

# WILD *resistance*

*A Journal of Primal Anarchy*



No 6

# WILD

## *Resistance*

*A Journal of Primal Anarchy*

Our world is burning, both figuratively and literally.

Civilizations come and civilizations go. The world as it is faces a problem as old as historic time, but we face a scale that is unprecedented. Catastrophic loss, cataclysmic shifts, endemic cascades; in the midsts of it all is a world of mounting turmoil and nativist drum-pounding against a rising sea and a flood of forced migrations. It becomes wars, it becomes feasts for the few, famine for the many—all lost on distracted faces lit by glowing screens.

We are broken, yet we are still searching. The narratives we are sold tell us that our future lies in the machines. We are told that our world will get better, that it has been improved. Facing a full-on collision with the reality of a burning world, we look away and hit the gas.

This is far from the primal anarchy that is lived out by nomadic hunter-gatherers—the way of life built by millions of years of evolution. A life enmeshed in a wild world: a wild world that still exists and still struggles to outlive the cosmic blip that civilization will soon become. As civilization continues to fail us, as individuals and as communities, this is a struggle our bodies yearn for too.

A wild world is closer than you think, but it isn't going to wait.

Better to be the iceberg than the ship.

# *Wild Resistance*

No 6, Winter 2019

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# Opening Editorial: Kevin Tucker

I've opened nearly all of the previous five issues of this journal with an unintentional, yet persistent theme: our world, the world that civilization has created and recreated, is shifting.

Politically, socially, ecologically: not only is the climate shifting towards instability and unpredictability, social and political climates are as well. It is no longer a question about whether or not we are off the rails, but how far off we are and what damage will be done in the crash. The events of our world seem to unfold in the chaotic outpouring of feedback loops created by the real time updates fed into devices that are meant to keep our attention. Devices meant to keep us from looking up.

If you feel doomed, that's the point. It always has been. Technology has just made it a whole lot easier for programmers to keep you looking down at a world of content, a place where the Inversion point has been crossed: where the content created by bots becomes indecipherable from that created by flesh-and-blood "users." We become so accustomed to interacting with machines that we become enmeshed in their patterns.

So if you feel exhausted and overwhelmed, that's both form and function. That's the point.

That's why in an era of unprecedented catastrophe, nativist drum-pounding, fascist sentiments, and xenophobic fear mongering are on the rise. Walls have two sides. That's why the first and last cities will spend their final days fixating on them: if you feel the cage brings safety, then you overlook that the reality is they confine.

Like technology, walls are meant to pattern behavior: to acclimate us to an ordered world, psychologically, if not physically. They are barriers both to movement and to thought. As the world is simultaneously burning and oversaturated in the midst of flooding and droughts, we stop thinking about the one thing that has always worked for us, as a species: movement.

Our world is changing, but this time it is changing because of us. Because of civilization. There are precedents for this situation, but not on this scale. We will see, sooner than we might be able to anticipate, where this all ends, but even now the direction is clear.

It turns out that those now-departed rails too were just another kind of wall.

They are another way to pattern our thinking and perception. For thousands of years, we've been lulled into the idea of Progress, the notion that we are improving upon our primordial state. And thousands of years later, we're all still born the same hunter-gatherers.

Our situation has changed, but only so long as we are able to maintain it. Until social networks hooked us on a continuous drip of The Feed, Progress was always the trajectory: A Brave New World, A Better You. While we should be bracing for impact, we no longer have to look towards the Future, but get lost in the perpetual waves of input and data. Walls become a landmark in a world that is increasingly unfamiliar.

Even while distracted, our presence is profound. Meanwhile, its accumulated residue compounds.

Yet in the middle of all of this, there are still places where an American missionary can wash ashore to preach civilization. Such was the case for John Chau on November 17, 2018, after landing on North Sentinel Island in the Bay of Bengal for a second time. He met an end that all of recorded history could have predicted when the Sentinelese—the Indigenous occupants of the island—killed him on the beach. They have seen the crash course we've created for ourselves, literally had its wreckages beach on their island, and defended themselves from the intrusion.

There are still enclaves, places beyond the frontier, cracks in the veneer: places where life is far from untouched by the impacts of civilization, yet they remain, resolute in their persistence.

Wild. Resistant.

I've spent the past few years digging deep into the impact of missionaries and other frontier agents of civilization's innate expansion.

It enrages. The intersection of a living world, a place where history is lived, the snapshots we have of both past and present are of the miserable—the only people who would need to seek salvation—with truly free people, while preaching the virtues of service, of poverty. It just exposes the depravity of civilization in its worst form.

In light of that, putting one pin or a dozen in a missionary's ability to preach ignites a kind of insurgent joy. It's a reminder that this living world still has fight in it. But the reality is that there is nothing to celebrate here. Civilization is an unsustainable parasite that has continually found ways to artificially preserve itself, day-by-day, often hour-by-hour.

The pathogen that is John Chau's rotting corpse on the beaches of North Sentinel Island are a problem that the hunting and gathering Sentinelese should have never had to deal with. It is a contagion that civilization should have never produced.

The reality of this world, our world, is that resistance isn't our natural state: *wildness* is.

This is an entirely fabricated situation. A reality that we were born into, but help recreate and breathe life back into, bit-by-bit, on a daily basis. And for what? For sea turtles older than the American Empire to choke to death on plastic? So the largest mammals on earth—blue whales—can have their brains crushed by subsonic blasts used to try to find just a bit more oil to leech? So children fleeing endemic climate change and its ensuing chaos can die alone in refugee camps or, more aptly, detention centers?

What is it that we are after? By every measure, the more Progress seems to yield its results, the worse the society becomes. Paranoid isolationism fed and fostered by an increasingly mechanized world and decided by algorithms: is that it? That is where we are headed, if we bothered to look up at all.

In most cases of missionaries meeting their logical end—martyrdom, as they like to call it—the end result is a bolstering of the base: donations flood in, the miserable take up the distraction so they can share the Good News instead of wonder why it has fallen so flat in their own lives. No doubt, that is happening, but it seemingly hasn't been the predominant reaction.

But even here, Chau becomes the pariah, the abnormality.

He is anything but.

In terms of the history and on-going practices of civilizations, missionaries remain not only active, but a predominant form of frontier path-blazers. Chau, in this regard, is one of *many*. Not only that,

he is just one form amongst waves of colonization, each clamoring for another bit of a wild world to feed into our starving Leviathan.

Chau is easy to isolate because the threat he posed was direct. Just like those before him and, sadly, just like those that will follow. Neither Chau nor those like him exist in isolation, just as the Sentinelese do not. Beyond Chau is the culture that produced him, the civilization that we all inhabit.

The threat that we pose, both to the Sentinelese and to the Island and its ecology, can be obscured enough to be considered, at best, indirect. Yet the persistent threat here, just as it is the world over, is that our resource-devouring, carbon-spewing pit of overflowing toxicity bleeds out into that wild world. Whatever walls we build on land or in our minds are still tethered to this living world.

And it is suffocating.

Chau can be consumed in the headlines, even if momentarily, because he becomes our martyr. Not for God, but for civilization. For our sins, he is gone. Not that I'll miss him, good riddance I say. But he becomes the sacrificial lamb: the offering to obscure the impact that civilization, as a whole, threatens upon this island, upon these people, upon the entirety of life itself.

In the limbo between allegory and literal truth, Chau is like a pipeline.

I keep coming back to a quote from Madhusree Mukerjee, whom I had the privilege of interviewing for this issue. It comes from her closing thought in a *Scientific American* post regarding the death of Chau:

*What can I, a representative of a civilization that, within the span of a few hundred years, has destabilized the biosphere of an entire planet, have to offer to a people who have thrived since the dawn of humankind on these tiny islands? Is it we who have something to teach the Sentinelese, or they us?*

We become spectators. It makes sense, path of least resistance and all that. But where does this leave us? Civilization, this thing that threatens our lives and our home, is the anomaly. In geological time, all of the plastic and toxic residue that we have created will eventually be overtaken by a feral world, robbed of all we have taken from it. If it were to incidentally be stumbled upon, it won't be more than a blip.

Maybe glitch is the better word.

All the walls that we have built, the ones that have and will be

built, they'll all be gone too. Absorbed back to the tortured lands they were extracted from and imposed over. Artifacts for a future world that won't be interested in remembering them, but will still bear the scars.

Without the hindsight of all the walls and rails that we've accepted as patterns and barriers in our lives, it will only be harder to justify our complicity. Here, we remain the crash test dummies of a globalized, hyper-technological civilization. Convinced that we were just along for the ride, when the only wall we didn't see is the one directly in front of us: the collision of infinite need and a finite world.

Domestication functions by tearing apart our wants and needs, replacing community and grounding with a perpetually infantilized dependency upon civilization. We parcel ourselves out to the economy instead of learning to subsist, how to work as a community, and how to read the land and its patterns. We cling to those narratives. We sing the lullabies. We click, follow, and like.

We are patterned to equating our value with keeping this train on the rails, against all impossibility. It's that path of least resistance, a piece of us patterned by evolution.

Ultimately, in the wild world—the world that shaped and fosters us—resistance is unnecessary. There can be moments of fight and moments of flight, surely, but there is no outsider, no enemy within, any invading force that needs to be constantly warded off. In the wild, there is nothing to resist. We created that. That is the reality we have inherited. What the domesticators have always known is that when everything is taken from you, you'll only fight harder for what minuscule substitution is left.

That frontline can look like an idyllic beach on North Sentinel Island. It manifests in John Chau, there to sing the praises of one of the last deities that a starving civilization could conjure up. Words etched into stones thousands of years ago, revised for the modern audience, all while being fatefully unaware or maladapted for the shifting ecology it helped create.

He was there to preach the Gospel of civilization. To stir the pot and turn egalitarianism into sin. To create shame from self-sufficiency and community. To reduce people who have no question about their place in a living world into our state of paranoid isolationism. If the Bible has one lesson, it is that being wild is a sin. Complacency is the step to atonement. Give up the fight, put down the bow and draw the curtain.

It's a fantasy really, a very specific one at that. But maybe that's

the point. Maybe the point of conversion is to impose your fears onto those who were never acclimated to them.

Objectively speaking, Chau was as American as you can get. Trained in Kansas for the challenges a missionary might face in a wild place—demons and all that nonsense—the point is to reenact the domestication process in each “unsaved” individual. Sure, they might die in the process, but maybe their souls can be saved.

If you can fixate just enough on saving their souls, then it becomes a whole lot easier to keep disregarding your own. The reason for the training is that when someone like Chau is thrust onto this frontier situation, the risk they face isn’t the one posed by demons and malicious spirits, but the remnants of free spirits they inevitably are going to face.

The Sentinelese, in the end, were never the ones being tested. Most likely, as was the case among the Great Andamanese and far too many Indigenous societies, is that they would just be cleared out. The act of supposedly saving souls isn’t grace: it’s philanthropic genocide. If individuals survive the process, then it’s upgraded to ethnocide.

All that matters is that we can say we tried. Our sins abated, the devil’s grip was just too tight.

Next time, right?

But the reality is far more grim. The Sentinelese have maintained a stable population, despite contact, despite raids and attempts to pacify, despite what shifts climate change has already unleashed on a very small island, one that might have been occupied for upwards of 40,000 years: maybe more, maybe less.

The particular brand of civilization that Chau was carrying—the American kind, its lineage soaked in the exact same kind of omnicidal clearing and ethnocidal clean up—has only made it hundreds of years to wind up at this point. Double that, you wind up covering the entirety of its exploratory and colonial lifespan. In a cosmic sense, that’s even less than a blip, but a catastrophic glitch all the same.

While Chau was prepping to spread the Gospel, preparing for all the evils that free will might entail (it is the original sin after all), the leading spot for cause of death in the United States was claimed by opiates. Pain killers.

Against all odds, we keep clinging. It is clear where civilization is heading. It is clear where the path of Progress led us. At the very least, it ought to be painfully clear. The glut of an orgy of technological debris and isolationism created a world that we can no longer bear. Across all demographics, we just want out. Passive suicide, active eco-

cide.

Like Chau, the warning shots for civilization have already been fired. Also like Chau, if we stopped to think about it, it becomes increasingly obvious that jumping ship was always the better bet.

But we are like Chau. Maybe less direct, but the end result is often the same.

The path of least resistance might be hardwired into us, but sometimes the path of least resistance is resistance to civilization. In the constant flood of exhausting devastation, that might seem absolutely ridiculous, which is exactly how you are meant to feel. The only way that would ever possibly be true is if the rails were still there.

They are not.

Rising waters eroded their foundation. Iron rusts. Heat parches. Floods saturate. Infrastructure starves.

There is no precedent the scale of our destruction, but there is precedent for us. There is a wild world and it is struggling. Fighting, against all of its nature, against an artificial enemy that is, itself, against nature.

There are still places in this world where you can put one pin or a dozen in it. Our world and our future could certainly stand to see that happen a lot more.

### *On the Name Change*

If you're familiar with the journal, you'll immediately notice a difference with this issue: it is no longer called *Black and Green Review*. The change to *Wild Resistance* has been a long time coming. As has been mentioned in over half the opening editorials, the original concept for *BAGR* was pretty different than the direction we ended up going. In our opinion, the new name more accurately reflects that.

In terms of content and direction, nothing else is going to change. We've been extremely happy with what we have presented up till now and the trajectory is clear for us. If you are unfamiliar with the journal, the contents are always being expanded upon, but they aren't the kinds of discussions that age. So if you are picking this up for the first time and like what you see, I'd strongly recommend getting the past issues as well. And future.

### *Decolonize/Anti-Civilization Focus for Issue 7*

We have not, to date, done any themes for issues. Discussions often

feed off one another, but are still fairly contained. For the next issue, we're looking to explore and bridge the gap between the growing De-colonization and Anti-Civilization milieus.

For some time, there has been a kind of parallel growth of what can mostly be considered two sides of the same anti-economic coin. Perhaps chiseling away at different aspects, but likely ending up at the same spot. As the growing Indigenous resistance to pipelines expands, a lot more discussion and action has come to the forefront in terms of what colonization looks like. Ultimately, that's a question of what civilization looks like.

So let's get into that. We're looking for report backs, essays, discussions, interviews; anything that gets us past the surface and into the details of where commonalities exist and where they might not.

Want to get involved? See contact information below.



*Colorado, Marmot. Photo by Yank.*

Today's anarchist milieu seems largely stagnant and defeated, as well as uninterested in the world outside its bubble. The disastrous reality all around us doesn't seem to have aroused much of a response.

Fortunately, one anarchist current is very much engaged, and is connecting with an increasing number of people. In Fall 2015, Zander Sherman's "Anarchy in the USA" appeared in the literary zine *The Believer*. The anarchy on offer was the anarcho-primitivist critique of civilization and technology, paramount among "the country's most important insurrectionary movements." In December 2017, primitivist John Zerzan was invited to give the concluding lecture of a survey anthropology course at Columbia University. The May 24, 2018 issue of the *Los Angeles Review of Books* featured an essay by Ben Etherington, "The New Primitives." He described "a resurgence of primitivism in popular culture and radical politics." Clear signs of interest in anarcho-primitivism from various quarters. New translations of

primitivist writings in Italian, Catalan, and German, for example.

Zerzan's anti-civ *A People's History of Civilization* appeared in 2018 and was widely reviewed (e.g. *Counterpunch*, *Fifth Estate*, *Artillery*). Podcast and radio interviews followed, including Oregon Public Radio ("Think Out Loud," May 2, 2018). Attention to anti-civ ideas on BBC's "Philosophy Bites" and Australia Public Radio's "Philosopher's Zone" as well.

The international Conference on Hunting and Gathering Societies met in Malaysia in July 2018. The program included an unprecedented level of presentations and exchanges focused on congruence among academics, anarchists, and Indigenous people. An important bridge was established involving those whose studies have inspired the critique of domesticated life and have engaged primitivists politically.

We are about challenging the dominant Death March, which necessarily involves reaching out. Anarchy Radio ([johnzerzan.net/radio](http://johnzerzan.net/radio)), featuring Zerzan and others, is a primitivist project, but very likely attracts many listeners who don't identify as anarchists. The self-absorbed and no-hope nature of some anarchist media is one reason for this. There's nothing within-the-scene about Kevin Tucker's Primal Anarchy Podcast, by the way ([primalanarchy.org](http://primalanarchy.org)).

It could be that many self-proclaimed anarchists will be among the last to make a difference.

*Wild Resistance* is an annual publication of Black and Green Press. The editorial collective is Kevin Tucker, John Zerzan, Four Legged Human, Cliff Hayes, Joan Kovatch, Lilia, Yank, and Evan Cestari.

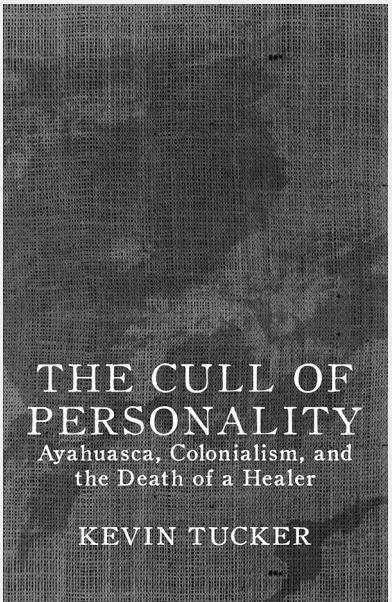
For information on submission guidelines and deadlines, please see the website for details. The tentative deadline for number seven is September 1, 2019. As always, that is subject to change.

For information on distribution or to order back issues and other Black and Green Press titles, check the website or write to us using the contact information below.

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## New Books!



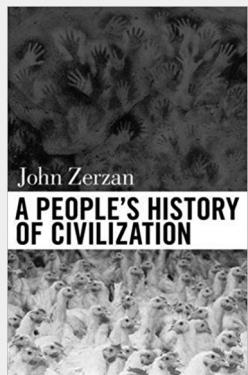
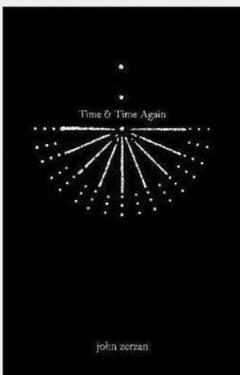
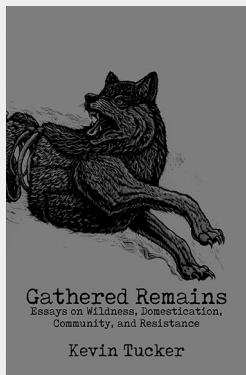
*The Cull of Personality: Ayahuasca, Colonialism and the Death of a Healer*

Kevin Tucker

Black and Green Press, 2019

Situated around the 2018 killing of a Shipibo healer by a Canadian ayahuasca tourist, *Cull* digs into the ever-present colonialism in the Amazon. From conquest through slavery and the rubber boom up until ecotourism, the goal has always been to extract resources to feed a starving and sprawling global civilization.

"For the best thinking in Decolonial Studies today, please read this book!" - Pegi Eyers



*Gathered Remains*: Kevin Tucker. Black and Green Press, 2018.

*Time and Time Again*: John Zerzan. Detritus Books, 2018.

*A People's History of Civilization*: John Zerzan. Feral House, 2018.

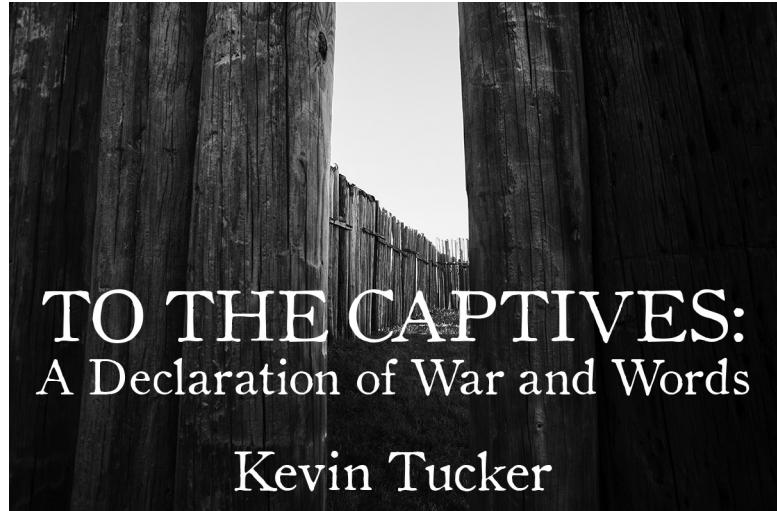
Available for purchase at [blackandgreenreview.org](http://blackandgreenreview.org)

Primal Anarchy Podcast, hosted by Kevin Tucker: [primalanarchy.org](http://primalanarchy.org)  
Anarchy Radio, hosted by John Zerzan: [johnzerzan.net/radio](http://johnzerzan.net/radio)

# *Essays*



*Karasjok, Norway. Sami Reindeer. Photo by Yank.*



# TO THE CAPTIVES: A Declaration of War and Words

## Kevin Tucker

*Reconstructed border wall at Cahokia. Photo by Yank.*

*No one, it is said, can go back to the Pleistocene. We will not, in some magic time warp that denies duration, join those prehistoric dead in their well-honed ecology. But that is irrelevant. Having never left our genome and its authority, we have never left the past, which is part of ourselves, and have only to bring the Pleistocene to us.*

-Paul Shepard, *Traces of an Omnivore*<sup>1</sup>

Semantics can be painful, but sometimes a little goes a long way.

For nearly the past two decades, I have loudly called myself an anarcho-primitivist. I've found both grounding and a place within anarcho-primitivism. It's helped define a place to learn and fight from. But, like all things, it's important to realize limitations as well. Is this new ground, or are we still on enemy turf?

As one of anarcho-primitivism's primary proponents, it's a fairly comfortable backdrop for me to offer as shorthand: that there's more to what I'm saying than what is in any one essay or talk. Anarcho-primitivism is my context. But there are a number of drawbacks that continually come up. So let me say this clearly: I am an anarcho-primitivist. I have no issue with what we have built up and continue to build upon. I will always be an anarcho-primitivist.

The problem isn't the critique. The problem, to the extent there is one, is in the name and its framing: anarcho-primitivism.

This is a conversation that has been growing for a while. John

Zerzan and I have privately and publicly discussed the relationship of anarcho-primitivism to anarchism more widely. It's been a part of internal discussions among *Wild Resistance* editors, as well as others. It's felt increasingly apparent that the name is a limitation, attaching itself to two different lineages—anarchism and primitivism—neither of which is necessarily fitting in its own right. Anarcho-primitivism becomes the square peg, tethered to sets of rules that are neither applicable nor useful.

I've increasingly used another phrase: *primal anarchy*. As both anarchism and primitivism seem to quickly wither and decay on their own, I'm only finding more reasons to embrace that term entirely.

We are all stuck in a strange predicament.

Until the past 10,000 years or so of our history, little about the world drastically changed until civilization began to alter it. Since the technology capable of disrupting the feedback loops of a wild world arose. Since the organization of labor fostered the domestication of plants and animals, turning the communal spaces into churches, and the introduction of draft animals only for them to become replaced by the combine, there has been a massive disruption to the way that we, as social animals, have engaged the world. Whatever we throw at it, however we dam and damn it, this is the very same earth that fostered our evolution, our development. It allowed us to thrive. And we thrived within it.

In return, we subjugate and assault it.

We develop technologies to become more efficient at that assault. We continually become more proficient in our attempts to suffocate the world that we remain a part of.

All of this comes in stages and steps. In great leaps forward. In wars and peace. From the vantage point of the supposed victor, the self-appointed hero records a trajectory. Our rise. Our history.

At every step, we award ourselves the ingenuity of conquest. We document it. Our achievements. Our first boom, our last burst. It's all in there, we wear our colonial past and present in globally sourced and produced articles of clothing, bought and sold on a world market through machines and shanty factories. It's at our table. It's the beds we seek solace in at night. Buried in plain sight, the lineage of civilization lies before us.

If you dig, it falls apart. It becomes increasingly apparent. It becomes impossible to escape.

It is the predicament of our world, that it is easier to explain that

past, to expand our present back and then into the future, both far and wide, than it is to understand the answer to the simplest of questions: why?

Why do we go to work? Why do we consume? Why do we defend our abuser?

Why do we seek to salvage the corpse of a system that brings more misery than joy?

One that brings more content than grounding? More fiber optic cables than connections?

Those questions are like plagues: why do we continue to play along and take part in a system that ultimately could destroy us and our home? Why are we more comfortable with catastrophic annihilation than the minor discomforts that a machine-free world might bring?

There is a foundation to this world; infrastructure, economic systems, systemic distancing and oppression, individual trauma and collective dispossession are all at its core. When you chart the history of civilization, all of those things come to the front. But they are drivers. As social animals, we need more than that. We need a story. We need a reason or a justification for why we do what we do.

Narratives don't conquer, but narratives enlist troops, miners, loggers, and missionaries. In limiting our perception of the world, a solid story is sales pitch for a life that we didn't ask for and a sacrifice we didn't seek to make. Narratives shape the questions we ask and the answers we are willing to hear in return.

As the world becomes both more literate and literal, both the stories we tell and the terms we use continue to gain more and more power. They become our baseline. They set the parameters.

The words we use, the frameworks we exist within, matter. They flatten the world and our interactions with it. They keep us looking anywhere but down to the earth where grounding is possible. Keep on dreaming, keep on working.

It's not satisfying to say, but to condense the questions above into one: why do we actively take part in perpetuating a way of existence that is unfulfilling and omnididal? It's because we've stopped seeing it as an option. Our training pays off and we no longer see it as a choice. We no longer see that the entire trajectory we are on has more bodies behind it than futures ahead.

The words matter because this world matters.

If you feel no more satisfied than I do with this, then we better start finding ways of telling a new story. And it helps to know that

older stories are still here. Buried close to the surface hastily by conquistadors and developers, they're tied to the earth we've been led to believe has long since been subjugated. Conquered. Repopulated. Repurposed.

We are led to believe that we arrived here by choice. That we are free, acting on free will.

That we are anything but captives.

Everything we interact with seeks to reinforce that perception, but it is a veneer. A house of cards. A palace of glass and mirrors. Within it, we have rocks and we have Molotovs at our disposal, but it helps to know what we're up against. And to do so, we have to be able to see it more clearly. Choose our words cautiously, so we can react fiercely. We can once again become grounded in the world that exists, rather than remain stuck with the divided, mapped, and claimed reality that we were born into.

We have the chance to realize that we were never really gone in the first place.

### *Anarchism versus Anarchy*

*The only -ist name I respond to is “cellist.”*

-Freddy Perlman<sup>2</sup>

Let's start with anarchism.

Anarchy is a relatively simple term. From the Greek, *An-* and *arkhos*: without a chief or ruler. It's prescriptive and open to interpretation pretty widely. The various sects of anarchism split over a central question: what constitutes government? What constitutes social control? At the very least, anarchists all agree that government is an impediment to freedom.

Ultimately, that isn't necessarily saying a lot.

The problem is that anarchism is largely reactive in nature. It's left focusing most often on what *a particular society* might look like without government, when there is a focus at all. In a sense, that's not a bad starting point, but it is limiting.

For anarcho-primitivists, simply being against government has never been enough. The subjugation implicit in social power presses beyond humans. The war against the wild started long before the first smokestack ever went up. Industrial strength domination just sped up the process and efficiency of draining the earth to fuel itself. This is a realization shared widely amongst all green anarchists.

Among green or eco-anarchists, it was no longer just about the State, but state-level societies: civilization itself.<sup>3</sup> Bio-centrism took a central role, but even anti-civilization anarchism has taken on a life of its own, having its nihilist and egoist sides being against “wildness” and “nature,” alongside civilization. It’s not uncommon for those particular anti-civilization anarchists to call themselves “green anarchists,” but the “green” aspect is merely incidental.

It is anarcho-primitivism that has driven green anarchism. And this continues to be the case. Anarcho-primitivism is concerned, first and foremost, with not just opposing civilization, but in digging up its roots. While other sects of anarchism have sought to oppose or theorize about what functional anarchist societies might look like, anarcho-primitivists dug into history, ecology, anthropology, and our experiences and actually found them: nomadic hunter-gatherers. Those that have lived a mobile life, hunting, foraging, and scavenging, refusing to store foods; here we have it, anarchy in action.

This isn’t the anarchy that most anarchists have dreamt up. Mostly you hear about modern communes, communal living situations, or cooperative ventures. Short-lived stuff, but always stuck on being relatively compatible with a modern, civilized life. Romantic, revolutionary anarchists can be indiscernible from their socialist affiliates on the Left and their libertarian affiliates on the Right. “All the movements of the left and right,” wrote Jacques Camatte in 1973, “are functionally the same inasmuch as they all participate in a larger, more general movement towards the destruction of the human species.”<sup>4</sup> In their view, anarchism is an ideal. One worth fighting for, but mostly one that will be proven true after the Revolution is won.

And herein lies a central conflict: ideals are meaningless.

Those instances of “anarchy” are unstable, fallible beasts. When they fail, as they always have and will, it will be said that it was because they weren’t enacted properly. Or the individuals faltered. Anything other than being a flawed dream of industrial and post-industrial philosophers and activists, dead set on tackling only the oppression most directly in front of them.

What the anarcho-primitivist critique came down to is something that one of anarchism’s founding voices, Kropotkin, also saw: hunter-gatherers live in a state of anarchy.<sup>5</sup> He was overly optimistic in pulling that thread, rightfully seeing that anarchy hadn’t been fully suppressed by horticultural societies, but then mistaking currents of *anarchy-as-resistance* with the potential for *anarchism-as-ideal* to continue existing in the fields, factories, and workshops. The path for

anarchy diverged from reality to ideal.

Anarcho-primitivism, however, found it again.

Social control was no longer just the object of States, but made possible by domestication. Our baseline as a species became more apparent: 99.999% of our time on Earth was shaped by and for life as nomadic hunter-gatherer-scavengers. The most egalitarian societies ever to have existed—where social power in all its forms (patriarchy, tribe-based, and otherwise) were not only absent, but also impossible—function not because of planning, but because of practices.

Unlike ideals, there was no need for perfection. There's nothing innately better about individuals in a hunter-gatherer society, their societies work because they remove all the premises of domesticated life. When you remove production, you remove the need for exclusive rights and access. When everyone is capable and a participant in acquiring food (rather than producing it), there's nothing to wield over others or coerce with. When tensions rise, you can just walk away.

This is primal anarchy: a holistically functioning, resilient, and egalitarian society that is innately and ecologically sane. The anthropologist Peter Gardner has called it “pure anarchy.”<sup>6</sup> It has often been conflated with “primitive communism,” but when there is no surplus there is no production. With no production and no articulated tribal identity, it’s hard to find a means of production for a non-existent, yet well-defined, society to communally own.

You’d think the anarchists would rejoice, but, again, the ideal won. Anarchists were already in too deep, having constructed a hypothetical situation where civilization wasn’t only desirable, but magically tenable. In the minds of the romantics, unshaken by both history and ecology, to break the course of Progress is heresy.

All the arguments come out; anarcho-primitivists romanticize hunter-gatherers. We can’t turn back the clock. Genie is out of the bottle. Civilization is what *everyone* wants. It goes on and on. Anarchism, for anarchists, is seemingly superior to anarchy.

Likewise, one thing was horribly apparent: primal anarchy, where it exists, is profoundly lacking in anarchists. It doesn’t need idealists and visionaries to exist. It’s not planned and articulated, but actualized. As an anarchist, that’s exciting. But it’s also telling: we are anarchists because of what we oppose. In some cases, because of what we strive for. Individual flavors of anarchism remain the ideals that determine goals and targets.

Primal anarchy isn’t content with that. Our bodies, minds, and the ways we relate with the world were forged within context. It’s not

just what we think, but how we see, how our bodies move, the way our nerves react to impulses, and the nagging refusals of domestication that have spurred anarchism and resistance to all forms of control, past, present, and future.

Primal anarchy isn't an ideal: it is our context.

This may sound semantic, but it is a significant shift. We aren't disempowered agents: we are captives of civilization, of domestication. We aren't yearning to find freedom, we yearn to express it and live within it. It is here, with us, now. It is both within and surrounding us.

A common critique of anarcho-primitivism is that we have drawn lines around nomadic hunter-gatherers. That any other society, no matter how close or far it is to hunter-gatherer life, has simply crossed the line. To some, it separates the work that anarcho-primitivism has produced from that of anarchist anthropologists like Pierre Clastres and James Scott, who have focused on anarchism in horticultural and agrarian societies as a resistance to power in "societies against the State."<sup>7</sup>

By taking primal anarchy as our baseline, those lines are gone. Vanished. To anarchists, we've just narrowed the ideal. But this is a complete recontextualization of our history and present, one that favors anarchy over anarchism. Primal anarchy closes the gap: anarchy is our nature. It is our natural state: we don't just want egalitarianism or, as State-level societies mirror it, equality, we want wild communities built on freedom of movement and subsistence.

Every State, every civilization, has had to face that resistance.

Domesticators, politicians, priests, and programmers know this better than anarchists. Those pulling the reins aren't smart enough to completely fabricate wants and needs, it's far easier and more effective for them to tear apart the innate needs and wants that we have as social animals, repackage them and have us work for them piecemeal.

They tell us that we chose to leave our "primitive" life in the hopes of having more. They know that if they remove our context, we'll take part in the unending search for meaning. They know that if we can't forage, then we'll plant. If planting is taken from us, we'll work for food.

Anarchists accept this. Anarchy refuses it. That is why we fight. That is why the entirety of civilization is a litany of struggles led by those who quit working, sat on the front lines, smashed police barricades, took the lives of capitalists and politicians, and burned the machinery of Progress.

Primal anarchy isn't reducing our experience, but understanding it. We aren't dead yet, we've just been broken to the idea that we can do something about our condition. Anarchists typically dream of their ideals as though they will be able to craft some new means of subsistence. They believe the narrative that egalitarianism may have never existed, but take the risk anyway. They strive for the improbable because they fixate on the impossible.

What we have is a living legacy. When we start feeling it and finding our grounding again, then we can stop seeking our dreams through civilization's apparatus and vision. We can stop being bound to repeat the mistakes of history only to think that next time we'll do it better: we won't. Domestication has always had to work to undermine primal anarchy and more often than not, it fails. It has only built a mighty arsenal and it has bred a lot of bodies to throw into trenches.

But we have the upper hand: when we embrace primal anarchy, when we cease to be anarchists, we no longer have to play on their terms. Power and control were never meant to be harnessed, not by anyone. Civilization succeeds in cutting the throats or infecting the minds of those who seek to steer away from it. Primal anarchy reminds us that the world the domesticators have built leaches our living, wild world. That world is not dead, but it is being suffocated and suppressed. We can wallow through the rest of history, counting our dead as they fail to take control. Or we can dig deeper and follow the path of domination, find its bottlenecks and strangle them.

Primal anarchy reminds us that a functioning world isn't one where power is fought, but where it is rendered impossible.

### *Future? Primitive?*

*The project of annulling time and history will have to be developed as the only hope of human liberation.*

- John Zerzan, *Elements of Refusal*<sup>8</sup>

Anarchism has its own baggage, but primitivism might have more.

The term "anarchy" may predate the term "primitivism," but as a movement or reflection, primitivism has a slightly longer history. Art, music, literature; primitivism is all of these things on a wider level than it is a means of social critique. And even there, anarcho-primitivism might just be the loudest of its advocates.

But what primitivism can be is generally confusing. There's no consensus amongst those who have chosen the label and those who

have had it applied. Without the anarcho- preface, it likely wouldn't have any teeth.

The indisputable aspect of “primitivism” is the root of the word: *primitive*. Taken on its own, that aspect gets a fair amount of negative attention. It would be wrong to say that as a term ‘primitive’ is free of judgment or value. It is treated as an insult towards Indigenous peoples because it is still widely used as one.

At its best, “primitive” was a part of the early anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan’s attempts to classify societies. Here you have three classifications: *savage*, *primitive*, and *barbarian*; or, hunter-gatherer, horticulturalist, and pastoralist/agrarian, in that order.<sup>9</sup> As imposed terms, there’s no point in saying that this categorical application by a social science is neutral. Coming from an imperialist society, the colonialism is implicit. But, for whatever it’s worth, it would seem that the usage of this strata was not intended for the horrifically racist justifications of colonizers.

That said, anarcho-primitivists have never denied that what was more lasting and impacting than Morgan’s social theories were the realities of colonization. These terms were used to demean and to justify genocide and ethnocide, leaving the salvaged lives of Indigenous communities to be stripped down by missionaries and sold as prostitutes, slaves, and workers.

The “primitive” in primitivism remained because it accepted that this is how colonizers worked. And, as a big fuck you to the colonizers. The term flips the entire measure. In this regard, civilization hasn’t won by the force and will of inevitability, but has suppressed and decimated an ecologically and socially stable world to suffocate the rest in an imposed and ultimately failing civilization.

There’s a bit of street brawler in there that can easily be sanitized out of context. Philosophers and literary critics, the masters of thinking about thinking, have drug out the corpse of post-modernism and its latent uprooting to pull this purposefully aggressive reaction back into the realm of ideals.

For years, I’ve been dismissive of their attempts: usually saying primitivism could only be racist by upholding colonial idealism and on from there. Not that all critiques have no merit, but just that these ones were latently dismissive, not meant to engage. Likewise, they’ve rarely been worth engaging.

Personally, nothing about my views on the usage of “primitivism,” as a term, has changed fully in this regard. But I have to admit, I’m hardly alone in having pulled back from using “primitive” as a



*Monk's Mound, Cahokia. Photo by Yank.*

descriptor in nearly any other case, unless it's within quotes or used more sarcastically. Removed from context, it just becomes distracting in unnecessary ways. I don't know if that alone is reason to abandon the term, but it was enough to draw it into question. In doing this, there are more reasons why the term is as fitting as anarchism, if not less so.

Outside the issues with the word's etymological base, there are bigger issues with its implications.

Primitivism lacks definitive context. "Primitive" is a considerably older word than primitivism and anarchism. It might have been more specifically implied as an "uncivilized person" (which is harder for anarcho-primitivists to take issue with), but it is a reactionary term. Much like anarchism.

Primitivism remains rooted in concepts of linear time. While many primitivists, like anarcho-primitivists, have actively attacked notions of history as a progressing and monolithic force, "primitive" here is self-referential. "Primitive" isn't a horticultural society, but alluding to a "simpler," less complex state. In many cases, that can be equally inclusive of the State or state-level societies.

Primitivism becomes diluted to the point of just meaning a preference for an earlier state of "social evolution." Paul Shepard tried giving it power by speaking of a "post-historic primitivism." No friend of the calendar or clock, John Zerzan's "future primitive" is both a challenge and a threat to our understandings of time. Both have tried to free primitivism as a source of primal empowerment and a reminder that what goes up must come down.

Both, in my eyes, succeeded, but the caveats on the terms seem to just grow. As the critiques expand, the need to distance from so much

impotent primitivism becomes more obvious. If you've passed billboards for "primitive" decor or any other agrarian throw back, you've probably winced as much as I have. Critics of anarcho-primitivism often toss out the lazy and tired response: "go live with the Amish then." But we can only shrug so long before accepting that without heavy connotation, primitivism has no point of reference at all outside of "previous" or "earlier" times.

We can keep pressing on and rolling our eyes at it, relying necessarily on anarcho-primitivism as an all-or-none term, but I'd rather reassess here. This is another area where primal anarchy makes more sense.

The words *primal* and *primitive* share a lot of etymological history, but where they vary is significant. "Primitive" is used to imply simplicity. "Primal" is used to invoke primacy. To the point: "primitive" is *who* and *when*. "Primal" is *what*.

*Primal* is latent: not over there, but here. The distance of the past and place are removed because "primal" is what we are before being domesticated, colonized, and taken captive. Anarcho-primitivists have always sought to understand the roots of civilization and domestication to undo them. This isn't a task for a time machine, but of tracing patterns through history going back to where our separation from the world began.

The anarcho-primitivist critique has always been about finding patterns in history and the reflections of civilization. It seeks to understand how our own relationship with the world and each other is interpreted and placed within that lineage. Here, time itself is crucial to the domestication process: the civilized narrative is that *we* have changed. That *we* made a choice. That *we* strove to improve our condition and that a world of machines enhances *our* experience.

The ideology of civilization, when distilled, is that *we* don't only need civilization, but that *we're* better off because of it. Divergent views of the world stem back to the great questions of philosophers: what is the social contract and where did it begin?

But that level of articulated control never came overnight. It grew exceptionally slowly as hunter-gatherers settled around flush fields of wild grains and seeds or where plants were selectively planted and animals were ultimately domesticated. However, both of those things happened in relatively few places.

And, most tellingly, none of the outcomes have improved our lives in any qualitative way since. Yet this is the story that *we* are told and then tell ourselves over and over again. History is born of an

agenda and that is to affirm that we are prisoners to time. If you want to hunt and gather for a living, that ship has sailed. Or so that's how the story is told.

This is such a twisted and small vision of the world. One that is demonstrably untrue.

Hunter-gatherer societies, embattled though they may be, still exist today. It is their adaptability and resilience that have helped them escape the earth-leveling path of civilization. The story we tell of foragers becoming gardeners, and then taking up herds of domestic animals in one hand and turning gardens into fields with the other, until technology permits a new era of industrial growth, is a lie. Our past has virtually never broken down that way, even when looked at from the perspective of the civilized.

What is prevalent is our primal anarchy. Every single domesticating force, every single colonizer, every engineer and prophet, has had to fight against it. As social animals, that is why we tell mythic stories to implicate a cosmic meaning and power to be found in the fields, factories, workshops, and, now, outlet malls.

The struggle of civilization is the constant suppression of the wild. That includes the wild within us. It is our primary sense of want and need. It is the part of our mind that must be bargained with by bosses and administrators. It is the part of our body that sits at desks or stands in factories only to practice walking on a treadmill or stationary bike later.

When primitivism flips the table over, saying in defiance that we were better off before, a part of our grounding is lost. In reacting, we implicitly accept the timelines and inevitability of accumulated power in the hands of the State. It becomes easier for philosophers and literary critics to say that we've upheld the Fall-from-Eden myth, despite our protests and evidence to the contrary, for one simple reason: *primitive*, as a term, is always somewhere and someone else.

It accepts "The Fall" narrative because it can easily go from placing the origins of civilization in historic time to historicizing our domestication. From the viewpoint of primal anarchy, there was no grand event. There was a historical point of entry for domestication, but also an illicit understanding that it is a constant and on-going force.

Primitivism is born of nostalgia. Primal anarchy reminds us that domestication can and must be resisted at every single impasse. Being our *primary* state, when everything else is stripped from us, this is what remains: a wild animal.

It's hard to simply be sentimental about something when you realize you never lost it.

*Re-wild, Resist.*

*I take it for granted that resistance is the natural human response to dehumanization and, therefore, does not have to be explained or justified.*

-Freddy Perlman, *Against His-Story, Against Leviathan*<sup>10</sup>

“Human nature exists.”<sup>11</sup>

Those are the opening words of anthropologist-turned-doctor Melvin Konner’s 2002 book, *Tangled Wing*. Konner’s work was with nomadic hunter-gatherer societies, much like Marjorie Shostak, who was the co-author of their 1988 book, *The Paleolithic Prescription*.<sup>12</sup> That book was the failed launch of what would eventually become the Paleo diet, along with its lifestyle aspects—from barefoot running to minimalism to natural movements and so on. It failed because it took dietary information from nomadic hunter-gatherers anecdotally and brought in a third author, Dr Boyd Eaton—also a physician—to tether the anecdotal information against contemporary medical practices and advice.

The book might not have taken off in even a fraction of the way that subsequent Paleo books and contributors have, but its premise is telling: we evolved to be nomadic hunter-gatherers. The same message that Shepard brought to the forefront decades earlier, but now in an actionable, scientifically approved package.

You have Paleo/Primal authors like Nora Gedgaudas, absolute in her basis of prescriptive diet and lifestyle advice within nomadic hunter-gatherer life and respond directly to a world of industrial toxins.<sup>13</sup> Outside of that small circle, gurus and marketers ready to grab and conquer a niche market have hijacked the majority of the Paleo world.

Though much of what we see is diluted or often convoluted, the illicit principle is here: you are a hunter-gatherer in mind and body, so you should, at the very least, eat like one. Cue a bunch of jarhead ex-military evoking “caveman” imagery. The point gets drowned out, but that exposes the bigger picture on a new level: domestication becomes clearest when you begin to see the patterns of historic time arising. In this case, it’s pretty straightforward. Those selling Paleo foods (even packaged ones) are telling us something intrinsic about



ourselves but intervening with sustenance-for-sale over subsistence.

Just as it has always been for domesticators, the closer something is to our actual human nature, the easier the sales pitch. If our interests are coddled and catered towards a consumer-based identity, then we're less likely to dig deeper. Bait and switch, this time on the genetic level. Human nature becomes apparent not through distilling blueprints of nomadic hunter-gatherer societies, but by filtering the institutions that arise with domestication, understanding their role and purpose. Here, you find the patterns. Even though their form might be radically different, their function is always the same: divert the needs of a nomadic hunter-gatherer through socio-economic and religious identities and rites.

The ability of marketers to capitalize on hunter-gatherer diets, lifestyle, and gadgets doesn't negate them; it just shows the power of social domestication. The lives of nomadic hunter-gatherers have always been the targets of domesticated societies and that remains true. They're hunted, systematically stripped of their land and their humanity, displaced and made destitute by missions, corporations, and governments, and deemed as evil or backwards by religion.

Even the existence of hunter-gatherers, as individuals and as societies, is such a threat to the fragile ecology of the civilized landscape, that they must either be rid of or contextualized. That's why Ishi, the last of the Yahi of California, died on display in a museum. He became a living relic of times past. After his death, his body was torn apart to become a literal relic.

What we are left with is a sanitized variation of reality. Just beneath the surface of skulls and cultural artifacts in museums is the radical realization that there's much more to the life of "cavemen" and that the egalitarian, primal anarchy they lived in is what our bodies

and minds are comprised of. It's a pretty shallow grave, but it's still an effective one.

So the question remains, if a relatively mainstream wave can come to accept primal anarchy as our nature, even if left unarticulated, then why has this been such a contentious issue for anarchists and such a missed basis for primitivists?

We come back to ideals.

For primitivists, the nostalgia needs little reference point. Having succumbed to time, primitivists accept defeat to civilization, hoping to revitalize the past in some form rather than to liberate the present.

For many anarchists, however, human nature is terrifying. That's because, like anarchism, it remains an ideal. The more ideological of anarchists, as romantic as the less-articulate primitivists, don't have a problem with human nature in and of itself, they just see it as something to be actualized in the future, after the Revolution.

For the rest, human nature is dangerous because it can be weaponized. In all fairness, that's not the worst reason to avoid the term. Human nature, as used by nearly every nationalist, revolutionary or counter-revolutionary movement, has always been about exclusion. It is about defining who is or is not a human worthy of rights and inclusion in a society. At best, it becomes the subject of campaigns for civil equality, but, more often, it has filled gulags and graves.

If you want people to do horrible things, make them feel isolated, then give them a group and make them feel threatened or attacked. Human nature, here, is to solidify power: it becomes the idealized group, a more naturalized—yet more potent—form of xenophobic nationalism.

That's awful, truly it is, but it is contextual.

What we're talking about when we say human nature is that there is an ecological, biological, and psychological imperative to the way that our bodies move, thirst, and react. The only way that this is threatening is if those implications could undo the fragile socio-economic order that has been created. Because fascists on all sides have used the ideal across the political spectrum doesn't negate the simple biological reality that social animals have specific needs. If we neglect to focus on that, then we are left only with ideals about where power comes from and where it goes.

When we seek to undermine and bring down the very means that make social and economic power possible, it's pretty hard to see how gulags and trenches can come of it. Our goal isn't to weaponize the notion of human nature to prop up ideologies and States, but to ex-

pose the ways that domesticators hide it to turn us into subjects.

It's hard for me to soft-pedal this concept, because I don't think this approach is really that unique. Nearly every group that has a critique or praxis has some degree of human nature in mind, primal anarchy has only chosen to articulate it and that's because it is demonstrable. In a word, it's anti-idealist.

For the anarchist, the very minimum of definitions for "anarchy" implies a refusal of the legitimacy of State power and control. States say that we need them. What anarchists say is that we don't. Well, why? It's simple to point to primal anarchy as an example. But to say human nature doesn't exist, yet that a society without law won't be overwhelmed by chaos and violence is harder to ground. It all comes from somewhere.

We all have our wants. We all have our wishes. It's not liberating to say that they don't exist nor that they don't color our sense of urgency for action, it's disingenuous. Primal anarchy puts it up front. It identifies what it is, how it is suppressed historically, and how it is continually repressed through rituals of domination in our own lives. It is demonstrable because it isn't a historic event or ideal, but an ongoing process.

Like Konner makes clear above, we aren't the first to notice either. Anthropologist Tim Ingold writes:

*The advent of domestication, in both senses, had to await the breakthrough that liberated humanity from the shackles of nature, a breakthrough that was marked equally by the emergence of institutions of law and government, serving to shackle human nature to a social order.<sup>14</sup>*

In separating us from a living world, domestication hijacks our nature and obscures it by intertwining our needs with that of the machine. Human nature is never gone; it is simply re-purposed by civilization.

That is why we speak of *re-wilding*. The wild is implicit. Wildness is what we are removed from. Along the same lines, Ingold distinguishes enskilling from enculturation. Enskilling can "only take on meaning in the context of... engagement with the environment."<sup>15</sup> Our ecology and biology are tied to the context of a wild world. The same one we evolved within and amongst.

That is our context. This is a context where anarchy isn't the ideal, but the default.

If we're willing to excuse the imperfect language, we aren't alone here either. Anthropologist Stanley Diamond was clear on the matter:

*The longing for a primitive mode of existence is no mere fantasy or sentimental whim; it is consonant with fundamental human needs, the fulfillment of which (although different form) is a precondition for our survival.<sup>16</sup>*

In finally parting with “primitive,” we recognize what anarcho-primitivism has always told us: time is a historic creation, one intent on universalizing our displacement from the wild world, to justify our decimation of the earth, to see our wild and less-domesticated relatives as less-than-human, and to leave the relics of our ancestry to history in our trail-blazing path to our destined future.

Time gives us a story, a narrative. It gives us a place within the timeline so that we don't look around and wonder how domesticated plants and animals might have changed anything about who we are as individuals, as societies.

*Primal* is not an indicator of who we were, but who we are. It animates the past that history tames in death and conquest. It diminishes our ability to isolate the present from the future. It sees life as a continuum.

In upholding primal anarchy, we aren't denying the anarcho-primitivist critique of civilization, but actualizing it. We are no longer anarchists wishing to live in anarchy, but the embodiment of a resistant primal anarchy. One that is capable of biting back.

We are agents, not spectators.

Our lineage doesn't end with the origins of domestication, but is the ever-present past of refusals and uprisings that have fought and continue to fight domesticators in all their forms. Colonizers win more often because they have the numbers and the technology, cannon fodder to continue throwing in trenches. Defeat comes with force and subjugation, not in ceding to the narratives of those with power.

Most resistance movements since have failed because of their inability to articulate targets. Like revolutionaries, the ideal dictates that you seize the means of production and the reproduction of power. It feeds off of a visceral and immediate rage, biting directly at the closest outpost of control. We have been in the unique position where hindsight is buried in plain sight. It is expected that we won't act on our rage, or at least not in unpredictable and uncontrollable ways.

On that playing field, anarchists lose. We will never defeat the

State or civilization on its own terms or within its own limitations.

Primal anarchy shows us another world. The world domestication preys upon and prays against. It is here. It is within and around us. Not another time. Not another place. Like the world that shaped it, it is dynamic, resilient, and resolute.

It is us.

I see no reason why we should continue to see ourselves any other way.

#### *Endnotes*

1 Paul Shepard, *Traces of an Omnivore*. Washington DC: Shearwater, 1996. Pg 220.

2 Cited in Lorraine Perlman, *Having Little, Being Much*. Detroit: Black and Red, 1989. Pg 96.

3 This wasn't always the case, "green State" social ecologists used to be under the umbrella of "green anarchism," but that seemed to have definitively faded by the time the *Green Anarchy* editorial collective added "anti-civilization" to its masthead (no 9, summer 2002).

4 Jacques Camatte, *This World We Must Leave and Other Essays*. New York: Autonomedia, 1995. Pg 95.

5 Speaking specifically of Peter Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid*. Boston: Extending Horizons, undated [1902].

6 Peter Gardner, 'Studying Pure Anarchists.' Lecture, CHAGS: Twelfth Conference on Hunting and Gathering Societies. Penang, Malaysia. 2018.

7 Most specifically, Pierre Clastres, *Society Against the State*. New York: Zone, 1989 [1974]. For Scott, this is a recurring theme through all of his work, particularly; *Weapons of the Weak*. New Haven: Yale, 1985, *The Art of Not Being Governed*. New Haven: Yale, 2009, and *Against the Grain*. New Haven: Yale, 2017.

8 John Zerzan, *Elements of Refusal*. Columbia, MO: CAL Press, 1999. Pg 29.

9 Lewis Henry Morgan, *Ancient Society*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1995 [1877]. I've joked somewhat publicly that "anarcho-savagism" would have been a more appropriate label over "anarcho-primitivism."

10 Fredy Perlman, *Against His-Story, Against Leviathan*. Detroit: Black and Red, 1983. Pg 184.

11 Melvin Konner, *The Tangled Wing*. New York: Holt, 2002. Pg xiii.

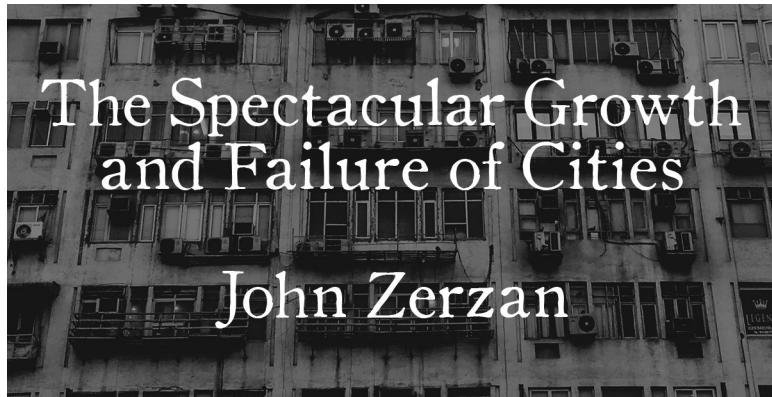
12 Melvin Konner, Marjorie Shostak, and S. Boyd Eaton, *The Paleolithic Prescription*. New York: Harper & Row, 1988.

13 Nora Gedgaudas, *Primal Body, Primal Mind*. Rochester: Healing Arts Press, 2011.

14 Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment*. London: Routledge, 2000. Pg 64.

15 Ibid. Pg 37.

16 Stanley Diamond, *In Search of the Primitive*. Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1987. Pg 207.



# The Spectacular Growth and Failure of Cities

John Zerzan

The elephant in the room—one of them, anyway—is the City. As it grows ever more elephantine, maybe its trumpeting and knocking over furniture will make its nature and future more at issue.

Robert E. Parks’ seminal work, *The City*, portrayed the city as the “natural habitat of civilized man.”<sup>1</sup> For P.D. Smith, urban space is “the wellspring of our creativity as a species...our most remarkable invention...at the heart of human civilisation.”<sup>2</sup>

But Richard Sennett found that “something has gone wrong, radically wrong, in our conception of what a city itself should be.”<sup>3</sup> For the first time in human history, most of the planet’s inhabitants now live in cities. This is one reason why the human condition is more and more the urban condition. A national culture is a network of metropolitan economies. The global techno-culture is urban culture, as the last, unitary civilization diffuses throughout the world, completing its work of integration and uniformity.

Stephen Graham estimates that by 2050, fully 75 percent of Earth’s more than nine billion people will live in cities.<sup>4</sup> The ongoing urban explosion is especially pronounced in the global South. 70 percent of Latin America’s population is already urban. Dhaka, capital of Bangladesh, was home to 400,000 in 1950; its projected 2025 number will exceed 22 million.<sup>5</sup>

The term “megalopolis” first gained currency through the work of French geographer Jean Gottmann, who applied it to the region between Washington, D.C. and Boston. Many decades later, mega-cities and their environs are found on every continent, hallmarks of human, inter-species, and environmental devastation.

C40, an international coalition of cities, found that over 70 percent of the world’s carbon dioxide emissions come from cities.<sup>6</sup> Throughout 2017 there were reports that London’s air quality was even un-

healthier than that of Beijing and New Delhi, cities well known for their poisonous air. Mexico City and Lahore also stand out, among many others, for life-shortening air.

Water contamination is a widespread urban problem, severe in Mumbai, for example. An alarming development is the fact that Earth's protective ozone shield is thinning over urban areas.<sup>7</sup> The heat-island effect magnifies the rapid increase of global warming. Made of concrete and metals, cities are hotter than non-urban areas. The European heat wave of 2003 killed an estimated 70,000 city dwellers.<sup>8</sup>

As the seas rise, so many world cities are increasingly endangered, such as Miami and New York. And many are sinking under their own weight; Jakarta is an example of extreme subsidence. Cities have always been sites of disaster and disease, and the great majority of their inhabitants have been and are poverty-stricken. Mike Davis aptly refers to this reality as constituting a "planet of slums."<sup>9</sup>

In 1887 Edward Bellamy wrote *Looking Backward*, pro-industrial, bureaucratic, and urban. William Morris countered in 1891 with *News from Nowhere*, anti-industrial and non-urban. By this time the existence of cities had long been tacitly accepted by both Left and Right. Along with domestication, civilization, and mass society, urbanism had triumphed thousands of years earlier and had long been taken for granted.

Along with its tensions, anxieties, and anomie, the city holds out the promise of tolerance and diversity. Holds out the possibility of reclaiming and transforming the city itself. In recent decades many writers have championed this illusion, with titles like *The Age of Intelligent Cities*, *The Emancipatory City*, *Green Cities*, *Good Urbanism*, *Sharing Cities*, *Smart Green Resilient*, and *The Healthy City*--all in support of the oxymoron "urban sustainability."

Nan Ellin is positively giddy in her unreal perspective: "Good urbanism generates places that are livable and lovable, places where people feel connected with themselves, others, nature, locales, the sacred, the past, and the future.... Good urbanism is increasingly apparent and possible everywhere."<sup>10</sup> Were Guy Debord and the Situationists all that more grounded, in their quest to unlock the frozen character of the city by means of the *dérive*, the drift?

Erving Goffman described the way people navigate city streets, after that initial classifying glance at one another, positioning themselves so as to risk as little physical contact as possible.<sup>11</sup> This reflects the fact of mostly fleeting, instrumental relations. Georg Simmel

observed that “one nowhere feels as lonely and lost as in the metropolitan crowd.”<sup>12</sup> There is a fundamental connection between this isolation and unease and what Ernst Bloch termed the urban-technological “perversion.”<sup>13</sup> The world is rapidly urbanizing and we are losing a vital sense of what it means to be fully human.

Cities. Again, the elephant in the room. Just a given. The nature of the thing ignored, or, as we’ve seen, celebrated in ignorance. These celebrants also include supposed anti-authoritarian radicals, as in the case of Crimethinc’s Curious George Brigade. Their 2009 offering, “Liberate Not Exterminate,” is as stupid as the rest of pro-city cheerleading. “We love the city and believe in anarchy,” and people are “rethinking and recreating the cities they live in.”<sup>14</sup> This myopia manages to assert that “anarchy and cities are not in conflict.”<sup>15</sup> New York’s Central Park is lauded for its many species, forgetting that this sad simulacrum of wildness is a trapped enclave, the grave of squatted communities displaced when the park was built.

Similarly, Emmanuel Kreike’s “The Palenque Paradox” is a post-modern denial of conflict between cities and nature. It’s all a lovely continuum, he manages, unbelievably, to claim.<sup>16</sup>

The first cities appeared in the Nile Valley, Indus Valley, and in Mesopotamia as early as 7500 years ago. Early Babylon had at least 250,000 inhabitants. Mass society is not a recent development.<sup>17</sup> But only since about 1950 have cities become the key nodes in a globalized network, today’s world civilization. The 21st century is well-known as the urban century.

In the West in the 19th century, a ruling metaphor or analogy saw the city as a body, with the natural systems of a living entity.<sup>18</sup> As if it were, overall, a healthy organism. It is harder and harder to maintain that (very ideological) metaphor.

Jacques Ellul referred to the actual estrangement and unhappiness inherent in city living: “It became indispensable to make urban suffering acceptable by furnishing amusements, a necessity which was to assure the rise, for example, of a monstrous motion-picture industry.”<sup>19</sup> Diversion and distraction are obvious cornerstones of urban life. A pervasive rootlessness is the underlying fact of cities. The possibilities for urbanites to connect with each other in emotionally substantive ways have all but disappeared. Community survives as a word, not a reality.

Especially in the U.S. since World War II, sprawling metropolitan regions have included what quickly became known as suburbia. Following the extirpation of community by mass society, neighborhoods

were next, at the hands of the suburbs. Two important sources are Kenneth T. Jackson's *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (1985) and James Howard Kunstler's scathing *The Geography of Nowhere* (1994).

But the myth of Main Street, the lure of small town USA, endures, despite the fact that, as Miles Orell observed, "the small town has been dying for almost as long as it has been in existence."<sup>20</sup> Think of Norman Rockwell's tableaus of innocence, Garrison Keillor's Lake Wobegon, Disneyland. Corny nostalgia in the face of urbanizing mega-reality.

In 1973 mysterious, non-uprising firestorms swept through the ghettos of older U.S. cities, such as Chicago, Detroit, and St. Louis. Mike Davis found that "No civilization...had ever tolerated such extensive physical destruction of its urban fabric in peacetime."<sup>21</sup> At present, cities like Dubai are engaged in grandiose developments for the super-rich, while the poor in Hong Kong are forced into tiny, squalid housing known as "coffin" or "cage" homes.<sup>22</sup> Integral to the veneer of shiny urban promise are sports stadiums, a key part of city reality referred to as *The New Cathedrals* by Robert C. Trumbour (2007).<sup>23</sup>

In the 1970s, Ivan Illich noted the irony that modernization means spending ever greater time stuck in traffic.<sup>24</sup> Benjamin Schneider (2018) underlines and updates the enormity of the congestion problem in the world's biggest cities.<sup>25</sup>

Mike Childs of Friends of the Earth (!) declares that cities can be fixed by means of the wonders of the digital world.<sup>26</sup> This is fleshed out a bit in *The Age of Intelligent Cities*: "Smart environments and big datasets complement user-driven setting of intelligent cities with real-time information gathered by sensors, location-aware applications, Internet of Things solutions, and social media."<sup>27</sup> And let's not forget algorithms and self-driving cars—a veritable utopia, along with total surveillance! Emily Badger's "Technology Eyes the Ultimate Start-Up: An Entire City"<sup>28</sup> pushes this totally unsupported fantasy orientation to its limit—rather like the dream of blasting off to other planets, away from the ruin of this one.

Cities, like technology, are fundamentally parasitic on their environment. Cape Town has a very severe water shortage; Phoenix, the world's least sustainable city,<sup>29</sup> faces a similar looming crisis. Nonetheless, such artificial excrescences keep growing at an astonishing pace. John Vidal's "Overstocked Cities: the 100 million city: Is 21st century Urbanisation Out of control?" is aptly titled.<sup>30</sup>

Nearly identical in their techno-sterility, world cities characterize the unchecked cancer of civilization itself. Gandhi considered industrialization acceptable if it respects village values of self-sufficiency and simplicity. But it does not, any more than cancer respects its host. Lewis Mumford's *The Culture of Cities* likewise argued in vain for a principle of limits.

*No Local* by Greg Sharzer<sup>31</sup> points out the weakness of small-scale alternatives, reform efforts that take up a lot of energy but do not aim at overturning anything basic. Cities as cities need to go if the biosphere is to have a future.

Let me close with an observation from S., an Alaskan friend of the Earth: "I just got back from a quick trip to the land of a thousand roads and zero caribou: New York City. It messed up my head. I've spent too much time on the land...to adjust overnight to that blizzard of people and traffic, sirens and stink and noise. My inability to live life through my iPhone made it worse."<sup>32</sup>

#### *Endnotes*

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- 4 Stephen Graham, *Cities Under Siege: The New Military Urbanism* (New York: Verso, 2010), p. 2.
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- 7 Robert Lee Hotz, "Ozone Thinning Over Populated Areas," *Wall Street Journal*, February 6, 2018.
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- 9 Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums* (New York: Verso, 2006).
- 10 Nan Ellin, *Good Urbanism: Six Steps to Creating Prosperous Places* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 2012), p. 126.
- 11 Cited in Richard Sennett, *Flesh and Stone: The Body and the City in Western Civilization* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1994), p. 366.
- 12 Georg Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life," in Richard Sennett, ed., *Classic Essays on the Culture of Cities* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1969), p. 55.
- 13 Cited in Mike Davis, *Dead Cities and Other Tales* (New York: The New Press, 2002), p. 9.
- 14 Curious George Brigade, "Liberate Not Exterminate," Anarchist Library, 2009 ([https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/curious-george-brigade-liberate-not-exminate](https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/curious-george-brigade-liberate-not-exterminate)).

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16 Emmanuel Kreike, "The Palenque Paradox," in Andrew C. Isenberg, ed., *The Nature of Cities* (Rochester, New York: University of Rochester Press, 2006), pp 159-161.

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20 Miles Orvell, *The Death and Life of Main Street* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012), p. 47.

21 Davis 2002, *op.cit.*, pp. 387, 392.

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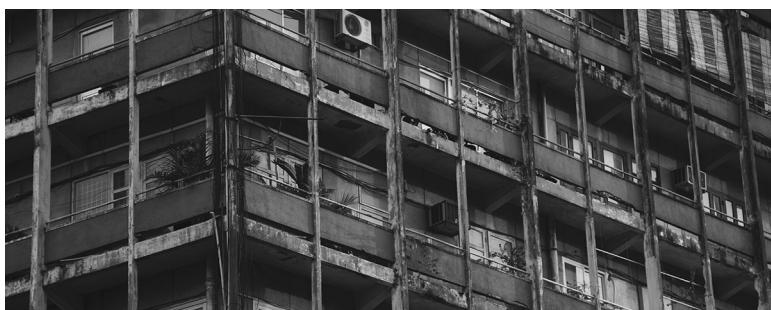
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32 Personal communication, March 18, 2018.





*Tsimshian Wolf totem pole. Photo by Four Legged Human.*

With over a decade of hunting on foot in Arctic and Boreal environs, I've had the honor of sharing space with wolves several times. Here I simply wanted to share my reflections on some of those instances, with the intention of making a small contribution to the not insignificant discussion about the relationship between predators and humans, particularly dogs and humans, especially in the context of rewilding and anti-domestication.<sup>1</sup>

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The first time I saw a wolf was somewhere in northern British Columbia, not far from a road. We stopped the car for a rest and walked a short distance down to a river. A ways downriver, all of a sudden, a yearling moose came rushing out of the forest and into the river, followed abruptly by a large black canid. The moose had used the river to escape the black wolf. As the moose crossed the river and emerged onto the opposite bank the wolf stood there and stared at it, seemingly not interested in swimming across the river to continue the pursuit. The moose disappeared into the forest and the wolf disappeared from our view as it walked further downriver along the bank. Perhaps it had a new trick up its sleeve and would get that moose yet, or perhaps to the highly resilient wolf it didn't matter that much at all.

Later I would learn from my time with both Athabascan and Eskimo hunters that solitary wolves are seldom successful in being

able to bring down a moose and that even entire packs can have real difficulty killing a healthy adult moose. When pursuing almost any fleet-footed wild ungulate wolves normally focus on the young, old, injured, or sick and hunting success often depends much on the collectivity of the pack. Before we had industrialized technologies, the success of human hunters was often also dependent on the same suite of parameters, cooperation with others being of particular significance.

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My next wolf encounter occurred while I was staying in a remote camp. I crawled out of my shelter and stood up and a silent brown-grey female wolf was standing there, twelve or so meters away, just looking at me, her tongue out, in what I interpreted to be an entirely non-hostile manner. It was only a split-second before she was gone into the spruce trees. A few minutes later she reappeared, this time on a bluff overlooking the complete opposite side of my camp. She had looped around through the brush unpredictably, this time from a safer spot from which she could observe me. My interpretation was that she was simply curious, slightly timid, but not entirely. She stayed a few minutes this time and then was gone. Reflecting on the encounter as night fell, I could not help but consider that she was attempting to make some type of connection with me. The wolf's behavior, if it had encountered a moose or a deer, would have been much different than its behavior when encountering my hominin form.

Maybe like the coyote, the wolf is a trickster, attempting to lure me into complacency by acting benign and even somewhat afraid. Or maybe there is not much sinister at all. Rather, there could be something anciently symbiotic being enacted between two hunters whose presence has generally been a benefit to one another, rather than a nuisance or a threat. To take on this type of interpretation, however, requires breaking through any of the indoctrinated agriculturalist Taker narratives about wolves which so many of the civilized have been raised upon. In fact, I would later discover that speaking to almost anyone else about real-time encounters with predators that were non-threatening and even intimate normally brings on not only a reaction of incredulousness, but a quick mental labeling of me as some type of whack-job-nature-hippy. Fear of the wild in general, let alone a snarling wolf, is a quintessential part of the psychological development of domesticated humans, so such reactions are typically the rule, not the exception. I have pretty thick skin so this does not

generally hold me back from sharing my views and experiences with others. Being the 'crazy hippy' claiming that I had made friends with wolves, it is actually somewhat entertaining to witness the anti-predator 'varmint hunter' type sneer, snicker, scratch their heads, and express their disbelief, when confronted with the possibility that their entire mental map is a fanatical reification.

*If there's an injured moose in the area, they'll [wolves] track it and they'll kill it and eat it...Sometimes when the moose slips and falls on glare ice, they can't get up. That's when a pair of wolves can get 'em easy. Even a single wolf can get him...also in times when there's lots of snow, when they break through and can't get out, [this] is when [wolves] catch [moose] real easy.*

-Yup'ik Hunter

*They are part of the land because...wolves...they take down a sick bull or something like that and it serves its purpose, I think, when you have predators in any area, you know, it's like having ravens, they serve a purpose here.*

-Gwich'in Elder

*Wolves don't like to eat moose unless they have to. It's too dangerous for a couple of wolves to tackle a moose. They'll get injured. If there are enough wolves, they can take a moose down. But caribou, it's easy for them, easy for wolves to go out caribou hunting. Wolves are caribou hunters.*

-Yup'ik Hunter

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*Where there are large amounts of caribou there are usually wolves following.*

-Yup'ik Hunter

*Caribou bring a lot of life with them. When the caribou came they brought an entire ecosystem along with them: wolves, wolverines, coyotes, foxes, hawks, eagles, owls, and magpies.*

-Yup'ik Hunter

*When the caribou came through, there were hundreds [of wolf tracks]. You'd go up there and you'd see a pack of six [wolves]... and look over and there'd be a pack of eight over there. It was*

*all day like that. There was always a wolf around.*

-Yup'ik Hunter

*When we had all them caribou, man we had a lot of wolves. The caribou were doing well, but because there was so much food for the wolves, the wolves were doing really well too. When the caribou headed north, the wolves followed them. For a few years we still had a lot of wolves, but then the wolves were starving and not having very many pups.*

-Yup'ik Hunter

Wherever ungulates abound, predator populations will grow and entire ecosystems become more diverse and robust. For example, when caribou populations become healthy and expansive they become an increasingly abundant and reliable food source for wolves and other predators, mostly eagles and sometimes bears, and in turn the abundance of carrion leftover from predation provides a source of food for a diversity of other wildlife.

My next encounter with wolves occurred in the above context; surrounded by an abundance of caribou. It was late-winter above the Arctic Circle. I had skied several miles through mountains searching for caribou and in the early evening I had located the herd. It was too late in the day for a hunt, so, with the temperature rapidly dropping, I got busy making camp. As the twilight faded the unmistakable howl of wolves erupted from the mountainsides – aaaaahhooooooooo – aaaaahhooooooooo – aaaaahhooooooooo – establishing a tonal atmosphere of immense enchantment, but also one which sent a chill through my body, a blood pumping chill that somewhat alleviated the chill of the sub-zero cold.

With the remaining light I scan the distant moraines. I discover that a pack of wolves has bedded down for the night not far from my camp. For several moments I watch them sing. As I crawl into my sleeping bag I feel quite vulnerable, alone in the Arctic, sub-zero temperatures, and darkness, surrounded by one of the most storied predators on earth. I am given comfort and confidence in my reflection that for thousands of years indigenous people residing in northern environs have spent their lives in the company of wolves, while surviving largely by sharing the same prey: various species of deer, and bovids, such as musk ox, bison, sheep, and goats. My role here, and my intention, is to participate in that hunt, to learn it and know it, and with this comes the need to share the same relational space with wolves that other hominins have for eons, listening to wolf song as

they settled into their evening camps. Until very recently, wolves have always walked in the shadow of the hunter and I try to focus on my fortune that in this particular place the wolves and I are united at this cycle of the seasons for the same purpose.

Arising the next morning, there was no longer any trace of wolves. Only in the early evening, a few miles from my camp, did I encounter my next wolf. Black in color and, my intuition told me, female. She was alone and walking towards me, undoubtedly completely aware of my presence, albeit several hundred meters distant. Her attention was for good reason; I was busy preparing to haul to my camp the parts of a bull caribou I had shot. I wondered how close she might come. She kept her distance but traversed around two separate sides of my perimeter. She walked slowly and stopped every now and then and stared directly at me. This traipsing went on for a while until eventually she settled down in the snow about 300 meters away. She was waiting patiently for me to move on from the kill in anticipation of receiving the gift of guts, bones, and carrion I would be leaving for her. ‘Perhaps she is just a scout,’ I thought, and pondered that maybe once I was gone a pack would be following her lead. I made my final preparations for travel and looked up to see that the black wolf was gone.

With scattered bands of caribou and wolf packs as my companions, a lonely hominin in the sub-zero Arctic, struggling to move with 100 lbs of dead caribou in a sled tethered to my waist, hardly moving, one only naturally begins to wonder if the wolves might skip the carrion and come directly for the struggling, seemingly debilitated two-legged, dragging the sled-load of meat. With such thoughts I am intensely attentive to every angle and every movement on the landscape. The sun is dropping rapidly and I need to make it to camp. Shelter and a warm sleeping bag are my survival. Without these I shall not survive the night. The caribou meat must also arrive in camp. I won’t leave it. But the snow is deep and unconsolidated so I wallow rather than glide. I think I probably look like an injured moose or some type of idealistic prey for the packs. Yet, in such situations, what is one left with? Only stubborn diligence and some faith that the spirit of wildness is on one’s side, this time, so you go forward, step-by-step, pull-by-pull, sing songs to the land and the wolves, stay strong, hope for the best. My rational mind also played a role. ‘They will be happy with all that gut pile and bones I left for them there, they are not worried about me,’ I tell myself. And I think, ‘there are so many caribou I am sure those wolves are living well and they most likely won’t bother with me.’ But despite any rationalizing towards the positive, realism

also broaches the mind. One considers the reality that humans have certainly been prey in the past and that it could easily happen here. I thought about some San Bushman rock paintings in Africa I once saw which depicted both leopards and lions preying on people. But I am not aware of any oral histories of wolves' preying on humans in North America.<sup>2</sup> There are one or two verified cases of fatality from wolf attack, but no history of a pattern of predation on hominins. So as one trudges along, breath-by-breath, scanning in every direction for wolves, these are the diversity of thoughts which might naturally occur, as they did for me.

Movement is the only thing keeping me warm now. Camp slowly gets closer. With only sparse daylight to spare, I stop at a dense patch of willow shrubs one hundred meters away and dig out a pit in the snow in which I will bury the meat and cache it away for the night. A thorough scan of the snow covered tundra reveals no sign of wolves. My frozen, blood-soaked outerwear discarded for my sleeping bag, I shiver my way to regaining warmth, but my feet are stubborn to come along in the twenty-below-zero temps. Desperately I want to feel my toes again. Slowly my toes come back. Suddenly, the Arctic silence is broken by an eruption of wolf song – aaaaaahwooooooo – which has me startled and very much present. This time the calls are not distant from around the valley but very close by, astonishing and direct. Fear is my initial response.

The soundscape is dominated by that iconic primal call – aaaaaahwooooooo – everywhere around me. ‘Have they come for my caribou?’ ‘Will they come for me?’ ‘In the morning the meat will be gone.’ I lie frozen, but warm. Tense and worrisome but simultaneously in blissful awe. Wolf spirits visiting my camp. Their sounds and their presence pierce the nerves and the heart, but the situation is equally beautiful. Perhaps a once in a lifetime. Frozen in time and space, I don’t go out and look for them. I just lay and hope. ‘If you must take the caribou meat then go ahead. This is your world, your hunting grounds. Leave me be and have the caribou. I will arise with the sun and leave.’ The wolf song continues, fades, comes back, then fades again. Eventually silence. Not entirely at ease, but wholly fatigued, I sleep.

The sun rises. The wind is calm. The sky, clear. The cold, biting. I cope with getting into my frozen outerwear, knowing that in due time, with movement, it will be easier. Scanning the tundra and the hills, no sign of caribou or wolf. The meat remains cached, unaltered. Feeling good, happy, lucky, excited to travel, it’s a good day to move on, head towards home. I pack up the sled and start moving, looking

forward to becoming warm again. Movement is slow, the weight of the caribou is overwhelming, it burns my hips. Again, I certainly look like a cripple: easy two-legged prey for a pack of fleet-footed four-legged hunters. Yet my confidence in the presence of wolves has improved considerably. They were there all night, surely aware of everything that was happening. They purposefully came to visit me, sing to me? And they purposefully did not take my meat or come directly into my camp. Why? I don't have answers and perhaps there are none. The only tale I can think of is that the wolves came to congratulate me on the success of my hunt, to sing me a welcome song, as a comrade, not an adversary. And maybe they were even thanking me for the guts, bones, and meat scraps I had left for them further up the river in the snow. Whatever the explanation, the experience of being with the wolves left me feeling more alive, more aware, more connected to my reality than anything ever before. Add to that the success of the DIY hunter, out on the land, moving across it, and being within it, fully present, total freedom to either perish or to obtain the food needed for existence in a wild winter world. The best moments in life, living dreams, that could never be traded for the so-called 'security' of 'success' inside the alienating and debilitating shackles of Leviathan.

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*Ahead I see tracks in the snow. We cross the tracks and pause, looking down. My mind quickly registers – certainly a wolf. I look at the man I have been following and he lets out a loud call – aaaaaahhwooooooo. I nod back - wolf. Happy, we smile at each other; there is nothing else to be said – a universal language that we both understand, even though neither one of us knows a single word of the other's native tongue. His language is a dialect of Tuvan spoken by the Uriyangkhai, or "forest people", a culture of indigenous Siberians, whom have likely inhabited this mountain range, the Altai in the heart of central Asia, for thousands of years.*

-4LH field notes, February 2016

Over the next few years I sometimes came across wolf tracks on rivers bars and occasionally heard their distinct howl during evenings at hunt camps, but I never did see a wolf again. Then, while moose hunting one Fall afternoon, wolves reappeared in my life. I had attempted to stalk a small bull that was lying down next to a stand of alders. Crawling in the grass, slowly and meticulously I closed the gap,

feeling confident I would make the kill. Suddenly the moose stood up, looked directly at me, and darted, disappearing into the alders. I was made; perhaps by scent, a wisp of wind, or slight sound in the grass, or simply the well-honed instincts of the giant boreal deer.

Stalking and being serious about killing always creates some anxiety in me. The stalker is fully present in the moment, but also consistently thinking ahead, contemplating every stage of advance, anticipating quickness of action the second it is required. Tension builds. When the stalk fails and the animal spooks there is a sense of loss, but also a feeling of relief as the pressure immediately dissolves. There is no longer a requirement to calculate every move and worry about the consequences, as the animal is gone. The ability to relax again provides some solace and appeal. Perhaps more importantly, the intention to take a life is gone and it's always beautiful to see the wild others get away. The lessons of humility. Now is not this animal's time to die. I did something wrong somewhere in the past and did not earn the right to take this life. My education as hunter and earth inhabitant is only stronger because of this. Every experience of pursuit, every stalk is meaningful, powerful, connecting, physically and spiritually rewarding. To pass the threshold from mere pursuit to actual shedding of blood further complicates; a never benign affair. To locate prey, intend to kill it, and attempt to do so, but then fail, or simply decide it is not right and walk away is similarly complex and meaningful. On this day I felt that.

I sat down in the grass and relaxed, thinking to myself that life was all about that: stalking that moose, crawling as silent as possible through the grass – being animal – the true presence and wholly tangible meditation. Satisfied, I could walk away, forget hunting for now and try again another time. I scanned the hillside for moose, one last look. Some movement in the grassy ledges above catches my eye. A wolf. Then there are two, stopped now, both sitting on their hind legs staring directly at me, our eyes seemingly locked. Neither I nor the wolves move at all, we just absorb the presence of each other. 'Aho, hoyah' I call out to them, a common Lakota utterance that I've always enjoyed meaning, 'Hello, this is good.' They scamper up the slope a ways and then stop again, resume the hind leg position and continue to stare towards me. I decide to leave. These are their hunting grounds. Maybe they were also tracking that bull and I ruined it for them. Or maybe they had observed my efforts and had hoped for my success, knowing that they would also be fed. As I begin to descend the slope and head for the forest I keep my attention on the wolves, wondering what they might do. Would they follow? Pursue me? Yes. Five minutes

or so into my retreat I look back to see the wolves coming downslope directly towards me. I stop and watch for a few seconds and call out ‘hoya, hoyo.’ The wolves stop again and stare towards me. I continue to descend towards the forest. I look back and watch the wolves running upslope, heading for the ridge, and then watch them disappear over the skyline. Gone. ‘Maybe there was a moose calf or a Dall sheep lamb over there,’ I thought. What I continue to believe regarding the entire encounter, however, is that those two wolves had been aware of my presence all long, well before I began to stalk the bull. They were curious about my motives and enjoyed watching my stalk. Perhaps they were even laughing at me for being the careless two-legged that I am. As I walked away that day I began to think about my various wolf encounters and considered each of those cases together in a holistic context. Why is it that the behavior of wolves towards a human, in my experience, seems to be more curious and sociable than it does aggressive or threatening?

I’ve never heard similar stories from others who have encountered wolves around these parts. Most hunters who I have talked to about it think I am some type of weirdo-tree-hugger simply for the reason that I have not hastily tried to kill any wolf I have seen. Unfortunately, this is the dominant ethos in this country; not only is a hunted or trapped wolf a significant prize for both prestige and pelt, wolves are the scapegoat for almost every rural civilized person’s problems when it comes to not being able to find game (and in regions where there are domestic stock it is well known how greatly wolves are reviled); wolves are THE enemy. In most people’s minds any wolf encountered should be immediately killed. Therefore, most people out on the land around here have likely never taken a moment to observe and experience that wolves often behave in comparable ways to other canids humans are more cordial towards. Every now and then however, I’ll meet a Native elder or hunter who views predators differently than do dominant culture humans. They will tell you it’s not wise to try and kill every wolf or bear you see on the land because, not only are these species important to the ecology, there are, at times, spiritual consequences associated with attempting to harm these powerful animals or for treating them improperly in one’s encounters with them.

*That's wrong [eliminating wolves]. There's got to be wolves. It's the natural balance. When people talk like that that's stupid. They don't know. They've never watched it long enough. People long ago never believed that they should shoot all the wolves. That's all B.S. Wolves is gonna kill old game. That's how they*

*gonna' survive. Human kills game, that's how they survive.*

-Gwich'in Elder

*A lot of people they don't wanna shoot bear because of the belief of the clan member that it belonged to, not allowed you know. Indian don't bother other animal that they sleep to, don't bother with it, cause if they do they certainly will die. Of course that's a medicine, bad medicine.*

-Koyukon Elder

\* \* \*

My next, and most recent, wolf encounter is what led me to thinking that I needed to write about these experiences. It was something indeed significant enough to share with the world. It was the middle of September and I was working my way on foot into a remote area to establish a camp from which I intended to hunt mountain sheep. The terrain was rough: uphill and tussocks, always slow going, especially when one is carrying a lot of weight on the back. I had about a mile to go before I would reach the base of a short slope leading up to the plateau on which I planned to camp. Earlier, bushwhacking near treeline, I had spooked a bull moose out of the brush, which I then watched run along the mountainside in its attempt to escape the clumsy hominid predator that had disturbed his mid-day sleep.

Encountering deer and sending them into flight is always an experience that brings a person present, into direct relationship with the flow and energy of the particular socioecological context. The predator approaches, the prey animals scatter. Escaping the brush, and with a clear view of the open country above, I watched the bull moose disappear on the skyline and paused to scan my surroundings. I counted two more moose browsing distantly on willow-lined edges out in the tundra expanse and two white sheep grazing on a steep mountainside. Looking ahead I sighed. My anticipated campsite was farther than I had hoped and, although open country, the ground was boggy and undulating. It would be tiresome and slow going. With not many hours of light remaining, it was time to move quickly and make a push for camp.

Struggling my way up the drainage towards the steep moraine leading up to my anticipated tundra bench camp, a brown movement on the slope above catches my eye. 'Caribou?' was my initial reaction, but no, too small. 'Coyote?' No, too big. The shape-shifter stops. It is a tan-brown wolf sitting on its hind legs now, staring directly at me.

The wolf was heading precisely in the same direction as I was, towards the big tundra bench above, thus I questioned whether I should continue on my route, leading directly into the trajectory of the wolf. Would my approaching the wolf trigger some type of aggression, a predation response? Or would the wolf sense my confidence and run away? Steadfast in my intention to establish my camp and hunt for sheep, I stubbornly decided to push forward and test the wolf. As I moved further up the drainage the wolf began to follow me, tracking my every movement and adjusting its movements in a manner that seemed as if it would lead to our intercepting one another toe-to-toe. I chambered a round into my rifle barrel, slung it over my shoulder, and kept moving on my intended path. The wolf came closer, directly towards me again. It was now traversing above me, maybe two hundred meters away. I stopped to watch. Then the wolf stopped too, sat down again and stared me down. Suddenly the wolf began howling – aaaaaahhwoooooooo – aaaaaahhwoooooooo – aaaaahhwoooooooo – howling directly at me. As before, my initial gut reaction included both fear and wonderment. But here occurred an overall recognition that I was living within a specifically powerful and important moment of space and time. The wolf was speaking to me. I spoke back – aaaaaahhwoooooooo – I howled. Then the wolf returned the call – aaaaaahhwoooooooo – and I howled back again to the wolf – aaaaahhwoooooooo. This back and forth went on five or six times. I thought, ‘Is this wolf trying to warn me off? Or is he urging me on, welcoming me to the valley, saying, ‘You’re almost there, here on the other side of this moraine is where you will camp.’ With deep contemplation, my sense was the latter. It was like when a dog you are hiking with stops to wait because you are moving too slow for its liking, and it yelps and whines a little to urge you forward. Those were the positive thoughts that allowed me to continue my movement. I howled one more time – aaaaaahhwoooooooo – and kept moving up the slope. The wolf scampered and disappeared over the skyline.

Thoroughly enchanted by my experience of talking with the wolf, I cautiously continued forward. Is he gone? Or would he be waiting for me somewhere over the next rise? Finally, I reached the top of the moraine and the vast expanse of mostly flat and open country spread out before me. I diligently scanned everywhere for any sign of the wolf, wolves, or other wildlife. Other than the two white sheep continuing to graze on a faraway mountainside, there was no trace of animal life before me. The wolf was gone. I walked towards a small creek and built my camp in close proximity to the flow of clear water. Up until dark I continued to scan for sheep, bears, moose, and wolves.

I contemplated my morning hunt plan. The night was clear. I watched some stars and abruptly passed out, hard, exhausted from the considerable effort of the day's travel. Around what I guess was about midnight, I was awakened by a piercing sound – aaaaahhooooooooo – the wolf was back. This time he was very close. I looked out into the darkness and saw nothing. But he was there, perhaps one hundred meters away. Then from the far side of the valley an ensemble of wolf song erupted. He wasn't just a lone wolf. The pack was there too and they were responding to his howl. But why was he here, nearly in my camp? He had returned, or maybe he had always been there, and I never knew it. But he was calling to me again, singing under the crisp moonlit sky. The pack howled back – aaaaaahhooooooooo – aaaaaahhooooooooo – aaaaaahhooooooooo. I clutched my rifle, still alternating between total enchantment and fear. For ten or fifteen minutes the wolf song went on. Then silence, only a slight wisp of wind. I laid there wondering. My next memory was awakening to a still clear sky, no trace of wolves anywhere to be seen, only the prospects of finding myself a mountain sheep. Life is good. All these things, this is why I am here and not 'down below, eking out an existence in the slop and mud of the farms'.<sup>3</sup>

On the quest for sheep, I spent the day on a high ridge, observing everything around me. Sheep were present, but occupying difficult terrain, hard to come by. That night no wolves visited my camp and I never heard a wolf call. My assumption was that the wolves had moved on. The next day I climbed up to the ridge again and waited for sheep. Abruptly, at mid-day, resonating from the valley below, there was wolf call – aaaaahhooooooooo. The sound actually seemed to be originating from my camp! The sight, upon closer inspection, was stunning: the brown wolf was on heel in the grass directly across from my shelter, no more than 30 or 40 meters away, staring into my camp and howling at it. 'What is going on?!!!' I thought to myself. 'What does this wolf want? What is he trying to tell me?' Maybe he thinks I am there and he is saying 'come out and play' or 'let's go hunting, I know where there is a sheep, let me help you, help me.' These were my only explanations. I was almost certain that at this point there was nothing aggressive or hostile in this wolf's approaches to me. He was there calling in a way I could only interpret as an attempt at friendship, at social bonding, or perhaps simply an attempted enactment of a practical symbiosis between hominin hunter and wolf that is thoroughly ingrained within the wolf's genetic code, something all wolves continue to long for despite being endlessly persecuted by *homo domesticus*? Rather than trying to be 'friendly' perhaps his visitation

to my camp is an effort at demand sharing:<sup>4</sup> ‘Come on. What’s the hold up? Where is the meat? What kind of sorry hunter are you? Let’s hurry it up. I am getting hungry.’ Or maybe I have no idea what was actually going on. All I really knew was that something was happening. Something beautiful, meaningful, and real. Yet part of me also could not believe that any of it was real. This wolf reaching out to me, attempting communication. I had a lot to think about. One point of inspiration was that, even more than before, I wanted to kill a sheep now, not only for myself, but to see how my friend the wolf might react.

I returned to camp at dusk, again without a sheep, and, somewhat to my discontent, the night passed without any sounds of wolf touching my ears. The weather was still good but a cold wind was picking up, a wind which would hamper my efforts to successfully hunt sheep all throughout the next day. While up on the ridge looking across the valley I did see a large group of sheep. They were crossing the valley, heading for new range. With wolves in the area, it was a risky move. Mountain sheep and goats are adapted to staying high, on steep difficult terrain, for a reason; it protects them from predation. Whenever one of these horned four-leggeds comes down it makes itself more vulnerable to being killed by wolves, bears, lions (the North American type), leopards (in the Himalaya and other mountain ranges of central Asia particularly), and hominins.<sup>5</sup> I watched the group of sheep traverse the valley floor, quickly but cautiously, lambs stumbling along, keeping up with the ewes. Suddenly they darted, full-speed ahead. In their wake was the pack of wolves. I counted eight but there could have been more. It all happened so fast and all I really saw was the mass of white sheep hurtling out of my sight down into a small drainage with the wolves sprinting after them. Then they were all gone. The only sound was the increasingly powerful wind ripping over the ridgeline and telling me it was time to go down. Another day without a sheep for this hunter. ‘Maybe the wolves had better luck,’ I thought. In the distance a storm was arising, a dark black sky seemed to be moving towards the direction of my hunting grounds.

The wind continued to whip as I lay warm in my sleeping bag. The stars went in and out, now and again being obscured by the oncoming clouds. If the weather wasn’t clear in the morning, I figured it best that I packed up and went down. My sheep luck didn’t seem to be with me on this hunt and I had given it almost all I had. Awake before dawn, the wind was calm. First light revealed dark skies and slight sprinklings of snow. The wind had carried in the storm. As the first sliver of sun emerged over the horizon the wolf pack revealed

its lingering presence. The valley erupted again in loud wolf song – aaaaaahhwooooooo – this time they were howling at the rising sun. Perhaps they were also singing in celebration for their successful kill of a sheep the day before. Perhaps they were singing me a departing hymn, knowing that I would be surrendering to the oncoming snow and walking away, leaving their valley behind.

The howling stopped and I packed up. I never did see the lone tan-brown wolf again, my friend. I figured he was too busy with the other wolves to offer me a personalized goodbye. But as I walked out of those mountains, all I could think about was him. What was he up to? What was he really after in his contact with me? The threshold between wildness and domestication seemed to blur somewhat as I pondered the reality that, after all, domestic dogs entirely originated from wolves.<sup>6</sup> Somewhere, somehow, that relationship started in a moment similar to what I experienced. My interpretation became that I had experienced in real-time a sliver of that critical primordial moment when man and wolf began developing their symbiotic relationship – a four-legged and two-legged hunter-scavenger united in their comradery for the needed ungulate flesh, fat, bones, and blood. Sometimes the wolf killed for the hominin scavenger and other times the hominin hunter killed for the canid scavenger. Demand sharing.<sup>7</sup> Our inter-species social bonding started there, and that was perhaps where I was over the course of those few days together with that tan-brown wolf.<sup>8</sup>

And maybe it's best for the both of us that I did not kill a sheep during those days. From there the wolf might have been lured into a



later trap. For I am not the average modern hunter normally traveling this land. I am one of the few two-leggeds that the wolf can trust. If I was to feed that wolf and celebrate together with him on the success of our kills, later almost any other hunter would strike dead without a second thought the now less afraid wolf. So together this wolf and I walk on tricky, precarious ground, where our actions have consequences, often unforeseen by many, though nonetheless serious. The wolf singing to me, leading me along, visiting me in camp, but always keeping its distance – this seemed to me about the perfect level of balance, all that was actually necessary in our particular bond. Nevertheless, in deep time, that type of relationship between canid and hominin became more beneficial for both parties and thus more intimate. The mutually beneficial symbiosis between human and dog has gone on for likely hundreds of thousands of years, and in many cases, even at its most enhanced stages, has remained sustainable and non-pathological. Dogs, as others, are undeniably an important part of our relations. That's about as certain of a thing I can say with complete confidence and I am not attempting to suggest too much in terms of concrete answers to the dilemma here, I am simply reflecting on powerful experiences I am lucky to be able to have lived first-hand. Yet, I will close this writing with an attempt to use these reflections as an experiential conduit to say something more concrete in regard to a definable threshold between a healthy, vibrant, and resilient wildness, in contrast to a debilitating, maladaptive, and largely pathological condition of domestication.

\* \* \*

I think of ‘rez dogs’ (semi-feral dogs inhabiting Indian reservations) and/or other dogs I have encountered and observed in less ‘developed’ places. Like hunter-gatherers, these semi-strays ebb and flow between various habitats and domiciles and utilize the opportunities presented to them within these diverse niches of space and time. They can easily survive and thrive in all sorts of social and subsistence situations and are highly resilient during times of scarcity. ‘Rez dogs’ or ‘Village dogs’ (so-called in northern Indigenous communities) often roam in packs and are not bound to any single household. Similarly, I have also become acquainted with what I shall call ‘Mountain dogs,’ who are highly independent. For example, in a small town in the Sierra Nevada Mountains where I once lived the dogs ‘owned’ by individual households rarely spent a day without roaming on their own as individuals or in packs that formed during various activities

and interactions of the day. Humans would do their thing and the dogs would do theirs. Sometimes this meant hanging out with people and other times this meant doing whatever they wished. Our house had a dog that was free to do as it pleased in this manner, and that dog would faithfully return home each night or even after a few days. We became used to never worrying about her. Some of these dogs would go off alone or in packs into the forested mountains. There would be times when I was hiking or skiing several miles away and one of our local 'Mountain dogs' would suddenly appear to join me in my activities for the remainder of the day, only to disappear again later. I am guessing that at least some readers have had similar experiences, such as when a random dog decides to join for a hike or walk? I've had that happen more than once.

A very notable incident occurred a few years ago while I was staying in a remote village in far-west China. Numerous stray dogs roamed the village. Some were friendly and forthright beggars. Some were shy and obviously suffering trauma from some type of abuse. Others were hostile, snarling and barking (obviously suffering trauma from some type of abuse). One day I went for a walk in the adjacent forest and a small dog started following me. I recognized it was one of the beggar dogs that the locals had been hissing at and shoving away earlier in the village. The dog kept his distance but nonetheless followed my every move. I called him to me and he just stood still. I kept calling and he slowly moved forward, not certain that I was to be trusted. But he seemed to be following because of his curiosity about me, a stranger who appeared different than the village folk he was familiar with. He refused to come close and let me pet him. So I kept walking and he kept following. When we returned to the village I went to my cabin and the dog ran down the road. Later that night I came out of the cabin and the dog was there. I gave him some food. He let me pet him for a while and seemed happy. The next day I had planned to climb a high mountain just outside of the village. I left the cabin early in the morning. After about an hour along the trail I turned around to find the small dog there, wagging his tail at me. He had tracked me down and ended up spending the entire day with me, climbing all the way to the summit of the mountain and then staying with me for the entire return. This semi-feral dog and I had developed a bond. At my cabin again I fed him. I felt so emotional about my bonding experience with this dog, and so bad about him staying out in the cold, I decided to bring him into the cabin for the night, but after about ten minutes he began scratching on the door, wanting out. He didn't want to stay in a confined and heated room all night. He was

fully adapted to being out roaming with his pack of strays. But that did not stop him from verifying the mutually beneficial social bond he and I had created and doing his daily rounds of visitation with me for the remainder of my stay there. I never had time for another big hike, but I am positive that if I went into the mountains for another walk (or hunting and gathering) he would have very likely shown up again out of nowhere to accompany me. This scenario was perhaps just a few steps forward in social evolution between hominin and canid from that of my later experience with the tan-brown wolf.

The autonomous self-reliance of a stray dog has a lot of wildness about it, but also, when it interacts with random humans, an often simultaneous essence of social bonding and symbiosis, mutually beneficial in regard to both emotional experience and species grounding, even without a subsistence format. Yet, I will attest that the subsistence component makes the bonding even more extraordinary. Various people whose dogs accompany them for hunting will strongly agree.<sup>9</sup>

Our relationship with dogs seems always to have been a special one, intimate, communicative, bonding, and socially binding. But we never needed to make dogs our dependents. This becomes the problem: we make our ‘pets’ helplessly dependent on us, sapping the wildness out of them leading to their living in a perpetual state of fear. This is also what self-domestication has done to hominins, tamed us, enslaved us to relationships of hierarchy, domination, and socioecological alienation that for our current survival most now dare not break.

In full cognizance of the offensive sensitivities involved here, we should be honest that what we have done to ‘our’ dogs is an accurate analogy to our own domestication and highlights also how our relationships with domesticated animals shape us and our possibilities. It is ironic that for many who dedicate their lives to otherwise helpless pets, the capacity to break free of domestication at all becomes greatly hindered. I’ve seen this often with various dog ‘owners.’ Every choice in life revolves around pet sitting the now helpless and eternally needy dog and it seems that once enveloped in this mutually re-enforcing domestication symbiosis, neither the dog nor the human has much capacity for shedding domestication. Domesticated humans will make the same choices they do for themselves as they do for their pets. Domestication is a mutually reinforcing positive feedback loop.

My encounters with wolves<sup>10</sup> provide something antithetical to this. The wolf genes know the long-range functional, sustainable, and resilient symbiosis: Wildness. The wolf wants the relationship, but not at the expense of her autonomy. So she uses that relationship to her

advantage, both for subsistence and sociality, sharing the power of her beautiful night song under a starlit sky. While some wolves and humans have been caught, tricked into becoming tamed, and others have even volunteered in the momentary illusion that life will be easier on the other side of the threshold, others, both wolves and some hominins, get it. They see the trick and don't allow themselves to be caught; they maintain their wild autonomy and run away howling into the night, laughing at the naïve domesticates who make attempts to control them. But we walk on shaky ground, ever more vulnerable to the programmers and deceivers. With the spirit of the wolf in its blood, the chained and barking dog is fighting for its life, it wants out to be free and run wild. With time, it will learn not to snarl, that the others surrounding it are not its enemies to be perpetually feared. Likewise, the chained and barking modern human also wants to be free, but most of these have no mental baseline for how to get there, no reference point other than what they observe and are fed by the economic, digital, and technological world. Wolves are a reference point. Hunter-gatherers are a reference point. Wild autonomy is the baseline. Every experience I have while actually attempting to live in wildness, especially my experiences in shared space and relation with wild others, make this core reality continuously and increasingly clear.



#### *Endnotes*

1 For the record, I personally don't 'own' a dog, nor desire to 'own' one, so none of

what I write here is rooted in any pro-dog bias readers might suspect I hold. My interest stems first from encountering and observing wolves and then considering dogs more in-depth after the fact.

2 If any readers are aware of these, please share.

3 Paraphrasing a line from the film *Jeremiah Johnson* which a hunting friend of mine seems to constantly recite whenever I have walked the land with him.

4 Peterson, N. 1993. *Demand sharing: reciprocity and the pressure for generosity among foragers*. *American Anthropologist*. 95, 860–874.

5 The considerably important history of human hunting of the various mountain sheep and mountain goat species should not be underestimated. Throughout the high mountains of central Asia, Europe, and North America there are well documented indigenous traditions and cosmologies related to hunting and relying on these horned animals as sources of food. Stone age rock art in the form of paintings and engravings depicting mountain sheep and hunters pursuing them with spears and bow and arrow occur in Asia's Altai Mountains, in the European Alps, and throughout the North American southwest, among other places. George Frison documented the major importance of big horn sheep hunting for various paleohunters and contemporary Native Americans in the Rocky Mountain and High Plains region, verified by numerous evidence of faunal remains, stone and wooden drives and traps, and even the use of nets, to capture Big Horn sheep. Frison's discovery of a Big Horn sheep ram skull embedded inside the trunk growth of an old-growth Juniper tree in Wyoming provided some verification that Big Horns had spiritual significance for High Plains hunting cultures. See Frison, G. 2004. *Survival by hunting: prehistoric human predators and animal prey*. University of California Press. Moreover, some northern Athabascan and Interior Eskimo peoples maintain significant Dall Sheep hunting traditions. One reference is Nadasdy, P. 2003. *Hunters and bureaucrats: power, knowledge, and aboriginal-state relations in the southwest Yukon*, Vancouver, UBC Press. For various northwest coast tribes North American Mountains Goats were important prey. Wolves were likely often involved in these ongoing interactions.

6 For example, one can start with Yong, E. 2013. *Origin of Domestic Dogs: New analysis suggests that domestic dogs evolved from European wolves that interacted with human hunter-gatherers*. *TheScientist.com*

7 Peterson, N. 1993.

8 And perhaps also in my previous encounters with wolves as well.

9 Existing references on this topic abound, covering huge swaths of geography, culture, time frames, and context. Several small-scale immediate return hunter-gatherer groups are well documented in using dogs as companions and helpers in hunting. One example is the Dobe Ju/'hoansi San discussed in Lee, R. 1979. *The !Kung San; men, women, and work in a foraging society*. Cambridge University Press.

10 And also applicable to this are some encounters with stray, semi-stray, or semi-feral dogs.



# breath at the threshold

joan kovatch

*All photos by Joan Kovatch.*

rushing downriver, perched and fur-shrouded,  
motor screaming behind in a roar so persistent  
my ears shift it aside as superfluous -  
there is no reprieve from wind at this speed,  
it reaches insistent out of need, snaking down windpipes,  
cold nose plugged, my lungs struggle to restore their rhythm.

this time at least, the context is far-stretching spruce forest,  
knee-deep muskegs lush with berries, ancestral bear tracks and  
the gusting punch of aroma from labrador tea leaves  
while a near-arctic sun shimmers overhead, as if smiling.

the normal fight is what crushes me -  
not just the drifting hum from ever-chugging wires overhead,  
not just the shift of bills, hand to hand, disappearing  
as the days and weeks slip bodiless away, not just  
the crush of metal bodies hurling purposefully, nor  
the supposed haven of noxious homes and poisoned harvests -

but that all this facade, this supposed everything  
whose masks have been ripped away, chipped off  
by the lofting scientists, chewed to shreds  
by scavenging raccoons, torn with bleeding, calloused fingers  
by wild hordes seething in desperation,  
determined that revelation would bring it down -

it still stands, still crushes ancient forests, still churns our  
earthen bedding and gushes waste like so many festering boils  
that our far-distant children will somehow contend with.

reigning unspoken so long, i guess people stopped  
looking skyward, assured they knew the face above them,  
the benevolent father of our progress and possibilities,  
they haven't realized his rushing steps have churned the winds,  
feet dragging through oceans snagged coral beds and  
sent the tides lashing in discontent, his waving arms  
hurling marvels onto the unseeing  
as they draw in their breath in wonder -

and so the storm wind rushes in, raging, indignant  
at unfounded rough regard, his natural ascendancy wrecked,  
he'll snatch at any offering of revenge and come punching lungs,  
leaving us knocked flat and breathless.



that same sensation, felt in untold multitudes, builds  
into a sort of senselessness, a staggering, and we grasp,  
helpless, at fast-flicked screens, relentlessly tapping to upload  
the moments we stretch to consider best  
among those we can still see, night-blind as we are,  
vision tunneled and truncated into hashtags.

it's that in-drawn breath that wrecks us,  
that sucking in of storm wind, as we touch such delicate screens,  
willing them toward human response,  
and wait, breathless -

for a pixelated flicker something like love,  
for soft hands resting on shoulders or  
knowing glances delivered with fertile depth;  
for the brush of familiar skin, or the soothing tones  
of storied voices that lift our hearts like a rising tide

and rest them, gently, in the waiting hands of ancestors.

i've only ever exhaled in the forest, over sun glimmer through green leaves shifting or drifting above ocean's edge; i've only ever breathed as the fulling moon flashed its pulling light through my veins and woke my startled senses.

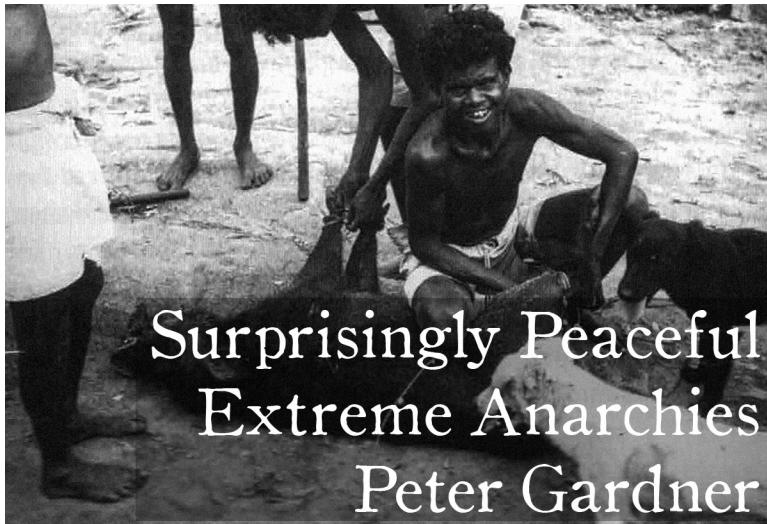
have others found some secret source of air, or breathless, do they make their way alone? it's fathomless to me, their windless fight - my shoulders strong, i still can't haul this burden without stepping world to world for love and air, for i've never found another in the forest, never felt that storied finger through the screen.

there is no hunt to me but this - the aching years as plans are laid, the leafy stretches of our forest mapped, the ladders built and cordage slowly twined for one big climb and clawing to the top.

clambering up the unmasked peak, our shadowed forest hurting far below, we'll loose the hurling gales our hearts have towed, wreck every rusted blade while plunging deep, burst ancient lungs too long in spewing woe, and sever cables needed to abide.

then endless will the breath come rushing in, not pushing but in wafting breezes mild. still poison everywhere will threaten skin, but skin to skin we'll set a swinging stride, our forest home all welcome and all wild.





# Surprisingly Peaceful Extreme Anarchies

## Peter Gardner

*Paliyan hunter butchering a wild hog. Photo by Peter Gardner.*

Over time, the meanings of any term will generally change, this being especially so when there is a drastic change in circumstances. Meanings of the word anarchy are a case in point. The Greek word ἀναρχία (anarchia), meant literally “without a leader.” When the word entered the English language in 1539, it might have been predicted that its meaning would soon have to be tailored to the wholly new social relationships that were about to be ushered in as the western world experienced its Industrial Revolution. There had, of course, been social stratification in Europe for centuries, but now the workers were about to face a combination of harshly regimented work conditions and slum housing. The net effect of this was marked subordination of what was soon to be known as “the working class.” Think of the position of nineteenth century factory workers. As might have been predicted, sensitive social theorists, from William Godwin (1756-1836) to Pyotr Kropotkin (1842-1921), began writing about the need to develop more humane economic systems. Admittedly, although they were speaking mainly of the middle and lower ranks of the society and not the actual aristocratic leadership of the society, they began calling themselves “anarchists.”

Long before the birth of Anthropology, Westerners who were exploring new lands encountered quiet tribal peoples as they went, peoples who did not produce food, they lived simply by foraging for it in nature. Their social groups were necessarily small and they subsisted by hunting, fishing, and collecting vegetable foods. In many cases

they lacked leaders. One such people were the Micmac in southeastern Quebec. After living with Micmac for 12 years, the Franciscan, Chrétien Le Clercq, wrote in 1691, “they hold it as a maxim that each one is free: that one can do whatever he wishes: and that it is not sensible to put constraint upon men.”<sup>1</sup> What is more, they “do not dare correct their children.”<sup>2</sup> From a structural point of view, he appears to have been describing an anarchic system in the strictest sense—a pure or extreme anarchy.

Eventually, and quite reasonably, 20<sup>th</sup> century anthropologists began using the term anarchists for those foraging peoples they encountered who had weak, if any, formal leadership. This was done fully in keeping with Greek usage. Thus, Kaj Birket-Smith in 1929 said Caribou Eskimo society “is entirely built upon that voluntary agreement of which Kropotkin dreamt.”<sup>3,4,5</sup>

Some findings were dramatic. Especially near the southern tip of India and in subarctic northwestern North America, anarchy permeated the entire cultural fabric of a number of foraging peoples, with quite an impact on men, women, and children. I myself spent a year and a half doing fieldwork with the Paliyar<sup>6</sup> in India and then the same amount of time with the Dehcho Dene in Canada’s Northwest Territories.<sup>7</sup> Both were quiet, egalitarian peoples, and I found them to be truly anarchic in all regards.

Amongst Paliyar, striking one’s spouse or even telling him or her what to do is deemed disrespectful and grounds for marital separation, achieved by just walking out. For them, the key to respecting others lies in granting them autonomy. What is more, Paliyar believe it wrong to subject their own children to the mildest punishment or rebuke, and equally wrong to tell them what they ought to do.<sup>8</sup> No one holds a position of even mild authority within a Paliyan settlement. People go as far as avoiding comment on the behavior of others, this being especially true as regards their relative abilities, for judgmental statements are deemed offensive. One middle-aged man said of his wife’s ongoing affair, “It is not my business” and an older man, who clearly tolerated his young wife bringing in a younger co-husband, told me “If I have caught hold of a branch, I should not leave it.” I can attest that his general behavior was fully in keeping with his figurative speech.

Despite the occasional word play of several men and women, it would be hard to overstate Paliyan taciturnity. My impression was that only 20 or 30 words might be spoken in the course of an hour as people sit in patches of sunlight on cool mornings and as some move

from one patch to another. When people leave settlements, others are usually unaware of their planned destinations (whether they are merely going off to the day's work or actually moving away from the settlement), despite the general air of calm and friendliness. Although I often saw mothers stopping in front of objects and murmuring a few quiet words to the one to two year olds whom they carried in cloth slings, children from 3 or 4 on learn largely by watching others quietly and by playing experimentally in small, loose, heterogeneous groups.<sup>9</sup>

Nayaka, who are broadly similar with Paliyar, but northwest of them, avoid asking others for what would be to them merely hearsay knowledge.<sup>10</sup> Parents believe telling their children what to do would interfere with them acquiring *budi*—“wisdom” or “understanding” that is based on their own personal experience.<sup>11,12</sup> Naveh described this eloquently, after months of close observation of boys. Southwest of the Paliyar, Morris has described Malaipanḍāram learning similarly; they watch adults, then experiment playfully with tasks they will use someday in tasks like honey collecting.<sup>13</sup> It is also notable that, in all three of these cultures, children climb tall trees, and play with fire or with sharp (machete-like) knives, without any adult supervision. They are deemed to be learning.

In the Northwest Territories, among Dehcho Dene, whom several of us have studied,<sup>14</sup> as well as among the Dene Tha just to their southeast<sup>15</sup> and the Gwich'in to the northwest in Alaska,<sup>16</sup> youths get only a few general words of guidance then brief visual lessons from elders on the most critical subsistence tasks—tasks such as setting snares or traps on a trap-line and processing moose hides and fish. Helm has also seen that Dehcho Dene adults permit children to handle adult tools, even if it means that they destroy property.<sup>17</sup> Finally, as Christian has reported, parents merely hope that children learn from having an attentive frame of mind. Whether they do so is left up to them.<sup>18</sup>

Various aspects of Paliyan and Dehcho Dene coping with misbehavior, learning by watching, and reacting to mention of headmen or chiefs bear mention.

### *Handling Misbehavior*

Paliyar tend to live in public view, so a 137-day summary of child punishment (in the settlement that was least affected by recent culture contact) ought to be relatively complete. Every two to four weeks, I watched a mother respond in frustration to a misbehaving child, then

either initiate separation between the two of them or allow another adult to give the child temporary refuge. Once I saw a tiny girl being swatted by her mother with a strand of soft plant fiber. Another time a child's grandmother moved in quickly to stay the mother's hand. And, in the harshest such incident, a woman—who had just given her son three audible slaps on the buttocks for stealing a bit of food from his aunt—wept over what she had just done. Then a nearby non-relative immediately led the 10-year-old boy off for 24 hours of food and shelter with her own three children.<sup>19</sup>

Dehcho Dene, whatever their age, find it offensive to be told what to do by someone else. A young child may be struck for wandering—which could be dangerous in the harsh Subarctic. Otherwise, children are obliged to learn by observation, or by an adult in the household merely frowning, raising a hand, or demanding eye contact.<sup>20</sup> When I was in the process of seeking research subjects, I myself unwittingly violated Dehcho Dene propriety. An elderly man finally advised me that for me to knock on a cabin door amounted to an unacceptable demand that someone come and open it for me.<sup>21</sup> Proper behavior is to scrape one's boots noisily on a doorstep (even if they are not muddy), simply enter, and then sit quietly for a few minutes. Even if I did not know the people involved, that worked smoothly. Respecting other peoples' privacy is very much a matter of our own cultural concerns, not theirs.

#### *Outcomes of Learning by Watching, Rather than by Verbal Lessons*

One of the biggest surprises for me when studying Paliyan culture was that their way of learning led to individuals having idiosyncratic labels for even the most critical and basic items in their food quest. Paliyans I worked with early in the study had given me terms for essential equipment, such as the digging stick woods they use for digging tubers. I did not think it necessary to verify all those terms with others in the community. But, a couple of months later, during a rest stop with a young (but long-married) couple and an adult cousin of one of them, with whom I had spent that day working in the forest, I asked the name of a particular nearby jasmine bush.<sup>22</sup> All three of them inspected the bark, leaves, and so on. Although the bush provided one of the 5 main hardwood digging stick woods, they gave me 3 different terms for it. It rather obviously puzzled them when they heard each other's terms, but one, with a chuckle, said in the end “Well, we all know how to use it!” Naturally we all laughed, but the

experience did warn me that I needed to actually study this variation. Terms for the vipers (including the lethal krait<sup>23</sup>) varied similarly.<sup>24</sup>

As with Paliyar, the Dehcho Dene terms for basic subsistence items commonly varied as, for instance, their anatomical terms for parts of a moose—a crucial source of meat. I did a preliminary test exercise, eliciting, one person at a time, terms for parts of the meat-rich hind leg of a moose (and boundaries of those parts) with six adult members of an extended family I knew well. A few days later two of them came to me smiling and told me of everyone's amusement to learn how diverse the terms are within their fairly close-knit family.<sup>25</sup> So, how diverse are their terms in general? Let me just say that, for months, several times a day, newlyweds and trap-line partners can be heard asking one another, "What do you call this?" And they do so to clarify one another's usage, *not* in order to learn what is correct, or to reach agreement.

Notably, I found too that speakers often respond to puzzled looks by rephrasing their thoughts or scratching an example on the ground, for people tend to watch as much as they listen, and this helps alleviate confusion.



*Paliyan digging for tubers. Photo by Peter Gardner.*

#### *Responses to Outsiders' Mention of Leaders*

If a visiting forest produce contractor or forestry officer asks for a Paliyan *talaivan* (which for him, means "head + man") who could help him mobilize a few laborers, his request tends to work. Hearing

the word *talaivan*, people take it to refer to a man *or woman* with a “*good head*” that is to say—a gift of wit or soothing talk—who could indeed be helpful in the recruiting.<sup>26</sup> In any given settlement, several people generally have such ability. When an outsider stepped forward one night and, without saying anything, wrapped his hand around a sharp machete blade and lifted it from the hand of a trembling, deeply upset man, this helper<sup>27</sup> was referred to afterwards as a *talaivan* by one worried onlooker.

Asch and Smith recently wrote that, in many Dehcho Dene communities, recently elected leaders replaced the traditional “social control” and “leadership” by specialists or elders.<sup>28</sup> Not so. In 1975, near the close of my research, I saw *not* the election of a leader, but—in the words of the retiring “chief”—“choice of a helper to ensure that elderly widows got a share of meat from a hunt and that large families had adequate children’s winter clothing.” People sat on the grass and 9 out of 27 raised hands for all 3 nominees; a few others supported 2 of them. What they were actually doing was *endorsing* those who might adequately *help* their fellows; many actually made the grade. The new helper set out at once to address peoples’ needs. Soon after his selection, we watched him fold his hand in a poker game that he was almost certain to win, in order that a needy man instead could take the pot. Later we discovered that he was also giving thought to some workable alternative to trading furs for tools and supplies at the Hudson’s Bay Trading Post, because its century-old monopoly in the settlement gave people no opportunity to negotiate prices. Although he happened to be experienced in the outside world, the way in which he dealt with his fellows differed little from that of responsible community members in past times. Anarchy continued, albeit in disguise.

### *Conclusions*

While some may see no problem with applying the term “anarchist” to many or even most foragers, we find that there are a few places in the world in which foragers have what might be called “pure” or “extreme” anarchies. These are cultural systems in which there is no formal leadership at all and people do not rely on those individuals who have acquired some expertise.

The general outcome of all this can be to create populations of creative, self-reliant people, each of whom manifests somewhat distinctive personal behavior and tolerates the idiosyncrasies of others. It would give birth to cultural systems of the kind Pelto once called

“loose,”<sup>29</sup> but which are very far from being chaotic. They tend as well to be relatively peaceful, due to the difficulty of anyone mounting power plays or manipulating others, unless perhaps by sorcery. A little respect goes a long way.

## NOTES

*This paper is an expanded, substantially modified version of a paper which was prepared for presentation in an anarchy section of the 12<sup>th</sup> Conference on Hunting and Gathering Societies (CHAGS) in 2018, but which I was unable to attend. The original conference paper may however be published eventually together with other papers from that session.*

### *Endnotes*

1 Le Clercq, Chrétien 1910 *New Relation of Gaspesia: With the Customs and Religion of the Gaspesian Indians*. Translation of the 1691 edition by W. F. Ganong. Toronto: The Champlain Society, 15. Pg 243.

2 Ibid. Pg 242.

3 Birket-Smith, Kaj 1929 *The Caribou Eskimos: Material and Social Life and their Cultural Position, vol. 1 Descriptive Part*. Copenhagen: Gyldendalske Boghandel, Nordisk Forlag. Pg 260.

4 Men, though, may eat first at a common meal. Birket-Smith, 1929. Pg 267.

5 From 1937, Ruth Landes, A. I. Hallowell, John J. Honigmann, etc. also used “at-omistic,” a near synonym, to characterize wary, individualistic, leaderless peoples in northern American woodlands. See Landes, Ruth 1937 “The Ojibwa of Canada” pp. 87-126 in M. Mead, ed. *Cooperation and Competition among Primitive Peoples*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

6 The singular noun and adjective of Paliyar is Pal iyan.

7 I thank June Helm for telling me, “Your Paliyans sound like my Slavey,” at the 1965 Conference on Band Organization, at the National Museums of Canada, Ottawa.

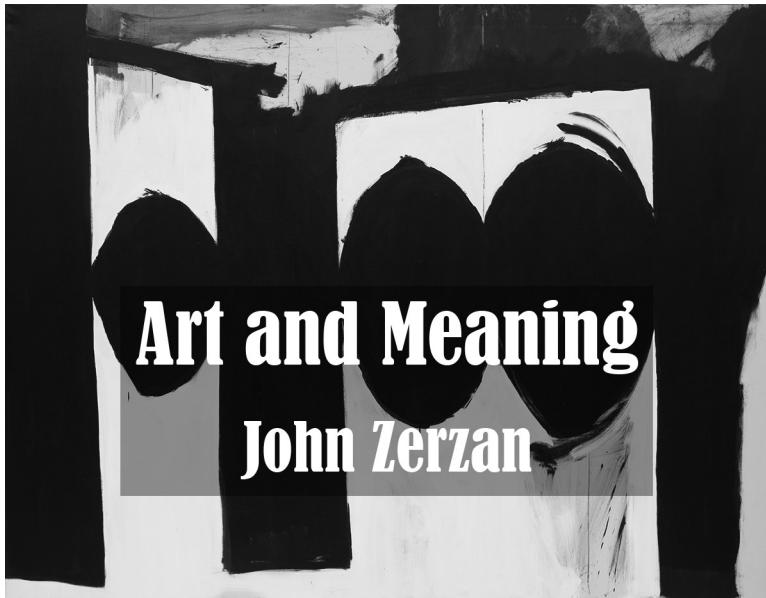
8 Gardner, Peter M. 1966 “Symmetric Respect and Memorate Knowledge: The Structure and Ecology of Individualistic Culture,” *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, Vol. 22, 4: 389-415. Pgs 391-3; Gardner, Peter M. 2000, *Bicultural Versatility as a Frontier Adaptation among Paliyan Foragers of South India*. Lewiston, N. Y.: The Edwin Mellen Press. Pgs 101-3.

9 Gardner, Peter M. 2018, “Foragers with Limited Shared Knowledge,” publication forthcoming in D. Friesem and Noa Lavi, eds. *Inter-Disciplinary Perspective on Sharing among Hunter-Gatherers in the Past and Present*.

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11 Naveh, Daniel 2007 *Continuity and Change in Nayaka Epistemology and Subsistence Economy: A Hunter-Gatherer Case from South India*. PhD dissertation, University of Haifa. Pgs 86-97; Naveh, 2014. Pgs 346-52.

- 12 Budi has cognates in several tribal Dravidian languages (Burrow, T. and M. B. Emeneau 1961 *A Dravidian Etymological Dictionary*. Oxford: The Clarendon Press. Entry 3563a), suggesting that it is not simply a recent, sophisticated loan word.
- 13 Morris, Brian 1982 *Forest Traders: A Socio-economic Study of the Hill Pandaram*. London: The Athlone Press. Pgs 146-9.
- 14 Helm, June 1961 *The Lynx Point People: The Dynamics of a Northern Athapaskan Band*. Ottawa: National Museum of Canada, Bulletin No. 176. Pg 87; Gardner, Peter M. 1976 "Birds, Words, and a Requiem for the Omniscient Informant." *American Ethnologist* 3: 446-468. Pg 463; Christian, Jane 1977b "Moosehide processing", pp. 286-307 in J. Christian and P. M. Gardner. *The Individual in Northern Dene Thought and Communication: A Study in Sharing and Diversity*, Paper No. 35. Ottawa: National Museums of Canada. Pgs 286-348.
- 15 Goulet, Jean-Guy A. 1998 *Ways of Knowing: Experience, Knowledge, and Power among the Dene Tha*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press. Pg 58.
- 16 Nelson, Richard K. 1973 *Hunters of the Northern Forest: Designs for Survival among the Alaskan Kutchin*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Pgs 9-10.
- 17 Helm, 1961. Pg 87.
- 18 Christian, 1977b. Pg 118.
- 19 Gardner, 2000. Pgs 95-6.
- 20 Christian, Jane 1977a "Some aspects of communication in a Northern Dene community", pp. 21-102 in J. Christian and P. M. Gardner. *The Individual in Northern Dene Thought and Communication: A Study in Sharing and Diversity*, Paper No. 35. Ottawa: National Museums of Canada. Pg 67.
- 21 Gardner, Peter M. 2006, *Journeys to the Edge: In the Footsteps of an Anthropologist*, Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press. Pg 162.
- 22 *Jasminum grandiflorum*, identified by Br. Arochiasami, S. J., using the region's Jesuit botanic archive at Shenbagatope.
- 23 *Bungarus caeruleus*.
- 24 Gardner, 1966. Pgs 397-8.
- 25 Gardner, Peter M. 1977, "Comparative anatomy of a prime resource", pp. 262-85 in J. M. Christian and P. M. Gardner. *The Individual in Northern Dene Thought and Communication: A Study in Sharing and Diversity*, Paper No. 35. Ottawa: National Museums of Canada; Gardner, 2006. Pg 147; Gardner, Peter M. 2007, "On Puzzling Wavelengths", pp. 17-35 in J-G. Goulet and B. G. Miller, eds. *Extraordinary Anthropology: Transformations in the Field*. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press. Pg 34.
- 26 Gardner, 2000. Pgs 93-4; Gardner, Peter M. 2014 "The Status of Research on South Indian Foragers," *The Eastern Anthropologist (Special Issue: South Indian Foragers)* 67: 231-55. Pgs 238-9.
- 27 I must confess to having done this. I did so in response to an anxious 5-year-old girl waking me and requesting that I "do something." Gardner 2000. Pg 98.
- 28 Asch, Michael and Shirleen Smith 1999 "Slavey Dene", pp. 46-50 in R. B. Lee and R. Daly, eds. *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Hunters and Gatherers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Pg 48.
- 29 Pelto, P. J. 1968 "The difference between 'tight' and 'loose' societies" *Transaction* 5, 5: 37-40.



According to Joan Miro in 1927, "Art has been decadent since cave art."<sup>1</sup> He felt that painting hadn't developed much since its beginnings on the cave walls of the Upper Paleolithic.

A deeper question has to do with art's very nature. It exists, arguably, out of a lack, as a substitute for what is missing. Yrjo Hirn referred to a general dissatisfaction and its counterpoint in art: "...the same longing for fuller and deeper expression which compels the artists to seek in aesthetic production compensation for the deficiencies of life."<sup>2</sup> It shouldn't be surprising that art has needed its defenders over the years.<sup>3</sup>

"The more fearful the world becomes, the more art becomes abstract," was Paul Klee's prescient remark.<sup>4</sup> This judgment reaches its fullness with Abstract Expressionism in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the high point of what is called modernism.

Critic Harold Rosenberg put this emphasis on it: "The new movement is, with the majority of painters, essentially a religious movement."<sup>5</sup> The Abstract Expressionists imagined themselves as outside capitalist culture, which they disdained, in solitary battle. There was, as Rosenberg saw, a redemptive aspect, a messianic-prophetic sense of responsibility to their efforts. This "heroic" aspect was soon to be contested by those who were more interested in money, who were in no sense oppositional.

Mark Rothko produced deeply spiritual works consonant with

his anarchist beliefs and aims. Mako Fujimura put it succinctly: “He painted the abyss.”<sup>6</sup> Robert Motherwell’s equally abstract *Elegies to the Spanish Republic* radiate a brooding, powerful intensity. With Jackson Pollock, line is no longer a boundary, but a search for its own beginning or end. His large action paintings display an unparalleled primal, utopian energy. In an age of entropy, the Abstract Expressionists, each in his or her own way, strove to find a way out, to point beyond art via art.<sup>7</sup>

An important source or inspiration for many, including Rothko, Pollock, Clifford Still, and Adolph Gottlieb, was the art of several Native traditions. As antidote to modern decay and as renewal of creative capacities.

An opening to the non-built world also beckoned. In a well-known confrontation with older, established artists Hans Hoffman, Pollock declared, “I am nature.” This was in response to Hoffman’s verdict that Pollock’s painting would run dry because he didn’t work from nature.<sup>8</sup> His comeback meant that Pollock was part of nature, an enactment of nature. Elizabeth Langhorne writes perceptively of Pollock’s dream of a Biocentric art, which would have involved, among other aspects, showing works unframed, out-of-doors.<sup>9</sup> This was unrealized, however; conceivably because such an effort would have served to underline, rather than to bridge the gulf between culture and the natural world.

Any promise of radical change seems to have evaporated by the mid-1950s, as Pop Art arrived, hard on the heels of Abstract Expressionism. The era of the autonomous individual was over. Here was the first flush of postmodernism, when subjectivity and individuality go missing.

Although production for the market has been a fundamental condition of art since the Renaissance, Pop Art impudently embraced the language of commerce and the commodity. It became a part of the media system.

Gay artists such as Jasper Johns and his partner Robert Rauschenberg challenged not only the masculinist bias of AE, but also its notion of a lost deep meaning in need of recovery. Disillusion had set in, and resistance faded. Pop figures wanted to cooperate with the culture and its objects, rather than critique them. They were with the times, not against them; contemporary, detached, deeply complicit. Any critical gestures were annulled by ambiguity and above all, by irony. Originality was explicitly rejected “in favor of a practice oriented to mediation and repetition.”<sup>10</sup> Banal and superficial, e.g. the

productions of Roy Lichtenstein, Jeff Koons.

Andy Warhol was a comparative latecomer to Pop Art's carnival of massified mediocrity, but he became its biggest star. "He paints the gamy glamour of mass society with the lobotomized glee that characterizes the cooled-off generation," wrote Robert Rosenblum.<sup>11</sup> From celebrities to soup cans, Warhol had begun in commercial advertising and never really left it. Fond of saying he wanted to be a machine, he aptly dubbed his studio The Factory. Pale and blank-faced, Warhol could not help but embody vapid and empty Pop output.

Many decades on, painting seems to have succumbed to the "moronic inferno of the information age," as Martin Gayford put it in a review by Matthew Brown, which pointed out that art "hasn't offered anything new for a long time now."<sup>12</sup> Postmodernism came in with Pop Art, and out went any notion of possible radical transformation of society.<sup>13</sup> Doubt-filled gestures, tentative and diffident, seem to typify today's art scene. In our thoroughly image-saturated and digitally mediated culture, the most pervasive idea is that no-one *should* have a grasp of what contemporary art is.<sup>14</sup> This credo exemplifies the first principle of postmodernism: refusal of overview or metanarrative. And the fact of technological society is at the heart of this cultural state of affairs.<sup>15</sup> Artifice is pervasive, and art is lost in the shuffle--everywhere and nowhere. It lacks both development, and a grasp of how much a part of the dominant order it has always been.

In his *Negative Dialectics*, Theodor Adorno decided that "The freedom of philosophy is nothing but the capacity to lend a voice to its unfreedom."<sup>16</sup> The same can be said of art.

### *Endnotes*

1 Catherine Grenier, *Big Bang: destruction et création dans l'art du 20me siècle* (bi-lingual) (Paris: Centre Pompidou, 2005), p. 84.

2 Yrjo Hirn, *The Origins of Art* (London: MacMillan and Co., 1900), p. 113. This is the main point of my "The Case Against Art" in John Zerzan, *Elements of Refusal* (Seattle: Left Bank Books, 1988).

3 For example, Christine Herter, *Defense of Art* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1938) and *The Necessity of Art* (New York: Penguin Books, 1959).

4 Darrell D. Davisson, *Art After the Bomb: Iconographies of Trauma in Late Modern Art* (Bloomington, Indiana: AuthorHouse, 2009), p. 113.

5 Harold Rosenberg, *Art and Culture* (Boston: Beacon, 1961), p. 41.

6 Eric Slade, *Rothko: Life Beyond the Abstract*. (Portland, Oregon: video by Oregon Public Broadcasting, 2018).

7 See my "Abstract Expressionism: Painting as Vision and Critique," in John Zerzan, *Running on Emptiness* (Los Angeles: Feral House, 2002).

8 *Ibid.*, p. 102.

- 9 Elizabeth L. Langhorne, "Pollock's Dream of a Biocentric Art: the Challenge of his and Peter Blake's Ideal Museum," in Oliver A.I. Botar and Isabel Wunsche, eds., *Biocentrism and Modernism* (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2011).
- 10 Stephen Melville, "Postmodernism and art," in Steven Connor, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 89.
- 11 Robert Rosenblum, "Saint Andrew," *Newsweek*, December 7, 1964, p. 100.
- 12 Matthew Brown, "But Is It Tart?," *Times Literary Supplement*, October 19, 2018, p. 20.
- 13 A refreshing counter-perspective is Liam Dee's cheeky but informed *Against Art and Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).
- 14 Terry Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), p. 1.
- 15 Lorenzo Simpson develops the idea that postmodernism is, at base, a function or outcome of technology in his very important *Time, Technology, and the Conversations of Modernity* (New York: Routledge, 1995).
- 16 Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* (New York: Continuum, 1997), p. 18.



There is something to walking we all know. There is something to moving our bodies — just our bodies — that we have deep familiarity with. Nothing to assist: no machine, no mechanical, no extra noise to announce our presence. Sometimes our voices call across a landscape. *Hey-yo! Iiiieee...yip-yip! AHO. Aaaawooo.* Language not required out here. There is no purpose, except the purpose to move. The path, or lack of path to follow. The trail through wood, or the trail-less tundra. Each landscape we travel across. A vessel to carry water. Cupped hands. Something to offer protection to our free appendages; air molecules that float frozen or burn the dust of sweltered heat. Bare feet to feel the weather.

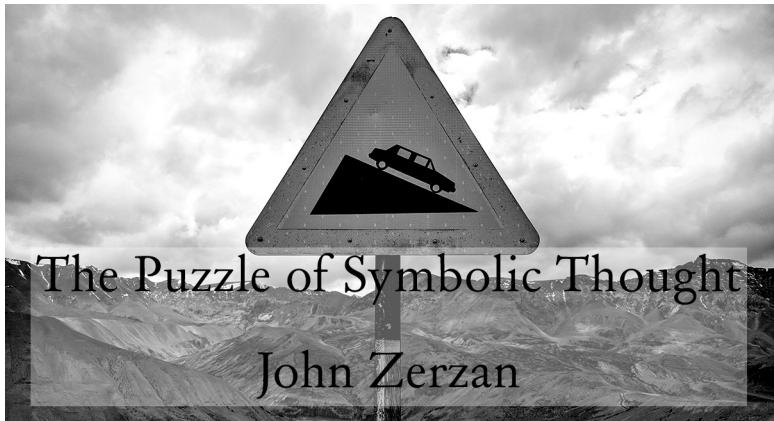
Sometimes in comfort, sometimes in great pain. But it is movement that matters. Some food to sustain the flow of blood and muscle. I will not say my bones will last forever, moving. Nor my hair never turn

white from the press of time. These muscles can hurt, they are mere matter. My feet cross a creek, chilled, climb on. I am as important as the ptarmigan that protects her space, these high crags of rock from which she rears her young. I am as unimportant too, as the folded granite she careens over. Some of us are here longer, some shorter. Look for no purpose, no divine signature.

You could call it something, if you wish. I am not sure the birds do. You could give it a name, if you need. I am not sure the insects would insist. You could give it all meaning, but what will it matter when your bones compost into rich material and give life to the earthworm? That fat worm, it loves to move, to squirm, and slither. It finds the darkest of places, deep in black humus and it feeds. And when the thrush alights, flashes orange breast across shaded undergrowth, there she finds the worm. She flaps in anticipation, for the best angle of her hunt. And the earthworm, finished feeding within my empty cavities, is struck and torn out.

Movement calls me. It is the work of the soul. Call it a soul, or just a bird's word-less call across an alpine lake. Some declare the residence of the soul, claim knowledge by the intentional hands of a god. Or does it float on the back of a gull gliding, scanning always for a silver flash in water? Look at the welcome accident of my birth; it is an echo of the gull's chicks, the one that survives and one that does not. For fox hunts the water's edge, driven by the fresh scent of chick unfolded from membrane, from shell. Can the fox carry my soul in its clenched and dripping jaws? Can it swallow me whole or carry me to caches—weave my raw body into the threads of the earth?

Yesterday I returned home from walking. Felt my tendons in places I forgot they were, connected me to me. What a delight to know how I fit together, placed here on this earth to feel pain. My feet ached as the miles circled under, as my toes bowed over volcanic rock and the creation of mountains. The snow streaked in pink, I slip and strain and suffer. I push and pull and protect. My need to move. To know my body in the shape of the valley, always larger than me. Than my life. What solace is this, to know it will be here beyond me. That's the soul then. Not my own. Nothing with my name. Absence of language. Sweeping through like fog, the heat of lift, a cool descent. The soft bend of ankle into forgiving terrain. Drenching my feet through the draw of gravity, dense wetness on leaves.



The achievements of symbolic culture—what can be expressed through art or language, for example—have been powerful consolations. But they have not been able to save us. “eARTh” is an evocative coinage, but reflects wishful thinking. Art is our compensation for having moved away from, and against, the earth.

In Plato’s allegory, we are mesmerized by shadow-images on the wall of a cave, projected by a fire behind us. Instead of turning around to experience reality outside the cave, we go on staring at images, representations, screens.

Regarding the symbol and representation, Jacques Lacan put it simply, “Its condition is that of being not what it represents.”<sup>1</sup> Think of René Magritte’s painting of a pipe, captioned “This is not a pipe.”

Symbols communicate by referring to other symbols, but if we knew only representations we would not be able to evaluate their validity or success *as* representations. Nonetheless, reification is basic to symbolic communication: that which was living becomes a thing. The world presents itself to us, and we re-present it.

Why? How did this arise? All we really know is that symbolic thought is now wholly taken for granted. Leibniz concluded, referring mainly to mathematics, that human knowledge cannot avoid the use of symbols.<sup>2</sup> But there are no numbers in the world, and human knowledge (e.g. manufacture and use of stone tools) predates known symbols by two million years.

Sibel Barut Kusimba contends that early “sharing relationships... were the first symbolically constituted” ones.<sup>3</sup> Yet only humans have created systems of representation, while many other species have non-symbolic sharing relationships. Others assert, with no supporting evidence, that human consciousness doesn’t exist without repre-

sentation.<sup>4</sup> Michael Franz Basch claims that a central function of the human brain is to turn experience into symbols.<sup>5</sup>

The word comes from the Greek *symbolon*, to bring together. There is a resemblance to the Latin *relicare*, re-tie together, the root word of religion. Out of a need, or a loss, both symbol and religion seek to make up for something that went missing. These remedies being symbolic, they cannot really heal.

In Hegel's *Logic*, the very structures of reality are made up of autonomously generated representations. How has all this representing advanced our understanding? Didier Debaise points to part of its failure in his *Nature as Event*: the symbolic enterprise has not helped "to deepen or develop our experience of nature." Rather, it has only served to "obscure its meaning."<sup>6</sup>

It is commonly said that communication involves the transmission and/or reception of symbols. Stephen J. Newton goes a step further: "There is no communication without symbols."<sup>7</sup> Of course, there was face-to-face communication for thousands of generations before the earliest evidence of symbolizing. At some unknown time, speech began to emerge, very likely accompanying the gradual emergence of social complexity. Symbolic ritual seems fairly recent, pointing in the direction of other symbolic storage systems, like written records. Technologies of symbolic communication across distances followed. The modern age brought the printing press, newspapers, telegraph, telephone, computers.

Communication predates even our existence as human species; symbolic communication is quite recent. Not only is the symbolic a reified form of communication; it is always a simplified form.<sup>8</sup> Witness the iPhone and its like moving us further into the disembodied, truncated symbolic, as texting replaces voice-to-voice communication.

In 1945, Claude Lévi-Strauss commented that sociology, and by implication social anthropology as well, cannot explain the genesis of symbolic thought.<sup>9</sup> He may not have considered an effort made thirty years before by Freud's disciple and translator, Ernest Jones. One need not swallow all of Freud's metaphysics to draw upon his insights, beginning with Freud's supposition that symbolization is an unconscious process. He also held that repression establishes the unconscious, accessible only through dreaming. In his 1916 essay, "The Theory of Symbolism," Jones proposed that "only what is repressed is symbolized; only what is repressed needs to be symbolized."<sup>10</sup> With the symbol, we moved away from immediacy and direct life. Jones

called civilization “the result of an endless process of symbolic substitutions.”<sup>11</sup> His approach echoes Freud’s premise that the repressed is sublimated into symbolic products as we trade away Eros and freedom for civilization.

The unconscious is structured like language, according to Lacan’s well-known formulation, and language regulates the unconscious, not the reverse.<sup>12</sup> So language becomes the subject, its constitutive role paramount. “Language speaks,” said Heidegger.<sup>13</sup>

In *The Mechanization of Mind*, Jean-Pierre Dupuy concludes that thinking amounts to computations of representations.<sup>14</sup> Symbolic technologies have achieved a determining influence on human cognition. Personality disorders have accompanied this development: autism, schizophrenia, bipolar illness, obsessive-compulsive disorder, among others.

*The Lord of the Rings*, by J.R.R. Tolkien, is a tale of a mysterious power which if possessed, promises empowerment—but ends instead in destruction and spiritual debilitation. An allegory of technology, very plausibly; perhaps more deeply, about the reign of representation.

*One Ring to Rule them all, One Ring to Find them*

*One Ring to bring them all and in the darkness bind them...*<sup>15</sup>

The book is complex and even convoluted at times, but I can’t help seeing its main theme as related to symbolic thought.

Our encirclement by representation has trapped us in symbols, and keeps presence at bay. Wittgenstein said that no problem in philosophy can be solved until every philosophical problem has been solved.<sup>16</sup> Could it be that the solution to the puzzle of representation would show “every philosophical problem” in a radical new light?

### *Endnotes*

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2 Massimo Ferrari and I.O. Stamatesen, eds., *Symbol and Physical Knowledge* (New York: Springer, 2002), Introduction, p. 5.

3 Sibel Barut Kusimba, *African Foragers* (Lanham, MD: Altamira Press, 2003), p. 91.

4 For example, Eric Gans, *The End of Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), p. 25.

5 Michael Franz Basch, “Psychoanalysis and Communication Science,” *The Annual of Psychoanalysis*, No.4, 1976.

6 Didier Debaise, *Nature as Event* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017),

p. 1.

- 7 Stephen J. Newton, *Painting, Psychoanalysis, and Spirituality* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 75.
- 8 Sandra Wallman, "Appropriate Anthropology and the Risk of 'Capability' Brown," in Alison James, et al., eds., *After Writing Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1977), p. 244.
- 9 Alan Barnard, *Genesis of Symbolic Thought* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 5.
- 10 Agnes Petocz, *Freud, Psychoanalysis, and Symbolism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 14.
- 11 R.H. Hook, "A Psychoanalytic Point of View," in R.H. Hook, ed., *Fantasy and Symbol: Studies in Anthropological Interpretation* (New York: Academic Press, 1979), p. 277.
- 12 Ellie Ragland-Sullivan, *Jacques Lacan and the Philosophy of Psychoanalysis* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), p. 101.
- 13 Martin Heidegger, *Heidegger: Poetry, Language, Thought*, translated by Albert Hofstadter (New York: Perennial Library, 1971), p. xxv.
- 14 Jean-Pierre Dupuy, *The Mechanization of Mind* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 13.
- 15 See Christopher Tolkien, *The History of The Lord of the Rings* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1988), p. 258, and Jane Chance, *The Lord of the Rings: The Mythology of Power* (Lexington, Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 2001).
- 16 Michael Dummett, *Frege: Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 266.



*Secret Beach, Oregon. Photo by Yank.*



# *Fucking It Up*

## *Fossil*

A 24-year-old goalkeeper at the peak of his career. A professional performing at the highest level.

And he fucked up.

I don't need to explain the specifics. The footage has been dissected in slow motion across the internet. Liverpool lost 3-1 to Real Madrid in the 2018 Champions' League Final. And it was all his fault. All that time, money and passion wasted because of one loser who should have been replaced long ago. Revelations that Loris Karius was suffering from concussion at the time of the bloopers have done little to quell the anger of Liverpool fans and police are investigating death threats. But so what? Karius earns £25,000 a week – he gets paid to take that shit. Plus, it's just a game, right? It'll blow over in no time. Karius might even redeem himself, eventually. And no one's really angry about it. Is anyone ever really angry when we fuck up, or just relieved it wasn't them? Our mistakes are more likely to induce laughter, assuming no one died – and sometimes even if they did.

But there's a lot we can learn from civilisation's obsession with fucking up and the way that failure is positioned as the underbelly of success. In the techno-capitalist nightmare, the dichotomy of losers and heroes is iridescent. In millennial speak, you are hash-tag fail or hash-tag legend. And everyone walks the tightrope, from CEOs to cleaners. Each year, the 'worst CEO screw-ups' are well documented and YouTube is bursting with blue collar 'fails'.<sup>1</sup> Consider the subway cleaner who lets her industrial sweeper drift off the platform; she is left contemplating life without a job as the unit's cracked carcass spews chemicals onto the tracks.<sup>2</sup> But the insatiable public thirst for

fuck ups far precedes the internet. Before Americans could watch real people hurting themselves on AFHV, there was Charlie Chaplin, Laurel and Hardy and way before that, in Europe, Punch and Judy shows,<sup>3</sup> medieval court jesters... One might say that the slapping stick of misfortune has always echoed the drumming myth of progress. And it's important to remember that farce and laughter have long been considered reactionary. Terry Eagleton noted the 'licensed [...] permissible [...] contained' nature of Bakhtin's carnivalesque 'blow-off'<sup>4</sup> and today, in the age of 'post-truth' Trumpism, Jordan Peterson yearns for a return to a 'normative incompetence' or 'foolishness' in politics.<sup>5</sup>



*Laughter and the Viral Spiral*

Years ago, on a visit to Oslo, I noticed that slipping on the ice was such a commonality that, when it happened, no one appeared to laugh. Not understanding the subtleties of Norse humour, I figured that, because it happens all the time, people must refrain from giggling out of empathy. I find it fascinating that, throughout civilisation, humans choose not to apply this attitude to fucking up. When someone reverses their car into a lamp post, something any one of us could do, why is our go-to reaction one of laughter or contempt? Henri Bergson offers an insightful analysis of the functional, if at times 'evil', role of laughter as a 'corrective'.<sup>6</sup> For Bergson, life and society demand of us an alertness for sussing out the 'present situation' with an 'elasticity of mind and body' to enable adaptability. Society is, therefore, 'suspicious' of 'inelasticity' of character, mind and body, which implies laziness and 'separatist tendencies'.<sup>7</sup> Absentmindedly running into a lamppost suggests a lack of alertness and adaptability: you have failed to notice the lamppost and adapt your gait. The resultant laughter is an innate

'social gesture' born out of fear which 'restrains eccentricity.'<sup>8</sup> 'Nature,' Bergson argues, has given us all a spark of 'spite' which reveals itself in corrective laughter, intended to humiliate. One can see how such laughter might offer relief and correction in the face of disaster or taboo. Indeed, no de-civilised world has been, or would be, free from human error or socially 'corrective' reaction.<sup>9</sup> And, in wildness, the consequences are worse than humiliation or the sack: pick the wrong mushroom, slip from a tree and you could very well be dead.

My issue isn't that civilisation is the cause of all fuck ups, but that it places us in complex situations that increase the likelihood of fucking up whilst demanding near-perfect 'performance.' And as well as checking the cameras, bosses can micro-log our every mistake. Punch in late and the Wasp Barcode will amend the stats.<sup>10</sup> Forget an email, or say the wrong thing online? The Veriato 360 allows your boss to itemise everything 'in context.'<sup>11</sup> Lost? There you are on GPS, doddering along like Pacman. If you brake too hard in your truck, the Airfleet 'driver compliance' system reports it, in real-time.<sup>12</sup> Our personal fuck-up data is live, fermenting in pie charts for bosses to devour, or throw in our face when the law suits come knocking. And so we plod terrified through life, hopelessly avoiding humiliation. When we inevitably hit the shit we bury it, or roll it downhill. When that fails, we must 'man up' and 'take responsibility' just as Karius did, tearfully opening his palms like some pathetic Christ. The cult of professionalism is obsessed with responsibility – and why wouldn't it be? By owning the problem, you simultaneously defend and internalise the dominant order. Owning up can even gain you respect, in the short term, allowing your boss to play the forgiving God; after all, to err is human... But it's a cheque you can only cash once. After all, it's *you* that fucked up and people shouldn't fuck up, at least not all the time, no matter how unrealistic the expectations.

But it's not just corporate freaks who are recording and dissecting our behaviour; the general public are salivating over their iPhones in the rush for viral gold. You literally can't shit in the wrong place without the whole world knowing, as Andrew Macintosh, or the 'poo jogger,' discovered.<sup>13</sup> Thanks to the 'power' of the internet, an impulsive action could ruin your life. We are no longer held accountable by our families or immediate community, but potentially by the whole anonymous world. Complete strangers who don't understand my personality, upbringing or culture are free to take a shot as soon as I trip and stumble over the virtual parapet. In hunter-gatherer life, there is immediacy in responsibility. There is no internet of jeering

hypocrites, no media with its tangle of politics, no boss to take away your means of existence. There is you, your kin and the harsh-but-honest line between life and death. Tough as it sounds, it would no doubt be a much saner and more humane social condition than the ones most of us exist within now.

### *Square Pegs*

In civilisation, we consistently subscribe to the myth that ‘good’ or ‘successful’ people don’t fuck up, ‘bad’ or ‘inept’ people do. Karius didn’t fuck up because he’s a human being playing a game with myriad variables in which he is required to wear particular clothing, stand exposed on slippery grass and keep a spherical object from entering a large rectangular net. He didn’t fuck up because of the unnatural lights, sounds, taunts surrounding his adrenaline-pumped (and concussed) mind, spinning with dreams of heroism and nightmares of failure and humiliation. He didn’t fuck up because of the rules of the game, the confines of the pitch, the limited time frame of ninety minutes. He didn’t fuck up because of the high-speed, kamikaze tactics enforced by manager Jurgen Klopp.<sup>14</sup> According to the moronic voice of our culture, Karius fucked up because he’s shit, and that suits civilisation fine. It means that he is the problem: not us, not you and definitely not the game.

You don’t need to delve into anti-civ critiques to realise that, when it comes to fucking up in civilisation, the odds are stacked against us. Pulitzer Prize winner and former Wall Street Journal columnist Joseph T Hallinan published *Erronomics* in 2009, in which he makes it clear that fucking up is little to do with the convenient narrative of individual inadequacy: it’s not because we’re shit, but because our minds are forced to function in unnatural ways whilst dealing with unnatural expectations.<sup>15</sup> Take our brains. Hallinan considers our skill at ‘sizing up a situation [...] within a tenth of a second’.<sup>16</sup> It’s not difficult to see how, in wildness, the ability to read signs of tension, danger or resources would be valuable for our survival. But Hallinan also notes how poor we are at retaining details: ‘we are asked [...] to memorise countless passwords, PINs [...] Yet our memory for this type of information is lousy’<sup>17</sup> No doubt because our wild brains don’t need such clutter! It’s made worse, Hallinan suggests, by the number of ‘complex’ objects we are required to engage with and the extent of information: ‘Even our clothes now come with instructions.’<sup>18</sup> Indeed, Hallinan blames fuck ups on the sheer demands of the modern world

and our environments that ‘seem bent, in a thousand small ways, on upping our odds of making a mistake.’<sup>19</sup> At work, we are expected to ‘perform’ whilst ‘sleep deprived,’<sup>20</sup> distracted and over-faced, with ‘multi-tasking’ – a term ‘ cribbed from the computer world’ – becoming the norm. Multitasking is the way a computer splits its work into ‘many processes or tasks’,<sup>21</sup> but for humans, it seems, this is a complete impossibility. ‘There is no such thing as dividing attention between two conscious activities’ Hallinan confirms, despite what bosses have us believe.<sup>22</sup> And contrary to popular capitalist belief, throwing money at people isn’t a solution either. Using the apt example of ‘choking in sports,’ Hallinan observes that incentives such as money, fame and success are actually a hindrance as ‘people become self-conscious about an activity that should be automatic.’<sup>23</sup>

Hallinan concludes his study with such Thoreauean advice as ‘think small’<sup>24</sup> and ‘simplify when you can,’<sup>25</sup> but the increasing complexity of modern life makes this impossible. Tamarack Song describes the notion of ‘dynamic tension,’ ‘where there is neither peace nor war but simply a community of fully present, fully engaged plants and animals.’<sup>26</sup> ‘Focusing on a goal’ Song argues ‘projects us into the future and takes us out of the moment.’<sup>27</sup> As Bergson indicates, we make mistakes when we are taken out of the task in-hand, yet with the background noise of civilised life, it is impossible to remain focused on anything. Bergson offers as an example the seemingly ‘absentminded’ individual immersed in daydreams of heroism after reading Don Quixote.<sup>28</sup> In primal wildness, daydreaming about novels or gawping at an iPhone would soon lead you to a sticky end. After all, ‘An animal who dwells in the past quickly becomes a part of another animal’s future.’<sup>29</sup>

### *Highway to Hell*

The place where we are most likely to fuck up and die is undoubtedly the car, and perhaps nowhere are the contradictions of civilisation so glaring. The sexy Ballardian death-wagon has more safety features than ever, but is still primarily marketed for its power and ability to distract. A particularly alarming observation in *Errornomics* is the irresponsible (2008) fantasy of Bill Gates who, in his ‘ambition’ to offer ‘connected experiences 24 hours a day,’ identifies the motor vehicle as an area that ‘clearly demands special work.’<sup>30</sup> Hallinan points out that ‘We should not be required to remember more than about five unrelated items at one time’ before asking:

*How many things does your car ask you to remember? Onboard navigation system? Cruise control? Anticorrosion warning device? Blind-spot warning device? Rearview camera? Entertainment system for the kids? MP3 player? Cell phone? Cars now come with so many of these devices that the systems themselves are contributing to accidents because they increase driver distraction. Yet who gets blamed for the accident – you or the car?*<sup>31</sup>

Hallinan criticises the cabs of heavy goods vehicles which, he notes, are ‘increasingly filled with distracting gadgets,’ causing drivers to ‘rear-end passenger cars in front of them.’<sup>32</sup> 40,100 Americans died on the road in 2017, with ‘distracted driving’ playing a significant part. Deborah Hershman, CEO of the National Safety Council, identifies that deaths are ‘not falling as much as some would expect given the advancement in auto safety technologies.’<sup>33</sup> There have been various, often ludicrous, tech ‘innovations’ to make cars safer – remember the ‘Blind Spot Information System?’<sup>34</sup> But Hallinan wryly observes that devices which work by distracting drivers ‘may not work as well as expected.’<sup>35</sup> Indeed, when it comes to in-car safety, I’m very much with Tullock and his spike! As well as lulling us into a false sense of security, safety devices add to the bewildering electrical complexity of the modern automobile.<sup>36</sup> And let’s not forget those helpful electronics that ‘failed’ in thousands of British BMWs, causing the total death of the vehicles and, in one case, the total death of a human being.<sup>37</sup> And then there’s the tech that isn’t built in. Whilst smart-phone use at the wheel has been outlawed in many countries, sanctions are nothing to addicts. Consider the cases of Felix Gillon, Ian Glover, Thomas Wallace, Jorge Espinoza (etc...): truckers who have killed at the wheel whilst watching porn. One less discussed area of distraction is roadside advertising, where it seems anything goes: huge, animated billboards at dangerous junctions designed, quite specifically, to distract drivers.

Despite tech’s efforts, people (and vehicles made by people) continue to fuck up. But still, we spin the myth that accidents occur because of ‘bad’ drivers who shouldn’t be on the road, ignoring the fact that any human being is potentially tired, stressed or distracted enough to make a mistake whilst engaging in what is a fundamentally unsafe activity. Within the world of driving, there is a self-appointed, often male, ‘elite’ who have convinced themselves that driving high-speed vehicles on crowded, chaotic roads is a perfectly safe activity,

as long as you are suitably skilled (and gendered). Such pathological egoists are highly critical of anyone who makes a misjudgment, but often grant themselves full entitlement to drive as fast or aggressively as they please. A similar blind arrogance no doubt compels self-congratulating men to convert the mistakes of other drivers into viral entertainment. Consider British Youtube channel ‘HGV dash cam footage,’ which aims to expose ‘acts of bad driving’ caught on camera by (mostly male) ‘professional drivers,’ despite the fact that many of the ‘crazy stunts’ captured are also committed by (male) ‘professional drivers.’ Amongst thousands of comments calling for licences to be revoked, or vehicles to be crushed (with the driver still inside) I am yet to find one that questions the safety of driving itself.<sup>38</sup> The smugness of these self-appointed kings of the road seeks to mask the inherent unsuitability of human beings to control fast vehicles safely with any consistency. And, of course, Hallinan cites overconfidence as a major fuck up factor,<sup>39</sup> perhaps explaining why ‘Men are three times as likely as women to be involved in fatal automobile accidents.’<sup>40</sup>



*If Karius Drops a Football in a Forest Does it Still go Viral?*

Perfectionism is now recognised as a mental illness<sup>41</sup> and ‘perfection’ aspired to by those under civilisation’s spell leads them into a dangerous web, which fully expects them to fuck up but swallows them when they do. I see a very-near future of cyber Patrick Bateman’s, scrutinising personal ‘performance’ apps, self-flagellating because they only scored 71% in – I don’t know – dental hygiene accuracy. But there’s an alternative. Next time you bump the car because

you're in a rush to get to the job you hate; go overdrawn at the bank because you forgot that direct debit; give a patient the wrong dose of meds because you've been awake for 24 hours, just stop and think. Would this problem exist in wildness? Then repeat the mantra *This is not what I was born to do*. By turning blame outwards, we are not negating responsibility, but placing it where it belongs. Imperfection is a part of what makes us animal, and animals are too busy living in the phosphorous present to care what their 'performance' looks like. Why should we strive for anything else?

### *Endnotes*

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- 2 'Bad Day at Work Compilation 2018 Part 15' <https://youtu.be/zUmMeARjIAU> [accessed 23/08/2018, 10:30]
- 3 Punch and Judy shows are raucous folk puppet shows with roots in 16th Century Europe. They are typically violent and darkly humorous.
- 4 Terry Eagleton, *Walter Benjamin or Towards a Revolutionary Criticism* (London: Verso, 1981) p.148
- 5 'Jordan Peterson on the Worst Thing about Donald Trump' <https://youtu.be/O7EaCVnw5n4> [accessed 23/08/2018, 14:25]
- 6 Henri Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic* (1900) <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/4352/4352-h/4352-h.htm> [accessed 23/08/2018 14:02]
- 7 ibid
- 8 ibid
- 9 ibid
- 10 'Employee Time Tracking with RFID Chip Time Clock/ Wasp Time' <https://youtu.be/IcnYjjXzmu8> [accessed 23/08/2018, 18.30]
- 11 'Veriato 360 Overview Video' [https://www.veriato.com/ppc/veriato-360/employee-monitoring-software-capterra??utm\\_source=Capterra&utm\\_medium=PPC&utm\\_campaign=Veriato%20360&cid=70170000001653W#](https://www.veriato.com/ppc/veriato-360/employee-monitoring-software-capterra??utm_source=Capterra&utm_medium=PPC&utm_campaign=Veriato%20360&cid=70170000001653W#) [accessed 23/08/2018, 17.00]
- 12 <http://www.arifleet.co.uk/services/driver-management/compliance/> [accessed 23/08/2018, 17.00]
- 13 Ben Smeet, 'Man Dubbed Australia's 'Poo Jogger' Resigns From Corporate Role' *The Guardian* (07/07/2018, 06.06) <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/jun/07/man-dubbed-australias-poo-jogger-resigns-from-corporate-role> [accessed 23/08/2018, 19.57] A Brisbane Corporate Manager had a habit of defecating in the street whilst out on his morning jog. His antics were caught on camera and went viral. Whilst I'm not necessarily defending his behaviour, which probably stems from a corporate sense of entitlement and lack of respect for others, does the whole world really need to know about this? For me, the consequences by far outweigh the action.
- 14 'Ex-Goalkeeper Shaka Hislop Reveals what Liverpool's Loris Karius was

Thinking on Blunders/ ESPN FC' <https://youtu.be/moZXVfu41YA> [accessed 23/08/2018, 18.35] The most insightful consideration of the blunders came from former goalkeeper Shaka Hislop, who noted the extent to which Klopp puts pressure on his players to do everything without 'stopping to take a moment,' an apt critique of civilised life per se.

15 Joseph T. Hallinan, *Errornomics* (Reading: Ebury Press, 2009)

16 Ibid, p.4

17 Ibid, p.4

18 Ibid, p.177

19 Ibid, p.7

20 Ibid, p.216

21 Ibid, p.78

22 Ibid, p.79

23 Ibid, p.220

24 Ibid, p.210

25 Ibid, p.198

26 Tamarack Song, *Becoming Nature* (Vermont: Bear&Company, 2016) p.23

27 Ibid, p.66

28 Bergson, H

29 Song, T, p.26

30 Hallinan, J.T., p.85

31 Ibid, p.4-5

32 Ibid, p.89

33 Phil Lebeau, 'Traffic Deaths Edge Lower but 2017 Stats Paint Worrisome Picture' CNBC (15/02/2018) <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/02/14/traffic-deaths-edge-lower-but-2017-stats-paint-worrisome-picture.html> [23/08/2018, 11.15]

34 Hallinan, J.T., p.87-88 The Blind Spot Information System (BLIS) alerted drivers with a flashing light when a car entered their blind spot. The problem, of course, was that this happens every time another vehicle overtakes you.

35 Ibid, p.88

36 'The Tullock Spike', Weird Universe (12/01/2017) [http://www.weirduniverse.net/blog/comments/tullock\\_spike](http://www.weirduniverse.net/blog/comments/tullock_spike) [accessed: 25/08/18, 18.25] Economist Gordon Tullock reasoned that a sharp spike in the middle of the steering wheel might be a more appropriate safety feature than a mandatory seatbelt, reminding drivers of the fatal danger of driving as opposed to making them feel at ease behind the wheel.

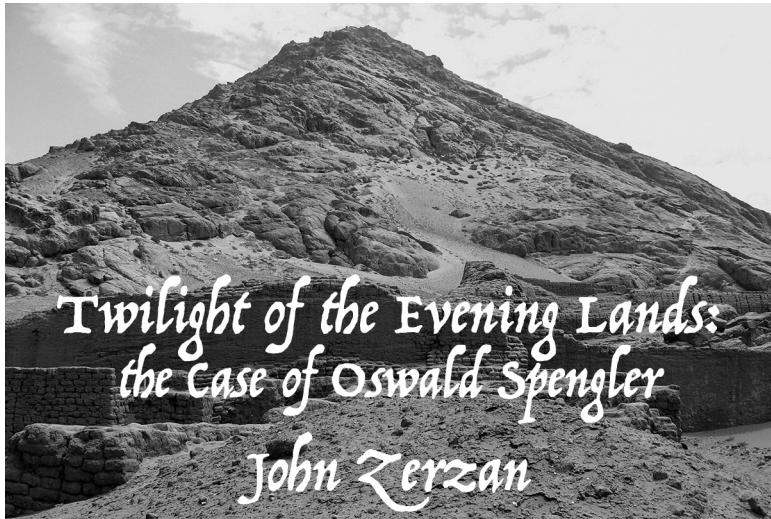
37 Angela Monaghan, 'BMW to Recall over 300,000 Cars in UK over Stalling Risk', The Guardian (09/05/2018, 15.15) <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2018/may/09/bmw-to-recall-more-than-300000-cars-in-uk-over-stalling-risk> [accessed 25/08/2018, 18.12] British Narayan Gurung, aged 66, was killed on Christmas Day in 2016 whilst swerving around a stalled BMW.

38 <http://www.hgvdashcamfootage.com> [accessed 24/08/2018, 12.04]

39 Hallinan, J.T., p.7

40 Ibid, p.136

41 Paula Cocozza, 'My Brain Feels Like it's Being Punched': The Intolerable Rise of Perfectionism, The Guardian (17/07/2018, 06.00) [accessed 23/08/2018, 17.27]



# *Twilight of the Evening Lands: the Case of Oswald Spengler*

## *John Zerzan*

*Ruins of the Moche's Huaca Del Luna, Peru. Photo by Four Legged Human.*

Oswald Spengler (1880-1936) was a reactionary, might-makes-right German nationalist. He also came up with a remarkable work of metahistory or theory of civilization. As Karl Marx said somewhere, referring to novelists, one often learns more about society from the reactionary writers than from progressives.

*Des Untergang Des Abendlandes* is known in English, rather less poetically, as *The Decline of the West*. Its two volumes were mainly written just before and during World War I. Something of a bombshell in the 1920s, as Germans and other combatants reeled in shock from the carnage of the war, the book fell out of favor thereafter. Frank Ankersmit wrote in 2005 that the work was “now sadly underestimated.”<sup>1</sup> Earlier, Theodor Adorno had provided a more specific comment on one part of Spengler’s contribution: “...the course of world history vindicated his immediate prognoses to an extent that would astonish if they were still remembered.”<sup>2</sup> Alfred Stern points out a prognosis of some pertinence today: Spengler’s conclusion that cultures/civilizations (he used the terms fairly synonymously) last about a thousand years, and that this (“Faustian”) one began with the Crusades. The first Crusade dates from 1095—forecasting the end of civilization in 2095(!).<sup>3</sup>

Spengler looked at eight civilizations, arguing that each has its life cycle, its spring, summer, fall, and winter. He pegged the onset of decline/winter in the West as early as 1800. Every civilization has come and gone in this way, obeying a kind of cosmic destiny. The fatal

fulfillment of life cycles is inescapable, corresponding to the general pattern of living organisms. One may well wonder whether the fatalities are more like suicides than natural deaths. But the appeal of his overall concept is manifold. A colonized person, for instance, might well be drawn to a book entitled *The Decline of the West*. Today, a looming sense of crisis, decadence, and tragedy gives the work a general, even compelling appeal.

He was very influenced by Friedrich Nietzsche, who preceded him by almost half a century. Spengler was an obscure high school teacher who, like Nietzsche, never held a university position or had academic standing. Both men died at 56.

He held that war was good for the vitality of a culture, and that hierarchy was the natural order of things. His minor book *Prussianism and Socialism* (1920) advocated a form of state socialism based on obedience and hard work. It resembled the Nazis' later National Socialism structure to some degree, but Spengler hated the Nazis for their anti-Semitic rubbish. His opposition to the Hitler regime became quite well known. Had he not died of a sudden heart attack in 1936, he would have most likely ended up in a concentration camp.<sup>4</sup>

A German jingoist, Spengler, like Hegel, saw in the German nation the chosen summit of the World Spirit. But unlike Hegel's abstract works, *The Decline of the West* is breathtakingly rich in historical particularity. Others wrote about the cycles of civilizations: Giambattista Vico in the early 1700s, and even Florus of Rome, around 125 C.E. Spengler greatly surpassed their basic approach, with his breadth of vision and richness of references. Nietzsche's example encouraged Spengler to take an outsider's position, but Goethe was far more influential. Spengler more or less transposed Goethe's principle of plant morphology to human history and culture.

For Spengler, every civilization is unique and self-sufficient, so there can be no "timeless" art. In fact, realities of time and space are also defined or experienced differently in various cultures. But the striking, even brilliant contribution Spengler makes is his comparative overview of civilizations. That is, each stage of a culture corresponds with its counterpart in other cultures or civilizations. They are homologous or equivalent, expressions of the same life-cycle period. Their cultural significance is the same; Alexander the Great and Napoleon are contemporaries in this sense. Greek sculpture and the works of Haydn, the pyramids of Fourth Dynasty Egypt and Gothic cathedrals, Indian Buddhism and Roman stoicism, Pythagoras and Descartes, and so on. A staggering breadth of scholarship is prerequi-



*Collapsed pyramid at Chan Chan, Peru. Photo by Four Legged Human.*  
site for such an overview.

Our present, global, Westernized civilization of technology and capital he called Faustian, another borrowing from Goethe. Its prime symbol is limitless space; geographical expansion of power and influence is a cardinal aspect of every late culture. Music, which transcends temporal and spatial limits, embodies the Faustian spirit reaching toward infinity. Spengler noted that the last stage of every civilization has its main achievements in technology, not in, say, the arts or philosophy; Rome, for example. He also saw the negative contemporary impacts of media and increasing urbanization.

It is impossible to miss the fact that the 20th century German critique of modernity was exclusively a rightist phenomenon. Along with Spengler, others come to mind: Martin Heidegger, Ludwig Klages, Ernst Junger, Carl Schmitt, Hans Freyer. Klages' 1913 lecture "Man and Earth" was anti-civilization, as well as ecological. Spengler wrote that mankind "is an element of all-living nature that rises in rebellion against nature. He will pay for his defiance with his life."<sup>5</sup> Walter Benjamin made a great effort to bring such thinking to the Left, but was thwarted by the progressivist core of leftism.

The decay and failure of all civilizations heretofore can easily be discerned, but what is it that sets civilization itself into motion? Arnold Toynbee pointed out that Spengler had nothing to say about the genesis of cultures, a defect, he felt, "unworthy of Spengler's brilliant genius."<sup>6</sup> For Spengler, the question of civilizations' origins had to do with "soul" rather than anything so pedestrian as the development of such basic social institutions as division of labor and domestication. Joseph Tainter, Jared Diamond, and others, are useful in filling in that blank.

Late in life, Spengler realized that pre-civilized humanity was a very important area he had overlooked.<sup>7</sup> He had long admired and

respected what he saw as the eternal primitive of the species, its true, natural essence. He regarded every symbolic artifact as merely “a sublimation of the eternal primitive.”<sup>8</sup> “Domestic animals are civilized animals,” he averred. “Man makes them to resemble himself.”<sup>9</sup> His domesticated self, it might be added.

But death intervened in this late-inning effort. We will never know how Spengler’s political orientation might have changed if he had had more time, but it seems a stretch to see some redemption there given his very reactionary political orientation.

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3 Alfred Stern, *Philosophy of History and the Problem of Values* (The Hague: Morton, 1962), p. 127.

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5 From *Urfragen: Fragmente aus dem Nachlass*, quoted in John Farrenkopf, *Prophet of Decline* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), p. 222.

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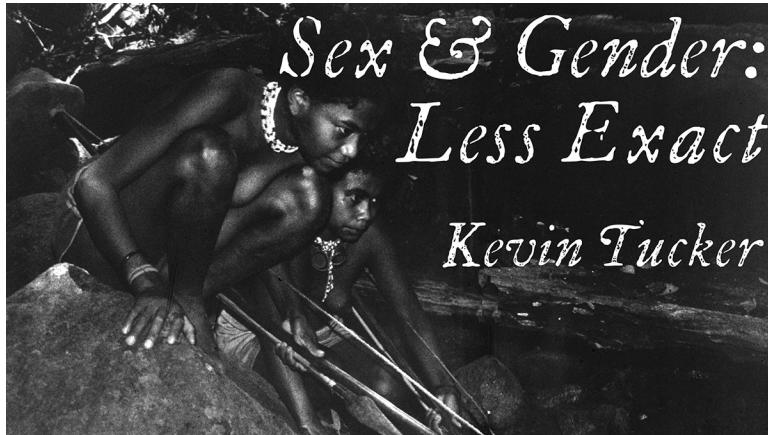
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Murals of those to be sacrificed at Huaca Del Luna. Photo by Four Legged Human.



# *Sex & Gender: Less Exact*

## *Kevin Tucker*

*Agta women hunting.*

*Note: this is an excerpt from my book-in-progress, Of Gods and Country: the Domestication of Our World. Of Gods juxtaposes the narrative of how domestication, looked at in minutiae, creates openings where religion, nationalism, and patriarchy can potentially take root with the reality and history of missionaries as agents of colonization.*

*What has not been so widely noted as the egalitarianism among hunters is the fact that it is combined with a marked acceptance of, and latitude for, individuality.*

- Eleanor Leacock, *Myths of Male Dominance*<sup>1</sup>

Generally speaking, in a hunter-gatherer society, men hunt more and women gather more.

In a broad sense, that is *typically* true. Like most things, there's neither a reason nor a want to treat a generalization as a rule. Without being held to economic goals and production schedules, there's a lot more liberty not to have to wedge yourself into rigid roles. Once again, we find that hunter-gatherer life is not exact, not measured.

This also applies to concepts of gender.

What matters, above all else, is that you're a contributing part of the group. In what capacity, that matters much less. Our economic worldview clouds our vision, which "obscures the qualitatively different relations ... obtained when ties to economic dependency linked the individual directly to the group as a whole, when public and private spheres were not dichotomized, and when decisions were made by and large by those who would be carrying them out."<sup>2</sup>

The civilized perception of the world, inherently patriarchal, tends to paint sex and gender roles as both universal and natural. While we have seen repeatedly that gender is a social construct, that perception has not easily been forgotten.

Neither sex nor gender needs to have inherent social implications. For the most part, a sexual division of labor is universal. To a large degree, that is because of anatomy. Women give birth to babies and, short agricultural or industrial substitutions, they nurse them. Men, to a certain degree, are expendable enough to go on longer hunts than mothers. That, however, doesn't create hard and fast rules for how a society functions.

More importantly, it doesn't dictate what is seen as value.

"In reality," writes Hugh Brody, "those who have the least interest in possessions are the most open to gender equality."<sup>3</sup> All accessibility being equal, all people will be equal. Differences exist, but there's a greater sense of both respect and dependency. Though we might look at the life of hunter-gatherers, and even the term "hunter-gatherer" itself, and think this carries our patriarchal preference for the work of men, it gets more complicated than that.

Bushmen women, in particular, bring between two and three times more food—by weight—than men back to camp.<sup>4</sup> Gathered foods, berries, roots, and slower/smaller game, however, were outside the usual roles of demand sharing. They could be eaten on the spot, they could be brought back to camp, and, arguably, used as leverage to encourage hunters to bring more to the table.<sup>5</sup>

It is important not to let a point go unnoticed: small game, such as rabbits, lizards, turtles, and all kinds of insects, are widely considered as *gathered*, not hunted. Clearly hunting is involved in this act. Outside of turtles and most insects, rabbits and lizards, as well as snakes and birds, move very quickly. Quite often, children hunt them to improve their skills. But they are often hunted with our first real multi-tool: the digging stick. While this is clearly hunting, they are considered gathered foods because they aren't subject to being shared the same way that large game is. This is because of a fairly simple reason: they usually don't offer much meat. They are often cooked and eaten either while out gathering or immediately upon getting back to camp.

It can be easy to construe that as a value, but it has more to do with practicality. It's the fault of no hunter-gatherer what we might get mixed up in the, often rough, translations.

With that technicality in mind, the reason for saying hunt-

er-gatherer, as opposed to gatherer-hunter, has more to do with how these nomadic foragers prioritize things. While meat and fish might typically make less of a contribution by weight, they are substantial in terms of calories.

And in terms of personal preferences.

Among the Bushmen, men and women both prefer meat. If there's a meat shortage, no amount of vegetable matter is enough to curb meat cravings.<sup>6</sup> While camps will move for plants, the movement of animals is far more likely the reason.

What matters is that hunted, scavenged, and gathered foods are brought back to camp. A rigorous and crucial habit of sharing without keeping tabs means that all large game is distributed evenly throughout camp. So the work of any individual, much less a particular gender, never really gets the chance to develop as much meaning or implication.

For the Mbuti, “sex does not seem to be of any particular significance in determining the structure” of their society.<sup>7</sup> Nothing about nursing implies a lack of care or attention from the father in child rearing. Among the Aka, fathers are second only to mothers in nurturing children.<sup>8</sup>

Fathers, in hunter-gatherer camps, remain optimistically engaged in their children’s lives and infants are given much love and affection.<sup>9</sup> In every regard, men and women are seen as equals. For the Batek, “gender concepts did not explicitly or symbolically devalue or privilege males or females either in the human or superhuman realm.”<sup>10</sup>

And that generalization about men being hunters and women gatherers? Well that too gets tricky. Among the Agta of the Philippines, 85% of the women are bow hunters. On their own, they’re actually more successful than males, with an average success rate of 31% compared to 17% among men alone. However, when men and women hunt together, that jumps up to 41%.<sup>11</sup> And for that skill, men and women eat meat daily.<sup>12</sup>

For the Hovongan, Kereho, and Bukat, women hunt as much as men do. Women typically do the hook and line fishing among the Penan. For the Punan, men, women and children all take part in the act of barricading sections of the river to stun fish with poison and then catch them.<sup>13</sup> Yamana women, in Tierra del Fuego, steered and paddled boats during seal, porpoise and whale hunts, as well as fishing and collecting shellfish.<sup>14</sup>

Counter to everything we are taught about life within civilization, the more intact the community, the more room individuals are given

to determine their own lives. Unlike agrarian societies, in need of farm hands, there is no real pressure on hunter-gatherers to keep breeding children. The nomadic life keeps the onset of menses relatively late for girls. The absence of mush or breast milk substitutes slows down the ovulation of nursing women, keeping a consistent birth spacing of at least 3-4 years. Hunter-gatherer women, on average, have about half as many children as the mean of all other societies combined.<sup>15</sup>

Despite being widely loved and cared for by all within the camps, the viability of newborns is solely up to the mother. Among the !Kung, women give birth alone and if a newborn has serious health issues, she alone will determine its fate alone and if the child has major issues, she will bury it with the afterbirth.<sup>16</sup>

While that can be hard to stomach, this isn't something hidden within band life. This isn't a secret that a parent must live with silently and be forced to carry on in economic, productive life regardless. Infant mortality isn't a private matter; it's dealt with publicly both through the healing trance-dances and in acknowledging that it is a probability from the outset. For the first year of life, infants are considered an extension of the mother. The Aka "believe that dead young babies come back again reborn as other babies." The death of infants is regarded as a "failed birth."<sup>17</sup>

That's a very practical cosmology.

One that gives a lot of room to both grieve and celebrate. To love children unconditionally, without having to suffer silently if things go badly. That's more than can be said about our own society, where infant mortality and medical interventions are on the rise.<sup>18</sup>

This is no coincidence though. As surely as we end up suffering alone through rough periods, we are meant to feel isolated in general. Modernity sells us the pride of individual achievement, culminating in individual reward: if not on Earth, then on whatever it is we're told comes next.

The cost: conformity to the moral principles supposedly agreed to by birth.

For a lot of people, that simply doesn't work.

By all means, living a life of misery shouldn't be at the expense of having community.

We live in an era where the individual is celebrated and upheld, but only as an ideal. We embrace the concepts of freedom and liberty while our reality shows that those ideals mean nothing more than how you spend your earnings. What options you chose to buy.

While there have been massive improvements in terms of civil rights in some parts of the world, they are hard fought and yet legal equality has rarely ever netted any semblance of egalitarianism. Anyone who veers from a gender-sexual binary of straight males or females still has to struggle the world over.

And why? Simple, because of religion and its morality.

All the liberal and progressive ideals aside, all the struggles of radicals accounted for, the movements that have happened are juxtaposed against the lowest possible bar: particularly Judeo-Christian-Islamic suppression of joy by force. The great monotheisms, in particular, might lean on the supposed sanctity of the family (we'll set aside child-raping priests temporarily), but the underlying principle is more practical: worship of their God is worship of production.

Farms need farmers. Cities need citizens. Warfare needs warriors. Priests need servants. Religions are born of ordering the world, crafting a hierarchy and then feeding it. In many cases, that's literal in the term of human sacrifices.

Your submission to God is personal because your submission to storehouses and warehouses must be internalized. The joys of sex become secondary to production through reproduction. The only true sin of homosexuality or any non-binary confirming identity is the failure to reproduce. Yet within religious terms and morality, that is a cardinal sin.

This is why missionaries treat the innately anti-economic approach to relationships of Indigenous societies with such voracity and spite. It mocks their doctrine. It mocks the repressive nature of such hyper-domesticated misery that missionaries carry.

Indigenous societies, even those with degrees of domestication and even, patriarchy, lack the infrastructure and ideologies necessary to craft and uphold such rigid dogma. That level of micromanagement is as impossible as it is unwanted.

Needless to say, upholding gender roles and even promiscuity aren't much of a concern. Gender isn't held down upon the altar of reproduction. Indigenous societies may be lacking the sociobiologist's demands that the sole purpose of all living beings is to pass on their genes, but clearly aren't missing it either.

The confluence of these worldviews creates a massive problem, one that can fog the radar a bit. The most tangible impact missionaries can have, even before working with functioning translators, is forcing clothing and strictly intervening in acts of overt sexuality. No Indigenous society has missed the mark on that observation. So while

anthropologists have carried on with stated ideas about the impermissibility or occurrences of homosexuality, they are, rightfully, just as likely to pass on what the people themselves have stated—a white lie to avoid unwanted intrusions and often punishments—or they will lie themselves to protect the people they care more for than a missionary with a latent agenda is going to have.

In terms of ethnography, there are plenty of cases discussing a lack of or negative attitudes towards homosexuality, but they become more complicated. There are two cases in particular that I think exemplify this best.

The first has to do with the Mbuti.

In his groundbreaking 1965 ethnography, *Wayward Servants*, Colin Turnbull rather plainly states that: homosexuality is “greeted with apparent horror, and homosexuality is never alluded to except as a great insult, under the most dire provocation.”<sup>19</sup> Seems very black and white? But context matters.

Mbuti camps tend to develop informal bachelor huts:

*In such huts, and even out in the open, around the campfire, it is usual to see not only youths but also married men sleeping together. The two age groups do not mix, but among themselves members of the same sex think nothing of sleeping close to each other and deriving mild sexual satisfaction from the physical contact.*<sup>20</sup>

However, most sex among the Mbuti takes place in the forest, not in the hut or in the open around a campfire. So while it is stated that there is no homosexuality, or, at the very least, the sentiment is publicly carried on before Western eyes and ears, there is no qualm about having sexual gratification from same sex intimacy.

It would be easy to say that I’m seeing what I want to here, but it continues to gets more complicated. Turnbull himself was bi-sexual. He lived most of his life in a long-term homosexual relationship with his nearly life-long partner, hating any label placed upon it throughout his life. His starting point for his work among the Mbuti, however, predates that relationship.

During that time, he had a relationship with Teleabo Kenge, a Mbuti hunter who acted as a guide and interpreter for him.<sup>21</sup> Having no stigma against physical affection or even love between men, they had little to hide. Sleeping together in the forest, their feelings for each other were clear. But, for both Kenge and Turnbull, if the extent of their relationship had been out in the open, it would have been sub-

ject to consequences imposed upon and reinforced by neighboring villagers and state/missionary agents, and potentially other members of the band for fear of repercussions.

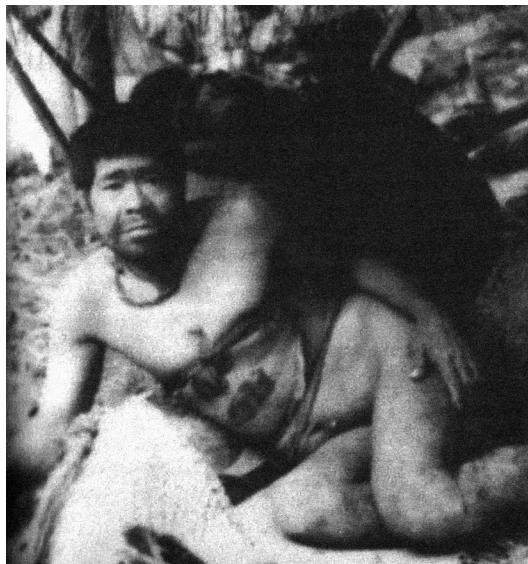
Whatever the reason, Turnbull knew to keep it quiet and to keep it out of his best-selling ethnographies where, it would seem, he was more than willing to blow some smoke to divert attention. It wasn't even until decades later, near Turnbull's death that he even acknowledged the extent of that relationship, alluding to Kenge without saying his name.<sup>22</sup>

That the secret was one that he took to his grave seems to indicate not only the extent of that relationship, but the necessity of keeping up appearances because the consequences, not only individually, but seemingly socially, never faded.

Which leads us to our second example, this time among the Huaorani.

During their time with the Huaorani, anthropologists Clayton and Carole Robarchek began to slowly notice that there was a prevalent, yet still hidden, undercurrent of homosexual relationships just barely out of sight. Hidden, but extensive enough though that they would describe them as common.

Their first encounter was watching two young men during a soccer game, who were both rolling around together and wrestling, both



*Chachubutawachugi, one of two Ache "basket wearers" Clastres encountered.*

with apparent erections. At dusk, they went off arm-in-arm to one of the houses. They carried on during church the following morning, causing a good source of laughs for young women, including the wife of one of the men.

With that, the curtain began to pull back for the Robarcheks. They realized that everyone had “restrained any overt expressions of sexuality, either heterosexual or homosexual, in our presence.”<sup>23</sup> This was due to the overarching presence and consequences that Rachel Saint had instilled. The Huaorani weren’t wrong to think that most whites that came there were missionaries—*kowudi*, cannibals—of some sort and had to hide aspects of their lives from them.

Once that became clear, “we began to see it often.” This aspect of Huaorani life was still kept from being overt for them, exemplified by one particular instance:

*One evening, for example, Kogi and Tuka...were standing in the middle of the airstrip as the soccer game was winding down. Tuka bent over from the waist to tie his shoes, and Kogi laid across Tuka's back and put his arms around him. Tuka looked towards us with an embarrassed grin. The two spoke softly, and we caught the word "kowudi" as they straightened up. They proceeded down the air strip, with Kogi keeping his arm around Tuka's neck.*<sup>24</sup>

It’s hard to hear that and not feel a bit sick about this level of joyless intrusion. The depth of demolition that Indigenous societies the world over continue to face in light of such unwanted, yet such self-righteous, guests such as missionaries. That their joy stands in the way of our prolonged need for misery.

What the Robarcheks had begun to see, however, seems more likely to capture hunter-gatherer attitudes about homosexuality, if not more of the reality behind what is reported.

The Onge of Little Andaman islands seemingly had homosexual sex fairly commonly.<sup>25</sup> In the 1950s, a State anthropologist, Lidio Cipriani, wrote of being shocked by the Onge men’s “rampant homosexuality.”<sup>26</sup> Among the Bushmen, it’s also on record of even women having homosexual relationships.<sup>27</sup> Considering that sex doesn’t get a lot of coverage in ethnographies, the lack of mentions isn’t shocking, but that doesn’t mean it’s not telling too.

One area where it does come up fairly often is among teenagers. Despite being hunter-gatherers, and fairly capable ones at that, there is little reason or incentive for them to cover up or try to hide their

fumbling through adolescent sexual curiosity. As with most aspects of adolescent life, adults are more than happy not to impinge upon their exploration.

Here, the nomadic life pays off. Girls in nomadic forager societies tend to have later onset of menstruation and earlier onset menopause.<sup>28</sup> That means that mid-to-late teenage sex is largely inconsequential. Here the Agta are typical, there is no social value put on the idea of promiscuity for adolescent boys and girls.<sup>29</sup> There are no stigmas for any adolescents in exploring sexuality.

Anthropologist Frank Marlowe personally met no one who identified as a homosexual during his time with the Hadza. However, there was absolutely no stigma about it, but it was also very common during the sex play of adolescents.<sup>30</sup> All of which often happens in full view of the community and without any second thought.

Likewise, while sex and gender imply nothing about social value, gender conformity is equally more fluid.

During the trance and healing dances, along with similar ritual, it isn't uncommon for gender reversals to take place, symbolizing a play on potential hostilities or sexual tension that might arise. This need not be a temporary thing either. The Maidu of California have elaborate mortuary baskets that are woven by *Suku* specialists, who "were not women, but homosexual, transvestite males."<sup>31</sup>

Chipewyan notions of gender are so fluid that they don't even seek to or care to classify them at all. That is to the point that they "themselves are frequently unaware of (or indifferent to) the role and function of gender in their constructions of reality."<sup>32</sup> Throughout Native American societies, there is a widely acknowledged group of "two-spirited" peoples, *berdaches*, which includes; gays and lesbians, those with alternative genders, traditionally institutionalized gender variance, transvestites, transsexuals, transgendered peoples, and drag queens and butches.<sup>33</sup>

Among the Guayaki of Paraguay, anthropologist Pierre Clastres had seen two different cases and responses to gender fluidity. In this case, men are strongly identified with the bow and women with baskets.

In one case, you had a man who was subject to a considerable amount of ridicule. In terms of being a man, he continued to push the good will of food sharing beyond its limits. He was a failed hunter and seemingly uninterested in finding other ways to contribute. After so long, he eventually decided to carry a basket, but refused to carry it the way that women would. Stuck, more or less, in the in-between,

but refusing to find a place to contribute or exist meaningfully with the rest of the band. He failed all roles in society, regardless of gender association, and was never accepted because of that.

At the same time, there was a homosexual male who dressed and lived as a woman. She lived out that role and fully contributed to society, rendering any biological constraint completely irrelevant.<sup>34</sup>

What matters here is not whom you love or how you might exist in terms of gender or sex, simply that you are a part of the community: that you contribute. There is no need to surrender to some distant morality, some gods of production and servitude.

So long as you take part, this is where anyone can belong.

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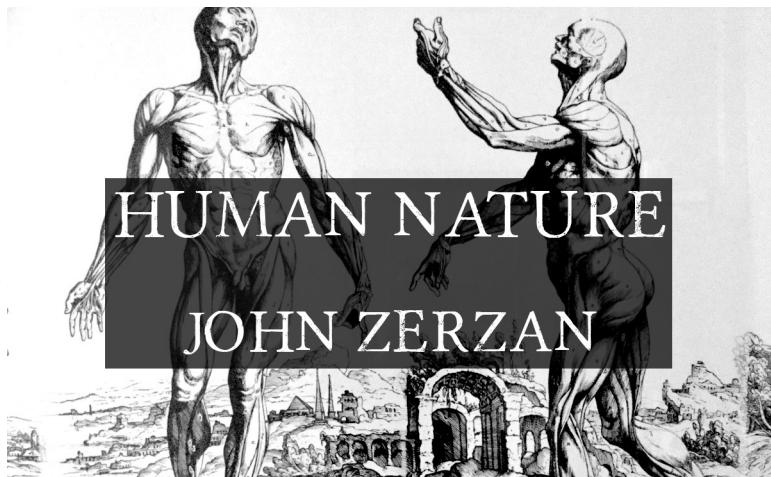


We-Wa, Zuni Berdache.

# *Discussion*



*Batek children. Photo by Four Legged Human.*



It's just human nature to \_\_\_\_\_. Women are by nature \_\_\_\_\_.

Fill in the blanks. Unexamined essentialism, usually in service to the dominant order.

But a blanket condemnation of essentialism, applied to everything, is its own error. Domestication, for instance, has an essential, core quality: control. It grows broader and deeper, according to its inner logic, and that is easy to see. An open-and-shut case of essentialism!

Human nature is certainly to be rejected in a generally postmodern, no stable meaning or truth culture. Rousseau found our true nature to be that of pre-civilized freedom. His “noble savage” conception is roundly mocked on all sides. But doesn’t anarchism rest on the (essentialist) notion that at base, humans are good? And that, as per Rousseau, the problem is that we have been debased and corrupted by various institutions?

Freud’s *Civilization and its Discontents* portrayed domestication as an incurable wound to our nature, an unending source of pain that represses our original condition of Eros and freedom. Only the end of domestication/civilization, Freud strongly implied, could cure this fundamental unhappiness. Definitely an essentialist perspective.

For more than 99 percent of our two to three million years as Homo species, we lived as mobile hunter-gatherers/foragers. How could this be other than foundational?

Edward O. Wilson proclaimed a “predisposition to religious belief...in all probability an ineradicable part of human nature.”<sup>1</sup> This is

an absurd judgment, given how very recently (about 3000 years ago) organized religion entered the picture. Much closer to the mark is the effort by Maryanski and Turner “to discover our ‘human nature’ by looking at the past—the very distant past....”<sup>2</sup> Our past as foragers and hunters is distant in terms of its duration, but is also recent, considering that domestication is barely 10,000 years old.

“We have not lost, and cannot lose, the genuine impulse of living in balance with the world.... it is the inherent possession of everyone,” in the words of Paul Shepard.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, Fredy Perlman referred to the constancy of resistance to Leviathan, the death culture that is civilization.

On a very deep level, it is our nature to want what we have lost.

#### *Endnotes*

1 Edward O. Wilson, *On Human Nature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), p. 169.

2 Alexandra Maryanski and Jonathan H. Turner, *The Social Cage: Human Nature and the Evolution of Society* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992), p. 4.

3 Paul Shepard, *Nature and Madness* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1982), pp. 27, 26.



We are all born wild, human animals. We are born with nearly the same genetic makeup of our gatherer-hunter ancestors, despite all of the domestication our species has undergone in the past fourteen thousand years. Domestication is a process that we have not yet fully succumbed to...at least until now as our species enters the technological age.

Public schools and religious institutions are major instruments of domestication that work to break the wild spirit of the human animal, forcing us into submission as we develop. This process ultimately succeeds with children internalizing the cop and the judge, suppressing the wild spirit in them that cries out and rebels.

Until fairly recently, children have had the relief of unstructured play outside of these institutions to de-stress, fortify, and recover suppressed parts of themselves. Once released from the four white walls of church and school, kids generally have had the freedom to run, build forts, turn over rocks and role play with other children...time to be a human animal. That freedom has all but disappeared as humans migrate into the technosphere. Gone are the hoards of feral children stalking through neighborhood backyards, loosely watched over by a community of adults. Gone are the skinned knees and muddy clothes, replaced with glowing screens and skyrocketing rates of anxiety, depression, loneliness, obesity, ADHD, sensory processing disorders and Autism.

A few years ago, we founded a rewilding school to explore and attempt to address this migration of childhood to the electronic screen.<sup>1</sup> To remind children how to play, to inspire them to adventure in real life, and explore themes of resistance through stories. The things we've learned and results we've seen so far have been promising.

Many children first arrive at our camps like astronauts on a foreign planet...disembodied, googly-eyed spectators barely able to walk and process what is happening in real-time all around them. They are terrified of bugs, uncomfortable with dirt and screech at the slightest prickle from blackberries along the trail. They carry incredible anxiety from the things they've seen on the screen and struggle to relate to the other children. Many of these children are from progressive liberal families who make a value of "nature" as an abstract idea.

But here's the wonderful thing. By the end of one week in the forest, we watch those children come alive. We watch them re-inhabit their body, laugh, express joy and become children again. Parents ask over and over what it is we do, because it's as if they have a different child. Children often say it is the best experience of their life and look forward to coming back all year. More importantly, many of the kids go home to recreate the experiences from camp and continue their learning – teaching friends and parents the names of plants, how to poop in the woods, and building their own scout shelters at home.

We have found that with rewilding childhood it is less a process of undoing domestication, as just giving them the space to be themselves and watching the wildness unfold. It's all still there and just needs the space and support to breathe.

But many of the children's parents also want the space to learn and rewild for themselves. And though we started our school to explore rewilding childhood, we have realized that without a communi-

ty of rewilding adults to teach and support those children, our work can only go so far. But what does a community of rewilded adults even look like in this day and age? And what if any role can a school play in supporting it? As we asked ourselves these questions, we discovered we had opened a big can of worms.

We are all born wild, but the layers of social conditioning and wounding in a colonizing culture run deep by the time most of us reach adulthood. Whether you've spent years internalizing the colonizer or fighting against it, it's nigh impossible for the human adult to develop unscathed.

If you leave a child in a patch of forest, they will probably rewild on their own. If you left the average American adult in the forest for more than a day, they would most likely psychologically implode.

While helping adults release decades of cultural baggage and re-inhabit their playful animal nature, major amounts of emotional support are needed as the dams break open. It's a hard thing to go through alone, and having the support of a facilitated container seems to be a helpful thing for those who want it.

One of the most difficult hurdles we have faced while rewilding with adults has been the pre-suppositions and pseudo-wildness many adults come with. Consumptive patterns of relating with "nature" to enhance oneself and hyper-domesticated cosmologies under a spiritual guise have been the greatest deterrents to adults attempting to rewild, because they miss the underlying point entirely. Ultimately, we've found that if adults do not have a healthy critique of civ and understanding of its roots, rewilding is unlikely to lead anywhere past selfies in the forest or another subscriber to Daniel Vitalis's podcast. Undoing domestication is at the root of rewilding, and if people are just looking for another natural "magic bullet" to solve their life's problems, crisis will inevitably occur at some point in their rewilding journey when all of those presuppositions come crashing down.

Though we've had a much more difficult time supporting adults in their rewilding, there is real opportunity here. Adults can actively choose to forgo aspects of domestication in their lives, whereas children are subject to the belief systems of their caregivers once the camps are over. We have seen adults radically change their life situation during or immediately following a program – checking themselves into rehab to overcome addiction and leaving relationships, their house, and job in order to live a more feral life. But all of those people were in a place beforehand of deeply questioning the system and just needing support and affirmation to go further. Not everyone

is affected so deeply. In many cases, adults walk away feeling a little healthier, happier, with a deeper relationship with the wild and some new skills to share and integrate in their family.

We are engaged in a constant conversation about the role of a school in rewilding and whether it is worthwhile to continue working with adults. We've made many mistakes and have learned much along the way. But we've watched a lot of feral happy children leave our forest, and a community of adults who are asking the hard questions and making their way together has blossomed alongside the school. Ultimately, we are working to get to the place where schools and programs no longer exist and we are just doing life again, together.

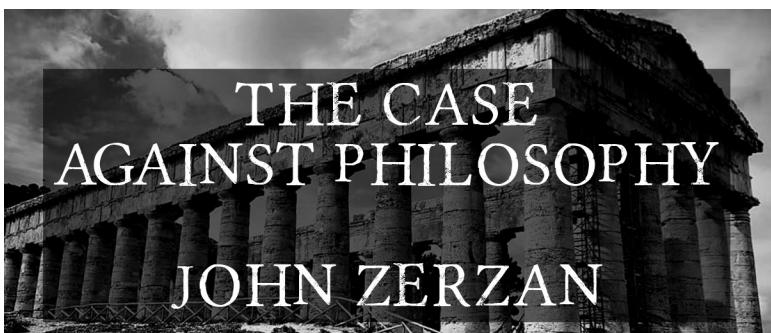
#### *Endnotes*

1 Our approach to rewilding is in alignment with the definition on rewild.info:  
ri-wild/ verb

-to reverse the process of domestication.

-to return to a more wild or self-willed state.

Rewilding means restoring ancestral ways of living that create greater health and well-being for humans and the ecosystems that we belong to. Many things lead people to rewilding — concern over ecological collapse or economic uncertainty, health problems, a nagging sense of something missing in life, or a desire to “save the world” — but from those starting points we come together in a desire to rewild our homes, our communities, and ourselves. Rewilding learns from the examples of indigenous people past and present provided by anthropology, archaeology, and ethnobiology. It means returning to our senses, returning to ourselves, and coming home to the world we never stopped belonging to.



Philosophy is thinking at the most general level. It addresses questions or problems theoretically, abstractly. Philosophical knowledge is knowledge attained by avoidance of what is singular, non-generic. It is disembodied thought, decontextualized, removed from ordinary surroundings. As Agnes Heller put it, “philosophical activity is only possible via the suspension of particularity.”<sup>1</sup>

Philosophy is an essentially impersonal pursuit or inquiry. Thus it is misleading to assert, as do Lakoff and Johnson, that “philosophic theories are attempts to make sense of our experience.”<sup>2</sup> How can we plumb the human condition by using a method that is purposefully abstracted from the substance of life? William Desmond’s caveat is ingenuous: “By its nature philosophy risks being merely abstract thought.”<sup>3</sup>

Philosophy is allegedly above all a love of wisdom. What wisdom, whose wisdom? A search for the meaning of life? When was it lost?

Aristotle famously claimed that philosophy began in wonder, but his “wonder” avoided most of reality. A key reason for this avoidance lies in the quest for what is universal. Particularity, including individuals, is trampled underfoot by supposed universality. National differences in preferred philosophic approaches run counter to claims of philosophy’s universality. The Anglo-American tendency, for example, is predominantly analytic/empiricist/pragmatic, and likely to refer to the more speculative efforts of French and German philosophers as unintelligible nonsense.

There is certainly wide disagreement among philosophers. How many would claim progress or positive results overall, in the field? Blackford and Broderick tell us that the most debated “subject” in this century has been philosophy itself, accompanied by criticisms of devastating scope.<sup>4</sup> So much critical reflection, and has it helped?

Philosophy arises from negative experience, from encountering the world as “radically defective, disappointing, or unsatisfactory,” in Raymond Guess’s words<sup>5</sup>—a common and valid judgment. William James, on several occasions, noted that philosophy begins with discontent. There is a “need in thinking,” as a book about Theodor Adorno phrased it.<sup>6</sup> We seem to have arrived at the fullness of this condition. After thousands of years of history, as Max Scheler wrote about a century ago, our age is the first to have been seen as wholly and completely problematic.<sup>7</sup>

And philosophy has utterly failed to make sense of the world, of reality. The opening line of Adorno’s *Negative Dialectics* proclaims: “Philosophy, which once seemed obsolete, lives on because the moment to realize it was missed.”<sup>8</sup> Hence the continuing, ruthless self-criticisms. There is little mystery to this situation. Philosophy arose from division of labor, and like every aspect of civilization, follows its alienating logic. Philosophy became a profession and an academic “discipline” in due course, along the road to hyper-specialization and self-absorption. Philosophy as delimited, and limiting. The

literature is self-referential, situated determinately away from effort to grasp the actual, much less the whole.

The fundamental limitation is that of the symbolic itself. A “realized” philosophy would not be a practice of representation, but of presentation—a place of wholeness, immediacy, presence. Gilles Deleuze pointed out that philosophy remains caught in representation; at times he attacked this mode of thinking, in favor of “a theory of thought without images.”<sup>9</sup> But it’s hard to imagine such a move away from philosophy as a marketplace of symbolic goods. Symbolic culture may be the most durable facet of civilization, the most difficult for us to abandon.

Philosophy does not help with this challenge. In fact, philosophy has been going in precisely the wrong direction, down the rabbit hole of the symbolic. In the 20th century, language became its central theme or subject, from Gottlieb Frege to J.L. Austin and A.J. Ayer and the biggie, Ludwig Wittgenstein. The so-called “linguistic turn” is based on the false premise that language is the a priori constitutive condition for experiencing the world. Wittgenstein brought this orientation to its fullest—or emptiest—expression. In his *Tractatus*, he said very plainly that philosophy cannot itself say anything; it can only demonstrate what can be said. “It can in the end only describe it [the use of language].... It leaves everything as it is.”<sup>10</sup> How better to guarantee in advance the innocuousness, the pointless irrelevance of philosophy?

The idea that in philosophy we discover only what we already know is not confined to philosophers of language. Jerome A. Miller notes that this idea is built into philosophy’s self-image; one “can find it in Plato, Kant, Hegel, Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and many other philosophers.”<sup>11</sup>

Immanuel Kant insisted that any and all empirical elements be excluded from philosophy. Likewise, Martin Heidegger never made the slightest effort to address the social or historical roots of the ontological or essential tradition he attacked. Nonetheless, a few, starting with Helmuth Plessner, have advocated a philosophical anthropology, a collaboration between the two fields.<sup>12</sup> Whether this approach provides necessary grounding to philosophy is doubtful so far, as it implies a counter-current to abstraction, philosophy’s fundamental orientation.

The rarefied thickets of philosophy are a bad joke given our painful present, not forgetting that through the ages this Throne of Thinking has ignored the fact of vast misery. As Adorno had it, “Perennial

suffering has as much right to expression as a tortured man has to scream.”<sup>13</sup> For Adorno and Horkheimer, the Holocaust was prefigured in Kant’s disembodied rationality.<sup>14</sup>

In my opinion, Nietzsche’s most valuable insight bears on this very avoidance. He saw philosophy as a false and cowardly evasion, because it has no interest in the cruelty and unhappiness in the world.<sup>15</sup> Especially in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche underscores the historical constructedness of philosophical concepts. He saw Kant as a weak and watery sun, as that “pale, northern, Konigsbergian.”<sup>16</sup>

François Laruelle’s leftist “non-philosophy”<sup>17</sup> promises to “liberate philosophy from itself” but provides only vague rhetoric, e.g. “Non-philosophy is thought made into an ultimatum.”<sup>18</sup> The post-modern “weak thought” of Gianni Vattimo<sup>19</sup> at least has the good grace of abject surrender. He explicitly accepts that philosophy can achieve pretty much nothing. Sal Restivo offers a requiem for philosophy, finding it ever more irrelevant and outdated.<sup>20</sup>

“Philosophy is really homesickness, an urge to be at home everywhere,” according to Novalis;<sup>21</sup> but this urge misses its mark completely. Adorno’s reversal of Hegel comes to mind: not “the true is the whole,” but “the whole is the false.”<sup>22</sup> The only whole is that of nature, its sheer thereness intolerable to civilization. Civilization at its core is a dead thing, but it continues to metastasize, along with a contagious nihilism.

Despite the presence of the very few dissenters (e.g. Diogenes, the Cynics), philosophy is part of the anti-life current. I’ve been called a philosopher; as I hope I’ve made it clear in these few words, that is a misnomer.

### *Endnotes*

1 Agnes Heller, *Everyday Life* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), p. 111.

2 George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), p. 337.

3 William Desmond, *Philosophy and Its Others* (Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 1990), p. 209.

4 Russell Blackford and Damien Broderick, eds., *Philosophy’s Future: The Problem of Philosophical Progress* (Hoboken, New Jersey: Wiley Blackwell, 2017), p. xv.

5 Raymond Guess, *Morality, Culture, and History: Essays on German Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 79.

6 Donald Burke et al., eds., *Adorno and the Need in Thinking* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007).

7 Eugene Trias, *Philosophy and Its Shadow* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), p. 105.

8 Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* (New York: Continuum, 1997), p. 3.

- 9 Robyn Ferrell, *Genres of Philosophy* (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2002), p. 120.
- 10 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations* (Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 1999), #124.
- 11 Jerome A. Miller, *In the Throe of Wonder* (Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 1992), p. 1.
- 12 See, for example, Kevin M. Cahill et al., eds., *Finite but Unbounded: New Approaches in Philosophical Anthropology* (Berlin: DeGruyter, 2017).
- 13 Adorno, *op.cit.*, p. 362.
- 14 Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Verso, 1979), pp. 81-119.
- 15 Cynthia Halpern, *Suffering, Politics, Power* (Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 2002), p. 180.
- 16 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols and The Anti-Christ* (New York: Penguin, 1990), p. 50.
- 17 François Laruelle, *Philosophies of Difference: A Critical Introduction to Non-Philosophy* (New York: Continuum, 2010).
- 18 *Ibid.*, pp. xv, 149.
- 19 Gianni Vattimo, *Weak Thought* (Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 2012).
- 20 Sal Restivo, *Sociology, Science, and the End of Philosophy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).
- 21 Quoted in Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1995), p. 5.
- 22 G.W.T. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right* (Kingston, Ontario: Queens University of Canada Press, 1896), p. xxvii; Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life* (New York: Verso, 2005), #29.



When I was in my late-teens studying music in college, someone relayed to me a quote attributed to Charlie Parker that struck a chord with me (pun intended!). I've never been able to track the quote down exactly, but the way I remember it is – “The reason you learn music theory is so you can forget it and just play.” The point was clear to me at the time. The reason I came to study music was because I loved playing it and wanted to learn more about it. I wanted to become a

better musician. However, what I struggled with in college, and judging by the conversations I've had over the years with fellow musicians who "seriously studied music" at some point in their lives, was that studying music took the fun out of it. It made music not something you did in a creative way, but something you pondered in an abstract and theoretical way. Studying music in an academic setting means immersing yourself in music theory. In order to fulfill the academic requirements as set forth by the university music department, that meant taking 3 years of music theory and analysis.

It wasn't that I disliked the music theory and musical analysis. I did enjoy it. I felt it was rigorous and I could find satisfaction in approaching music in this abstract and intellectually challenging way. I even felt it was helpful in enjoying music audibly. Through the knowledge of music theory and by learning various musical analysis methods, I felt I could "hear more" of what was going on in music. What I questioned was - did it help me play music any better? In short, a musicologist doesn't always make a great musician and I wanted to be a musician, not a musicologist.

Be that as it may, it wasn't long after graduating with my music degree that I developed an interest in philosophy. To me, the parallels were clear. Philosophy was to living as musicology was to playing music. In studying philosophy, I saw different techniques for analyzing some basic experiences of living. In the years where I pursued a degree in philosophy, I took the path of studying political philosophy out of a personal interest in the concept of justice. In the end, I wrote a thesis on justice, collected my degree and moved on with my life. I was ready to live it, not endlessly contemplate what it is and means. Through those years, I realized that I didn't want to involve myself further with academia. I was done with its amorphous and bureaucratic treatment of everything it touched. My interest in philosophy had spread out from the purely political branch, and the physical surroundings I found myself in seemed increasingly less conducive to academic thumb-twiddling.

In this regard, I can understand John Zerzan's dismissal of "capital P" Philosophy and his refutation of the label "philosopher" being applied to him and his work. He isn't interested in the endless push and pull of philosophizing which attempts to either:

- Crystalize all thought into a structure of theoretical perfection
- Deconstruct all thought into an ambiguous mass of theory

Both outcomes are self-absorbed and self-referential to the point of being almost entirely disconnected from the physical reality that gives rise to the act of philosophizing and the discipline of philosophy. In a sense, philosophy only exists because civilization provides the division of labor and specialization needed to produce it.

Given all this however, I'm not "against" philosophy in itself, and I don't think I can be against philosophy in general, just like I don't think I could ever be against anthropology in general. Philosophy is concerned with concepts, and in being so, philosophical thinking can provide various ways to analyze, and develop interpretations of, the physical world. Zerzan is hinting at that, but also claiming that philosophy "does nothing," which I will concede is literally true. In contrast though, I believe that philosophy can help focus thoughts that inform action. While philosophy itself may do nothing, there are those who act according to the results of philosophical investigation. Along these lines, there are two things from my reading of Heidegger that have stuck with me through the years that I think are important in regards to philosophy:

- Heidegger criticized Karl Marx's quote of "The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it" by saying the following: "By citing this sentence and by following this sentence one overlooks that a change of the world presupposes a change of the conception of the world, and that a conception of the world can only be established by an adequate interpretation of the world. This means Marx relies on a certain interpretation of the world to demand his change. And therefore, he himself knows this sentence is not a sound sentence. He gives the impression as if it was directly spoken against philosophy, while in the second part of the sentence just as unspoken is the demand of philosophy that is presupposed."<sup>1</sup> Philosophy helps develop an interpretation of the world upon which we can act.
- Heidegger criticized science and scientific thinking, rightly in my view, for being a specific type of philosophical thinking that is frozen in its methods.<sup>2</sup> Now, recall the quote I attributed to Charlie Parker: the reason you learn music theory is so you can forget it and just play music. I believe there is a similarity here to the reason you might study philosophy – study it to forget it and then think without philosophizing. Similarly, you might study anthropology in order to live

without having to do anthropology.

The problem, as I see it, is philosophy for the sake of philosophizing. I don't see that as a problem with philosophy itself, but rather the way it is practiced. The problem isn't that philosophy is inherently disconnected from reality, but that it can become disconnected from reality. I think philosophy needs to line up with, and lead to, actions. It was exactly that which drew me out of philosophy and towards anarcho-primitivism.

When I first read John's essays in graduate school, I think it was the connection to philosophy that resonated with my own thinking. He was pointing out, and is still pointing out, that philosophers were trying to reclaim something that they thought was lost or missing. What he was pointing out is that it's been there all along (wildness) and philosophical gymnastics on their own won't reconnect to that. They only lead away from wildness. We need to pursue a "wild existence" and in doing so its philosophy will be embodied in our lives. It doesn't work the other way around. You can't think yourself into wildness.

To me, the issue at hand here is this - is philosophy all abstract thinking or not? I've never considered it to be all abstract thinking, which I hope should be clear from what I've written above. I think this is why my own brother disliked philosophy – it was all abstract, theoretical nonsense with no application to the real world. It was arguing for the sake of arguing and he specifically hated metaphysics for this reason. He preferred science and engineering. However, in the same way, when he would unleash a diatribe against philosophy, I always felt that I could say the same thing about science and engineering - it can all be boiled down to mathematics which is also an abstraction built on various theoretical models of reality.

So, is the real enemy here that which promotes the abstract modeling of life? Regardless of that model being carried out either with philosophy or mathematics. If it is, then that should be what we build "the case against."

### *Endnotes*

1 [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OxmzGT1w\\_kk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OxmzGT1w_kk)

2 "All scientific thought is merely a derived form of philosophical thinking, which proceeded to freeze into its scientific cast. Philosophy never arises out of science or through science and it can never be accorded equal rank with the sciences." Martin Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics* (New Haven and London: Yale

University Press, 1987), p. 26.



## This is not a pipebomb. Kevin Tucker

*After all, with lions on the same plains, with both of us following the same prey and stealing each other's kills, we became human. We have a lot in common. It's not the lion's fault if some humans later became philosophers.*

- Carl Safina, *Beyond Words*

I appreciate John's 'Case Against Philosophy' while recognizing immediately how Cliff could ask the same question many of my critics would: wouldn't the same be true of anthropology? Or sociology? Or history, ecology, ethology, etc?

In a roundabout way, I think the question answers itself: no.

I won't rehash all of my arguments here about digging through the wreckage of science. From every objective standpoint, there are many pitfalls in all of the sciences (social or biological) and many a wretched thing done in their pursuit. No question. But does that make all fields or specializations equal? Absolutely not.

Let me be blunt: I find civilization abhorrent. I despise it. But my own opinion, whether I hate civilization or enjoy a hot shower, doesn't matter a damn bit to anyone else.

And it shouldn't. All things being equal, all things aren't equal. It is the nature of civilization that my opinions, aided by the technologies made available to me, are justifications for the impact I have upon the entirety of life as it is. That's a power that should have never existed and a power that is ultimately unsustainable.

My goals are simple: to use everything I can to undermine and attack civilization.

That demands presence in the real world: a world that the scienc-

es have dedicated themselves to understanding, though typically so they can break them down and domesticate them. Biological science seeks to remove agency from the world by hyper-focusing on the details and dissecting them.

However, it's still dealing with matter.

Anthropology is the study of human societies. Biology is the study of living things. Philosophy, however, plays by its own rules; it is the study of thought. Thinking about thinking is necessarily self-referential and, largely speaking, humans are always the measure. And it flows downhill from there, which is why ethologists have to deal with the Godly shit-storm that Descartes created. There can be no more self-assuring right of power than his dictum: "I think therefore I am."

Yeah, well, he was an asshole. He publicly dissected dogs *while they were alive* and said their screams were just a mechanical reaction. God hath spoken. Having granted the throne of the Ultimate Thought to humanity (well, at least the ones in power), the court was already set. Descartes could reference the Bible and then the world has to live with the consequences.

Like religion, philosophy relies on faith, not matter.

And this is where the crucial differences lie: anyone willing to play on the terms of philosophy grants the medium its validity. Philosophers piggyback philosophy. Abstracting abstracts, but without any demand for objectivity (even pointlessly questioning the objectivity of existence), the Word or the Thought all have equal merit as Ideas.

It's like social media; it doesn't matter if you vehemently argue against it on those platforms. All those companies want is your participation. In the end, all of us and our data are just helping building out their algorithms. To predict behavior, you have to create predictive commands.

Like philosophy, algorithms seek to understand the human mind.

Like algorithms, philosophy sets the terms of engagement.

One way to look at it is the Penrose Stairs: the two-dimensional "impossible object" that MC Escher would make famous. The other is to just call it what it is: a self-referential mind-fuck. And its only discernible existence is to be theoretically right. Philosophy can be debated, not disproven.

Descartes, Rousseau, Plato, Hobbes, Aristotle, Zizek, Nietzsche, Stirner, and whoever the hip kids are going to read next: What is to be salvaged? Even when they stumble upon some greater Truth, without real world grounding, what is anyone doing with it?

For me, it comes back to my first round of college. I went down the Deep Ecology rabbit hole and thought philosophy could be liberating. I didn't agree with Marx, but what revolutionary isn't a bit overly romantic? I spent years arguing, vehemently, about the virtue of the living world. I could cite philosophers to back my points and they could be written off just as easily.

In my naivety, virtue mattered.

The final argument was about to come to fists before the professor physically got in the middle. I was arguing with a nihilist, about what barely seemed to matter, but always about utilitarian arguments over the costs of civilization. In the end, I asked how he could justify his bleakness, no matter how consequential it would be, and his response said it all: "none of this matters anyways, I'll work for my father, doing PR for cigarette companies next year."

And he was right. It didn't matter. He took the job. I was infuriated, dropped out of college and gave up on philosophy completely.

Public relations. Is there not a more appropriate application for philosophers? Heidegger's critique of technology didn't stop him from joining the Nazis. Spengler saw the rise and fall of civilizations and then voted for Hitler. The Bolsheviks hung peasants for supposedly failing the Revolution. Mao's Cultural Revolution was the same. Philosophy, the Great Idea, was correct: revolutionaries had simply failed it.

Say what you will about the scientific method and its history: its core—disjointed though it may be—is simple, can the conclusions be disproven? There are theoretical approaches (and sociopaths), but beneath the quantifications and qualifications is observable and documented reality.

Anthropology, like all other sciences, has its theoretical approaches. I'm a die-hard cultural materialist. Marshall Sahlins is a die-hard post-structuralist. We can battle about our take away, but my use of his work means that, framework aside, there's still a hefty core of actual material that I can use without any contradiction. The framework is very significant, but it's also the interpretation of core information, which can, theoretically, exist unscathed.

In the case of Napoleon Chagnon—anthropologist, asshole, and sociobiologist extraordinaire—even sifting the core material in his ethnographies could distill his role in the genocide of the Yanomami.

Imperfect though they may be, the social sciences offer tools if we wish to understand how we came to see the world as abstracts to

dominate. Ironically, we can deconstruct our worldview, not by digging within, but by digging around. Look to history. Look to societies that haven't dedicated themselves to the pursuit of meaning in an otherwise meaningless existence. Look at the death toll civilization is racking up.

Or literally put your hands in the dirt.

Descartes saw matter without the grace of God. Stirner saw matter without the grace of I. Philosophy is a justification for how we already exist within the world. By divine right or by nihilistic indifference: we remain the core. The measure.

Cliff is correct; we can't think ourselves into wildness. I'd argue that the more we try to formulate and frame it, the less wild it becomes. It's felt, experienced, and lived: it defies abstraction. It's a world where humanity—particularly civilization—is not the measure. It's entirely possible that philosophers can glean touches of that reality, but only as an ideal.

That's one reason I'm exceptionally happy that John brought philosophy into his sights. For decades, he's tried to tether it to the history of civilization. In some ways becoming the counterweight to Spengler who saw its futility and then thought it best to end in an orgy of decimation. John sought to drag it back to Earth, pull it into the light, and show that the message was there all along. It was written inside and outside the gas chambers at Auschwitz.

If you want to argue the merits of philosophy, those observations are hard to simply write off. But then you have to ask: what is one instance of philosophy being implicated in positive change? Philosophy, like revolution, serves the society in which it exists. It gave us Earth Day and its corporate sponsorship. Grounding, in the real world, gave us Earth Night and its burning resistance.

At a certain point, thought ceases. The self ceases. Ideology dies in the birds' dawn chorus. And when we stop looking in the mirror for meaning, we'll be more inclined to smash them on the way out.

It is the living world that shaped our minds.

It is only with civilization that our minds were able to shape the living world in drastic and impacting ways. We created our kingdom, but its existence is so dismal that we have nothing left to explore outside the emptiness civilization leaves in its wake.

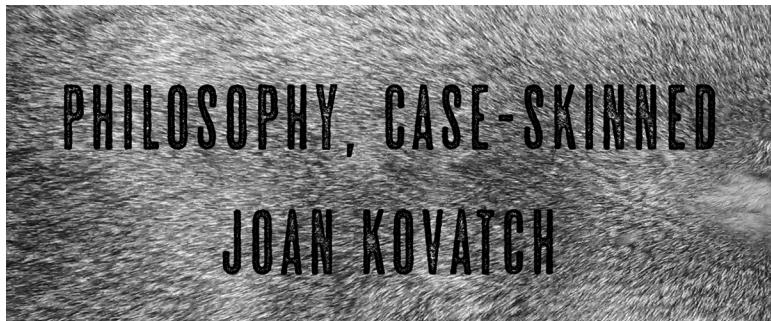
The way out is not inside of us: it is *us*. It is the wildness beneath the domestication. It is the living world that domesticators—such as philosophers—have to channel, abstract, and vilify at every possible turn. It's the microbiomes that defy where our bodies end and be-

gin and the maggots and worms that sort our remains back to their source.

So I say good riddance. The corpse has withered: the autopsy unnecessary.

I don't doubt that many will say that in upholding the existence of objective realities there is a glitch in their philosophical matrix. They'll say that I'm equally guilty of being lost in thought.

My response is simple: *prove it.*



*A note on context: I write this from a particular worldview as a 'white' (Irish-Slovak American), educated, middle-class-raised female-bodied creature. I'm addressing Western culture in general, since the essayists I write in response to are from this culture.*

If philosophy is the mental means through which we interpret our world, the intangible and semi-permeable thought-skin that shrouds us in our worldview, then there are some more relevant things to point out. Allow me a moment to establish context through a definition, for those who aren't familiar:

To 'case' an animal that has been trapped or hunted, I (and many ancestors) make a cut around each wrist and ankle, and then from ankle to ankle across the animal's backside. The animal's skin is peeled off of its body inside out, leaving an otherwise complete pelt and carcass behind. Case skinning has been widely used throughout history, especially when the tanned hide was to be used as a bag or container, such as for a quiver, traditional bagpipes, or a common storage pouch.

If you've been case skinning domesticated rabbits your whole life, and if your parents, grandparents, and their ancestors for some thousands of years have only ever case skinned domestic rabbits, the first time you case a raccoon is going to be interesting. Their hides are

incredibly different. Raccoons are fatty; the fat that lies within and beneath their skin makes for tricky work. Having lived wild, a raccoon's skin will be much more firmly attached to its musculature and tendons, especially in spots likely to be bitten – namely along the spine and neck. Their fur will be patterned according to their landscape, made for blending in, thicker and softer in colder climates, more wiry and water-shedding in milder ones. Compare this with domestic rabbits, whose hides are only loosely attached, designed to handle predator attack by offering a mouthful of fur instead of vital organs; whose fur type and pattern variations are limited only by the patience and whim of their breeders, who seek novelty and luxury for their own sake. Domestic rabbit hides convey only weak context or connection to their surrounding environment.

So too does the study and practice of philosophy reveal our own placement within the faltering machinery of civilization. The fact of our domesticated descent (and subsequently contextually very particular worldview and experience of 'Philosophy') does not negate the lived philosophies of other cultures. We are tame rabbits, no matter whether we have dyed our hides to match our surroundings, or whether we have sought out the edgiest warrens in which to house ourselves. For those of us rewilding, we creep into the edges of the forest, honing skills, strengthening bodies, building endurance, and knowing full well that the level of transformation required will come only in future generations.

When 'doing' philosophy, domesticated folk are in some ways practicing a sterilized version of an out-of-body experience – seeking to step above and beyond their physical existence to make visible the terms upon which it's mediated. If we do this from a civilized worldview, in the midst of cities and the ever-present grid and all the alienation they bring, it's no surprise that we turn circles, thinking we can just pluck the fruits of thought from various countries, assume objectivity (not wanting to face our true context), and blindly reach for belonging in some sensible-seeming tradition to salve the gaping, seeping wound that was once our feral heart. This perilous position in which so many feel trapped (and thus turn endlessly in those circles, seeking solace in semantics or self-congratulatory feedback loops) is not the only position. Domesticated humans may be the center of their own philosophies, but theirs are not the only philosophies, nor is it productive to assume a defeatist posture based on faulty premises because you have either given up on your culture, yourself, or are too beaten to truly widen the scope of possibility for healing.

Here I'd like to widen our context, and smash some windows in what otherwise runs the risk of becoming an echo chamber. For help, I'll turn to Native American philosopher Viola Cordova. Referring to her as such may seem overly general, but it's a term she uses with intention in her work, and I respect her choice and position in the comments referenced below.

*A study of European philosophy brings out the relative “youthfulness” of Euroman. It brings out also that Euroman shares something with all the other peoples of the Earth: he is, as are the rest of us, the product of a specific belief system that originally provided him with “answers” that grew to serve as the unquestioned foundation of his world. ...*

*The major ideas, or definitions, of Euroman did not arise in the far past. The view of man as a stranger on his own planet is only as old as Christianity. The idea that man's individuality is preeminent over his role in the group is only centuries old and that too can be traced to incipient roots in Christian thought. Euroman's treatment of human beings and of the Earth is essentially based on the views of man as an individual who is somehow superior to, or different from, the Earth. The definition of the Earth is generally that the earth is a thing (as opposed to a “being”).<sup>1</sup>*

Cordova continues by laying the groundwork of a Native American philosophy: identifying its context, as a continent's worth of cultures living in opposition to the “Western” worldview, as a tool used by all Native American cultures to answer questions about their world, as a practice which for them is a natural outgrowth of a deep embodiment in place and non-linear time. (With the notable exception of the few American cultures that became civilizations and then collapsed.)

I argue that any philosophical proposition made by any person will necessarily be connected to their place and cultural context. But it will also expose the strength or weakness, the health or decay of their relationship to place, to the living world, to their fellow humans and other-than-human beings. The simple awareness that civilized philosophers have a fragmented and diseased view of reality as a result of their worldview doesn't negate the potential of philosophical thought (whatever you choose to call it). Such thought must not be limited to those sickly realms when there is a whole world full of distinctly

adapted, vibrantly different self-aware cultures more than capable of adding their own unique offerings to an otherwise culturally impoverished conversation. To put it bluntly: just because culturally bereft Westerners are doing it wrong, doesn't mean it can't be (or isn't already being) done right elsewhere.

It's important here to include more from Cordova: "We must, as philosophers, not lose sight of the fact that the reason for exploring alien ideas is to expand our understanding of the diversity of human thought and not to expand our own specific way of thinking so that it encompasses all others. It is common to examine the Other as a means of gaining understanding about ourselves, but we should not mistake the Other for a *mirror*. We can learn something about ourselves as well through a *contrast* with the Other."<sup>2</sup>

As shared by Gardner in his essay on Extreme Anarchies elsewhere in this issue, within many cultures there's allowance for and comfort with a multitude of perspectives, which quickly overturns the Western perspective of a singular, provable truth and the belief that defining another's existence for them is acceptable. Gardner shares one example about the variations in naming other beings among the Dehcho Dene: "So, how diverse are their terms in general? Let me just say that, for months, several times a day, newlyweds and trap-line partners can be heard asking one another, "What do you call this?" And they do so to clarify one another's usage, *not* in order to learn what is correct or to reach agreement."<sup>3</sup>

John Zerzan puts his hopes eloquently: "A "realized" philosophy would not be a practice of representation, but of presentation--a place of wholeness, immediacy, presence."<sup>4</sup> This already exists, in myriad cultures who are, for the most part, choosing not to publish in scholarly journals or pass years in high-brow argument. This exists in cultures that domesticated humans have been ripping to shreds for several thousand years now. It shines out in tattered constellations between the lines of awe-struck writings from anthropologists in the field, and burns brightly when presented holistically by people such as Dr. Cordova, whose culture has been forced toward assimilation strongly enough that she understands our desperate need to have these perspectives framed and presented in a manner that we can comprehend and possibly even accept.

While Westerners are standing suited up in sterile labs, using machine-made blades to carefully skin and dissect their inhumanely raised domestic rabbits and wondering subconsciously why it all feels so wrong (and arguing over minutiae), many other cultures are

out there, existing in the world, skinning wild critters with handmade tools, taking no photographs, recording no video, sterilizing nothing. The results of their hunt and subsequent meal and home-tanned pouch will never be published, debated, held on shelves for hundreds of years. They will be told in stories around fires. It's time for civilized folks to stop wasting time on this planet (as it rots from the surface as a result of all our 'accomplishments') nitpicking over cogs in the Leviathan's thigh muscles, and instead step the fuck outside if we want any hope of breaking down the faulty programming we were handed at birth and replacing it bit by bit with viable, living, sane worldviews.

Cordova frames philosophy simply as the asking of three central questions that are open for answering: What is the world? What is a human being? What is it to be a human being in the world? By her definition, *nothing is expected to be proven*. There will be millions upon millions of answers to these questions throughout our existence. They will mean everything, and nothing, based on our context and lived experience. I see realized philosophies as simply another type of skin, determining how we interpret our connection to the living world. They are inevitably place-based, however blind we may be to that fact. They are based on our genetic memory of sometimes distant lands, and the soothing or harried tones of our parents when we were small, and the lessons drilled into us by rote while under the thumb of uncaring institutions. Too long this dominant culture has left the answers to these questions stagnant. Those of us questioning anew better get accustomed to discomfort, and find new ways to interpret the answers brushing against our long-sleeping skin.

Does this mean I support Philosophy, with a capital P? I don't waste my time with it. Discard the term if you want, attack the institution, harass the arrogant practitioners with their chemically-tanned domestic rabbit hides hung on the walls in frames. I'll be out here at the edge of the forest with my raccoon skin pouch, watching the patterns of the world shift, eating wild berries and watching the vines slowly encroach on that looming facade as the high-minded argue their way into their perfectly rectangular, sterile graves.

#### *Endnotes*

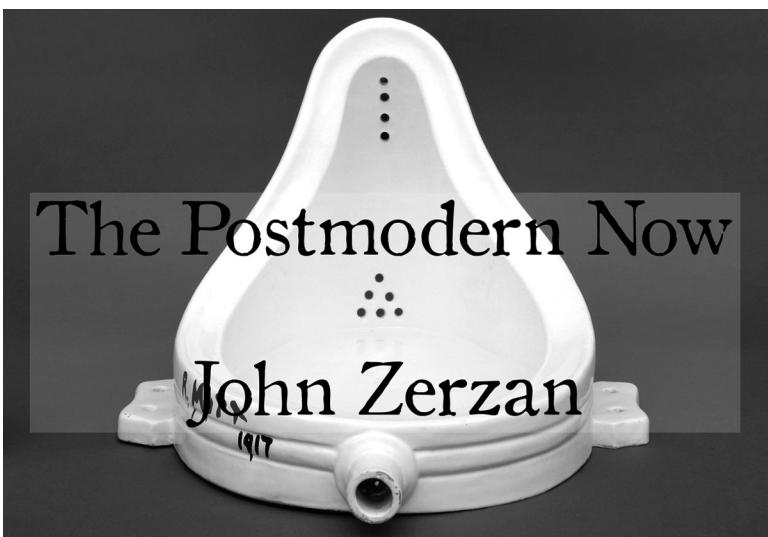
1 Cordova, V. F. (2007). Windows on Academics. In K. Moore, et al. (Eds.), *How It Is: The Native American Philosophy of V. F. Cordova*. Tucson, Arizona: University of Arizona Press. P. 52.

2 Cordova, V. F. (2007). Windows on Native American Philosophy. In K. Moore,

et al. (Eds.), *How It Is: The Native American Philosophy of V. F. Cordova*. Tucson, Arizona: University of Arizona Press. P. 56.

3 Gardner, Peter (2018). Surprisingly Peaceful Extreme Anarchies. *Wild Resistance*, No. 6.

4 Zerzan, John (2018). The Case Against Philosophy. *Wild Resistance*, No. 6.



Kieran Flanagan's *Sociological Noir: Irruptions and the Darkness of Modernity* (2017) refers to the "emptiness" of postmodernity. But hasn't the postmodern had its day, come and gone?

By the late 1970s it was clear that the energy of the movement of the 1960s (and early 70s) was dead. The 80s was a decade of retreat and reaction, with the likes of Reagan, Thatcher, Mitterand in power. And fittingly, the ascendancy of postmodernism and personal computers.

Lorenzo Simpson (*Technology, Time and the Conversations of Modernity*, 1995) saw the deep connection between PoMo and the juggernaut of technology, emerging at this time. He observed postmodernism arriving at a point where everything is "in danger of being thoroughly dominated and domesticated by technology." Postmodernity as the completion of the tech ethos, its realization.

In its particulars, the postmodern is a debilitating retreat. Its well-known dictum, "the totality is totalitarian," encapsulates the belief that overview is neither possible nor desirable. To grasp the whole is a no-no.

Postmodernism favors surface over depth, margins over centrali-

ty, fragments over the ensemble. There is no causation, no inner logic at work, the merely contingent at best. Indeterminacy over distinctions, conclusions.

There is no stable meaning/fact/truth. My story is as valid/invalid as your story. An issue of the anarcho/nihilist zine *Black Seed* carried an article titled “Against Anthropology.” The postmodern novelist/artist Douglas Coupland curated a recent exhibit at the Google Cultural Institute in Paris, “Everywhere is anywhere is anything is everything.”

In the dark night of know-nothing muddle there is nothing to debate. At times, in various countries, I’ve tried to have some debate. A typical instance, in western Turkey: en route to a talk at the university in Izmir, I was told of a well-known postmodernist professor there and decided to devote a bit of my presentation to a full-on critique of PoMo. She was present, front and center, with her coterie of students/admirers--and said nothing in response to my detailed attack. She smiled and waved when we filed out. Some months ago, “anarchist” publisher Aragorn! was asked why he doesn’t respond to my references to him as thoroughly postmodern. He replied, “John and I are fine. There’s nothing to debate.”

Postmodernists were leftish sorts, originally. But now it’s more than clear that some on the Right have opted to take advantage of a generally postmodern culture. Trump’s disregard for fact is an obvious example. CNN misses the point as it insists on “sticking to the facts.” Postmodern society is significantly post-factual, post-truth.

Cynthia Ozick sums it up aptly: Ours is a “no-man’s-land that more and more begins to inherit the name postmodern...where anything goes, everything counts, significance is what I say it is.” The postmodern has not gone away, despite the fact that little has been written about it since the 90s. It is quite current, infecting culture with its mind-altering, free-will-sapping premises.

# *Field Notes from the Primal War*



*Batek hunter. Photo by Four Legged Human.*

# True Crime Case Files: Attacks on Self-Driving Cars

Where: Various

When: Increasingly

FOR  
EDUCATIONAL  
PURPOSES  
ONLY

There's nothing we can say about technology that isn't true for civilization in general. If you have social and economic power, you can do pretty much anything and say just about any kind of bullshit about it now. Maybe, just maybe, in time someone might question it.

Today's empire, tomorrow's PR blurb. That is, if anyone notices or says enough.

From the viewpoint of those currently with power, they're here for us. Colonizers, civilizers, domesticators of every type have always been here for the little people. The commoners. The consumers. The story of those with power always has and always will be that they're here to save us from ourselves.

So when 49-year-old Elaine Herzberg was struck and killed by a self-driving Uber in Tempe, Arizona on March 18<sup>th</sup>, it is ostensibly for our sins that she died. Not the machine. Not the failsafe driver sitting behind the wheel, seemingly playing with their phone. Like civilization has spent the last few thousand years telling us, free will is our original sin. Our fall from grace.

Foolish human that she was, Elaine was walking her bike across the street at 10 PM. It's that goddamn fallible behavior. The vehicle, a Volvo XC90, was outfitted with three types of sensors that would enable this self-driving car to be field-tested. By most metrics, you should be able to say that it failed miserably.

The problem isn't that the machine didn't recognize a human, it's that it apparently didn't care. The machine did recognize the human, but in a follow up report on the incident, it is said that it "decided not to react immediately"<sup>1</sup>

*Decided.* If there's an argument that should be hard to swallow, there it is. As with all of civilization, it is, ironically, never reason that prevails. There was immediate backlash. Uber reacted, reached a settlement with the family. Uber laid-off the safety back up drivers in the

Phoenix area, halted operations and then abandoned the market.  
Temporarily.

It has been the goal of the futurist tech gurus that self-driving cars would finally cure free will.

Our original sin: our fallible nature and impulsive, unplanned decision-making. That's why, even in response to, what we'd have to call the *murder* of Herzberg, technology's fan club is still singing the praises from the peanut gallery. If a human driver makes a fatal mistake, all options to learn for that individual die with them. No second chances. A program, however, can, theoretically, be taught that killing is wrong. Software updated, lesson coded.

Besides, they say, over 37,000 people died in auto-collisions in the United States in 2017.<sup>2</sup> What's one more? Or a few? That might sound flippant. If so, it's because I'm understating it. Actual quote: "autonomous vehicles at large would immediately create a more equitable age distribution of crash victims -- a small moral victory in its own right."<sup>3</sup> I've never really been a fan of morals, can't say this small victory sold me on them.

But let's get to the meat of it, "more importantly, fleets of self-driving cars gain driving wisdom in unison, and therefore break humanity's continuous cycle of reintroducing dangerous novice drivers to the traffic mix. Through communication, driverless tech becomes a single cohort that only improves with age, as opposed to suffering a never-ending influx of ignorance."

If only we give ourselves completely to the machine, at least it will learn to kill us with a more equitable age distribution. Except Herzberg was a pedestrian. Not a driver. If we want to have the supposed benefits of the complete machine takeover, then we need to succumb to an automated world. A place for machines, explainable in binary and mathematics: like quantum physics.

Or collision-fatality statistics.

Statistics inflated once more five days after a self-driving Uber "decided" to run down Herzberg. This time it was the driver of a Tesla Model X in Autopilot mode in California. Or, more appropriately, it was the person in the driver's seat as the car ran into a concrete barrier and then burst into flames. Tesla did release a statement, but they didn't clarify if the car had sensed the concrete barrier that was, in their words—used here to scold the now deceased driver's seat occupant—clearly visible for 490 feet prior to the collision. The driver—the human one—had, according to their statement, not had his hands

on the wheel for “six seconds prior to the collision.”

As though it somehow absolves the safety granted to the potentially homicidal decisions of machines, it is pointed out that the “unobstructed view” of impending doom was visible for five of those six seconds.<sup>4</sup>

So, about that learning in unison part... It would appear that the first death—in America—from a self-driving car, a Tesla Model S, two years prior to the barrier collision wasn’t enough. Joshua Brown, the 40-year-old victim of the earlier collision, was killed when the software failed to distinguish “the white side of the tractor trailer against a brightly lit sky.” Artificial intelligence indeed.

Prior to that incident, Brown had sung the praises of the Autopilot mode. Not so much for having “saved” his own life, but for Auto-pilot having “saved the car autonomously from a side collision from a boom lift truck.”<sup>5</sup> As a human, I acknowledge that I am fallible, so take it with a grain of salt when I suggest that a fifty percent success rate for avoiding fatal collisions is less than ideal.

A handful of fatalities: against the 37,000 and change of them in 2017, a handful doesn’t seem like much.

That’s the story, the headline. If these are truly intelligent machines—which they aren’t—then with the “decisions” leading the fatal actions or inactions, perhaps you could say they aren’t very successful murderers either. It can make it seem like any reaction to the sudden boom in self-driving and fully autonomous vehicles on the road is just, well, reactionary. Conspiracy theories, stuff like that.

But sometimes good ol’ fashioned Luddite reactions are just what is needed. Because here’s the reality of it: despite some fatalities—even, potentially, murders—this genie isn’t about to go back into its bottle. Technology, in our hyper-infatuated and ultra-saturated technologized world, is only being tested in real time. We act as though this display of astrological hubris is safe simply because we believe we have no evidence that it isn’t safe. Yet. Not a single point in our history, particularly the most recent and on-going parts, supports that notion with its own evidence.

We are flooded with toxicity. Our giving in to the social networks and treatment of technologies as appendages have had immediate and catastrophic impacts upon our lives and our world. We become so enmeshed in the very notion of change and constant “upgrades” that we rarely bat an eye when something as bleak as “autonomous vehicles” suddenly starts pouring out on the streets.

The car that killed Herzberg? It was brought onto the streets of Arizona by decree of an Executive Order, signed by Arizona Governor Doug Ducey in 2015. This was an Order that removed existing automotive and safety regulations explicitly to lure in tech companies and start-ups. Emphatically lending Arizona's streets and populations to testing out the technologies that "could produce transformational social benefits such as the elimination of traffic and congestion; a dramatic increase in pedestrian and passenger safety."<sup>6</sup>

So while technology fanfare journals started ho-humming about how the self-driving "industry was battered by bad news" in 2018, it's done nothing to deter its momentum. Unlike the Volvo XC90, it might have hit the brakes, even if a little too late, but it hasn't stopped either.

Waymo, owned by Google's parent company, Alphabet, launched its commercial service in Phoenix: Waymo One. It turned out to be a disappointment, leading to a cancellation of more immediate plans to start a fully driverless residential service there.

Outside of that, the losses haven't been significant enough.

Uber might have pulled back on its Phoenix program, but by December it had launched again in Pittsburgh. It's worth noting that Arizona, in general, had been chosen for its relatively dry and stable environment—a fact made all the more confusing by jumping to the hilly city of Pittsburgh, complete with a full four seasons worth of weather patterns.

Tesla might have killed a couple people, but the Autopilot has resulted in a lot of non-fatal collisions as well, often with stationary objects. There are a number of start-ups in various stages, many of which come from individuals formerly under the Google sub-directionary. But few corporations are being shy on the prospects.

Ford's self-driving subsidiary, Argo, is considered conservative for hoping to launch its commercial services by 2021. More are like Aptiv, a company under the auto parts supplier, Tier 1. They launched a self-driving taxi operation in Las Vegas, partnered with Lyft, in early 2018. By December, they were claiming over 25,000 paid rides had been completed. Nuro, a company headed by two veterans of Google, struck a deal with Kroger, one of the nation's largest grocery chains. They too launched fully autonomous grocery deliveries in December 2018.

Not surprisingly, there are others working the philanthropic angle, such as Voyage. It offers rides in the Villages in Florida: a retirement community.<sup>7</sup> A place where it is oddly believed that lesser mo-

bility means less people acting unpredictably meaning less collisions. It's increasingly clear that in reference to self-driving cars, it's hard to decipher what is actually an accident and what is just programmed "decision-making."

What happens is the same thing we've seen happen continually within civilization, but at an exponentially rapid rate since the dilution of cell phones and always-on networks over the last two decades: a vast normalization of innately more powerful technologies being unleashed. These things aren't being field-tested in labs, but in streets. Streets with pedestrians. Cars with occupants in the driver's seats.

If we focus solely on the statistics of death for a trickle of these machines being put into circulation and operation, then we miss the entirety of it. The story being crafted and sold is the same as it has always been. It's safer. It's better for us in the end. By the time there are enough fatalities—be they murders or accidents—there will be enough of these machines and the parent corporations out there that there is no chance to stop them. Enough Executive Orders that there won't be much thought as to how we got to that situation in the first place.



It is entirely possible that we'll either get to or have already crossed the line with self-driving cars where we don't even think twice when we see one. We'll hear about the supposed good times. Just like when Otto, the self-driving truck company, teamed up with Anheuser-Busch to publicize its first mostly-autonomous delivery: a 120-mile beer-run in a semi, back in 2016.<sup>8</sup> Or, like Brown preemptively proclaimed, when the self-driving prompts will save us.

We love hearing about the machine as a hero. Or, at least, the pro-

grammers love telling us about the machine being a hero. That's why most of us didn't even flinch when the culprit behind the June 2018 Capital Gazette mass shooting was identified with facial recognition software.<sup>9</sup> The same software that pop stars like Taylor Swift now use at their concerts to identify "stalkers."<sup>10</sup> The same software that Amazon is trying to sell to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents to identify immigrants:<sup>11</sup> a pretty terrifying technology for either the corporation or the agency to have at their disposal.

How far will it go? That's hard to say. The self-driving cars have all the same issues that normally operated vehicles do. Which, as we shall see momentarily, is a massive benefit: they can be rendered inoperable by many of the same means that any other vehicle might. The problem is that this is all a part of the unquestioned, mass-scale submission of all thought to the machine. Automation is never a failsafe;<sup>12</sup> it's just about recalibrating our actions, expectations, and thoughts to accept the limitations of the machine.

The reality of technology has always been equal parts about conditioning ourselves to the experience of the world as mechanical functions and eliminating all of the variables that challenge mechanistic thinking, or, more appropriately, computation. "Computational thinking," as James Bridle has called it: "the belief that any given problem can be solved by the application of computation." Pushing that out a little further: "It internalizes solutionism to the degree that it is impossible to think or articulate the world in terms that are not computable."<sup>13</sup>

The degree to which computational thinking pervades our reality is almost comically emphasized by the incidents of "Death by GPS."<sup>14</sup> When drivers trust their GPS more than their eyes and do things like drive into a body of water that their GPS shows as a road. It's an extreme case point for a pervasive reality, considering how we increasingly offset memory to "the Cloud:" Alexa, Siri, how much brain function have we offset to Google?<sup>15</sup> Despite this, programmers still remain haunted by that pesky free will.

Free will, fortunately, means that we can make decisions. We can act in ways that might appear, to a machine, to be completely irrational. We can do irrational things as simple as acts of self-preservation.

Things like breaking self-driving vehicles.

Sometimes, being a living, breathing being, one capable of being irrational, is a good thing.

It doesn't always mean that our actions make sense, certainly

not to an algorithm, but they don't have to either. When it comes to self-driving cars, the reactions are often just visceral disgust. Which is why by March of 2018, two of the six crash reports filed in California involving self-driving cars, were instigated by humans attacking them.<sup>16</sup> When some people are confronted with a glimpse of a dystopian Brave New World, their reaction was to toss their own body at it.<sup>17</sup>

True to the Luddite legacy, that includes a cab driver, stuck in traffic behind his potential future replacement and then, in a fit of rage, attempting to "tackle" the self-driving vehicle.<sup>18</sup> Sure enough, disenfranchised and unemployed truckers, cab drivers, and even Uber or Lyft drivers are among those keeping autonomous vehicle security experts up at night.

For all the ingenuity and supposed intelligence that we are so willing to impart of machines—elaborate mechanical devices that operate on algorithms while still using completely worldly parts—if artificial intelligence is its own thing, it doesn't appear to be all that smart. For all the supposed futuristic safety the fanfare cheers about, self-driving cars are apparently pretty easy to hack.

Even before touching on hacking though, normal operation is a "nightmare" for the autonomous vehicles. They require meticulous care, including being constantly washed by hand. It turns out that "soap residue or water spots could effectively 'blind' an autonomous car." With or without supposed intent to murder, the sensors on the cars are costly. Their calibration and accuracy couldn't handle the intensity of a carwash. Their arch-nemeses include dirt, dead bugs, water spots, and, of course, bird shit.<sup>19</sup>

Those risks don't just come from the car itself. It has been found that something as simple as small stickers on a stop sign can disrupt the machine's ability to properly identify it.<sup>20</sup> When websites want you to identify something like "which photo contains X, Y, or Z in it" to prove that you aren't a bot? That should give an indication about what these algorithms can and cannot figure out. Makes it a hell of a lot more terrifying to trust sharing a street with these things.

Hacking a self-driving car, however, can be anything from an easy to a complicated task, depending on what your intentions were. The sensors are easily jammed. Smearing them seems to work fairly easily to shut them down or render them useless. But a high-powered laser pointer is equally capable of overloading the software.<sup>21</sup>

A particular threat came in the form of two hackers remotely controlling an autonomous Jeep Cherokee with a Wired journalist

sitting in the driver's seat, completely unable to gain control of the vehicle. That incident sparked Jeep's parent company, Fiat Chrysler, to recall over a million vehicles in 2015.<sup>22</sup> That recall, however, wasn't enough to keep the idea off of a particularly insidious radar: ISIS has been working on using self-driving cars for attacks since 2016.<sup>23</sup>

Between terrorist groups, corporations, governments, would-be school shooters, and algorithms deciding not to avoid pedestrians or concrete barriers, I'm not sure which outcome is the worst. All that is clear is that the visceral reaction of pummeling the machines seems like a fair starting point.

Here, it becomes clear that no body count is ever going to be considered a valid argument against the self-driving cars. In the minds of the corporations, it'll always be human error. Or it's a part of the learning curve: one attributed to faulty human programmers, not the nature of programming. This is how technology works; this is how it continues to invade our lives. But these things aren't mythical entities like some kind of Robocop. They're cars with sensors and programs. They run on gas and/or electricity. They use mechanics to operate. They're linked up to the grid and connected by wireless signals and channels. Machines that we continue to give far too much space and trust to, but, ultimately, they're just as vulnerable as any other machine.

That makes them also prone to sabotage: random acts of vandalism and destruction.

In Chandler, Arizona, a suburb of Phoenix with a population of 240,000, police have documented 21 cases of people harassing Waymo's self-driving cars over the past two years. While there have likely been far more unreported cases of visceral rage pointed at the vehicles, those 21 attacks include people drawing guns at the vehicles, throwing rocks at them, running them off the road, and slashing tires.

Considering that Waymo boasts of logging 25,000 miles daily on public roads, 21 seems like a low number.<sup>24</sup> In California, those attacks against self-driving cars come back to mind. Perhaps it is the nature of a supposedly autonomous vehicle that minimizes the amount of attacks upon them: they have proven that they are capable of killing both pedestrians and occupants, potentially by "choice."

But when it comes to other, more manageably sized robots, attacks appear to be both more common and simpler. In December 2017, a San Francisco SPCA animal shelter had to remove its 400-pound Knightscope security robot after local residents were tired of being harassed by it. Rendering it out of commission was as simple as some-

one “put a tarp over it, knocked it over and put barbecue sauce on all the sensors.” In April 2018, a man was arrested after attacking another Knightscope robot in Mountain View, CA—the home of Google. For all their perceived impenetrability, most of these robots, used to constantly observe and document, are just tipped over.

Once off their wheels, there isn’t much that they can do. In some ways, the end of a futurist dream is simply toppled, often to comedic effect.<sup>25</sup> That explains why, in 2015, a DARPA Robotics Challenge Final prize of two million dollars meant that the winning robots had to pass a pretty mild obstacle course: “That means walking over debris, driving vehicles, climbing stairs, cutting through walls, opening doors, closing valves, and more.”<sup>26</sup>

I can’t lie, watching the future stumble and crash against the most formidable of enemies: such as a stair or dirt, is pretty hilarious. But this is happening because this is how the steps are being taken. Considering the high maintenance surrounding self-driving cars and the simplicity of the threats they face, this ought to be an alarm call for the fact that these things are being tested in real time and in real spaces.

How much can you call something a field test when it’s just being rolled out, figuratively and literally, in neighborhoods while rich tech gurus are in a race to see who can get over the next hurdle—in this case, something like a speck of dust—first to grab the funding and accounts. It’s happening with fanfare and all caution is thrown in the wind, just like the body of any human or animal the machine “decided” not to stop for.

While the dreams of post-humanists might pose an existential threat and the death count of machines might appear to be a statistically negligible one, this isn’t a hypothetical situation. Even according to their own admissions, the supposed safety of autonomous machines exist in that computational world: that place where all actions, movements, and decisions are predicated off of optimized and learned algorithms.

So long as we act like machines we should be statistically safe from them. Or, at the very least, we’ll be treated to “a more equitable age distribution of crash victims.” If you feel fine and safe with that, it’s an indication of the conditioning we’ve been subjected to as far as computational thinking goes.

But the reality is that these things are being rushed to field test in plain sight for one simple reason: their pervasive presence, when people actually look up from their smartphones, is meant to normalize

something that is, by all measures, a significant change in our relationship to technology.

Think of Waymo's 25,000 daily logged miles. If they aren't making money on that testing it is solely because those miles are an investment in a not too distant future where those 25,000 daily miles carry no back up "drivers" to supervise, but carry occupants or deliveries for humans. When that becomes an accepted part of our reality, that investment will only amplify exponentially.

For now, it is the safety that is hypothetical. Yet it is the machinery itself, in its rudimentary and very accessible state, which is being road tested in public spaces. And in that place, our shared reality, all of the fanfare surrounding tomorrow's technology remains vulnerable.

The irrationality of a living being, it would seem, might not be so irrational after all. While that visceral rage and attacks on cutting-edge technology might be written off by reports, police, and analysts as a minor footnote, there is no reason to believe that they won't rightfully increase. In that scenario, knowing the weaknesses of these machines can vastly increase the effectiveness of resistance to the machines themselves.

In the very least, if we can seemingly be fine with even the wording that the self-driving Volvo XC90 that struck and killed Herzberg had "decided" not to swerve or brake—to murder her—then we should accept that as living, breathing beings we too are capable of making our own decisions. Those are decisions that aren't necessarily fitting to the algorithmic frameworks of computational thinking.

If the normalization of this technology happens, it's because we didn't stop it.

As it turns out, unlike the XC90 that struck Herzberg or the Tesla Model S that struck a concrete barrier, stopping it is well within our reach.

The more you know...

### *Endnotes*

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*Mashco Piro. All photos by Luis Felipe Torres Espinoza unless noted otherwise.*

*Photo by SERNANP.*

Often unknown or overlooked, yet of critical importance to our current planetary crisis, is the fact that most of the world's last entirely self-reliant and free indigenous peoples continue to exist in the Amazon Basin and the Gran Chaco of South America. In remote areas of Brazil, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Paraguay and Venezuela there exists a minimum of 50 distinct so-called 'uncontacted tribes,' and very likely more.<sup>1</sup>

Luis Felipe Torres Espinoza is a Peruvian Anthropologist completing his PhD at the National Museum, Federal University of Rio de Janeiro and Doctoral Fellow in the *Indigenous Peoples at the Confluence of Worlds* (INCON) project. INCON is a project funded by the Kone Foundation (Finland) that engages with governmental agencies, indigenous federations, and academic institutions to promote protection of the territories and rights of isolated indigenous peoples. Luis previously spent five years working in the *Indigenous Peoples in Isolation and Initial Contact Protection Office* within the Peruvian Ministry of Culture.

*Wild Resistance* was fortunate to spend a few days with Luis in a tropical forest on the other side of the world, together visiting Batek hunter-gatherers in Malaysia. It was there that the important conversations took off about his work in Amazonia. Later we were able to conduct a formal interview with Luis over the phone. What follows is the result of that conversation.

*The existence of "uncontacted tribes" in the Amazon forest has become increasingly well known by Western society. I've heard you mention that*

*the term “uncontacted” is primarily a misnomer and that “isolated indigenous peoples” is a more accurate description, why is this the case?*

I think the term ‘uncontacted’ is kind of a misleading definition. It’s not that they have not been aware that the wider-society was there and that they didn’t know anything about it and they’ve had no contact at all before. Rather, it is precisely because of the experiences with contact that they have had before that they have made a decision; they have chosen to live in a certain way and that certain way is what we call an ‘isolated’ way of living. This is why we call them ‘isolated indigenous peoples.’ I think that is a more accurate characterization of the situation because it stresses the decision, the political decision they are making to live in their own way.

*You have previously used the term “hunters by choice” to describe isolated people in the Amazon. Is it your interpretation then that isolated peoples are generally making a conscious choice as autonomous agents to avoid contact and interaction with civilization?*

Yes, I think this is one reason why ‘isolated peoples’ as a term has been used rather than ‘uncontacted’ because it stresses the decision, a conscious choice they are making as ‘autonomous agents’.

But of course, we should not forget the conditions that are driving them to make this decision. In many ways it is because their territories are under negative influences. For one example, because they have been treated with violence. There is context leading them to make this choice. It isn’t a neutral context or an optimal context. In this respect you could say that they have been forced to make this choice. So to a certain degree it is an autonomous choice, but you must also see the context from which this choice is being made. That is important.

*Do you believe the context driving this choice to avoid civilization is rooted in past experiences that were highly negative, even going back generations? If so, what were those events?*

Yes. In past generations the experiences of contact were mostly negative. When we talk about ‘isolated peoples’ we are talking mostly about the Amazon region, which has a really violent history, not only during the time of conquest and into colonial times, but even now.

A main event that severely impacted indigenous people in the

Amazon region was the rubber boom. Towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century the rubber industry was really strong and it reached almost every corner of the Amazon.<sup>2</sup> In this context indigenous people were taken by force to work in the rubber camps. Lots of tribes were massacred. They were slaughtered if they didn't want to work in the camps. So this was a really traumatic context from which lots of indigenous peoples made their first contacts with wider-society. Those experiences, for many groups, remain continually present today by oral tradition. Those experiences have been very important in making the choice for isolation.

Today, the situation is not the same as at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; there are protection efforts, and more human rights laws are being enforced in the Amazon region. Of course, this is still not the best situation but it is better than during the rubber boom times, and the experiences of the past during those dangerous times have been very important in the decision making of these groups.

*You mentioned the role of oral traditions. I once watched a video of FUNAI (Brazilian National Indian Foundation) agents hiding to view isolated peoples walk through the forest. Soon one of the isolates discovered the agents in the trees and the people screamed the alarm "Enemy!" and quickly scattered. This led me to consider that within the social narratives of isolated peoples exists an oral history passed on through the generations which warns people of the consequences of contact and interaction with outsiders. Is this accurate?*

Yes. I think this past situation—that I was just talking about—is known by current generations through stories that have been told by old people. It is not that the younger people now have lived through these types of negative situations that occurred in the past, not in all the cases, but there is a lot of oral history here.

*Can you talk about FUNAI and the other agencies/institutions most responsible for protecting and monitoring these societies? What are the current governmental policies?*

FUNAI is the oldest institution in the Amazon region that is dealing with this topic of isolated indigenous peoples. Before the existence of FUNAI the institution was called SPI – the Indian Protection Service in Brazil. It was created in 1910 and the FUNAI was created in 1967. And the other countries; Peru, Colombia, Ecuador, have been mak-

ing some legislation and creating institutions that deal with isolated indigenous peoples only since the 1990s, and really even just in this century. So the experience of FUNAI has been really important for developing the institutions in the other countries.

Originally FUNAI—and the SPI before FUNAI—had a policy of contacting isolated people in the jungle with the goal to have them assimilate into Brazilian society. That was their mission for many, many decades and only in 1987 did they change this policy. They changed what was a ‘contact-to-assimilate’ policy to a ‘no-contact’ policy based on a newfound effort to respect the right to self-determination of these indigenous peoples, the right to remain isolated if that is their decision.

So, this change in policy was also implemented by the other countries. Peru has the Ministry of Culture. Columbia has the Ministry of the Interior. In Ecuador, the Ministry of Justice has offices with the specific mission of ensuring that the rights of indigenous people are protected. Yet FUNAI, and all of the countries really, have lots of trouble in actually implementing this protection and ensuring that it happens in real-terms on the ground. But, in regard to this legislation, at least, there has been major advance.

*Do you think that has been effective when there are missionary groups like New Tribes Mission (now Ethnos360) and Wycliffe Bible Translators/Summer Institute of Linguistics that are intent on trying to contact all ‘uncontacted’ societies?*

Since the end of the 1980s, when the countries began trying to enforce the ‘no-contact’ policies, the missionaries have been more limited. Before that they were allies of the state’s ‘contact’ policy to assimilate indigenous peoples. They were seen as having good intentions such as ‘saving their souls’ or something. But now missionaries are not usually good allies of governments, so there is an intellectual conflict between missionaries who say that ‘these souls need to be saved by god’ and the government who says ‘these souls’ have a right to freely choose their own determination.

*What are the main groups of isolated peoples you personally have attempted to monitor and in what countries? Can you give a little background on some of them?*

Most of my experience is in the southern part of the Amazon region

in Peru. When I worked for the Ministry of Culture in Peru in the Indigenous Peoples in Isolation and Initial Contact Protection Office, I worked both with Panoan family indigenous peoples and Arawak family indigenous peoples. These are two linguistic families and within these families there are several groups.

The group that I've worked with the most is called the Mashco Piro. The Mashco Piro are an Arawak family group. The Mashco live in both Peru and Brazil, in the southern part of Peru in the regions of Madre de Dios and Ucayali and in the Estado Acre in Brazil.

They are mostly hunter-gatherers. There is not much evidence that they practice agriculture extensively. They are roaming people. They walk within a big territory of almost 8 million hectares, or 80,000 square km. It is a big, big territory and they have been there for a very long time. There is information about isolated peoples in this area going back since the rubber boom at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. We know that these peoples have been in this area since at least that time, more than 100 years and surely longer. We still don't know the size of their population, how many Mashco Piro people are there. The current estimated population is no less than 1000, but some would say even up to 5000 people.



*Photo by SERNANP.*

They gather in little groups. They do not live together in villages. They live separated in little groups that go walking in the forest hunting and gathering. They stay in small camps and they stay no more than one or two weeks and then they just move on. So in this way of living they are moving all of the time and they do not impact much

in the forest. If you do an overflight [*editor's note: airplane reconnaissance*] over this huge territory you will just see forest because they do not make big villages.

Their territory is mostly protected in both the Peruvian and Brazilian parts. But it is 'protected' more on paper than it is on the actual ground. In the last ten years, in both Peru and Brazil, there have been major advances in protecting their territories physically, but they still have lots of problems protecting these territories from invaders conducting illegal activities and even from development projects initiated by the governments themselves.

*One of your activities has been to roam the forests and look for evidence of isolated peoples living there. Can you describe some of the things you have found which verifies their inhabitation?*

As I said before, they do not make villages and barely disturb the forest at all. With other indigenous peoples you could do overflights and even rely on satellite images to find them in remote places. However, with the Mashco Piro to find some evidence of them you must go into the forest. When they walk in the forest they do not make permanent trails and they do not cut the trees. You can just see small marks. They just break little parts of the trees to make signs for other Mashco to follow the way. So we can find these little broken parts to see that there have been people walking. Other times you can see their camps. Their camps are made with only palm leaves because they do not stay there very long. So when they move on, the remains of the camp will only be visible for a few months and then the rain and the leaves and the activity there in the forest will make them disappear. When you find a camp, you can see these little palm leaf houses. They do make fire, so you will also see the burned firewood. You can always see some traces of animals that they've been eating. They eat a lot of turtles so you will see the turtle shell. You will see some bones of monkeys and bones from lots of other animals.

These are the proof we have that there are people living in certain areas. Sometimes people will say that a specific area is 'virgin forest' and nobody lives there because there are no trails or villages, but if you pay attention you will see some of these different traces and then we can be certain that there are people living there.

But here it is important to note that going into the territories of Mashco Piro, or the territories of other isolated peoples, is never done unless it is absolutely necessary, such as when there is physical proof

that they or their territories are under threat. Even looking for evidence of their camps must not be done without first taking severe safety and health precautions. Such efforts should only be pursued by people with the highest levels of experience in both Amazonian indigenous cultures and Amazon forest ecology.

*If some random person just walked into the forest that wasn't looking specifically for these signs, do you think they would see these things or would they mostly be undetected?*

If just any person goes into the forest they would not likely notice the signs of the trails, they almost definitely wouldn't. Not even many of the other indigenous peoples can see the signs. Where there are other indigenous people living in villages near the Mashco, they have learned to watch for these signs around these places. But only these specific people and not all indigenous peoples know how to identify all of the traces of the Mashco Piro.

And it's difficult to find the camps because they are not made near rivers or open spaces. They are always constructed in really difficult to access places. To find them, you first need to see the small traces of the trails and that is very difficult to do. But if you can do that, then you can find your way to a camp. If you go very deep into the territories where we know they are, it is always possible find something.

*Does that suggest to you that there are a lot more isolated peoples out there that are unknown?*

Yes. For instance, in Peru there have been five big areas recognized just last year where there is good evidence for the existence of other isolated peoples that were not recognized before. I think we still have some areas, particularly in the northern part of Peru, where there are some isolated peoples that have not been recognized by the state.

*I understand that most isolated peoples in the Amazon have been able to obtain steel machetes and metal cooking pots. How did they get these items?*

Most of these are obtained by raids. When they find a village near their territory or there is a logging camp they take the opportunity to go and grab these things, from camps or from villages.

They also directly exchange things for meat, for example, with

other indigenous peoples to obtain these tools. In the case of the Mashco Piro group in the Alto Madre de Dios area that I have been speaking about, this occurs almost every week now. In other areas, this has also been the case but not as often, perhaps twice a year. It depends on the specific group. Some of them do not trade with outsiders at all.

There have also been some product exchanges in the manner some anthropologists have called “silent trade,”<sup>3</sup> that is, for instance, that without direct contact the Mashco have left some animal meat for neighboring villagers, and the villagers understood that they had to leave some other things (knives, axes, pans) in return. It is impressive how this has been understood by Mashco’s neighboring indigenous villagers in a rapidly intuitive way.

This touches on one reason why we prefer the term ‘isolated’ because of such known cases where, in some way or another, isolated peoples have purposely sought out other indigenous people and made contact with the intention of obtaining these metal artifacts or other goods.

*For people who are unfamiliar, do you mind giving a quick background on the impact that steel tools, machetes, and cooking pots and things like that have had historically in the Amazon?*

Undoubtedly, a main historical element in the assimilation process has been metal instruments. Metal axes, machetes, and pans have consistently been used as mechanisms in the contact of Amazonian indigenous peoples. All of the indigenous peoples I’ve known and that I’ve read about in Amazonian history have been interested in getting these artifacts because they really change the way of living. Almost all the basic tasks of life in the indigenous Amazon become much easier with these tools; the construction of hunting instruments such as bows, arrows, and spears, the clearing of forest for settlements, houses, gardens, and the construction of trails. To live in the forest having a machete, having a pan, has been really important since colonial times, since the first conquerors got into Amazonia. These artifacts have been the most important items that have been used for building the relationships between outsiders and Amazonian peoples.

A large component of the history here is related to the exchange of these items. Darcy Ribeiro, the famous Brazilian intellectual and ‘indigenista’ said that, in many cases, after knowing metal instruments Amazonian indigenous peoples tended to “become so needy of

them that they are willing to make any sacrifice to obtain them.”<sup>4</sup> This interest in obtaining metal instruments is usually one of the main reasons isolated peoples attempt to establish contact, but then this usually gives way to a series of other elements, such as western garments and cultivated foreign foods like salt and sugar.

*Is it true that most isolated peoples practice a mix of hunting, foraging, fishing, and forest gardening? In general, how much do they rely on wild food relative to their forest gardens? How mobile are they throughout the year?*

Among the known isolated peoples you can find some that rely more on hunting and foraging, like the Mashco Piro, but you will also find other peoples, like the Machiguenga, the Nahua, that rely a lot on gardening also. So it's not a rule that all isolated peoples are mostly hunter-gatherers. How much they rely on wild food is dependent on the specific group. What is true is that all of the groups rely on wild animals as important part of their food and their overall orientation. This is why they have big territories and healthy territories. A healthy territory is so important for these indigenous peoples. But yes, many of these are not ‘pure’ hunter-gatherers and they do utilize small components of agroforestry for their survival.

Importantly however, we cannot avoid the fact that an introduction of agricultural practices in a mainly hunter-gatherer system definitely modifies the economic structure of the group; their patterns of production, feeding, mobility, settlement, among other things. In this regard, addressing the now great interest of the Mashco Piro in bananas and other agricultural products, while also working to avoiding their falling into a dependency relationship, is one of the most important issues we are trying to pay attention to. This requires that we recognize the important role cultivated foods and manufactured objects have played in the establishment of social relationships between different people in the Amazon. It is therefore also necessary to understand the Mashco’s interests in cultivated foods not just as a simple utilitarian desire for survival, but also a desire for certain cultural dimensions.

*Does it seem like the hunter-gatherers are more difficult to detect than are the gardeners?*

Yes. What usually happens is that the isolated peoples who do have

gardens live in the most remote places, in places really far away from other villages. The people that do not have agriculture usually end up spending time closer to other villages, but it's really hard to know where they are because there is no reference point. It is difficult to track the existence of isolated peoples when they do not have these reference points, when they do not make agriculture. A fundamental point here is that as indigenous peoples' territories get smaller, the dynamism inherent to mobile hunting and gathering makes it a more viable strategy for evading the outside threats they are facing. In this context, foraging becomes in many ways less risky than staying in a village and doing agriculture.



*I have heard a theory that the ancestors of some of the isolated peoples likely once relied much more on food growing, but that when negative events during the past (violent groups, rubber tappers, slave raiders etc.) occurred they were driven into isolation and thus turned to mobile hunter-gatherer lifeways as the most effective means of resilience and resistance. Can you elaborate on that at all?*

That is the situation for many groups. For instance, this is the most often suggested theory for why the Mashco Piro do not practice agriculture. The Mashco Piro belong to the Arawak linguistic family, and all the Arawak are very much agricultural people. All of their Arawak-speaking neighbors on these indigenous lands in the southern Peruvian Amazon, all of them practice lots of agriculture, they make big villages based on agricultural activities. So, it's really weird for an

indigenous Arawak people to dedicate themselves only to hunting and gathering.

This is why people are suggesting that there are social reasons for why the Mashco Piro developed this kind of living. When you are trying to run from other populations and you are trying not to get discovered, you do not stay just in one place and make big gardens because that makes you much easier to find. In this context, the nomadic hunting and gathering style of living is therefore more than likely associated with a strategy to not be found. It is a theory of course, but I think it is accurate.

*You told me before that you also have personally observed isolated people from across rivers. Have there been cases where they have reached out themselves to FUNAI? Can you describe your experiences and feelings on this?*

As I mentioned before, in the case of indigenous people in isolation, the primary measure to protect the integrity of these populations and their neighbors is defined by the principle of ‘no contact.’ However, this protocol must be adaptable to situations where isolated peoples under their own autonomy attempt to initiate contact themselves.

There was a situation with a little group of Mashco Piro along the Rio Madre de Dios, which is in the Manu National Park. Here the Mashco were for many years attempting to approach one of the nearby village-based indigenous populations. In this case many things happened between the Mashco and the village population and the state decided to go out in the middle of this to try and control things, with the purpose to avoid any spreading of diseases to the Mashco, and to avoid violence between the two groups. The Ministry of Culture, whom I was working for at the time, stepped in to attempt to lead this contact between the two groups that was occurring. Even though the government of Peru has a ‘no-contact’ policy there are some situations like this where contact is already being made and here the state has to intervene, with the purpose to protect the isolated people engaged in this contact.

During that time, I was working in this post where the Mashco were going out across the river in the front of our post and eventually I had to go with some of the indigenous people from the village and make contact with the Mashco Piros. At first, not only for me as an outsider, but also for the other indigenous people from the villages, it’s kind of scary, everybody is nervous, but once you are there in the

same space with the Mashco you start to think more personally about them and with them.

For me, all of sudden there was no longer any ‘isolated’ group, this kind of ghost entity that is lurking unseen to everybody. No, they become people, people with their own problems, with their own minds, their own ideas. So in one respect it is a critical situation, but in another respect you can only start to humanize the situation.

Before I made this contact I was always just thinking about the human rights of the Mashco in the abstract, but after the experience of actually meeting them I began to think about the human rights of the Mashco in a very concrete way. It is very sensitive.

One of the most paradoxical things I experienced was that we were trying to make protocols to minimize the contact with them, but once the Mashco have made their own decision to make contact, to go out of the forest and start to exchange things, they were quickly interested in actual physical contact. They like to touch people, to see who they are, to see if they are similar to them. They know other people not just by talking to them as we do, like when we meet someone new we start talking to them and that is how we know them, but the way the Mashco know people is also touching a lot.

And this is really paradoxical because we, as the state agents, are always strictly thinking in terms of ‘no-contact’ but the Mashco are thinking the other way around; here they are actually very much wanting to contact you, to physically touch you. But only after they have made the decision to initiate the contact.

*Do they seem to be aware of the fact you and other people are closely monitoring them?*

Now they are aware. These first experiences started in 2015 and currently we are still in the same situation where the Mashco come out of the forest and exchange some things with the villagers. But the Mashco always go back into the forest. The advantage here is that the indigenous peoples who live in the village in front of this river speak a very similar language as the Mashco and so the Mashco have been told that we [*editor’s note: Ministry of Culture field agents*] are friends, that we are people who do not have bad intentions, that we are not here to take their lands, not to take their children, not to harm them, but to try to protect their lands, and that they should feel free to go into the forest and not come back again, or if they decide to, then they can come back and we will receive them. We are really trying to

emphasize to them that it is their choice to make.

*After spending so much time monitoring these societies and getting glimpses of them based on what was left behind at camps, how was it for you to actually be among them?*

The isolated people have this aura of mysticism. For many of us, they are like ghosts who are not to be seen. From this abstract position, it is difficult to recognize their humanity in the same way that you do when you are actually in the same place together with them. You realize that we are so similar. You see the remains of the camps and it is not easy to make any parallels between yourself and these people, you only can see differences. When you see them, when you are in physical contact with them, when that happens, you feel deeply this connective relationship of common humanity. Like me, they are just individuals, people. They are not ghosts. They are not just an 'isolated' group, they are persons, they are all different individuals, they are not all the same. They have different personalities; you can begin to see the different individual minds. So rather than just see them in the abstract, you start to individualize them.

Of course, we don't force this contact at any time. But once it happens it certainly changes the way you see them.

*What are the kinds of threats that the Mashco Piro and other isolated peoples face?*

Principally the threats are to their territories and there are two types. First are the illegal threats to their land which the government cannot control; narco-trafficking, illegal logging, illegal mining, illegal fishing, illegal hunting – all of these entities are encroaching into the territories of isolated peoples and are essentially unhindered in doing whatever it is they want to do, even inside of those territories that are supposed to be protected for the isolated peoples to continue living in their own way.

That situation has seen some positive changes however. It was much worse around twenty to thirty years ago. It's not the same today. Now there is much more control. But even so, there remain many ongoing illegal activities within the territories of the isolated peoples.

The second threat is the legal activities; the development plans of the governments. In Brazil there is a lot of agricultural development that is getting closer and closer to the territories of isolated peoples. In

Peru it is oil, it is road construction. Lots of activities that have been promoted by the government itself are encroaching into indigenous lands.

What I believe is the main thing needed to protect Amazonian indigenous people's rights is to protect their territories.

*How have they responded to those threats?*

Some of them just run away and go further into the forest. Some of them attack. There are several cases where they have attacked illegal loggers. And some of them make contact. In Brazil it has happened where isolated peoples' territories have been invaded so heavily for some of these illegal activities that the isolated peoples themselves went to search for the FUNAI post to make contact with FUNAI as an attempt to find safety from these encroaching illegal invaders. So there are some different responses. It could be to go away, it could be to make contact, or it could be to attack.

*What are the consequences of contact for isolated peoples?*

The primary thing everyone needs to be careful about are diseases spreading. The isolated peoples have almost no immune defense to external diseases. In most of the cases it is a huge problem. In the first years of contact, especially if there are no well-trained, well-equipped health teams present, the contacted populations have decreased in a very big way; 30%, 50%, and even 80% of the populations have died.<sup>5</sup> In the first years this is really difficult.

Then in the following years, the challenge is how will they enter this dynamic of belonging to a society within a Nation-State without knowing anything about how this works. So then they face the threat of forced labor. Slavery has occurred in some cases.

But what also needs to be said is that it depends a lot on who the external people they are making contact with are. It is not just that isolated peoples are naturally vulnerable to contact, it is also that the actions which the wider-society and the governments take are really important for how the situation will develop, whether it will develop in a negative or positive way. In any case, however, it is a very critical and difficult situation.

*You were rightfully involved in calling out anthropologists Robert Walker and Kim Hill after they argued that it is in the best future interests of*

*isolated peoples that they be subjected to a “well designed,” systematic, and “controlled” contact. They claimed this protocol of forced contact could be done without negative consequences and indicated that this would require initiating permanent settlements.<sup>6</sup> Can you explain why this is wrong?*

I think that theoretically it could be possible, that you could forcefully contact a group like the Mashco Piro with the intention to safely ease them into a more active relationship with wider-society and not initiate really negative consequences. But everyone knows that past experiences with contact for isolated peoples have not resulted in happy experiences for them. Lots of negative things have happened in this context.

And, most important, the Mashco themselves are not looking for the type of systematic and assimilative contact proposed by Hill and Walker. The main thing is that you need to respect that decision. That is the core of the ‘no-contact’ policy and the main reason why Hill and Walker are so wrong. They are trying to impose what they think is best for the Mashco. In theory, it might sound like the best option for isolated peoples in their discussions, but I am quite sure that, in the field, it will not be possible without severely negative consequences for the Mashco.

To do so is also a principle violation of their rights, to try to enforce a contact when the Mashco are not looking for that type of contact. If they were looking for that then we would have to respond and go, and do our very best to make sure the contact is done without negative consequences, but it’s not Kim Hill’s choice, it’s not an anthropologist’s call, it is the Mashco Piro’s call.



*I think this is also a good example of why the delineation between ‘un-contacted’ vs. ‘isolated’ is important, because, as you say, you have had contacts with the Mashco Piro, but these are vastly different than what Kim Hill and the other anthropologists, and the government, might be talking about in terms of contact being a prolonged force, a permanent contact, instead of the cases you have experienced where somebody needed help or the Mashco initiated the contact themselves.*

Above all else, I view the ‘no-contact’ policy as a strategy to assure the right of self-determination. If their self-determination is to remain isolated then we must honor that. You cannot violate that. But when isolated peoples initiate the contact under their own autonomy, we have an obligation to respond to them. It is in fact a predicament with no simple black and white solutions. In certain cases, absolute ‘no-contact’ approaches have been forced to shift as a result.

For example, as I mentioned before, in the case of the Mashco Piro of the Alto Madre de Dios, sightings and contacts among the Mashco and their neighbors were increasing and the protection strategy that was in place was forced to evolve as a result.

At first an attempt was made by the government to establish measures that would eliminate situations of contact. These were actions such as the establishment of a restricted transit zone where the delivery of any type of manufactured object was prohibited. The original hope was that once any efforts by outsiders to make contact were curtailed, the risk of contact with the Mashco Piro would be eliminated. However, the original measures that were advanced on paper to impose a barrier between the Mashco Piro and the foreign populations were totally ineffective in the field. Beyond the fact that it was difficult to control the approach of the foreign parties, most decisive was that the original strategy came up against the fact that this group of Mashco themselves were the ones who most insistently promoted their own establishment of relations with the neighboring populations. In this way, the principle of ‘no contact’ was systematically broken by the Mashco Piro themselves and, in this particular case, ‘no contact’ became an impossible strategy to apply.

To cope with this evolving reality, a set of alternative protocols for interventions outside of the absolute principle of ‘no contact’ became necessary to develop. Paralleling a similar policy change in Brazil, the protocols for protection of isolated peoples evolved to stipulate that the state would intervene only in cases where a.) the isolated group

itself initiates the contact, b.) where third party outsiders are illegally initiating contact, or c.) where the isolated group is at risk of being exposed to disease. Such cases are now considered circumstances that require rapid intervention by the state as a measurement of protection for the isolated indigenous people being affected. And there have been some successful outcomes in this regard. For example, while historically in Brazil mortality in cases of contact has been unacceptably high, in recent years interventions have been carried out with close to 0% mortality rates, because adequate attention to health protection was a priority.<sup>7</sup>

But none of this should be understood as an open letter for contact. The policy evolution, and examples of its success, should above all else be taken as reference for how, in emergency situations, a strict and adequate application of the relevant protocols could minimize the chances of a health disaster. The larger reality is that indigenous people in isolation, freely having ongoing interaction with other local populations, face not only significant disease related mortality threats but also other serious consequences. This overall vulnerability of isolated people is critical. When we refer to the vulnerability of isolated peoples, we are not only referring to immediate health risks, but also specifically to the risk they face of their rights bring impeded by their interaction with the larger society.

With contact, it is nearly certain that a transition will occur from their traditional self-sufficient and autonomous way of life to one based in dependency on a mercantile economy and subjection to political subordination. Isolated indigenous peoples undergoing contact will be at a severe disadvantage in this regard because they are likely ignorant of the true long-range implications of their becoming increasingly entangled in the modern system, and they have limited response capacity to the abrupt types of changes that they will face in this interaction. The most important implications are both the institution of private property, which enables the legal appropriation of indigenous territories, and the eventual inclusion of these indigenous populations in the labor force, in which they will most likely be slaves, as workers without rights, or as employees of the most elementary type.

It is well known that the disadvantaged position from which already assimilated indigenous peoples are inserted into national societies makes their opportunities to enjoy the 'benefits of civilization' practically zero. Although modern civilization presents itself as the provider of advanced humanism and technological progress, it is cer-

tainly doubtful that newly contacted indigenous peoples will experience these elements in the positive ways they are so often idealized by the proponents of assimilation.

So, it is important to clarify that in these cases where isolated peoples are autonomously approaching other populations, our efforts at intervention as a protective measure do not in any manner mean forgetting the large suite of vulnerabilities they face with contact. This is a case-by-case interventionist policy which prioritizes strategies that, above all, protect their rights to health and territory, as well as protect them from externally created coercions and incentives. But it is critical to emphasize that we do not overlook the way they themselves are understanding the situation and how they are exercising their autonomy. It implies, therefore, a careful and diligent attempt at reaching a balance between tutelage and autonomy, between protection by outside entities and honoring the self-determination of indigenous peoples.

*Aside from the Rio Madre de Dios Mashco Piro, are there other cases where isolated peoples have made voluntary contact on their own accord with settled peoples? What has been the result of these contacts?*

Yes, there have been cases. They have happened in Brazil, they have happened in Peru. Some groups of isolated peoples have gone to a village and tried to make contact with the people there. Now, in our current times, usually the government tries to intervene in these contacts. As I was saying before, the state has a policy that they shall intervene in these contacts to ensure that they are being made in a way that minimizes the negative consequences, mainly to provide some health protection. The result of these contacts has depended on the specific conditions of the isolated peoples who initiated the contact and also on how the government actually responded.

Following the protocols I described before, in recent years, in Brazil and also in Peru, these contact situations have been treated much better than they were before. That's not to say that these contacts have been optimal or inconsequential, but the protocols are much better developed now. However, this more positive situation can easily change for the worse. For example, now in Brazil there is a political situation where the president elect, Jair Bolsonaro, is clearly against indigenous rights, so he will likely dismantle FUNAI or not allow them the resources to do their work. So, the future is by no means a free pass, but in the most recent years things have been developing

better than before.

*Regarding Bolsonaro; is that a sentiment that has been on the rise or is it just a continuation of the general attitude coming from the dominant culture?*

For instance, to talk about FUNAI and the political situation; FUNAI has already been in crisis over recent years, especially since the current president, Michel Temer. There was an impeachment of Dilma Rousseff and Temer was put in after her. He started right away cutting FUNAI's resources, so they have been in crisis.

And Bolsonaro has been saying in his campaign that he is going to continue this dismantling of FUNAI and the overall increased cutting of all budgets for indigenous peoples issues. He has said he is not going to give indigenous people one more centimeter of land, and that he will actually be trying to take away indigenous lands and transfer their lands to people who will be more 'productive' with the land; agriculture and industry, basically. He has threatened to do that. With Bolsonaro there are difficult times coming for indigenous peoples.

*I recall once hearing a settled indigenous Amazonian voice the opinion that isolated peoples "need to be civilized." Can you speak briefly about the cases where settled relatives and language speakers of isolated peoples have pushed for increasing contact and for convincing isolated peoples to move into villages and settle down?*

This is very interesting. I was speaking to this when I was answering some of the earlier questions. Those of us working to protect isolated peoples see them from the perspective that they are vulnerable, that they are threatened by disease, and that we need to protect their rights.

Settled indigenous peoples and communities, indigenous villagers, they often do not see the isolated peoples in this way. They see them in a type of paternalistic way, as if the isolated peoples are like children who need to be helped and nurtured. Some of this is rooted in religious influence; the view that to be 'saved' the isolated peoples should be contacted and civilized. And the villagers often think that the isolated people are not isolated and roaming the forest by will, but instead that they are simply afraid, and would actually like to learn and share things with the settled people. It is a different perspective

that should be understood. We need to be working with these villages, case-by-case, to educate them that this could be a wrong position.

However, in some cases it could be important to work with them in this regard. Let's say that an isolated group of peoples are initiating the contact, we need to learn from the isolated peoples themselves why they are making this contact, and why they are doing it, from an indigenous point of view. It is a very tricky and hard situation. But this interface between the settled indigenous peoples and the isolated peoples is really interesting and it is a necessity to try to understand the indigenous perspective and to try to work with them and not against them.

*What can people do to ensure that isolated societies living by their own autonomy can survive into the future?*

The first thing is to protect their territories. But the Amazon is not protected just because illegal loggers are banned, because narco-traffickers are banned, or because an oil company project is disapproved.

All of these activities, which are destructive to isolated people's territories, have their roots in the wider-society's ways of living. So if we, say, continue demanding lots of oil, the South American oil will inevitably be extracted from the Amazon. If you continue to buy lots of food, eating lots of meat, you're going to get a lot of that from Amazonian areas that have been deforested. Not only deforested for beef agriculture but also to plant soy to feed the cattle.

Yes, we can try to fight these invaders into Amazonian isolated people's territories. But also our way of living needs to address its dependence on getting all of these commodities that are destroying the forest. This is a huge component, the changes that need to be made by the wider-society itself.

### *Endnotes*

1 S. Wallace, *The Unconquered: In Search of the Amazon's Last Uncontacted Tribes*. Crown Publishers, 2011. Aside from South America, other isolated and/or uncontacted peoples continue to exist in south Asia; in select pockets on the Andaman Islands and in remote areas of Papua New Guinea.

2 Rubber trees, *Hevea brasiliensis*, are native to the Amazon forest and contain a latex producing sap, which became a crucial resource for making rubber in the nineteenth century. The ensuing rubber boom became one of the bloodiest periods of colonialism and reshaped both the Amazon and the Congo (where a similar sap comes from a native vine). For more on this, two solid books are M. Stanfield, *Red Rubber, Bleeding Trees*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico

Press, 1998 and A. Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999.

3 See J. Woodburn. 'Silent Trade with Outsiders: Hunter-Gatherers' Perspectives.' *Hau: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 6(2): 473-496. 2016.

4 D. Ribeiro. *Os Índios e a Civilização: a Integração das Populações Indígenas no Brasil Moderno*. São Paulo: Global. 2017 [1962]:284. Similarly, the great expeditionary and historian of the Amazon, John Hemming commented that "from the year 1500 to the present, metal blades - from knives, machetes, axes and saws - have been the currency of contact with all isolated peoples...Again and again, once a contact has begun, we know that the Indigenous population had seen those blades and were thus desperate to acquire them, either through theft or coming to good terms with the whites" [L.F.T. Espinoza translation to English]. J. Hemming. *Tree of Rivers: The Story of the Amazon*. Thames & Hudson. 2008:12

5 Jared Diamond estimates that over 90% of the pre-Columbian indigenous population in the Americas was decimated due to their susceptibility to European agriculturalist diseases which spread at the time of contact. This means that approximately 20 million indigenous people were eliminated as a result of disease spread following contact. J. Diamond. *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies*. New York: Norton, 1999. As Torres Espinoza makes clear, 500 years later, that threat continues.

6 The initial letter was published in *Science* in 2015 and is available online here: <http://science.sciencemag.org/content/sci/348/6239/1061.full.pdf>

Survival International responded with an open letter that is available here: <https://www.survivalinternational.org/articles/3390-open-letter-to-u-s-anthropologists-kim-hill-and-robert-s-walker>

7 G.H. Shepard Jr. 'Ceci N'est Pas un Contacte: the Fetishization of Isolated Indigenous People Along the Peru-Brazil Border.' *Tipití: Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America*: Vol. 14: Iss. 1, Article 8, 135-137. 2016:136



## The Point of Contact: An Interview with Madhusree Mukerjee



On November 17, 2018, an American missionary, John Chau, was killed by the Sentinelese during his second attempt to make contact with them. His very presence on the island was a violation of strict 'no contact' laws and policies enacted in response to the genocide of the Great Andamanese. Even his body being on the shores poses a severe biological threat. But this act was innately colonial in nature. In attempting to contact, pacify, and convert an isolated hunter-gatherer society, Chau just became one of the most recent victims of civilization's unchecked growth.

Madhusree Mukerjee is among the first people I had thought of to follow up with and I am very thankful she took the time to do this interview with *Wild Resistance*. Her 2003 book on the Andaman Islands and their hunter-gatherer occupants, *Land of the Naked People*, is exceptional. In focusing on the costs of the spread of civilization and the growing impacts of climate change, it is unparalleled. I can't recommend it strongly enough.

In addition to *Land*, Madhusree is the author of *Churchill's Secret War* and a Senior Editor at *Scientific American*.

Thank you, Madhusree.

-KT

*For a number of people, the recent killing of a 26-year-old American missionary, John Chau, is probably the first time hearing of hunting and gathering Sentinelese of North Sentinel Island, potentially all of the Andaman Islands and their hunter-gatherer inhabitants too. Can you give a quick overview of the Islands?*

The Andamans are an island chain off the southern tip of Burma. They were colonized by British officials from India in 1858, who es-

tablished a penal colony there. At independence, the islands passed to India, which settled refugees from internal conflicts on the islands. Currently the indigenous population of the islands is perhaps 700, but the settler population is about 400,000, which is more than the islands can ecologically support. Widespread deforestation has led to water shortages, which hit every summer.

*Can you describe North Sentinel Island? What does it say about a group of people to seemingly thrive on such a small island and how they subsist?*

North Sentinel Island was never colonized, probably because it was too small to be worth the effort. It has an area of only 60 square kilometers, all but the beaches being densely forested. All sightings of the Sentinel Islanders indicate that they are healthy and robust. That is a sign that their population, even if small, is viable and that they know how to live within their ecological means. Since the Andamanese thrived on such small islands without overpopulating, they must have evolved cultural adaptations (such as late marriage and the use of natural contraceptives) and possibly even biological adaptations (such as late menstruation and early menopause) to limit population growth and maintain it at zero. These characteristics have been observed in other Andamanese populations.

*One of the final chapters of your excellent 2003 book, The Land of the Naked People, is on the Sentinelese. What stands out is a constant theme: nearly every interaction with the Sentinelese is seeing them at a distance on the beach of the island, bows drawn, since the 1800s. We often conflate uncontacted societies with not having knowledge or interactions with civilization, but this level of violence towards outsiders comes from somewhere. It has also kept the Sentinelese relatively safe from outside intrusion. Hence the more appropriate term, “isolated by choice.” Do we know anything about the way they view outsiders and their experiences with them?*

A British administrator, M.V. Portman, tried to pacify the Sentinelese by landing, capturing three of them and taking them to Port Blair. All died. Portman imagined turning the island into a coconut plantation, but fortunately the effort involved was not worth the profit.

In the 1970s to the early 1990s, Indian anthropologists and officials made a few so-called “friendly contact” missions to the Sen-

tinelese, floating coconuts down to their shores. A couple of anthropologists, including a woman, are said to have landed and interacted with the islanders. The Sentinelese also scavenged iron from a ship that was wrecked on coral reefs surrounding the island in 1981. (The crew were rescued.) Later in the 1990s, when it dawned on anthropologists how harmful contact trips were to a formerly isolated peoples, the contact missions were suspended. Since then the Sentinelese have been consistently hostile.

*Chau is a member of the US-based missionary group, All Nations. And this method of “church planting” is the core of their approach, which also has a massive historical legacy in terms of missionaries as agents of colonization. In his actions, he violated a “no contact” policy. Can you speak to why that policy exists and the importance of avoiding contact for isolated societies?*

Contact policies, practiced over decades on the Jarawa, a formerly isolated tribe living on South and Middle Andaman, broke their hostility to outsiders. In 1998 they laid down their arms and began to emerge in peace to interact with settlers. They were immediately felled by epidemics of pneumonia, mumps and others. That, with some nudging from civil society activists, finally persuaded the anthropologists that contact efforts with North Sentinel people were potentially lethal and should stop.

*The “no contact” policy is an important move, but we know that it is far from being the standard approach in the colonization of the Andaman Islanders. What were the consequences of contact with the Jarawa, Great Andamanese, and Onge of the Andaman Islands that would lead to this no contact policy?*

The Andaman Islands have been occupied by these hunter-gatherers for possibly 50,000 years. Their survival strategy was to kill anyone who landed on their shores, and they were feared by sailors, who avoided them. Even so, Andamanese slaves did turn up in local courts, which means that slave-raiders occasionally visited them, likely reinforcing their hostility to the outside world. The Andamanese did take iron from shipwrecks, which they fashioned into arrow-heads. There is no native iron on the islands.

The isolation collapsed in 1858 when British officials colonized the islands. They pacified the Great Andamanese, who lived on

North, South, and Middle Andaman, by means of “gifts” such as rum, which were designed to create dependence on outsiders to feed the new “acquired wants,” as one official put it. Colonization and contact proved devastating to the hunter-gatherers, who were felled by infectious diseases that thrive in densely populated societies such as ours. Only about 50 of the Great Andamanese still survive, although they were originally believed to number 5,000 or more.

The Onge of Little Andaman were similarly pacified by Portman. They may have numbered 1,000 initially—we don’t know. Currently their numbers hover around 100, with depression and alcoholism rampant.

*The process of conversion and assimilation has long been the narrative to justify a process of colonization, the forceful hand of civilization pushing further. What have been reactions you have seen amongst other hunter-gatherer and former hunter-gatherer populations to the process of acculturation and settlements, often built around missions?*

Colonization starts a process that seems to never stop. If you look at indigenous peoples today in Canada, for instance, their rates of depression, suicide, and alcoholism are staggering. Indigenous women get raped and murdered at many times the rates of other Canadian women, and mostly by outsiders. Subsisting as a powerless, subjugated people is very difficult. Native Americans speak of inherited trauma... I don't know to what extent trauma is biologically transmitted, but there is no question that being part of a culture that has been subjected to genocide leaves a permanent scar.

*There have been significant arguments over the retrieval of Chau's body. Can you speak to what is happening there currently?*

I was one of a group of civil society activists who urged that efforts to retrieve the body stop. It could only lead to more fatalities. I believe these efforts have stopped.

*All of this happens as India has made strides to lift the no contact policy over the past months in an effort to build up tourism around the Andaman Islands. What has that looked like and what are their plans for this?*

India under Prime Minister Narendra Modi is developing the An-

damans and the Nicobar Islands further south as a military base to be mobilized in future wars with China. India is a key US ally in the region, and the islands figure very prominently in Pentagon plans to control the ocean routes by which China gets its oil. These plans involve a railway line through the Jarawa reserve, 24 new ports, container terminals, dry dock—all this plus naval bases, which aren't being announced in public. There are reports that US naval ships are docking at Port Blair. At the same time, the islands are being seen as a cash cow, with visions of a million tourists arriving every year. The islands simply don't have the ecological carrying capacity to sustain such development, but the planners don't seem to care. In this lust for power and money, the people living on the islands do not matter.

In all this, the lifting of restrictions on visitors to North Sentinel, which was announced a few months ago, is a sideshow. It means that some official in New Delhi thought it would be a good idea to use North Sentinel as an open-air zoo.



*Your chapter in Land has just had a new realm of relevancy: the juxtaposition of a government statement from 2000 how “no citizen of India” should live as “savages” with a discussion of a “hands off” policy alongside Navy drills. Clearly this is not a new issue even if it has only just now grabbed international attention, though I fear it will only be temporary. And here even the Navy drills are a recurring issue as the Andaman Islands have become a proxy zone in the persistent and contentious struggle between China and Japan (partnered with India) over access and entitlement to the seas for military, extraction, and logistical purposes. Can you give some background about this situation and*

*where it currently stands?*

The idea that the Sentinelese or the Jarawa should be “civilized”—taught agriculture, wearing clothes, etc.—comes up from time to time. So that they can avail the “benefits of modern civilization.” Even in the context of this killing, several so-called experts, including an anthropologist, opined that contact is good for the Sentinelese. With the Jarawa, the idea that they should be “civilized” was even the subject of a court case, if you recall from my book.

A group of us, in particular Pankaj Sekhsaria, has been activists on these issues for decades now. Every time these ideas come up, say, a proposal by some government official or someone’s remark on the andamanicobar webgroup, we remind them why contact and integration are bad ideas. We have been accused of racism, of wanting to keep them in a zoo, etc. etc. I had a particularly nasty run-in with a historian I won’t name. It gets so tiring to make the same arguments over and over again. I should say that Sophie Grig of Survival International has been useful in this regard. They have kept a focus on the Andamans and spoken up every time some insane proposal comes up.

*Land of the Naked People is an extraordinary book in a number of ways, but, as I believe you could have predicted, a central narrative has only become more timely: the book uncovers the impact that civilization has had upon hunter-gatherers and Indigenous societies living at or beyond its frontier. A major aspect of that are the impacts of climate change. The Andamanese got some international attention when they knew to move upland when the massive tsunami of 2004 hit. Seemingly, they are the only population in the region to have suffered no losses from it.*

*So while there is a depth of knowledge and awareness, no one could be prepared for the kinds of mass die offs and climate instability that civilization has caused. In the case of the Sentinelese, you write that what ultimately threatens the Sentinelese the most is “the flatulence of the wealthy society where I lived, at the other end of the globe.” There is an ocean between us, but even that is not enough. Here you have the juxtaposition of a tiny island of hunter-gatherers, living as they potentially had for tens of thousands of years, and the persistent threat of civilization in the form of missionaries, militaries, tourists, and, to top it off, endemic and catastrophic climate change. It’s been 15 years since you’ve written that book, yet here we are. What are we not learning and*

*why are we so seemingly incapable of grasping it?*

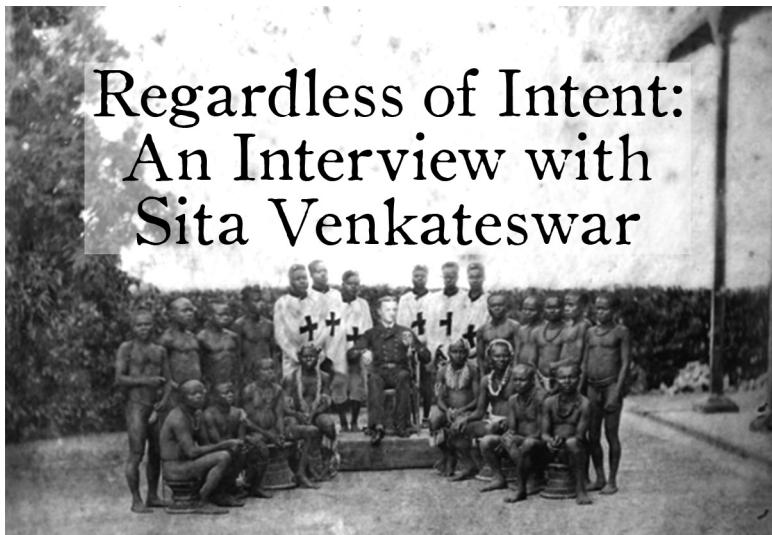
I think we live in a cage of our own making. Our way of life is so powerful, so dominant on this planet that we cannot imagine that any other way of life is possible or legitimate. It is a failure of the imagination, born of ignorance of “the other”—in this case, the hunter-gatherer. This was how humankind thrived for most of its 200,000-year existence. And yet it seems to most people merely amusing to suggest that it is a valid way of life.

*You bring up in Land that you were on a boat to see North Sentinel island and write about it in ways that Chau and others like him should have read and understood. There's a quagmire when it comes to fighting for isolated societies, in wanting to protect them from contact and also an awe of their lived struggle. It's hard to not want to witness it, but you turned around, while Chau and others like him kept going. Do you mind sharing that story and how, twenty years later, that moment resonates with you now?*

I went on a boat that circumnavigated the island, and saw them on the beach, from a distance. Yes, we humans suffer from incorrigible curiosity, and so did I. I knew how harmful contact was to the Sentinelese, of course, and yet, for some reason that I can no longer remember, suggested that we bring along red cloth and other gifts. What was I thinking? We saw from a distance of perhaps a kilometer a couple of figures in a dugout, fishing, and others on the shore, watching us. It was only when the boatmen I was with began to aggressively bring the boat closer to the dugout and the shore that I came to my senses and pleaded with them to not get closer. Fortunately, they turned around.

In retrospect, this was not a trip that I should have taken. Anyone can construct a rationale for why they should be the one to see the Sentinelese, and not others. There need to be patrols to make sure no one is landing on the islands, but they should not come so close as to cause alarm to the Sentinelese. We did cause alarm, disturb their peace, and I regret that.

*For more from Madhusree and information on her current and future books, go to [madhusree.com](http://madhusree.com)*



*MV Portman and the Andamanese.*

In following the story of John Chau, Madhusree introduced me to Sita Venkateswar. Rarely have I been so impressed by the thoroughness and depth of someone's work and insights while also being completely shocked that I hadn't come across it earlier. Sita's 2004 ethnography, *Development and Ethnocide: Colonial Practices in the Andaman Islands*, is among the best ethnographies ever written and a thorough condemnation and examination of colonialism. The topics we touched on in this discussion are just scraping the surface of her work and it gets my highest recommendation.

I'm exceptionally grateful that Sita took the time for this interview and helping give more additional context about both Chau's place in the history of the Andaman Islands and the colonial nature of contact—regardless of the agents and/or their intents. Sita teaches anthropology at Massey University in New Zealand and is the co-editor of *The Politics of Indigeneity* (2011).

Thank you, Sita.

-KT

*In terms of the Sentinelese killing John Chau, was there anything that should have been a surprise? Was there anything about this situation where his execution wouldn't have been the likely outcome?*

No, it was no surprise. Because for a while there have been deterrents to anyone actually landing ashore and trying to establish contact or

communicating with them. Or being there to gather any resources.

Prior to this there was, a few years ago—I can't be sure of the exact date, I think in 2006—there was a group of poachers who were killed that had landed there or their boat had gone astray into those waters and they had been washed ashore, and they were all killed as well.

So it isn't a surprise. It's very clear that if people come they're likely to be at least attacked, if not killed outright. And in the case of Chau, what is interesting is the fact that they didn't kill him at first instance. They kind of warned him to stay away without injuring him, but at least scaring him. And that should have been enough, for anyone to then think about it and stay away. But he pushed ahead despite that. And so his death is not a surprise at all.

*I know according to what I've heard about what is in his journals that he had no intention on becoming a martyr. I don't know how true this is, but I heard on a previous attempt at contact that he had been shot at by an arrow and it had actually hit his Bible.*

Yeah, that's right. That is how it was described, that it hit his Bible. So he was obviously holding it. You can read some significance into it, but I don't think they knew it was a Bible. I think they just shot at something that was close to his body without necessarily targeting any part of his body. It just happened to be the Bible.

*I can imagine there are people who would try, for obvious reasons, to say the Bible saved him or whatever, but I would agree that it tends to be overlooked that it wasn't meant to be a kill shot. These are hunter-gatherers, they've been hunting and gathering for a long time, I trust they know how to hit a target.*

Yeah, I think if they had directed the arrow at him, it would have hit some spot, but it was close enough to him to presumably scare him. And it did scare him because he fled.

*There's no reason to think it would have gone any other way.*

*Just to give an overview, in your book Development and Ethnocide, you go into a lot of detail—and now with the killing of Chau the history of the Andaman Islands have been talked about a bit more—can you give a bit of the history in terms of contact and what impact that has had upon the hunter-gatherers of the Andaman Islands.*

So “contact” is one thing and then permanent settlements are another. You just want to talk about contact, and usually when contact has occurred, it’s contact that has included the gifting of various goods and it is interesting that it has happened that way. These gifts were planned as potential lures that people would want more of them. And ask for more of them. That would be the way in.

It’s had a long history, because earlier on, during the former colonial period, contact initially involved bringing all kinds of beads, mirrors, and other such trivial things, which were strange goods for the people contacted. Following on from that would be tobacco and alcohol. Which were seen as lures. So here, the contact did not include tobacco and alcohol, because it’s “post-colonial.” But the intent has remained, I think, the same: as a way in as a route and a lure—potentially a way to seduce the people through those goods.

And that has succeeded. That certainly succeeded as far as the Jarawa were concerned, although that has quite a long and complex story. It would be hard to understand fully what exactly were the factors that turned things around for the majority. Almost overnight it seemed like they stopped being a threat, that they stopped being overtly hostile. And they seemed to want a more peaceful mode of interaction.

But that happened in 1996. That happened after many, many decades of efforts towards contacts. With mixed results, because on the one hand, there would be these formally staged encounters known as “contact.” And then in the night there would be these raids by the Jarawa into nearby farms and settlements when all hell would break loose. They would just come and loot—disrupt and take things and then just go. So there were two kinds of things happening in parallel, which is very interesting.

Another anthropologist—I think I might have mentioned a little bit about this in my book—whose writings you may have read, Vishvajit Pandya, has also written at length about that. He too went on to research the Jarawa over an extended period. That started just around the time that I was finishing my fieldwork and then extended beyond that as well. So he’s another person to read for more information and interesting insights on these kinds of parallel juxtaposed processes.

*I know you’ve mentioned it other places as well, but just to kind of touch the notion of contact. It seems like the very idea of it feeds into this romanticized sense that people who have chosen to remain isolated have*

*had no contact. Yet the violence that the Sentinelese and even the Jarawa had shown towards outsiders was itself seemingly a response to earlier stages of colonial violence. That this was a cultural memory that had been building for a significantly long time that led to this outright hostility towards outsiders.*

I think it's a mistake to assume that people who are purposely isolated—voluntarily isolated is how they are described now, that's the nomenclature: voluntary isolated Indigenous groups—are not uncontacted groups. That is a misconstrual. Voluntarily isolated groups have had a long history of different modes of contact from which they have sought to remain isolated. To not come within the fold of the different kinds of interactions that they have been aware of over a very, very long period.

As far as the Sentinelese are concerned, there has been some writing about the fact that there had been these shipwreck salvagers who were sent to salvage the wreck on the shores of the island. And they worked for quite a long time, over many months, to salvage that. And there would have been interactions between them and the Sentinel Islanders. And I think one of those people who worked over there has commented or has been interviewed or has written publicly about his experiences as a salvager.

That happened in that period before that first contact that we've been hearing so much about: when a group of anthropologists and the Andaman administrators took coconuts and other things. For the first time, the Sentinelese came forward and accepted it. At the same time, salvaging crews had been working in the months prior to that and leading up to that historic moment. So one could extrapolate from that and perhaps consider the impact those interactions. You don't know what kind of exchanges occurred there.

There is so much that is murky. There's so much that's not known. And so much that's just speculation.

*It is definitely something that we do: with or without the people there, the very transfer of produced goods or foreign goods have profound impacts on societies. Is there any reason to believe that wouldn't be the case here?*

Just by looking at the material artifacts—I can't remember who has written about it, it could have been Pandya—the fact that you can trace the changes to the weaponry, what they used to craft it and the

different kinds of materials that had washed ashore or been salvaged from wrecks, that were then used, reused, and recycled for various purposes. So even without actual people bringing them goods, because they are on an island, things wash ashore. Which are put to different uses. And so, their technology and their material artifacts that they've used to go about the business of daily living can demonstrate changes over an extended period. All just because of them being there and the changes occurring in the world beyond. Whether it is directly targeting them or not, they too have been part of the exchanges which can be discerned in those small material shifts that have occurred in their lives.

*I think that's a really important point, there's an interview you have in your book with one of the Onge. They mention how it was almost as though they had provoked a ship to shoot at them, just to lay low in the forest and collect the iron that was shot at them afterwards.*

Yeah, that's right.

*I found that fascinating!*

*In terms of some of the attempts at prolonged or permanent contact or settlement, this kind of puts Chau at the end of a long line of missionaries, government administrators, anthropologists, and NGOs that have made very explicit attempts to establish contact—often in the name of establishing civilization, in their words. Can you speak to that explicit goal and how these contacts all tie together?*

The Andaman Islands are quite a unique situation in many ways. It is similar, but also quite distinct from, other parts of the world. There were Indigenous people and then there was a penal colony with an external colonizer. And the changes that occurred as a result of all of that impacted on all of the groups, but more on some than the others.

It is also quite unique, because of that, at the end of the colonial period, as we've gone into the post-Indian Independence, post-colonial period, that island also became a kind of haven for refugees from the aftermath of Independence and Partition. People fleeing violence from elsewhere, people fleeing to India, from what was East Pakistan and then from Bangladesh and different parts of Sri Lanka, they were all rehabilitated throughout the Andaman Islands.

A new colony was created, was engineered, because it was seen as virgin terrain. The presence of already established Indigenous groups

were not construed as particular impediments to that. Also, while all this was happening, there were some protections in place because they were seen as “primitive tribal groups.” And either to be brought under the paternalistic fold of the government and it was the governments’ business to protect them. To make sure that they were not subject to interference or violence.

But what the government itself did was not seen as interference. Such as the kinds of welfare efforts and the kinds of development efforts that were targeted towards some of those groups. The one group that was most devastated at the end of the British colonial period and the beginning of the Indian period were the Andamanese.

The Great Andamanese, there were ten or twelve linguistically different groups that used to range across the main bulk of the main islands, at the end of the British period there were about 23 people left. Which was a terrible tragedy, all in various stages of ill health and addictions. So the welfare efforts targeted towards them were required, were necessary, because it was really a matter of life or death for some of them. But those same welfare efforts were also then extended to the other pacified group: the Onge, who were much more independent and much more viable in many ways. But that island was then set out to house refugees from Bangladesh and East Pakistan and Sri Lanka. And also from some of the Indigenous groups from the Nicobar Islands, that island was so small and couldn’t accommodate that growing population, so they needed to be shifted to another location and there was room made for them for resettlement on Little Andaman.

A consequence of all that for the Onge, was that they were pushed into these little corners on the two extreme ends of the islands. Their territory for ranging and foraging and maintaining a certain kind of lifestyle was considerably restricted. Then because of those welfare efforts and the kinds of direct, targeted impact that they would have, the kinds of welfare brought about the most marked shift.

The government thinks that it is doing good by giving them rations. But that’s the most dangerous thing it could do to people that were self-sufficient and independent. And knew how to go about finding food and the different kinds of foods that they had learned to eat and produce—not produce in the way that there was no cultivation, they were hunter-gatherers—but they knew what to do or not do with the foods. The kind of embedded knowledge you have of the dos or don’ts of different kinds of foods.

For instance, when you have rice or lentils, they wouldn't know how long it will keep, when it's good to eat, when it's not good to eat, they wouldn't have known these things. Unlike the integrated knowledge about what you do with turtle, what you do with dugong, what you do with wild boar, how to cure and up to what point it's good to eat or when the rest should be given to the dogs, you don't have that kind of knowledge about food spoilage.

So cleanliness and hygiene, what you do with milk and what you don't do with milk, and how you use milk powder: all these ingredients that were added on had grave impact on their bodily health. That's what Indians ate. And here's where you have this kind of colonial assumption about what foods are good to eat and therefore what foods are good to donate.

Without thinking is this appropriate to donate? Are these people really meant to be eating these foods? With the Onge—and this is why when I finished my fieldwork what I felt strongly about needing to write about, is about food—of these welfare directives around food and the impact it had on them. What it meant for them. Some foods have meaning beyond just consumption, because foods were imbued with different spirits and were a part of their ritual life as well. And when you take that away, that completely destroys a kind of essential core of what is of value and what has meaning for a people.

So with the Onge, during my research, the impact of welfare was much more strongly and markedly visible. The notion of welfare, to me at least, at that time, looked like an imposition that they could have well done without, unlike the case of the Great Andamanese.



*Anthropologist Madhumala Chattopadhyay during a “peaceful contact” mission with the Sentinelese.*

*The food and impact of food is something I think is an extremely important area. It's kind of ironic, because in the Western world, as the Paleo, Primal, and Ketogenic diets are coming about, it's taking all of that to really come about and really get an understanding within our culture about the impacts of civilized foods—the products of agriculture. We can even go back and question now, with the standard diet of India at the time, was there an acknowledgement of how much impact this would have in terms of subjugating people?*

No, I don't think they understood. They thought they were doing good. Just like the colonizers did. They thought they were doing good: they were bringing civilization. But the underlying subtext of pacification, subjugation: it's always masked, but it is there. It's part and parcel of these sorts of efforts, whether you voice it or not. Whether you articulate it or not.

*Absolutely. It can be kind of complicated, especially in more recent attempts as far as colonial administrators, especially post-colonial administrators, welfare agents, and missionaries in a post-industrial world and the consumer society that we have just to give food. But a lot of these policies go back to a colonial era where that wasn't necessarily the case.*

*So some of these earlier contacts on the Andaman Islands and these penal colonies, such as you write in your book, it's important to understand colonizers as they see themselves in their own myths: they were trying to not do on the Andaman Islands what they had just done in Tasmania. Which is that they had killed all of the Indigenous people.*

*At the same time, in the Americas and so many other places there was that very latent colonial drive to say that if you eliminate the wildlife and make the native diet impossible to attain, then they have to come to the colonizers. There is that shift, even then, for the most part the colonizers had suffered from their own hubris, but they didn't have the current consumer society we have to give it all away to bait people, but there was that latent attempt to say we need to starve them out. Then you get, at the same time, in other parts of the world, the same incident, but they think they're helping and really it's the worst thing for everybody.*

*In terms of that policy of not wanting to recreating the situation in Tasmania...*

And yet, they pretty much went on to do exactly what they did earlier in Tasmania.

On the other hand, the important factor to not lose sight of is the fact that, yes, they started off perhaps with the best of intentions, with the lessons learned from Tasmania. But the reality on the ground was so difficult, so hard. The climate, the environment, the sicknesses, the fear, the fear of being killed, the fear of being killed by convicts, the fear of being killed by the “native savages.” I think good intentions disappear in the day-to-day reality of setting up the penal colony and the magnitude of what was entailed there. It could not stand up that exigencies of the context.

So it went the way of other good intentions. They ended up replicating, pretty much, what happened in Tasmania.

Also, there are the different people who were posted there. It's really interesting when you kind of trace the different colonial officers who came and went at different points of time. What experience they brought with them to the tasks that they were set to work on when they were posted in the Andamans. For instance, Lord Cornwallis came there on the back of having been defeated in the American Revolution. And the next place he went to was the Andaman Islands.

Then you have others that worked in other parts of India or Northeast India or they worked in Southeast Asia and so the colonial experience that they brought with them also served as a framework for how they went on to do what they did while in the Andamans. What they did during the time that they were there. That is really interesting to trace for quite a few of the different administrators over the duration of their presence on the islands.

That's a whole other story and I'm sure there are historians much better skilled to be able to do that and may have already done that.

*The very nature of the colonial experience exposes the irony of the nature of civilization. To say that we're going to come here and preach civilization to these “savages,” meanwhile they're there to build a penal colony.*

It's always violent no matter what. You can't get away from the violence of it.

This is what makes some of the recent commentary, following on this episode in the Sentinel Island, even by some anthropologists who have gone on to critique the idea of no contact, of staying away and letting them be, and try to say “this isn't right.”

But even by saying “that’s not right” is making assumptions about what is right. Any effort to then impose what others think is right is always a violent process: it destroys. By people saying, “there might be health issues,” “we need to offer them these things,” “how’s it possible to leave them to their own devices,” “it’s a human right’s issue,” “no contact is all well and good, but in the twenty-first century you can’t let people be in that state.” The risks of that and the dangers of that, we haven’t learned to avert any of that.

In all of these years of civilization, we haven’t learned to not be destructive. So until we do, how can we replay that scenario yet again?

*There’s a point that you bring up here that I tend to think gets overlooked often. A lot of people, particularly these very liberal sensibilities about the nature of contact, the idea that someone is capable of making this decision to have prolonged contact with civilization is just a decision that someone might make even if the reality of civilization, climate change, and, in this case, deforestation and logging, all hitting at once weren’t the issue.*

*That’s never the case. These things don’t happen in a vacuum. We are all stuck with the world that civilization has created. In that regard, people get kind of comfortable with this academic sense that we can have decolonial studies, but also feeling the need to apologize on behalf of native societies while also making it seem like them being violent plays into these civilized narratives about them.*

*I’ve seen you ask this question directly to the Onge, “why did you put the bows down at all?” Or why would they? This isn’t a matter of being violent people to see the world that civilization has created, the world that is attempting to thrust itself upon them, and it should be unthinkable to try and judge how people defend themselves. This isn’t a case of decolonization, it’s a case of anti-colonization. It’s a reaction to a constant reality.*

*In a historical sense, it seems like you can talk about resistance movements, but the violence gets apologized for. Even there, these are choices that are being made. This is an outright statement: being on the beach with bows drawn is a statement that “we do not want what you have.” It’s not a matter of saying these are just violent people. I really appreciate you putting that on the table and it’s something that needs to be acknowledged more and more. It blows my mind to see people put any kind of morality on this. Knowing what we know about the Andamanese being reduced to 23 people, any kind of judgment put on them for trying to avoid that outcome seems insane.*

They can't defend themselves in the ways in which they used to. That context is long gone, except in the Sentinel Islands. Even until the 90s, the Jarawa would defend themselves that way. With the Onge and the Andamanese, so much happened, too much violence happened for them. It's all part of their oral lore.

What is really needed, and I don't know if that will ever happen, but that's what I hope might happen, is that some savvy person becoming a spokesperson and being politicized enough and being articulate enough to take a leadership role. But for that to have happened, I think people would have had to suffer even more. Or maybe the context is very different.

For someone like, say Davi Yanomami, to come up: someone like that. Someone who has lost so much, but in that losing has also acquired so many political skills that enables him to go and stand up at the UN and say what he says. Or to speak to media the way that he does. But that hasn't happened in the Andaman Islands. There hasn't been a radicalization or a politicization from within those communities, for someone or more than one to have challenged and taken leadership in a way that we are familiar with in other contexts. That we can say that someone is acting on their own behalf, some representative has come from within. Because until that happens, until there are demands that come from them, voiced by them, it is only external people trying to act on their behalf. That is always dangerous, that's always a half-baked measure.

*It turns out colonialism is a very complicated situation.*

It is, because on the one hand, it destroys, but at the same time it is the catalyst for creating new kinds of people. And where such catalysis has occurred it has been remarkable. But it has come with huge losses, huge destructiveness, and maybe that's part of that. Something like that, it has to happen at that magnitude for something else to be possible.

*Bringing up Davi, there are a lot of things that come from that. I know that being heavily involved in anthropology and decolonial/anti-colonial struggles, it is hard to navigate that idea that you are trying to speak on behalf of anybody, that's all part of the entire colonial situation, but you see the kind of decimation it took for someone like Davi to come out and want to believe that if those voices are heard, that they*

*will have a profound impact. Currently, even over the past few days, in occupied British Columbia, the Unist'ot'en are being removed from their own land, which are unceded territories, where they are blocking fracking pipelines going across their own lands that hereditary chiefs have said flatly that they don't want this to happen.*

*You kind of get this sense that over time people might learn, which I guess is the same thing with the British saying that they didn't want to recreate Tasmania in the Andaman Islands, yet they did. I want to believe that if these voices come out, they will be heard. But we're seeing in real time that when they do, they're still suppressed. The entire colonial mechanism is such an entity, that it'll just swallow that up.*

Yeah.

*You've brought up in your book and elsewhere that knowing, in and of itself, is an act of colonialism.*

See this is the thing that makes one really wary of the ways in which—as academics, as knowledge seekers, as anthropologists—we are complicit with these regimes of power. Because of the ways in which seeking to know and learn more puts you in a position that is not dissimilar to those who are in that context holding the reins of power.

All of the ways in which you become complicit with those structures just because you need to play nice to get access, to get entry, to be allowed in so that you can go on to seek to learn more. That makes me really cautious and in a context like the Andamans where I already feel so strongly about what is happening over there and what is going on in their day-to-day lives.

There is no way to escape the way in which you are positioned when you are there. You can't be anybody other than how the structure positions you. Despite how much you might imagine that, “no, I'm different.” You're not different; you're there because you want to know more. And you are who you are and to be doing what you are makes you part and parcel of the problem.

Which is why I found it really difficult to go back. That's a key reason, I couldn't get around this conundrum. How could I ignore it? I write about all of this, then how can I ignore it and go back just because I think there is more to be learned. That comes at such a cost, but the cost to whom? The cost to me, I think, the cost to my conscience.

*In the time since you've written this book in particular, do you feel like you've come to any answers about that question or where that leaves things?*

I do, I do. Especially now in the post-Sentinel Island events, I have a strong sense of wanting to go back to the Onge and the Andamanese. And I want to go back, not to the Jarawa, not to the Sentinel, but I want to go back because I feel like I owe it to them to go back. I feel like they've been abandoned. That these are people who have been written about and what happens after all the anthropologists have left? When everything that there is to say, when all the notes and queries have been covered, and is there nothing else to write about? What is left of the people when the anthropologists leave?

There is another anthropologist who works in a very different context, João Biehl, and he wrote about people with mental illnesses. There's one research participant he wrote about extensively over many years called Catarina, who languished in this mental asylum in Brazil, that's where he found her. And over many, many years of maintaining contact with her until she died, he has written so much about her and the context of this research and he uses this phrase, "zones of abandonment." And that has come back into my cognizance repeatedly in these several weeks. That these are zones of abandonment. And in all good conscience, can I also abandon them, can I say there is nothing more to be said?

Of course there is more to be said. But if there is more to be said, how can I say it differently, what mode of engagements can I put in place that would allow a different kind of reencounter with the Onge and the Great Andamanese? As an older woman, one who's lived her career in anthropology and is going back almost to start anew, but with no stakes. With no stakes. At the time I did my research as a PhD student, there was everything at stake. And the kind of anxieties of field work, of not knowing what you were doing or where it was going or what it was about, there's none of all of that. The only reason I would go back is because I would think there is the possibility for a different kind of engagement. What that will be, how that might be, how going there and what I do might make a different kind of contribution. It's not about what I can get from it as much as what I can do over there that might be of use. How might we change the encounter? Those are the questions I ask myself now. And those are the questions that I am trying to work through.

*Very important questions. It's really interesting and there's that side of being trained in anthropology that makes you feel bound by academic rigor, but at the same time you see, experience, and understand things and you get a glimpse at all this reality, it's hard not to just say that, rigor aside, this is becoming more and more necessary to become a louder and louder advocate. That you can't just turn a blind eye.*

*You've been writing about the Andaman Islands for over twenty years now, the killing of Chau isn't necessarily anything new, but it seems to have captured the world's attention in a different way. To me it seems that way and at least for now. I don't know if it will stay that way or not, but do you think anything was different this time? Do you think things will change? After saying very powerfully for over twenty years, talking about this situation, do you feel things are changing?*

Things have been changing on the island all the time.

There are administrative reasons for that, because people who are posted in decision-making roles in the government, they are there on short-term tenures. There's a continuous turnaround of personnel. Every person who comes and has a position of importance, they try to leave their mark and they reinvent the wheel. They go and operate as if nothing else came before. And so, every time, you have to start over again with a new set of people who are in that place and trying to leave their mark. And each one's mark has a different kind of impact.

That has been the context of what administration in the Andaman Islands has been in the post-Independence period. Because everyone who is posted there is usually from mainland India, who see this as a punishment posting to somehow or another to get to make the most of it and extract the most from there. And then move on to something else and something better. Unless the system shifts so that people who have a real stake in being there are the ones who are put in those important positions, things will not change in the islands. Things will not change for the better.

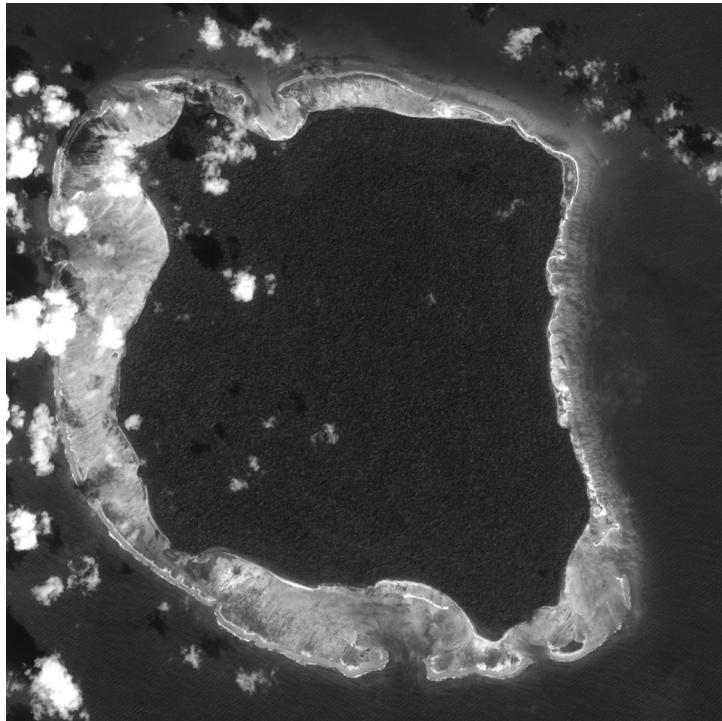
And the most important thing to remember is that you can't plan things for one group of people in the absence of the other. You've got to take the Indigenous and non-Indigenous as co-inhabitants of this island and look at how you might think of doing something that is in the interest of both. They may not be the same interests, but you've got to see them both as mutual. And you can't act in the interest of one and not consider the interest of the other. That has been the mistake; they prioritize one or the other to the neglect of the other. That has created a whole slew of problems that then they've had to pick up

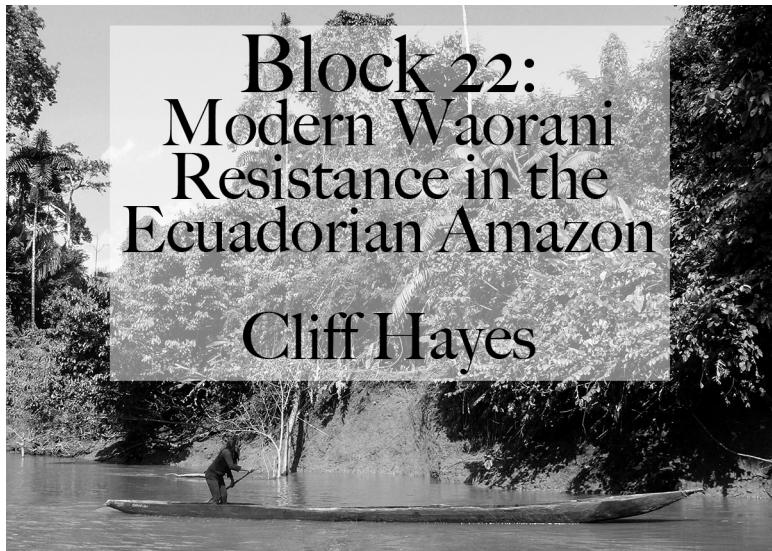
behind them in the wake of that.

Until that changes, I don't think anything positive will emerge in the islands.

So, for instance, what is happening now is this great effort to make it into a tourism hub and a military hub, as a place to counter the growing threat of China in the Indian Ocean. They're doing all of this as if the Indigenous people didn't exist. As if the local Andamanese didn't exist. Because all of this is guided by decisions that are made on mainland India, of people who are continental people, not island-based people. And so the ways in which these decisions create ripple effects by people who have no idea what living on an island means and the day-to-day life is like.

Once again, it's going to perpetuate a whole slew of changes that are not positive for the people of the Andaman Islands, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous. So it's another kind of colonialism—a subtler internal colonialism—of the kind of center/periphery dynamic that all these other people have written about—Wallerstein, and others. That is exactly what it is underway in the Andamans: between the mainland metropolis and the island periphery.





# Block 22: Modern Waorani Resistance in the Ecuadorian Amazon

## Cliff Hayes

*Waorani canoe. Photo by Four Legged Human.*

The Waorani are semi-nomadic hunter-gatherer people of the Ecuadorian Amazon who have had little recorded contact with modern civilization, and even other Indigenous people, until the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The evidence of their isolation is provided by two of their defining features, their unique language and their genetic homogeneity.<sup>1</sup>

There are four recent historic events which have brought them into recorded contact with outsiders. Those being, the rubber boom of the late 1800s and early 1900s, early oil exploration in the 1940s, missionary contact in the 1950s and the oil boom starting in the 1970s. The earliest contacts are documented by Waorani spearing deaths of outsiders. These incidents increased through the 1920s and 1930s which solidified the Waorani's reputation for fierce and deadly attacks against intruders. In the 1940s, Royal Dutch Shell established a base camp just outside of Waorani territory and built several air-strips in the heart of their territory. The Waorani killed several Shell workers during the 1940s and in 1950, Shell abruptly abandoned their operations within the Waorani territory.<sup>2</sup>

But the departure of Shell didn't stop the flow of intruders. In the 1950s, missionaries arrived with an aggressive plan to contact and convert the Waorani. In 1956, the Waorani speared and killed five of these missionaries whom had landed their plane deep within Waorani territory. This was an event that made world news. However, only two

years later, the missionaries had developed the first settlement which established a peaceful relationship with one of the Waorani groups. From this point on, civilization extended its influence on the Waorani people and their territory. The 1960s saw the Waorani people relocated to villages under a government authorized protectorate. This relocation of the Waorani was often carried out using oil company helicopters. In the 1970s, oil exploration increased in the areas abandoned by the relocated Waorani people. The Waorani people, now forced into small sedentary communities, became dependent upon the missionaries for survival. The Waorani suffered a polio epidemic in the years immediately following their relocation and their connection to the land and their previous way of living began to fade.<sup>3</sup>

*We are the Waorani. We have always lived in the Amazonian jungle. For thousands of years, we have defended our territory against invaders.*

*The exploitation of oil is what keeps cities alive around the world, but in our territory oil extraction destroys everything that is important to us.*

*Our land is not for sale. We will not let the government call it Block 22.*<sup>4</sup>

The words above are from Oswando Nenquimo, one of the Waorani people living in the Ecuadorian Amazon in an area that the Ecuadorian government labels Block 22.<sup>5</sup> He spoke these words at a gathering of Waorani communities. At this gathering, Oswando presented information about the government's plan to lease the area to oil companies and what he was doing to prevent this from happening.

What Oswando has been doing since 2014 is making a living map of the Waorani lands using modern technology to document and record the Waorani relationship with those lands. As Owsando states:

*Without our land, the Waorani cannot survive. That's why I always dream of saving our land, so we don't shrink or lose what we have. We've been very worried because the government is going to put Block 22 up for sale. Our ancestors always defended their land... The map is an important tool for our defense, but each community must also defend itself. Today, we defend our land with this map. Before we killed with spears. Things are different now.*

Oswando is using drones, camera traps and GPS to map Waorani territory. The map will include the quantitative and empirical data provided by modern technology, but it will also contain the integrated connections the Waorani have developed with the land. In doing so, he is using the Waorani way of life, its context and its grounding in the land, as a way to reject the idea that a map is a record of raw geographical landscape delineating peoples and showing the locations of resources to be extracted, processed and commodified. He is tying the wisdom of his ancestors to physical locations that he can point to in the colonizers model of the Waorani territory (Block 22):

*The elders' wisdom is now being transmitted digitally...*

*I've visited all of the communities in the Waorani territory. In 12 communities, we've developed a living map. The outsiders have had our map, but we've never had our own map. We want to make it from our own point of view.*

*Throughout the Waorani history, the tales and myths, all kinds of songs, and the knowledge of its territory, have formed the nation. Before the elders are gone, we need to know their knowledge because as we lose them, our culture is dying.*



*Working a spear. Photo by Four Legged Human.*

*The concept outsiders have of our territory is very different to ours. Outsiders just see an empty map. We have to fill it with cultural and environmental information so they can understand. This map hits the government hard because look how much information it contains. With just a document, outsiders don't understand because they don't live it. The only thing the government wants is evidence.<sup>6</sup>*

Oswando instructs the Waorani youth how to use GPS devices to send geolocation data to him so he can pinpoint places on the map which is filled with cultural information from the Waorani elders:

*As you draw the musk hog path, you should also draw the mountains, jaguar tracks, wild boar. Where leaves for roofing are, everything. Identify what's important to you. Where edible fruits are. Fill the map up.*

*Whatever you draw, the youth will mark it with a GPS point.<sup>7</sup>*

*The wise guides always accompany the local technicians. They say, 'This is important,' and we take note... It's as if they talk to the trees.<sup>8</sup>*

Examples of the type of cultural information being documented in Oswando's map come from a few Waorani elder women:

*Right next to the river Obapare, there are a ton of trees to make canoes. And here, near Kakataro, outsiders hunt illegally...*

*There are lots of cedars for wood by the river... That plant is for the common lancehead viper. There is another plant for smaller snakes. ... You can call toucans like our ancestors did with this plant. The youth don't do it anymore.*

*This is a panka bokawe tree. It works for the flu, for when you're coughing and your body aches.<sup>9</sup>*

Oswando clarifies the importance of the living map as being more than just a supporting piece of documentation to use against the sale of Block 22, "If we don't put it on the map and someone gets sick in the community, no one will know where it is. They need to see what's in the territory from the map."<sup>10</sup>

The paradox of this new map's dependence upon technology

doesn't go unnoticed. The Waorani population, displaced by the demands of an invading civilization that is built upon resource extracting technologies, is now using facets of the same disruptive technologies to provide a link to their ancestral knowledge while simultaneously providing evidence to the invaders that there is more to the land than resources waiting for extraction. Their ancestral way of life was decimated by the arrival of civilization and its technology, but in order to maintain a link to that ancestral knowledge and prevent further incursions into their territory, they are becoming dependent upon technology to make this living map. This map is not the Waorani, it is a symbol of their lives within, and dependent upon, the physical world. GPS, drones and image data are dangerous in their own right to the Waorani. If they come to depend upon those technologies, then they would have to integrate their being into the wider technological system. And it is that system which is making their traditional way of life impossible. It is that system they are resisting.

The Waorani are being invaded and they don't have the resources or the infrastructure to "Build the Wall" to prevent them from losing their land and their identity. Any wall they could build, physically or emotionally, can be ripped apart in the national interests of Ecuador. As an official in Ecuador's Ministry of the Environment explained the situation to Oswaldo and others representing the Waorani:

*As the Ministry of Environment, our only duty is to manage the environment. But as you know, as part of the Ecuadorian government we must take into account our 16 million inhabitants. And from our environmental perspective, extractive industries are how we currently survive.<sup>11</sup>*

And so many of those 16 million inhabitants are estranged from the world through the desires manufactured for them by civilization and its exploitative technology. The civilized would be literally lost, and likely dead, should they find themselves in the area known as Block 22 without the veins of civilization extending into it to support them. But that's the opposite relationship the Waorani have with the same territory, as Oswaldo explains:

*GPS only has battery for some time, then dies. An elder enters the forest and returns on a new path. They have their own GPS; the knowledge of the land. They don't get lost.*

*When you go deep into the jungle, you hear thousands of sounds. It stays with you your whole life, recorded in your head, your brain. Sometimes the gorgeous wind whistles in the hills, and the trees move, and this beautiful sound comes out like someone's whistling, singing, playing a piano. You never forget.<sup>12</sup>*

An elder Waorani woman echoes this sentiment with – “I won’t let us forget the wisdom of our elders.”<sup>13</sup>

The jungle is the Waorani. There is no difference to them.<sup>14</sup> If civilization enters the jungle to install its extractive technology, then the Waorani will no longer exist. They will become yet another colonized and domesticated people. An alienated population, dependent upon civilization to provide everything it took from them. This is precisely the situation that Oswando wants to avoid and why he continues to resist:

*My biggest fear is that the people lose the will to fight and it weakens and weakens and it could die...*

*We know where our land is. We've lived for thousands of years without the protection of the government. We've taken care of our land by ourselves. Our way of life in the jungle, our way of thinking, our way of living...*

*The fight doesn't end tomorrow. The fight will continue long-term, for years. Technology won't save our land. We have to save our land. It should be as our Waorani elders had it: alive.<sup>15</sup>*

It needs to be stressed that Oswando states, “Technology won’t save our land.” As alluded to earlier, there is a paradox here in using technology. Oswando is using the language and means of civilization to resist. He is attempting to retain the Waorani identity and way of life. However, he also realizes that technology, and specifically the dependence upon it for survival, is not the way to maintain the traditional Waorani way of living. It is used now to resist further invasion of their physical territory, but he acknowledges that becoming reliant on technology is a mistake. As he emphatically says, “We have to save our land.”

The words of a Waorani man at a gathering, the words of a Waorani man speaking to the Ministry of the Environment, and a Waorani woman speaking to a journalist echo the same sentiment:

*Today, we have to join our forces for this process. Now, everyone raise your hands in the fight for life!*

...

*The Ministry of Environment is responsible for protecting nature. Without our mapping, we have seen this threat cause only misery, poverty and division of families. You need to listen to us. We declare our territory free of oil extraction. Our land is not for sale.<sup>16</sup>*

*We do not want to live in a small, narrow, deforested, destroyed, contaminated land. That's important for me as a Waorani woman and as a mother... We have to fight, we must unite the communities, and have one purpose ... that in the future our children will live healthy and happy.<sup>17</sup>*

As of May 2018, the Ecuadorian government had received interest in Block 22 from numerous national and international oil companies including ExxonMobil and Shell.<sup>18</sup>

In September 2018, it was reported that Indigenous communities in Block 10 of the Ecuadorian Amazon had rejected oil drilling in their blocks with plans to resist the expansion of resource extraction in their territories.<sup>19</sup>

*More information about the Waorani Resistance can be found at <https://waoresist.amazonfrontlines.org/>*

#### *Endnotes*

1 <http://www.shiripunoresearch.org/waoraniPeople.html>. Accessed December 26, 2018.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/amazonian-tribe-defending-land-technology-181220113423595.html>. Accessed December 22, 2018.

5 "The southeast Amazon region has been divided into 13 blocks in which one area, referred to as block 22, overlaps almost entirely with Waorani territory." <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/05/ecuador-indigenous-waorani-launch-petition-save-amazon-180523102935421.html>. Accessed December 22, 2018.

6 <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/amazonian-tribe-defending-land-technology-181220113423595.html>. Accessed December 22, 2018.

7 Ibid.

8 <https://news.mongabay.com/2018/06/ecuador-waorani-people-map-their-rainforest-to-save-it/>. Accessed December 22, 2018.

9 <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/amazonian-tribe-defending-land-technology-181220113423595.html>. Accessed December 22, 2018.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid

13 Ibid.

14 "The Waorani don't distinguish between the health of their people and the health of their rainforest... Caimans and tapirs, capybaras and toucans, are cause for celebration whenever they are sighted. The Waorani's trancelike community dance is performed to lyrics that translate to something like 'This is us, this is the uncontacted people, we are the land, we are the animals.' And that's what they wish to remain."

<https://www.nrdc.org/onearth/village-ecuadors-amazon-fights-life-oil-wells-move>. Accessed December 22, 2018.

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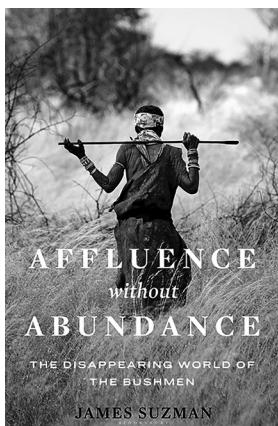


*Photo by Four Legged Human.*

# Reviews



*Colorado, Golden-Mantled Ground Squirrel eating Russula. Photo by Yank.*



*Affluence without Abundance*

By James Suzman

Bloomsbury, 2017

Reviewed by Kevin Tucker

*What was also special about primitive affluence was that it suggested that Keynes's "economic problem" was not a "permanent condition" of the human species but instead that it was a relatively recent phenomenon when viewed against the broader scope of human history. One that emerged only when some of our ancestors abandoned a life of foraging and became farmers and food producers.* (16)

There has often been a fatefully inadequate chasm between interrelated and often intersectional fields of inquiry. Academia and the general world of the sciences, social and biological, have created many a career out of hyper-specialization. It allows focuses to remain narrow which has the potential to keep the implications of any particular research from infecting related strains of analysis.

The totality of civilization is never so simple and easy. Nothing happens in a vacuum. And yet there is a major industry of specialists left with such a narrow field of vision that anyone can get a glimpse of how civilization both destroys and fails in minutiae without ever seeing the big picture or putting it all together.

Some things are simply too convenient to be coincidental. The act of effectively quarantining the alarm bells is a case in point.

For decades, many anthropologists have been meticulously upholding one constant piece of information: life before civilization, before agriculture, was egalitarian. To those who live and have lived it, this isn't an ideological manifestation or cause for celebration; it's just the world as they know and have experienced it.

As Suzman puts it, the egalitarianism of hunter-gatherers needed no manifesto.

While most anthropologists were fine to leave that kind of finding as data sets, there have been a number who weren't afraid to tell the rest of the world to take note. You have people like Elizabeth Marshall Thomas who has written books on her life with the Bushmen that are

excellent and meant for mass consumption, *The Harmless People* and *The Old Way*.

Ethnographies have created a treasure trove of information that has been used effectively to show that the drudgery of civilization is neither universal nor necessary. At the same time, the snap shots of societies contained within ethnographies seem to rarely encapsulate the histories and circumstances under which they were created.

This has meant that you get civilization's cheerleaders like Steven Pinker, who would use murders by colonizers within hunter-gatherer communities to bolster his argument that life outside of civilization was intrinsically more violent than within. A claim that his own evidence deflates, but only when anyone is paying close enough attention.

The response has largely come from within anthropology: discussions about the "ethnographic present." That is a problem of trying to represent and document a society as though culture change wasn't underway or smashing on the door while the fieldwork was being done. Questions that spawned an influx of post-modernist sleaze that has said all societies are in flux, so anthropology can't be constrained by history. Conversely and positively, you have the rise of ethno-history, glimpses of ethnography that are driven by understanding how history and the present have impacted all societies, but particularly those that anthropologists have worked within.

In that regard, James Suzman's new book, *Affluence without Abundance*, is exemplary. This is ethnographic history at its finest.

The tone of *Affluence* is perhaps best told in its subtitle: the disappearing world of the Bushmen. The Bushmen are hunter-gatherers who span through what is now Namibia, Botswana, and into South Africa. The overarching term, Bushmen, groups together a number of similar band-based societies that share a linguistic background.

While many excellent books have been written about them, few have been as direct in scope and aim as Suzman's. Unlike most anthropologists, Suzman's extensive quarter century of working with the Bushmen has included staying with nearly all the different bands, camps, and settlements. This means that he's walked the divide between some of the more traditional elements of hunter-gatherer life and also all the older settlements and more acculturated ones. This makes his contribution far more in depth and also, sadly, one that is quickly becoming historically unique.

This also gives it teeth.

The problem is that anthropology is, by necessity, a post-contact

affair, one that is often mired in the realities of conquest and colonization. It's a situation that has turned the ethnographer into the unwitting stenographer of a society under fire. Colonization might get a chapter in the book, but it is often the paper the book is written upon and the language it is written in.

It's not that many anthropologists haven't known. Some have even been among its loudest critics and often given a platform to advocate on behalf of societies under fire and in helping to keep isolated societies uncontacted.

The problem of the ethnographic present flattens the reality of colonization and conquest. It can ignore the devastation of forests cut down, ecological annihilation, the onset of diseases, the catastrophic and cascading impacts that steel tools, guns, sugar, and alcohol can unleash, and the sheer decimation that loggers, miners, militaries, missionaries, government agents, and competing settlers and expansionists bring. Then you wind up with Pinker, his bloody hands writing the would-be epitaph of a society that is still struggling.

For the outsider, it's all too easy to reduce the entirety of it. To romanticize the good: to ignore the ugly. Accusations of cherry picking or whitewashing rightfully follow. The problem is that the complexity of the frontier and its expansionism is a massive part of the nature of civilized existence. It's not new and it's certainly not over and done with.

The specialist lies in their cul-de-sac, eyes on the ground while they're knee deep in a process that is as old as recorded history itself. When you look up, that moment isn't a place or a society, but a swamp of history that spans time, place, and population. Here, discipline to singular disciplinary protocols can be worthless.

And Suzman is fitting as fieldworker and coroner.

His story is told with both style and finesse, but he shows his work. He has no interest in trying to create a romantic notion of the Bushmen as individuals, but to show how the egalitarian society that he has seen, that is their immediate lineage, has collided with modernity and all of its ills. To show how this anti-work ethos has fared against the violent intrusion of an expanding economic empire. He contrasts the failures of civilization against the longevity and function of hunter-gatherer life.

It's tempting to walk through the book, but it would end up being a full on recitation of it. The narrative is important. Using British economist John Maynard Keynes' pro-capitalist wishes for a technological utopia—one where hyper-productive machines lead to an

increase in leisure—as a springboard, Suzman offers an overt counter-example:

*Perhaps Keynes would have had a better sense of the scale of the problem—and its genesis—had he realized that hunter-gatherers, the least economically developed of all the world's peoples, had already found the economic promised land that he dreamed of and that the fifteen-hour working week was probably the norm for most of the estimated two-hundred-thousand-year history of biologically modern Homo sapiens.* (8)

The arc of the story shows the failure of Keynes and the civilization that produced him in terms of vision and practice. Keynes unwittingly dreamed of a promised land, one acutely more similar to the pre-contact and pre-settled lives of the Bushmen. Suzman builds on that, walking through the catastrophic impacts of farming upon the world and its hunter-gatherer populations. He shows the violent expansion innate to its nature, as well as the propensity for more work and less stability.

The arc of Biblical narratives comes through as well. First as the God-driven explorers and missionaries who attempted to turn the hunters into farmers, when they didn't kill them outright or send them by force as slaves and laborers onto white farms. Then there is the exodus as neighboring pastoralists, the Herero, and agriculturalists, the Bantu, push into the Kalahari, pushing and wiping the Bushmen out as they sought to escape European colonizers themselves.

Then there is the influence of external politics, from government policies down to Apartheid and into civil wars, then to NGOs and conservation groups. The narratives all collide in the end, at a particularly hostile and decrepit settlement called Kanaan.

Literally, the Promised Land.

Against this, there are the voices of the Bushmen. There are their experiences. They retain their presence in a world where they have little to no political power. Always the cast outs of an economic world and its realities, they remain the obstacle that Keynes never sought to include in his glorious vision of the hyper-technological world that has ripped and torn its way through this ancient world and left its broken promises and litter in its wake.

In this regard, there's no need to simply portray victims or innocence. It is an ugly world. The frontier isn't just where the world of civilization expands; it is the world where civilization, with all its

carrots and sticks, intersects with a world that didn't need fixing and a worldview that reflected that.

This isn't a soft-peddled attempt to explain some of the details that Pinker might have drawn out indiscriminately, but instead is filled with the necessary nuance to show how these situations come about. And to clarify what that says about our world and the world of the Bushmen.

In that sense, the book is sobering. It can be grim, but its grimness comes with realizing the futility that farmers, missionaries, and capitalists have upheld in seeking a world that was already here from the start.

At the core of all these wretched situations are people. People who were once freer and, in many ways, potentially living fully free. They possessed the skills, knowledge, and connections that all of our ancestors had to maintain a higher quality of life with a lot less stuff and without hierarchy and work. People who still struggle to make sense of the world that has been pushed into their home, just as they struggle to cope with the poverty and powerlessness that envelop them.

This story reminds us of the depravity of civilized life by upholding the potential a life of hunting and gathering has offered us:

*The evidence of hunting and gathering societies suggests that both Marx and the neoliberal economists were wrong about human nature: we are more than capable of leading fulfilled lives that are not defined by our labor. (256)*

Keynes was wrong. So was Marx. But this isn't just a philosophical question, it is a real life quandary that humanity and the entire world now face in the roughly ten thousand years since the Neolithic Revolution. Stories were told that still echo into Neoliberal policies.

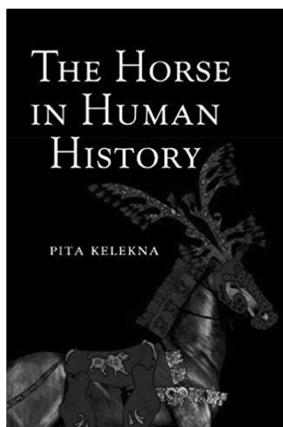
And throughout all of that, you have the Bushmen. Societies of hunter-gatherers that didn't need to figure it all out. Sadly, it's a story that we need to be reminded of because it is still a prevalent and infectious reality. One that we are no less a part of.

But in this equation, it is the civilized world that rolled the dice on theory and practice. By the end of this book, it should be absolutely clear that it was the hunter-gatherers that had the most to lose. That is a gamble that was never ours to make.

It is, however, within our power to unmake it.

In that regard, *Affluence without Abundance* is one of the most

powerful and compelling arguments I've seen made and it demands to be taken seriously.



*The Horse in Human History*

By Pita Kelekna

Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Reviewed by John Zerzan

In 460 pages Pita Kelekna has given us a history of the world, through the lens of the horse. Equus is 4.5 million years old, but only domesticated from about 4000 B.C. onward. Some two thousand years later than the domestication of sheep and goats, which irrevocably devastated the Middle East and adjoining areas. (See Clive Ponting, *A Green History of the World*, especially Chapter 5.)

We say a horse is “broken” or tamed, illuminating domestication generally. Horse-breaking began on the steppes of Eurasia, and has never been an easy task. Horses are fast, strong, and intelligent – much more so than sheep or goats. They are also very resistant to cold weather. Prize attributes to be brought under control.

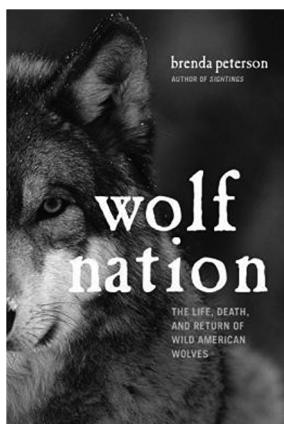
Kelekna takes us place by place through time, covering the development of herd management, selective breeding, and other aspects of the domestication process. Of course, there were those who declined the role of domesticator, such as Paiute and Shoshone hunter-gatherer bands in North America’s Great Basin. (See Peter Mitchell, *Horse Nations*, pages 213, 357, 359.) But from the fourth millennium B.C., the horse became the vanguard of civilized dominion, relatively quickly driving the movement toward empire. The warhorse increased bloody organized violence, and also expanded the scale and complexity of civilization.

Horse chariots and cavalry changed the nature of warfare in the civilizations of the Middle East, India, and China, transforming those civilizations in the process. The powerful role of the horse affected everything from religions to conceptions of property. Systems of written language, coinage, and weights and measures were requirements of this horse-drawn initial globalizing force.

As with so much history writing, this book is not very strong in terms of theoretical analysis; but it is rich in factual detail if not in primary sources. Columbus brought fifty war horses with him to be-

gin the invasion of the New World. Until the mid-20th century, thousands of “pit ponies” spent their whole lives working in underground mines. Nearly a million horses died in combat and transport during World War I.

From Pegasus, Greek mythology’s winged horse, to Star Wars, much of human life has been dedicated to speed, horsepower, victory. A blindly logical and lethal aspect of domestication.



*Wolf Nation*

By Brenda Peterson

Da Capo Press, 2017

Reviewed by Kevin Tucker

*In Yellowstone and throughout this country as well as in our science and stories, the wolf nation must thrive if we are to make the world wild and whole again. (257)*

To describe Brenda Peterson’s new book, *Wolf Nation*, in a few words, I would say: extremely well intentioned.

Allow me to take a step back here.

For those of us living in areas where wolves were exterminated and have not been reintroduced or repopulated, it could be easy to claim ignorance to the kinds of wars their presence creates. For some, the Wild West lives on in the slew of overly romanticized and politically confused rancher-cowboy identities. Holding themselves up as the backbone of America’s rugged individualism and protectors of its sacred sense of freedom, ranchers in the West are a pervasive and parasitic bunch. Earth First! cut its teeth taking on the “cow that ate the West,” but those sacred cows are still very much alive and the ranchers are still very much a threat.

The rest of us got a little taste of it as the armed and entitled Bundy clan and their ilk took up arms and occupied the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in Oregon. The 40-day stand off was a protest over fines they received for not paying millions of dollars in fees for grazing their cattle on federal land. If you need a better understanding of what white privilege looks like, the US Government didn’t even stop delivering mail to the occupied federal building, which prompted their hilariously pathetic battle cry, “send more snacks.”

Ridiculousness aside, what’s apparent is that the Indian-hat-

ing, wildlife-decimating frontier never died. Not even close. Today, Manifest Destiny plays out daily as flag, gun, and bible toting red-necks play cowboy-dress-up on their horses and then shoot wolves with semi-automatic weapons from helicopters. Or they go for the time-tested favorite: blanket poisoning.

Most of this takes place under the directives of the Department of Agriculture and its Wildlife Services division. That's a whole sector of the government dedicated solely to exterminating wildlife quietly. In 2015, Wildlife Services killed 3.2 million wild animals. (8) In 2014, their tab was one billion dollars. (9)

Why? In policy, to defend livestock: that is privately owned, privately insured animals raised to be sold for profit, many of which are grazed on public land, typically without even paying lease fees.

In practice, it's just the good ol' fashioned war on wildness.

What ensues is a heated debate, one that most of us are probably not even privy to. And here, Peterson is an apt guide. She's been a part of this behind-the-scenes battle between environmentalists and other fans of the wolf with ranchers and their idealists for decades. She recalls events like the Alaskan Wolf Summit, which had all the over-the-top ridiculousness you'd get if you mashed a Trump Rally and peak WWF frenzy (the wrestling one, not the wildlife one) into the Wild West frontier.

In that place, the Big Bad Wolf is very much alive. The anti-wolf fanatics evoke the idea of wolves as villains, despite the fact that in 2011, "only 0.2 percent of all livestock losses that year were due to wolf predation." (12) Her goal with the book is straightforward:

*Hate them as terrorists or love them as noble remnants of the wild, the real lives of wolves are often overlooked in our own struggles for dominion and management.* (12)

That's a fitting statement for a world of caricatures, portraits of a colonial legacy that should have never existed in the first place. It is her look at the real lives of wolves where the book excels. Be it chronicling the paths of the more infamous wolves, like Journey or El Lobo, or talking about pack dynamics, she sheds a lot of much needed light.

The wolves come alive. For example, "wolf howls can transmit intent and meaning, like a musical language." (164) And how a "mother wolf will train her pups to follow her by adjusting her pace," (144) a move that sets the mother apart from the babysitter of the pack. Or that "wolves play on the average of every thirty minutes." (35) A

point driven home further when she talks about how pack and social dynamics are upended as elder and Alpha wolves are killed. Or how wolves mourn.

There's plenty here to add life to this backdrop of a tale where the ecological role of wolves and a deeper understanding of their social lives is juxtaposed against their past, present, and future extermination. That much is good.

But what is holding this book back is her target audience: she wants to defend the wolves, and does, but to do so she feels there has to be a conversation with the ranchers, their fan base, and the profiteers who bankroll and support the silent execution of predators. Throughout the book, that approach—be it hers or her editors—temper the highs and the lows.

The book seeks to walk that middle ground: to prove that wolves have value to people who believe that they do not.

In her defense, she talks with groups that show there is some middle ground: range riders who oppose blanket targeting of wolves. Ranchers who have given their cattle room to adapt to both wolves and the prairie, in short, by acting more like animals and less like livestock.

Did those conversations arise because of an approach like this? That's harder to say. In other realms, a lot of Wildlife Services-esque employees simply couldn't face their actions anymore and turned. An early example of that kind of movement was none other than Aldo Leopold. But I find that rage and anger are sorely missing. There are statements, quotes, and stories in the book that forced me to put it down, to walk away, and have to mentally regroup before picking it up again.

That, I believe, is how it should be.

What we are doing to the wolves, what we are doing to the wild, is horrific. It shouldn't just make your stomach turn: it should be revolting. It should incite revolt. Had Peterson kept that as her target, then her passion about the social and individual lives of wolves could have been more infectious. Instead, it often made her prose feel more like an assignment than a driven need.

The structure of the book feels less organic and it's because it starts out with the more enraged parts and then it seemingly walks through an attempt to be fair and balanced towards the ranchers: to try and pull together in that middle ground.

For me, that moment culminated in a quote from a wolf advocate and wildlife veterinarian who is quoted as saying of the ranchers and

wolves that “Coexistence *is* possible.” (222) Next to those underlined words in my copy is my guttural reaction to that: Is it? Should it be?

The problem, to me, is straightforward: cattle and sheep can co-exist with wolves. Both of their wild counterparts evolved alongside wolves and it’s a stretch to say that these species would have evolved the same without their *Canid* pursuers. What that means, however, is that wolves are going to hunt and eat sheep and cattle from time to time. No harm, no foul.

Whether ranchers and wolves can coexist is another kind of question.

It is possible, even for ranchers, to give room for cattle and sheep to walk back their domestication and evoke the social and ecological presence innate to their wild side. Doing so might lead to the restoration of plains and prairie lands for the eventual return and probable inter-mingling of feral and wild herds of bison. That movement, though growing, is in the minority and relatively borne of awareness that ranchers doing business-as-usual isn’t sustainable. At the very least, a more cognizant market demands that they stop business-as-usual.

Walking that middle ground leads to a situation where the war on wildness can be won in a truce: to try to find a path where wolves don’t kill livestock. At times Peterson almost makes it sound like wolves, if left unprovoked and untouched, wouldn’t. This is backtracking.

We know wolves are smart, alive, and aware. Her book celebrates the fact. We know that certain wolves were seemingly masters of evading capture. We know they are coy and alert. Why would we presume that wolves being warred upon by ranchers wouldn’t actively kill their livestock? Why take that moment to rob them of their agency and cater to an idealistic variation where wild beings are never really too wild?

Because the most painful part of this book is its brief discussion of Judas wolves. That is wolves who are captured, collared and followed so that they inadvertently lead the state-funded butchers to kill off the pack they live with and any pack that might take them in when their entire family is killed before their eyes: all because wolves love and care for each other.

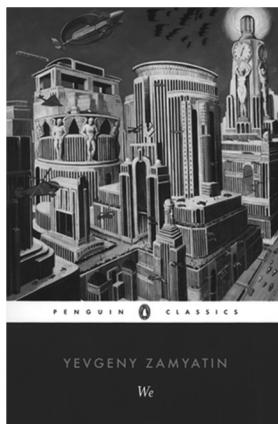
They know this. They see it as a weakness. They weaponize it.

For me, my seething anger is incapable of being weathered. If there is to be a conversation that involves psychopaths who are willing to do that, again and again, then fuck the conversation. Fuck their ranches. Fuck civility.

There is no greater encapsulation of the pathology of civilization than Judas wolves. You can't take the side of the wolves, know that, and then try to come to the table and sway opinion towards only killing some wolves, as a last resort, if they kill too much livestock and become a nuisance. That's why I'm not interested in policy. I'm not interested in placating ranchers.

What I want is a world of wild wolves. Wolves that aren't owned, raised, and managed by the same government that spends billions of dollars exterminating the ones they can no longer justify budgeting.

In the epilogue, Peterson cites Blackfoot elder Jimmy St. Goddard, saying, "It's time for mankind to realize that they are not the only sacred beings on earth." (250) Ultimately, that is the story that I wanted to hear from the start. No less. No compromise.



We  
By Yevgeni Zamyatin  
Reviewed by John Zerzan

Yevgeni Zamyatin, *We*, translated by Gregory Zilboorg. New York: E.P. Dutton, 1924. (Banned by the Soviet censorship board, the manuscript was smuggled to the West where it was first published, in English translation. The first Russian-language edition was published in New York in 1952.)

Yevgeni Zamyatin's *We* is a dystopian novel written in the early 1920s, a forerunner of Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) and George Orwell's *1984* (1948).

The book takes the form of a diary or journal, the first-person account of D-503, as he is known in the techno-world context. D-503 falls in love with I-330, a rebel who embodies all that the United State tries systematically to stamp out: free will, emotions, imagination. But D-503 cannot break from his bondage, his allegiance to the totalitarian system, which wins out over his love for I-330. The ending backdrop is that of emerging insurrection, although I-330 is executed after she refuses to name her fellow rebels.

In 1984, by the way, Winston Smith also keeps a diary, falls in love—and learns to embrace Big Brother.

There is a great tension within D-503 throughout *We*. It is, of course, a tale of statist collectivism, with its constant pressure on the

subject. And it is also about high tech—written almost 100 years ago. D-503 is a mathematician/functionary; what we would recognize as algorithms are key to his society. “One sees these equations in everything,” he notes. “The world of the square root of minus one” is an emblematic watchword, while human feelings are basically absurd, the “result of mathematical ignorance.”

There are machines “to produce sonatas” and the “aeros of the Guardians” observing all, prefiguring surveillance drones. The oceans have been domesticated, while the enormous “Integral” spacecraft project promises “to take these walls, up into the heights, to the thousands of other worlds.”

Zamyatin grasped the logic, the direction of an ever more technological, global civilization. D-503 is a clone. His mathematized personality reflects perfectly the dominant, totalitarian society, and yet the specter of love and liberation cannot be entirely banished. I-330 is the life-force of freedom. Her spirit endures to the end of her life.

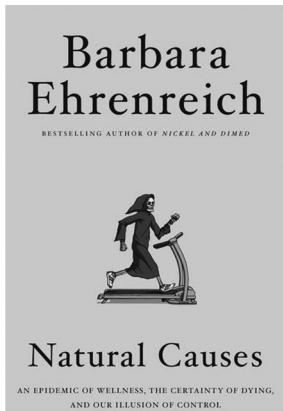
Beyond the Wall, to the west, are primitives. They threaten this techno-scape, which in many ways indeed resembles life on earth today.

*Natural Causes*

By Barbara Ehrenreich

Twelve, 2018

Reviewed by Kevin Tucker



*It is one thing to die into a dead world and, metaphorically speaking, leave one’s bones to bleach on a desert lit by a dying star. It is another thing to die into the actual world, which seethes with life, with agency other than our own, and, at the very least, with endless possibility. (208)*

The realm of social critics is, by and large, filled with a self-righteous stuffiness of those who proclaim to know better. Lecturing, as they often do, in a way that owns a problem, while seemingly being unable to do anything about it. It’s a great way to fill shelves with hardbound books and get tenure, which, ultimately, means nothing.

It is here that Barbara Ehrenreich is a much-needed mainstay. Quite often, she’s also a much-needed breath of fresh air. Her narra-

tives follow a natural arc that makes reviewing her books harder; it almost feels like spoiling a novel. But fiction this is not.

Ehrenreich's claim to fame is, in her words, amateur sociology. Her landmark books, *Nickel and Dimed* and *Bait and Switch*, take on the laughable reality of the tall capitalist tales of Progress. She goes far and wide from there, which might help explain how *Natural Causes* is cross-listed in the medicine, aging, and death categories. Yet this is the book where her PhD in cellular biology seems most fitting as she dissects microphage, the nature of cells and their agency.

*Natural Causes* sits well with her excellent book on the Cancer Survivor Industry, *Brightsided*. A book that cuts through the bullshit of trying to spin beating cancer as a triumph of positivity (and industry), while seeing the muted reality of cancer deaths as personal failures. Her own experience with breast cancer also seemingly bleeding into the premise of this book:

*Once I realized I was old enough to die, I decided that I was also old enough not to incur any more suffering, annoyance, or boredom in the pursuit of a longer life.* (3)

From there, *Natural Causes* begins. And for just barely over 200 pages, covers a good bit of ground. So let me pull apart some pieces relevant to discussions within this journal.

In lieu of questioning the quality of life that our hyper-technological civilization might offer us (those of us in the First World, that is), there is a tendency to praise its ability to prolong life. Considering the ludicrous number of medical and consumable interventions available, perhaps it's more fitting to call it the ability to prolong dying.

Here, the throne of Science and its Medicine get dragged into the light.

Ehrenreich quickly contrasts the role of ritual healing within tribal societies with the rituals of the medical industry. Or, as she aptly calls them, "rituals of domination." Healing, within tribal and band societies, serves a direct function. They offer medicinal cures and much in the way of social and physical contact and support. Contrasted with the gowns and gadgetry in a sterilized, timeless hospital environment—where the patient is reduced to barely covered flesh, free for the prodding and poking—it is clear that the ritual element remains.

In one case, the individual is an active participant. In the other, they are a problem to solve. Presumably a problem with no awareness

of self, interrogated with checklists as though passing a lie detector test. Quoting anthropologist-turned-doctor, Melvin Konner, the doctor's detached view of the body "may actually require a measure of dislike." (49)

If you've been to the doctor, you're likely familiar. As Ehrenreich points out, "one of the functions of medical ritual is social control" (27) More to the point, they're a recent ritual. One that has been granted unevenly across modernized societies and one that has been disproportionately meant to target women. Focusing on feminist challenges to hospital births and women's ownership over their own bodies, she points out that gains made in the 70s have recently found a newer blockade: "Women were also up against technocracy." (25)

The annual physical gets a hefty bit of scorn. As a \$10 billion a year industry (38), it's hard to say they don't deserve it. But again, the intrusion of technological solutions and management take the wheel. Preventative measures, horribly intrusive and also very expensive, are granted a level of unquestioned validity.

And they are self-validating.

Cancer screening, in particular, gets a boost from high-tech imaging, which may actually be a bigger issue. Imaging with more detail guarantees finding more abnormalities. But that doesn't distinguish benign and malignant abnormalities. Consider that 80-90% of women's thyroid cancer surgeries across the US, France and Italy "in the first decade of the twenty-first century are now judged to have been unnecessary." (11) Or that "almost half the men over sixty-six being treated for prostate cancer are unlikely to live long enough to get the disease anyway. They will, however, live long enough to suffer from the adverse consequences of their treatment." (37) And that "international studies showed no significant decline in breast cancer mortality that could be attributed to routine mammographic screening." Worse, "the treatments themselves—surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation—entail their own considerable risks." (36)

If you seek it, you will find something. Whether that something is benign or malignant is another question. It comes down to ridding the aberrations: to succumbing to the bloodletting of the ritual.

But do these rituals of domination actually improve life? That is a central question here. What is more important is that the process means handing our agency and our own livelihoods to the supposed experts. Yet we have little reason to believe that all of these advancing intrusions are necessary, much less beneficial.

They are a crucial part of the domestication process: a ritual of

control.

We want to believe that Science has improved our lives. We want to believe that doctors are out to help us; that the entire medical industry is a life-saving gift of our collective achievement. Time and time again, this is a key argument that is presented as evidence for civilization's greatness. As if the omnicidal decimation of a living world *just might* be worth the costs.

And it is here that Ehrenreich's contributions are crucial: not only asking if these measures are effective, but also are the costs worth it? Even solely on a human scale, given her own refusal to take part in the rituals, the answer is no.

This shifts the mark. As we've seen, the direction is pretty clear: how far are we willing to go, how much time are we willing to spend, how much pain are we willing to endure in pursuit of longevity? And what is longevity if not just a belief that we can conquer our biology? The dream of domesticators far and wide: to achieve the immortality of the gods we've created.

No better case in point for that lunacy than the well-deserved punching bag: Silicon Valley billionaires.

Where else do you get the unaware wishes of a neoteny-driven pathology in a form so pure? There's much to be taken from that chapter (Madness of Mindfulness) and its look at the irony of Buddhist gurus leading tech-moguls towards "Mindfulness" in the search for eternal life. I'll have to settle for a single quote from Oracle Corporation's co-founder and former CEO (also self-proclaimed philanthropist), Larry Ellison, and his \$58 billion net worth: "Death makes me very angry." (80)

Life is tough, right?

The narrative then flows back towards another point of entry for Ehrenreich: cellular biology.

Her segue here is significant. Considering much of Silicon Valley was spearheaded by the lucid dreams of drop out hippies and Yippies turned yuppie, Ehrenreich takes aim at concepts of "holism." Nuclear power's cheerleader, James Lovelock and his Gaia Hypothesis get a nice slap. (116) She calls out the perception of holistic as "kind, peaceable, and inclusive," adding that this "of course is how every vendor of services seeks to be seen." (117)

What follows is a bit much to properly surmise here, but there are aspects that are exceptionally relevant to ongoing discussions in this journal, the anti-civ milieu, and rewilding in particular: is "nature" (for lack of a better term) harmonious? Ehrenreich here is interest-

ed in cell behavior. More importantly, that cells exhibit *agency*. (158) This is a subject that gets extensive treatment, merging between the edges of current ethological findings about animal agency and cognition and on cutting edge findings about cell behavior and microbiomes.

I think the discussion is important. Mostly because I place an importance—often overlooked, it would seem—on the realization that “wildness” is not a living entity, but a lacking term for what comprises living entities. That is energy: that is shared cells and microbiomes. The understanding that the world is living (a point Ehrenreich backs enthusiastically) doesn’t require that it function as a harmonious, conscientious whole.

The criticism is often made that what we speak of here is simply another iteration of god. That it invokes implicit morality and justice in perpetuity. But that completely misses the point: that “wildness” functions and sustains doesn’t mean that there is equality of law or a sense of moral goodness within it. The most perfectly functioning ecosystem can, at times, look downright ugly.

It doesn’t mean that the sociobiologist’s vision of life as constant war is correct, but it does undermine religious notions of paradise, the walled garden where the lion sleeps with the lamb. At times, it does seem like Ehrenreich could dip a bit into the sociobiologist’s argument, an assumption that she would rightfully balk at.

This needs to be continually drawn out; the interconnected, functional whole of life exists within its own right. By its own measure. Agency and free will, on the level of an individual cell or being doesn’t negate that: they express it. There is a whole picture here, but there is a tendency to draw out the particulars to validate our underlying want for control.

Ehrenreich exemplifies that larger picture well. In talking about animism, the world of living spirits and comprehension of the wills of wild beings were shaped in what we might consider an ambiguous relationship with other predators. They could be capable of taking us out, but, as scavengers ourselves, “the predator was also a provider.” (160)

At times her delving into macrophages might be guilty of missing the larger picture itself. Cancer, naturally, is a regular subject of the book. She has minced no hairs in attributing its rise and spread to a toxic environment, both here and elsewhere. But she lets “hallmark disorders of aging—such as atherosclerosis, arthritis, Alzheimer’s disease, diabetes, and osteoporosis,” all recognized as “inflammatory

diseases” (173), off too easily.

I, admittedly, know nothing about macrophages, but considering that most, if not all, of those inflammatory diseases are commonly linked directly to both diet and toxins, it’s hard to think that aggressive macrophages are solely to blame for their spread. If diabetes is a hallmark of aging, then what does that say about toddlers and children with it?

Despite that, the lead-in here confronts the most crucial aspect of this journey: what is a “living entity,” what is this life that we are trying to prolong?

“The spectacle of decomposition,” Ehrenreich states, “provides a powerful incentive to posit some sort of immaterial human essence that survives the body.” (181) In spite of the wishes of tech-billionaires, health and wellness gurus, or fitness buffs, we all inevitably cease to be. If we are to accept, as I do and as Ehrenreich presents, that we are a collection of cells, mass, and energy, inevitably set to decompose, we return to the question: what am “I”?

The Self, the sacred core of post-Enlightenment society and its necessary individualism, is a historic creation. Ehrenreich traces it to Protestantism and the need to place God in the head of the individual: “Every transient thought and inclination had to be monitored for the slightest sinful impulse.” (186) The Self is the necessary bedrock of Modernity. It is the outgrowth of a moral order trying to keep pace with increasingly technological change: “The self may seem like a patently false deity to worship, but it is no more—and no less—false than the God enshrined in recognized religions.” (187)

The battle for meaning, the search for immortality, wavers between the sacred Self and sacred gods. These aren’t contradictory impulses: they’re born of the same urge; the same need and want of the civilized to control life. And what more complete approach than to conquer death? The endless quest to prolong our own lives flows naturally from “modern reductionist science, which took as its mission the elimination of agency from the natural world.” (200) Even as that science cedes ground slowly to agency beyond human life, its grasp remains tight.

Rather than revel in the defeat of eternal life, Ehrenreich argues that we stop pretending that we are in control. To stop dedicating life to a violating “medicalization of death,” prolonged only by rituals of domination, conceding our agency to the medical industry, and a vain search to “crush the body” into supposed healthiness.

Killing the self. That is the call to action here. Egocide as I have

called it. It's a move that's easy to underestimate, but true to her eco-feminist roots, it demands expanding our understanding of life itself: to see the world as a living place, though not a conscious entity or god. I do question her call for psychedelics, which are no less a rabbit hole of a supposed shortcut than Buddhism or Mindfulness gurus. But I can't fault her too much for the reach.

In the end, we find ourselves on the tried and tested turf. A battlefield I am more than willing to stand upon:

*Maybe then, our animist ancestors were on to something that we have lost sight of in the last few hundred years of rigid monotheism, science, and Enlightenment. And that is the insight that the natural world is not dead, but swarming with activity, sometimes perhaps even agency and intentionality. Even the place where you might expect to find quiet and solidity, the very heart of the matter—the interior of a proton or a neutron—turns out to be animated with the ghostly flickerings of quantum fluctuations. (202-203)*

For all of our supposed advances, we have changed nothing about the innate nature of life: we are subject to the same fate of all other living beings. We all rot. I find comfort in that and see it as a call to action to ensure that one day we may live in accordance with that understanding again. In the meantime, there are some obstacles in the way that need to be removed.

No small feat, but the more we can feel alive and sense our place within life in general, the more inclined we will be to take those steps.

To rejoice in a living world seems a cause more worthy than the futile battle for control over dying. Ruins always seemed far livelier to me. And, as Ehrenreich concludes, "The blackbirds would keep on singing." (209)

*Lost Connections*

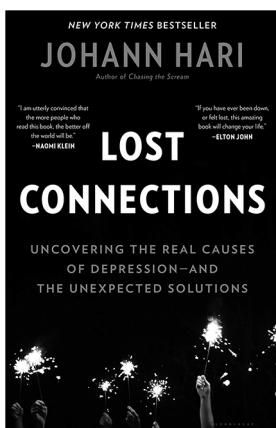
By Johann Hari

Bloomsbury, 2018

Reviewed by Candice Archer

"It's not serotonin, it's society."

If Johann Hari's bestselling book *Lost Connections* was reduced to a single phrase, that might be it. A bold claim, which has earned him both widespread accolades and resistance for challenging the modern approach to depression and anxiety, he maintains, "You aren't a ma-



chine with broken parts. You are an animal whose needs are not being met.”

In a palatable and, at times, overly simplified way, Hari breaks down what he sees as the root components that have led to the current mental health epidemic. Loneliness, lack of purpose or meaningful work, “junk” values such as materialism, individualism and addiction to the self, loss of community, disconnection from the natural world all play key roles. These are not new concepts to an anti-civ audience, but they seem to have struck a fresh nerve with the general public, media, and the self-help industry.

At a time where personal growth books, life coaches, health regimens, therapy and pharmaceuticals have all become profitable “solutions” which promise to fill the void or lead us on the path to fulfillment, there remains a nagging, uncomfortable question: why do the rates of depression and anxiety continue to rise? In the year 2000, according to *Psychology Today*, there were approximately 50 books published on the subject of happiness, and how to achieve it. By 2008, there were over 4,000. As Steven Pinker proselytizes in his book *Enlightenment Now* about the virtues of modernity, claiming that we are living in the most peaceful, prosperous times, and happiness is on the rise, the skyrocketing depression statistics form cracks in the foundation of his claims.

Hari does a formidable job of pushing back on the medicalized narrative that depression is caused simply by a chemical imbalance in the brain, a myth that has persisted and paved the way for \$100 billion in profits within the pharmaceutical industry. Meanwhile, “between 65 and 80% of people taking antidepressants become depressed again within a year.” While he is careful not to dismiss the usefulness of pharmaceuticals altogether, or blame doctors for not solving the problem of depression, he does point out the impossible situation that develops out of the ‘chemical imbalance’ narrative. Hari states, “in thirteen years of being handed even higher doses of antidepressants, no doctor ever asked me if there was a reason why I might be feeling so distressed. The message my doctors gave me—that our pain is simply the result of a malfunctioning brain—makes us ...disconnected from ourselves, which leads to disconnection from others.”

Protracted loneliness tends to catalyze depression, causing one to shut down socially, become suspicious, paranoid, take offense where none was intended, push people away and be wary of strangers. This snowball effect causes many anxious and depressed people to receive less love and support as they become harder to be around, often becoming the target of judgment and criticism, which accelerates their retreat from the world. Despite the fact that the majority of humans live in densely populated areas, and may regularly interact with several people, loneliness and isolation pervades, as many of these interactions lack investment or a true sense of connection. The arrival of the internet promised social connection at our fingertips, however we find ourselves never having to make eye contact with the outside world, while maintaining a false sense of purpose and involvement through armchair activism, social media, role playing games, etc., often leading to compulsive internet use, but not fostering strong social bonds.

*The difference between being online and being physically among people...is a bit like the difference between pornography and sex: it addresses a basic itch, but it's never satisfying.*

While *Lost Connections* succeeds at explaining how our lack of community impacts us emotionally, it falls short of pointing any fingers at civilization itself being part of the equation. A brief reference to hunter-gatherer societies paints a simplistic picture of how humans learned how to cooperate, share food, and look after their sick: “They only made sense as a group.” John Cacioppo, a neuroscience researcher, roughly explains, “Every pre-agricultural society we know about has the same basic structure....Against harsh odds they barely survive but the fact that they survive at all they owe to the dense web of social contacts and the vast number of reciprocal commitments they maintain....nature is connection.”

Hari admits to not having much of a personal connection to nature, beyond viewing it on screen savers. Concrete and infrastructure feel safer to him, although he is able to deconstruct how this contributes to depression. Observing his own reactions as he participates in a hike to a mountain peak, he finds himself feeling a spectrum of emotions from terrified to fully alive. Depression (a manifestation of domestication) robs people of the unfiltered experience associated with the natural world. Realizing one’s place in the landscape can be a metaphor for belonging to a grander system, where “you have a sense

that you and your concerns are very small, and the world is very big, shrinking the ego down to a manageable size.”

The criticisms of *Lost Connections* may be as telling as any of the points included in the book. One of the most common sentiments to appear is a defensiveness regarding the use of pharmaceuticals to treat anxiety and depression. Although the author states repeatedly in media appearances, and in the book, he has no intention of shaming anyone who uses or prescribes them (as he has taken them himself), many reviewers claim that they abandoned the book because they felt it was a rant against antidepressants. Others took exception to the author’s politics; what they perceived as embedded socialist propaganda, dismissing it as “fake news.” References to universal health care, basic income, collectivism, provoked some readers to (accurately, perhaps obliviously) accuse Hari of placing the blame on society’s ills but not the individual.

What many seemed to crave, and that which the author was careful not to prescribe, is a pre-packaged solution. While he does offer some observations and promising approaches on how we, on a societal level, might reconnect with the elements that have been lost, the takeaway message is that people who experience these conditions are not a problem to be fixed. “Depression and anxiety might, in one way, be the sanest reaction you have. It’s a signal saying, you shouldn’t have to live this way.” He points out that the search for individual solutions is a trap, part of what created this mess in the first place. Self-help gurus have capitalized on our need to function as good, calm little worker bees, selling us yoga, meditation, and various brands of higher consciousness, so that we can cope with the world we find ourselves in. Hari flips the switch on this approach, advocating: “ask not what is inside your head, ask what your head is inside of.”

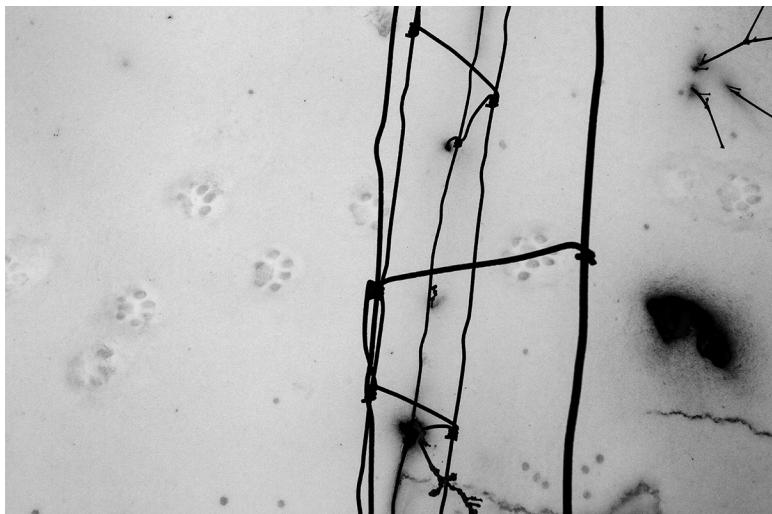
We become captive to civilization, through contemporaneous forms of trauma. Although 99.9% of our time as humans has been lived as hunter-gatherers, a time where life did not exist without intense social connection and congruence with the natural world, domestication serves to isolate the individual and sever the bonds. While *Lost Connections* may not dig deep into our ancestral ways of life, we must not lose sight of the crucial elements if we hope to escape the clutches of captivity.

How we achieve this is informed by our past, rather than an attempted reenactment of it. Nor can we expect to find shortcuts through appropriation of existing indigenous cultures that are not our own. Yet, fundamental sociological needs are not culturally specific,

and *Lost Connections* is a good starting point to understanding how we might work towards healing the severed bonds within our social lives and with the Earth itself. Connections may be “lost,” or unrealized, but this does not mean they are forever out of reach.

*White European/Americans cannot become Hopis or Kalahari Bushmen or Magdalenian bison hunters, but elements in those cultures can be recovered or re-created because they fit the heritage and predilection of the human genome everywhere...*

—Paul Shepard, from *Coming Home To The Pleistocene*



*Bobcats don't see borders. Be more like bobcats. Photo by Yank.*

*Formerly:*

# BLACK AND GREEN REVIEW

WILD EXISTENCE  
PASSIONATE RESISTANCE

*Those who claim they control  
the cosmos and the future of  
civilization survive only as  
long as they are able to  
command the loyalty of their  
subjects.*

- BRIAN FAGAN

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