the contrary, the more removed from economics they are, the more pertinent they become. The example of our feelings should suffice to make this point abundantly clear. Buying someone's affection fails to make us happy. Loving someone for money is not love. However much money allows us to surround ourselves with people ready to declare their feelings for us, we all know that what those people really care about is the money, and anyone (even the greatest economics advocate) would prefer sincere affection. Obviously, what goes for feelings also goes for life's other needs. If we take a minute to think about the pleasure we derive from doing things on our own, we immediately realize the cold feeling we are left with when we obtain the same thing through purchasing power. The economy—with its efficiencies and production lines—has sterilized our sense of self-satisfaction, diminishing our accomplishments to a cold, inert, superficial transaction of buy and sell.

In other words, economics has not only taken away our ability to procure what we need to survive (once again confirmed by the story of the native-turned-worker) it has also stripped

> very visible. It is immaterial like the waves that carry information.[16]

Our sense of sight, then, along with our sense of smell and taste, is no longer of use to us, not even as a mechanism for self-defense. Instead, our senses have been sterilized by the overbearing power of technology. In a technical world, real threats can no longer be detected simply by sniffing out a rotten smell; in fact, radiation, electromagnetic waves, artificial energy fields, smart dust, the latest waste treatment plants and "clean" exhaust fumes cannot be detected with the nose at all.

After having led us down the path of "intellectual cynicism," where we denigrate any cognitive process that is not based on cold rational thinking, civilization is now pushing us toward a "sensory cynicism,"[17] which would have us distinguish reality from unreality without the help of our basic senses. Seeing, smelling, hearing, tasting, moving, thinking are not keys to "understanding" anymore, but rather to "supposing." Human beings who live in a technological world are like children who have to figure out on their own that what appears on TV isn't always real. And once this program of deforming the senses has been set in motion, it cannot be stopped (unless, that is, the entire system is stopped).

If we look around us, we can all see clearly how useful electricity, telephones, running water, gas and television programming, as individual luxuries, can be. Nevertheless, "all these technical advances taken together have created a world in which the average man's fate is no longer in his own hands…but in those of politicians, corporation executives and remote, anonymous technicians and bureaucrats whom

[16] Cf. P. Virilio—D. Dufresne, "Cyberesistance Fighter - An Interview with Paul Virilio" in: *Apres Coup Psychoanalytic Association* (January 2005)

[17] A term coined by Jerry Mander. Cf. J. Mander, *Four Arguments against Television*

> their wood, the land is drying up. The harvest is increasingly smaller, and many Garos are forced to work in coal mines.[39]

In a world run on money, people have no way of maintaining their personal independence; they are strictly tethered to pecuniary interests. Those who possess this "precious Nothing" can rest assured they will find housing, food, clothing, social prestige. Those without have no choice but to languish in poverty and go hungry. In reality, the reason money plays such a determining role in the rise of poverty is not only because it draws a line between the haves and have-nots, but because it makes it so that no one is capable of providing for themselves.

The grocery store is usually packed to the gills with produce all day, while primitives heading off to pick fruit start out the day empty-handed. Yet while a hunter-gatherer can rely on his own skills to feed himself (eg, knowing how to forage for berries, vegetables, roots, etc), modern men and women only gain access to the grocery store goods thanks to something that has nothing to do with their personal strengths—the power of money. If that power is in their hands, they are saved. Otherwise, they are left for dead.

By providing everyone with the necessary skills to feed themselves, and drawing a direct connection between subsistence and individual skill, the un-economic way of life preceding civilization created the proper conditions for people to lead their lives autonomously. Economics, on the other hand, severs the connection between individuals and nature in such a way as to deeply rupture all of life's natural processes, piling on completely unrecognizable and unpredictable variables (inflation, stagnation, income return, unemployment) that individuals have no control over. Once a primitive hunter has acquired the skills to catch his prey, a strong link is forged between his

[39] The program aired on Rai 3, as part of the series *Agenda del Mondo*. Cf.

ability to acquire (to catch) and the means of his subsistence (the catch). "Economic" men and women, on the other hand, even if they have acquired professional skills to spend on the market (eg, passing qualifying exams to obtain a doctorate in engineering), literally struggle for years to understand what they can do with the skills they have learned if those skills do not translate directly into financial gain. Moreover, whereas a rabbit being hunted remains a rabbit after it is caught, people cannot be so certain about the value of the money that they make to buy a rabbit; the credit value or the rabbit's market value could come crashing down in an instant. Any of the thousands upon thousands of victims of financial fallout over the years are all too aware of this particular facet of money, as bubbles go on bursting constantly. Incommensurable patrimonies go up in smoke in a matter of hours; hopes and dreams are shattered; prospects of material wealth, financial security or mere welfare are definitively drowned.

The conditions of equality that people in a non-economic community enjoy are literally wiped out by the currency system and its most convulsive aspects. Today I'm flush, I'm a king. Tomorrow I'll lose everything and become a slave. True as it may be that not everyone living in a non-economic sphere possesses the same skills to provide for themselves (eg, young adults have a major advantage over little children, the elderly, the wounded and the sick) the way in which that world promotes the interests of the group over individuals, and aspires to a way of life marked by helping others without seeking compensation, obviates any potential trouble. In the sphere of money, on the other hand, where, given the personal interests promoted by the ideology of exchange, there isn't a hint of neighborliness, everyone is on his or her own. Those who are less capable of providing for themselves (or less inclined to bleed others dry) are therefore destined to be done in by others' success.

ceivable abuse ceases to appear arbitrary and wins acceptance when it is perceived to be an offshoot of technology.

Now that technology has managed to sway public opinion, social criticism has been expunged. The same goes for dissent, protest and censure. Our passive attitude toward the devastation of nature at the hands of technology attests to this. We can continue to believe that technology does not influence our lives, however, while we consider manageable that which is clearly unmanageable, and deem neutral that which is clearly not neutral, we ultimately find ourselves living in a world that jurists tellingly describe as a *risk society*. And that fact cannot be met with indifference. Now more than ever before, we coexist with elements that threaten our lives and the life of the planet. The threats of chemical, atomic and biological hazards, as well as mass pollution (smog, electrosmog, chemical vapors, water contamination, noise pollution) have become our partners for life, the ones who will never leave our side, come rain or come shine. And terms like "environmental disaster," "radioactive pollution," "hazardous material" and "climate change" have infiltrated our lexicon to the point that they barely affect us.

When we talk about technology, said Giairo Daghini, we are talking about "the production of destruction," which is to say every technological invention is a potential for hazard. Paul Virilio, who has examined this aspect of technology for decades, draws a crystal clear picture of what this means:

> To invent something is to invent an accident. To invent the ship is to invent the shipwreck; the space shuttle, the explosion. And to invent the electronic superhighway or the Internet is to invent a major risk that is not easily spotted because it does not produce fatalities like a shipwreck or a mid-air explosion. The information accident is, sadly, not

upheaval."[15] Imagine what would happen if an ordinary glitch in any industrialized country's system were to cut off the gas supply for a week in winter.

Contrary to what the ministers of the cult of technology say, technology does not increase human ability to work together with nature; it decreases it. We are no longer capable of walking forty miles a day, nor can we live in the woods without the aid of hiking gear. We rely so heavily on these gadgets that the mere thought of going without makes us queasy. And the more these gadgets are refined and perfected, the greater is our reliance on—and belief we cannot live without—them.

Hardly retractable, technology conditions our existence and gradually turns us into its admirers, its affiliates, willing to be led down the road it has laid without asking any questions. There are no exits on that road for us to double back, and the road itself runs one way only: toward new technological inventions, new neighborhoods, where the farther we go forward the more gates close behind us. Unfortunately, barred from putting the car in reverse, everything relating to the old neighborhood is kept out of the new. This explains how, without our even realizing it, our basic skills (our manual skills, for example) gradually dissipate, as does our ability to think independently, our sense of responsibility (especially toward the natural world) and our capacity to provide for ourselves.

As it furtively upends the natural world, technology also upends our vision of it, along with our deepest convictions, which are gradually remodeled to benefit technology itself, as well as its logical and ideological stratagems. Because if it is technology that establishes the need for making sacrifices, such sacrifices are more readily embraced. Because if it is technology that sets the parameters for a given behavior pattern, then there is no reason to stand in opposition to them. Even the most incon-

[15] Cf. G. O. Longo, *Homo technologicus*

Care for the greater good as practiced in non-economic communities is replaced by diffidence and preoccupation with individual concerns in the world of financial exchange. Similarly, mutual support that generally connotes personal intimacy is transformed into subsidiarity, financial aid. Yet this shift in perspective corresponds perfectly to the aims put forth by pecuniary logic. In fact, poverty, in the economic sphere, has never been a tragic side effect of the system. Rather, it is a necessary condition of the system, which absolves people of becoming personally involved in social aid in favor of symbolic gestures of goodwill.

The first social function poverty serves is to make charity possible. Charity actually helps reinforce poverty in the guise of offering aid. The more charities become about financial donations, the more sway money has over the poor, whose dependence on their benefactors' supplies only increases. Far from the kind of aid that seeks to even out each party's condition, often at great personal risk to the helper (think of leaning over a cliff to save someone, or divvying up the meager spoils of a hunt, or organizing a strike to protest the abuse of a fellow worker) charities accentuate the (economic) difference between those who beg and those who donate, without the donor's ever having to expose himself to danger. When all is said and done, money divests us of the spirit of fellow feeling and ensures that the good deed can be paraded around for all to see with the minimum amount of personal involvement. It allows the "rich" to clear their consciences with a few bucks without getting their hands dirty and, more importantly, without ever considering the actual cause of poverty. In effect, it succeeds in humanizing donors despite the fact that the very gesture of charity sanctions their predominance.

Yet economic poverty serves a second and more decisive social function. It allows donors to think of themselves as "rich."

Agenda del Mondo: Planet Bolliwood, Maria Cuffaro (2004) (translation Schutt)

What could possibly drive a young worker with a precarious job to think of himself as lucky if it were not for the presence of someone who didn't even have his unstable, underpaid job? And what could possibly permit an out-of-work man to consider himself touched by the hand of God if there were not someone else, in some far corner of the world, dying of hunger?

By leading us to believe others are worse off than ourselves, the financial world tricks us into accepting, even good-humoredly, our own impoverishment. Our daily life is a case in point. Surrounded by devastation, besieged by the misfortunes and diseases of progress that mow us down by the millions like some crazed gunman, and forced to labor till we drop (oftentimes at humiliating and degrading tasks) we have learned to look to people on the fringe of civilized society as a way of feeling better about ourselves. We're rich, we think. As Debord writes, the only source of gratification for a modern citizen is that he is told "he lives so well" and "loves to believe the agreeable things he has been told," even if they are blatantly false, since, "while a part of the planet is dying of famine, the inhabitants of these ['rich'] countries are not living like Sybarites: they live in shit"[40]

Even the social doctrine of the Church instructs us that "the poor are not to be considered a 'burden,' but a resource, even from the purely economic point of view."[41] And since in today's globalized world emigrants constitute the most consistent share of desperation and poverty, they are the ones the Church considers "a resource" (ie, productive pawns to be put to work for a profit). "Foreign workers," the Pope continues in the same *Encyclical Letter*, "despite any difficulties concerning integration, make a significant contribution to the economic development of the host country through their labor, besides that which they make to their country of origin through the

[40] Cf. G. Debord, *Abat-faim* (1985)

[41] Cf. Benedict XVI, *Encyclical Letter, Caritas in Veritate*

minutes to connect to a site, you were *obliged* to acquire a digital subscriber line from a major telecommunications corporation, which meant accepting all of the terms in their contract, being saddled with worthless accessories and charged for a variety of other services, technical repair bills and so on and so forth. All of these items, of course, were indispensable.

The binding force of technological progress lies in its occult ability to create need, to make us consider necessary that which before was not. Every item technology presents to us as desirable quickly becomes indispensable, and people wind up being forced to receive it willingly: a gadget heretofore inexistent is now used on a daily basis; a practice heretofore inexistent is now customarily performed; a system heretofore inexistent is now commonly acknowledged. This process proceeds automatically and effects every facet of our lives. We can protest the use of weed killers and chemical fertilizer all we want, but once someone uses them, we all face the consequences one way or another. We can staunchly oppose the idea of building a new trash incinerator, but once the plant has been built, everyone's trash will end up there. The only way to defend against technology is to reject it in advance and *in toto*.

The spread of technology is spurred on by the belief that technological advancements represent a kind of "physiological" development connected to human evolution and our inherent need to intervene in the natural world. Because technology does not appear to us to be an influencer, it tends not to trouble us. And yet technology's capacity to infiltrate the deepest recesses of human consciousness "allows its conspicuous and perspicuous elements to 'disappear' (just as electricity, telephones and calculators have 'disappeared' after becoming so customary and omnipresent). That is precisely the moment they take greatest effect." Once technology has penetrated our most intimate realm and we have been wired to it, "eliminating it (ie, kicking the habit of using it) entails a difficult and painful

> traffic lights that are designed mainly to serve auto traffic.[13]

One might add that traffic circles, which have gradually replaced traffic lights in much of Europe, not only spell the end of walking (it's impossible to cross a traffic circle without risking your life) but the end of non-motorized forms of transportation (biking through a traffic circle being extremely dangerous too). When all is said and done, urban bikers and roller skaters have been confined to designated paths, which, after all, are designed to help the flow of motorized transport.

"When a new item of technology is introduced as an option that an individual can accept or not," continues Kaczynski, "it does not necessarily REMAIN optional. In many cases the new technology changes society in such a way that people eventually find themselves FORCED to use it."[14] For example, thirty years ago a few new car models featured power windows, a brand new technological device sold as an "optional" accessory. Those who wanted one could buy a car equipped with them. Those not interested could continue to roll their windows up and down the old-fashioned way—by hand. Yet today, as we all know, there are practically no cars left *not* equipped with power windows. And if once upon a time your hand lever broke, you could buy a new one for a couple of dollars and replace it yourself. But if a junction box breaks down, now you are *forced* to take the car into a specialist whose work is irreplaceable and unquantifiable *a priori* (neither parts, labor nor taxes can be calculated beforehand).

The same holds true for the Internet. When, in the not too distant past, a digital broadband navigation system (ADSL) was introduced, there was no intimation that people would have to abandon the old system. Yet if you did not want to wait forty

[13] Cf. T. Kaczynski, *Industrial Society & Its Future*

[14] Ibid.

money they send home."[42] Ah, so here is the true "politics of reception" as practiced in the civil world—a recruitment camp for the workforce.

Duly exploited, the poor have always represented the backbone of the labor system, whether the ancient system that resulted from the agricultural revolution or the avowedly feudal system of the Middle Ages or the system of the industrial age or today's techno-industry, whose most rancid manifestations (social instability, population booms, the efficient consumption of natural "resources," sweatshops, outsourcing, market economics, bottom lines) have been dubbed "green" and "blessed" by the Catholic Church. Every machine-based economy needs fuel. Without servitude, privation or poverty, the economy would come to a stand still.

Ever since humankind dropped the free life in nature for an economic existence *against* nature, the myth of material wealth has indisputably justified the exploitation of the poor. And yet material wealth (unlike poverty, which has always been a concrete fact in the world of money) is pure myth. It is a condition that contributes absolutely nothing to our happiness.

In a world where values are aligned with economics, the idea that one's wellbeing is directly connected to how much one possesses is a belief that dies hard. When we think of the conditions in which indigenous populations live—dressed in rags, living in makeshift huts, without flooring, without televisions, without juicers and 4x4 SUVs in the garage—we immediately equate that image with poverty. We confuse poverty with simplicity. "To Western eyes, Ladakhis look poor," writes Helena Norberg-Hodge, in her study of the native tribe that has inhabited the region of Ladakh in the northern Himalayans (between India and Pakistan) for over two thousand years. "Tourists can only see the material side of

[42] Ibid.

the culture—worn-out woolen robes, the *dzo* pulling a plough, the barren land. They cannot see peace of mind or the quality of family and community relations. They cannot see the psychological, social, and spiritual wealth of the Ladakhis."[43]

People are not poor because they have little money or few things; they are poor because they have been uprooted from their self-reliant nature and forced to depend on an economic system whose rules have been established by others, and individuals are powerless to breach them. On this point, it seems appropriate to quote Marshall Sahlins: "The world's most primitive people have few possessions. but they are not poor. Poverty is not a certain small amount of goods, nor is it just a relation between means and ends [...] Poverty is a social status. As such it is the invention of civilisation."[44]

Those populations on the edge of the civilized world (Asia, South America, Africa, etc) are not poor because they live outside the economic system, but because they have entered it. They are poor because they have been robbed of their independent means of sustaining themselves, and forced to enter the sphere of financial dependence, industrial production and consumerism. This sphere that serves as a dumping ground, a laboratory, a tool with which to glorify advanced economies.

Populations in the southern hemisphere are not poor because they no longer possess gold or precious stones, but because they have begun to take an interest in profiting from such frivolities. They are not poor because a developed system is alien to them, but because they have been subjected to its brutal laws and mechanisms that they have no way, obviously, of determining.

Before civilization infiltrated Africa, the Americas, the Middle East, Southeast Asia and Australia, the people in those countries did not live in poverty. It was the advent of

[43] Cf. H. Norberg-Hodge, *Ancient Futures: Learning from Ladakh*
[44] Cf. M. Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics*

For example, consider motorized transport. A walking man formerly could go where he pleased, go at his own pace without observing any traffic regulations, and was independent of technological support-systems. When motor vehicles were introduced they appeared to increase man's freedom. They took no freedom away from the walking man, no one had to have an automobile if he didn't want one, and anyone who did choose to buy an automobile could travel much faster than the walking man. But the introduction of motorized transport soon changed society in such a way as to restrict greatly man's freedom of locomotion. When automobiles became numerous, it became necessary to regulate their use extensively. In a car, especially in densely populated areas, one cannot just go where one likes at one's own pace. One's movement is governed by the flow of traffic and by various traffic laws. One is tied down by various obligations: license requirements, driver test, renewing registration, insurance maintenance required for safety, monthly payments on purchase price...Since the introduction of motorized transport the arrangement of our cities has changed in such a way that the majority of people no longer live within walking distance of their place of employment, shopping areas and recreational opportunities, so that they HAVE TO depend on the automobile for their transportation. Or else they must use public transportation, in which case they have even less control over their own movement than when driving a car. Even the walker's freedom is now greatly restricted. In the city he continually has to stop and wait for

However, what is worse is that, while one generation is forgetting their experience of coming into contact with the earth, future generations will never even have the chance to experience that contact. In place of nature, many kids today rely on solitary games in front of a monitor as their sole source of entertainment, or cartoon monsters doing battle in various intergalactic wars staged on television. The fact that in our time the sensorial deprivation Johnson suffered as a child is no longer limited to the scions of the middle class does not legitimize it. A world populated by alienated people does not make alienation a boon. On the contrary, expanding alienation to affect people of all ages and all backgrounds makes it, if anything, more worrisome. And it is this worry that we must address every time we see the natural world transmogrified into a techno-world, since, as Nicholas Negroponte, the messiah of the digital age, observes, "Computing is not about computers anymore. It is about living."[12]

Negroponte's idea of living would turn games into pastimes, social connections into web connections, human communities into electronic communities and heart-pumping pleasure into technology-dependent adrenaline kicks.

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At present, technology has penetrated both the personal and public realms. More bewildering is the fact that technology not only affects techno-apologists, it affects everyone alike, whether devotees or naysayers, sympathizers or skeptics. Despite promises to the contrary, people have little choice but to use technology. It is too embedded in the culture to be openly resisted. As the author of *Industrial Society & Its Future* explains, the idea that technology is optional and not willed by the people is patently false.

[12] Cf. N. Negroponte, *Being Digital* (1996)

civilization—with its exploitative methods, its privatization of nature, its (economic, sanitary, technological) forms of dependency and its need to control and govern (via social politics, the military, culture, religion) that impoverished populations and made them go hungry. "There is no starvation in societies living on the subsistence margin,"[45] observed American ethnologist Herskovits in 1940. Indeed, stock markets are not essential to our being fed. There is no need of the structures, laws and economic activities, that undermine individuals' independence in order to preside over the commercial distribution of goods and products. On the contrary, every time subsistence practices are transformed into economic practices (and thus filtered through the market) hunger, which had never been a problem before, becomes a scourge. "It is the absence of the threat of individual starvation which makes primitive society, in a sense, more humane than market economy," writes Karl Polanyi in *The Great Transformation*, concluding, "the white man's initial contribution to the black man's world mainly consisted in introducing him to the uses of the scourge of hunger."[46]

Moreover, the destruction of self-subsistence is a defining feature of the process of civilization. Nearly twenty years ago Fini reckoned as much in his essay "*Il terzo mondo sta morendo del progresso*" ("The Third World Is Dying of Progress"). "Drought and natural catastrophes are not the real cause of what is happening in Africa right now," he writes.

> Those have always existed. Their plight is due to the industrial world's violent intrusion into a different socio-ecological system, which the country had heretofore managed to balance. Thanks to our stupid, arrogant belief that our

[45] Cf. M. Herskovits, *The Economic Life of Primitive Peoples* (1940)

[46] Cf. K. Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (1944)

> scientific-technological model is "the best in the world," we destroyed that balance…The screws are put on Africa to industrialize into a degraded outlying territory of the Empire.[47]

Civilization did not only use cannons and machine guns on its colonizing campaign. It used every means possible with the aim of making others subservient. "Today's conquistadors," writes Norberg-Hodge, "are 'development,' advertising, the media, and tourism."[48]

In order for the insatiable financial system to thrive, new markets must be created and marginal populations conquered and assimilated so as to desire the artificial goods of industry. That way, the civilized world can sell them the products that the economy churns out in such insanely large quantities as to saturate all demand. In the end, these populations must go from being "underdeveloped" to "developed," ie, they must be transformed into total consumers at the price of devastation. And as long as civilization's campaign (and the myriad military deployments in the name of Democracy, Bureaucracy, Market, Progress, Culture, Technology, Terror, Social Control) is not complete, this brutal, modern form of colonialism will not stop. We call it globalization; "*en*globalization" would be more fitting.

The voracity of the science of utilitarianism knows no limits, and once it has conquered the planet and squeezed the earth like a lemon, it will set its sights on the outer solar system. Perhaps the only way we can stop the economy is by seeing it for what it is: a criminal act perpetrated by criminal means by criminals.

[47] Cf. M. Fini, *Il terzo mondo sta morendo del progresso* in "Domenica del Corriere" (July 6, 1985) (trans. Schutt)

[48] Cf. H. Norberg-Hodge, *Ancient Futures: Learning from Ladakh*

in a non-technological environment appears to us. The more artificial the world, the more the latter is destined to succumb to technology. The result of all this, writes Ellul, is visible to the naked eye: we are rapidly moving toward "a time when there will no longer be a natural environment."[9] Such a prospect does not depend upon how we use technology (for good or evil) but upon the essence of technology itself, which, given its constitution, pits an artificial world against a natural one.

Even supposing that technology has been built with the best of intentions, argues Kirkpatrick Sale, there is no denying that modern day life has become "less and less…connected to other species, to natural systems, to seasonal and regional patterns; more and more to the technosphere, to artificial and engineered constructs, to industrial patterns and procedures, even to man-made hormones, genes, cells, and life-forms."[10] Without our even realizing it, we have jettisoned the wild and embraced broadband, digital protocol, graphic interface, Internet connections, scanners, hypertext and computer literacy.

In his book *Everything Bad is Good for You*, American journalist Steven Johnson made his obsession with video games public, and defended mass culture as a "kind of positive brainwashing." Recounting how as a lonely kid he would entertain himself on the living room floor with simulated baseball statistics, Johnson confesses, "For some people, I suppose, thinking of youthful baseball games conjures up the smell of leather gloves and fresh-cut grass. For me, what comes to mind is the statistical purity of the twenty-sided die."[11] Yet Johnson's childhood is nothing unusual; many of us have a hard time calling to mind a particular smell, the call of the wild or even the touch of warm clay that we sculpted with our bare hands growing up.

[9] Cf. J. Ellul, *La technique ou l'enjeu du siècle* (1954)

[10] Cf. K. Sale, *Rebels against the Future*

[11] Cf. S. Johnson, *Everything Bad is Good for You* (2005)

our children to distinguish between nature (forests, streams, fires, the human voice) and what is manmade (cities, highways, dishwashers, voicemail).

> The child lives with us in a room inside a room inside another room. The child sees an apple in a store and assumes that the apple and the store are organically connected. The child sees streets, buildings and a mountain and assumes it was all put there by humans. How can the child assume otherwise?[8]

"Daddy, what's the moon a commercial for?" a child once asked, looking up at the sky. As adults, we are convinced that we're immune to this sort of deception, meanwhile we fall for digitally altered photos, breasts pumped up with silicone, the fairy tales politicians tell us and supposedly unbiased news reports. We assume we can see through the manipulations of technology, meanwhile we go on thinking air conditioning is air, genetically modified tomatoes are tomatoes, artificial light is light and backbreaking work is life. Scents, tastes, physical contact, hiking, and kissing are neither mental exercises nor statistics; in reality, they are part of the living environment, not the environment shaped by technology. Only technology's suppression of this real environment can definitively expel them from daily experience.

The real strength of technology lies in its ability to make all of us technological, less capable of distinguishing between what is organic and what is inorganic. And thanks to the technological mindset we are inculcated with from the day we're born, we have learned to believe that everything we see in the civilized world (from warfare to bureaucracy, from economics to politics) is natural and therefore acceptable. The more technological our way of thinking, the more inconceivable living

[8] Cf. J. Mander, *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television*

5. Criminal Money

> *Whoever loves money never has money enough.*
> — Ecclesiastes

Schopenhauer used to say, "Wealth is like sea-water; the more we drink, the thirstier we become." Not only does the longing money incite in us makes us money's slaves, it also drives us to act criminally, mainly thanks to the concept of speculation that money entails.

To speculate means to profit from commercial and financial activities, and "everyone knows the definition of commerce– *the art of buying for three francs that which is worth six, and of selling for six that which is worth three.*" As we can note by this description, money's first crime is that it gives us free license to deceive others. That fact becomes graver if we consider how commonly accepted it is. "To-day even, and in all countries," writes Proudhon, "it is thought a mark of merit…to KNOW HOW TO MAKE A BARGAIN—that is, to deceive one's man. This is so universally accepted that the cheated party takes no offence.[49]

If money is considered the indisputable standard for determining one's wealth, there can be no doubt that the more one has, the richer one is, ie, the more one speculates, trades, cheats one's neighbors, the richer one is. Accumulating greater quantities of money is paramount; the means by which one pockets those quantities is only of secondary importance. A billionaire rarely asks herself how she became rich. Which brings us to the second nefarious aspect of money—money leads to irresponsible behavior, with no thought of the consequences. Economics, concludes German scholar Ernst Schumacher, "deals with goods and services from the point of view of the market, where willing buyer meets willing seller. The buyer is essen-

[49] Cf. P-J. Proudhon, *What is Property? An Inquiry into the Principle of Right and of Government*

tially a bargain hunter; he is not concerned with the origin of the goods or the conditions under which they have been produced. His sole concern is to obtain the best value for his money." In a mercantile universe, continues Schumacher:

> There is no probing into the depths of things, into the natural or social facts that lie behind them. In a sense, the market is the institution-alisation of individualism and non-responsibility. Neither buyer nor seller is responsible for anything but himself. It would be "uneconomic" for a wealthy seller to reduce his prices to poor customers merely because they are in need, or for a wealthy buyer to pay an extra price merely because the supplier is poor. Equally, it would be "uneconomic" for a buyer to give preference to home-produced goods if imported goods are cheaper.[50]

A similar attitude that inspires the "triumph of *quality* over *quantity*"[51] embodies the very spirit of money. Money *is* the triumph of quantity over quality. Even when the buyer is concerned about quality (fair trade, non-profit, ethical banking, etc) the reign of quantity does not disappear altogether, since quantity makes the rules of competition by which any economic transaction, even if morally driven, must be measured. "The religion of economics has its own code of ethics," writes Schumacher, "and the First Commandment is to behave 'economically'—in any case when you are producing, selling, or buying."[52]

There are no subjective differences when money is involved, since money determines the value of everything. Everything refers back to quantity. For example, if a country's

[50] Cf. E. F. Schumacher, *Small is Beautiful*

[51] Ibid. (italics mine)

[52] Ibid.

that candidate's name, and our conscience is clear whenever we are given the possibility of participating—without doing anything other than entering that little ☒—in any number of "good causes" that do not require us to personally mobilize. This is because, in the world of "yes" or "no", we become key players simply by checking the box.

Far from making us more intelligent, technology makes us more conventional, superficial and brusque. Not to mention the pall of frenzy and performance anxiety it shrouds us in, or its ability to dull our imaginations. Technology only prompts us to conform to its own mechanisms. It was not made to increase the forms of human intelligence. If anything, it was made to transfer human intelligence to machines. Which is to say, in the words of Roberto di Cosmo, technology turns us all into "technocretins."[7]

Yet technology not only erodes thought, expression and sensitivity. It erodes human aptitude altogether, starting with our sensory-motor skills, which have already been inhibited by electronic devices that keep us from actually using our bodies. The fact is, technology drains the life out of everything it touches, and unfortunately, like money, it touches everything. It even succeeds in compromising our human capacity to experience the joys of nature. Technology is artifice, which means that a world made up of technological inventions not only differs from the natural world, it stands in direct opposition to the natural world, and works toward eradicating it.

As happened with sunlamps, liquid solution of sodium chloride substitutes the sea, oxygen tanks supplant fresh air and treadmills replace hiking up a mountain. Once again, these substitutions are made so subtly as to sneak by almost imperceptibly, to the point where we have gradually lost our ability to recognize them for what they are. Today we no longer even ask

[7] Cf. *Piège dans le cyberspace* (http://www.dicosmo.org/index.html.en)

tronic network that allows us to access whatever technology makes available to us. Interactivity, says sociologist Federico Boni, is only the simulacrum of interaction, just as network sociality is the simulacrum of sociality and virtual reality is the simulacrum of reality.[6] Given how steeped we are in the world of technology, simulacra prevails, and we learn to see the world as one enormous jumble of bits, pixels, chips, lines of text, dollars and cents, and screens, and these are the things we wind up valuing exclusively.

Galimberti defined intelligence shaped by technology as "converging" and "binary." "Converging" because it is an intelligence that no longer freely analyzes questions but rather inertly adapts to the statement of the problem. It neither examines the question "from the outside" nor reverses the initial presuppositions nor interrogates the premises. In other words, it is the exact opposite of creative intelligence, whose energy lies in its ability to overturn the original hypotheses. "Binary" because the mentality that technology accustoms us to tends to be stripped of all nuance. As with questionnaires, we are told to be practical and not get caught up in useless, personal clarifications, discussions, analyses or explanations. Just answer yes or no, true or false, black or white, up or down, right or left.

Put in even clearer terms, technology breeds a kind of check-the-box intelligence. Doesn't that about sum up how little we participate in the civilized world today? We are always judged by checks in the box—whether we are taking a driving test, a school quiz or a college entrance exam. Check marks are used to identify us as patients and insurance clients. They allow us to forego the heavy lifting of individual expression. Alone in our voting booth, we feel as though we have a political voice every time we check a box next to this or

[6] Cf. F. Boni, *I media e il governo del corpo: Televisione, Internet e pratiche biopolitiche* (2002)

GNP grows, it is considered a positive thing in and of itself, even if that growth entails blatantly destructive elements. As Norberg-Hodge points out, a country's budget may appear healthy because it has cut down all its forests. "And if crime is on the increase," she writes, "and people buy more stereos or video recorders to replace those stolen, if we put the sick and elderly into costly care institutions, if we seek help for emotional and stress-related problems, if we buy bottled water because drinking water has become so polluted, all these contribute to the GNP and are measured as economic growth."[53]

The mechanism is so perverse as to have made reality, economically defined, paradoxical. "Rather than eating a potato grown in your own garden, it is better for the economy if you buy a potato grown on the other side of the country, which has been pulverized, freeze-dried, and reconstituted into brightly colored potato balls."[54]

Even future risks to the environment and people's health assume, for economists, "a positive value since they are an inexhaustible reserve of 'demand' that capital needs in order to propagate."[55] The sicker we are, the sicker the world, the sicker people, the faster the wheels of the economy spin. Focused as he is on the quantity of phenomena, the economist is concerned solely with the growth of GNP. "The idea that there could be pathological growth, unhealthy growth, disruptive or destructive growth, is to him a perverse idea which must not be allowed to surface,"[56] writes Schumacher. The GNP is sacred and inalienable! And those who see its opposite, "declining" side hold it sacred too. In fact, as Schumacher observed back in 1973, if it is true that "a small minority of economists

[53] Cf. H. Norberg-Hodge, *Ancient Futures: Learning from Ladakh*

[54] Ibid.

[55] Cf. Gruppo M.A.R.C.U.S.E, *Miseria umana della pubblicità* (translation Schutt)

[56] Cf. E. Schumacher, *Small is Beautiful*

is at present beginning to question how much further 'growth' will be possible, since infinite growth in a finite environment is an obvious impossibility,"[57] the fact remains that "even they cannot get away from the purely quantitative growth concept. Instead of insisting on the primacy of qualitative distinctions, they simply substitute non-growth for growth, that is to say, one emptiness for another."[58]

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Given that the meaning of money is completely tangled up with the concept of measurement, and the greater the measurement, the greater the promise of material wealth, the criminal sway of money explicitly becomes financial sway, which is to say, the automatic exponentiation of money. In that case, we must not forget that money is a mere convention, a symbol, an idea. To instill the flimsy sheaves of colored paper that represent this idea with (quantitative) value, they must be circulated, spent and exchanged for something. To acquire goods, for example. Nevertheless, by acquiring goods, we cannot expect to accumulate money; money must be spent on objects for the economic budget to grow. Moreover, by consuming the goods that we acquire, those goods lose their value. The only way money can be fruitful is to invest it in businesses that produce more money.

In general, any endeavor aimed at procuring economic capital without exchanging something in return is called finance (and is therefore different from a seller who gives away the goods she sells). If commerce is the art of buying for three francs that which is worth six, finance is the art of getting six francs and buying nothing; in short, it is the most sensational conjuring trick played on us by money, the perfect hoax.

[57] Ibid.
[58] Cf. Ibid.

"it must be used, and not doing so is [believed to be] criminal and antisocial."[5]

It's hard to consider technology neutral given that technology is this rational, artificial phenomenon that deprives humans of their ability to act and behave autonomously.

As has already been said, the rational scientific approach, which technology heralds as the only way to interpret the world, is not the only way. Technology makes a radical selection in favor of a cognitive model that clearly has historic precedents (the idea that knowledge is power) yet is by no means absolute; and pressuring people otherwise unaccustomed to such an approach to internalize this model ultimately conditions their way of thinking. In a technological world, our vision of things tends to be increasingly practical, Cartesian and calculating. And since this rational approach is not reflexive but rather operative, the kind of intelligence it breeds is usually just as linear, unaccustomed to digression and little inclined to doubt or call into question the facts as they are presented to them.

Using electronic devices, watching television, entertaining ourselves with the adventures of PlayStation or the pseudo-explorations of cyberspace limits the development of our brains enormously. It teaches us to conform to a logical-computational framework. We are taught to apply our intellect to follow rules in the instruction manual, rather than make up our own games; we learn to race to get the right answer rather than work with others to figure things out; we learn to plop down in front of the screen and gorge on entertainment (videogames), other people's drama (reality shows), and the predictable unfolding of fictional events (TV miniseries), ultimately abandoning our own ability to act.

With *interaction* out of the way, we are left with *interactivity*, ie, downloading information from a pre-designed elec-

[5] Ibid.

> which man sets technology in motion are artificial means…The world that gradually accumulates technical means has the same character. It is an artificial world, and therefore radically different from the natural world.[4]

In the end, technology is inherently marked by automatism, which is to say, every technical invention is capable of functioning on its own. Once activated, it moves automatically and acts independently of every other product, contraption or process that does not meet its specific purpose. Thermostats raise the temperature of our house, airplanes provide the fastest way to travel from one country to another, remote controls turn on our television sets. If you want to stay warm, all you have to do is turn the thermostat up and the machine will do the work: the heater will turn on, the water warm up, air will rise through the vents, etc. Similarly, if you want to reach the far ends of the earth in no time, all you have to do is reserve a plane ticket, pay for it and show up at the gate on time. The airline company will take care of designing the plane, building it, testing it, training the pilot, checking the aircraft engine, filling the tanks up with fuel, planning the flight path, and so on. Ditto televisions. You don't have to do anything but push a button on your remote control and a dazzling world opens up before you, as if by magic.

Automatism is fueled by the fact that, once the technological processes have been set in motion, human beings are completely taken out of the equation. The individual is in no way shape or form the one who chooses. He is transformed into a device that records the effects, the final results of several technologies. Technology is seen as an opportunity to seize upon precisely because it aims to replace human activity. From the moment a gadget has been invented, it is looked upon favorably. "If the machine can achieve certain results," writes Ellul,

[4] Ibid.

In the world of lucre, when we talk about financial activities, we are inclined to think immediately of investing in the stock market. Yet there are endless substrata of speculative enterprises that exert a powerful influence over the culture of credit. The most salient is without a doubt interest loans.

Otherwise known as usury, this financial practice guarantees the accumulation of wealth without losing weatlth. We all know that courts and lawyers have sought to distinguish, redefine and regulate the practice of usury for centuries, in the hopes of curbing abuses. In modern law, interest loans are called mortgages, and are only considered usury (ie, illegal) when the taxes applied to the loan exceed certain amounts set by the law. You would have to be blind not to see that the sole distinction between a mortgage and usury lies in the "dosage," rather than in the speculative logic encouraged by both institutions equally. It is also clear that establishing purely quantitative legal limits (say, for instance, a rate of 15%) legitimizes speculation up to that limit. Yet usury represents the first form of capital investment to crop up here on earth, which fact explains why it has never been wholly outlawed.

Whether or not the courts find it legal, *dation in payment* remains a reprehensible practice. The merciless way it targets the needy (whoever asks for a loan is clearly in need) and the ferocity with which it guts its victims make it the perfect instrument of civilization. The horrible idea it gives rise to (Professor Hicks' formula, "The rate of interest is the price of time")[59] is its abiding symbol. It is no coincidence that, once money arrived on the human stage, loan sharking became a common activity in every corner of the civilized world; the Sumerians, Babylonians, Hittites, Egyptians, Hebrews, Indians, Greeks and Romans were all notorious usurers.

The rancor that this investment practice incited in the charitable, and the ill repute the world of finance enjoys today, can

[59] Cf. As quoted in N.O. Brown, *Life Against Death: The Psychoanalytical*

be easily traced back to the early agricultural world.[60] Nevertheless, the transformation of personal relationships into relationships based on debit and credit, so entrenched as to hardly have found opposition (if not marginally, or between members of the same community) is the foundation of the economic spirit *in toto*. Financial investment is speculation, exchange is speculation, economics is speculation.

Officially heralded by the rise of the practice of *giving-to-have* (consolidated over the centuries, and later institutionalized) usury could spread legitimately in its most natural and evolved state: the banking system.[61] Even today the most powerful credit institutes around the civilized world continue to exercise this noble art under the protection of national and international legislation that grants them impunity by establishing thresholds and maximum percentage rates for loan sharking.

But the speculative nature of usury is not only linked to financial loans. Gaining interest on money in exchange for a loan describes rituals that are totally analogous to usury. If we need a house and do not have the money to purchase one, we have no other recourse than to lease it. If we need to eat and do not have the money to purchase a tract of land to harvest our crops, we have no other recourse than to rent land or sharecrop. Time can be priced in several ways, and usury can take

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[60] One is reminded of Amartya K. Sen's words: "Jesus drove the moneylenders out of the temple; the injunctions of the prophets and the Jewish rules of conduct denounced the charging of interest; Islam proceeded to forbid usury. […] Solon cancelled most debts and forbade many types of lending altogether in his laws, which were emulated by Julius Caesar five centuries later. Aristotle remarked that interest was unnatural and unjustified breeding of money from money […] Cicero mentions that when Cato [the Elder] was asked what he thought of usury, Cato responded by asking the inquirer what he thought of murder." Cf. A. Sen, *Money and Value: Ethics and Economics of Finance* (1991)

[61] As Proudhon writes, "But the distinction between the banker and the usurer is a purely nominal one." Cf. P-J. Proudhon, *What is Property?: An Inquiry into the Principle of Right and of Government*

tinize it closely. Jaspers himself laid the groundwork for critically analyzing his assumption. When the German philosopher admits that technology shapes the human spirit, distorts the relationship between humans and their surroundings, imposes a "mechanism culture," binds humanity to the inanimate and uses people and the natural world to create the kind of energy production it needs to survive, he was certainly not alluding to a neutral phenomenon.

To examine the nature of technology we must start by looking at its principal features: *rationality*, *artificiality* and *automatism*.

"*Rationality* is the first clear feature [of technology]," writes Jacques Ellul in his famous study of technology.[2] As the practical application of science, technology pursues a plan to implement the principles that science is founded on, which is to say, logical argument, mathematical predictability and computation. "From whatever angle technology is examined," writes the French academic, "in whatever field it is applied, we are in the presence of a rational process that tends to subjugate spontaneity to the will of its mechanism."[3]

Technology runs on abstract, as opposed to empirical, reason, speculative intelligence that dulls the meaning of direct experience, the verity of rationale and logic understood as the one way to access our perception of reality. In a technological world, something is recognized only if it can be translated into a mathematical formula, an algorithm, a functional coordinate, a law.

The other main feature of technology is artificiality. "Technology runs counter to nature," writes Ellul. It ultimately spawns

> [an] artificial system. There is no logic to it at all. It merely pronounces that the means with

[2] Cf. J. Ellul, *La technique ou l'enjeu du siècle* (1954)

[3] Ibid.

XII. Technological Invasion

1. Against So-Called Neutrality in Technology

> *The current belief that 'technology is justified by its use' completely avoids the political question concerning just who is handling technology and exactly what for, and freely accepts technical means as if they were politically neutral, as if they did not constrict how human activities are organized.*
> — Bertrand Louart

The philosopher Karl Jaspers was the first person to put forth a kind "third" position—after the age-old anti-technology stance (taken up by the cynics of Ancient Greece and the 19th century luddites) and the equally longstanding apologist attitude (which championed the pyramid builders, the Roman aqueduct engineers, the space ship designers, etc)—which argues that technology is a neutral phenomenon. Distinguished scientist and profound thinker though he may have been, Jaspers planted the first seeds of what has now become the most shallow depiction of the nature of technology. "Technology is per se neither good nor evil, but it can be used for either good or evil," he writes in *The Origin and Goal of History*.[1] Is that really true?

Generally accepted as indisputable, the argument that technology is essentially neutral does not hold water if we scru-

[1] Cf. K. Jaspers, *The Origin and Goal of History*

on various forms of economic duress. Proudhon admirably explained how leasing, renting, sharecropping and earning revenue are perfectly legal forms of usury in the civilized world. The only thing that differentiates these practices from usury is that the "loaned" object is not money. We may label them free market activities or describe them in other, similarly cheerful terms, but the financial logic that unites them and pertains to each (making money without giving up one's possessions) remains the same: a form of exploitation; the strong milking the weak; a relationship founded on the power of yoking someone to another's demands. If we consider the connotations of the verb "profit" (take advantage of, exploit) you would think that we would be immediately repulsed by all financial activities. Yet again, observing the brutality bred by the civilized world reminds us just how antithetical is the existential condition of those who lead their lives sharing with others, accepting others and volunteering to help others without expecting anything in return.

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If profiting from an economic relationship means gaining an advantage to the detriment of an opponent, the criminal spirit that triggers disputes in the almighty name of money knows no boundaries. "Money naturally leads to scams," writes Fini.[62] The most obvious example being "lying about the weight and value of money. The State became a bona fide expert at that."[63] And, as Heichelheim showed in *Ancient Economic History*, the practice of plating money became a common means of plugging the public debt during times of crisis. Once the value was entirely cleared of the value of the precious metal (gold in the international monetary system) the scam knew no limits.[64]

[62] Cf. M. Fini, *Il denaro "sterco del demonio"* (translation Schutt)
[63] Cf. Ibid.
[64] Whoever has the power to issue new money can change the value of

The production of paper money is a clear example of this same legal thievery. In the world we live in, in fact, there is someone with the power to make a piece of paper for less then thirty cents and claim that it is worth $500. The difference (in this case, $499.70) is called seigniorage (or banking seigniorage, since the central banks have the power to issue money). The cost of printing money is lower than its nominal value, while the seigniorage is greater. This explains why we have been pushed to the brink of virtual money today. In fact, with a currency distributed by electronic credits that have no inherent value, that are not coined, that are completely disconnected from convertible mechanisms, individual banks create money from nothing (making them superior to banks that have actual materials in their safes) and in return get real money in the form of capital and interest (usually bank loans). This expedient is called credit seignorage and it is how credit institutes around the world do their business.

Depreciation, inflation, speculation on the nominal value of money, large-scale price increases to incentivize the production, creation and traffic of virtual credit, financial crises that force individuals to sell their stocks and personal goods—clearly these are not practices of a forgotten world, but the palpable features of the world today, populated with

money. Marco Della Luna and Antonio Miclavez provide an easily graspable example of this power. "Imagine we're a hundred people on an island. Each of us has 1,000 dollars. That makes the total money supply 100,000 dollars, and each of us has a purchasing power of 1/100. Let's say I'm the king and have the power to issue new money. I decide to issue 10,000 dollars more, which I keep for myself. The money supply has increased by 10%. It's now 110,000. I didn't create any new product, the value of the island's products has not changed, but now I can buy 11% of those products with the money I have, whereas before I could only buy 1%. At the same time, all of you still have 1,000 dollars each, which is no longer 1% of the money supply, but 0.9%. The money you have is not enough to buy 1% of the island's resources. It is only worth 0.9% of the resources. Each of you lost 10% of your purchasing power. I took it from you. It's as though I taxed your liquid assets." Cf. M. Della Luna, A. Miclavex, *Euroschiavi* (2008) (Translation Schutt)

fruit that has been shipped across the globe. What we "gain" as a result of technology we lose in terms of disaffection for the world and those around us, and therefore we also lose our sense of responsibility for the life of this world. When all's said and done, technology's sophisticated correctives cut us out of the equation entirely.

When our primitive ancestors built fires, they made no pretense to replacing the sun. Electricity, on the other hand, does, as do hairdryers, infrared lights and sunlamps (the name says it all). We go to the tanning salon believing a sunlamp provides us with the same exact benefits as the sun. We even go so far as to talk about heliotherapy. Our rational selves know that a sunlamp is not the sun, and yet we are so taken in by the ideology of the machine that we think a lamp can really do the sun's job. Indeed, we think it goes a step further than the sun. And we are actually disappointed every time we find our dermatitis has not abated (as it does when we spend the summer at the beach) or when we discover that artificial radiation has triggered some physical ailment.

Our faith in the power of the Machine leads us to believe that the rays of the main star in our solar system consists of a simple chemical compound of ultraviolet rays that can be reproduced with an electronic device. And the more we champion this kind of power, the further removed we are from the actual context in which we operate. Placed in increasingly artificial settings, we behave toward other living things with increasingly less sensitivity. All it took was the arrival of the axe for the Babongo of Gabon in Africa to turn a thousand year old practice of harvesting honey into a form of environmental destruction. Traditionally, during harvest time, natives would climb tall trees to get to the beehives at the top, and then drive out the bees with smoke while collecting the honey from a basket made out of leaves. With the arrival of technology, the Babongo became much more efficient honey collectors. Now they chop down whole trees for every hive. Two hours of hard work and down comes a hundred year old tree.

Technology has no respect for existence, and it makes those who use it just as inconsiderate. It often operates on a level that makes it difficult for us to detect this. Just think of the pollution we generate every day without realizing it—using a coat of varnish or a battery-operated device or buying an exotic

financial watchdog institutions. After all, financial criminality is not even a category anymore. Finance is criminal de facto. For a person to be invested with lawful economic powers to make his own rules and set his own prices, then impose them on a person in a position to do little else but follow them, is detestable in and of itself. To confer legitimacy on that kind of abuse is a criminal act, whatever the law may say.

Kinship is born of sharing and mutual understanding and not of formal, abstract conventions and the pressure to heed them. Far from attenuating circumstances for criminal monopolies, the "democratization" of financial speculation represents explicitly aggravating circumstances. While projecting the appearance of a "popular capitalism" ready to open the doors to the kind of financial wealth that the Agnellis, Berlusconis and Rockefellers partake of, this modern form of economic abuse actually aims at widening the base to finance the major market speculations of colossal multinationals. Deceitful financiers practice zero restraint, and, trained as we are from childhood to faithfully advocate the values of the business world, we do not put up a fight. Like Pinocchio, we let ourselves be hoodwinked by the Fox and the Cat, sure that they can multiply the little piggy banks that we have filled up by the sweat of our brow. We hand them over to the financial bigshots so that they can invest them in any odd campaign (military, child labor, all kinds of trafficking). There we are, ready to furnish them with our meager earnings, our pensions, our life savings, not giving a thought to the ethical questions that arise from fortune-making (ie, if someone is making money, another someone is losing it). If a few decades ago it was the great magnates and industrialists who were investing the money they made from their enterprises, and indirectly obtaining the public subsidies thanks to that famous law that privatizes profits and socializes risks, today, added to those practices of state support is direct popular financing. Providing our earnings so that the titans of industry and finance can continue to live it up at the roulette

table is the final frontier to be conquered by the democratic world of the dollar god. The fact that the criminal sphere of economic devastation has been opened up to include "popular" participation is only the most indecent outcome of that conquest.

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Seediness may be an innate feature of economics, but money has a way of exacerbating that feature. Suffice it to watch the escalating dearth of bartering systems to get a sense of how money has vanquished all its rivals in the economic system. Based on reciprocal trading of actual goods, bartering limits the potential for speculation; I can trade a sheaf of oats for ten or fifteen or even twenty liters of sheep's milk, but I'm not interested in forcing the terms of exchange to the point of gaining a thousand liters of milk that I wouldn't know what to do with. Conversely, money exchange breaks the mold; since money is fungible, and can be *used for anything*, I can never have enough. As a consequence, where money is involved, the maximization of profits—unnatural to a trade mentality—becomes *agonistic*, which is to say, one constantly works to obtain more, to the detriment of his or her interlocutor. What we lose as a result is first and foremost our sensibility, and secondly our affability, generosity, respect for others and care for our neighbors' needs. The guiding principle of all economic affairs is, as Werner Sombart says, "the utter lack of moral scruples."[65]

As long as the spirit of trade traffics in real, natural goods, it can be easily mitigated by the impact of gift giving. I have ten bushels of pears. Once I have acquired enough to feed my table and make jam, I will feel compelled to give away the rest (which is how things happened in the country up until a few decades ago). But if I have ten bags of money, I'll never have

[65] Cf. W. Sombart, *Economic Life in the Modern Age*

Practically speaking, once a tool has reached its peak efficiency, it is perfect, and, as such, can be used. A technological device, on the other hand, has no such limits. On the contrary, technology works to cross those thresholds of perfection established by biology. Thus, a plastic paddle surpasses the optimum efficiency of a paddle made with natural materials (wood, for example), launching a search for unattainable heights. Today a plastic paddle, tomorrow a carbon fiber paddle, the day after tomorrow an engine to replace paddles. The paddle, as a means, is ultimately abandoned. It no longer corresponds to the immediate aim of those who invented it, since technology has definitively altered the goal; the new goal is to harness sea power.

> "The birch tree never oversteps its possibility," Heidegger reminds us. It is first the will which arranges itself everywhere in technology that devours the earth in the exhaustion and consumption and change of what is artificial. Technology drives the earth beyond the developed sphere of its possibility into such things which are no longer a possibility and are thus the impossible.[25]

In a technological world, the impossible becomes the point of departure: our mania for greatness, our pursuit of absolute perfection, our foolish quest for power and efficiency that can be glimpsed in our desire to exceed individual limitations, surpass nature, travel beyond the realm of the possible. Such begins to define (or re-define) the character of our ambitions. As we strive for the impossible, we lose all sense of what is actually possible (ie, what is natural) to the point where we become spectators, no longer waiting to be surprised by what nature has to offer but by what technology promises to offer.

[25] Cf. M. Heidegger, *The End of Philosophy* (1954)

example, "chimpanzees actually seek materials for tools and carry them several yards for a specific purpose."[22]

Humans may not be the only ones to use tools, but they are the only species to use technology, the only group to develop multidisciplinary fields of scientific research and production aimed at constantly manipulating the environment. Our capacity to do so has been seen in a favorable light since the advent of cultivation, even if today it has become more and more difficult to hide the price we pay for our actions. The endless "by-products of the technological society are polluting both our physical and our psychological environments. Lives are stolen in service of the Machine and the toxic effluent of the technological system's fuels—both are choking us."[23] And yet, if one listens to the fanfare of modern propaganda, no such problems exist, apparently. Everything is in order, everything is going according to plan, even if it's easy to see that this plan is continuously adjusted to allow for the increasing levels of toxicity and existential impoverishment in the technological world.

Technology's effect on the environment is one of the many "urgent" issues everyone has to reflect upon. As Leslie White explains, technology poses a practical problem that tools do not. "The efficiency of a tool," writes White

> cannot be increased indefinitely: there is a point beyond which improvement of any given tool is impossible. Thus, a canoe paddle can be too long or too short, too narrow or too wide, too heavy or too light, etc. We may therefore both imagine and realize a canoe paddle of such size and shape as to make any alteration of either result in a decrease of efficiency.[24]

[22] Cf. N. Tanner, *On Becoming Human*

[23] Cf. Green Anarchy, *An Introduction to Anti-Civilization Anarchist Thought and Practice*

[24] Cf. L. A. White, *The Science of Culture*

extra. Money makes us attached to money. And the more it does, the more it distances us from others, from nature, from ourselves.

As a result of our having placed our belief in money, shuffled off our scruples, grown detached from everyone and everything, we have become cynical, implacable, insensitive and arrogant. Money justifies and legitimizes our increasingly shameless behavior. As Georg Simmel, who studied the subject at great length, writes: "money takes on a colourlessness and a lack of qualities that, in a certain sense, devalues everything for which it can be an equivalent."[66] Money does not inspire ethical behavior. Instead, it makes us inconsiderate. Because money leaves no tracks, all memory of how it was used can be cancelled easily. Consequently, to paraphrase the famous German sociologist and philosopher, once the transaction has flown into the wide sea of money, we can no longer retrieve it. It says nothing of its tributaries.

"*Pecunia non olet,*" said the Romans. Metaphors aside, the idea that money doesn't "stink" is an idea that has not lost currency in modern times. Our maniacal obsession with hygiene has led us to disinfect and sterilize everything. We wash our hands a hundred times a day, every time we touch an unknown object or an animal. But we are not loath to touch money, the one truly dirty thing passed from hand to hand. If we recall Ferenczi, the explanation for this appears crystal clear. Money, said Freud's apprentice, is "nothing other than odourless, dehydrated filth that has been made to shine."[67]

However we hide its filthy and irresponsible nature, money is still money. The mere fact that with it we can buy human beings, friends, opinions, benevolence, consensus, feelings, bodies and body parts is enough to qualify it as unclean. And yet, one of the many paradoxes of money (and civilization, which

[66] Cf. G. Simmel, *Simmel on Culture: Selected Writings* (1997)

[67] Cf. S. Ferenczi, *Sex in Psychoanalysis* (1909-1913)

has long made money its symbol) is that those who possess a lot of it acquire an aura of prestige and, in general, are given greater license to disrespect those who have none. Surely this is another aspect that distinguishes money as an opprobrious institution. To paraphrase Simmel again, cheating someone out of a small amount of money is, according to prevailing social mores, held in much greater disdain than stealing large sums of money.[68] A good example of this phenomenon, as Simmel showed, is how "upright" modern society views prostitution. Its distaste for prostitutes is determined by how rich or poor the prostitute in question is; the less well-off the prostitute, the greater our repugnance. Yet all doors are open to an actress everyone knows is living with a millionaire for his money.[69]

In the modern world, what one is matters less than what one succeeds in appearing to be. And economic prosperity plays a crucial role in this, too. In a world where appearances are everything, money, the indisputable essence of superficiality, becomes a central factor. Not only is it a useful tool for making those superficial adjustments essential to appearing to be what one is not, money factors into one's identity. It seems as though the fate of humankind is to become just as malleable as money, increasingly superficial as money, more flexible, brusque and unscrupulous as money. Convinced that it is a painful but necessary tool, humankind has completely surrendered to money's will to power. Perhaps Frank Capra's film *Meet John Doe* best captures our modern dilemma, when the happy vagrant, The Colonel, compares modern civilization to ancient Sparta:

> Listen sucker, you ever been broke? All right, you're walking along, without a nickel in your jeans. You're free as the wind. Nobody bothers you. Hundred of people pass you by in every

[68] Cf. G. Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*

[69] Ibid.

needs.[14] Sea otters use a rock, which they carry on their bellies, to smash open mussels and other bivalves.[15] Several kinds of birds make their own tools. Finches from the Galapagos Islands extract insects from under trees using cactus needles.[16] American blue jays can tear sheets of newspaper in their cages to rake in food pellets they could not otherwise reach.[17] Other birds use stones to break the hard shell of ostrich, emu, and crane eggs. Even certain types of fish and insects avail themselves of tools.[18]

And the scientific literature about how chimpanzees make and employ tools is, frankly, endless. Not only do these primates use stones as weapons and sticks as levers or shovels (to open up the entrance of beehives, for example), not only do they know how to equip themselves with branches, snatching them from the trees and chewing the ends in order to insert them into insect colonies and anthills, but they also manufacture "sponges" by chewing up leaves, soaking them in water, and using them to clean their hair, remove gunk, and wash their babies' backsides.[19] Chimpanzees commonly use twigs to clean their teeth[20] and fronds to shoo away flies from their genitals after mating,[21] and, not least, they display what anthropologist Nancy Tanner calls "foresight." To procure food, for

[14] Cf. N. Tanner, *On Becoming Human* (1981)

[15] Cf. K.W. Kenyon, *The Sea Otter in the Easter Pacific Ocean* (1969)

[16] Cf. D. Lack, *Darwin's Finches* (1947)

[17] Cf. T.B. Jones—A.C. Kamil, *Tool-making and Tool-use in the Northern Blue Jay*

[18] Cf. M. Harris, *Our Kind: Who We Are, Where We Came From, Where We Are Going*

[19] Cf. M. Harris, *Cultural Anthropology* (1987)

[20] Cf. W. C. McGrew—C.E.G. Tutin, "Chimpanzee Tool Use in Dental Grooming" in *Nature* (1971)

[21] Cf. Y. Sugiyama, "Social Behavior of Chimpanzees in the Budongo Forest, Uganda" in *Primates* (1969)

armed, well-trained army willing to die for my cause once we have reached our destination. That is technology!

Similarly, if my goal is to find food for my family and friends, catching a bison means I'll need to live on a prayer for a few days. But if my goal is to get rich selling bison hides, I'll need more than a week. The more I kill, the more I earn. The more rare the bison, the more valuable their hides will be and the better price they'll fetch on the market. A bow and arrow won't do. I'll need a good gun, which means I'll be reliant on a gun manufacturer, on ballistic experts to refine the weapon's precision, on laborers to make and assemble the parts, on salesclerks to sell me the finished product. I will also need trucks to transport the animals, a subsidiary group to cure the hides, a market to sell them on and an advertising system to entice people to buy them. That is technology!

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Just as technology functions on a separate plane from basic tools, it also differs from the combination of single technologies that allow it to function. Better yet, technologies (not technology) are (manual, intellectual, organizational) skills that can contribute both to making tools and putting technology into effect. As long as they rely on an autonomous set of skills, they remain tools (as is the case with building fires, tying knots, swimming, hunting, climbing, etc). On the other hand, when they are placed at the service of technology (and are generally specialized and hierarchically organized) they become technologies, or, as we usually say, they allow technology to function. Labor division, chemistry, statistics, mathematics, writing and printing are just a few of the myriad technologies that serve the technological world.

Human beings are not the only species to avail themselves of tools; several members of the monkey family (gorillas, orangutans, gibbons) adapt objects to suit their particular

> line of business. Shoes, hats, automobiles, radios, furniture, everything, and they're all nice loveable people. They let you alone. […] Then you get ahold of some dough and what happens? All those nice, sweet, loveable people become heelots. A lotta heels! They begin creepin' up on ya, tryin' to sell ya something. They get long claws and they get a stranglehold on ya and ya squirm and ya duck and ya holler and ya try to push 'em away, but you haven't got a chance. They've got ya. The first thing you know, you own things—a car, for instance. Now your whole life is messed up with a lot more stuff. You get license fees and number plates and gas and oil and taxes and insurance and identification cards and letters and bills and flat tires and dents and traffic tickets and motorcycle cops and courtrooms and lawyers and fines—and a million and one other things! And what happens? You're not the free and happy guy you used to be. You've gotta have money to pay for all those things. So you go after what the other fella's got. And there you are—you're a heelot yourself.

6. Apologia of Emptiness

> *Today's man is like his money: frenetic and empty.*
> — Massimo Fini

The kind of debasement money sets in motion is illustrated by its inconstancy. There are no feelings, thoughts or will to be found in money. It has neither customs nor a code of ethics. Money can serve any purpose as long as one asks it to. Given the impersonal way it operates, it can be molded to fit any need,

undertaking or mission. Like a soldier in uniform, money is always eager to follow orders. Like a true politician, it is always willing to adapt to its audience, to don whatever suit the occasion demands. Void of particular bias, it is subject to all biases. Void of particular propensities, it is subject to all propensities. Lacking in particular temperament, it lends itself to all temperaments. Money has no substance. It is purely superficial and teaches us to live superficially.

Lovelessly exchanged, money betrays the abject meaning of its nature. According to Simmel:

> We experience in the nature of money itself something of the essence of prostitution. The indifference as to its use, the lack of attachment to any individual because it is unrelated to any of them, the objectivity…which excludes any emotional relationship—all this produces an ominous analogy between money and prostitution.[70]

The fact that we are brought down to the degraded condition of our means is, for the father of formal sociology, "the strongest and most fundamental factor that places prostitution in such a close historical relationship to the money economy."

Massimo Fini's provides a similar argument.

> The ability to pimp out everything, to objectivize everything, to turn people, or parts of people, into commodities, comes from the fact that, lacking any quality besides quantity, it equalizes, flattens, homogenizes, makes everything undifferentiated…If today there are businesses that sell drugged and explanted organs of Brazilian children to wealthy Americans, it is not just because modern medicine

[70] Ibid.

removed from its technological setting. This partly explains why a technology-governed world tends to grow sterile and devitalized, crammed with useless stuff and inhabited by people who have no skills (besides expressly technical skills) and therefore depend on the very same useless stuff populating the universe. Not to mention the fact that they also depend on the production system that invents, designs and distributes them to every corner of the world, turning life itself into another technological microchip.

Contrary to popular belief, not every elaborately designed object is a technology; a tool can be elaborate too (the Inuit use a harpoon for hunting seals that consists of 26 distinct parts). Technology is best defined as a phenomenon that transcends the power of individual interaction and operates regardless of its material form. All told, technology is "more than wires, silicon, plastic, and steel. It is a complex system involving division of labor, resource extraction, and exploitation for the benefit of those who implement its process."[13]

In other words, technology is not simply an evolved tool, just as a tool is not a rudimentary technology. What moves one and sets the other going should sufficiently attest to the fact that they are irreconcilably opposed. If I want to reach the other side of the river because I'm curious and want to explore a new valley, I need a raft or a canoe. But if my goal is to cross the ocean and conquer new lands, I won't get anywhere with a raft. I'll need something structurally distinct. I'll need a three-masted ship and a hundred men to cut down the forest in order to build it. I'll need sailors, cabin boys, cooks and porters who have to follow me on my pursuit because they have no money. I'll also need a hundred oarsmen who will take orders from the captain. And, for that matter, I'll need a captain, someone who knows how to coolly command the crew. I'll also need a well-

[13] Cf. Green Anarchy, *An Introduction to Anti-Civilization Anarchist Thought and Practice*

vey Feit, unlike technological inventions, suggest a universe built on equal relationships between the subjects of the world (people, plants, animals, forces of nature, energy, things). With respect to the meaning of tools and the changes they bring about when used, it is "always appropriate to ask 'who did it?' and 'why?' rather than 'how does that work?'"[11]

Seen from this angle, the classic distinction between means and ends can be drawn to show the difference between tools and technology. Whereas a tool acts as a medium to participate directly with the living things of the world (means), technology represents a finishing line (end). Whereas tools help humans develop the skills to operate them (means), technology replaces both skill and ambition (end). Furthermore, whereas tools depend upon an individual's interest and skill, technology disregards individual craftsmanship and, rather than working in conjunction with its user's mastery, it only corresponds to other technologies, which justify its existence and make it possible. Taken out of their "technological" context, devices make no sense. An antenna serves no purpose without an antenna tower to send signals to it or a television to transmit images or an audience willing to let the carrier waves wash over them. In the words of Umberto Galimberti, "telephones, radios, televisions and computers are not a "means" as a hammer or tongs are means for the simple reason that they would not mediate anything if they were not connected to other telephones, other radios, other televisions and other computers strewn across the planet."[12]

Unlike tools, which fully engage their users' senses every time they are put to use, technology is completely helpless once

a Northern Hunting Society" in *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology*, n.19, 1982

[11] Cf. H.A. Feit, "The Ethnoecology of the Waswanipi Cree: Or, How Hunters can Manage their Resources" (1973) in B.Cox, *Cultural Ecology: Readings on the Canadian Indians and Eskimos* (1973)

[12] Cf. U. Galimberti, *Psiche e techne* (2007)

has made that possible, but because money facilitates that business, practically and conceptually.[71]

In other words, the inhumaneness of money makes us inhuman. Its fleeting, untrustworthy and cold nature teaches us to be curt, disloyal and superficial.

Thanks to money, we have learned to lead perfectly detached lives, stripped of any real agency and driven around, disengaged, lacking inner-selves, unemotional, un-alive. While leading us to passively accept the tragic consequences (environmental plunder, the traffic of harmful, toxic waste, vivisections, antipersonnel mines dolled up to look like toys so that they will explode in children's hands) the imperturbable quality of economics that we have absorbed does not save us from a life steeped in acrimony and enmity. Armed with our endless, *agonistic* personal interests, we are made to rush, to be constantly on the run, to "go with the flow" of a "flowing" world. In affluent societies where the dream of Great Wealth is paramount, our destinies are flowing; they stream by as quickly as lives stream by—dulled, fluid, totally alien. Max Weber described the ethics of capitalism as "one's duty in a calling."[72] Any calling.

Nothing moves us today. Nothing engages us, charms us or enchants us. We go berserk over the stupidest technological gadget yet at the same time trample flowers, pave over the yard, build roads, accept the fact that the stars are more and more occluded by a thick blanket of gas and lead that puts one in mind of the place in hell Dante reserves for hypocrites. "If those chimneys keep blowing smoke, the sky's going to start coughing," says a four year old girl. Such wisdom is lost on us now, and we cannot countenance it. Deep down, we are all bit-

[71] Cf. M. Fini, *Il denaro "sterco del demonio"* (translation Schutt)

[72] As cited in I. Hodder, *Reading the Past: Current Approaches to Interpretation in Archaeology* (2003)

terly aware of its truth, which is why we smile smugly every time we hear children talk that way.

Completely disregarding an effort to comprehend one another, we only care about making money. Anything not directly remunerable doesn't matter. Cordiality doesn't matter, warm company doesn't matter, kindness doesn't matter. Smiles and tears are of little concern. The apathy and arrogance that define the spirit of the age of finance has been neatly captured in an aphorism: "He who finds a friend finds gold. He who finds gold screws friends."[73]

The market does not demand honesty. It gets along perfectly without it. The same is true for assistance and support. These days we have no time to come to peoples' aid. We are too busy producing, rushing off to work, getting the job done. If, in the wheelings and dealings of today's society, we fail to lend a hand to someone who has fallen on the ground (or go about our own business after a car accident) it is because the stringent rhythms of utilitarian morals have made us slaves to this moral. The don't-do-anything-for-nothing ethic and couldn't-care-less attitude are the legitimate offspring of the dollar god. A god that is blackening out the last glimmers of our humanity.

If we take as a model the "self-made man," the pompous man on television who succeeds in captivating despite his stupidity, the scenario hits rock bottom. As with loyalty and kindness, responsibility becomes irrelevant in the world of money. Every virtue is supplanted with characteristics better suited to the economic mindset: social prestige, success, appearances. Or the ability to influence, condition, show off one's power. Helmut Kohl, the former chancellor of Germany, put it frankly when he admitted, "Morality is one thing, business is another."[74]

[73] The saying is attributed to Ivan della Mea, an Italian novelist, journalist, and political activist.

[74] As cited in S. Latouche, In the *Wake of the Affluent Society: An Exploration of Post-Development* (1991)

for a long time, pointed out this peculiarity, starting with the need to illustrate hunter-gatherers' typical vision of the world. Individuals who live by hunting and foraging, writes the British anthropologist, do not see themselves as alienated from the non-human world, but rather as

> "imbued with human qualities of will and purpose." From their perspective, tools are like words: they mediate relations between human subjects and the equally purposive non-human agencies with which they perceive themselves to be surrounded…hunters and gatherers do not regard their tools as instruments of control. Thus in hunting, it is commonly supposed that the animal gives itself to be killed by the hunter…If the arrow misses its mark, or if the trap remains empty, it is inferred that the animal does not as yet intend to enter into a relationship with the hunter by allowing itself to be taken. In this way, the instruments of hunting serve a similar purpose to the tools of divination, revealing the otherwise hidden intentions of non-human agents in a world saturated with personal powers of one kind or another.[9]

These interactive tools express a potential that is diametrically opposed to the typical powers of technological devices whose aim is not to enter into contact with the world but rather to make its own world. "Instead of attempting to control nature," writes Robin Ridington, hunter-gatherers "concentrate on controlling their relationship with it."[10] Such a relationship rests on a principle of trust, not domination. Tools, notes Har-

[9] 864 Cf. T. Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (2000)

[10] Cf. R. Ridington, "Technology, World View and Adaptive Strategy in

human, breaks human limits, eliminates human "error." Where technology exists, humans are always forced to step aside, so that the difference between what technology is and is not depends on whether or not humans are removed from the framework within which it operates.

Not everything we put to use qualifies as technology, nor does everything we make with our hands. A tool (or, if you will, an implement or instrument) differs profoundly from a technological invention. The difference lies precisely in the latter's ability to remove whatever is human from the object's field of action. For example, we can easily distinguish between an electric blender, say, and a lasso or boomerang, and not only because the blender is more complicated than the other two. The complex appearance of an object never determines the complexity of its function; it takes decidedly more skill to work a boomerang or lasso than it does to plug in an electric cord and push a button. It is that same elimination of human skill that makes the blender a technological device. Because it requires no skill whatsoever to turn the blender on, we become passive participants when we use it, which is to say, the blender takes us out of the equation completely. When we use technology we lose the sense of how things function, since it's not us but machines that are doing the work. The results are terrifying. Nowadays we can destroy nature without personally participating in any way—with a chainsaw, maybe, or turning on an engine, or spraying pesticides on plants, or hitting a switch that drops a bomb somewhere…

Fraught with major consequences, the idea that production organized by humans can outperform nature (which is, in fact, constantly overpowered and molded to our liking) winds up backfiring. It is no coincidence that non-civilized people have categorically used tools but not technologies; they do so in order to preserve the living world they have always felt connected to. Tim Ingold, who studied the relationship between human behavior and the environmental surroundings

Taking a step back, we can clearly see that money not only has the power to degrade human relationships, but to destabilize all that it touches. The problem is that its intoxicating power permits it to touch everything. The invention of new needs translates, in a manner familiar to us, into this intoxicating power.

We all know too well that once an artificial need has been satisfied, the need for something else crops up, and we are ultimately left holding nothing. The emotional void that the economy feeds on exacerbates our discontent, and this process is absolutely indispensable if we want the economy to rule our lives. "The key to economic prosperity is the organized creation of dissatisfaction,"[75] said the head of General Motors Charles Kettering, shamelessly. Several decades ago this industrial giant understood that in order to make people desire things they did not need, one had to follow two basic tenets. First, introduce a new car model every year that would surpass last year's model. Second, launch an advertising campaign that would make consumers dissatisfied with the car they own.[76]

Massimo Fini observes that individuals are increasingly "subordinate to economic and technological needs that somehow transcend them,"[77] and consumerism has risen so relentlessly that it is now our top priority. Who hasn't "heard economists, politicians and union leaders say a thousand times, 'We need to stimulate consumerism to increase production.' If you examine that phrase carefully you'll see how insane it is. We don't produce to consume anymore, we consume to produce."[78] Nowadays we have been turned into "digestive tracts, sinks, toilet bowls where everything we've rapidly produced must be flushed down us just as rapidly. We are the back-end

[75] As cited in J. Rifkin, *The End of Work*

[76] Ibid.

[77] Cf. M. Fini, *Il vizio oscuro dell'Occidente. Manifesto dell'antimodernità* (2004) (translation Schutt)

[78] Ibid.

men. We're not even men anymore. We're consumers. And we're not even conscious, voluntary consumers, but frogs that must jump at the push of a button, even if we'd prefer to rest, in order for the omnipotent machine ruling over us not to jam."[79]

The story behind Coca-Cola, as Jeremy Rifkin tells it, is paradigmatic.

> Coca-Cola was originally marketed as a headache remedy… Asa Candler, who bought the patent from an Atlanta pharmacist, reasoned that "the chronic sufferer from headaches may have but one a week. Many persons have only one a year. There was one dreadful malady, though, that everybody suffered from daily… which during six or eight months of the year would be treated and relieved, only to develop again within less than an hour. That malady was thirst."[80]

Coca-Cola's rise from an unknown pharmaceutical product to a soft drink craved by millions of people around the world proves the harsh fact that in the world of economics there is no room for human beings. They should be replaced by malleable, indistinct entities with no free will, trained to ingest anything. Not men and women, not boys and girls, but loyal collectors of receipts.

Outlining the full extent of our depressed state, Raoul Vaneigem writes, "The expansion of merchandise has stifled the expansion of life."[81] Rather than on life, our dispirited days run on merchandise, exchange, business and work. "If the weight of inhumanity has defeated human society," writes the Belgian Situationist, "the fault lies with a distortion of nature,

[79] Ibid.
[80] Cf. J. Rifkin, *The End of Work*
[81] Cf. R. Vaneigem, *Aux vivant* (translation Schutt)

Between the warning signs he must have seen with his own two eyes and the reassuring words of his device, the driver chose to listen to the little digital voice. Technology's ability to render us incapable of living (and unsure of ourselves) should serve as sufficient evidence for those who want to meditate carefully on this point. Just like domination, culture, fear and economics, technology reigns wherever it succeeds in making people absolutely dependent on its inventions, rules and methods. The more we allow machines to do things for us, the less we know how to do things ourselves or bear the strain of doing things or glean the significance of them. Humans will no longer be tasked with providing pleasure or protection; technology will. Our self-esteem will turn into esteem for technology. And the more we rely on artificial means, the more insignificant humanity will appear. Every ability allotted to technology is our own disability.

2. Tools and Technology: The Psychological Approach to Technology

> *Beside changes to the political, social, and economic order, the advent of technological progress implies the elaboration of new psychological structures.*
> — Jean-Pierre Vernant

We commonly equate technology with machines, or the culture of machines, but technology is not only the machines we think of. Technology is the machine in its ideal form, or rather, the representation par excellence of mechanical and logical perfection. Technology, frankly, is the incarnation of a machinist ideology. It is the incarnation of impeccable organization, absolute efficiency, utility, regularity, pre-planning, applied order, uniformity and limitless strength. This is one reason why technology lives up to its "superhuman" status—it goes beyond the

control leads to: "A steady reduction of our contact with the living world, a speeded-up Information Age emptiness drained by computerization and poisoned by the dead, domesticating imperialism of high-tech method."[8]

Whatever grows out of a situation as conditioned by machines as ours is, can be nothing if not a spasmodic demand for new machines. That is, in fact, the case with the current civilized world. Everything screams out to be technologized; everything refers back to the value of new technologies and their potential. Whether it's mass media or politicians, mainstream advertising or popular literature, they all advance a completely mechanized world. And the attempt to put a human face on this world of scrap metal and microchips (as in the smug animated films starring sweet, sensitive robots) finds its parallel in the equally disgusting attempt to paint machines—and every other form of civilized impoverishment— as if they were a boon—from prostitution to war, from big business scams to media celebrity, from social control to pollution, from "legal" exploitation to the humiliating duty to obey and revere.

Regardless of what its proponents claim, technology is never human. Technology is responsible for uprooting all that is human (or rather, vital) in the world. We cannot generate emotions, experience, happiness and pain by pushing a button or punching in a password on our keyboard. As long as we search outside of ourselves for a device to turn on our inner worlds, we will merely remain malleable, battery-operated gadgets. More importantly, as long as we resign ourselves to seeking to "set in motion" our humanity with the "click" of a button, we'll always remain "off."

A good example of the follies of this process of dehumanization is the case of the Polish driver who, following the directions given to him by his satellite navigator, wound up driving his Mercedes Sprinter straight into a reservoir.

[8] Cf. J. Zerzan, *The Nihilist's Dictionary*

not nature itself."[82] The sickness of money ruins everything. The sickness of economics ruins everything. The sickness of civilization ruins everything. Without a powerful crusade to disband this superimposed reality, there will be nothing left but ruin.

7. Assault of Production, Resistance to Development

> *The exchange of presents did not serve the same purpose as trade and barter... The purpose that it did serve was a moral one. The object of the exchange was to produce a friendly feeling.*
> — Marcel Mauss

Economics may stand for the practice of exchange, the cult of money and the consumption of things or services, but it has another meaning, too. It also means the "mystique of production." The training it takes to conceive of every element in the universe as material to eventually be manipulated, transformed into a product and sold off is a perfect illustration of how we identify with this mystique. To paraphrase Latouche, production has only one underlying moral: that good is based on goods. If the goods aren't there, we must create them and put them on sale. "To save the economy, we must buy, buy, buy anything" was General Eisenhower's refrain.[83]

The notion that we can possess anything at any moment makes us feel omnipotent. The economy sublimates this notion, promising to be a pathway to material attainment. As the media constantly reminds us, 'The stronger the economy, the more things we can buy, the richer we are.' And yet while these purely theoretical assumptions may appear enchanting,

[82] Ibid.

[83] As cited in R. Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life*

they do not correspond to reality at all. The economy cannot provide us with everything; it only tricks us into thinking we have everything, while in fact it has a diametrically opposite effect. Marshall Sahlins proved this point by making a simple, obvious observation: in every advanced economy "the market makes available a dazzling array of products…all within a man's reach— but never within his grasp. Worse, in this game of consumer free-choice, every acquisition is simultaneously a deprivation, for every purchase of something is a foregoing of something else."[84] Which is to say, if you buy one kind of cellphone, you must forego another kind; if you buy this BMW model, you have to give up that BMW model. The list goes on.

Basically, the prospect of material wealth remains, in the end, mere dazzle. We can wish for everything. We can can admire the shop window and every new toy in it, but we ourselves have nothing, are nothing and, what is worse, we do not even realize that is the case. In the meantime, however, to keep this big ramshackle house of nothing standing, we have to work like Trojans: doing, un-doing, hurrying up, taking orders, without ever stopping to take a break, without a second's breath to live. All our natural needs are subordinate to the preeminent imperatives of work, democracy and the wealth of the nation. The atavistic impulse of economics leads us to work relentlessly and is an essential attribute of the *productivist* system. Because consumerism can be fueled continuously, there is always room to be more productive, harder working, more obedient to its laws, more willing to support and safeguard it. The logic of efficiency promoted by economics is an inflexible logic of exploitation, of self-exploitation.[85]

If we look once more at the experience of those living outside the economic realm, we can see how the concepts of abun-

[84] Cf. M. Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics*

[85] Jean Baudrillard described this condition thusly: "It is a fantasy of death which leaves only the alternative of downfall and collapse…it is a policy of self-exploitation…it means cultivating servitude without the presence

Nowadays, we do not live *with* technology but *off of* technology, and this goes a long way toward explaining just how much our approach to understanding things has been changed, when technology provides us with a valid representation of everything. At the root of this desire to objectify lies our obsessive need to impose our will over everything. If science translates the principle of human dominion into mathematical formulae, technology concretizes our dominion—it is the application of science, its strongman and ultimate end. The history of technology, wrote the Americans Derry and Williams fifty years ago, "comprises all that bewilderingly varied body of knowledge and devices by which man progressively masters his natural environment."[4] On the other side of the Atlantic, Pierre Brunet spoke the same language when he stated that the evolution of technology (understood as the application of science) depicts "the stages of man's taking possession of nature."[5] Equally emphatic, Rupert Hall and Marie Boas Hall, two of the most famous British historians, pointed out that the most abhorrent aspect of such a patrimony is that we end up manipulating nature. Yet the most explicit criticism of technology was probably made by Herbert Marcuse in response to what Leo Marx called "the rhetoric of the technological sublime"[6] in the 1960s. "The very concept of technical reason is perhaps ideological," he writes. "Not only the application of technology but technology itself is domination (of nature and men)— methodical, scientific, calculated, calculating control."[7] Today, concludes Zerzan, we know exactly what that kind of

[4] Cf. T.K. Derry-T.I. Williams, *A Short History of Technology: From the Earliest Times to AD 1900* (1960)

[5] Cf. P. Brunet, *La science antique et médiévale* (1957)

[6] Cf. L. Marx, *"The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (1964)

[7] Cf. H. Marcuse, "Industrialization and Capitalism in the Work of Max Weber," in *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory*, with translations from the German by Jeremy J. Shapiro (1968)

> interface between us and the world, and between us and ourselves, it can distort, empower or annul communication, in particular the signs and messages that contribute toward forming our self.[1]

Similarly, Sherry Turkle, reflecting on *Life on the Screen* (eg, television, computer, Internet, role playing games) writes that technology provides us with "new lenses through which to examine current complexities."[2] Thus, once again, the world is presented to us through a filtered lens that stands between immediate experience and us. As with culture— whose lenses are symbolic and not material—the result is that "for every step forward in the instrumental use of technology…there are subjective effects. The technology changes us as people, changes our relationships and sense of ourselves."[3]

Modeled on the idea that the machine is an absolute *medium*, our lives have become increasingly technological: the "value" of freely perceiving reality no longer exists in a technological world, since technology continuously intervenes in individuals' relationships with nature, reformulating every outgoing and incoming message. Whether it is a computer, a car or a biopharmaceutical doesn't matter; what matters is that, thanks to technology, our sense of perception does not correspond to reality. We rely on the technological means employed to investigate reality and entrust the latter with showing us a translated version of reality. Technology, in short, mediates our direct experience. The voice of our interlocutor is less real than the mechanical voice that comes out of the telephone speaker; our sense of lightness is less real than the number we read on a scale; our feeling well is less real than the image of a CAT scan.

[1] Cf. G. Longo, *Homo Technologicus*
[2] Cf. S. Turkle, *Life on the Screen*
[3] Ibid.

dance and quality is more befitting of those who are totally disinterested in production (whom Sahlins calls underproductive) than it is of the "superproducers." "The primitive economies," writes the author of *Stone Age Economics*, "are underproductive. The main run of them…seem not to realize their own economic capacities. Labor power is underused, technological means are not fully engaged, natural resources are left untapped."[86] Yet this underdevelopment is the very strength of non-economic sustainability. "This is not the simple point that the output of primitive societies is low," continues Sahlins, "it is the complex problem that production is low. So understood, 'underproduction' is not necessarily inconsistent with a pristine 'affluence.'"[87] In fact, if humans concentrated on satisfying the bare necessities, they could satisfy those necessities with the least amount of effort. "Want not, lack not," as the English say.

If I pick every orange from an orange tree, I'll be left with nothing in short order. Moreover, picking each and every one would be a major undertaking: I would have to procure a ladder to reach the highest fruit, crates to carry them in, workers to transport them, a warehouse to store them, refrigerators to conserve them, security to guard them, an enormous amount of physical energy and money to distribute them. And that's not all. Other members of the community could feel the same compulsion to harvest all the oranges in town (whether driven by the fear of falling victim to my monopoly or the spirit of competition). So the tree itself would have to operate at full capacity. A thousand oranges being insufficient to satisfy people's greed, the tree would have to produce two thousand, five thousand, a hundred thousand. And to train the tree to yield maximum profits, we will use every means known to man: chemical

of the other, since each person substitutes himself for the other in the oppressor…The pinnacle of self-inflected servitude." Cf. J. Baudrillard, *The Illusion of the End*, 1992
[86] Cf. M. Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics*
[87] Ibid.

sprays, compost, genetic modifications, "hormones," industrial fertilizer, synthetic additives and whatever else science dreams up in response to the growing demands of production. The more picked apart the tree, the more it needs to be protected from outside agents. New parasite treatments and antibiotics will have to be manufactured, tested and passed on, as well as being presented to the public as the new panacea.

Oppositely, if all I want to do is pick one orange at a time (or a few to make juice) there will always be 990 left for everyone else. In other words, there will always be a surplus, which is to say, no toil, no environmental exploitation, no need to protect anything. And that is how we lived up until ten thousand years ago.

Applying this hypothetical situation to the conceptual realm of classic economics, we might say that there are two economic roads to prosperity: producing more or desiring less. The productivist or "super-productive" road, which perpetuates the myth of there being limitless quantities, constantly increases demand so that people only pursue gratification through the production of new goods and services. Then there is the anti-development, "non-production" road that achieves abundance by limiting demand.

Focusing on the particularity of things and not how many there are is one sure way of preserving against the cult of quantity; our attention shifts away from economics toward subsistence. Only a few of the many thousand things surrounding us is needed to live. Limiting ourselves to these few things indispensable to our survival would make us immediately rich. And yet, as if that meant nothing, the production mentality continues to shape our personal and collective behavior. Faced with an endless supply of consumer goods, we have begun to consume everything without satisfying our essential needs or alleviating our existential suffering. It is the Tantalism contagion

XI Technological Expropriation

1. Means and Ends

> *Technology is a way of organizing the universe so that man doesn't have to experience it.*
> — Max Frisch

At this point, technology has come to be considered indispensable to human existence, both defining and anticipating our present moment. Just like economics, it has been woven into our social fabric, into the hearts and minds of every individual, confident it cannot be unraveled. Often we hear that technology makes life easier, more comfortable, more complete. Seen in this light, technology acts like a kind of lackey to modern humankind: as interested in improving our quality of life as it is indifferent to its own needs; as democratically used as it is incapable of using others; as powerful in taming nature as it is powerless to wiggle out of our control. And yet technology is not just some simple sidekick that has no effect on modernity. As Giuseppe Longo, a professor from the University of Trieste, explains:

> Technology profoundly affects our way of seeing the world and ourselves in the world, even our innermost selves. On the collective level, technology influences the most intimate processes of the society that adopts it. And thanks to its tendency to

TECHNOLOGY = AN APPLIED ORDER MANIPULATING AND DOMESTICATING HUMAN SKILLS
(civilization versus the ethics of personal capability)

> *Even while he stalked a God in his own fancy, an infantine imbecility came over him…Arts—the Arts—arose supreme, and, once enthroned, cast chains upon the intellect which had elevated them to power.*
> — Edgar Allan Poe

Ralph Bircher diagnosed:[88] instead of sticking to the bare necessities, we navigate the choppy waters of "more more more" whose only sure destination is to make us lesser beings.

On the other hand, economics is nothing more than the transformation of interior wealth into exterior wealth, of spiritual gifts into material possessions. Given this conclusion, how could one possibly believe that nothing is lost? Worn down day after day, we give in to the world of production and consumption. That we should find ourselves worn down and consumed at the end of the day comes as no surprise.

For its part, the art of business could care less.

Progress is a profitable business for those helming the institutions in civilized countries: it inspires people's hope that things will improve, motivates them to work toward this imaginary (and never-ending) end and provides a nice scapegoat when things don't go as planned. "All the modern regimes have been 'productivist,'" writes Latouche. "Republics, dictatorships, totalitarian systems, governments of the right or the left, liberal/socialist/populist/social-liberal/socialdemocratic/centrist/radical/communist parties."[89] Seeing as the economic world is a world of creation fueled by dissatisfaction, progress serves as an infallible illusion, insofar as it projects the idea that it can assuage that dissatisfaction. But it's a trick! And the trick lies in the very essence of economics. In fact, given that material wealth is based on creation fueled by dissatisfaction, the economy can only assuage dissatisfaction by eliminating itself. Paradoxically, if the economy satisfied everyone, no one would buy anything, no one would want more and therefore no one would produce anything or put it on sale. The economy would literally commit suicide, since in order for it to live it needs to frustrate people's satisfaction.

[88] Cf. R. Bircher, *Hunsa: Das Volk, das keine Krankheit kennt* (1952)

[89] Cf. S. Latouche, "De-Growth: An Electoral Stake?" in the *International Journal of Inclusive Democracy* (vol. 3, no. 1, January 2007)

No coincidence, then, that economics is commonly known as the sad science.

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"As for happiness," states Cioran, "if the word has a meaning, it consists in the aspiration to the minimum and the ineffectual."[90] Indeed, only by upsetting the logic of efficiency is it possible to recover the full meaning of a gratifying existence, rather than the obsessive "better" that has no end. All of Pierre Clastres' studies of subsistence as practiced by primitive American-Indian communities point to the fact that their sole ambition was to attain just as much as was needed for every member of the community to live. Confirmed by no less an authority than Matilde Callari Galli, this anti-economic way of interacting with nature is not a result of native peoples' inability to do otherwise, but rather a voluntary and conscious undertaking to preserve equilibrium with the world and other people. "Neither shortcomings nor weaknesses impede primitive societies from surplus production," writes the anthropologist, "their resistance to accumulating goods is a deliberate choice, with an implicit but extremely firm awareness that accumulation leads to social disintegration first and the power of One (over many) later."[91]

All over the world, notes Marvin Harris, men and women living outside the sphere of economics "lived healthier lives than did most of the people who came immediately after them."[92] Even as regards

> amenities, such as good food, entertainment, and aesthetic pleasures, early hunters and plant collec-

[90] Cf. E.M. Cioran, *The Fall into Time*

[91] Cf. M. Callari Galli, *Un'etnografia del potere, introduction to the Italian edition of Pierre Clastres' Archaeology of Violence* (1998) (translation Schutt)

[92] Cf. M. Harris, *Cannibals and Kings: Origins of Cultures*

Part 5: The Technological Imperative *(A critique of technology)*

basic necessities of our lives, we will all feel compelled to do everything possible to seek out means of coexisting with others and the world, irrespective of economic intervention, and to work toward the economy's dismantlement.

> tors enjoyed luxuries that only the richest of today's Americans can afford. For two days' worth of trees, lakes, and clean air, the modern-day executive works five. Nowadays, whole families toil and save for thirty years to gain the privilege of seeing a few square feet of grass outside their windows. And they are the privileged few.[93]

In order to fuel the mega-machine around the clock people need to be convinced that a world without consumption or production or exchange or money is impossible. Everyone must be convinced that *having more* means *feeling better*, and that to pursue this chimera we must embrace stress, all-out brawls and toxic air. Furthermore, we are expected to celebrate existential catastrophe as if it were the pinnacle of human progress.

We are so accustomed to seeing development as the anodyne to (rather than the cause of) our ailments that a world without development seems inhospitable. Nowadays, nature (ie, whatever exists outside the logic of the market) has become "inhospitable" while a universe founded on transforming the world into a product appears "natural" to us. Even economic growth is considered a "natural phenomenon."

In fact, according to development theories, everything in nature should grow interminably. That is to say, economic development should be no cause for concern. It didn't take Konrad Lorenz long to poke holes in the improbable productivist notions of unlimited growth. The champions of development argue that even trees grow exponentially, in all directions at once. Yet in reality, objects Lorenz, trees do not grow endlessly. Aging aside, there are purely physical factors—the waning transport of sap, the pressure of the wind—that limit their growth. Industries, on the other hand, are potentially immortal, and become less fallible the larger

[93] Ibid.

they are. Further, whereas plants are incapable of changing their methods for "gain," industries improve their methods constantly. The rarer the whales, the more refined the methods for hunting whales.[94]

Development does not rid us of misery: we sink in it as if it were quicksand. And as our dependence on development grows, our resistance to the mercantile system wanes. Modern rhetoric about sustainable development may be the most tangible proof of civilization's self-conservative tendencies. As Latouche commented, everyone who, under the spell of those championing progress, demands a new idea of development "should rethink his position in light of the fact that President Chirac has created a minister with that title; that Michel Camdessus, the former president of the International Monetary Fund, has signed a manifesto for sustainable development circulating among celebrities; and that the biggest polluters on the planet—British Petroleum, Total-Elf-Fina, Suez, Vivendi, Monsanto, Novartis, Nestlé, Rhone-Poulenc, etc—are the most vociferous defenders of sustainable development."[95] The term "development," the French scholar states elsewhere, "[is] a toxic word, no matter what adjective you attach to it."[96]

[94] Cf. K. Lorenz, *The Waning of Humaneness*

[95] Cf. S. Latouche, *Survivre au développement* (2004) (translation Schutt)

[96] Cf. S. Latouche, *Petit traité de la décroissance sereine* (translation Schutt)

economics" and so on. Still producing and consuming, still aspiring to ecological efficiency and greater output—what distinguishes these platforms from every other empty campaign promise that acts as if it wants to change everything when in reality it will change nothing? Thanks to economic apologies of the so-called "alternative" ilk, the forests continue to be considered "forest produce," the earth continues to be called "biomass production" and nature remains an "exploitable resource." Commerce can go on forging human relationships, becoming a more and more substantial part of communal life, to the point of becoming an ethical model that we believe will keep the social fabric from unspooling. Thus, humans can continue to be held hostage to *better technologies* and *improved management*…

By expanding our field of vision, as Caillé[10] intelligently pointed out, we can realize that economics, and the cynical and mercenary approach that it promotes as a way of life, degrades logical-rational thought (rationality), turns nature into a tool to exploit, abandons sharing in favor of personal hoarding, converts community life into an every-man-for-himself race, and humiliates people by making them perform menial tasks so as to maximize profits. The question, then, is not can we redeem economics by making it more acceptable or attaching an ecological meaning to it—which it has never had and never will have—but rather how can we free ourselves from its tentacles and put it to rest once and for all.

Breaking the physical and psychological chain that binds us to the world of loan sharks is possible. Ousting the economy from the throne that we erected for it and carried on our shoulders—and the planet's shoulders—is possible. The fate of all that has yet to be bought and sold rests on our affirming our vital relationship with the living components of the earth. The moment we realize that economics does not appertain to the

[10] Cf. A. Caillé, *Critique de la raison utilitaire*

the environment, from interacting with the other creatures on earth.

Economics is never a neutral phenomenon, since it expropriates human destiny and confines it to a universe run on competition, conflicting interests, the reduction of the natural world to a "product," accounting, profiteering and exploitation. There is no point in trying to stop it by playing by its rules or using its instruments (money, credit, property, work). Every component of economics justifies economics. A more "ethical" economics will not free us from economics. Neither new political economic platforms nor aspirations to support the "less wealthy" or more evenly distribute financial wealth will make economics more humane, since economics (and the utilitarian and productivist attitude it incarnates) is inhumane.

As long as we continue to believe that the problems created by civilization can be resolved with money and power, we will remain victims of money and power. As long as we continue to believe that civil devastation is a model to export to places where it has yet to gain a foothold, our planet will continue to writhe under the weight of such devastation. As long as we continue to believe that "wellness" means opulence and that mortgage loans and financial investments will help the poor, the number of slaves who, like us, are shackled to economics, will continue to multiply.

Like civilization, business will not allow itself to be criticized; economics feeds off of consensus and possesses all of the tools necessary for self-preservation. As a consequence, as long as business shapes the way we see things, everything will be arranged so that an increasingly larger base will continue to sustain the economy, even as the economy itself is transformed into "alternative economics," "sustainable economics," "spaceman economics,"[9] "bio-economics," "slow economics," "green

[9] Kenneth Boulding coined the term, comparing it to "cowboy economics."

X. Mercantilism: Dirty Business, Slavish System

1. A Case Against Economics

> *They thought they could change the world to their profit, but profit wound up changing them, them and the world.*
> — Raoul Vaneigem

We can, if we want, continue to participate in the process of consuming the world and dutifully accept the reigning logic of commodification. Indeed, we can let this process infiltrate everything and everyone, accelerating the pace, "paying dividends" on things before they have even become usable. Nowadays, even beneficence has become a business, an economic marketing tool for multinational companies, credit institutes, religious congregations, municipalities and "socially engaged" communities of artists and athletes. Or else, like Karl Polanyi, we can meditate on the meaning of our current natural environment, which at this point is little more than an accessory of the economic system.

As the incarnation of a disenchanted vision of life, economics has taught us to replace a wealth of feelings with a feeling for wealth. So rampant is this criterion that we have all become economic objects. The economy has transformed our core thoughts and feelings into economic elements on its mad crusade to convert the universe into a religion of economics.

"Make a donation so that young women of Burkina Faso can learn a trade," reads one flyer. "Help fundraise for the people of Saharawi," reads another. "Support a micro credit program for the villages of Bangladesh," implores a third. Even when the motivation behind such initiatives is genuine, it inevitably promotes the mercantile agenda rather than coming to people's aid. Establishing financial loan networks, labor markets and production industries in the Indian or African subcontinent does not lead to local self-subsistence. On the contrary, it absorbs those populations into the sphere of civilization. The same is true for financing the construction of schools, churches, centers for western medicine, roads, highways, airports, train stations, movie theaters, soccer stadiums and internet cafes. Such actions make these people dependent on "our" lifestyle—its tools, its amenities, its laws, its centers of power. (En)globalization does not embark upon "good wars" or put into effect the programs of multinationals, governments, financial institutes (the World Bank, the IMF, etc) alone. (En)globalization also sets in motion that swarm of "basic" economic initiatives that put the finishing touches on the larger politics of credit dependency brought about by the "big dreamers of this world." These local projects rob individuals of the chance to support themselves, to live outside the system of debt and exploitation.

Economics has "remade us in its image," Vaneigem wrote twenty years ago.[1] "It could never have acquired such power without economizing life, transferring our libidinal energy into labor, and proscribing the pleasure and selflessness by which our desires are continuously fulfilled and reborn."[2] The result of our economic mentality is a universe increasingly measured by profit and loss, increasingly dependent on the flow of money, the trafficking of goods and the relative mechanisms of specu-

[1] Cf. R. Vaneigem, *Aux vivents*

[2] Ibid.

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"We have profoundly forgotten everywhere that Cash-payment is not the sole relation of human beings,"[8] wrote Thomas Carlyle. To paraphrase John Zerzan, if it is true that today we depend upon the economy to provide us with the jobs we need to pay the bills, a single question can explode that concern: what if there were no bills to pay, as has been the case for most of human history? Societies have only recently been founded on mass production.

To put it in concrete terms, however we may depend on economic extortion (and its ethic of remuneration) we have still been able to invent ways of looking at the world through the clear lens of community rather than the dark glass of arithmetic, markets and money. Most of all, economics has not stopped us from acting out of anti-economic feeling. We do not have to purchase a magic ticket in order to take pleasure in sprawling out under the sun, baking our own bread, telling our children stories. At least not yet…

There is no flesh-and-blood despot manning the economic switchboard, no masonic elite conspiring against us: there is a value system that we must stop accepting passively and start radically questioning. It is the economy that creates the "conditions for war" that then grow the economy. Once we accept the imperatives of its twisted mechanisms, we wind up being ground to bits by those mechanisms, whether we are its champions or its subjects. Thinking the economy can be made "sustainable," can be "cleansed" with new regulations, new multinational coalitions and new checks and balances, means continuing to believe in the economy, or rather in the primacy of economic interest over life. It also means accepting the role of watching that atrocious spectacle from the outside as it pushes us farther away from our vital needs, from direct contact with

[8] Cf. T. Carlyle, *Past and Present* (1843)

already shot up in Italy. We reckon that increase is around 20 percent."[4]

For his part, Wojtyla would not have taken offense. Astute and farseeing monarch that he was, he knew how to adapt his age-old religious organization to the prevailing capitalistic order and offered holy protection for financial gain. He certainly would have understood Assotravel's excitement. His judgment of capitalism, which he expressed in the encyclical *Centesimus Annus*, leaves no margin for doubt: "If by 'capitalism' is meant an economic system that recognizes the fundamental and positive role of business, the market, private property and the resulting responsibility for the means of production, as well as free human creativity in the economic sector, then the answer is certainly in the affirmative."[5]

Rino Cammilleri and Ettore Gotti Tedeschi, two powerful exponents of contemporary Catholic thought, clearly welcomed the Polish pontiff's gesture with great enthusiasm. "John Paul II was the one," they write proudly in *Money and Paradise*, "who recognized the importance of free markets and their usefulness to man's self-affirmation; here was a Pope who recognized that capitalism and profit are good."[6] In short, there's no more sense in chasing moneylenders out of the temple. Instead, the church should facilitate their sanctified wheeling and dealing. Obviously, thanks to this unequivocal opening up, the soon-to-be sainted Wojtyla was looked upon as a comrade by the people in power of his day. The comedian Daniele Luttazzi put it splendidly: "When Wojtyla died his big dream died with him: to unify the five great religions in the world: Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Walt Disney and Sony."[7]

[4] Cf. V. CH, "Per il turismo religioso è già effeto Vaticano" in *Il Sole-24 Ore* (May 17, 2005)

[5] Cf. John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus* (1991)

[6] Cf. R. Cammilleri—E. Gotti Tedeschi, *Denaro e Paradiso* (2004)

[7] Luttazzi made the joke on an episode of his show, *Decameron*, which aired on November 24, 2007 on La7.

lation, and suffocated by the pervasive mechanisms of supply and demand.

Wherever it has expanded its domain, economics has turned the world into an estate for production and compensation. What was once a simple apprehension of experience is now a "training camp" whose task—given its system of loans and debts—is to prepare its trainees for a life of exchange. What was once entertainment is now an industry guarding its box office receipts. What was once an informative account of the facts of life is now a product ("the news") that, like all products, is carefully controlled, edited and manipulated so as to be a presentable moneymaker. Money isn't all that we spend. A person's individual qualities are considered "values," like the courage with which one faces difficult situations or the mark of greatness in scientific language. To place faith in people means giving them credit, and the reduction of life to a credit report has fully entered our lexicon: professional skills are based on credits (college credits); songs on a movie soundtrack are credited; people's reputations are based on a credit system (social lending). Even love is painted with the same brush. Families are understood to be socio-economic units, and individual family members are seen as investments to count on.

So rampant is our tendency to see everything through the lens of finance that those who work the land (once called peasants) are now called "agricultural entrepreneurs." Nor are there even hospitals anymore. Today we have "hospital corporations," entities that compete for pecuniary incomes and expenditures.

The idea that the economy provides the support base for our universe has bolstered the conviction that the economy is infallible. Then, every so often, the economy hits a rough patch. Which is to say, this so-called support base needs its own support, and world governments have no qualms about furnishing that support with public funds. So we suddenly have to ask our-

selves: is it the economy that sustains the modern world or the modern world that must toil away to sustain the economy? It's just like three-card monte—no one ever picks the ace. The ace is always up the con artist's sleeve, and the con artist is always aided by his shills.

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As soon as war becomes an opportunity to make a profit, and environmental destruction a stimulus for industrial development, it should be self-evident that something is rotten in the System. When, in December 2004, hundreds of thousands of people perished after a tsunami, a certain Italian "section" of elite financial journalists wasted no time in hailing the misfortune as a favorable incident. One week after the seaquake, Italy's premier financial newspaper ran the following front-page headline: "The black plague? It's good for the economy." The article went on to say that

> In the mid 14th century, the bubonic plague wiped out a third of the entire population of Europe, yet economic historians now see that event as having had a positive effect on development…Had the Stock Exchange existed in 1350, it would have profited from the lepers, the pests, the suffering, the carts carrying the dead to be burned. Today these strange institutions— shareholder markets— echo that same cynicism and impiety, profiting from the pain and devastation of the immense tragedy that struck Southeast Asia.[3]

Faced with a system that draws its life-blood from catastrophic change, exploitation, collective tragedy, murder and the remorseless devastation of every living thing, our repulsion should be instinctive and our outrage unrestrained. The ethic of economics is plain to see: all productions, costs, desultory or tragic events must be considered beneficial if they help spur commerce, financial speculation, capital flow, investments and profits.

In the civilized world anything that incentivizes the economy is seen as a good, even gambling. Each of us knows how many tragedies great and small are crushed in the coils of what we call the demon of gambling. And yet a mere whiff of the big wins this business promises is enough to make us forget all the "demons" such a phenomenon entails. In the modern world, gambling is not a sin—it's a business. It's a billion dollar market. In Italy alone, for example, it produces tens of billions of Euros a year, half of which comes from state-sanctioned gambling (lotteries, poker machines, scratch & win, bingo, horse race betting, sports gambling, online casinos, etc). Because the term "gambling" still raises some eyebrows, today it often goes by another, less scandalous name: betting. Thus, while the demonic becomes angelic, the placard reading "Casino" has been taken down, the sign "Betting Offices" swings from the window and the doors are opened to the paying public. It's a bit like prostitution; for some time politicians, especially the Left, have stopped denouncing the vile trafficking it promotes and the ugly reality it hides, and instead focus on the fact that it tends to encourage tax evasion. Which is to say, there's room for everything in the world of economics—from "red cooperatives" to "red light cooperatives"—as long as people pay their taxes…

The debit-credit system is so paradoxical that even the death of a leader can be considered an opportunity to get rich, even when that leader happens to be the Pope. "Religious tourism," announced the president of Assotravel just two weeks after the death of Pope Wojtyla, "is a significant segment of the market with a turnover of over 4½ billion Euros [annually]. Since the death of John Paul II, demand has

[3] Cf. F. Galimberti, "La Pietà delle Borse," *Il Sole-24 Ore* (January 2, 2005)

Enrico Manicardi
Free From Civilization
Notes Toward a Radical Critique of Civilization's Foundations:
Domination, Culture, Fear, Economics, Technology
2013

Retrieved on 22nd April 2021, from
<archive.org/details/ManicardiFreeFromCivilization>
Preface by John Zerzan.
Translated by Will Schutt and Alberto Prunetti.
Edited by Alice Parman.
Dedication: To Gioia, my 6-year-old daughter whose profound wisdom has taught me to understand the unspoken language of tenderness, to rediscover the wonders of the colors of flowers and to see perfectly with my eyes closed. To she who has also made me understand what strength lies beneath our natural longing for independence. And to think that we adults force children to become like us instead of learning from them!

he has an individual has no power to influence."[18] The fact that our remove from our own destiny has grown to abyssal proportions should indicate to us that technology, as a whole, continues to shrink our sphere of autonomy.

As with the world of authoritarian order and discipline, so with the universe of advanced technology: everything has to be pre-programmed, prearranged and impeccably organized. Every last detail must be taken care of and every individual need quashed. And each person is responsible for refashioning him or herself into the "average individual" who can wield a mouse, tabulate the cost of every product in the supermarket, sit back in the uncomfortable bus seat, learn how to turn off the alarm system that goes off every other hour, push a button to collect a parking ticket and follow the proper street signs. We think we control technology when really it is technology that governs our every move. And the more technology evolves, the more we will be forced to get in line with its precepts, mechanisms, timeframes and performance standards. We don't need to call up the image of Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times* to understand that in the world of machines, human beings are the ones who have to adapt to machines, not the other way around. As the old sign hanging from the entrance to the 1934 World's Fair in New York flagrantly asserted, "Science Finds, Industry Applies, Man Adapts."

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Portraying technology as a neutral phenomenon under our control is self-serving propaganda; it leads people to underestimate technology's constrictive potential and persuades us to view industry as an opportunity, not a problem. Comforted by this notion of a neutral technology, we all breathe a great sigh of relief, confident we can separate the benefits of technology from its negative effects. Unfortunately, however, one of the

[18] Cf. T. Kaczynski, *Industrial Society & Its Future*

reasons technology is ultimately aggressive is that its total effect cannot be divided into pros and cons.

People usually respond by saying that it is not technology but rather the way human beings use technology that leads to "evil." If we only modify how people use it, so the argument goes, technology will be totally advantageous. Keep dreaming! To think we can morally instruct technology is to ignore the essence of technology, whose inherent automatism makes it impervious to moral judgment. Once activated, technology imposes its own rationale, its own logic of mathematical perfection and its own artificial world over our ability to act as free individuals. Good intentions are hardly enough to stop it!

Add to that the fact that technology caters to the interests of the establishment, and the idea that we can curb its negative effects becomes a chimera, since the concept of negativity can be cast as pure opinion—fuzzy and up for debate. What does the word negative mean from a political standpoint? Not everyone, as we know all too well, regrets the tragedies of Nazism or Imperialism.

Given the impossibility of objectively defining something as right or wrong, enter the illusion of all illusions: the ethical code. The idea that such a code can defend human liberties against the incursions of technology appears more naïve than supposing we can count on technology to make moral decisions. The example of genetic engineering as being linked to the development of conventional medicine demonstrates that:

> a code of ethics would not serve to protect freedom in the face of medical progress; it would only make matters worse. A code of ethics applicable to genetic engineering would be in effect a means of regulating the genetic constitution of human beings. Somebody (probably the upper-middle class, mostly) would decide that such and such applications of genetic engineering were "ethical"

> and others were not, so that in effect they would be imposing their own values on the genetic constitution of the population at large…The only code of ethics that would truly perfect freedom would be one that prohibited ANY genetic engineering of human beings, and you can be sure that no such code will ever be applied in a technological society.[19]

Clearly, a ruling elite would never bring the negative effects of technology to the public's attention. Given the enormous economic interests and the need to attract customers, public attention must be directed toward the invention itself, how innovative it is and how the latest model outdoes its predecessors, so that the industry appears stately (not risky), liberating (not liberticidal), providential (not counterproductive). Technology itself makes its own case for its innocence on at least two grounds.

a) As Samuel Butler surmised two centuries ago, technology proceeds slowly so as not to appear conspicuous.[20] In 1789, when the German pharmacist Martin Klaproth discovered uranium in a piece of pechbenda (a type of mineral) he had no idea he was paving the road toward atomic destruction. For approximately a century and a half, Klaproth's finding had no practical value. But all that changed with the discovery of nuclear energy. Enrico Fermi tested out the nuclear fission of uranium; then Niels Bohr realized that isotope U-235 was the best means of making uranium fissible; finally, the need to defeat Hitler justified the development of nuclear technology and the creation of the atomic bomb, which, it goes without saying, was

[19] Ibid.

[20] "The power of custom is enormous, and so gradual will be the change that man's sense of what is due to himself will at no time be rudely shocked; our bondage will steal upon us noiselessly and by imperceptible approaches." Cf. S. Butler, Notebooks (1863), cited in L. Mumford, *The Pentagon of Power.*

tested on a completely different target…thus began the race to manufacture nuclear arms, and nowadays we can sleep easy at night knowing that the governments of France, India, Pakistan, Russia, the United States and many other countries are capable of instantaneously crossing Earth off the list of celestial bodies that gravitate around the sun. And, as if that were not enough, the danger of "nuclear war" has been supplanted by the danger of "nuclear peace," with all its ancillary threats to the environment: atomic reactor explosions, radioactive spills, stockpiling nuclear waste, etc.

b) Secondly, all technical intervention is initially presented as if it were the best possible answer humankind has to respond to the problem of the moment, whether reducing world hunger, curing incurable diseases, prolonging life, thwarting crime, increasing leisure time, lowering pollution or accelerating communication. Every technological advance is heralded as the preeminent remedy at our disposal. Yet its most immediate effect is to make us technologically dependent.

The sneaky, steady advance of technology cannot be influenced by feelings. And, unfortunately, our descent into the technological tailspin escalates exponentially. To borrow from Ellul again, technology tends to progress geometrically. "A technical discovery has repercussions and entails progress in several branches of technique and not merely in one," he writes. "Moreover, techniques combine with one another, and the more given techniques there are to be combined, the more combinations are possible."[21] Put another way, every step forward makes it ten percent more likely that we will not be able to resist the aftereffects of such progress, which means our chains expand by ten percent, blackmail increases by ten percent and psychological motives for not trying to reverse the course we're on increase by ten percent. It's as if what existed before no longer meant anything, and the world was

[21] Cf. J. Ellul, *La technique ou l'enjeu du siècle*

> me feel calmer, more attuned to the moment, more self-sufficient, a little braver, and in less of a constant rush. I don't care if this sounds maudlin: My time with the Hadza made me happier.[16]

Returning to the source, to a life tied to the land, sense perception and wisdom, means returning to ourselves. And tapping into a life free from routine, discipline and the daily humiliations of our universe means tapping into ourselves. Decivilize ourselves to decivilize the world; subvert our calculating attitude toward life so that life ceases to be the anonymous, empty place it has become today. Fight for an existence lived freely in a nature that is free before the dictates of this decaying world swallow all of us, and the world along with us, whole.

In a universe where life is the rule (to borrow a favorite phrase of the philosopher Hans Jonas) civilization found a way to impose its non-life. If there is still time to return to the joys an authentic existence has to offer, relished in all their sublime fullness, it is due to our ability to imagine, desire, and fight for a present of our own: a present to be lived *free from civilization.*

[16] Cf. M. Finkel, *The Hadza*

shoved so far forward that now we live in the least bearable conditions. At the same time those conditions, having swept away all we know, paves the way for a future sea change.

Modern industrialization gives us a preview of exactly what the exponential progression of technology entails:

> The flying shuttle of 1773 made a greater production of yarn necessary. But production was impossible without a suitable machine. The response to this dilemma was the invention of the spinning jenny by James Hargreaves. But then yarn was produced in much greater quantities than could possibly be used by the weavers. To solve this new problem, Cartwright manufactured his celebrated loom. In this series of events we see in its simplest form the interaction that accelerates the development of machines. Each new machine disturbs the equilibrium of production; the restoration of equilibrium entails the creation of one or more additional machines in other areas of operation. Production becomes more and more complex…But with the increase in the number of manufactured products, new commercial methods had to be created. Capital, labor, producers, and consumers had to be found.[22]

Responding to such needs gave rise to public and private transport, economic financing and commercial advertising. Cities had to adapt to this massive evolution by making room for industries and tolerating the enormous demographic pressure placed on urban sustainability given the large number of people who moved from rural to metropolitan areas. Industrial pollution became more and more rampant, and cars (which became a means for most people to get to work as early as

[22] Ibid.

the 1960s) contributed heavily to contamination. Increasingly risky industries mounted as environmental conditions worsened, and the deteriorated state of things led people to attempt to drastically intervene in nature in the name of health. Aren't new medicines and biogenetics sold to us as the best response to health problems arising from today's society?

Obviously, the flying shuttle is not entirely responsible for bringing the world to the brink of collapse; it is technology that, once set in motion, doesn't permit us to see where it might lead, and branches out so rapidly that it becomes totally indigestible. Author David Collingridge's famous "dilemma of control" perfectly outlines this concept: "At the time we can do something about a new technology we don't know enough about it and, by the time we do know enough about it, it's too late."[23]

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The problem with technology is that there are no limits to where it will extend. If we do not shun it as a material fact and mindset, it will not stop on its own. The image of HAL 9000, the computer on the lunar base in Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, refusing to shut itself down after killing everyone on board the space ship, is a metaphor for technology's inherent voracity. Today, Hal's portentous meddling is true to our real life experience.

This appears to have been evident since 1956, as the philosopher Emanuele Severino writes, "Bio-control techniques are able to control our minds, perceptions, emotions, 'consciousness', creating a series of convictions with which the control center intends to endow individuals."[24] We are already moving on from the manipulation of emotional states (commercials, political conditioning, social media) to cellular manipulation, and

[23] CF. M. Schwarz & M. Thompson, *Divided We Stand: Redefining Politics, Technology and Social Choice* (1990)

[24] Cf. E. Severino, *Téchne. Le radici della violenza*, (1979)

us to look at nature not with a purely analytical eye, but one that is "complicit and marveling."

In her essay on society and history, *Selvaggio e domestico* (Savage and Domestic) Elaine Fiorani recognized that there is a profound remove (beyond the merely ecological) between communitarian ways of interacting with nature "that take-thank-give back and those that, like ours, take-do not thank-do not give back." We must turn to the former method of interacting with nature and refuse to play the role of world emperor. We do not possess this world. Civilization just taught us to think that way, and it is civilization that we must put into question.

Leading the kind of life that unfolds in complete, recognizable autonomy—that is not tasked with exploiting nature or confined to social roles, that has no pretensions to superiority (based on race, sex, species) or prizes and punishments that make us childish as well as dependent on some authority figure—is clearly our best hope. All individuals living outside the constraints of civilization know perfectly well that competition is unhealthy, that there is no such thing as peaceful exploitation, that the division of labor, the logic of appropriation and the suppression of personal independence drain individuals of their humanity, shatter the clan and lead to social inequality, conflict and pecking orders.

"There are things I envy about the Hadza," wrote Michael Finkel after living among the indigenous Tanzanian community.

> Mostly, how free they appear to be. Free from possessions. Free of most social duties. Free from religious strictures. Free of many family responsibilities. Free from schedules, jobs, bosses, bills, traffic, taxes, laws, news, and money. Free from worry…The days I spent with the Hadza altered my perception of the world. They instilled in me something I call the "Hadza effect"—they made

Giving the boot to the system of hardhearted values, conformist models and processes of estrangement that ballasts and perpetuates civilization is a viable endeavor to fulfill individuals who refuse to endure a vicarious life. Forming communities, support groups (squatted houses, cooperative housing, community kitchens, anti-consumerist, bioregional and critical awareness coalitions) and social projects (independent social centers, pirate radio, homeschooling collectives, environmentalist groups, animal liberation movements, eco-boycotts) founded on anti-economic values and teamwork are practical ways available to any and all in order to bring about the decivilization of life and give vent to our unbridled desire for freedom.

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Nature isn't capital. It isn't a product. It isn't a resource to exploit. It doesn't mean saving money or making an economic investment. Nor does it mean stock shares or—still less –a computer that needs "a new operating system" (as Paul Hawken, the crafty proponent of "natural capitalism" and eco-efficiency, claims). Taking nature into consideration just because it can be useful to us is not the same as loving it. All that means is once again treating nature as we would any object. We need to make nature the subject of our discourse again. It should be respected not for reasons of convenience but because it is an integral part of our lives. We must love it the way we love a child, a parent, a close friend. The land is not "a commodity belonging to us," wrote Aldo Leopold a little over sixty years ago, but rather "a community to which we belong."[15] Another eighty years earlier Elisée Reclus wrote: "We are…the children of the 'beneficent mother,' like the trees of the forest and the reeds of the rivers."991 In the 16th century, Montaigne warned

coltivato." *Storie di vita bioregionale*

[15] Cf. A. Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*

technology has made it possible to adulterate the molecular and genetic foundations of human life. The first legally permissible experiments in genetic engineering were conducted in May 1989 by the father of gene therapy, W. French Anderson, and his colleagues at the National Institute of Health (NIH). The most significant aspect of this is that their experiment had nothing to do with therapy or finding a cure; it was simply a research project. During the experiment, they injected cancer patient cells with radioactive "marker genes," then transferred the "marked" cells to the patients in order to monitor how they functioned. Not surprisingly, the initiative was justified by a wave of official reports claiming that the tests had humanitarian aims. Since the 1970s, manipulating genes has become our daily bread, and the business of genetic modification (GMOs, gene-splicing, etc), in vitro fertilization and even cloning (whether animal or human) have never really been publicly addressed. On the contrary, they are still seen by many as fraught with phantasmagoric possibilities.

In fact, as far as the technological mentality is concerned, everything can be perfected with technology. Life itself is seen as something largely imperfect that can/should be improved. Paradoxically, then, the very same human being spearheading the campaign to transform the natural world into a technological world is the first hindrance to the "plan": his physiology, his biological nature, his corporality. Journalist Robert Jungk's exposé of jet pilot training techniques[25]—as summarized by Ellul—paints a dramatic, and poignant, picture: "The pilot is whirled on centrifuges until he 'blacks out' (in order to measure his toleration of acceleration). There are catapults, ultrasonic chambers, etc in which the candidate is forced to undergo unheard-of tortures."[26] This is the very essence of what we must suffer to adapt to technology, and it anticipates what

[25] For more, see R. Jungk, *The Future has Already Begun* (1958)

[26] Cf. J. Ellul, *La technique ou l'enjeu du siècle*

we can expect once technology supplants everything. These training exercises demonstrate:

> that the human organism is, technically speaking, an imperfect one…The sufferings the individual endures in these "laboratories" are considered to be due to "biological weaknesses, which must be eliminated…It will be objected that these examples are extreme. This is certainly the case, but to a greater or lesser degree the same problem exists everywhere. And the more technique evolves, the more extreme its character becomes.[27]

Already today the fierce attacks made on the material limits of the body speak an unambiguous language: "It is time to ask ourselves if a biped body, equipped with binocular vision and a brain of fourteen hundred cubic centimeters constitutes an adequate biological form," says Stelarc, the well-known forerunner of cybernetic body art who for years now has staged tecno-performances using biosensors and mechanical arms to control, amplify, and emphasize the physiological functions of the human organism. "The body is obsolete," declares Stelarc. Neither very efficient nor particularly resistant, he continues, it is "susceptible to age, diseases, and fated with certain and imminent death."[28] As the *Cyber Dada Manifesto* has it, "Your body is a burden."[29]

Without much effort, we can track down similar expressions of disgust with the human body (bodies are dirty, sweaty, smelly; they get tired and sick; they age and die; they hinder us from becoming one with cyberspace). So it's completely understandable that a technological society would adopt a largely hostile attitude toward corporality. As stated earlier, automa-

[27] Ibid.

[28] Cf. P.L. Capucci (Ed.), *The Technological Body* (1990)

[29] Cf. T. Innocent—D. Nelson, *Cyber Dada Manifesto* (1990)

inequality (work, hierarchy, competition, control). Developing organic bio-communities based on non-cultivation techniques that are carried out by everyone equally is one of many ways at our disposal to shake off the commercial exploitation of the techno-industrial system. But even just desiring to "re-inhabit the earth" (the countryside, the hills, the mountains) constitutes the first step toward repositioning our place in the universe, acting partially self-sufficient and getting in touch with the part of us not yet in captivity.

Even those of us still leashed tightly to civilization have a chance to embrace the fervor of authentic relationships. Live in the city but do not be of the city, suggested Antonello Colimberti.[14] Rediscover quality relationships based on affinity and personal contact before SMS, voicemail and camcorders have completely wiped them out. Rediscover the pleasure of communal living before television, entertainment and other systems of existential isolation turn it into a marginal accessory. Rediscover the meaning of the gift— which repudiates the logic behind business, job performance, obligatory restitution and personal interest—and not the remunerative giving praised by the champions of modern development. Value direct experience again, non-hierarchical relationships and engrossing, infectious passion. Enter into contact with your living side, your intuition, your instinct, your inner feelings, and re-appropriate those human qualities we have been separated from so arbitrarily. Strengthen relationships based on sharing instead of those based on the false security of owning things. As for things, reestablish the importance of recovering them, repairing them, reusing them and making them yourself, because what we make with our hands not only takes the consumerism out of the equation, but also makes those things more ours, more genuine, made with an ingredient nowhere to be found in industrial recipes—love.

[14] Cf. A. Colimberti, "Tempi e ritmi selvatici collected in Selvatico e

taking responsibility for their own decisions and cultivating greater personal autonomy. And it is becoming harder and harder to trick them into believing in the magnificence of this leaky ship we call civilization.

We now know perfectly well that it is possible to reestablish a direct relationship with the earth, with our fellow humans, with other living creatures, with the components of nature. The Fukuoka Method,[9] Synergistic Gardening,[10] Forest Gardening,[11] permaculture[12] and constructed wetlands[13] are all antiauthoritarian practices for interacting with the environment that counter a manipulative approach to one's ecosystem, foregoing methods that devastate ecological stability as well as our dependency on technology and social

[9] The Fukuoka Method is named after Masanobu Fukuoka, a 20th century Japanese farmer and philosopher who believed that plowing the earth was the most deleterious farming practice, since it disrupts the biological balance between plants and the soil. Taking his inspiration from nature, which was able to flourish for at least three million years without human intervention, Fukuoka created a farming method known as "Natural Farming" or "Do-Nothing Farming."

[10] Synergistic Gardening is a system of organic gardening developed by the Spanish gardener Emilia Hazelip. Traditional garden plants are cultivated without using fertilizers (not even organic fertilizers), plows or hoes.

[11] Forest gardening is based on natural cultivation methods practiced by indigenous tribes in tropical zones. Pioneer Robert Hart successfully applied the method to deciduous forests in temperate climes. Plants are intermixed to grow in a succession of layers of organic compost. The plants produce flowers, fruit and other foods for human consumption. Without using plows or other intervention methods, the system creates a perfect biological equilibrium thanks both to the plants and the numerous insects and animals that come to inhabit the forests.

[12] Permaculture is a hybrid of farming practices that seek to maintain the natural fertility of the soil. It is a branch of ecological design and engineering that develops and protects ecosystems over time (hence the name permanent agriculture). This holistic approach to farming is aimed at reviving and preserving stable, enduring ecosystems.

[13] Certain wetland plants can be used to treat wastewater naturally, in a process which completely recycles the natural elements (water, vegetables, organic substances). Plants like reeds and rushes can be used to purify water.

tism brought about by technology is not interested in making individuals more intelligent or skillful; it is interested in making them superfluous. With typical acumen, Jean Baudrillard writes, "McLuhan saw modern technologies as 'extensions of man'. We should see them, rather, as 'expulsions of man'."[30]

The greatest combination between individuals and technology is only realized when the individual and his obligatory apparatus is annulled. Technique, which is, essentially, perfection, insists on our annulment in an increasingly brazen and forceful manner, because "in human reactions, howsoever well calculated they may be, a 'coefficient of elasticity' causes imprecision, and imprecision is intolerable to technique."[31] Bertrand Goldschmidt, one of the fathers of the French nuclear program, gave us a chilling taste of this when he stated that what nuclear power is to radioactivity, gravity is to aviation. And it seems unlikely that humans can adapt to radioactivity the way they have to gravity.[32]

In short, resistance to the advent of the technological world stems from human beings; and humans emanate imperfection, doubt, incoherence, limitation, error. "The enemy is man," states Louart. "There are too many of him and too few of machines."[33] He has to be made to believe that "he himself is nothing and machines are everything." In a technology-saturated universe, there is no room for human beings. Or better, the foolish vanity of civilization leads to a techno-centric world that strips individuals of the important presences in their lives. In an objective, machine-driven world, subjectivity is seen as a flaw that must be corrected by technical innovation. "'To err is human' says the proverb.

[30] Cf. J. Baudrillard, *The Perfect Crime* (1996)

[31] Cf. J. Ellul, *La technique ou l'enjeu du siècle*

[32] Cf. B. Goldschmidt, *The Atomic Complex: A Worldwide Political History of Nuclear Energy* (1982)

[33] Cf. B. Louart, *Il nemico e l'uomo*

'To eliminate error, all that is needed is to eliminate man,' concludes science."[34]

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We can, if we so choose, continue to harbor the illusion that technology is impartial, but if we take a good look around us, we will see that the world has become utterly technical, subject to technical rules, whose one ambition is to conform to technology. And once life, transformed into a mere mechanical object, finds itself reproduced in a laboratory, or discovers that roadblocks have been placed on its natural course toward death, the pervasiveness of technology becomes terrifying. Given all its risks, Ellul noted roughly fifty years ago, heredity will be repressed and humans made to serve an ideal function. Thus, added Ellul, the ideal man will soon be nothing but a tool.[35] The fact that we are now beginning to understand how a group of biological messages can be deciphered and reassembled to our liking, proves just what direction we have set out upon. Our noses, eyes, ears, hands, sex are morphing into interface data, destined to be digitally enhanced or substituted with other data. Governed by machines, we are nothing more than spare parts—improvable and replaceable.

The Machine-Individual mimesis, raised to an emblem of the civilized world, informs—or rather deforms—people's thoughts, feelings, actions—even their lexicon. People are considered intelligent as a computer, fast as a jet, insistent as a jackhammer. And when they experience something exciting or uncanny, they refer to the experience as something "out of a movie." Obviously, there is never a lack of authority figures and stage whisperers leading us to identify with machines. Marvin Minsky, the chief promoter of the Artificial Intelligence initiative, described the human brain as a "meat

[34] Ibid.

[35] Cf. J. Ellul, *La technique ou l'enjeu du siècle*

Breaking this psychological chain can be a significant step toward reclaiming our independence.

"Accepting" does not necessarily mean "sharing in," and by not sharing in the tyranny of the modern world, we no longer have to legitimize it. If civilization promises that science and technology are the only means to create a dignified society, then beginning to view these "religions" with diffidence can do us no harm. If civilization teaches us that life without competition is meaningless, then getting back in touch with community spirit, with what it means to help others, can only be good for us. If civilization says that happiness is measured by how much capital we amass, then ceasing to think of our existence in economic terms, refusing to follow the stock market and ignoring the wheelings and dealings of business will help us put the concerns of the advanced world out of mind.

To rediscover the meaning of life, we need to rediscover our lives. And to rediscover our lives, we need to fight everything that is taking us away from life itself. Fight the modern world's myths and dreams, its meddling ways, its instructions and discipline. Fight its endless forms of socialization, bureaucratic centralization, hoarding mentality, egocentrism and utilitarianism, which pits each of us against one another. But we must also fight *for* something: for our own liberty and independence and for the Earth's; for responsible awareness; for inner happiness; for the physical and moral pleasure to enjoy life to the fullest. We must fight to regain a harmonious world that isn't aimed at manipulating and controlling life, but one that instead places importance in the uniqueness and the dignity in existence, our existence and the existence of everyone with whom we share the universe.

And this is exactly what is beginning to happen.

A growing number of people are beginning to embrace an anti-civilization stance, turning their attention toward the problems plaguing the planet and those who live in it. Men and women are becoming more aware of the world around them,

in non-collaboration isn't impossible. Indeed, civilization provides us with the ideas to put such a plan into action every day. If civilization teaches us to fear freedom, then ridding ourselves of such fears is already an important step toward preserving our natural inclinations. If civilization strips us of our ability to act autonomously, forcing us to depend on machines, economics and the decisions of specialists, then taking back control of the choices in our lives is a sign of concrete change. If civilization goads us forward with our heads bowed, then stopping a moment to look around and breathe in the here and now can only be a boon.

It isn't difficult to distance ourselves from civilization. Ceasing to glorify the debilitating technological universe so that we can re-cultivate our taste for doing things ourselves is quite feasible. Ceasing to rely on politics to resolve our problems—whatever our party, whoever our leader, whichever the institution—is easily done and can be put into practice immediately. Refusing to empathize with the values of the modern world or take part in the ongoing celebrations of its manifold forms of persecution is doable, as long as we truly want it. And this distrust, this critical spirit, this non-cooperation can continue to be nourished even if tomorrow we have to return to work to put food on our table; even if tomorrow we have to enter a bank to withdraw money from our account; even if tomorrow we have to switch on the computer to write to a long-distance friend, perform a web search, or offer our advice on homeschooling in an online discussion forum.

Convincing us that everything we have to do we do of our own free will is one of the slyest tricks in the modern world's playbook. Thanks to this invisible thread sutured to our mind, we end up believing not only that the remedies modernity sells us are necessary to our wellbeing, but also that they are inevitable, and, as a consequence, we end up believing in the grandeur of the manipulative system that produces them.

machine" and the body as "a bloody mess of organic matter" that acted as a "teleoperator of the brain."[36] Hans Moravec, senior research scientist at the Robotics Institute at Carnegie Mellon University, has long spoken of the need to move on to a post-biological world, where the human brain is separated from mind (and body) and attached to self-sufficient machines called "Mind Children."[37] The Extropian David Ross imagines being able to transfer human consciousness from an organic body into digital memory.[38] And the philosopher Alexander Chislenko, thinking of the development of "super intelligent" robots that can transmit information in real time, from one end of the world to the other, believes that humans will be forced to merge into cyborgs so as to prodigiously extend their physical, mental and communicative potential.[39] And AI guru Earl Cox forecasts a time when society will be founded on reproduced intelligence and that "technology will soon enable human beings to change into something else altogether [and thereby] escape the human condition."[40]

Laughing off these macabre pronouncements as the ravings of mad scientists will not help us get free of the biological manipulations technology has already embarked upon. The process of transforming the living into a living-machine has sped up, and is increasingly difficult to resist. Biotech eyes, computerized language, electronic noses, remote-controlled prosthetics, microchips inserted under our skin—these things have been unscrupulously championed as if they were universal panaceas. The myth that humanity (thinly populated

[36] Cf. As cited in S. Turkle, *The Second Self: Computers and the Human Spirit*

[37] Cf. H. Moravec, *Robot: Mere Machine to Transcendent Mind*

[38] Cf. M. Dery, *Escape Velocity: Cyberculture at the end of the Century*

[39] Cf. C. Formenti, *Incantati dalla rete. Immaginari, utopie e conflitti nell'epoca di Internet* (2000)

[40] Cf. E. Cox—G. Paul, *Beyond Humanity: Cyberevolution and Future Minds* (1996)

by humans) can be rid of pain, sickness, aging or death is perpetuated by the jargon surrounding biogenetic engineering, synthetic biology, bionics, bio-robotics, nano-robotics, AI and every other "artificialization of human beings" (to use Tomás Maldonado's expression). Moreover, as practices, they have historical and scientific continuity, starting with 20th century eugenics.

Technology is not neutral. It neutralizes, but it is not neutral. It neutralizes the potential for personal independence, putting individuals at the mercy of its devices. It neutralizes thought and feeling, putting rules in place so that we have a single vision for comprehending the world. It neutralizes individuality, turning us all into potential machines and passive consumers. In a technological world, we are nothing but usernames.

Furthermore, thanks to the multitude of tireless soothsayers, technology can successfully play down all of its problematic aspects. Its aggressions become legalized, binding, every false note becomes a grace note, every loss a gain. Does digital society relegate human relationships to the lonely, sensory-deprived realm of the virtual? "No, it's only a different social lexicon for us to learn," assures Giuseppe Granieri.[41] Does technology undermine our direct knowledge of reality, which we have enjoyed for thousands of years, cutting off all physical and sensual contact with life? No problem, insists the scholar. "We only have to continue to experience it for it to become part of our normal activities."[42] Does the computerization, hybridization and combination of bodies and machines make us disgusted by the carnal and excited by techno-dependeny? Nothing to fear, says Stefano Rodotà. We are only being asked to "begin getting used to a new, scary word—posthuman."[43]

[41] Cf. G. Granieri, *Umanità accresciuta*
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid.

We have to recover who we are, not reinvent who we are. Our ability to recover our self (and the natural and organic world that make us who we are) is inside of us, not outside—in the intentions, feelings, thoughts, imagination and actions of everyone who truly wants to *destroy that which is destroying us*. We might start by rejecting the little, everyday things, all the bait that lures us in, the constant bullying we accede to, the various burdens we have learned to let other people shoulder. Then we can continue by opening up so that we can look deep inside our souls, without doubts or prejudices. Ultimately, we might begin radically questioning our way of life.

There's no question that without production, entertainment, art, music, culture and commerce, we're nothing. Living completely outside of civilization has become impossible for us (and that says a lot about our so-called freedom!). As Matteo Garrone, the director of the film *Gomorrah* (based on the book of the same name), explains, the minute we have entered an organization that "gives us access to everything," we feel the need to go all in. It's not enough to take part in the organization, we have to *be part* of it, even if that implies having to strap on a bulletproof vest and practice getting shot.

"Are you with us or against us?" demands civilization. "Because if you're with us, you better prove it." So everything becomes a duty; education becomes a personal duty, respect becomes a social duty, conformity becomes an ideological duty. Even voting for the soul-sapping system becomes a duty—a civic one. Nothing is free of obligation in the advanced world. Life itself has become a moral duty, a religious obligation, a medical responsibility. And destroying nature is the direct corollary of all these duties: the irrefutable imperative that furthers the aims of progress, affluence and dominion.

Rejecting a call to arms of this kind leaves us with only few options—desert or refuse to collaborate. Non-collaboration is, in fact, the greatest tool at our disposal to stop civilization from conquering our hearts, and finding the strength to engage

do to rectify the situation. Obviously, no one possesses a recipe to solve all the problems of civilization: there is no roadmap to chart or official plan to follow or manual to read. No one solution lies in the recommendations of the various gurus, in the promises of new political platforms or in the suggestions of experts in ecology, sustainable economics and low-impact technologies. Instead there are many individual and group solutions that each of us can come up with and put into practice. Freedom doesn't follow a set pattern. Happiness isn't something we're granted by someone as if it were a law, or sold as if it were a block of cheese. We are the architects of our own destiny.

In fact, the "professional liberators" have always worked against our ability to work on our own. These con artists have always pushed us to look outside of ourselves for something that we supposedly lack. As Vignodelli writes, for them:

> Living won't do…Being ourselves isn't enough. We must be perfected with strict discipline in defiance of pain. [Yet this is one of the reasons] for our profound malaise. Idealistic narcissists seduce us with their glittering prizes so that we spend our lives working, competing with others (and ourselves), doing a job, pursuing a vocation and being enslaved in order to get one. So that we hide our personality behind a mask, in a uniform, under a halo. It's Eve's shiny, poisonous apple.[8]

We cannot, therefore, give voice to the personality that sets us apart by suppressing our feelings or denying our rage, pain, love, passion and enthusiasm for life. Nor by repressing our instincts, our vital impulses, our ability to act. Everything that works toward rendering us mute, manipulating us and turning us into "civil subjects" makes us more civil and less individual.

[8] Cf. M. Vignodelli, *La civiltà contro l'uomo*

The superficiality with which technophiles cast technology as a tool for "a better world" is only comparable to the bad faith of those who continue to worship it while pretending to oppose it. And both attitudes are just as troublesome as the resignation with which most people usually accept technology.

Mistaking technology's immeasurable versatility for neutrality, or its intrinsic ability to dominate everything (people, nature, the planet) we do not allow ourselves to critically investigate the origins of our current domesticated condition. We consider the technologization of the planet to be an inevitable phenomenon, we abandon our need to independently find meaning in our presence on earth and thus lose the ability to understand how, why and to what extent technology continues to transform us. *That* is the most frightening aspect of the entire process of colonization triggered by technology.

2. Technicist Ethics, Technical Propaganda: Technology as a Tool for Power

> *The technological society is a system of domination which operates already in the concept and construction of techniques.*
> — Herbert Marcuse

The fact that technology can singlehandedly engender social conditioning and progressively regiment the environment and mentality of its consumers does not mean it has spawned itself. Much less is it an unpremeditated, unguided phenomenon. On the contrary, technology is increasingly organized and exported in order to preserve the social and ideological structure of the world that operates it. From this point of view, we must echo the words of David Noble, who states that "the evolution of technology lies in the relations of power within a so-

ciety,"[44] and that the work of engineers is directly influenced by these relations. "When we look past the veil of mystery that enshrouds the work of technical people," Noble continues, "we find that their activities reflect their relation to power at every point. Their link with power gives them power—it entitles them to practice their trade in the first place, to learn, to explore, to invent; it emboldens their imagination; and it gives them the wherewithal to put their grand designs into practice." Rather than act as hindrances, these designs actually sustain and reinforce the dominant paradigms of the world the engineers serve.

"Engineers are not stupid people," insists Noble, "they learn quite early on that in our society, the authoritarian pattern predominates in all institutions and workplaces. (Workplaces are either run autocratically by the boss or governed by labour contracts that give managers exclusive control over production and technical decisions.)"[45] Science must correspond with the interests of its financial backers. War is fought for governments. Even sports are managed so as to promote the values of the civilized world (the division of men and women, the cult of training, the myth of strength, the logic of competition, the will to win). "So when an engineer begins to design a top-down technical system," writes Noble, "he reasonably assumes from the outset that the social power of management will be available to make his system functionable."[46] This explains why technology is most developed in the field of economics, politics, and the military. In fact, the Internet grew out of a United States military defense project designed to create a decentralized network of interconnected computers (ARPANET), and was made available to everyone only after the end of the Cold War. The web, one of the main features of the Internet, was de-

[44] Cf. D.F. Noble, *Progress Without People: New Technology, Unemployment, and the Message of Resistance* (1995)

[45] Ibid.

[46] Ibid.

crow in the morning, sperm after making love, the sand on our skins after a day at the sea, ththee gray in our hair or the roots of trees that rip up the concrete. We are so used to an adulterated, artificial, domesticated existence that if a dog runs away we immediately worry about his newfound freedom. What will the poor guy do, we wonder. Will he miss his leash? Will he die of hunger without his dog biscuits? We are likewise so overwhelmed by power and money that those who go without (indigenous populations, self-sustaining communities, eco-villages, the homeless) appear unnatural to us, the same way that those who oppose replacing the living world with a synthetic, remanufactured one, appear unnatural to us.

We are all capable of recognizing the brutality and futility of modern life. Freedom has been turned into permission, kinship into useful connections. Legislation keeps tugging at our collar, impeding us from moving freely, acting spontaneously, even from breathing. Technology drafts us into its ranks and trains us to conform at command. Crushed by the weight of our daily encumbrances, we have no decision power over our own lives, and our destiny falls into the hands of some stranger, executive group or automated machine.

> We must be outsiders, [writes Zerzan] never represented, investing nothing in the death match we are expected to help reproduce. The ultimate pleasure lies in destroying that which is destroying us, in the spirit of the Situationists, who, when asked how they were going to destroy the dominant culture, replied, 'In two ways: gradually at first, then suddenly.'[7]

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Taking action against the moral and material desertification caused by civilization involves asking ourselves what can we

[7] Cf. J. Zerzan, *Running on Emptiness*

but they were difficulties that humans could confront on their own and not, as happens today, problems so impossible to answer that we are all thrown into a tailspin. However scored with complications their lives may have been, our non-civilized ancestors never depended on a techno-bureaucratic-industrial system that steamrolls everyone and everything as it plows forward. As Daniel Quinn explains with disarming straightforwardness:

> 'The story the Leavers [hunter-gatherers] have been enacting here for the past three million years isn't the story of conquest and rule…Enacting it gives them lives that are satisfying and meaningful to them. This is what you'll find if you go among them. They're not seething with discontent and rebellion, not incessantly wrangling over what should be allowed and what forbidden, not living in terror of each other, not going crazy because their lives seem empty and pointless, not having to stupefy themselves with drugs to get through the days, not inventing a new religion every week to give them something to hold on to, not forever searching for something to do or something to believe in that will make their lives worth living. And—I repeat—this is not because…they're innately noble. This is simply because they're enacting a story that works well for people—a story that worked well for three million years and that still works well where the Takers [civilization] haven't yet managed to stamp it out.'[6]

We have grown so estranged from nature that whatever genuineness we have left tends to bother us, like the rooster's

[6] Cf. D. Quinn, *Ishmael* (1992)

signed to counter the electromagnetic effects of a large atomic explosion. This electronic calculator was created to meet military goals, just like radar, and the common compass.[47]

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Without technology, the expectations of global domination that the "titans of empire" are making tangible would be unrealizable. Neil Postman made this point a long time ago. First and foremost, writes the author of *Technopoly*, the computer has "increased the power of large-scale organizations like the armed forces, or airline companies or banks or tax-collecting agencies. And it is equally clear that the computer is now indispensable to high-level researchers in physics and other natural sciences."[48] Genetically modifying food (and other living organisms) cloning and crossbreeding would be unthinkable without technology, just as nanotechnology, bioengineering, information science and cognitive science would be unthinkable (which explains why they are commonly known as "converging technologies"). The idea that technology ushers in a more easily governable society clearly refutes the image of technology as a solution for people, and reveals quite the opposite: that technology advances social control and political agendas. Monitoring people's daily activities is yet further evidence of this fact.

Sure, in order to stem public opposition and popularize the ideology of the Machine, no one is hesitating to put the propaganda pedal to the metal. The same rules that apply to the sale of commercial goods—ie, constantly pitching their imaginary potential— apply to the cult of technology. It's a centuries-old trick that works well. Building on the research of several other authors, Clifford Stoll, a professor at the University of Berkeley,

[47] This is a reference to the famous geometrical and military compass invented in the 1500s by Galileo.

[48] Cf. N. Postman, *Technopoly*

recently unveiled the inner-workings of this trick, listing some of the most bizarre spiels aimed at selling people technological innovations.

"The Utopian promotion of technology has a long history," writes Stoll. "In the 1860s, poets wrote elegies about how the transatlantic cable would end war—after all, instant communication will prevent misunderstandings. Newspaper editorials of 1890 praised the telephone as a tool of democracy, allowing citizens to bypass the palace guard and directly call the president."[49] A century ago, automation was billed as the decisive factor for eliminating hard labor; today we're told it will free us from the fetters of bureaucracy and a world obstinately ruled by who one knows…

At the end of this past century, OGM were considered obligatory in order to rid the world of hunger, and the Internet was supposed to create a new global society that did not discriminate on the basis of age, class or sex. Yet we know that hunger continues to plague the world. And we also know, to echo Stoll, the more time we spend navigating the web, the less time we spend acquiring the social skills we need to interact with other people. There is no better way to create a system of isolatos than shooting our kids out to cyberspace and telling them to communicate with each other electronically.

Yet still we go on happily believing in technology's sunny prophecies and false promises. We believe, for example, that genetic modifications will make us healthy and attractive; that Nutrigenomics will allow us to stuff ourselves on fatty foods without having to worry about the side effects; that Neuroengineering will rid us of depression, sadness and drug addiction (and perhaps our addiction to technology too?). We believe that telematics will facilitate the building of solid human relationships through online tele-speak, that the information

[49] Cf. C. Stoll, *High-tech Heretic: Reflections of a Computer Contrarian* (1999)

As long as we fail to distance ourselves from this way of seeing things, we will continue to suffer, fall sick, work obsessively and become anxious whenever we have a moment of down time. We will continue to pop pills to forget ourselves, since our conscience won't fall for our bullshit.

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To climb out from under the shadow of boredom, we must try to overcome our dependence on the mediated universe we live in: quit believing in it and try to live in a deep and direct manner. The joy of existence is not a product of industry. You cannot find it at the supermarket. It isn't subject to the whims of the economy. It doesn't grow out of politics or policy. It can be found in the ability of every one of us to give free rein to his or her natural instincts, relocating the virtues inherent in our personalities so that we can realize ourselves. The individual, writes Vignodelli:

> can acquire full use of his senses only in the social and physical world for which he was made, down to the finest details of his bio-gram: a large, familial community that inhabits a vast, untamed territory, with a rich variety of plants and animals…a world in which we are conditioned by nothing more than our own personality. Not by alarm clocks, deadlines, fashions, laws, orders from our superiors. In which we share everything with the community—food, experience, song—oblivious to the difference between work and play.[5]

This is not to say that primitive life was ever a cakewalk, an unproblematic, untroubled stroll through the woods. Thinking so would be utterly preposterous. There were difficulties,

[5] Cf. M. Vignodelli, *La civiltà contro l'uomo*

> bread by the sweat of his brow. It wouldn't do, and it didn't last: the Indians were soon put to work, and they died of it.[3]

While traveling to the Kalahari Desert, Laurens Van der Post was told an analogous story by his young African guide:

> You know, I once saw a little Bushman imprisoned in one of our gaols because he killed a giant bustard which, according to the police, was a crime, since the bird was royal game and protected. He was dying because he couldn't bear being shut up and having his freedom of movement stopped. When asked why he was ill he could only say that he missed seeing the sun set over the Kalahari. Physically the doctor couldn't find anything wrong with him but he died none the less![4]

You could say we are dying of the same disease. We were never meant to be shut in an office, or holed up on the third floor of a squalid city building, or packed into an apartment on the outskirts of town. Like the Bushmen, we cannot stand being confined to a cage. We too need to see the colors of the sunset and feel the song of life wash over us. Neither work nor sports nor gadgets nor amenities nor modern comforts can restore to us the serenity we've lost. Nor can other people's opinions nor our ability to blend in with the crowd. We require open spaces and endless horizons—not barriers, borders, and walls. We need to be free to act independently, not bullied by laws and rules that treat us as if we were children and bar us from being ourselves. We need to rediscover and share nature, not hoard it. It is collaboration and play that give meaning to our lives, not the myths of competition and the battle-axe of meritocracy.

[3] Cf. P. Clastres, *Society Against the State*

[4] Cf. L Van der Post, *The Lost World of the Kalahari*

superhighway will help us escape countless "deaths" (unlike every other highway) and that digital interaction will preside over the advent of a new society based on democratic participation in the public domain. Meanwhile, locked up in our modern singleuser autocracies, we laugh at the kind of naiveté that led people to praise the miracle of electricity one hundred years ago, completely ignoring the fact that we ourselves are permanently kneeling at the altar of the same kinds of technological discoveries.

Without the missionaries of the Machine-World incessantly doing the dirty work to turn us into excitable supporters of technology, the process of socially adapting to new technologies (to borrow from Carolyn Marvin)[50] would not incite us to be so effusively open to technology. On the contrary, technology would be exposed for what it is: a business that is cutting away at the pleasures of direct, sensory experience and independent, convivial, natural living. But the ideology of artifice gains the most ground by concealment. Technological propaganda not only functions by tickling the imaginations of its worshippers and exploiting their anxieties, fears, hopes and wounded aspirations. Stressing the "secondary advantages" of technology has proven just as efficient a way of cultivating new enthusiasts.

We often hear that, thanks to computers, we can now do as we please. We can manage our bank account from home. We can acquire information in real time. We can consult virtual libraries from our armchairs. We can even increase the high fidelity of musical sounds on our stereo systems. There is no doubt that these are benefits, but they remain minor benefits, and, in any case, are offered up without ever revealing the total price we pay for them. Dazzled by the "wondrous feats of computers, almost all of which have only marginal relevance

[50] Cf. C. Marvin, *When Old Technologies were New* (1988)

[to their quality of life],"[51] the inhabitants of the technologically advanced world are, in reality, more limited in their actions. As Postman writes, "[People's] private matters have been made more accessible to powerful institutions. They are more easily tracked and controlled; are subjected to more examinations; are increasingly mystified by the decisions made about them; are often reduced to mere numerical objects."[52]

It used to be the case that, in order to catch a person out, someone in charge (a police officer, a supervisor, an instructor, a professor) had to be physically present to witness the act, evaluate the infraction and charge him or her with an offense. That is no longer the case. Nowadays, everything is automatic and indisputable. As the British sociologist David Lyon explains, a surveillance tool such as a Mailcop can detect the slightest transgression at an office terminal and immediately notify management. Mailcop "alerts workers that their email use violates company policy."[53] The number of times a call center operator punches his or her keyboard a day and the duration of phone calls they receive can easily be electronically monitored and used as evidence to fire or punish those employees deemed unproductive. Lyon cites a famous case of car workers from a Toyota manufacturing plant in England who were surprised to discover that urine tests were being routinely and automatically performed in the bathrooms.[54] Surely the plant managers were not philanthropically motivated to stage such invisible tests on their employees' personal health!

But even in the so-called private realm, technology has augmented the ways we have of spying on people secretly. While we surf the web in the privacy of our own homes, we are really leaving behind a long trail of electronic footprints (electronic transactions, cookies, information regarding the

[51] Cf. N. Postman, *Technopoly*

[52] Ibid.

[53] Cf. D. Lyon, *Surveillance Society: Monitoring Everyday Life* (2001)

[54] Ibid.

entertainment, illusions. Such condemnations are a symptom of our awareness that we need to defend civilization because it is unlivable, even if it means transforming our opposition to it into a superficial, officially ok'd form of rebellion. Cioran did not mince words when he wrote, "Civilization, with all its panoply, is based on our propensity to the unreal, to the useless. If we agreed to reduce our needs, to satisfy only necessities, civilization would crumble forthwith."[1]

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The universe we have built up over ten thousand years of civilization was neither made for us nor does it suit us. As Vignodelli observed, "It's easy for ants to live in a caste system because that is exactly what every cell in their body was made for."[2] And it's natural for the queen bee to be confined to her narrow cell, since biology made her that way. Likewise the earthworm doesn't suffer because it spends its life plowing through the earth, nor does the moth worry that it spends hours circling the same lamp. But things are different for humans, very different in fact. For us, living in a caste system, shut in, with an artificial light instead of natural sunlight, performing enervating, routine tasks and giving and receiving orders pose major problems.

When early colonizers first encountered the indigenous people of Brazil:

> great was their disapproval in seeing that those strapping men glowing with health preferred to deck themselves out like women with paint and feathers instead of perspiring away in their gardens. Obviously, these people were deliberately ignorant of the fact that one must earn his daily

[1] Cf. E. M. Cioran, *The Fall into Time*

[2] Cf. M. Vignodelli, *La civiltà contro l'uomo*

organ system dysfunctions, degenerative diseases and chronic sickness. Our physical health is in greater peril, and we are constantly relying on specialists, pharmaceuticals and happy pills. The fact that heroic treatments vie to add years to the life expectancy rate is yet another sign that in the civilized world our existence is always judged on quantity rather than quality. And in order to consolidate this quantity, it is necessary to trample peoples' free will, even their choice to take their own life (a case in point is the argument against euthanasia, which would deny humans the same basic right we give to our pets).

At bottom, the whole development of civilization is exactly what creates and ultimately annihilates civilization, following a self-destructive pattern that resembles that of neoplasia (the abnormal proliferation of cells). Like cancer, civilization develops inside the organism that produced it; like cancer, it gradually sets about suppressing the (social and collective) fabric in which it grows; like cancer, civilization is characterized by the way it gradually expands its sphere of control and eats away the energy and strength of its host; like cancer, it multiplies easily and is very difficult to treat, seeing as it sustains the pathology, eventually becoming the support base of the host.

Civilization has made us indolent, passive, unable to react as if we were really alive. In impotence everything becomes acceptable: the speculations of the financial world; pollutants that, according to law, do not pollute; restrictions that "guarantee freedom." Indeed, in impotence, we stomach anything, even the fact that a six year old child who naturally struggles to sit still for twenty minutes should be chained to a desk for eight hours a day just so that he can learn that everywhere in the world there is always a teacher in charge.

In an increasingly domesticated, lifeless universe everything becomes acceptable, even converting our potential to change into the resigned litany that we constantly repeat to comfort ourselves. "It's not all that bad," we tell ourselves, accommodating our anguish, making it disappear with words,

frequency with which we visit certain sites) that authorities and private companies have no trouble reading and using against us, either to monitor our transgressions or inundating us with advertisements, unbeatable sales pitches and boatloads of spam. Sending out emails therefore entails activating an electronic surveillance system as widespread as it is implacable. In several articles, British journalist Duncan Campbell revealed how this process of global electronic surveillance works. To take one example, say Jill from New York sends an email to her boyfriend in Italy. Her email will first go to her local Internet provider, where the FBI's Carnivore system can read it. As her message crosses the Atlantic Ocean via satellite, the Russian base in Cuba can intercept it, as can the French base near Bordeaux, and the various UKUSA stations around the world. As it passes through the British Internet system, it can be read by the British secret security. Finally, Jill's boyfriend can read her email.

Military technology also plays a key role in public surveillance. Always at the forefront of innovation, military technology is not only used to carry out brutal, inhuman warfare. Instead, as David Lyon uncovers, "High resolution satellite images may now be bought in order to examine in detail areas of the city, to a range of as little as 1 metre. Geographic Information Services images, once used for cold war purposes, are now widely for sale."[55] And for those of you who think that a world entirely patrolled by micro-spies is only the paranoid delusions of a crazy person, you might want to consider that this frightening world already exists! Micro-spies go by a very familiar name: cellphones.

Furthermore, that roadside surveillance cameras and sophisticated red-light cameras at stoplights immortalize our every move—and can be used in court as evidence of any transgression—is no secret to anyone. Our reasons for

[55] Ibid.

speeding matter little to the electronic eye of the camera. Nor does it matter that certain tracts of the highways and byways have unjustifiably slow speed limits for the simple reason that the unfortunate driver can be squeezed for all he or she is worth. This is to say nothing of the systems in place for identifying people using their DNA (in Canada and Great Britain, authorities can collect DNA samples without people's consent); or genetic testing (used to discriminate against employees with certain pathologies or fill up insurance company coffers who can select clients based on how likely they are to contract certain diseases). This is to say nothing of IQ tests (which reify human intelligence by establishing an arbitrary means of measuring it) or the various drug tests, breathalyzers and lie detectors. This is to say nothing of sensory security systems (body heat detectors, voice-operated systems, eye scans, digital fingerprinting), which are, at this point, widely known and commonly used.

While we drool over the picture quality of the latest camera; while we let ourselves be hoodwinked by ads for the newest videophone that we just have to have right now; while we remain speechless at the sight of electronic sofa chairs, automatic air diffusers and talking robots, our lives become more and more confined to the tiny universe technology has reserved for us, where we are watched over like little children, spied on like criminals, personally discriminated against and punished for the slightest infraction. Confined to living in a state of anxiety over what we do, or don't do, or would like to do but are told not to do, we wind up suffering from permanent stress. This explains the drastic increase in the number of people who can no longer go on, who, as they say, "implode." People have by and large become progressively ruder, more impertinent, cynical and insensitive. More and more people desire to consume everything and everyone, seeking refuge in artificial paradises, popping (legal or illegal) narcotics, risking their lives on a whim, driving at a hundred miles per hour just for a

Epilogue: Decivilizing the World

> *After two or three million years of an egalitarian foraging (aka hunter-gatherer) mode of existence, in only 10,000 years, the rapid descent into a civilized life gave way. Since then, an ever-accelerating course of social and ecological destructiveness in every sphere of life... A "Future Primitive" is called for, where a living involvement with the world, and fluid, intimate participation in nature will replace the thingified reign of symbolic civilization.*
> — John Zerzan

Civilization counts as its crowning achievement the extension of human longevity, yet it bases this claim on so-called "life expectancy" rates, rather than on the average lifespan, thus ignoring the millions of people who are killed in car accidents at twenty, or expire at thirty in one of the many industrial plants that sustain our economy, or who die at forty or fifty of a heart attack, stroke, tumor, or one of the thousand other diseases caused by pollution, stress, and attrition in the "free" world. While civilization prides itself on having improved our quality of life, in reality living conditions have been in sharp decline. The number of people living with handicaps is constantly on the rise (including those with handicaps caused by work-related injuries, car accidents, vaccinations, drug consumption and surgical mishaps). Similarly, there are more cases of physical defects, mental disabilities,

It is up to us to derail this train that has been conveying us to the brink of destruction for ten thousand years. If, like THX 1138, we sense that the weight of this unnatural, less and less human world is unsupportable, then there's still a chance for us to get out before it's too late. If, like THX 1138, we recognize the overwhelming sadness in this tired, cold, frenetic world, we can find the courage to seek the sun once more. No one will aid us on our search. Everyone will tell us to turn back. Everyone will try to persuade us that there is no sun (be sides the one shown on TV) and that there exist practical ways of accepting this automatized and inauthentic world.

In effect, only we can free ourselves from this perverted, suffocating existence. Only we can act to regain a foothold in the living world. Only we can fight to re-attain the meaning of life and enjoy it responsibly with others. Our capacity for self-determination, which civilization has gradually taken away from us (through, in part, technology) should not be negotiable. We need to re-appropriate it before our desire to exist freely gives way to docility.

Charlotte Brontë defined resistance as "the throes of a moral earthquake," and Michel Foucault spoke of "The Great Refusal" made up of "a plurality of resistances, each of them a special case: resistances that are possible, necessary, improbable, others that are spontaneous, savage, solitary, concerted, rampant, or violent."[95] We won't find the wherewithal to tear down technology's synthetic shroud. Nor can it be found in the platforms proffered by the multitude of political, economic, medical or religious "saviors." Only we can free the world from technology. Only we can free the world from impending death. But we have to want it—firmly, passionately, and unwaveringly.

[95] As cited in K. Sale, *Rebels Against the Future: The Luddites and their War on the Industrial Revolution*

whiff of danger. Or else, as happens more and more often, they take out their frustration by doing violence to themselves or to others. In the most tragic cases, someone winds up stabbing another person for overtaking him on the road or massacring large groups of people for no apparent reason.

Moreover, as an instrument of power, technology fulfills a fundamental task in the civilized world: it substitutes the loss of power to gain something (independence) with the hope of gaining power over something (domination). In a world where individuals are increasingly unable to provide for themselves, technology shines its radiant, false light of redemption. Technology is *performance*, Ellul argued persuasively.

> What excites the crowd? Performance—whether performance in sports (the result of a certain sporting technique) or economic performance…in reality these are the same thing. Technique is the instrument of performance. What is important is to go higher and faster; the object of the performance means little. The act is sufficient unto itself. Modem man can think only in terms of figures, and the higher the figures, the greater his satisfaction.[56]

Today's world precludes human beings. We can neither express ourselves nor understand ourselves nor live on our own. Gaining fulfillment through basic, human necessities has become impossible, since in the civilized world such necessities no longer exist; they have been replaced by modern necessities, and our lives have been turned into a meaningless search for things—racing against the clock, hemmed in by laws, duped by the insubstantial mirror of tele-reality. Impotent and un-free, the individual tries to escape himself. Lost inside a discouraging, dissatisfying routine, he "learns that the airplane his fac-

[56] Ibid.

tory manufactures has flown at 700 miles an hour! All his repressed power soars into flight in that figure. Into that record speed he sublimates everything that was repressed in himself. He has gone one step further toward fusion with the mob, for it is the mob as a whole that is moved by a performance."[57]

A world invaded by technology inevitably slides in the direction of what Robert Jungk called "performance society," a society in which the only thing that counts is the expedient result, the winning outcome. "The fact that nuclear tests are still run," writes Umberto Galimberti, "when we already have a sufficient supply of bombs, ie, enough to extinguish history and the earth, shows just how deep-rooted and relentless—because beyond the limits of the absurd—the technique mentality is, as it strives toward perfection"[58] even when there is nothing left to perfect. It is the foolish will to power, systematized and self-justified. It is the foolish will to power that endlessly drives toward empowerment. Or, if you will, it is the locomotive speeding like a bullet toward the precipice with one goal in mind: to keep picking up speed. And we're the ones fueling the train.

3. Technology and Totalitarianism

> *Power, like a desolating pestilence,*
> *Pollutes whate'er it touches; and obedience*
> *Bane of all genius virtue freedom truth*
> *Makes slaves of men and of the human frame*
> *A mechanized automaton.*
> — Percy Bysshe Shelley

Having entered our lives in the guise of master, technology acts the part. She does what she pleases, orders us around and puts us to work for her own, devastating ends. Technology

[57] Ibid.
[58] Cf. U. Galimberti, *Psiche e techne*

> schooling, written records stored outside the body, and recently machines that can do some of our thinking entirely without us… Hard working intelligent machines may complete the trend.[93]

Civilization, which is the engine behind humans' occupation of the world, is also the engine of its own technodestruction. Our having "kept up" after the split between individuals and nature did not entail putting the broken shards back together again. On the contrary, it has meant progressively distancing ourselves from any chance of reconciling the two. As Butler presciently observed in the 1800s:

> Day by day…the machines are gaining ground upon us; day by day we are becoming more subservient to them; more men are daily bound down as slaves to tend them, more men are daily devoting the energies of their whole lives to the development of mechanical life…Our opinion is that war to the death should be instantly proclaimed against them…let us at once go back to the primeval condition of the race.[94]

Technology has conquered us; it has made us its servants. Our only consolation is that we don't realize what's happened to us. Even if the world today is not as technically regimented as the one in Lucas' film (or Allen's project) all we have to do is think about the gloomy predictions of Ph.D.'s like Michael Dertouzos, Eric Drexler, Neil Gershendfeld, Adam Greenfield, Kevin Kelly, Myron Krueger, and Donald Norman to understand that it is only a matter of time. If we do not stop the machine that is turning us into machines, it will ultimately rule over everything.

[93] Cf. H. Moravec, *The Universal Robot* (1991)
[94] As cited in P. Raby, *Samuel Butler: A Biography* (1991)

have nowhere to go. You cannot survive outside the shadows. We only want to help!"

Ever since eight scientists locked themselves in a glass hangar in the Arizona desert and lived for two years straight inside the "Biosphere II" (which simulated some of the earth's ecosystems—a tropical forest, a savanna, an open sea), we have inched that much closer toward creating the universe of THX 1138. John P. Allen, who designed the experiment with the idea of colonizing Mars in the future, heartily reassured those who asked him what the historical and scientific precedents for such a bizarre experiment were by saying: "The story of Biosphere 2 begins ten thousand years ago with the origins agriculture, when man first began making human-controlled ecosystems and exploited the surplus energy thus made available to create cities and develop technology."[92]

Allen's answer is as clear and compelling as Hans Moravec's assessment of the roots of technological progress. In his study on the origins of robots, Moravec writes:

> Less than 10,000 years ago the agricultural revolution made life more stable…But, paradoxically, it requires more human labor to support an agricultural society than a primitive one and the work is of a different, "unnatural" kind, out of step with the old instincts. The effort to avoid this work has resulted in domestication of animals, slavery and the industrial revolution…Our minds were evolved to store the skills and memories of a stone-age life, not the enormous complexity that has developed in the last ten thousand years. We've kept up, after a fashion, through a series of social inventions—social stratification and division of labor, memory aids like poetry and

[92] Cf. C. Kinder, *Biosphere II* (1992)

transforms us as people. On the surface, she has given us that unmistakable, "cleaned up," eco-phobic look typical of someone who has had no contact with the earth. On the inside, she has furtively shaped the structure of our thoughts, directed our regular behavior and altered our value system so that it aligns with hers. As previously mentioned, technology teaches us to think functionally, move deliberately and perceive reality as though reality were nothing but cogs and wheels. And in the meantime, it morphs nonexistent needs into supposedly vital ones on which we all concentrate our frustrated attention: the need to be precise, orderly, practical, functional and productive.

This is the kind of ideology technology teaches us to know the world by. Bureaucratic centralization, social uniformity, personal irresponsibility, acting on command, the fitful drive to be impeccably organized, hyper-regulation of all aspects of life, utilitarianism, competition and the cult of the "new"—these are our points of reference.

Bureaucratic Centralization and Social Uniformity

"Technique always supposes centralization," writes Ellul. "When I use gas, or electricity, or the telephone, it is no plain and simple mechanism which is at my disposal, but a centralized organization. A central telephonic or electrical station gives substance to the whole electric network and to every individual piece of apparatus."[59] More importantly, that centralized organization splinters off into various groups that supervise the management and spread of technology. "The idea of effecting decentralization while maintaining technical progress is purely utopian," continues Elull. "For its own centralization, technique requires interrelated economic and political centralization."[60] This centralization presupposes a clear alliance of intentions and actions going forward. From

[59] Cf. J. Ellul, *La technique ou l'enjeu du siècle*

[60] Ibid.

a centralized laboratory for testing medicine to a centralized ruling party in government, efficiency breeds uniformity, not variety—a uniformity of decision-making, a uniformity of actions, a uniformity of viewpoints. Doubts, alternatives and counter positions are mere hindrances for the speed, absolute certainty and efficiency needed to get the technological job done.

Irresponsibility

Technology tends to wipe out all personal responsibility because, wherever technology reigns, individuals are simply tasked with executing whatever the order is that they have been given. Do you think the worker who helps assemble machine guns really stops to consider how those weapons will be used in the future? Or do you think the employee of a multinational company that traffics in the sale of radioactive materials agonizes over the significance of what he does? When Colonel Paul Tibbets, the pilot of the B-29 that dropped the atom bomb on Hiroshima, was asked whether he felt he was to blame for the deaths his actions caused, he didn't miss a beat. "I was only doing my job," he said. And his words echoed the Nazi criminals who, during the Nuremberg trials, said, "I was only following orders."

In short, the "technician" is not required to ask questions; all he is supposed to do is get the job done. As Galimberti would say, in the technological world there is no right or wrong, good or evil, beautiful or ugly. There is only the obligation to perform one's duty.

Command

Precisely because of its ability to annul conscious action, technology provides the best means of engendering and developing a command mentality. Indeed, command (what David Noble calls "the quintessence of the authoritarian approach to organization"[61]) defines technology through and through.

[61] Cf. D. Noble, *Progress Without People: New Technology, Unemploy-*

it isolates us from others, obfuscates our sense of responsibility, strips us of our autonomy, depletes nature and dramatically alters our social fabric. It doesn't matter that we are forced to use technology in the modern world. What matters is that it is seen for what it is: not a salve but a poison, not a solution to our problems but the cause of them.

"What I learned is that our technology is killing us," remarks a former asbestos worker who was dying of a work-related cancer.[90] Chellis Glendinning, his interlocutor, gathered his story and many others' in *When Technology Wounds: The Human Consequences of Progress* around the time she published her essay *Notes Toward a Neo-Luddite Manifesto*. In the manifesto, Glendinning argues in no uncertain terms that "We have nothing to lose [by opposing technology] except a way of living that leads to the destruction of all life."[91] We have only to gain our world back by opposing technology.

Examining what technology may hold for us in the future—ie, a totally automatized, sterilized, performance-driven, regulated world—it's hard not to think of the aseptic and claustrophobic society George Lucas depicted in his first feature film, THX 1138. "Love is the ultimate crime," the loudspeaker drones as the citizens of that subterranean, high-tech world go about their non-lives. "By eliminating love we eliminated unhappiness," the voice continues. In a place where every vital urge is quashed, vital urges quickly become an impediment, a problem, a crime. And when THX 1138, the film's exasperated protagonist, tries to escape that world of computer-run manufacturing plants, rehabilitation centers, and bald conformity, he is immediately told he is sick. As he climbs his way out into the real world, the voice over the megaphone calls after him, "Please come back. You have nothing to be afraid of. THX 1138 you

[90] Cf. C. Glendinning, *When Technology Wounds: The Human Consequences of Progress* (1990)

[91] Cf. C. Glendinning, "Notes Toward a Neo-Luddite Manifesto" in *Utne Reader*, 38, no. 1 (March/April 1990)

might mean to your life."[89] In short: the one way of truly understanding what being digital means is to do so without being digital.

The fact is life isn't death. And the sly peddlers of the techno-world are perfectly aware of this fact. Yet in bad faith or out of self-interest they tell human beings that nature and perception are about the equivalent of a digital bit, cyberspace, videogames, or some other electronic device. A machine, however, is a machine. And the time has come to back away from these New World techno-illusionists, these digital-addicts whose sole ambition is to spread their addiction to everyone on earth. More especially, the time has come to realize that the dream of a perfectly orderly technological world governed by social engineers, swabbed clean of life, and purged of any unexpected event, is just a nightmare. Civilization is a nightmare! The only thing it has produced in ten thousand years is us, and we are just an amorphous mass of narcissists unable to give meaning to our lives.

The sooner we wake up from this excitable torpor, this—to quote Marcuse—mass euphoria in unhappiness, the sooner we can take steps to counter it. And we need to do so now, since technology, this all-consuming, unfeeling process that is turning the world into a cold and sterile place, possesses every tool necessary to monopolize the world irrevocably.

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In the disenchanted world of calculating reason, technology represents the crowning achievement for suppressing our feelings and *joie de vivre*. That is the world we must scrutinize if we want knock technology off its throne. Which is why just criticizing the futility of technology is not sufficient to immunize us from being persuaded that it is essential. Rather, we must shine a light on its full scale hazards, the suffering it causes, the way

[89] Cf. N. Negroponte, *Being Digital*

Which is to say that technology is not an aspect of command, it is command. When you press a button to turn on a machine, the machine sets about doing what it is supposed to do, without talking back, without vacillating, without disapproving or expressing reservations. Automation guarantees there will be no confrontation between those who give the command and those who respond to the command. In a single gesture, automation eliminates any intermediate phase of interpretation, criticism or opposition to the directive. The machine, which receives the command, must only perform its duty. Pushing the button activates it, and everything should begin to happen just the way whoever hit the button wanted (or else the machine will be taken in for repair or replaced).

Technology ultimately embodies a military vision of life. It drives people to model themselves on the principles of indisputable command and blind obedience. As if sucked up in a vacuum, people who live in an environment where technological thought is pervasive learn to "act on command" (or make others act on their command). "In the technological age, *acting* means *serving*,"[62] writes Galimberti. Serving machines and serving the way machines serve. Nowadays, we can already grasp the dramatic effects of this way of thinking: like machines, we no longer argue or protest, we no longer go on strike, we no longer rebel against anything or make a show of resistance.

Order and Hyper-Regulation

As the material embodiment of command logic, technology clearly perpetuates the ideology of order and strict organization. As Ellul writes, "It is contrary to the nature of technique to be compatible with anarchy in any sense of the word. When

ment, and the Message of Resistance (1995)

[62] Cf. U. Galimberti, *Psiche e techne*

milieu and action become technical, order and organization are imposed."[63]

In other words, the best functioning, most efficient performance can be obtained only through systematic coordination. The foolish race to grasp power is not something that can be left to the freewill of individuals, who may be creatively motivated. And the greater technology's foothold, the more it will give rise to the need for regulation, since its innate competitiveness leads to nothing less than the collapse of every known determinant, every traditional point of reference, every condition for stability.

Technology ultimately breaks down the "barriers" raised by nature to protect the living, and the obsessive regulation that follows represents the attempt (even if, as we can see, a totally futile one) to pursue the path of destruction and console people with the countless, toxic doohickies that technology supplies. The final result is, therefore, exactly the opposite of a free, deregulated society. "Deregulation, my foot. Minimal State, my foot," thundered Sergio Chiarloni at a recent conference in Milan on 'The Risk of Unknown Technologies.' "We now need more laws, greater legislative intervention to handle the various risks facing the contemporary world."[64]

Competition and the Cult of the "New"

"Out with the old, in with the new" is the mantra of technological progress. Like all forms of competition, the frenzy with which companies try to out-manufacture one another not only leads to personal annihilation, but also gives rise to the cult of the new, and not only in the tragic consumerist aspects of the phenomenon. The cult of the new (or "neophilia") is what Baudrillard called "the lethal illusion of perfection"[65]: or rather, that which extracts everything that is not practical, efficient,

[63] Cf. J. Ellul, *La technique ou l'enjeu du siècle*

[64] Cf. S. Chiarloni, transcript of *Il rischio da ignoto technologia*

[65] Cf. J. Baudrillard, *The Illusion of the End*

These days our faith in technology is immense and undifferentiated. It surreptitiously penetrates the *lingua franca*, the personal space of everyone who uses it. Any study against technology is immediately discredited and ridiculed. Any challenge to the overwhelming spread of technology is silenced. Any physical revolt against the oppressive order of technology is criminalized. Those who oppose the Machine World are accused of catastrophism, labeled techno-pessimists and technophobes, and eyed with suspicion. As it accustoms us to the unnatural, technology treats any dissenting voices as threats. Once again, in the civilized world siding with real life means being "out of touch with reality."

But something tells us that there are cracks in every argument and action in defense of technology, and these cracks cannot be concealed. Observing, for example, how even the most qualified supporters of technologizing life often accidentally denigrate their simulated worlds would come as a pleasant surprise were it not for the fact that their technological demagoguery had screwed up our lives so much. It's pathetic to watch them flail about, making one illogical point after another, espousing the most ridiculous contradictions. As when, in his widely translated book *Being Digital*, Negroponte (one of the most esteemed technoprophets of the day), enumerates the countless benefits of substituting real atoms with virtual bits and promises that the fact that we continue to use print matter—ie, books instead of digital devices—does not derive from the impossibility of doing otherwise, but is merely a preference for the "traditional" form. "Interactive multimedia leaves very little to the imagination," he candidly admits. "Like a Hollywood film, multimedia narrative includes such specific representations that less and less is left to the mind's eye…When you read a novel, much of the color, sound, and motion come from you. I think the same kind of personal extension is needed to feel and understand what 'being digital'

The real problem with technology does not stem from its existing in the first place— we can unmake what we have made— but from our having ceased to resist it. We place all of our trust in technology as if it were our mother, who, we're convinced, can only do right by us. The real problem, then, is not using technology, but our blind faith in it.

Sure, as we use technology our demand for it grows. Yet the world in which we live does not permit us to do otherwise. The problem, all told, is that we want more and more of it, hope it will enfranchise us and believe in it. Instead of perceiving the dangers involved with technology, we invert the terms of our relationship with it. And because the modern world would not exist without technology, we trick ourselves into thinking that it is an essential component of our lives. Technology, however, is not essential to our lives; it is only essential to the world that we have replaced nature with.

Once, during a conference on the value of human diversity, a very sharp feminist scholar made the following, disconcerting point: until just recently, every male in the civilized world considered women inferior to men. From proletariats to nobles, revolutionaries to monarchists, atheists to religious prigs, one belief united all men against women: their supposed superiority. Differences of class, wealth, political party or religious order could do nothing to break this strange alliance. Today it seems absurd to think how deeply rooted this belief once was, how one half of the human race could be entirely united against another for thousands of years, and yet…And yet such an embarrassing display of conformity has not vanished from the civilized world; it is even more diffuse in our relationship to technology. In fact, modern adherence to the world of machines not only unites highbrow and lowbrow, city folk and country folk, poor and rich, executives and interns, young and old, left wing voters and right wing voters; it unites men and women.

operational or durable. It matters little whether one is thinking of objects or subjects. In the techno-capital world, our retired fathers and our elderly mothers, our septuagenarian aunts and their husbands, our grandfathers and grandmothers are no longer seen as people, but as "old folks." People who, now that they are economically unproductive, should be shunted off somewhere, "legitimately abandoned" to the anteroom where they'll soon be pulped.

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The all-out havoc wreaked by technology is not pure happenstance: wreaking havoc is in technology's nature. The more widespread this mindset, the more the destruction of all that exists in nature will become a commonly accepted fact, written in the DNA of social life, just as pollution, commercial advertising, media propaganda, financial speculation, pornography, social control, hierarchy, obedience, bureaucracy and war are considered part of our DNA.

If one accepts technology, one must also accept everything that makes technology possible. The constant distortion of our modern lives confirms this fact. The more technology distances us from the earth, the more uncomfortable we feel in our natural state: we cut our hair, trim our beards and wax our legs; we obsessively wash, cleanse and "purify" our bodies. The same holds true for how we prepare our food—chargrilling, pasteurizing and processing food so as to kill off the tiniest microbes. As governments continue to augment the levels of refinement for our food, it has gotten to the point where, ironically enough, we believe that homemade food is unhygienic: we consume pounds of preserves, kilos of artificial coloring and industrial toxins by the ounce, and the whole time we go on thinking that genuine food—wild fruits, raw or unprocessed meats –are bad for our health…Obviously, these may seem like relatively minor concerns. Maybe they are. Yet the fact remains that the

more the technological order prevails, the more widespread this way of thinking will become, and we will end up washing our hands more often, plugging our ears every time we take a swim and putting on latex gloves to touch a stranger.

When technology is at the helm, morals become "technical"; psychology becomes "technical"; the very will that motivates all human endeavors becomes "technical." Everything turns cool, detached, disenamored. Resentment replaces sentiment; repression, passion. Life itself dissolves into a few obligations to meet. Once the heart has faded and empty TV tears have taken the place of real feeling, reason—now the supreme source of any significant action we may undertake—hardens into something absolute, indisputable and mechanical. Because technique, like science and faith, is never up for debate: it can only be overtaken by a new technique.

Technology possesses the power to determine the "truth" about everything it promotes, propagates and supports, and opinions are no exception. Determining what are acceptable levels of food contaminants, establishing the efficacy of medical drugs and health care, drawing up the legal rules for police conduct, measuring employees' competency levels and putting them into certain categories—technology silences any potential threat to its authority. If you don't believe me, all you have to do is talk about the environment with a sitting politician. His ability to steer the conversation toward technical data will be directly proportional to what he ultimately believes. Having ensured that the proper laws have been put in place, that every action has been authorized, that everything is technically in order, the party expert is able to turn a political problem concerning pollution into a technical problem. Naturally, men and women will continue to die of cancer, respiratory and autoimmune diseases. They will continue to inhale polluted air day in and day out. Their lungs will fill up with nano-particles. Yet our politician's technical arguments will still remain indisputable, even more so if they have been officially confirmed by

> table. That's what we do with the world, entirely at our pleasure.[87]

As we unlearn the life that exists outside, nature becomes more and more hostile: the earth "dirties" our shoes, silence makes us feel alone, idleness annoys us, darkness scares us more than the cancer-producing antennae just outside our door. We no longer know how to get around without motor vehicles. We don't communicate without cell phones and Internet connections. We don't know how to think without the aid of writing or audiovisuals or electronics. We lose concentration in a matter of minutes and forget everything we've just written down. Even eating has become a technological operation as we genetically modify our food or add chemical sweeteners, preservatives and food coloring to it. Nowadays we don't even talk about food. We talk about "food technology."

In the dead world of machines we too are dying. Our senses are dying: our sense of taste, touch, smell; our sense of responsibility; our empathy with others and our surroundings. When, a century ago, Oswald Spengler drew a link between technology and two other significant obsessions of the modern world, power and money, he deliberately attached an adjective to them that needs no further explanation: Faustian. And yet life is still out there, a step away from us, ready for reconciliation without our having to use artificial intermediaries, bar codes, magic wands to brandish against one another. As Laing would have it, if we manage to avoid turning ourselves into machines, and avoid treating others as if they were machines, than we might come close to what our primitive ancestors once called love.[88]

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[87] Ibid.
[88] Ibid.

> which can warn him of an imminent rarefaction of oxygen before his senses could have told him.[85]

Radar replaces his eyes; the radio amplifies his voice so that he can communicate with the control tower. He does not have to do anything other than keep an eye on the barometers, gauges, warning lights and altitude. He thinks he's piloting the machine, but the machine is piloting him.

In the words of Scottish psychiatrist Ronald Laing, we all think of ourselves as machines at the service of other "machines of our devising, upon whom we have become abjectly dependent…We've got a system in which we're being devoured by our own shit. It's using us up, and using our children up."[86] Those who live outside civilization are well aware of the devastating effects of industrial ideology.

> It's not because they're genetically inferior or on the brink of passivity, that they haven't surrounded themselves with the artifacts we have. At this moment some people are still out there, At this moment some people are still out there, with few clothes or without clothes, in the environment of the sky, the sun, the wind, and the stars. We're not. We're sitting on top of wood, on top of asphalt, on top of a cellar surrounded by bricks, with the windows plugged up, with all sorts of plumbing, with electric lights and recording devices, when there's a garden with trees outside. The sun is shining and we're not in it. We're in an office, on the cut-up wood of dead trees that we're sitting on, that we have as our

[85] Cf. J. Ellul, *La technique ou l'enjeu du siècle*

[86] Cf. R.I. Evans - R.D. Laing, *Dialogue with R.D. Laing* (1981)

the thousands of federal institutions in charge of furnishing such comforting data (such as the EPA, the NHS, the World Health Organization).

That which is considered technically perfect is only ever up for technical arguments. Landfills contaminate the planet? Who says? Nuclear plants emit toxins in the air? Whose idea is that? Biogenetics could change peoples' immune systems? As long as no geneticist from the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) raises an objection, every opinion at variance with the official line is considered arbitrary.

To borrow Plato's term, politics is the "royal art" (*basilike techne*) governing all other techniques to pacify society by force. Given that politics is the art of fine speeches and coercion that seeks to hold together everything that was never meant to be together (ie, corralling different individuals into a single social system) technology lends an air of the scientific to the process of collective homogenization. Yet it adds another facet: it conceals the enslavement of its consignees. In fact, to the extent that politically organized social cohesion is always forced cohesion (politics, as we know, needs to enforce the law in order to function) technology succeeds in making what is obligatory look voluntary. Technology, in short, is the art of using science, numbers, the power of speech and rational thought in order to standardize feelings, passions and opinions, propping up a society founded on artificial, yet seemingly unforced, cohesion. In this regard, Aldous Huxley appears to have had greater foresight than George Orwell. Through technology, people adopt the industrial ideology naturally— they are not strong-armed. Technology is no longer that big screen hanging over the citizens of the world, spying into their affairs and bullying them into obedience (as Orwell's Big Brother does). Rather, it is an identical screen that we ourselves desire, that we ourselves buy so as to be monitored more closely, and that we ourselves replace with

newer and more efficient devices as soon as the technology we possess appears to be outmoded.

And that's not all. As it seduces us into believing in constant progress, technology makes us complicit in its meddling, invasive, dangerous behavior, therefore preventing us from laying any blame at its doorstep, since that would mean contradicting our own routine behavior. Today we all participate in the kinds of exploitation brought about by technology. By using a computer, we contribute to the enslavement of silicon and coltan miners. By flying, we contribute to air pollution. By purchasing a cellphone, we support multinational companies that traffic in military weaponry. We all participate in the exploitation of the techno-capital world, which is precisely why we often find ourselves justifying it.

Ever since the first farmer was seduced by the plow, people have been at the mercy of technology and the world it nurtures. It infiltrates the dynamics of peoples' lives so deeply that they cannot resist it (unless they resist it in its entirety). There is no such thing as halfway; mediation isn't possible. The more technology is within people's reach, the more it becomes a tool that everyone seems to need (or at least a tool that is harder and harder to avoid, seeing as just about everyone uses it in one way or another). We have to legitimate the lifestyle that technology has forced upon us, because it is the only one made available to us. The unilateral, exploitative, hierarchical structure of this world remains unaltered, and our enemy becomes our kin. When all is said and done, technology pushes everyone to worship technology.

It is a fact, for example, that immersion in electronic reality has become increasingly diffuse, and new fans and followers flock to the web every day. According to sociologists, psychologists and other social rescue workers, the market of multimedia gadgets is in continuous flux, more and more people seek refuge in them, the way they seek refuge in the Internet, in the worlds of MUD, Second Life and SimCity. So happy are we

Technology, said Umberto Galimberti—like Fromm before him, and Ellul before Fromm—is not all about objects that provide more or less useful services. Rather, it is an out-and-out "environment," a mental and material space in which everything is redefined and artificially reconstructed. Today's human being "lives in cities, not the woods, surrounded by automobiles, not beasts,"[84] breathing in air conditioning, not air.

The ideology of the machine will not stop at a dead world, it wants people dead too. Under her watch, we're supposed to see appliances, computers, contraptions and robots as vital objects. Not nature, not living creatures, but machines. We're supposed to see through the eyes of machines—camcorders, microscopes, infrared telescopes; reason with the mind of machines—the cult of rational logic, facts and unambiguous binary thinking; and spend most of our time interacting via machines—whether at work or leisure, whether with others or the world. In other words, we are supposed to learn to not see, not think, not live. This is precisely the process Fromm had in mind when he compared the cult of technology to the cult of the dead: technophilia to necrophilia.

Our worship of the un-alive, therefore, involves everyone, not just techno fanatics. We all believe that life is inevitably a deployment of strict, perfectly organized procedures. We may return to Ellul's example of the pilot to reveal the extremity of such a philosophy:

> The pilot of the supersonic aircraft at its maximum velocity becomes, in a sense, completely one with his machine. But immobilized in a network of tubes and ducts, he is deaf, blind and impotent. His senses have been replaced by dials which inform him what is taking place. Built into his helmet, for example, is an electroencephalographic apparatus

[84] Ibid.

us suffer, to the point where we feel incapable of even thinking of living without it. Given such a situation, one clearly understands how technology proves far more than just insidious. One also begins to understand why the troubling invasion of technology makes it all the more necessary to break free of it.

5. Necrophilia and Technology: the Dead World of Civilization

> *[T]echnology may well serve as adequate shorthand to designate that enormous properly human and anti-natural power of dead human labor stored up in our machinery — an alienated power…which turns back on and against us in unrecognizable forms and seems to constitute the massive dystopian horizon of our collective as well as our individual praxis.*
> — Frederic Jameson

Whenever we think of technology, we cannot help but think of the automatic. Technical objects chug forward on their own: washing, drying, blending, chopping, sawing, kneading, writing, speaking, calculating without human intervention (besides assembling them and hitting the switch). Again, automation renders humans superfluous, obsolete. One of the limitations of technology, admitted Karl Jaspers, "is its being confined to the inanimate. The intelligence that dominates technical manufacturing is only applied to the inanimate and the mechanical, in the broadest sense of the word. Therefore technology can only deal with a living organism *by treating it as if it were lifeless.*"[83] Is that not the state of affairs in today's world?

[83] Cf. K. Jaspers, *Vom Ursprung und Ziel der Geschichte* (1959)

in our urban centers that we wander around imaginary cities. So happy are we in our state of sedentary productivity that we seek out fake electronic explorations and simulated adventures in cyberspace. And what do we have to say for ourselves? We are so satisfied with the possibility of expressing ourselves that even our own personalities have begun to feel confining, and we construct/deconstruct an avatar to our liking.

So, while the ideology of industry puts us at a further remove from what's real, it also bewitches us by opening up an escape route: the web, electronic games, multimedia distractions. Like every other form of consolation, technology doesn't oppose our detachment from reality; on the contrary, it fosters it, perpetuates it, makes it more effective by offering us imaginary alternatives. Just as art acts as a substitute for real feeling to satiate an otherwise unfulfilled humanity, technology also functions as a diversion or palliative, giving us that "breath of relief" so that it can continue to suffocate us. Once the videogame is over, the phone connection lost, the computer turned off, we are returned to the oppressive, daily grind that has become "real life."

Michel Maffesoli speaks of "an ethics of aesthetics"[66] to describe how, in an era of technology, the various sectors toward which civilized life is directed have become more "artistic" and therefore more palatable. From political campaigns on the web to interactive media; from 3D advertising to electronic surveillance; from patenting lives to multinational free enterprise to "creative" finance. Aesthetics, says Maffesoli, has contaminated politics, business, communications, consumerism and daily life, as though it had diffracted all of existence. Every pursuit, he argues, attempts to become an expression of creativity and aesthetics. Art, says Derrick De Kerchkove (the intellectual heir to Marshall McLuhan) is the best vehicle to make individuals

[66] Cf. M. Maffesoli, "The Ethic of Aesthetics" in *Theory, Culture & Society* Vol. 8 (1991)

adapt to the cultural program. In fact, it constantly mediates between technology (innovation) and psychology (adaptation to innovation) and functions in such a way as "to revise the standard psychological interpretation of reality in a way that accommodates the consequences of technological innovations."[67]

Thanks to art, the technological world has become artistic. The power of aesthetic representation turns surface appearances, fictions and masks into the ontological matrix of postmodernity, drawing a happy face on the real malaise of humanity. And the more technology invades our daily lives, the more we will find ourselves living in a virtual world stripped of any genuineness, steeped in simulation. As Paul Virilio states, the past century (and, one could add, our present century) "has not been the century of the 'image', as is often claimed, but of optics—and, in particular, of the *optical illusion*."[68]

To the logic of pure mass consumerism has been added the logic of mass aestheticization (as Paolo Dell'Aquila calls it[69]) which transforms life itself into one big stage populated with actors and extras. Pierre Lévy, the philosopher of the noosphere, has grasped the crux of the matter: "For better or worse, we must become the artists of our lives."[70] Which is to say what we must learn to accept, whether we like it or not, is that the one life we can lead in the high-tech universe is to transform life into an aesthetic fix, a décor, a stage piece.

"We live in an enormous novel," wrote Ballard in 1974, alluding to the process of aestheticizing life that had grown out of postmodern society.[71] Observing the same process fascism put into practice with regards to power, as early as 1930 Walter

[67] Cf. D. De Kerckhove, *Connected Intelligence: the Arrival of the Web Society* (1998)

[68] Cf. P. Virilio, *The Information Bomb*

[69] Cf. P. Dell'Aquila, *Tribù telematiche*

[70] Cf. P. Lévy, *World philosophie. La Planate, le marche, le cyberspace, la conscience* (2000)

[71] Cf. J.G. Ballard, *Crash* (1973)

ing rush hour. Most of all, you needed to pay constant attention so you could quickly figure out if there was a traffic jam due to some mishap or roadblock. Learning how to do this job was very hard, but, if you applied yourself, after a few months you could perform it well. Now we have satellite navigation systems. In that cold robot voice, it tells you which way to go. All of my younger colleagues love it. Now you can learn how to drive a taxi no problem. But in the meantime, while these guys drool over their electronic gadgets, over the voice guiding them, over the high-definition screen, they don't realize that if you don't apply yourself a little, you won't learn anything."

This kind of judgment may strike some as being shortsighted or ignorant of the full potential of technological evolution. Pretty soon, the new breed of taxi drivers will be proven right, and we will have computers on board connected to a switchboard system that can give them updates on traffic, tell them the fastest route to get to their destination and guide them through the streets so they can avoid traffic jams, construction delays, parades and detours. No one will have to apply him or herself personally.

And yet, even providing this, the old taxi driver's concerns are still valid. In fact, the more we stop relying on human skills to respond to real life situations and replace them with new technologies, the more such skills fray, and we resign ourselves to the power of machines. Our ability to function will never grow but our dependency on the technological system will. In this sense, if a simple GPS hampers our ability to learn how to become a taxi driver today, then tomorrow's autopilot will make us totally incapable of driving (without switching to autopilot).

As we grovel before the illusory dreams of a more comfy life, in reality technology teaches us to accept an ever more harried, toilsome, stressful, superficial, wasteful, toxic, and inhuman existence. Not only has it not freed us from having to work hard, but it has forced us to adapt to a system that makes

risky to stop archiving printed records altogether. The moral of the story, then, is that once upon a time we only needed to organize paper files and now, thanks to technology, the job has doubled.

If technology rids us of anything, it's not work but rather the desire to live happily, vigorously and responsibly. We should really take our cue from children, who revel in life's adventures and misadventures. Seeing a playmate hoist himself up a tree, no child would ever imagine building an elevator in order to reach his friend; the child would want to learn how to climb the tree too, and he wouldn't be thwarted by any tumbles and scrapes that might occur in the process of learning.

By studying the world of children we can get a better understanding of what it is we are losing with technology. Children are never naturally drawn to inaction and passivity. They never stop using their bodies so that they can sit still in front of the television, computer or with a book in their lap. By their very nature children want to learn to fend for themselves. Generally speaking, they take little interest in dolls that cry when you push a button or cars that move with remote controls or boxes that talk back. If anything, they prefer a cardboard box that they can customize, a length of cloth that will turn them into fairies, ghosts, knights or magicians.

We have twisted the meaning of comfort, and what we hope to achieve through the cult of inaction is exactly the opposite of what we need to live well, ie, not technology but the full recovery of what it means to be human.

Once, a veteran taxi driver was asked to comment on his younger colleagues who had begun to use satellite navigation systems to do their job. "In my time," said the old public transport driver, "it was very hard to learn how to do this job well. There were thousands of streets to learn by heart, thousands of shortcuts to get to key parts of the city quickly, thousands of addresses to reach avoiding traffic lights and congestion dur-

Benjamin intuited all that would come to pass. Concluding his famous essay, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, he writes, "[Humanity's] self-alienation has reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order."[72] That same "aesthetic pleasure" of destruction we experience today as we escape to our cybernetic, interactive games. Even a self-described "nethead" like J.C. Herz[73] acknowledges that virtual reality serves a purely distracting (not liberating) purpose, and suggests not believing in the false promises of emancipation that the industry of simulation advertises in its sales package. Instead, it is only the most evolved form of paddling away from real life and toward the aesthetic waves of tele-absentia.

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Technology has always been an essential component for government agendas around the world. It makes it possible for governments to better control their subjects while marginalizing anyone who does not toe the line, and has a tendency to strip people of their innate abilities while pretending to expand their imaginations. These facets of technology have enabled it to spread to every corner of the earth, adapt to all political ideologies, fly any flag. Real socialist parties, capitalist governments, military dictatorships, constitutional monarchies, confessional regimes, parliamentary democracies—has there ever been a structure of society that technology has had trouble inserting itself into? Stalin and Mao Zedong considered technological industrialization the primary condition for establishing a communist state. Hitler was infatuated with the absolute power of technology. Western capitalist thought is based on the idea that technology leads to progress, and progress has al-

[72] Cf. W. Benjamin, *Illuminations* (1968)

[73] See J.C. Herz, *Surfing on the Internet: A Nethead's Adventures On-Line* (1995)

ways kindled the hopes of the middle class. Even the seven religions of our time are perfectly aware that they need technology in order to retain power over their constituents (from the Vatican to Jewish religious organizations; from institutional Buddhist factions to Islamic confessional regimes).

When any of the fiercest critics of the civilized world attempts to define technology in relation to its effects on the human condition, he or she inevitably finds a link to totalitarianism. Günther Anders, Driencourt, Ellul, Friedrich Jünger, Louart, Mander, Marcuse, Munson, Postman, Virilio, and Zerzan have all voiced this belief repeatedly in their own way, even if their voices have been drowned out by the propagandistic screaming matches typical of the technological world. Similarly, Adorno and Horkheimer defined technical-scientific thought as totalitarian, and Georges Friedmann, the leading expert on industrial sociology and the history of labor, could not refrain from declaring that "technical civilization, because of the prodigious means of diffusion it has at its disposal, is, in this sense, totalitarian."[74]

Thinkers like Martin Heidegger, Umberto Galimberti, Siegfried Giedion and Emanuele Severino have stressed technology's ability to reduce the individual (and the world) to a mere instrument, a mechanism of the Mega-machine. Others, like Jean Baudrillard, have on the other hand underscored technology's power to annihilate, to make reality disappear ("derealization") and replace it with a seductive illusion called simulation (representation, make-believe, virtual reality). Both prospects hardly seem to contradict one another, and a synthesis of both validate the assertion that technology is a totalitarian phenomenon, a phenomenon that ensnares, degrades and dissolves the real world.

Even an avowed technophile such as Donald Norman, the former Vice President of the Advanced Technology Group at

[74] As cited in F. Ferrarotti, *Time, Memory and Society* (1990)

physical exertion altogether. In her essay "Women and the Assessment of Technology," Corlann Gee Bush takes laundry machines as one example of how technology has actually multiplied our daily tasks. We spend hours every day selecting cycles, washing, drying, folding, and ironing our clothes, says Bush. Laundry machines may have freed women from the laborious tasks of washing clothes by hand, yet as technology has changed our method of washing, so has the nature of what we wear and how we wear it. We wind up buying more clothes—peek into your closet—and the standards of cleanliness have increased. Because we change clothes more often, we have more clothes to wash. In an article in *Scientific American*, Joann Vanek pointed out that American women spent more time doing household chores in 1966 than they did in 1926.[82] Not to mention the fact that washing was once a group activity. Even if one that consisted of hard work, it was still a chance for human contact, unlike today, when it has become a daily pain done alone in a dark closet.

Naturally, given that there is no other solution, we must resign ourselves to every "inconvenience," large and small, that technology has to offer, every extra task it puts in front of us, every novel burden it piles on our plate. Can medical screenings save our lives? What about when they interrupt them, as when they spot a fetal deformity that is later revealed to not exist? These kinds of misdiagnoses are called false positives, and every diagnostic test has a percentage of false positives. Which begs the question: do medical diagnostic tests really simplify life, helping us understand what's going on, or do they complicate life, given the fact that their results might be wrong? A while back, when an employee at a local public records office was asked why he had to keep both electronic and paper records, the employee replied that the electronic files were too

[82] Cf. C. G. Bush, "Women and the Assessment of Technology" in A. Teich, *Technology and the Future* (2002)

Our ancestors did not depend on central heating, paved roads, running water, or knick-knacks with which to decorate their homes. They did not depend on everything's being perfectly tidy and functional. They did not perceive our ability to physically exert ourselves as a "problem." On the contrary, they were convinced that human abilities (our ability to move, think, remember and feel) were qualities and boons. Walking for miles to reach a clearing and gather roots and berries was not looked upon as work but as a natural fact of life, as was lifting heavy weights, climbing trees or traveling to collect water.

We think we've put the uncomfortable, difficult labors of our ancestors behind us, but that's not the case. Proud as we are, we fail to realize that encumbrances still represent a large part of our sad civilized existence. It is just that, taken out of their context, deprived of their meaning and piled onto the thousands of other impossible compliances of this sterile universe, these activities have morphed into something they originally were not: uncomfortable and exhausting tasks. We marvel at how technology carries water to our sinks, yet meanwhile that water has become undrinkable thanks to the toxic residue produced by the modern world. All we have done is substitute clean water with manufactured water that we purchase by the bottle. And in order to taste of that branded, imitation drink in plastic containers, we have to walk out of our house, get in our car, drive to the nearest supermarket, lose our cool while looking for a parking place, hurriedly push our shopping cart into the store, wander the maze of aisles, fill up the cart, wait patiently another half hour in the checkout line, pay the cashier, pack the car to the gills, return home, passing through streets jammed with all the other supermarket shoppers and walk up the stairs carrying our bags filled with that precious liquid which, in a couple of days, will have to be refilled again by the same, exasperating process.

Even if comfort does mean the elimination of toil, we can be sure that technology has not succeeded in wiping out

Apple Computers, was forced to admit that technology is oftentimes intrusive and irritating, and conditions people. He has even spoken openly about a real "tyranny of technology."[75] All we have to do is focus our attention on the prodigious powers of the industrial system to get an idea of the sharp rise in technological subjugation: millions upon millions of individuals around the world have been corralled into cities and are governed by bosses, work psychologists and local authorities, lured by the opportunity to make money doing servile, salaried work. Inhuman conditions for an inexistent humanity, trudging forward nonetheless, head down, shoulders stooped.

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Bruce Sterling, a cyber-celebrity, observed that in the 4th century B.C. a general by the name of Sun Tzu (Sunzi) was living in China. The general wrote a treatise on military strategy, *The Art of War*, which, besides being a training text for the United States army, has been used in other "paramilitary" operations—economic competition first and foremost. Essentially, Sun Tzu believed that "the apex of military skill is not a hundred victories in a hundred battles. It's subduing the enemy in such a thorough, silent way that it involves no war. The enemy of Sun Tzu probably doesn't even recognize that Sun Tzu is the enemy. Very likely he considers Sun Tzu a harmless, bumbling, likable figure who needs to be indulged."[76] Passing for a loyal friend (and not only a harmless, irrelevant person) is the lesson technology has taken away from Sun Tzu.

By blindly trusting technology, we have in fact wound up losing sight of the real danger it presents, and now mistake it for an omniscient ally. We no longer see how everything around us is changing and how we ourselves are being changed, including our way of being part of a community. Not

[75] Cf. D.A. Norman, *The Invisible Computer* (1999)

[76] Cf. B. Sterling, *Tomorrow Now: Envisioning the Next Fifty Years* (2003)

too long ago, for example, waiting at a bus stop or going up an elevator were moments in which it was possible to exchange a few words with people; now, clutching our multicolored phones, we no longer have anything to say to the person next to us. This kind of social ineptitude will continue to spread in the civilized world, because we will be increasingly confined to interacting with machines more than people. We are already learning to substitute the pleasure of going to a café for the chilly reception at the coffee dispenser. We are already forced to talk to automatic telephone operators that cannot address our questions unless we press 0. Like it or not, we have already formed major relationships with ticket machines, photo ID booths and parking meters; with pre-recorded voices that wish us a good day or safe travels or happy holiday.

Mute and isolated, we are losing what it means to live together. And in this antiseptic condition even the warmth of another person can be easily replaced by an electronic switchboard connecting us to new "friends." Whatever is not artificial, mechanical or automated is becoming incomprehensible, insignificant and distant, to the point where we confuse tweeting with engaging in personal relationships; where we swap explosive, ludic play for paralytic, doctrinaire, mind-numbing videogame fare; where we seriously believe we can make love on a computer…

Technology tyrannizes us every step we take and claims it's in our best interest. The one option left us is to follow its orders. The civilized world is ballasted by technology and therefore sings its praises. Without mincing words, Noble summed it up thusly: "There is a war on, but only one side is armed: this is the essence of the technology question today.[77]

[77] Cf. D. Noble, *Progress Without People: In Defense of Luddism* (1993)

Ironically commenting on the paralyzing habits created by a machine-run world, the Brazilian sociologist Gilberto Freyre called modern society a "seated society."[81] A sedentariness, moreover, that reflects a general stasis in greater and greater contrast with our natural proclivity to be active, sentient, mobile beings.

As far as meeting our own nutritional needs is concerned, inertia has proved to be a suicidal option. Mention has been made of how mobility constitutes a fundamental strategy to guarantee every individual (and the community he or she lives in) the best means for procuring food. Mention has also been made of how immobility (first created by farming societies) has made us increasingly dependent and driven us to progressively abandon our understanding of the environment, leaving us impotent and incapable of providing for ourselves. We who depend almost exclusively on industrial junk food know just how much civilization has enslaved us to economic, technoscientific, cultural and political forces. In terms of subsistence, one fact remains incontrovertible: we are not mollusks, trees or amoebae; we cannot open our mouths and expect food to just fall in. Acting like mollusks, trees or amoebae goes against our very nature, with consequences that are, unfortunately, well known to us already (physical and mental health risks, material dependence and the negative effect on how we interact—or don't—with our social environment).

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If we take a good look at reality, the myth that technology engenders a society without hardship turns out to be smoke and mirrors. Like all myths, it obstructs our ability to observe and understand the world without an intermediary. In this case, it obscures our vision of another kind of comfort, one far different from killing off activity and responsibility.

[81] As cited in A. Chiomento, *Vaccinare, perché?*

dies, "We demand everything and wind up living an excessively sedentary life," observed Armido Chiomento, former president of the Italian Naturist Federation. "Movement is life," he continues, and a good method for "preventing diseases requires physical and mental activities that involve ways of thinking and behaving that are at variance with today's lifestyle."[79]

Observing the biological development of humans, Linda Hasselstrom makes an insightful contribution to our understanding of the power of wear and tear that the "myth" of comfort rejects:

> We take a body with a hunter/fighter history, prop it upright for eight hours while the fingers lightly punch buttons, then seat it in a car where moderate foot pressure and a few arm movements take it home. Once it's home it slumps down on a cushy surface and aims its eyes at a lighted screen for two to six hours, then lies down on another soft surface until it's time to get up and do it all again. No wonder we're sick.[80]

In fact, given how this world bars us from moving our bodies, we are forced to turn to artificial physical activities, spending most of the little free time we have in one of the myriad gyms dotting this landscape of the living-dead. Aerobics, stationary bikes, water workouts, as well as home fitness programs, simulated rowing machines, ellipticals for housemoms and housedads, vibrating springboards, electronic treadmills, steppers and ministeppers— these contraptions prove how unhealthy our technology-saturated lifestyle is, and point to both the unnaturalness and addictiveness that lifestyle promotes.

[79] Cf. A. Chiomento, *Vaccinare, perché?* (1991)

[80] As cited in B. Cooney, *Posthumanity: Thinking Philosophically about the Future* (2004)

4. Cold Comfort: A Critique of Modern Comforts

> *Some of us are convinced that machines have 'freed' us, at least provisorily, in terms of time: machines "buy" us time, "save" us time. Terrific. However this is not always a good thing. When you're on your way to the gallows, walking as slowly as possible is probably the best way to go.*
> — George Bernanos

A discussion of technology entails a discussion of another commonplace that makes technology appear, at first glance, desirable—comfort. That technology can guarantee its users a more comfortable (and pleasant) existence seems irrefutable. We all know that remote controls relieve us from the hard work of having to get up off the sofa and change the channel; that dishwashers eliminate our having to scrub dishes by hand; and digital planners save us from having to remember our appointments. From this standpoint, technology looks like a crutch that we cannot possibly get around without. And yet, precisely because it appears so irreplaceable, technology leaves little room for us to reflect on the meaning of our growing need for such crutches. It contributes, that is, to reinforcing in us the need for a world that is completely free of work and toil; but no one ever said such a prospect equals a satisfying life.

The idea of being waited on hand and foot, of not having to move a muscle to get what we want, of realizing our dreams without applying ourselves in the least—these are the dominant aspirations of most civilized individuals. And yet, if comfort really means not having to be personally engaged or physically active, then why do we prefer living with the full capacity of our energies to a life deprived, for example, of the use of our arms and legs?

When the American actor Christopher Reeve—famous for playing Superman— was completely paralyzed after falling off a horse in 1995, no one ever envied him. Everyone believed what had happened was a tragedy. And no doubt it was! That is because, despite constant assurances to the contrary, our natural animal instincts are fulfilled when we exert ourselves fully and take personal responsibility. They are fulfilled when we provide for ourselves and our loved ones; when we walk, run, dance; when we use our eyes, ears, noses, mouths, brains; when we roam around our habitat; when we fall down and get back up; when we establish relationships and connections with others; when we experience—even at the price of sweat and tears—the consequences of such activities, since we take pleasure in experiencing things for ourselves.

The idea that feeling well means vegetating in a seemingly half-dead state and letting technology take care of us is a perversion that the modern, enervating world has injected into our willpower. This way, we quickly lose any propensity to commit ourselves personally or take responsibility for our actions. Doing wrong is never an error in the civilized world but a fault; not succeeding in something is never just a stage along the journey but a failure. Hooked on the amenities of modernity, stripped of any skills we may have had, scared of the world, we give up the ability to build a life of our own. And once this condition of essential ineptitude sets in, we are easily drawn to the readymade solutions that the world of production and consumerism is selling.

Add to that the frenzy and anxiety of the modern world, and it becomes immediately clear how each of us ends up dreaming of an end to the agony. After being obliged to engage one's entire "self" in tabulating gains and losses for a company, or scanning for defective parts on a conveyor belt for eight hours a day, it comes as no surprise that, the minute we have a little free time, all we want to do is not think about anything, not decide anything, not move an inch. Technology simply indulges

this *degeneration* by offering us the possibility of dreaming in front of a screen or gorging on fatty foods without having to lift a finger. What is industrial food anyway if not the end result of a process that tends to eliminate any and all desire to procure our own sustenance? What is a computer if not a medium that hinders us from using our senses?

Technology teaches us to mistake *comfort* for *inaction*, and it especially teaches us to define the latter as if it were the former. Technology does not make our lives more comfortable; it simply propels us toward a universe of personal inactivity. Parodying the technological dream of a life of absolute inertia, the creator of "The Simpsons" Matt Gröening has caricatured this perversion in the person of Homer Simpson. Homer's aspirations of spending his life in bed sucking beer from a gigantic straw without exerting any energy whatsoever, pokes fun at the quintessential modern attitude while also condemning—irreverently and derisively—the ferocious process of de-humanization currently assailing us. The fact that the image of Homer on his "bed of desires" makes us laugh should be taken as a sign that we will not find meaning of our lives in inaction. On the contrary, it is a sign that inaction is simply ridiculous.

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Life is activity, not passivity. In the words of Jacques Ellul, "Everything alive chooses of itself its attitudes, orientations, gestures, and rhythms."[78] Only the dead have no such choice. So, coveting inaction means coveting death rather than life. Immobility, moreover, is reserved for the dead. Nowadays it is common knowledge that immobility poses one of the greatest risks to people's health. From a physical standpoint—to say nothing of its deleterious psychological and ecological effects—immobility can cause disease. In the world of high-tech reme-

[78] Cf. J. Ellul, *La technique ou l'enjeu du siècle*