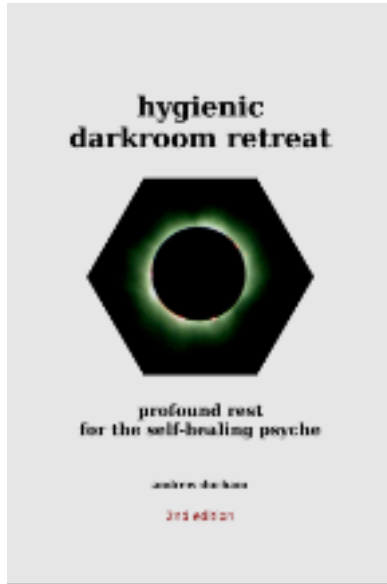


# hygienic darkroom retreat

profound rest for the self-healing psyche  
a book by andrew durham

[blog](#) [darkness conjecture](#) [reports](#) [other writings](#) [about](#)



## extras

the secondary content from

[hygienic darkroomretreat.com](http://hygienic-darkroomretreat.com)

in one printable page:

1. [blog](#)
2. [the darkness conjecture](#)
3. [reports](#)
4. [other writings](#).

Download pdf: [darkroomretreat.com/extras.pdf](http://darkroomretreat.com/extras.pdf).

Main site content is in the ebook, *hygienic darkroom retreat*, available from the site and at [leanpub.com/darkroomretreat](http://leanpub.com/darkroomretreat).

# blog

## welcome

2009/02

I think I've theoretically solved all the problems in the world with this idea. Sorry it took so long, and thanks for coming.

## it's not mine alone

2009/02

I have long felt like I could not impose the demands of my [quest](#) on others, could not trouble them with it. But today, it occurred to me that my quest is not really just mine. There are plenty of people who are in the same boat as I, having declined/rejected/imploded the roles we were offered in this cancerous culture.

As I began to nod my head, I thought, like me, they look for a viable alternative. They would be glad to participate in it if they thought it might work. Just like me, they feel they have nothing to lose. Maybe they have nothing better to do, either.

It is not for me to decide whether you participate in this. It is not mine alone.

Besides, the darkness conjecture is just a sketch of a hypothesis. It needs fleshing out and further testing. I make no promises, only a reasonable case for it. I am not bringing a revelation from the mountain, just a sketch of it from the plain. I would like to go there one day. Maybe you are headed that way, too.

I think of the group as a family, a research family. We would be a band of refugees from the death-culture, explorers of the future, looking together for a bridge to a human way of life. Each of us has different aptitudes and sensibilities, all of which are necessary to arrive at a genuine solution to the problem we all face: inordinate suffering.

Here is something about the money part of it that some friends, [Ethan and Sarah Hughes](#), have demonstrated: that the group immediately begin freely serving other people. It is not about making money. If I still worry about making money, it is because my material expectations are too high. If the conjecture is a good idea and if we approach it well enough, it will be supported. This has been the Hughes' experience, which they saw modeled in Peace Pilgrim's life and many others. I have seen it, too. Who hasn't, really? Generosity is infectious.

So rather than soliciting funds, we solicit opportunities to serve. One idea I had is to darken people's bedrooms with free reusable materials. Or to set up free darkrooms, portable or permanent, for neighborhoods or groups. Perhaps our own experiences in darkness would eventually inspire us as a radical theatre troupe or guerrilla gardeners. Or we could walk down streets banging pots and calling out to people for their sick. I do not know. Like everyone, I have a mostly untapped genius that could flow in many different directions.

My only possible conflict is I also wish I lived in a warmer place with yummy fruit and saner people, but maybe I'm not special in this regard, either.

To begin, I guess I will give a free talk somewhere soon. And there is more to say than what I have put up so far. Let me know if you would like to be there.

## news

2009/02

I'm collecting myself after my first failed attempt at a long darkness retreat. It only lasted two days, not two weeks as planned. I underestimated the need for quiet and chose a room that proved too noisy.

Thus I now seek a separate, finished building, preferably with a bathroom. I would need as much as a week to prepare it before heading in for 14 days.

If anyone has or knows of a such a finished building; or has any other thoughts, please [let me know](#). I can travel.

## new page - psychosis

2009/03

I just wrote a new page, [psychosis](#). It describes the insight I had on Christmas, 2008 which led to the darkness conjecture.

## new page - four darkness experiences

2009/03

I made a new page about my [four darkness experiences](#).

## midwest-bound

2009/04

I have decided that the darkness retreat must be embedded in a life that already works well in other ways. So I am going to the midwest next week to stay at the [Possibility Alliance](#), which I have [mentioned before](#). After languishing in Eugene for six weeks following my first failed attempt at a long darkness retreat, and exploring options here in Seattle for a month, it is clear my own happiness must become a priority. I cannot wait until the completion of a darkness retreat. And I cannot hope that anyone will really understand this before I complete one.

I really appreciate the comments and support various people have given me since I stumbled out of the darkness in February. Boy, what a strange couple of months it has been!

I have been printing up a booklet of this site's contents in order to send it to people who have supported me in the past. If anyone would like one, let me know.

In other news (ha), I just finished reading a long strange mushroom trip of a book by [Daniel Pinchbeck](#) called *2012: The Return of Quetzalcoatl*. Here is an applicable quote: "It may be that the only way to survive the Apocalypse is to undergo it, first, within your own being."

## kansas city

2009/05

I'm in Kansas City, Missouri now, pursuing an unexpected opportunity to build a spherical geodesic ptydome and retreat into darkness. Should take a month or two to prepare. We'll see!

The Possibility Alliance was relaxing and useful, but ultimately the folks there were not open to my doing a darkness retreat there anytime soon. Best wishes to the Hughes and everyone there. Worth the trip, for sure.

In KC, I have been helping around the home of some groovy peeps who needed some plumbing and a bike rack. Next, 6' [hexayurts](#) for myself and a couple other guys because they're so cheap, elegant, and quick to build. Then the ptyosphere and darkness!

## dark vader in the 3-day sith bathchamber of sleep, rejuvenation, and lust

2009/06

Now a report. See [dark vader in the 3-day sith bathchamber of sleep, rejuvenation, and lust](#).

## design bonanza

2009/07

Still here in Kansas City, MO. It is design bonanza day due to my friend's computer's webcam, which is an absurd but effective way of taking pictures. (edit: I retook 3 photos with a real camera. More photos soon.)

Anyway, the hexayurt's up! I'm moved in and basically, it is beautiful.

hexayurt front, with screen door (blue tape is screen repair, and yes, that's an impala). 6' hexayurt ( 1' extra height), plywood walls, OSB roof under salvaged asphalt roofing

hexayurt from back

Between my obsessiveness about details, the non-uniform, dirty, salvaged materials, and my funny toolset, it has taken way longer than expected. These things can be built in a few days if you just [follow instructions](#). C'est la vie. The hexayurt now has provisional solid and screen doors. It still needs shelving.

I racked my brains for three days over the design of the hexayurt's experimental "flat octet truss" floor:

It was worth it, though. I'd been imagining it for a few years and finally had a chance to build it. It is much lighter than a conventional 2x4 or 2x6 joist floor. It is springy and will work nicely in the dome.

Now that I'm sleeping in it, I'm keeping electricity out of it. This is due partly to the influence of the [Hughes](#), who make such excellent candles. I am using an oil lamp:

uses any vegetable oil or biodiesel

I developed it in April in Seattle for Marcus' Martini Heaven, the Pioneer Square bar of my hard rocking high school friend, Steve Alexander.

Recently I built a solar shower out of a 5-gallon bucket.

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solar shower bucket

A black planting bucket fits perfectly inside and heats up the water in the sun. A salvaged piece of tempered glass (framed in blue masking tape) traps the heat. A 3/8" OD polyethylene tube comes out a 5/16" hole toward the bottom to give a 12-minute warm shower. In use, the bucket rests on a chest-high platform I built above the tub in the bathroom. An upside-down bucket in the tub provides a seat. Our water runs cold and only to the sinks, so this baby has much improved our quality of life for the price of the tubing (\$2).

Also I built a compost tumbler for humanure out of a plastic 55-gallon barrel. It uses my first toggle latch.

1/8

These latches totally fascinate me. However, I'm not sure the tumbler is going to work for *all* the humanure collected over the last six months (!), so we'll build a three-bin shed in the backyard that will also act as a fence. Maybe the tumbler can go in front for food scraps. It will rest on a frame with four skateboard wheels to spin on.

The ever-snapping clothesline stays up finally and folks are keeping the house a lot cleaner. Three guests left, two disgruntled roommates moved out, and a smart, funny guy moved in, so things are running smoothly right now. I hope his somewhat resembles a "life that already works well in other ways" (see [midwest bound](#) post). I'm super grateful for the welcome, friendship, and shelter of the young KC crew. What is youth? The absence of resignation.

Oh, look. It is the 4th of July.

## spheres for darkness retreats

2009/07

Where should one do a darkness retreat?

For a few years, I have thought: a dome. Sphere-based structures, such as geodesics, [conics](#), [hexayurts](#), [superadobe domes](#), allow life force to flow. Thus they are very conducive to rest. They also provide an energetic shield against the psychic influence of this culture. In my [architectural experiments](#), I have experienced this first hand. These kinds of building feel different because they *are* different.

I mean different from square buildings, of course. Having observed the effects of square shapes on myself and others for many years, I have concluded that rectilinear geometry does not serve resting and healing well. This is because we rest to allow an inflow of vital energy and squares do not let subtle energy flow. Squares halt, concentrate, and focus life force. The square is a manifesting shape. Thus it can be good for productive activity such as work and spiritual practice (and then only if you know what the hell you are doing and are committed against becoming a black magician). In any case, the square disrupts and deforms passive activities. Thus resting and recreating in them is—how shall I put it?—significantly less than excellent.

Should the darkness conjecture prove true, then the energetic field generated by small groups of healed and sympathetic people can mitigate the effects and vulnerabilities of square buildings. Initially, however, a round shape is critical.

I found especially interesting [David Wilcock's](#) comments in [2012 Enigma](#) on an organic geometrical transformation that occurs when traversing the dreamworld. Apparently the conscious shift from spacetime to timespace is accompanied by a change from an icosahedral to a dodecahedral shape in the water molecules inside the pineal gland.

This kind of thing naturally appeals to my geeky designer-brain, with which I have been toying with Platonic solids and spherical trigonometry for the past few years. So, for the retreat, I'm going to build a

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nura icosahedral Self-Strutting Geodesic Plydome

18 ft geodesic plydome, shows construction method

18 ft geodesic plydome, shows construction method

Except I will make a whole sphere rather than just a dome. We may even hang it by ropes from the large surrounding trees in the backyard. It will be 12 feet in diameter and cost roughly \$600 (exact breakdown to come) in materials and be extremely interesting to build

12 geodesic plydome, size I intend to build, except without conical cap

12 ft

My roommates, who are grateful for the copious work I have done around the house, have expressed interest in keeping the sphere as guest quarters. One roommate might abscond with it to land he intends to buy in the fall. So they have offered to cover the cost of materials. What is not covered in the meantime are my other expenses: food, bike parts, laundry, etc, at about \$200/month.

I also feel dubious about being subjected during the retreat to the noises in this neighborhood, which is the local hunting grounds for KCMO's well-funded, racist police. This is not necessarily a problem because the sphere can be moved fairly easily if an idyllic countryside location opens up. Then again, this neighborhood might be the ideal location, given the radical nature of the retreat. We'll see.

The dome, food, and continuing to serve my household: so far these constitute my plan and wishlist. So various opportunities for participation in the project exist for interested parties. I would very much appreciate help if you feel moved to give it. Somehow, somewhere, and for the sake of all beings everywhere, especially on Earth, and especially *this* being, I will lie down in darkness for two weeks.

"If you want to teach people a new way of thinking, don't bother trying to teach them. Instead, give them a tool, the use of which will lead to new ways of thinking."

—Richard Buckminster Fuller

## sphere bid

2009/07

Here is my quick bid for the direct costs of building the sphere.

- body and awning:
  - 1/4" BCX plywood, 15 sheets @ 18.50 = 277.50
  - 130 machine screws, nuts, fender washers, = 5.00
  - linseed oil, 1 gal = 20.00
  - turpentine = 15.00
- stand
  - 2x4x8', 8 boards @ 2.50 = 20.00
  - metal stakes, 5 @ 2.00 = 10.00
- floor
  - 1/2" CDX plywood, 3 sheets @ 13 = 39.00
  - 2x4x10', 8 boards @ 3 = 24.00
  - deck screws = 5.00
- door:
  - 1/2" CDX plywood, 1 sheet @ 13 = 13.00
  - 2x4x8', 1 board @ 2.50 = 2.50
  - deck screws = 2.00
- tools:
  - circular plywood blade = 10.00

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- bits = 15.00
- misc tools & supplies = 20.00
- total: \$478.00
- time to completion: 3 weeks
- other necessary components, cheap or free:
  - humanure composting toilet
  - convection ventilation system
  - food cooler
  - water dispenser
  - bed
  - inversion swing
  - chin-up bar

If you feel moved to contribute in any way to the purchase of materials, the fabrication, assembly, outfitting, and occupation of the sphere, please [write me](#).

## ‘sleep: lost and found’

2009/07

This post now is a page, [make](#).

## psychosagenesis

2009/08

I came up with a new word for the process of inducing psychosis: psychosagenesis. This concept, I realized shortly afterward, is *identical* to the process of civilization. To civilize someone *is* to induce psychosis in her.

To induce psychosis in someone, just traumatize her thoroughly. Violently injure her. Do it physically and psychologically, repeatedly, relentlessly, in diverse circumstances and by various methods until something deep inside her *gives way*. Her will? Her wholeness of awareness? Her spirit, joy, and values? All these things. Now she is left with the peculiar sort of psychosis that makes it possible to function inside the machine that hurt her so badly. Civilization is thus both the process of causing psychosis and the collective embodiment of that psychosis.

Other words for or related to this include: zombification, mass hypnosis, walking wounded, living dead, coffee-drinking nation, got milk, beef: it's what's for dinner, idiocracy, sleeping world, matrix, "they". I will add more as they occur to me. Send your suggestions.

This is the most damning description of civilization I can come up with. All it takes to make the meaning of it palpable is to go into a darkroom for a couple of days and experience the contrast between being *rested* and living as a functional psychotic in the uncomfortable and vague dream that is modern life.

Note the light pollution nearly everywhere that prevents normal sleep. I read a little bit today about about delta brain waves. An EEG machine will record mostly delta waves during deep sleep, when the healing quality of sleep is most active. Modern life systematically prevents this kind of sleep through ambient urban light, light leakage around doors, LED indicators on machines, LCD alarm clocks, and night lights. The reason we are metaphorically asleep as people and as a society is that we are sleep-deprived.

Edison's invention was the logical consequence of 10,000 years of violence against humanity.

Now, is everyone in civilization psychotic? Yes, everyone. Even the realized masters of various spiritual traditions. Why?

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“God” is the civilized concept for the subtle and conscious aspect of Universe. This concept is a way to expose civilized people to the subtle dimensions of reality through an avenue effectively controlled by hierarchical traditions. It is as if we have been imprisoned in a cell where we are constantly tortured. Then someone—a realized person—drills a small hole through the wall of the cell and says, “Look, there is god.” But he stands there controlling access to it. He will be happy to teach you to drill your own hole through the wall, too. Sometimes, in heightened states, he can make the walls disappear. He is psychotic because he has accepted the necessity of the cell walls, just as he has acquired, by immense force of effort, the ability to dissolve them at will.

The truth, of course, is that the subtle dimension pervades Universe just as the gross one does. It is accessible at every point, every moment, even inside a cell. The blinders are inside consciousness, in the psychosis of everyone of us. They will remain there until we inside the cells appreciate the opportunity to relax into its darkness and we finally heal from them. The torture will continue whether this relaxation takes place or not. One has lasted this long. One can last a bit longer.

## situation report 090811

2009/08

If you’ve seen nothing, if the crimes of this culture remain unknown to you, then I would suggest you allow this post to pass unmarked. But if you see what I see, if you feel as I feel, and if you would seek as I seek, then I ask you to avail yourself of the vivifying veracity of these volumes:

[Confessions of an Economic Hit Man](#) by John Perkins A former perpetrator explains the precise mechanism of American imperial activity abroad. Not the [greatest](#), but the most important book I have read in years.

[The New Pearl Harbor Revisited](#) by David Ray Griffin, PhD A relentless, unanswerable, comprehensive exposé of Cheney’s bombing of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001 and the ensuing cover-up.

more by Dr Griffin: video [9/11 and the American Empire](#) interview What Really Happened on September 11?

EDIT: an even more radical description of events is by engineer, [Dr Judy Wood](#), who has interesting criticisms of Dr Griffin’s analysis. She says that energy (particle-beam) weapons were used on the World Trade Center and gives a mountain of evidence for it. Happy rabbit-hole spelunking!

## soundproof dome

2009/08

The dome must be soundproof, not just sound-dampened. Enough bad experiences with noise and enough reflections by other people have finally gotten it across to me. Sound, to a lesser but still significant degree than light, will sufficiently stimulate consciousness’s fixation on the gross dimension. How much? Maybe enough to ruin a test of the conjecture. I’m not going to take that chance.

As much as I’d like to build it, the [plysphere](#) mentioned before will not meet this new qualification. Furthermore, attempting the retreat in or near the city is also now out of the question.

Soundproofness, like other standards the conditions of this first test will meet, may prove non-essential. I

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hope so. But I will not know till I go through the test first.

Another project I heard about in the spring got me thinking of a corbeled straw bale dome with cob plaster and, like [i did with a friend in 2007](#), a [conic](#) roof of canvas. The design is very simple, fast, and cheap, and would work well for the retreat. I'm working on a model right now. Pics soon.

This also means I need a new source of funding for the dome, and a new, quiet location in the country. Maybe they'd like this at the [Possibility Alliance](#) and I should try again there.

We'll see. I'm glad to have finally seen the need for soundproofness before building something.

What else am I missing?

## darkness, take 6

2009/08

My 5th attempt to arrange for a darkness retreat has failed. So tonight I start my 6th attempt.

I began putting the word out that I need a location and a provider of funds for materials. The new retreat building will be made of straw bales, so unlike the plysphere design, I cannot build it first and find a location afterward. Also, I do not know if I will stay wherever I build the thing, so I need someone who wants it afterward, someone who would pay for the materials beforehand.

The cost should roughly equal the plydome estimate: \$600. This is for straw bales, twine, 15 sheets of 3/8 CDX plywood for a roof and gas to haul urbanite (for a foundation) and sand (for the cob plaster).

I aim to either succeed or fail thrice more by year's end. Plus leave the states for warmer climes because I prefer warmth, yummy fruit and Latin-Indigenous culture. Central/South America, anyone?

## william arthur evans

2009/08

I would like to share a bit of the background of the darkness conjecture by discussing the work of an early psychobiologist, William Arthur Evans. Evans wrote about the emotional origin of all illness. He had a practice in Dallas, Texas, and eventually, a school.

Due to his astonishing success with patients, he received a subpoena from the US Food and Drug Administration (funny how that works). He knew of and sympathized with Wilhelm Reich, the great somatic psychotherapist and researcher. Reich had recently died in federal prison while being persecuted by the FDA for similar reasons. Evans, lacking a victim complex to fulfill, left for England within a week, never to return. Thus we do not know who Evans was.

We do, however, know of his student, L Ron Hubbard, who lifted Evans' achievement wholesale; fabricated some new vocabulary; emphasized the religious side of his teacher's project; and, apparently, went around acquiring and burning copies of Evans' books to hide the source of Scientology and Dianetics. (I learned all this from an old friend, a diligent researcher.)

Nonetheless, Evans cogently describes in his books the existence of intelligence and feeling in each cell of the body. As the unit of life, it is a micro-scale embodiment of everything experienced on the conscious level. Cells are commonly observed to respond intelligently to their environment. What we experience as our intelligence and feeling is the integrated sum of the intelligences and feelings of our trillions of cells.

Like whole human beings, cells are conditioned by experience to feel a certain way. In this lifeway, that

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generally means a depressed way which only varies within a narrow range, depending on the circumstances. This persistent, pathological emotional state leads eventually to all disease.

He illustrates the idea like this: A man complains of a nausea in the morning and explains it by saying he ate too much the night before. Evans' singular question is: But why did the man eat too much?

Only the persistence of emotional habit explains the man's acting against what he already knew to be his best interest. Thus, the material habits of eating, sleeping, exercising, bathing, breathing, etc, all become the handmaidens of emotions. It is true, for example, that more than a very small amount of fatty food toxifies the body and thus should not be eaten. But as long as a given set of habituated emotions is running its course in response to habitual circumstances, the person involved will end up eating too much fatty food over and over, no matter what he learns or tries.

Can improved material habits lead to clarity of emotion? Temporarily, yes. But without further discipline and guidance, the process of purification and reconditioning will eventually break down. By force of will, the man can cut back on fat. But then he becomes absent-minded, or an asshole, or especially nervous, etc, any one of which can lead to other kinds of illness or injury of the same *intensity* and playing the same role in his unconscious drama. In other words, the being will make an internal compensation and remain fundamentally unchanged.

Before reading Evans, I had thought that material factors of health and disease were the main causes of disease. This is the superheroic emphasis of contemporary culture and of Natural Hygiene alike. Through my spiritual teacher, I had also discovered Gurdjieff's methods of self-study. In using these methods, I would sometimes experience profound physical and psychological relief. So the experience of health deriving from *clarity of consciousness* began to repeat itself in me in small ways. But I found it difficult to reconcile these two ideas about the causation of suffering.

Evans' work provided the missing link in what I had begun to imagine as a cycle of illness. While material causes of health or disease cannot be ignored if one's health is to be fully restored, the basic effect of these factors on health are determined by emotion. For Evans, this insight was enough. He was a master at helping ordinary people rapidly untangle the associations of their emotions and memories. Thus he was able to help people effect spontaneous healings on a regular basis. This likely killed local medical business, drawing the ire of the FDA, probably through the American Medical Association.

Having studied Ayn Rand and Gurdjieff (and a little E J Gold), I knew that emotions themselves are artifacts of *feelings* reanimated by thought. Evans well understood this. But in my growing view, thought was, in turn, a function of the spiritual dimension of the human organism. "Neti, neti," as the Hindus say: Not this, not that.

Presently, I intuited a long chain of causation of illness that also connected to my observations of widespread social breakdown and ecological destruction. Yet I was puzzled by the sense that all these causes seemed to exist on the same level. I had thought for a long time that the spiritual determines everything else, but this idea was also getting old to me. The work involved to make it true seemed too much. Being a designer, ie, a lazy person, I could not believe it. Maybe all these causes were co-arising, or reciprocal, quasi-causes. A single *deeper* cause must be at work.

This idea of a deeper cause of health, catalyzed by Evans, mixed into my experiences with darkness, spiritual practice, design, and diet. It led, a year later, to the darkness conjecture\*. In the conjecture, the six main kinds of human suffering are viewed as co-arising. That is, they appear to cause each other, but actually derive from impaired consciousness and its immediate effect, psychosis. The spirit becomes dim, the mind bored, the heart numb, the body fatigued, society brittle, and the ecosystem stressed, because so many peoples' consciousnesses are actually broken. Damaged. Wounded. The *majority* of available data is missed, suppressed, or misinterpreted automatically long before will (ie, volition, reason, choice) comes into play. Failures, deficiencies, and distortions result in the rest of the human system, individually and collectively. These dysfunctions renew existing cultural problems until it exhausts itself in total collapse. Survivors, more damaged than ever, begin the long, slow, "glorious" work of rebuilding toward the same end.

But the organism in darkness can break this cycle before it reaches its inevitable external end.

\*I read *Human Technology* and *Introduction to Human Technology*, which are out of print and very rare. However, a couple of Evans' other books have recently returned to print. See [abebooks.com](http://abebooks.com). Also, I mentioned Evans and Gurdjieff before in a [sketch of a piece](#) I never finished.

## darkness proposal

2009/09

Having just written a big hairy proposal to build a straw bale dome, it occurred to me that there may be a suitable building out there I could use. The main thing, after all, is the darkness retreat itself. So, if you have or happen to know of a small, round, building in a quiet place that I could use for about a month, then I would pay rent or work in exchange for its use rather than build a whole building from scratch. Please let me know.

## marketing

2009/09

I wonder if it is earlier in the process of realizing this idea than I thought. Maybe it needs more development. Usually, when I have an idea, I rush it into production. And it has not really mattered before because everything was part of a massive survey of information. I only needed a rough test of something to catalog it and move on.

But this is different. Of course I have ideas about the best way to apply this, but I do not actually know. The idea is so big it could be applied in any of a million ways. Maybe the thing to do is solicit help from people I know to develop the idea rather than apply it directly with them right away. Maybe I'm in an early stage of marketing.

Part of what has driven me before is not knowing where I was going to sleep or what I was going to eat in the meantime. It drives me still. Not having the ability, with my feet broken, to fall back on some form of craftsmanship to support myself steps up my level of necessity to break through. It makes me think I need to develop/produce the darkness idea *faster*, that there must be some way right now to apply it profitably for all concerned. It is very confusing.

The next few days will tell, I guess. Boy.

## conjecture's sixth point

2009/09

I just added a sixth point to the darkness conjecture (see original version in [basics](#)).

Until now, I have left it out because it is implied by the first five. But I cannot stop wondering if it is really all that clear to folks, so here it is:

1. Healed consciousness clears the way back to a full life, dispelling our inordinate suffering and absurd problems.

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The suffering I am speaking of is not just the suffering we acknowledge, but also the suffering we have so deeply resigned ourselves to that it no longer counts among us as suffering. For us, it's just how life is; get used to it.

For example, degenerative disease, such as cancer, high blood pressure, diabetes, AIDS, heart disease, Crohn's. Every kind of psychic illness: depression, schizophrenia, paranoia. Disease is not inevitable. Though at some point in every illness, death becomes certain, it is usually much farther along than medicine tells us. I do not care what you suffer from, you can heal, more rapidly and thoroughly than you can believe.

Frailty in old age. Perennial family conflict. The struggle just to make a living. Taxes. Wars of conquest sold as self-defense. Lying politicians. The boredom, hatred, and dread of schoolchildren, prisoners, soldiers, and employees. Homelessness. Famine, poverty, crime. Addiction and self-destructiveness of every kind. Basically, the noise all of us learn to turn down because it seems impossible to deal with. Yes, *that* is the suffering I'm talking about.

Every one of us has had moments of rapture, when the world appeared as paradise. In the conjecture, I am saying that these were moments of lucidity: clear awareness of the world as it truly is; that this awareness can be restored; that it will wipe out the suffering we have resigned ourselves to. Despite everything that has been drilled into us by school and church, by doctors and the state, by television and jobs, this is the world that can be lived in day in a day out, not just in rare moments.

## first incoming link

2009/09

Well, I got [my first incoming link](#) today\* from [entitled to an opinion](#), a droll, well-written blog on contemporary social and political issues. The author just wanted an ad-free copy of [Origins of Agriculture](#) by Greg Wadley and Angus Martin and found one here. Random, but strangely exciting.

[\*edit: in fact, this link occurred 1 1/2 years ago; I only just *noticed* it now that I'm using wordpress. Before, I just had a static html website and zero awareness of things like incoming links. Now, with WordPress, I'm starting to learn to manage this site properly. Thanks, TGGP.]

## darkness made simple

2009/09

I have a friend that I want to tell about my work. But she speaks only some English, and I became concerned my multisyllabism in the conjecture would make it too difficult for her to understand. So I just wrote a simplified version of the [original conjecture](#).

## simple

1. We civilized people hurt in our spirits, minds, hearts, bodies, society, and world.
2. This is because we are brain-damaged. This damage makes us crazy about the material world and blind to the also-real world of dreams.
3. We are locked into acting like this because, when we were young, civilized people hurt us very badly and so we are always afraid of getting hurt again.
4. With a lot of very deep sleep, our brains, like any part of the living body, can heal from this hurt.
5. Staying in a totally dark room for a couple weeks straight makes this kind of sleep possible.
6. Once our brains heal, then our lives fill up again, our [hurting](#) stops, and we can let go of our

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problems.

Writing it was fun. And a couple interesting things came up.

One, there is something I should clarify. My use of the word, *brain*, should not be taken to mean I believe consciousness can be reduced to the physical brain or the intellect. I'm using it in a very general way to refer to consciousness.

Two, something unexpected came out of the last point: "Once our brains heal, then our lives fill up again, our hurting stops, and we can let go of our problems."

This undermines the conventional view of the relationship between our suffering and our problems. Normally, we think that we suffer because of our problems. While paraphrasing, I realized that both our problems and our suffering result equally from our impaired consciousness. They co-arise, so they are reciprocal. Which is why our problems sometimes seem to result from our suffering. In fact, we just notice one first.

This does help explain the absurd and needless character of most of the problems we face in civilization. Like [Tracy Chapman](#) sang back in '88:

Why do the babies starve  
When there's enough food to feed the world?  
Why when there are so many of us  
Are there people still alone?  
Why are all the missiles called Peacekeepers  
When they're aimed to kill?  
Why is a woman still not safe  
When she's in her home?

What if we work as hard as we do everyday in order to maintain the illusion of our problems' stubbornness? I mean, come on. On some level we all know the nonsense we face everyday is unnecessary.

Sometimes people have frozen in response to my criticisms of civilization, especially after I have demolished their cardboard defenses of it. Sometimes all they can do is ask perfectly insane questions like, "But if we stop, how will we clean up the messes we have made?" Or, "What will we do with all the people who make their livings by doing things they hate?"

It is irrelevant that nearly every individual and every small group of people I have ever met or even heard about expressed strong willingness to deal with their parts of our situation. It is irrelevant that for decades, countless alternative engineers, designers, economists, saints, mothers, indigenous elders, farmers, politicians, etc, have demonstrated the viability of alternatives to this lifeway's ubiquitous violence and stupidity. It is irrelevant that together we have the money and resources to pay for the necessary changes thousands of times over. We do not need to know the answers to the above questions before we stop doing obviously senseless and destructive things. "First, do no harm," Hippocrates advised us. This means that if we find ourselves doing harm, we are to stop.

With the conjecture, I am saying, let us not just stop. Let's put down the impossible burden we bear, too. In our current state, we can *only* do harm our daily lives. We're not qualified for anything else. Our psychology will drive us to it again and again. In perpetual fear, we will only recreate fearful circumstances.

Rather than more fear, let us allow love, in the form of the organic processes of self-healing, to take over for awhile. Spiritual adepts for millennia have told us that the pursuit of pleasure is futile because as we are, we suffer. Immeasurably. Momentary pleasures cannot change that. Furthermore, sages say we cannot, for the time being, change how we are. And so suffer *consciously*, they say. The only way out is through.

Similarly, they have said that we suffer because we are asleep to the splendid reality of life. Or blind to it. Suffering are all we are capable of as long as we sleep. So let us sleep! But sleep *consciously*, literally, and fully, until finally, we wake up again.

## ayn rand and bullcrit

2009/09

People commonly act knowledgeable about things they have never read, let alone studied. I think this habit arises from the amazing idea that all the data necessary to life is in and now it is just a matter of sorting it out and making a decision. This, of course, is opposite the darkness conjecture, which is based on the idea that we are always short of most of the data we need to live because consciousness, the faculty which collects this data, is damaged.

Anyway, here is a quote from an unusually honest piece in the establishment press about the ubiquity of this practice among *media professionals*. I noticed it because of its reference to one of my favorite writers.

Over dinner at a French restaurant in Manhattan—there were four of us—the subject of Ayn Rand came up, and the air was soon full of thoughtful remarks about “enlightened self-interest” and “the way Fascism and libertarianism meet each other halfway in her books.” Under subsequent mutual interrogation, we all confessed that Rand was among the authors we had always meant to read. One guilty diner tried to win the court’s sympathy by saying, “Well, my best friend in high school read everything Ayn Rand wrote.”

[New York Magazine, 1989 Feb 6, “Bullcrit”, p44](#)

(Of course, students of Ayn Rand’s work have known of this phenomenon in the media for a long time. If only she had just gone away like she was supposed to, it would have all worked out.)

## new page - health proposal

2009/09

I just added a new page, [health proposal](#), to the site. It is my latest attempt to apply the darkness conjecture with others in a self-supporting, mutually beneficial way.

The dome proposal was a good step because it offered value rather than just asking for donations (my earlier, futile plan). But it had three major problems.

One, I do not actually enjoy design and construction. It is an overly fascinating compulsion I’m weary of.

Two, putting up domes, though very cool, is secondary to my overall purpose of giving direct support to people’s well being.

Three, the proposal does not help put my research on a solid footing. What if the darkness retreat does not work as expected? Then I will have lost three *more* months, and be back at square one with maybe a couple hundred bucks with which to nurse my reopened wounds. I have never been able to make a living at design. Enough, already.

I would like to be able to support a family in a stable home; grow and eat good food; and have the time and support to actually help people with what I have discovered. I can easily do this for \$10,000/yr, but not \$1,500.

The conjecture has given me something tangible and coherent to work with. My two broken feet have given me the opportunity to stop my normal frenetic design activity and properly review my situation. I

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believe this proposal is more straightforward, and I look forward to your response.

## health proposal live

2009/10

I'm now promoting my [health proposal](#), starting on facebook. Though published, I was still editing it and working out some logistics. There is a lot more to do, but the basics are in place now.

## new pages - poems, ashers

2009/10

I have made two new pages of some older writings: my [poems](#) from 1992 to the present and a short memoir, [The Ashers, a River, and I](#) of a canoe trip I took as a boy with the Boy Scouts, my Scoutmaster, Jack Asher, and his wife, LaVerne, which I wrote for their 50th Wedding Anniversary.

## natural hygiene 2.0

2009/10

So far, Natural Hygienists have said that toxemia is the cause of illness [NOTE: actually only some say this. See CORRECTION below], and that toxemia itself results from misinformed behavior. But how did this cycle get started? I do not think it just started out of the blue, as if otherwise healthy people started eating incorrectly and then lost their way. Something else had to have happened inbetween.

My first clue was how crazy illness is. Consider the lung cancer patient who keeps smoking or the overweight person who keeps eating junk food. What causes this craziness?

I think something hurt us very, very badly—worse than we typically imagine being hurt—and we never had a chance to recover. This makes us crazy. In my view, all our suffering and all the problems that attend it stem from this unhealed injury. In my approach, which I view as fundamentally Hygienic, we provide for the healing of this injury so that, with our newly recovered sanity, we can freely apply the more common Hygienic practices.

CORRECTION (2010.10.13): I was mistaken about the hygienic position on toxemia. *Fully informed hygienists actually hold that the basic cause of illness is \_enervation*, in this sense, the chronic over-expenditure or lack of energy). Toxemia is simply closely related.

I finally finished reading the super rad central text of Natural Hygiene, *The Science and Fine Art of Natural Hygiene* by Herbert Shelton. His clearest statement of this in the book is in the chapter on Rest and Sleep. The nine Laws of Life on which Hygiene is based are, in fact, largely about vital energy and the supreme and unsubstitutable intelligence with which the organism manages this energy. I had heard a little about the hygienic idea of enervation before, and it made sense to me. But later, a student of Hygiene whose views I overly regarded said that, according to Natural Hygiene, toxemia is the cause of all illness.

Enervation as the cause of all disease is an idea much more compatible with the darkness conjecture than mere toxemia. Enervation would naturally result from catastrophic, unhealed psychic injury. Enervation would, in turn, lead to toxemia and deficiency. Without energy, the body cannot clean itself out or deliver nutrients, whether the food is appropriate or not. The psychic injury would also explain the strange persistence of our obviously unhealthy lifestyles. Taking this persistence as “just how things are” instead of being part of the pathology itself, Hygienists have so far enjoined people to exert effort to overcome this persistence with willpower. Thus dependent on effort, a very unreliable foundation, success is

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correspondingly rare. (This position is useful, however, for maintaining the puritanical, self-righteous elitism that characterizes some Hygienists.)

Anyway, I knew there was some reason I liked Natural Hygiene. There is nothing like finding out things for oneself.

## wish

2009/10

On the [wish](#) to recover:

There are two kinds of doing—automatic; and doing what you “wish”. Take a small thing which you “wish” to do and cannot do and make this your God. Let nothing interfere. If you “wish”, you can. Without wishing, you never “can”. “Wish” is the most powerful thing in the world. —G I Gurdjieff

## last failure

2009/10

Tonight, I report my sixth and last failure to arrange for a long darkness retreat. I made two business propositions to people, the dome and health proposals. But my heart was not really in them. The effort was putting too much pressure on me and the project. It needs no pushing. And so unconsciously, I made these proposals randomly so they would not get enough response.

The benefit of all this has been to become able detach from the retreat in a way new to me. In other words, I no longer feel the need to make it happen right away or as a direct function of my livelihood.

Now I will find some simple work and do the retreat on my own time. If it works, then other opportunities will arise naturally.

Above all, one must be some place. Cold weather has not made sense to me for a long time. Nor has the American way of life. So I traded in my expensive winter coat for a flight to Guatemala on November 9. I will find a group to volunteer with, then go from there.

## site back online!

2009/10

8.17 – Ok, I got most of the content back up. It is still pretty rough around the edges. The look is temporary. Some links do not work. Pictures are missing. Some pages have funny bits of code visible. But at least the content is up. Will fix the rest soon.

(two previous posts:) 8.17 – I will have the site back up soon. Fortunately, before it crashed, I got a backup of everything. Watch for most important pages and blog posts to start going up tonight. I should finish with the details (photos) by Monday night at the latest. Thanks for your patience.

8.16 – My site was hacked. Please check back soon.

## vertigo

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2009/10

The strangest thing happened last night. I woke up with a strong sense of vertigo. I was having dreams of being way, way up high, of trying to cling to the flat surface I was spread-eagled on. When I woke up, the feeling persisted for a long time, with various high-up imagery to accompany it.

It is all coming from finally doing something I want to do: going to the tropics. I do not have money. I do not know anyone there. I do not even speak the language yet (started studying yesterday, though). But aside from all my grand ideas, my default vision for myself has, for a long time, included going there. It is like I have been huddled on the ground all this time, and now I'm climbing this crazy tower of my own desire. It has overwhelmed me in the past. It is still often scary lately, but sometimes now it feels exciting, like when I'm making arrangements for it, one after another.

I read in *The Continuum Concept* years ago that children who are held a lot when babies, like native people generally are, grow up without a fear of heights or agoraphobia. It is so odd now to feel it in connection with doing what I would like to do. It is as if people in this society, without necessarily knowing it, automatically stopped carrying around babies, especially with Victoria's popularization of the stroller, in order to condition children to a future of not doing what they want to do, not daring, not being free. And should we begin to act from the heart again, a tidal wave of fear rises to discourage us.

A friend just said we should take this fear as a sign we are doing something right, but also to prepare.

## guatemala

2009/10

For a long time, I have wanted to move to the tropics. It is warm, the people are not insane in the same way that they are insane here, and the food I would rather eat grows there. In short, the grass in Guatemala is not greener than it is here, but it is green year-round. I leave Nov 9.

## so long, secret design

2009/10

secret design, the site I made in late 2001 to present my design for Tribal Housing and a bunch of writings that followed, closed Monday with the rest of GeoCities.

GeoCities was cool. I learned basic HTML by tweaking the code on my templated home page. I published a lot of my ideas. It helped me see the coherence in my thought and helped me communicate it to what seemed like a lot of people: tens, maybe hundreds.

Of course, WordPress and Blogger and posterous and so on are much better because they simplify things and make websites more powerful and cohesive. I would not go back to GeoCities. But it was cool. It hosted lots of sites with tons of rad information from the early days of the web boom. I hope the site owners migrated the data in time. I still have everything I wrote from then. If you do not see it on my "other writings" page, let me know and I will send it to you.

## meta-ethics of darkness

2009/11

On the metaphysics of self-preservation: "Consciousness, for those organisms which possess it, is the basic means of survival." –Ayn Rand

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This idea is one of the roots of *the darkness conjecture*. Our lives are so thoroughly screwed up because our consciousness is comprehensively impaired.

Generally, we try to use will—the most delicate part of the very faculty that is so damaged—to fix our problems. How is it working out for us? As a designer of the Los Angeles freeway system would later put it, “Each and every problem we face today is the direct and inevitable result of yesterday’s brilliant solutions.” If I were the left hand, I’d say the right hand’s bluffing.

Which is why I think it would be better to use will to provide the organism, including consciousness, the conditions it needs to heal *itself* autonomically, to do with ourselves as Rockefeller did with his company: “All I did was hire people who were smarter than me.”

## atitlan report

2009/12

I’m sitting in San Pedro La Laguna, Guatemala, on the shore of Lake Atitlan in an internet “store”. It is just a painted cinder block room with a bare light bulb and four desks with computers. For 60 cents I can use the computer for an hour.

It *is* warm here. Everyone is out on the streets as Christmas Eve is a big deal here. Apparently the best way to celebrate it is with firecrackers. Very large ones. As often as possible. Small bombs, really. And the big show is tonight at midnight. Then I will sleep.

Speaking of the weather, the temperature here is the easiest thing to get used to. It hovers in the mid-seventies (21°C) all day. Last night it got really cold: 58 (14°C). Last week we had three cool days of rain. Very rare in December I hear.

The noise pollution is the hardest. It is like they were all born with earplugs in. It is hard for me to convey the intensity of the situation. My new house design fantasies involve caves dug deep into the side of the mountain behind several, thick, airtight doors. Maybe I can buy compressed air and just keep the valve open a little.

I have a job at the moment translating Spanish into English. Which is a joke, because I still speak Spanish only in infinitives in the present tense. However, there are automatic translation services online now that spit out very rough English versions of Spanish text. So I go through and make it intelligible. I know enough Spanish now to check it against the original. I get a whopping \$1.80 for an hour of work. This is also how much a cheap hotel room costs here for a night. Truly, it is a foreign country here.

The people are wonderful. Period. Despite 500 years of various levels of European and American terrorism and extremely vigilant evangelism that continues to this very moment, the people still have the sense to carry, nurse, sleep with, and always be deeply connected emotionally to their babies. This is my only explanation for their near universal good natures (even the drunks lying face down in the street). Calm, relaxed, with a ready smile and time to ask your name and where you are from. It is an enormous blessing to be surrounded by a people who are like this.

When Mayans play basketball, they can hover over the court while shooting backwards. The crowd laughs as off-balance players dogpile into the children sitting at the boundary. The instant a period ends, tens of children dash onto the court with every kind of ball for 60 seconds of hoops and tag. Vendors ply parents with water and candy. And oranges, with whose peels mischief-makers hook me into a friendly food fight.

Wheelbarrows and handtrucks are a luxury here. Very young men two feet shorter than I carry twice their weight on their backs. It never fails to drop my jaw. A bag of cement is 90 pounds. I saw a man carry TWO on his back. I did a triple take then followed him to make sure I was seeing things correctly. The “cargadors” use a simple strap that goes over the forehead, then behind the back and under the load, which they secure against their bent-over backs with their arms. I think they must have the strongest

necks in the world.

The mountains and lake continue to radiate their world-class beauty. I feel like the lake is where everything gathers, like I'm in the center of the world. The locals know they are a lucky and blessed people to live by this sacred lake, Atitlan. The volcanoes rise like three reticent and omnipotent gods from the south side of the lake, extending their protection to all who can see them. Really, they are the small children of a super-volcano whose crater now holds the lake. Seen this way, it is a little intimidating. It is the Mayan version of the fear of God, I suppose.

Well, Merry Christmas to you all there. Bundle up and sip an egg nog for me. When I get more settled here (still looking for a place to stay longer than a couple weeks), I hope you will come visit me. Tickets are very reasonable, as low as \$124 fees one way, depending on departure city and date. For fun, check [spiritair.com](http://spiritair.com).

## remission

2010/01

As I [wrote before](#), I was overwhelmed by [rapture](#) when I was 15 for three months. When it began to fade, I wanted to know what had happened. What caused this feeling? Why did it fade away?

The short answer to this question just came to me: I went into *remission*. I had been suffering from complications arising from an earlier injury. As a result of the developmental surge during adolescence, the complications temporarily and partially cleared up. But the underlying injury remained unchanged. So when the surge abated, the complications returned and the feeling faded.

While I had answered these questions at length, I have not, until now, been able to put it in a single sentence. Recently an acquaintance asked me what was the answer to my original question. When I launched into my longer explanation, she lost interest, and I realized I needed to have a simpler answer. It occurred to me a bit later that the idea of remission would enable me to respond succinctly.

Wikipedia defines remission as "the state of absence of diseased activity in patients with a chronic illness, with the possibility of return of disease activity." In my case, it was like an infected broken bone. If the injury is cleaned often enough, or if circulation is improved sufficiently, the infection can disappear. But if the bone is not set and immobilized correctly, healing of the basic malady will not occur and infection will return.

In this case, the infection is my inordinate suffering and problems. The break is the injury to my psyche that preceded the suffering and problems. The increased throughput of vital energy in my whole being during adolescence is the increase in circulation which temporarily and partially cleared up the infection.

## serious darkness

2010/01

Shortly after returning to San Marcos La Laguna from my seventh attempt at a long retreat in San Pedro La Laguna, several doors opened for me.

I was given a lovely house to sit for an indefinite time period. A friendly elder took strong interest in doing a darkness retreat, and then in the darkness project itself. Many people he talked to about it expressed interest in doing it. Then a suitable room for short retreats emerged. I have begun the minimal work necessary to prepare the room for retreats.

So basically, I almost have a going concern here. Amazing. Now it is much clearer what I can offer people related to darkness besides this free website: free talks, an affordable booklet made of the main content of

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this site, and short darkness retreats.

For years since my first retreat, I have had in mind to design and offer a proper eye mask for sleeping and resting in darkness. So this could come come next.

I think that with the intensified interest in the darkness conjecture that all of these services will generate, the opportunity for a long retreat for me will finally emerge.

## seventh failure!

2010/01

In mid-December, I made another serious attempt at a long darkness retreat. I thought I would try something different and keep it under wraps till it was over.

Across the lake, outside more populous San Pedro La Laguna, I rented what I thought was an appropriate house and bought supplies to darken it. The whole nine yards. Then the place turned out to be too noisy, cold, moldy, etc.

I spent all my money and a lot of energy. One of the first things I did afterward was write a long list of criteria any new space must meet before I spend a dime or minute on it. Then I returned to San Marcos to work and collect myself.

My new idea was that I will simply spend longer finding and preparing a place so that when it is finally time to begin, all I have to do is walk in, shut the door and turn of the light and everything will just work.

In the meantime, I would find a decent place to live (done! great housesitting job), decent work (done!), spend more time with the people here (doing it), and see to my immigration status in Guatemala, which I consider my home now.

Now cool developments have emerged since then. See my new post, [serious darkness](#).

## superlight hypothesis

2010/01

For the record: when I finally succeed in spending two weeks in darkness, here is one thing I predict will happen.

I will access the dreamworld and see the light that pervades it. This light is called [superlight](#). I believe it may be the subtle kind of light perceived directly by the pineal gland.

If so, then, superlight is food for the soul, just as the gross light of this dimension (sun, fire, star, northern, electric, etc) is food for the mind. Superlight is what floods consciousness from the inside out in moments of rapture and realization.

It is the light most of us are starved for and seek to replicate with technology, movies, computer screens, light shows at concerts, etc. That we do not see much of it is not a spiritual or moral shortcoming, but a physiological malfunction resulting from psychic injury.

(I believe this injury, by the way, resulted from the shock of incarnation on this planet after leaving the dimension and place in which many of people here were proficient. Earth is a crash-and-burn/trial-and-error planet. This makes more sense if you read the [myth of three cultures](#).)

# avatar

2010/02

"My daughter will teach you our ways. Learn well, Jake Sully. Then we will see if your insanity can be cured."

-Mo' At the shamaness in *Avatar*

Sometimes a Maya asked me what I did and why. I began my explanation with, "Do you know how all gringos are crazy?" He always laughed and nodded.

# love vs civilization

2010/10

Mayan youth, a quietly defiant demographic, have been playing "Love the Way You Lie" by Eminem and Rihanna over and over. So I read the [lyrics](#).

OMG.

I hear a torturous description of true love colliding with a singularly unworkable culture, internally and externally. Perforce, most of us give up on, fail at, or get ruined forever by true love because we are already too shattered, and the social context necessary to maintain love is cynically absent. Only manageable and "sensible" relationships remain, being better than nothing. This song represents to me a blistering indictment of civilization, its inherent bankruptcy, and the thoroughgoing resignation and selling out that it demands and gets from all but a few, whose autonomy is not a threat. Like Sinead sang years ago, "They only laugh 'cause they know they're untouchable, not because what I said was wrong."

# 2010 summary

2010/10

Long time, no news. Let me catch you up.

All spring I built a darkroom. I opened it in late May and 10 people got their first taste of darkness. All gave positive reviews. Common comments:

- "I feel more myself."
- "I feel more in my body."
- "I feel more rested."
- "I did not know how tired I was."

Some saw light of varying durations and intensities. Many had intense dreams. All went through some version of the nice/rough/nice cycle I describe in [four darkness experiences](#). I had an interesting time keeping the room going for them, bringing them food, not making too much noise upstairs.

The better rested a retreatant was in the beginning, the less affected by retreating he was. Several said they were just starting to get somewhere when their retreat ended. Those who felt major benefits did not really have time for the changes to become established. My conclusion was that people would benefit much more from longer retreats. About the same time, some noisy construction occurred at the house, so I closed the darkroom for improvements to make it suitable for longer retreats.

I also made a reasonable amount of money for my efforts and with an unusual degree of satisfaction. Businesswise, darkness retreating is very promising. The entire town knows about the darkroom and many are interested in going in. Word is getting out beyond the lake, even. Once I finish the room and do my own long retreat, there are 5-10 more people ready to do both short (3 day) and medium-length retreats (5-10 day). Wicked Rest Retreats (or whatever I'm going to end up calling it) has been a going concern from even before the room opened. Most of the first 10 retreatants made deposits on their retreats. And some of the depositors have not done their retreats yet. The proceeds allowed me to keep working on the room this spring until completion.

At first, I offered the retreats on a donation basis thinking it would be a cool way to do it. But I found myself thinking about money a lot more than necessary and expecting donations from people—very uncool. The donation model must be based on a genuine spirit of giving. I could not hack it. After one retreatant with lots of money donated very little, I got really annoyed and decided that simply setting a price would be better for me and everyone else, too. After that, I have had no dire problems with money. My scarcity habit will likely die hard, but something, at least, began to shift for me money-wise.

Recently, I have become very burned out from building, from being alone in the project (a bunch of friends left suddenly this summer). I have felt kind of shell-shocked from it all, weeping almost everyday for weeks. Living at the lake is very intense, especially near San Marcos, which is traditionally the spiritual/ceremonial center of the lake. In other words, even native people never lived here before. I'm across the lake at the moment, on one of my recent mini-vacations in San Pedro and Panajachel. I'm going back tomorrow to finish the new ventilation system. If I finish, and if beginning to sleep in the room helps me rapidly recover from my burn-out, I will continue working. Otherwise, I'm going to take a week vacation away from the lake.

Since closing the room, I have been living on some unexpected donations from my father, with whom I had a massive falling out three years ago about what the hell I'm doing with my life. Pretty ironic. But I'm glad he found a way to help me for awhile.

It has been a rigorous year. Not bad at all till the last few weeks. Let's see what the next few days bring.

**UPDATE:** the 6-day retreats proved just as safe and more effective than the short retreats. In the first three days, the body rests from its exhaustion and relaxes from its tension. The next three days, these effects become more established while the organism delves into a pressing psychic issue.

One man said he used a certain method of introspection in darkness to clear out negative emotions. This worked for the first few days. Then he encountered something more than he could handle with the method, so he let go of it. When he woke up the next day, the issue was solved. That day he went home and got together with the woman he had desired for months.

It can happen.

## wicked rest

2010/10

I have been playing with new names for this project. One that really strikes me is Wicked Rest. And here is a potential intro to the site with this name:

Wicked rest is what you get in a totally dark room. It is, finally, rest for the wicked, the tormented, the restless. It is automatic and foolproof as long as the room is set up properly. A couple weeks straight of wicked rest may also be sufficient to recover from the functional psychosis that characterizes the people of our culture, which may be what causes *all* our suffering—spiritual, mental, emotional, physical, social, and ecological. Below are three more formulations of this idea. The rest of the site provides elaborations upon and background for this proposition... (segue to three versions of the darkness conjecture).

Another word I like for a name is trapdoor. I think this gets closer to what I am trying to provide: a

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hidden door out of the otherwise seamless box of life in this culture.

(Update, 2011 Jan 30: What am I really offering here? What is the value of wicked rest or a trapdoor? These questions started bugging me after I wrote this post. So far the answer to the first question is, sanctuary. Asylum, refuge. Maybe one of these should be the name.)

I guess it does not really matter till I do the long retreat. Surely the correct name would come then. Vamos a ver (Let's see).

## e-ink writing device - a plea

2011/01

EDIT: Success! Type on e-ink now using [hacked B&N Nook Simple Touch](#), the open-source project I started at [xda-developers.com](#).

Here is a letter I sent an e-ink reading device manufacturer.

——— Forwarded message ———

From: Andrew Durham  
Date: Sun, Oct 10, 2010 at 18:49  
Subject: a plea for an e-writer  
To: [sales@pocketbook-usa.com](mailto:sales@pocketbook-usa.com)

Dear Ms Sergiyenko, Mr Bondarenko, and Mr Sheiman and everyone at Pocketbook around the world:

I have heard your devices will have typewriting functionality soon, and I want to express my bottomless support for your efforts to complete this task as soon as possible.

As a philosopher, health practitioner, designer—and a human canary in a coalmine—I cannot overstate how much I would like to type on a non-irritating machine. So: if your device can host a USB external keyboard so that I can use it as a typewriter, not just a reader, then I will buy it. Otherwise, not.

That's a little blunt. But frankly, I am baffled that no e-ink device maker has figured out yet that their e-ink device will only go viral when it becomes writable out of the box—and I mean serious typing with a proper external keyboard for touch-typing. Why?

Because then the e-ink device can produce its own content, just like computers and cellphones, the other big viral devices of our time. With one program and a USB host, you could double the usefulness—and the thus value—of your device, yet sell it for the same price as other devices.

I like USB because it eliminates the complication of recharging the keyboard, problems with bluetooth reception, and the alarming irritation of wireless radiation. For all the same reasons, you would much improve the device with an ethernet port or a third USB port for use with a USB-ethernet adaptor. WiFi burns and numbs my hands when I have to use it. I know other people who experience this, too, some of them without necessarily realizing what causes it.

Why else would you make your reader typable? Because writers, whose numbers have exploded since the beginning of the web, have not had a psychically neutral medium for writing—one that holds perfectly still to the eye—since the typewriter. To take advantage of the wonderful tool of word-processing, we have had to look at screens that exhaust the eyes, alter the mind, and disrupt the emotions.

This is not just a bad combination for us writers. Too much of what is done in this culture is harmful. Nearly everything done today is first written about. If the machine we wrote with did not hurt us, it stands to reason that we writers would cause less harm to the world as well. More people would participate in the process of cultural creation with less difficulty and more psychic integrity. This is a

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radical proposition. For every writer there are a thousand readers. Every device you sell would support the freedom, self-determination and harmony of a thousand people.

In short, all the reasons for reading on an e-ink device apply a thousand times more to writing on one.

Please help us writers with what, in a subtle way, may be the most important invention since the personal computer. Give us a modern (word-processing) typewriter: sleek, humane. Do so, and I believe that, in the e-ink device competition, you will take a leading position. Do it well, and you might keep it.

With sincere hopes for your success, I am,

Yours,  
Andrew Durham

UPDATE:

No reply as yet from Pocketbook, a company which has left multiple promises unfulfilled and many deadlines pass unremarked. FAIL.

However, another company, as yet unnamed, has responded positively to my idea. We'll see how that goes. [2012 Jan 23 EDIT: this was with ctaindia.com. The effort failed in 2011 July due to my impatience with the guy's lack of vision. Bad combo. No matter how much I explained it and how much he agreed it was a good idea, he'd always start in again with questions that began, "But what about..."]

<http://noteslate.com> is the advance marketing effort for an unproduced but extremely interesting e-ink device design which is "pencil" based and hyperconnected. Here is an unequivocal picture of their plans for typeability: <http://noteslate.com/img/photo/gal/NoteSlate09.jpg> (note the noteslate logo on the keyboard.) There is a small sketch of a keyboard with the noteslate in this photo: <http://noteslate.com/img/photo/gal/NoteSlate11.jpg> These are actually not photos, but photorealistic renderings of the design.

UPDATE (2012 Jan 23)

Success! See [typable e-paper breakthrough](#), today's blog post, above.

Now that we have proved the concept, I felt like unloading a little:

Other failures for the record: Jinke makes the Hanlin reader. We emailed for a few weeks in 2011 June about making a custom device for typing. The representative, Liumin, probably realizing I wasn't some deep-pocketed entrepreneur, but just a homeless slob, sarcastically estimated development at \$500,000. It was kind of disgusting. Today I was able to let him know that my team proved the concept for \$119. That was satisfying.

Then there was Edo-Tech. Apparently no one reads their email, but I finally I got a message through to them by guessing the management's addresses. Got a hasty reply from the president. A couple emails later with the vice-president, the homeless slob was dead in the water again. They only work with market leaders in a given region. But they also could not even tell me where I could get one of their devices. Business is so strange.

## darkness science

2011/01

Just came across these three entries in Wikipedia about the strange light that people often experience in darkness retreats:

[Ganzfeld Effect](#), [Phosphene](#), [Prisoner's Cinema](#)

"Cinema" certainly coincides with my idea of the entertainment value of the light show in the dark. It is

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just the “hallucinations” that the Ganzfeld Effect entry describes.

But maybe hallucinations are not fabrications of consciousness after all. With enough time inside, I think it will become evident either way.

## atlas shrugged. the movie. is. coming.

2011/02

Visit the Official [Atlas Shrugged Movie](#) Web Site!

Hey: Dagny Taggart has blackout blinds @1:45 of the trailer.

## typable e-paper

2011/02

I was talking with someone about my undying quest for typable e-paper. He concluded his comments with this suggestion:

“You can get an ipad and compose a book on that. The ipad has more glare to look at than e-paper that is e-paper’s advantage.”

I replied:

I say it in my [plea](#), but let me state my assessment of the advantage of e-paper slightly differently here to better match what you are saying.

The advantage of e-paper is something much greater, much more fundamental, much more affecting than its lack of glare. A matte finish can be put on any display, or even achieved after the fact with plastic screen protectors.

What is different about all e-paper devices, regardless of their finish—is the absolutely still nature of the image. Once the page changes and the new words and images appear, the screen holds perfectly still. [EDIT The rest of this paragraph is erroneous. See NOTE below {It does not continue to refresh. The tiny pixels are not quivering with reinstatement 60 times per second. The eyes, which normally make 80 movements per *minute* are not constantly exhausting themselves in adjusting to the movement of the image. As with the static nature of ink on paper, the eyes do not get irritated. Thought and emotion thus remain undisrupted.}]

This is why:

- people love reading on e-paper devices, even if they do not understand exactly why.
- e-paper would matter even more to a writer
- I think this would be the most important invention since the personal computer, if not the typewriter or even the printing press.

The written word is the motive power of this culture, the fulcrum at its center. E-paper device makers are thus sitting unawares on a revolutionary opportunity to do something super cool, serve the world—and make a pile of well-deserved money in the process.

Who will be the one to stand up at a company meeting and help connect the last dots by pointing out the simple, obvious application of an existing product? For the sake of everyone who has ever suffered from:

- an aching hand from handwriting

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- injuries from typing on a manual typewriter
- the strained eyes, headaches, and insomnia of the hundreds of millions who write on computers
- and far more importantly, the consequences of ideas that had to be dragged through all this torment.

I wish I knew how to help this happen in even the smallest way. I want one of these things in my hands as soon as corporately possible.

[NOTE I learned that it is strictly backlighting that causes the eyestrain I feel with LCD screens, whether the backlight is fluorescent or LED (due to Pulse Width Modulation). See my topic on mobileread about this, [Project: E-Paper Tablet \(typable!\)](#)).

## new articles - make darkness & retreat manual

2011/03

EDIT: these articles were renamed "make" and "protocol"

I wrote instructions for retreating in my darkroom here in Guatemala in [protocol](#) and for creating a darkroom in your home in [make][/[make](#)/]. These are now included in the paper booklet about darkness that I offer.

## cool site - photoperiodeffect.com

2011/03

[photoperiodeffect.com](http://photoperiodeffect.com)

This site talks about the effects of light on health and the use of darkness to reverse many illnesses. The author, Russell Johnston, who has used darkness to significantly heal from a serious malady, Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome, is a dogged researcher and a very clear writer.

## line in the sand

2011/03 If the Problem results from error, then the solution is virtue. If the Problem results from injury, then the solution is convalescence. Either I am sound but mistaken, or unsound and malfunctioning. Let us stop equivocating.

## syllogism

2011/03

[EDIT: I learned this is not a syllogism, just a regular old argument. Syllogisms have only three propositions. Sigh.]

Here is my clearest articulation yet of the conjecture's chain of causation, in the form of a seven-line syllogism:

Suffering comes from a catastrophic injury to the psyche; the psyche is a system of an organism;

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organisms are self-healing; healing requires vital energy; vital energy accumulates during rest; psychic rest is most profound in absolute darkness; therefore, darkness is the solution to inordinate suffering.

[EDIT: See end of [hygiene](#)/psychology and [basics](#) for updated versions of this.]

## new page - register

2011/04

Now you can [register](#) for your retreat online.

## limitless

2011/05

Just saw this movie. Awesome. It gives a good idea of the surge in creativity, clarity, synchronization, and motivation that sometimes occurs in darkness (without the side effects, of course). But just for the record, darkness will ultimately make NZT-48 look like potty training.

## greece

2011/06

I moved to Greece, partly as a result of my darkness retreat in March (more on that soon). My new friend and final client in Guatemala, Ajna of [Yoga of Beauty](#) in San Marcos La Laguna, Solola, Guatemala, is taking over the darkroom. Contact her through her website. I will be building a business here in Greece to open more darkrooms around the world.

Note: Ajna sold the darkroom to Arjuna. See his website, [dark-retreats.com](#).

## bodhisattva math

2011/06

Let us say Bodhisattvas are both sincere and realistic in their vow that, after their own personal enlightenment (which will free them from the necessity of reincarnating on this planet) they will keep reincarnating here anyway in order to help liberate all sentient creatures.

Let us further say that they, combined with those of equal realization and commitment in other traditions, manage to liberate a million people a year until the job is done. At that rate, it will still take them 7,000 years to finish. That's if population remains constant from now on.

Keep in mind this is a 2,500 year old tradition. And that all spiritual traditions combined are not pulling off more than a hundred genuine liberations a year. Which, according to some wise men I once knew, is an extremely generous figure. How are we to make sense of the Bodhisattva's project? What are they counting on?

Maybe they are banking on an exponential effect of their efforts. Maybe we are only a few years or generations away. The results come faster as time goes on and the task gets easier, because its enormity nonetheless is shrinking, while their collective power grows.

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Maybe they, like the Mayans, are merely holding out till a cosmic event completes the task in one fell swoop.

So they're not worried. Maybe I should not worry so much, either. Many people have said as much, and lately, I have begun to notice what they're talking about.

*And, maybe it is time to review the effectiveness of the method of liberation. Or maybe we could just eliminate the need for it.*

## swedish darkroom news

2011/09

Location secured for world's second hygienic darkness retreat: newly remodeled small cabin in quiet neighborhood of Swedish resort town. Modifications commence tomorrow; first retreat within two weeks.

EDIT: the above attempt failed. Taking a bare cabin with only electricity and heat and trying to make even a simple bathroom, kitchenette, and ventilation proved overwhelming. No, the thing is to start with a fully functional building, darken it and start retreating, already. This will require taking the message to the people again.

## conspiracy

2011/11

Here is something I wrote a friend about conspiracy theory following a conversation we had recently on the subject.

~/~

I had a thought during our conversation about 9/11 that there wasn't time to voice, but which I think you would like to hear. So I am writing you with it.

I think the reason that the idea of a conspiracy can be hard to entertain is that it seems to mean that the people involved are evil and consciously do evil things.

This, of course, is nonsense, and people are correct to reject it. The nature of human consciousness is such that it is impossible to do what one considers evil. But it is a simple matter to do evil that one considers good.

Any honest observer of history and current events can see that it is possible to justify anything (including the justification itself). For example, listen to professional political commentators of any persuasion. What is obviously evil to ordinary people can be seen as good and even obligatory by someone in power. Hitler and his helpers thought they were doing the right thing. Even on the stand in Jerusalem, Eichmann never really got what all the fuss was about. Some National Socialists (NAZIs) actually disliked the program, but they believed in it. It is only people's basic innocence combined with their great naivete that enables them fail to make this distinction.

All this is aside from the fact that the ultrarich and powerful are psychologically damaged to a degree almost impossible to believe. I hesitated to mention the other night—and it is horrible to think about—but in many established families, children are subjected to ritual sexual abuse from a young age. If you imagine a boy who is sexually molested in group Satanic rituals from the time he is less than a year old, with the knowledge and even participation of his own parents, then maybe you can see that his view of right and wrong might be a little bit distorted by the time he is forty years old and running a bank, a corporation, or a country (or these days, all three).

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If so, then you can also see how it is possible that if the interests of enough organizations require, for example, the events of 9/11, then as surely as the sun will rise tomorrow morning, those events will take place. Obviously the people in power are deadly serious about making omelets, and it matters to them not one whit that you and I happen to be the eggs.

That was the thought. As I write, it leads to a few similar ones.

Exactly why any organization would require such events as 9/11 has a lot to do with the debt-based monopoly money system I tried to describe to you. Since money as we know it comes into existence as interest-bearing debt, the money available to pay back the debt is always less than the amount owed. So as some pay their debts, the economy must expand to provide others more money to pay the mounting debt. This is why there is never enough money and why we are destroying the earth.

Imbalances in the system grow. People begin to borrow just to stay afloat. This inflates the money supply beyond the wealth that backs it and thus devalues cash holdings. Just to stay even, individuals and groups must always be climbing upward financially, stepping on others as they go. We know how desperate the situation is at our level. Imagine the wicked cut-throat tactics necessary to stay at the top of the game, where there truly is never enough.

Poetically, the naive resistance to the idea of an inside job on 9/11 rests on the same benevolent metaphysics as conspiracism. To the conspiracist, the universe is a friendly, life-supportive place and people are basically peaceful and just. Therefore, the horrors we witness in our culture must be *engineered*. So to those we consider denialists, we conspiracists issue this challenge: prove how the material beneficiaries of 9/11 did *not* perpetrate it.

Lastly remains the simple fact that government has ever been a tool of the elite to control the (admittedly infantile) peasantry (including the managerial “professional” class). That government could one day benefit the peasantry is merely popular propaganda. Since the job of the state consists of subjugating us—since that is what we pay it to do and as quietly as it can—9/11 is precisely what was required of it at this critical juncture in history. So, again: prove that it failed to perform its function.

With convention stood on its head like this, you can see the difficulty that conspiracists and denialists have in communicating. It is not just about the facts. It is about what a person considers humanly possible. Philosophically, it is a metaphysical difference. This is usually unbridgeable.

Everyone experiences what I am talking about, but as part of a whole lifetime of conditioning in resignation (hospitals, TV, industrial food, school, the legal system) and at a low level where the causes are invisible. This is especially true due to the common preoccupation with survival. Few have the time, stomach, or resources to even consider events in these lights, let alone understand or do anything about them. We issue bitter little complaints as we accept it incrementally.

And then there is the successful propaganda campaign about our masters’ being too stupid and incompetent to pull off something like 9/11. It is an impressive conceit that we are smarter and more capable than people who coordinate transnational corporations, global wars, and mass media. Those who deny conspiracy have underwhelmed me with their snide ignorance of basic facts of the case. In my few brushes with the ruling class, even average members impressed me as sophisticated and whipsmart. Now they have accomplished the additional feat of convincing most of us they are otherwise.

For the benefit of both us and our tortured masters, I hope that my [work](#) can help bring an end to the madness I describe. Like most people, I believe that each of us, underneath the exhaustion, resignation, and damage, is still innocent at the core. I cannot believe that anyone really likes or is satisfied with what is happening. Surely we can find another way to be here together. But surely we cannot find it without first seeing things as they are, both in our souls and in our society.

Well, it was nice seeing you, again. Thanks for dinner.

Best regards, Andrew

## facebook page up

2011/11

I made a facebook page called [Darkness Conjecture](#). There you can read about the latest goings on, including current public talks in southern Sweden.

## illuminati it may concern

2011/11

Dear Illuminati,

My understanding is that there are two factions of your organization: both people who try to use their power and wealth to free humanity, and those who use it to enslave us.

To both groups within your vast network, I wish to say that I understand and accept that you are each sincerely trying to handle our collective mess the best way you know how. For a long time, I thought that you were my enemy, and hatred and sadness about your activities consumed me. But now, as a result of my long search for understanding, I am extending both forgiveness and the offer of a way to handle our situation differently.

Since this subject is your main interest, please read my [darkness conjecture](#). Then write me if you would like to help make this deep way of healing possible for yourselves. I could use your help, you could probably use a break, and working together would be a nice change from our previous isolation.

I have tried to see a way through our conflict that makes a place for **everyone** at the end, especially those of you that many in my position would wish to exclude (if not summarily execute). In my opinion, you are hurt by all this worst of all, and I believe the way I have found would serve you in an acceptable manner. I really believe there is place for all of us, even you.

Welcome.

Sincerely,  
Andrew Durham

## breakdown

2011/12

Something important started to change for me last week. I have been hiding my own need for darkness by trying to make it happen for others. I wrote these posts about it on my facebook page this week:

**Thursday:** Dear Family and Friends: I am very sick. For the first time, I feel that I am slipping, that I might not make it. Please help me realize the solution I found. Not because it could be a solution for you, too. But simply because you care about me. This is what I have been trying to say for three years. –Andrew.

**Friday:** [In response to 20 people:] I am relieved to hear from each one of you. I also got supportive emails.

What I need is help in arranging and paying for a long darkness retreat. It needs an empty, functional house and people to bring food and say hello to me each day. And I need to not return to the US, where I feel very unsafe, to do it. There are places to rent here and new friends who could help.

The thing is, my 25 years of studying the absolute depths of both my condition and the world's made me good at solving extremely complex problems, but not good at making money or simple arrangements like this. I cannot overstate how much shame and embarrassment I have felt about this. But I can state the truth about it.

Please do not let my articulateness fool you into thinking that I am ok. No matter what, it seems, I am able to talk.

**Sunday:** Thanks to everyone who wrote. My immediate problem is solved. Nearly undetectable poor air quality where I have been staying wore me down over the last month. I am making arrangements to move into a proper apartment tonight.

The wider issue of why I ended up in that situation in the first place is also getting addressed by rekindled support for the darkroom and other unforeseen means.

**Wednesday:** [in response to a local friend:] I'm basically okay now. Still edgy, but not as bad as yesterday. It was nice to be able to walk with you the other day. I had been slowly suffocating, and then I suddenly crashed. It felt like I'd been run over by a train.

**Thursday (today):** By the way, I never identified my sickness here.

Essentially, I view it as functional psychosis manifesting as a rigid dependence on my mind. This has numerous ill effects on my life, some of which some of you know all too well. For example, unconsciously setting myself up for periodic breakdowns like the one this weekend.

At 16, I had only a vague sense of my sickness. But it was strong, and it motivated my long search for the root cause of rapture: sanity. My discovery of darkness as an irreplaceable condition of psychological health ensued. This is why I have confidence only in darkness retreats as a means of healing from my sickness and why my wish to do one has finally found its way to the top of my priorities.

## typable e-paper breakthrough

2012/01

At my request, xda developer, verygreen, with support from ros87, has done in 24 hours for \$10 and a \$109 donated device what tens of companies could/would not do in four years with all their resources (like the \$500,000 one company told me it would cost).

Watch him type on the Nook Simple Touch on youtube: [Nook Simple Touch usb host support](#)

EDIT: for outline of installation instructions, see: [Installation Wiki](#) These are at noob-hacker level.

There are still some bugs, and the instructions are over my head at this point [EDIT: not anymore—see wiki link above]. But the basics are there now for people who know how to use them. Once the bugs are worked out, I plan to simplify the instructions for everyone's use. Maybe even offer microSD cards with everything pre-installed. [EDIT: this plan is off my agenda for the time being.]

Here we go.

## money without debt

2012/02

Hey, I just came across this excellent web-based credit clearing system: [Community Exchange System](#) [EDIT: I no longer dig this system. It's popular but messy.] CES\* is international, free, simple, compatible

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with paper systems, thorough, and cool. It's just about what the godfather of new money, Thomas Greco, calls for in *The End of Money and the Future of Civilization*, chapter 17.

Other worthy systems I've come across in the last couple days:

- [payswarm.com](http://payswarm.com) web technology-based, multiple-scenario payment system. Big vision.
- [opentransact.org](http://opentransact.org) similar goals as payswarm, different architecture
- [picomoney.com](http://picomoney.com) clever, based on opentransact
- [cyclos.org](http://cyclos.org) open source software to run your own bank, complete with free hosting; soul boggling!
- [villages.cc](http://villages.cc) is the best implementation of
- [ripplepay.com](http://ripplepay.com), a compelling solution to LETS accountability concerns.
- [e-flux.com/timebank](http://e-flux.com/timebank) hip and simple
- friendly [favors.org](http://favors.org) 2nd largest after CES, social, clever, but aging and a bit complicated
- [johnturnmel.com/uniset.htm](http://johnturnmel.com/uniset.htm) very simple, start alone now. Improved by showing account as a ledger using a [web-based spreadsheet](#)
- [JEU/GAME](#) paper system (compatible with CES), very elegant, semi-private, decentralized accounting, best for when the lights go out.

CES is (NOT\*) the most accessible, practical, and mature, though some of these systems, especially payswarm, have much greater potential. Open source money has finally gotten legs, wings... and teeth.

\*EDIT: I gave up on CES because of issues with its design and management. So I am exploring two other systems now: [Community Forge](#), based on Drupal Community Accounting/mutual credit module, and [Villages](#). It's Ripple base is better, but CF is much more developed. The insides of it look great so far. Open source, delegated authority and responsibility. Kind of a weak social network, but it is there.

Greco says a proper system needs:

1. a marketplace
2. a social network
3. a means of payment
4. a measure of value or pricing unit

Both have all four criteria. So it's a toss up for me. I hope Villages works out.

- [complementaire-economie.startpagina.nl](http://complementaire-economie.startpagina.nl) huge list of currencies, systems, and software, some defunct
- [Open Transactions](#) open source digital cash, transmittable through tons of media, needing no third-party record keeper.

Two cool sites about money ideas:

- [MetaCurrency](#)
- [Webisteme](#) inventor of [#PunkMoney](#), a twitter-based currency. fricking brilliant.

## dominant assurance with a twist

2012/02

I came up with a twist on [Dominant Assurance Contracts](#). Which is economist [Alex Tabarrok](#)'s game theoretical extension of the all-or-nothing Assurance Contract popularized by [Kickstarter](#). In an assurance contract, if pledges toward a financial goal are insufficient by the contract's deadline, then pledges remain uncollected. With dominant assurance, everyone who offered to contribute gets a **bonus**. "Thus contribution becomes the *dominant* strategy," says Dr Tabarrok.

My idea takes off from there.

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~/~

Dear Mr Tabarrok,

Thanks for your idea of the Dominant Assurance Contract. I thought of a way to extend it to further open up opportunities in investment and value creation, possibly making crowdfunding more interesting than gambling. Maybe your students have already come up with all this and more, but what the heck.

I call it the Open Dominant Assurance Contract. Basically, it allows supporters of a proposal to:

- help fund the bonus pot
- adjust their positions throughout the game.

Here are the rules:

1. The proposer:
  - sets the monetary goal and deadline
  - seeds the bonus pot, which counts toward the goal. (hmm: increasible? for how long?)
  - sets the maximum bonus rate between 0@@ and infinity in case of failure
  - sets the maximum profit rate in case of success
  - and can increase both these rates until the campaign's deadline
2. A supporter sets her bonus rate from -100@@ to infinity. She can increase her contribution and decrease her rate until the proposal's deadline.
3. In case of failure, the pot is divided amongst supporters in proportion to their contributions and according to their final bonus rates.
4. In case of success, a supporter with an average bonus rates of less than 0@@ is treated as an investor who can eventually profit from the proposal in proportion to her average rate (-bonus rate x maximum profit rate).
5. Supporters can make multiple contributions with different bonus rates.

Thus someone with an idea but little seed money could still create a Dominant Assurance Contract. Whole-hearted supporters (those with 0@@ rates). The higher the maximum bonus rate, the wilder the game gets. It could be a spectacle of brinkmanship between the whole-hearts and half-hearts more compelling than a good craps game. Half-hearts would help attract attention to the proposal initially. Whole-hearts would help continue to attract half-hearts as the deadline approached. Just as in [webisteme's #PunkMoney](#), participants could tweet changes in their positions, and a program could track variables, calculate totals, display graphs, and keep accounts in real time.

Examples

- Due to Rule 3, a sole supporter of \$1 with an infinite bonus rate toward a failed proposal with an infinite maximum bonus rate would win the entire pot.
  - A second such supporter of \$99 would take away 99@@ of the pot.
  - If the proposer set the maximum bonus rate to 10@@, then the first would only get back \$1.10 and the second \$108.90, regardless of pot size.
- Due to Rule 4, in a successful proposal with a 20@@ profit rate, a supporter whose bonus rate was -40@@ for 10 days and -80@@ for 10 days would have an average rate of -60@@, earning her 12@@ on her contribution (to be paid when the project actually profits).
- Due to Rule 5, a supporter can try playing the game all three ways: whole-hearted, half-hearted, and neutral (0@@, the same as in an Assurance Contract)

What do you think?

The game theory in your paper was stimulating but over my head. So I thought, How about letting the participants decide the variables? Coming up with it was fun and exciting.

Which is ironic because I came across your uber-cool dealio while looking for ways to finance my recovery from exhaustion-depression. (Take something worse than chronic fatigue syndrome but better

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than death and combine it with clinical depression. A real kick in the pants!) I have less-than-zero confidence in medicine or its common alternatives. So I spent 21 years looking for a way to deal with it before hitting upon darkness retreating. It's relatively cheap (\$2500), but money-making is not my strong suit. So thanks for the ideas and,

Cheers, Andrew Durham

~/~

EDIT: I removed this sentence from the third to last paragraph: "And I could not decide what to call this variant of DAC: Self-Funding, Autonomous, Automatic, Inclusive, Cooperative, or Viral DAC? DA Orgy?" I decided on "Cooperative". If you think of a better name, please let me know.

EDIT: I renamed the contract again to Open DAC and heavily edited the letter, including removing one extra-complicated rule about reimbursing the proposer.

EDIT: added bit about [#PunkMoney][5]

## tech communication

2012/02

Very off-topic note about how I have come to think of long periods of silence and repeated non-responses in text communication with computer technicians. When it happens I assume one of the following:

- the issue:
  - was addressed before
  - is so basic I should already know about it
  - is easy enough in their minds for me to work out on my own
- they don't know
- they would like to but can't
- they aren't interested
- the answer is no

As long as my message contained no interesting requests or instructions, why would they respond? It's like a logic circuit. Or, at least, my idea of one.

I have read forums. There is simply too much data to respond to. One must not suffer fools or welcome the cloying "friendship" of a zillion strangers.

It took me awhile, but I'd like to think I get it. Here's to the techs. I'm on your side. Thank you for making computers happen.

## poetry of rapture

2012/03

Here is a poem I read at age 17. It prefaces one of my favorite books, *Magical Child Matures* by Joseph Chilton Pearce. It took all this time to start seeing the meaning. If ever there were a poem of rapture, this is it.

~/~

# If I Could Only Live at the Pitch That is Near Madness

Richard Eberhart

If I could only live at the pitch that is near madness  
When everything is as it was in my childhood  
Violent, vivid, and of infinite possibility:  
That the sun and the moon broke over my head.

Then I cast time out of the trees and fields.  
Then I stood immaculate in the Ego;  
Then I eyed the world with all delight,  
Reality was the perfection of my sight.

And time has big handles on the hands,  
Fields and trees a way of being themselves.  
I saw battalions of the race of mankind  
Standing solid, demanding a moral answer.

I gave the moral answer and I died  
And into a realm of complexity came  
Where nothing is possible but necessity  
And the truth wailing there like a red babe.

## gift economy basics

2012/04

Here's a letter I just wrote an associate about the gift economy.

~/~

Dear...,

I have news about the gift economy that could blow your mind. It has blown mine, anyway. I'm hoping you've heard of David Graeber by now, the author of *Debt: The First 5000 Years*. If not, it is an amazing anthropological study of money. I haven't read it, just the basics online.

Here's the gist: the gift economy is **not** made up of people just giving things to each other without expectation of return. This is a completely mistaken notion spread by a few lucky people who somehow pull that nonsense off (or pretend to). The gift economy is simply letting people you know and trust have things of yours when they need them, with the mutual understanding that when you call on them, they'll do the same. You say, "You like it? Take it!" and understand, "You owe me one."

It is because this understanding among traditional people is unstated, deeply engrained, even *obscene* to verbalize that modern civilized observers didn't notice it and assumed theirs was the same as our system of unconditional gifts. Which, you'll notice, often has a strange charge of propriety around it, a stale remnant of our past decency.

So the gift economy consists of an endless series of:

1. delayed exchanges of
2. unequal values
3. according to customs of evolving complexity.

Some cultures actively discouraged equal exchanges to help people stay on good terms with each other. (Thanks to [Eli Gothill](#), aka [webisteme](#), creator of [#PunkMoney](#) for points 2 & 3.)

Graeber also exposes the barter system as a myth. There are no examples of it among established people. Spot trades of equal values are only found between:

1. strangers
2. people who have temporarily lost their currency system (and haven't developed a gift economy yet due to conditioning)

Graeber's more general discovery about money is that before there was gold or clams or whatever people are said to have used as money, people had mutual credit systems. For example, tally sticks. Money was a *unit of account*, not a commodity-based *medium of exchange*. These credit systems were just formalizations of the old gift economies. Commodity-based money like gold or wheat came much later. And it came by force, too, like our current central bank-issued monopoly monies.

I think what the mutual credit systems I have found are really good for is reorienting people to this way of seeing a local economy while maintaining the familiarity of accounting and limited debt exposure. Once a basic reorientation occurs, the system can become informal. In other words, not written down with arithmetic.

When I was learning a new diet that had me counting calories (to make sure I got *enough* of the right kinds), I got into it for a couple weeks, then I just knew. It was like a skill. Once acquired, there was no need to keep exact record anymore.

Here is the interview that finally got it through to me: [An Interview with Economic Anthropologist David Graeber](#)

I'm telling you because you and I have both struggled with money and with the gifting idea for a long time, and we ought to have a solution to it finally. I think we were basically right. We have been broke because we didn't really want to have anything to do with regular money. It's got blood all over it. It's a tool of enslavement. To hell with it. Better to eat out of dumpsters.

But in 24/7 unconditional gifting, we were offered a false alternative. Historically, it is bizarre. It is a purely civilized invention. We wage-slaves evolved it to get a break from the cold, even exchanges we have to make most of the time. The real gift economies kept people obliged to each other, preserving relationships and work—peace and prosperity at a reasonable level.

Like I said, the exemplars of the unconditional gifting lifestyle whom we have met are just lucky. It's not learnable. It's unnatural and unnecessary. It's a sham.

Hope this helps.

Best regards...

## new stuff

2012/04

A handful of new and changed things have appeared in the last months without announcement:

- Three new retreat reports under "four darkness retreats"
- Updates to "make darkness" and "retreat manual" based on my latest findings
- Categories for both posts and pages

More to come.

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# brainsdamaged

2012/04

Psychology is the study of the psyche, not just the mind. Thus mainstream psychology will continue failing to seriously help people as long as it considers health and illness “mental” rather than “psychic” in nature. The psyche—consciousness—is not just mental, but emotional and physical as well. Feeling and movement are not mere products of the intellect, but their own forms of intelligence.

Various spiritual traditions have posited this for ages. Gurdjieff, a Sufi, said, “Man is a three-brained being.” He called these brains, “centers of intelligence.” In addition to the thinking center of intelligence, there are the feeling and moving centers of intelligence. Some psychological schools recognize this triune intelligence as well.

A very useful and easy to learn typology\* is based on the three ways that psychically traumatized people unconsciously armor themselves. Some people live into their heads. Others retreat deep in their hearts. Others go with their guts. It’s right here in our language!

Robotic intellectuals. Sensitive, helpless artists. Dumb athletes/fighters/laborers. We are entertained by the limitations of each stereotype. Nonetheless, all are able to do amazing things with their minds, hearts, and bodies respectively. All excel differently with different forms of intelligence.

Large amounts of neural tissue have been found in the [heart](#) and the [alimentary canal](#). There is a physical basis for intuition and hunches.

Psychic trauma and illness must be seen not just in the mind, to be worked out in only an intellectual way. We must also find the illness in the heart and gut and the rest of the being these are only centers for. Trauma must be worked out in a whole way, by organic processes also involving feeling and movement, conditions and time. We have more than one brain, and they are damaged. We are brainsdamaged.

\*Da Free John (Adi Da Samraj) explains this typology in detail in *The Eating Gorilla Comes in Peace*. Gurdjieff makes many observations about tendencies of the three different types in Ouspensky’s *In Search of the Miraculous*.

# koloni

2012/04

The koloni is my great discovery about Sweden this year. There is nothing like it in the States, really. That you can legally live somewhere that costs as little as one month’s salary to OWN is beyond belief. It can be had for as little as 9000:KR (See [blocket.se](#). Here is a [recent one](#). The whole rent thing is such a ridiculous drag.

It is maybe the greatest thing I have heard of in an industrialized country in my whole life. While kolonis are often near loud roads, trains, and electrical stations, there are nice places, too. It’s actually how people should live: in small houses surrounded by gardens, other people who are basically there to relax, no cars, minimal fencing, compost toilets, little or no electricity.

Of course, as a way of life, it is a big secret, because Swedes seem conditioned to see kolonis as vacation/summer/second homes, not primary residences. Some places are fairly closed down in the winter, and some places are not legal to live in in the winter due to insufficient insulation. But there are others where no one cares if people stay all the time. Houses can be properly insulated. Rainwater can be harvested. Power can be had from the sun and wind. Composting toilets are practically free to build.

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Again, I can't believe this is right under peoples' noses, and the government allows it. You pay 500-1500 yearly fees for basic services, keep your garden nice, your noise level down, and you're in. One could grow a tall hedge over time, I think, for pleasant privacy. It is instant freedom from the slavery of school/work/rent/distraction.

There are deals like this everywhere in the third world, of course. But, boy. What a miracle to find it in the first. It makes me think of developing a whole koloni with curved paths, round stugas, permaculture, etc. It would be a real village over time, with its own economy, etc.

Hmm. Except when the children are 6, they are all confiscated by the state for brainwashing and family destruction. Bummer.

## tao versus moralism

2012/05

### tao te ching, chapter 38

The Master doesn't try to be powerful;  
thus he is truly powerful.  
The ordinary man keeps reaching for power;  
thus he never has enough.

The Master does nothing,  
yet he leaves nothing undone.  
The ordinary man is always doing things,  
yet many more are left to be done.

The kind man does something,  
yet something remains undone.  
The just man does something,  
and leaves many things to be done.  
The moral man does something,  
and when no one responds  
he rolls up his sleeves and uses force.

*When the Tao is lost, there is goodness.  
When goodness is lost, there is morality.  
When morality is lost, there is ritual.  
Ritual is the husk of true faith,  
the beginning of chaos.*

Therefore the Master concerns himself  
with the depths and not the surface,  
with the fruit and not the flower.  
He has no will of his own.  
He dwells in reality,  
and lets all illusions go.

[emphasis added]

## genius and the stupidity problem

2012/07

One of my purposes with a solution to inordinate suffering is to solve "The Stupidity Problem". Stupidity results from psychic malfunction due to major psychic trauma. Healing from this will automatically restore natural human genius. Everyone has genius. It is yet another casualty of the stupidity-inducing process of becoming civilized through routine brutality and casual violence. But I have occasionally glimpsed genius in myself and others. It is yet another of the gems to be recovered upon recovering full health, full sanity, full consciousness.

I am going to be a genius again. I am clearing the way for billions of people be geniuses again. We are going to live forever do the same for the people of a billion other planets suffering the same psychotic stupidity as we do here. We will extinguish this age of darkness... with darkness.

"Everyone is born a genius, but the process of living de-geniuses them."  
-Richard Buckminster Fuller

## john zerzan

2012/07

John Zerzan was my neighbor in Eugene, Oregon. I got to know him through a long-lost friend who happened to help edit Green Anarchy Magazine with John. It was a great honor to meet him. John even critiqued one of my earlier writings, [Sociality Undenied](#). But until now, I had not absorbed his basic ideas from books, only gotten a shallow grasp of his thesis from his articles and conversation.

[\\_Running on Emptiness: The Pathology of Civilization\\_](#) is the most intellectually exciting thing I have read in a long time. I knew that suffering, technology, hierarchy were the inventions of civilization. But I did not know time, language, art, and culture itself were, too.

This goes beyond Daniel Quinn's critique of civilization. Quinn's and Zerzan's prescriptions overlap in some ways, differ in others.

Also I find it amazing to read a 60 year-old's crying out against the inhumanity of our society with such vehemence as John's. It's such a relief from feeling alone in my own protestations. Highly recommended.

## new retreat center in works

2012/10

My new business partner and I are building a new darkroom in Central Sweden. Will be open to the public when it is ready. Lots of cool things in the works. More news when we have it!

## guatemalan darkroom under new ownership

2012/10

Arjuna Thilo has taken over the darkroom I built in Guatemala. Ajna, the woman I sold it to, passed it on to him a few months ago. I never met Arjuna in person, but our communication has been good and he has built a serious website in support of the darkroom. Check it out!

[Dark-Retreats.com](#)

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## post-retreat protocol

2012/12

I've learned something really important this year about retreats, which is that for every 2-3 days spent inside, one day of identical conditions (except for being in light during the daytime) is necessary afterward to readjust to light and regular consciousness and to absorb the value of the retreat.

This takes a serious plan. The natural impulse is to blow off all the energy gained in the retreat. This can cause as much harm as the retreat did you good. The organism simply needs time to adjust. The parallel with an old saying about fasting is exact: "Any fool can fast. It takes a wise person to break a fast properly."

So if you are going to do a six-day retreat, then schedule two more days at the darkroom so you can continue resting in darkness while spending more and more time in daylight. If it is too late or too expensive to schedule this time at the darkroom, then arrange a private, quiet place to go directly afterward where distractions and stimulation can be minimized. Maintain the same diet of fruits and green leaf vegies. No electronics, no visitors or media.

Time in darkness greatly enriches one's inner life. Relishing it when it is so ripe is one of the points of setting this time aside. After this transition period, move as slowly back into your regular life as possible. Avoid annoyance. Take care to sleep. Take care of yourself.

## swedish darkroom nearly ready

2012/12

The darkroom we have been building in Skattungbyn, Sweden is nearly ready. We are putting the finishing touches on the nifty [fiwihex](#) ventilation system today and will test it before the weekend is out. We will test and refine it with local supporters in January and open it to the public in February. You can see a calendar for it on the [register](#) page.

## human exceptionalism

2013/02

This meme is the essence of the Dilemma. It is the idea to be exposed, invalidated, replaced, buried.

## darkness talk 2011

2013/03

[Using Darkness to Heal from Civilized Psychosis](#), talk I gave in 2011 in Helsingborg. I liked how it went.

## books

2013/04

I am working on a book now. It will contain all the articles about darkness here, all my retreat reports, and

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several blog posts that elaborate on theory and history of the conjecture. Once the book is published, I will start giving more talks.

## first client

2013/04

Our first client had a good retreat last week and our second client will exit the darkroom tomorrow. Sign up for your retreat now on the [register](#) page.

## laws of life

2013/04

Check out Herbert Shelton's cogent discussion of the [Laws of Life](#) as formulated in Natural Hygiene.

## the darkness hypothesis

2013/04

For four years, I have been trying to do a 14-day retreat. I thought short retreats were of little value, that a long retreat was the only action that mattered. But a room good for 14-day retreats is harder to set up than one for 4- or 8-day retreats. In my dysfunction, it was too big a leap for me, like trying to jump across a wide river. In my [last retreat](#), I discovered my first stepping stone.

With this retreat, the conjecture has become a hypothesis for me. The principal obstacle to human function and happiness is obviously psychic trauma, and dark retreating really works in healing from it. I'm not out of the woods yet, but this is definitely a clearing.

This book closes the first phase of practical effort that began four years ago Christmas morning. Once it is published, I will tour with it to generate more interest in dark retreating as well as more income and stability for myself. Then a longer retreat will become possible.

For the second phase, we will make a documentary about my investigation, focusing on my discovery of darkness. It will climax with the 14-day retreat and show the aftermath.

In its theme of reckless uncompromise, it will echo the story of another extreme seeker, Christopher McCandless (of *Into the Wild*). He also wanted to find a way to break out of our sick conditioning and live a real human life. I want to show what becomes of such a person who lives to share his findings.

## static site generator

2013/05

Soon I will migrate this site to a new content management system based on a static site generator. Generators are clients (like [jekyll](#)), hosted, or self-hosted (like [blosxom](#) and [stacey](#)). I'm most interested in hosted generators that use [dropbox](#) and [github](#) and usually [markdown](#). Here are the ones I have found so far:

[calepin.com](#) (closed) [droppages.com](#) [scriptogr.am](#) [site44.com](#) [paperplane.io](#) [telegr.am](#) [markbox.io](#)  
[droplets.com](#) [kissr.com](#)

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I'll add to this list as I find more.

## retreat reports moved

2013/05

All my retreat reports are now blog posts, arranged chronologically in their own category, report.

EDIT: this has changed again. [Reports](#) are now a main menu item.

## how not to retreat

2013/05

Retreating for less than 56 hours seems to be a really bad idea. [EDIT: glad to be wrong about this! See UPDATE below]

Three times in the last half-year, I have done mini dark retreats: once for 36 hours, twice for 16 hours. It just meant going to bed as usual then sleeping *way* in: waking up and going back to sleep several times, maybe all day and another night.

Rather than being lifted over a chasm, enabling further forward motion (as in 56 hours of darkness), a mini-retreat is like being lifted out of the dumps to a great height (nice), then dropped (not nice). I did not do this on purpose. It just happened in moments of crisis and extreme exhaustion. I needed rest but I was unprepared for a proper retreat. Unfortunately, this almost killed me.

A mini-retreat does not give enough time for the organism to adjust to being so re-energized, deal with underlying issues, or reset ones internal clock. Its like darkness turned into a drug.

At first it seemed promising. I went in super depressed and came out feeling like superman. So energized, I would lose track of time more easily than usual, stay up all night, go to bed feeling like crap and wake up feeling like supercrap. My poor sleeping habits were not neutralized in 16 hours, as in a regular retreat. They were accentuated. This excited my suicidal tendencies. I would not be surprised if people with good sleeping habits got thrown off them by this surge of energy.

For me, the point of a retreat is that it requires virtually no effort, and at the end, some things are made right in a permanent way, or at least fade out slowly. To do a retreat in a way that requires extra discipline afterward is stupid.

The only way it might work is if a person can go to bed on time despite having so recently awakened and with so much energy. But I still suspect something bad could happen. Ego-inflation at least. Like when people fast for psychological or spiritual reasons.

Myself, I have enough difficulty getting to bed without the promise of disaster if I dont. Normally, if I stay up late, I just get more exhaustion. Staying up after a mini-retreat led to serious vital and emotional crashes all three times I did it.

The last couple weeks, I have felt strangely paralyzed. I knew I was in trouble. But for once, I could not ask for help. I couldnt figure out what was going on. Now I think my winter and spring has been extra weird for this reason.

My shocking break-up in the fall from a girlfriend, set me up for all this. But the two mini-retreats I did afterward crystallized this pattern of emotional implosion. Since then, I have been especially imbalanced. A third one a few weeks ago revealed the pattern to me. I had wandered into the dark side of darkness! After watching me wander like a zombie in oblivion all winter, no wonder my fellow villagers are so

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hesitant about doing a retreat.

I was thinking of offering this kind of retreat as an introduction to darkness. It proved a *failure point test*: finessing a design to the point of collapse to find its absolute minimum requirements. A mini-retreat simply does not meet them.

**UPDATE:** I found a way to do a mini-retreat safely. The above dire description should just be taken as a warning against starting and ending a mini-retreat *late*. Starting and ending early is the key.

Go to bed in total darkness early: by 20:00 at the absolute latest. You might sleep the whole night if you are really tired. But if you wake up in the middle of the night as I usually do, don't turn the light on. As in a longer retreat, you can hang out, meditate, exercise, eat a bit of fruit, or take a shower. But stay in darkness. Return to bed after an hour or two and sleep. In the morning, uncover the windows by 10:00 (set an alarm) and have a regular day.

A mini-retreat is not as impressive as regular ones. But it is safe, it feels really good, and it accustoms one to total darkness without disrupting one's schedule.

It is actually just a slight modification of a normal night's rest, in which one goes to bed early, wakes up in the wee hours for a bit, then sleeps again. That was common until artificial light came a hundred years ago. We haven't adapted to sleeping the night through. We have just accommodated with chronic exhaustion.

## revisions, book

2013/08

I am working with professional writers to edit the darkness conjecture in preparation for publishing a proper book based on it. Several of the articles have changed significantly. Rapture and hygiene are extended. The retreat manual is now divided into design and protocol, and make was divided into format and design. All of these are better organized. More changes to come. These will include a re-organization of the articles into sections and a migration away from WordPress.

## peep

2015/03

I haven't made a peep here in almost two years. But not for lack of activity on my part. I released a new version of my book in early 2014. I discovered a flaw in my vent and started working on it, never dreaming it would take this long to fix, going through two versions and 20 iterations. I built several private darkrooms in the process and just released a new edition of my book that reflects some of my new designs and thinking about retreating. The main change, small but important, is reflected in the format chapter, summarized in the first paragraphs there.

## 2016 overhaul

2016/05

After two years of work, the new edition of my book, *darkroom retreat: deep rest for the self-healing psyche*, is finally done, fancy computer drawings, theoretical breakthroughs, and all. Get it now at [leanpub](#) for free or pay what you like. Or just read it [here as webpages](#). Leanpub keeps your name and contact info private, even from me, while enabling me to automatically send you free updates to the book.

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This edition started when Simen Kirkerød, a friend and supporter in Norway, sent me a shocking message that the lightproof vent I'd just made for him leaked light like crazy. It turned out he was right, and that my design was rather stupid. I was appalled. The simple hand-drawings in my book were possibly misleading billions of people all over the world trying to darken their rooms! The situation would not stand.

I had added the drawings to my book almost as an afterthought. I sketched them in an hour or two, and it seemed so simple that idyllic night in Karlstad, Sweden. Dozens of prototypes and a year later, I actually came up with a functional vent that is as small as possible while being relatively easy to make.

About the same time, I got new ideas for other components. I learned to draw everything on a computer and things got out of hand. Now you can see all 19(!) drawings and several photos in the [make](#) chapter.

I also made a couple theoretical breakthroughs regarding hygiene:

- formulation of the Law of Vital Capacity, which explains the beneficial mechanism lurking behind self-sabotage (and virtually everything else in life that goes sideways). See [hygiene/capacity](#)
- darkroom retreating's greater importance than fasting. This includes how darkroom retreating will make long, self-managed (unsupervised) fasts possible for the masses. This fulfills hygiene's radical promise of perfect health for the people and, along with my previous discovery of trauma at the heart of all disease, helps prepare hygiene to finally overcome medicine's stranglehold on healthcare. See [hygiene/psychology](#).

So much happened in the last two years, it will be difficult to catch up. But in the coming weeks and months, I will renew my [blog](#) and share some of my thoughts from this period. Some of them I already posted on facebook (where I tend to restrain myself more than I like sometimes). Many of them are still text files on my computer.

Many thanks (again!) to Daniel Reed and Heidi Sheryl Ewen in Sweden; Ketil Berg, Terje Tjensvoll, Bård Anders Lien, Benjamin Astrit Wold, Erlend Hårstad, Curare Austad, Magnus Vanebo, Bertrand Besigye in Norway; and Ségolène Lefébure, Marie Richter, and Virginie Bournaud in Paris for indispensable help since 2014 in completing this task. Special thanks to Sasha Day for heroic help with relevant personal matters, Nancy Gayle for cheerleading, and Mercedes Amapola Vlachou and Marion Abbott for recent enthusiastic help in preparing the text. Please forgive me if I left your name out of this list.

Everyone, please let me know what you think of this new edition and what you need. Cheers!

## new title

2017/09

I changed the name of the site and book. As darkroom retreating is growing a lot, I find it increasingly necessary to differentiate the hygienic from the usual spiritual, therapeutic, and psychedelic approaches. "Deep rest" unfortunately sounds like depressed, and other hygienists use the phrase, "profound rest", so I changed that, too. The essence of the book remains the same, or more so. I have new sections planned and will write them as soon as I am capable. Cheers.

## 2017 september update

2017/09

In 2016 June, I gave up on overwork as the means to arrange the conditions of profound rest for myself. With the help of Marion Abbott, a great new friend and fellow darkness seeker, I made a successful crowdfunding campaign to raise the money I needed to finally retreat for 20 days.

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For the first days, I was euphoric. Finally, the way was cleared for me to retreat. Or so I thought.

In four months, with \$2800, I only arranged a rushed 5-day retreat. My incapacity was heartbreaking and unbelievably strange. The ability I had counted on to accomplish the retreat vanished upon acquiring the means to do so. The incapacity persists and intensifies to this day. In February, I arrived at an explanation: the automatic loss of [false capacity](#) upon recovery of original capacity. This has helped me remain calm about my hastening debilitation.

I continued trying to arrange a retreat while struggling to keep a roof over my head as usual. I found a workshop to prefabricate a new portable building in. I met several people interested in participating and supporting it somehow. But my living situation constantly interfered with my efforts.

Finally I realized what everyone who knows me must know: my biggest and most immediate problem is my homelessness. I shifted my focus from arranging a retreat to making a home for myself. With a home, I could do the retreat and the hundred other things I need to do and which constantly plague my efforts to retreat. My darkroom building project became my home building project. Everything started falling into place. For several hours one day, I felt [rapture](#) for the first time since it overcame me as a teenager.

The house will be a hexayurt of massive materials for warmth and sound insulation, yet still portable. It will be full-size: 4.8m inside diameter, corner to corner, and 1.8m high walls and a 3m peak. Since a darkroom is just a proper shelter, and so easily darkenable, the whole building will meet my specifications in [design](#). I have built one-third of the floor. Photos soon.

About the same time (June), my meager cryptocurrency investments of the previous 18 months matured. Suddenly I had enough to build and feed myself.

The whole time I wondered what the hell had happened to me this year. Besides my strange incapacity, I felt like I had a target painted on me. I encountered several personality-disordered people in the past 18 months and one genuine psychopath this spring, perhaps the most evil person I have ever met. It nearly did me in.

I got away from him in time. I was offered a two-month housesitting job in a run-down yurt I didn't have to do much for. I had it to myself and began to recover. One day, I felt a primal power begin to stir in myself. It is the power to live, to survive, to run or fight, to maintain one's place in the world in the face of challenges, to take care of oneself, to be satisfied in oneself. Money represents it. It is fundamental to sexual power, which I had explored and [reported](#) on in recent years. The power to live had been largely decimated in me as a child, as much or more than my sexuality. But here it was. It felt clear though very faint.

Though I have more money (on paper) than I ever had at once in my life, my capacity for money and for the power it represents remain quite limited by ordinary standards. I pray it is enough to get me into darkness for 20 days. We will see.

Meanwhile, a new reader contacted me and offered to edit my book. She did it in June. We corrected lots of typos, spelling and grammatical errors. I also cleaned up the appearance of the book's text by replacing footnotes with underlined words that are links in the PDF or online. The new version is up at [leanpub](#).

It also includes three crucial new designs: a [silencer](#), [fan mount](#), and [instant sleeping mask](#). I believe these complete the basic suite of components everyone needs to make a proper darkroom and endure till it is ready to retreat in.

Ok, till next time.

## the darkness conjecture

# a strifeless recovery of rapture

Experiences, ideas, and implications of hygienic darkroom retreating.

- Intro
  - [conjecture](#)
  - [basics](#)
- Health
  - [rapture](#)
  - [hygiene notes](#)
  - [dreamtime](#)
- Disease
  - [psychosis](#)
  - [catastrophe](#)
  - [strifeless](#)
- Healing
  - see [darkroom retreat](#)

## the conjecture

Rapture, the natural human condition, turns to suffering in a catastrophically injured psyche, which, as an organic system, will heal itself with vital energy accumulated in the profound rest available in an absolutely dark environment.

## basics

I will briefly explain the title, subtitle, and thesis of this part of the book in terms of theory. This site's [primary content](#) is the practical part. Further notes introduce the rest of the essays.

## terminology

**darkness:** physical darkness

**conjecture:** a conclusion or supposition based on incomplete information

**strife:** conflicted effort

**rapture:** quiet, joyful communion with Universe; normally characterizes all human experience

**suffering:** spiritual, mental, emotional, physical, social, and ecological distress; human suffering and its attendant problems

**catastrophically injured psyche:** a consciousness deeply traumatized by the routine brutality of civilization: medical birth, attachment failure, social isolation, neglect and abuse, TV and computers, factory food, day care, school, and job/war/hospital/prison

**psyche...will heal itself:** consciousness will fully recover, not just cope.

**profound rest:** hard to believe till you've experienced it!

## argument

The conjecture is essentially a logical argument, each point of which everyone knows or can discover for herself:

1. Rapture is the natural human condition.
2. The human condition seems to turn to suffering due to catastrophic injury to the psyche.

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3. The psyche is a system of an organism.
4. Organisms are self-healing.
5. Healing requires vital energy.
6. Vital energy accumulates during rest.
7. Ideal psychic rest occurs in absolute darkness.
8. Therefore, dark retreating is a way to restore rapture.

## the darkness conjecture - original

The conjecture's wording used to be different. The original wording influences most of the essays that follow, so I am including it here:

1. Civilized people suffer inordinately from meaninglessness, confusion, self-hatred, disease, sociopathy, and ecocide.
2. These conditions result from *impaired consciousness*, one traumatized into a round-the-clock fixation on gross reality and a denial of subtle reality (dreamtime).
3. This pathological fixation is a defensive posture against further gross injuries which civilization routinely inflicts on its members.
4. Consciousness, as a biological faculty, will heal from these injuries given the proper conditions, primarily *rest*.
5. Sustained total darkness leads to radically altered brain chemistry, inducing deep rest long enough to enable consciousness to permanently heal.
6. Healed consciousness clears the way back to a full life, dispelling our [suffering](#) and [absurd problems](#).

I increasingly found this version convoluted. When I finally read *The Science and Fine Art of Natural Hygiene* by Herbert Shelton, I grasped the crucial role in health of vital energy. It integrated the points of the conjecture and is central to its present formulation.

## further notes

The *application* of the darkness conjecture lies in doing darkness retreats of increasing length, alternated with periods of radical change in lifeway until vitality is completely restored. Retreating alone will not solve all our problems. As we say in *Natural Hygiene*, "Health comes from healthful living."

I believe the darkness conjecture is true because, in my dark retreats and those of 20 clients, I have repeatedly witnessed: relief from existential suffering; healing of psychic dysfunction; habit-changing insights; long- lasting periods of well-being; and occasional rapture.

Dark retreating satisfies my ultra-snobbish *design constraints* for any such process: that it be simple, quick, cheap, pleasant, reasonable, scalable, and radical. The truth is free (as in speech and beer). Plain and direct like nature, it makes sense immediately. All else is humbug. It gives results in geometrical proportion to efforts. It is fun, easy, and adaptable. It enables people to get to the very bottom of things individually and collectively.

Regarding lifeway change: if the insanity and unworkability of our way of life are not yet obvious to you, dark retreating will change that. Consider yourself warned. In the meantime, note that when I talk about denial, I do not mean it moralistically, as if you're doing something wrong. Denial is simply a result of trauma, a symptom of psychosis. As you heal, you will become able to face the horror of our situation.

Similarly, you may feel that I exaggerate the potential of the self-healing psyche in darkness. I believe I describe it accurately and invite you to find out for yourself by dark retreating the way I recommend.

If our lifeway's insanity is obvious to you, yet you find yourself strangely unable to break free of it, take

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heart. The chains that bind you are wholly internal, and you will gradually discover them in darkness. The restoration of psychic integrity is the master key to a new way of life. We will still have to open the door and walk through, but we can stop trying to pick the lock.

## rapture

On Christmas morning, 2008, I solved the mystery I had investigated for over 20 years: Why did a state of rapture arise in me when I was 15 for three months solid, only to fade away?

At 15, I felt depressed, alienated, and hypercritical of everything around me. The year before, my dog and two grandparents had died, my parents had split up and were each unstable, and my all-important older brother had left for college. I did have a good friend and a world-class musical mentor. I struggled to keep my head above water in the soul-devouring world of American high school.

One day I was watching a video of a third-rate spiritual teacher. My dad played it everyday to escape his pain. When the teacher said something banal about just needing to love oneself and be happy, what happened to my negativity was like when Luke Skywalker's photon torpedo hit the core of the Death Star.

Within a few minutes, I had gotten up from my chair and gone outside into gusting spring wind. The clouds swirled and the trees towered over the neighborhood. Scraps of warmth swept past me. Suddenly I could *see* the beauty of the world. I rushed upwind in the street, gulping it all in, transported.

Everything else paled before rapture. It was a quiet, intoxicating communion with the universe. It was not ecstasy, not a peak experience, but one of *surfacing*. Not drowning anymore, I could breathe and see again. Restored to my place in the air, I felt oriented. Rapture felt natural and ordinary; the disruption that preceded it, aberrant. It was, finally, an experience of the normal.

I felt sublime. I thought, *this* is how life is. Lying on the grass between classes, I would run my hand lightly over the blades in awe; watch them wave exquisitely in the wind; feel cool, delicious air fall down my throat in slow motion; and say it over and over: life is sublime.

Rapture persisted no matter what was happening around me or what I did. It was clearly how life is supposed to be all the time.

So it made no sense when it began to fade. I tried to hold onto it, but it had not come of my efforts, so it would not stay due to them, either. All that was left to me was to find out what had happened. It took 21 years to understand it.

In a word, I had gone into *remission*. The intense biological activity of adolescence had partially restored the integrity of my consciousness. It was impaired by the trauma of our brutal way of life. For the first time since age five, I became especially aware of the perfection, beauty, and harmony of the universe. This naturally induced rapture in me.

However, once I had a biological foothold in adulthood, I *relapsed*. Vital energy levels decreased; my unstable consciousness refractured; my fearful and defensive habits of personality reasserted themselves; and my elevated perspective faded, taking rapture with it.

The experience flattened everything else I was involved in. I had a future in music. I couldn't care less. I wanted to be enraptured again. I made a resolution: "There is a way; I will find it." I started looking closely at other people. I was not the only one with whom this had happened. I became very interested in philosophy.

Until now, I could never explain what had happened to alter my course so drastically. So most of my family remain bewildered about me and all I gave up on. It saddens me. But I needed an answer, and few had more than a piece of it. Like the popular psychologist who named my feeling, [Leo Buscaglia](#).

When the explanation of remission arrived, I had already retreated in darkness. And I had been trained



from birth in the design perspective. This means seeking universal solutions to particular problems based on close observation of ordinary constraints. So my solution came full blown with these corollaries:

1. If a slight increase in vital energy from adolescence had caused a temporary, partial restoration of my psychic integrity, a massive increase from resting in darkness could cause a permanent and complete restoration.
2. The influence of someone with psychic integrity is so great that, even narrowly applied, this would rapidly bring an end to human suffering and resurrect the casualties of our mass psychosis: meaning, wisdom, love, health, conviviality, and ecological harmony.

In that instant, I knew my search was over. One burning question pursued obsessively had finally yielded something worth trying. The theoretical phase of my work was finished, and the practical phase had begun.

## hygiene notes

*Note: this is a early version of [hygiene](#) from the book. So some of the text is the same. But there is much more here about Natural Hygiene and other approaches.*

Natural Hygiene's principles enable us to understand how a darkroom retreat works, what part we play in it, and how it relates to our health in general. Natural Hygiene also provides an approach to darkness distinct from the spiritual and conventional scientific approaches often associated with it.

Inherently Hygienic, the restful use of darkness fits neatly into Natural Hygiene's comprehensive framework. In return, darkness provides Hygiene, nearly perfect in its care of the physique, an equally effective way to understand and care for the psyche. Further, it refounds Hygienic pathology on the deeper basis of trauma, with far reaching implications for Hygiene's place in the world.

This is a lot to discuss in one article. Let's get going.

## darkness

Human beings are diurnal creatures, normally awake in daytime and asleep at night. This cycle is critical to psychic function. Modern life replaces the natural extremes of sun and stars with the relentless grey of artificial light and sunglasses; natural sleeping patterns with graveyard shifts and afterparties. This, along with a hundred other offenses, has pushed severe psychosis to epidemic proportions.

The stress of ordinary functioning now requires hundreds of millions of people to consume psychoactive drugs. Few caught in this vicious circle want medication, and wonder helplessly how things can possibly change. While many factors contribute to psychosis, Hygienic darkroom retreating provides an opening: a simple way to begin reversing them all at once. First it brings harmlessly to a halt, then provides the being a chance to recover from them. Darkness thus exposes the Achilles heel of the system that causes mass psychosis.

Darkness, like light, is a normal condition of life. As tropical creatures, we should enjoy an average of 10 hours of it a day. We must ensure we receive nature's provision of darkness everyday and, in crisis, provide ourselves with an extended period of it. Darkroom retreating is to the soul what fasting is to the body: massive relief from constant processing of input, and time in which to renew itself.

## hygiene

## background

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Hygiene is from the Greek, *hygieia*, meaning health. Hygieia is also the Greek goddess of health, who cared for the well-being of the body and the soul.

In English, hygiene means a condition or practice conducive to the preservation of health. In common usage, hygiene means vigilant cleanliness and the use of safety equipment in protection against from a hostile world. By contrast, Natural Hygiene full expresses hygiene's meaning in harmony with a benevolent world.

Observing in nature the healthiness of life, Natural Hygiene identifies the conditions of health with all normal conditions of life (water, air, food, sunlight, rest, exercise, companionship, etc). It recognizes the organism's omnipotence in both preserving and healing itself when provided these conditions in proportion to necessity.

Natural Hygiene is based on "Life's Great Law:" that there *is* life, that life *lives*, meaning it is inherently self-generating, self-preserving, and self-healing in every respect, at every scale, from the cells to the organism as a whole. This implies that: only the organism performs vital action, including healing; and the power employed to perform this action resides with the organism, not anything external to it.

Thus, no drug, herb, or food; no practice, treatment, person, or device heals. All attempts to do so further damage the body's ability and drain its energy to heal itself, whatever benefit might appear in the short term. Whether well or ill, one's conscious role is to discover and provide the normal conditions of life in the proper proportion. The autonomic (involuntary) processes of the organism handle the rest.

Herbert Shelton, the great systematizer of Natural Hygiene, described its practice as, "the employment of materials, agents, and influences that have a normal relationship to life, in the preservation and restoration of health according to well-defined laws and demonstrated principles of nature."

A drug, for example, is toxic by definition. An organism does not relate with toxins but expels them. Fasting, by contrast, is an instinctual extension when ill of the time between meals. It is normal. It allows the body to rest from most metabolic processes and heal: to repair tissues, eliminate deeply stored waste, and replenish itself to the farthest reaches of every cell with nutrients and energy. So fasting is a part of Natural Hygiene. It has been the ace up Hygiene's sleeve, enabling routine recovery from every known physical illness. But it is extremely difficult to pursue a fast

## reform

It feels strange and sad to say that Natural Hygiene is America's most influential school of health and healing, going back 180 years, because hardly anyone knows about it. 1980s bestseller *Fit For Life* by Harvey and Marilyn Diamond was the last major sign of its existence.

However, everyone has heard of the benefits of exercise, getting enough sleep, fasting, washing after using the toilet, and the dangers of impure food, stale air, and unnecessary medicine. Other nature-based traditions knew of these things, but none of them communicated them to the modern world until Natural Hygiene. Health reformers like Florence Nightingale, founder of nursing, and Sylvester Graham, the namesake of Graham flour, set the world on fire with their logic and simple, pleasant, effective recommendations.

So why did it fade?

One trouble is that Natural Hygiene is so effective it embarrasses medicine. So Hygienic practitioners quickly find themselves on the American Medical Association's legal hitlist. With few exceptions, they either get jailed, ruined, quit, or leave America. This has been the case for over 100 years. I know of two cases first-hand and stories of others are available publicly.

Before targeting non-medical physicians of all kinds, the AMA first gained legal privilege for doctors and propagandized the public. In a lull of Hygienic activity caused by the Civil War; the economic crash a decade later; and the death of its foremost exponent, Russell Trall; allopathy laid claim to Hygiene's

widely-accepted teachings—and the massive improvements to public health that resulted. The rest of the teachings, it smeared.

For an unmatched introduction to the basic ideas of Natural Hygiene, including its history, read *The Science and Fine Art of Natural Hygiene* by Herbert Shelton. For a radical critique of medicine as nothing more than modernized exorcism, see his book, *Rubies in the Sand*.

As formidable an opponent as the AMA is, one's greatest foe is always oneself. So I have two innovations for Natural Hygiene and one prediction. I am not proposing or suggesting them, because there is no central authority in Natural Hygiene, only nature and reason. So I am just making them, expecting that over time, actively-minded Hygienists will see their logic and value.

## natural psychology

Shelton wrote, "The conscious functions of the body serve primarily to protect and provide the needs of the subconscious functions. If we listen to the demands of the subconscious for food, water, air, rest, sleep, activity, warmth, etc, and provide these as demanded, we have fulfilled our conscious function." *The Science and Fine Art of Natural Hygiene*, p139

The trouble is that the "conscious functions of the body", ie, the psyche, itself has demands and is vulnerable to injury. Being self-conscious, human consciousness has the capacity to meet these demands and care for injury. Which is the point of psychology. And without one, Natural Hygiene has been crippled as a system of health.

In place of psychology, Natural Hygiene substitutes typical 19th century moralizing. Given its origins, timing, and history, it could not have done otherwise. But it's time to get with the times and stop ignoring modern psychology's staggering contributions to understanding human health. Sick people do not need to be dismissed or told they are lazy, ie, bad. At some point, that's all Hygiene can do with some of us. It's discouraging and embarrassing.

Darkroom retreating, as the application of a genuinely Hygienic psychology, represents a major contribution to Natural Hygienic theory and practice. Just as Hygienic fasting supports physical healing, Hygienic darkroom retreating supports psychic healing. People have souls as well as bodies. Hygiene now has a way to help people care for both with elegance and grace.

## radicalized pathology

Though vastly superior to allopathic pathology, Hygienic pathology has remained limited and repressive. In a complex formulation, it attributes illness to the twin causes of enervation (low vital energy) and toxemia (excess latent toxins). These, it has said, are brought about by poor habits. But Hygiene has not been able explain how the healthy creatures we had to have been at some point ever acquired poor habits. Nor why people persist in them even after agreeing they are unhealthy. Hygiene, dependent on often weak wills, has been reduced to grandiosity and moralizing.

The identification of the self-healing psyche implies that trauma causes enervation and toxemia. Malfunction begins with trauma by definition. Trauma necessitates immediate vital accommodation. Psychic trauma, typically repetitive, finally disables the psyche from recovery and entrains it to persist in these unintentionally acquired habits.

With trauma at the base of its pathology, Hygiene is now free to address it. This will gradually eliminate most trauma from human experience because people will no longer be unconsciously compelled to recapitulate it. This frees Hygiene from the strange regard for and dependence upon surgery inherited from its *ex-doctor*-founders (ahem).

## prediction

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Surgery being allopathy's only remotely legitimate activity, a trauma-based pathology renders allopathy (Western medicine) useless in principle and eventually in fact. Allopathy has only dominated health care because of its willingness to relate to trauma, however fiendishly, and its mythical power to treat. As the recurring cause of all our woes, trauma is necessarily the fixation of everyone in this lifeway. It makes the frightened allegiance to allopathy seem like wisdom. As Natural Hygiene demonstrates the baselessness of this fearful motive, public health will improve even more than it did in the 1800s. Then Natural Hygiene will be permanently elevated to pre-eminence in health care.

After awhile, Hygiene itself will be forgotten because people will simply know how to live. Hygiene will be so integral to the new lifeway, there will be nothing to distinguish it from.

As Lao Tzu said, "The Tao that can be spoken is not the eternal Tao." So much for the curse of human suffering.

## management

Though I had been exposed to its basic ideas, hygiene was only vaguely in my mind when the self-healing psyche dawned on me. It took a couple months to solidify the connection between the two. An exchange with a friend, Brian, brought it out.

In our exchange, he talked about Family Constellations. This is an intense weekend training in self-discovery whose methods he said might be useful to darkroom retreating. He wrote me in response to my idea of the civilized "management" of human suffering in [strifeless](#). (Some of this may not be clear, but I think Brian's general idea comes across):

About "management" and weekend workshops, I cannot help but think of Family Constellations. I think Constellations, when done by less-skilled facilitators might fall, to some degree, into the "life is suffering/strife: learn to live with it" category. But the facilitator I like best to work with seems not to suffer from such a blindness to subtle reality (see [dreamtime](#)) as the rest of us, which—along with some other skills—allows him to offer that awareness to the rest of us in powerfully serving our healing. Such awareness can lead to strifeless modalities of healing and restoration, I submit.

I replied that, unfortunately, Family Constellations is probably only minimally useful in darkness. Like various other forms of transpersonal psychology, it lies somewhere between management and discipline, two of civilization's three standard approaches to inordinate suffering. The degree of knowledge and skill it requires makes it full of strife.

Myself, I invested a great deal of energy for a decade in tantric Hinduism. It makes me want tantra to be a critical element in this process. That it may very well not be is difficult for me to swallow.

Family Constellations and methods like it have helped many of us in our quest for well-being. But I no longer believe any method will get us over the hump, even with the best of facilitators. I also do not think it is enough to have the presence of someone else with access to dreamtime, even if an energetic transmission from him takes place.

I have received such boosts from wise people before. They feel great. But ultimately, spiritual hunger—longing—is only a symptom of an underlying injury which prevents us from metabolizing already plentiful spiritual food in the first place. Thus, healing of this underlying injury must occur for lasting satisfaction. Healing is not accomplished by the consumption of any kind of food, nor by the will of self or others, but in repose by the quiet, autonomic processes of life.

## passive support

This is the idea, anyway. And this why it is Hygienic in nature. Darkness is not primarily about hyper-secretion in the brain of DMT, remembering of dreamtime, accessing higher states, or practicing

meditation techniques, all of which can happen in darkness. It is about the profound absence of stimulation and activity which provides for an unusual degree of healing to occur. It is thus a fundamentally different approach from active ones. It is grounded totally in normal organic processes, such as those of the involuntary nervous system, which occur far beneath the level of consciousness, and the self-maintenance of cells, where the nervous system does not reach at all.

The ego's grip is overwhelming. And civilization has taught us well: in various ways, we have all come to think that somehow, someday, we would finally *do* something about our quandary. The conjecture asserts that we cannot do anything about it directly. We are utterly helpless in our post-traumatic fixation and denial. It is not a pleasant thought. But it is fruitful because it can elicit a strong enough response from conscience to finally support the self-healing organism. Attitude affects recovery.

In the relationship between food and nerve energy lies an example of the Hygienic perspective. Food does not actually give energy to the body directly. Food takes nerve, chemical, and muscular energy to eat and digest. Otherwise we could just eat to restore our strength. Food provides sugar, which refuels everything from large muscle movement to thinking to cell operation. Some of this refueling can occur within seconds of eating easily digested food like fruit. But the body transforms sugar into reserve electrical potential of the nerves only during sleep. It eliminates toxins from tissues and repairs them completely only while they are unused. Again we see that no externality, but life is the only owner of the power to act for itself. Life is the doer.

Pathologically disidentified from life, we are as yet powerless. We who still stumble chaotically try to control life rather than serve it. So we are not going to handle our quandary. As we imagine ourselves to be, we are not going to get it done or have anything to do with its getting done. We are not going to figure it out. We are fit to be tied.

The best we can do is fully admit to our helplessness and to surrender to the only forces that could ever untie the knot. It is the Gordian Knot. But the knot actually needs to be untied. Alexander did not really handle it by cutting it open with his sword, and neither will we with our plans or efforts or skills. Only the small, silent, slow tendrils of the organism's own intelligence can untie such a tangle.

The only effort involved is supportive: to maintain the conditions of healing. This ain't a tall order. Stay in the darkroom. Lie down as much as possible. Eat. Exercise. Bathe. Eliminate. Meditate when so moved. Lie back down. Stare at the backs of your eyelids or follow your breath and let sleep come.

It will anyway. Darkness ensures it. A nervous system flooded with melatonin, the pineal gland's response to darkness, is pretty compelled to sleep. And sleep deeply: you are positively knocked out. You have very few dreams. In 48 hours you will catch up on all the sleep you have ever lost. I am not speaking metaphorically. It is difficult to conceive or believe until it happens.

To me, it felt like falling through a trapdoor. I felt five or six more such trapdoors awaited me before I would see the other side of my personal struggle, my lifelong dilemma. In the meantime, there were times I felt I was crawling in my skin. So the whole thing was alternately very pleasant and very unpleasant. It is certainly unpleasant to discover the concrete form of one's slavery in all its reticulated techno-horror. But it is no worse than what we go through anyway. It is just that it is accelerated and concentrated, and there are no distractions. And there is a chance of never reliving the horror again.

How do you prepare for darkness? It is mostly logistics: making and furnishing the room, scheduling with a supporter, stocking the food. If the room works, the retreat probably will, too. Instructions are given for all this in the rest of these pages. The attitude I try to convey here and in the article, [protocol](#) is natural and for most people will come over time in darkness. I'm just trying to provide the words for it.

Otherwise, you prepare the same way you prepare for weeks in a hospital bed in traction. Ie, I am sorry. It is too late. You are already prepared.

## food

Due to decreased activity, stress, and appetite, darkness presents a miraculous opportunity to:

- eat well
- interrupt the malnourishing, dissociative, toxifying relationship with food from which most of us suffer
- clearly experience one's thoughts, feelings and sensations again

This is why I serve and recommend only fresh fruit and greens to retreatants. As a sampling of the frugivorous diet, common to all anthropoid primates (like us), these foods only nourish. They do not overtax digestion, intoxify or overstimulate the system, nor sedate feeling or memory.

For more about frugivorous diet, I highly recommend *The 80/10/10 Diet*, Douglas Graham's crystalline magnum opus.

That said, if: you are interested in retreating; the prospect of eating just fruits and vegetables stops you from doing so; and you are currently uninterested in learning about it for any reason; then just plan to eat in darkness as simply and naturally as you know how.

## spirituality

Many traditions use darkness: Taoism, Tibetan Buddhism, Sufism, Ayurveda, Native Americans, Welsh shamanism. South American tribes use ayahuasca with DMT in it. I know little about them. But they do not seem to emphasize the passive rest or healing possible in darkness. They emphasize active *practice* of some kind. They value lessons learned, virtues developed, levels of spiritual realization attained. It is all so very fascinating. And it is fine. But we have all eternity for practice. As EJ Gold says, there is no top end to spiritual work. But *this* organism, this chance at life, does not have forever. And its needs are too simple to justify ignoring.

Natural Hygiene's passive emphasis on rest and healing is very important because it defines the appropriate *attitude* toward the retreat. The mind becomes extremely powerful when it is resting and purifying. I learned in fasting that how one approaches a retreat has a great effect on what happens in it. If one's attitude is really to passively let the healing forces of the organism do everything (in conjunction with the benevolence of the universe), the effect will be much different than if one has the doer-attitude of a practitioner. I know no one who has gone into darkness with the hygienic perspective, with the sole purpose of simply providing the conditions of life to the self-healing organism. Since the organism is the only thing that can heal the organism, this is potentially far more powerful than any other approach can be.

The spiritual approach is to exert supereffort to gain special access to the energy necessary for transformation. My approach has become explicitly and exactly the opposite: rest profoundly to accumulate the energy necessary for restoration. My goal is to find a way to do this—restore original, organic innocence—in one shot. Like healing a broken bone. In the meantime, the retreats are alternated with periods of radical lifeway changes they make possible.

When we absorb a minimum of the wisdom of the body, we may become qualified to explore spiritual things on their own terms, not as thinly disguised ego enhancements. Maybe spirituality is a symptom of our illness and it will not be interesting to whole people. For example, observe how it turns natural human capacities into goals to be reached by learning and effort rather than things to be restored by autonomic processes. Maybe, in the restoration of psychic integrity, the arbitrary distinction between autonomic self-healing and the grace of god will collapse.

## therapy

The other thing that a Hygienic darkroom retreat is not is therapy. Therapy is something that is done to the organism—a treatment—with the idea that the therapy is going to effect some change, that the actors

in the situation are the therapist, therapy, and therapeutic substances or practices. The body is viewed as a passive reactor, helpless to varying degrees (depending on the therapeutic philosophy applied.)

This totally defies the Hygienic approach. In hygiene, the will, the very thing that is damaged and needs a break, is passive, and the autonomic system is active. It is true that something must be done. Just not directly by *me*, the conscious part of myself. Only the organism has the power to act directly to repair its damage and correct its malfunction. Rather than taking over, the will becomes the servant of the autonomic, of life itself. Which is actually how it is supposed to be all the time. In darkness, one has a chance for this fundamental orientation to be restored.

Usually, we give attention to the sensational effects of psychic illness: insights, beliefs, thoughts, feelings, muscular tension, physical illness. Those fascinated by these effects actively dig for them, analyze, examine, synthesize them, and make a big deal about working with them and the wisdom necessary to do it properly. But though these things seem to make our lives crazy, they themselves arose from madness. Modifying them cannot lead to sanity. The problem is not negative thoughts, but damaged faculties incapable of producing sufficient positive thoughts.

So in Natural Hygienic psychology, we look beyond all these for help, to insensible processes healing. Insensible because the nerves do not reach down that far. The autonomic self performs the heavy lifting. We wait for this deeper process to produce noticeable artifacts worth the little conscious consideration called for. We passively provide this process of healing what it needs in ordinary ways. We know that once something visible emerges from the process, it is all over but the shouting (literally). Insight leads not to healing. Healing leads to insight.

## summary

In the hygienic use of darkness, rest, and the other requirements of the automatically self-healing organism are emphasized. This is because no treatment, substance, or practice can substitute for the organic function of self-healing. Exercise and meditation do not heal us. Nor do talking, emotional exploration, or precise movements. They *cannot*, because they engage the very faculties in need of repair. At most, they can merely support the healing process. Anyway, I am still an injured infant, not a healthy, capable adult. "Spiritual" things may happen, but it is unimportant. We are not trying for a vision of god here. We are trying to get out of a big dreary hospital.

Freedom is only a light switch away.

## dreamtime

While chatting online with a friend, Brian Sullivan, I described to him my brief waking experience of dreamtime and wrote a bit about the pineal gland. I had learned about it from Mantak Chia in [Dark Room Enlightenment](#) and [David Wilcock](#) in [2012 Enigma](#). Here is the edited chat:

**Andrew:** Darkness signals the pineal gland to secrete melatonin. Melatonin causes us to sleep.

The pineal gland reuptakes melatonin and remanufactures it into pinoline, 5-Meo DMT, and finally, DMT. Apparently, DMT is the main chemical going through the brains of yogis when they are in deep states of meditation. Mantak Chia talks about this stuff.

**Brian:** Oh yeah, I guess he does, although I have not read it, but he has his dark retreats.

That reminds me of a story of his checking his stocks on his PDA in the middle of a dark retreat.

**A:** Thats hilarious.

**B:** Yeah.

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**A:** Its important to keep your priorities straight in spiritual life.

**B:** Hey, non-duality, man!

**A:** Its all one, man.

**B:** You know it.

**A:** Anyway, the pineal gland itself activates. Apparently it has rods and cones just like our eyes, which are light receptors, but no pupil. It does not deal with external photons. It is the third eye. It sees these other non- physical dimensions.

**B:** Wow.

**A:** One of them—the one I am after, which I had eight seconds of back in November—is dreamtime. Dreamtime, which David Wilcock and some scientists call *timespace*, is where three dimensions of time—past, present, future— occur simultaneously and space is one-dimensional. This is the exact opposite of spacetime, the familiar gross dimension. Entering timespace enables travel through time the same way that being in spacetime enables travel through space, such as strolling through a field or climbing stairs.

**B:** Awesome.

**A:** Yeah, it is awesome for sure. It felt unbelievably good. Suddenly I could FEEL my housemate through the wall and his grandson in yet another room. Like I can feel this keyboard. In fact, we were all sitting at computers at the time, out of each others sight. And everything was blue, like we were underwater.

**B:** Yessiree good.

**A:** All my worries disappeared. I felt content, fearless, and totally connected with my housemates. Suddenly, nothing else mattered. All my scheming and struggling ceased. But when gravity shifted and everything started tilting backward like a carnival ride, I got a little nervous and came out of it.

It was a long eight seconds. So now I know for sure this other dimension is real. I know for myself. The thing is, dreamtime-awareness is basic to human life, just like our awareness of the gross, physical dimension. Our repression of our awareness of it is what makes everything about us go haywire.

**B:** Hmm, reminds me of a movie with Aborigines, cant remember the title, about dreamtime. It ends with a tsunami.

**A:** Wow, Id love to see that.

**B:** Yeah, we watched it at “Tribal Movie Nights” a year and a half ago.

**A:** Let me know when you remember the title.

**B:** I can look it up.

**A:** Cool.

By all accounts, there are other dimensions that are higher, not necessary to know right off. But dreamtime is critical to know at least by adulthood, when young indigenous men and women get initiated into it. I think this is the dimension *adults* know. It is why indigenous people generally consider us to be children. Slow children with powerful weaponry.

We substitute many things for dreamtime. Dreams, for one. Real sleep is mostly dreamless. Movies, mass politics, celebrities, computers, tv, video games are all great dreamtime artifacts, or analogues, rather. These are all products of a fear-ridden imagination.



Just as the thinking center is closely allied with the gross dimension, so is the feeling center allied with subtle dreamtime. Let the mind rest and heal from its fixation on the physical; give it a chance to reorient with dreamtime; and the repression, the denial of the feeling center itself will lift.

**B:** *The Last Wave*. Now Ill catch up on reading what youve posted.

**A:** Cool- \_Last Wave\_.

With the recovery of feeling comes the real possibility for health, since disease is rooted in emotion —frozen feelings from the past that repeat mechanically in the present.

## Afterword

These emotions start to clear out when feeling returns. The compulsions, habits, and addictions one has that erode health are rooted in emotion, so they would begin to dissolve, too. One could begin acting on things about which she already knows better. Learning about something good could actually help the learner rather than inform the ego as to what *not* to do.

In supporting consciousness to dislodge itself from its fixation on the gross physical dimension; and by reversing our denial of our awareness of dreamtime; we could actually let go of the residual effects of our impairment: spiritual emptiness, mental confusion, negative emotion, physical illness, social collapse, and ecological destructiveness. They could all just begin dissipating like a bad dream we are no longer stuck in.

In short, we would no longer depend for our liberation on the rarities of sufficient will, luck, power, or advanced spiritual realization, but on an ordinary state of consciousness immediately available to all.

## psychosis

*This essay is the heart of my work. It describes the insight that instantly precipitated the solution described earlier in [rapture](#).*

On Christmas morning, 2008, I finally saw that I see the world:

- incompletely
- with tremendous distortion
- and with *no* power to do anything about this directly.

My consciousness itself has been injured, my psychic integrity disrupted. It is an organic condition, like a bruised muscle or a broken bone. Ordinary use reinjures it.

It is common knowledge that we in this culture are neurotic. What I saw on Christmas is that the situation is far worse than that. We are *psychotic*.

Psychosis is the inability to distinguish reality from fantasy. We really believe that the sliver of reality of which we are aware makes up the *entirety* of reality. I knew about this pretense before. But only in my head. On Christmas, I felt it. I saw it in myself. It was so huge, so real, like looking over a cliff at a vast and intricate panorama I had walked past everyday without ever noticing.

(Fortunately, our whole way of life is bent toward making the world in the image of the sliver. So within this lifeway, we can be considered functional psychotics. Everywhere else, they can see we are just plain crazy).

Curiously, I felt elation about this. In realizing my own utter helplessness to do anything directly about my “cramp” (an unconscious, habitual contraction from life), I felt an enormous relief. The relief came

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from not having to try to do anything about it anymore, because it is impossible. It is not a moral issue. It is disease—an organic condition arising from psychic injury. I could quit all the internal tricks I thought were keeping the chaos in check. The pretensions. The disciplines. The slogans. They would never fully work. They could never get under the psychosis or overturn it. Practicing them could only buy me a temporary or partial improvement while reinforcing the underlying impairment.

I had thought the problem was amenable to will, something I could address by effort in spiritual, mental, emotional, physical, social, and ecological terms. But these are merely the ways I experience the problem. The problem itself precedes and causes all of these kinds of suffering. My consciousness itself is *impaired* due to damage. And this condition, in the words of spiritual teacher, [Arnaud Desjardins](#), is “permanent for the time being.” Intractability is its name.

The impairment is a systemic malfunction in my basic awareness. Sitting in this house, I may be aware of the walls, the desk, the music in the background. But my awareness of entire categories of related facts, both subtle and gross, is repressed. Omission, hyperbole, and disproportion characterize my awareness.

Only a force from outside my habitual frame of mind can change this. And seeing this fact is not enough. It will take some kind of real submission to this force that exists outside the bounds of my egoic defensive strategy, a strategy to which I am normally enslaved. I am trapped in a cell with a madman who has total power over me. The madman is relentless. I am helpless. The walls are impregnable. This is the case.

And this, amazingly, can be dealt with. Trying to manage the madman, to deny his presence, to deny the cage itself cannot work. But in acknowledging the perfection of the trap I am in, I am freed, in principle, from struggling against it. This means I no longer have a justification for trying to escape the trap, even if my machine—my habit body—will still try. The *morality* of trying is dissolved. Attention is somewhat freed to become fascinated by the trap itself.

But I am still in a strange bind. I cannot beat the madman or escape. And I cannot completely stop myself from trying. In civilization, we are enjoined to resolve this bind by surrendering our helplessly relentless wills to the accomplished or embodied wills of others. This explains the worship, for example, of gods, gurus, states, ideas, institutions, and civilization itself. They are forces “greater than oneself” that can overcome ones will and either subdue the madman or offer protection from him... for a price.

If I am to become free without resorting to these agents of civilization (enslavement) I must discover another actor. Something needs to happen. Something must be done. But being helpless myself, I cannot be the actor. At least, I cannot be the star.

I studied my trap for some time. Now, I believe the actor is to be found in the walls of the prison itself: in the body. By this, of course, I mean the entire organism—the being—not just the parts that scientists discuss in public. The actor is the autonomic, self-healing power inherent in all life, the self-preserving, self-restoring power of every cell, every organ, and every system of every organism that ever lived.

I would like to briefly catalog the prison experience so you can be sure of what I am talking about.

Spiritually, psychosis appears as emptiness, meaninglessness, longing, dissatisfaction, disappointment, or an unsavory indifference. I spent a long time in the spiritual world thinking the solution was at hand. The people who occupy it with integrity are extremely impressive and rare. Spiritual life deals with psychosis at a deep level, but still only with its effects, not its cause. So the grace it invokes in peoples lives is partial and fragile. Except for the lucky, it leaves them a little weird or assholeish.

Mentally, psychosis is often experienced as confusion and rigidity. Intellectuals like me know this all too well. One is rarely if ever able to decide, to be quite sure of anything. One becomes absent-minded, abstracted, aloof, forgetful. Strangely, this prompts one to cling harder to one's convictions. Every opinion becomes cherished. There is nothing so absurd as some intellectual hasn't made a doctoral thesis of it.

Psychosis is experienced emotionally as anxiety, rage, or overwhelming worry. Sometimes it comes in the form of self-hatred as the result of unstoppable self-condemnation for unstoppable habits. You know, like when you feel so bad about something you did or said or thought for the millionth god-damned time that

you just want to die? That is the intensity I am talking about: the kind of shit that drives people to suicide or church or psychiatrists... or public office.

Personally, I suffer from exhaustion-depression, attachment disorder, social anxiety, and symptoms of Asperger's. These have rendered me largely incompetent except for discovering, writing, and speaking about the darkness conjecture.

I'm very slow at everything. I had to become like this to finally notice something that has been holding perfectly still in a total darkness for thousands of years.

Many of us suffer psychosis as physical disease. Knees that just will not come back from that fall. A back that seems pitted against our efforts to live. Cancer or a heart attack that simply kills, quickly or slowly. Or comes back again and again. It starts as a cold and ends as AIDS. If the disease does not get us, the doctors, with their ascientific treatments, knives, and drugs, probably will: iatrogenic (doctor-caused) disease is the 4th leading cause of death in the US now. They openly admit they do not understand most of the diseases they arrogantly offer help with, like the priests of an angry, inexplicable god. Strangely, we pour our life-savings into their pockets. We watch ourselves and each other do it just as we have been told to, as if it is inevitable. It is like one of those dreams in which one can do nothing but play along.

Cultural leaders seek social, political, economic, and ecological solutions to the various modern plagues. But it's Humpty Dumpty. Pens and guns are no more effective than scalpels. The strange persistence of these plagues derives from psychosis epidemic among the sufferers and reformers alike. Their initiatives are as futile as flicking ping pong balls at King Kong.

In the same moment of my discovery and acceptance of my psychosis, it further occurred to me that:

- psychosis is an impairment of a consciousness
- consciousness is a biological phenomenon, a function of an organism
- organisms are self-healing, given proper conditions
- consciousness can thus heal from its psychosis

The problem is organic in nature, in tissues gross *and* subtle. It is not primarily spiritual, mental, emotional, physical, social, or ecological. These are merely the ways the problem is experienced. Meaninglessness, confusion, etc, are merely symptoms of injury. Addressing them directly is futile. The problem consists of an awareness that is massively damaged, almost annihilated, not one that is merely deluded and in need of policing or education. After the Bomb fell on Nagasaki, nobody there complained of bad trolley service.

When we were young, we were comprehensively traumatized by a broad stream of injuries. Our well-meaning forebears unconsciously tailored these injuries to our personalities, touching every aspect of our beings, and recapitulating the massive injuries of our ancestors going back thousands of years.

Trauma is partly a systemic shut-down of non-critical systems. It is characterized by disruption and contraction of organic function. What remains becomes exaggerated and repetitive, no longer fluid and responsive.

Our trauma trips consciousness on in a way that makes it impossible, under normal conditions, for it to ever go off again. We keep living as if everything is fine. We endure ordinary demands with less-than-ordinary faculties. In this state, characterized in the personality by fear, repression, fixation, and confusion, we veer madly off-course in our daily lives. This leads to enervation and intoxication, the beginning of chronic disease.

Popular culture offers a near infinitude of distractions to numb, salve, bandage, blot out, and delay dealing with the problem until death or insanity come—but not before passing on the legacy of psychosis to the next generation.

Spiritual teachers have viewed the problem of inordinate suffering as requiring discipline and a willed lifestyle change toward saner practices. The intense demands of this approach leave most people out in

the cold. We are the losers of the world.

Psychiatry, as a particularly macabre extension of modernism and scientific materialism, attempts to treat consciousness as a gross-dimensional object, the kind which consciousness is already fixated upon and believes itself to be. Anti-psychotic drugs, the apotheosis of materialistic spirituality, are especially in vogue. Equally useless are the various therapies: talk, somatic, art, vocational, etc. To varying degrees, all of these treat consciousness as inert putty with no self-healing power. It is just something stupid and stubborn that must be levered back into function. Internally we use acts of will—ironically called “choices” and effort. Externally, we use and accept treatment, manipulation, and finally, force.

By contrast, in the little-recognized American tradition of Natural Hygiene, the organism is understood to be the sole healer of itself, in no need need of such promptings. It merely requires the necessary conditions of healing. These are identical to the normal conditions of health (warmth, food, air, exercise, etc), sometimes with their proportions temporarily adjusted. The processes of self-healing, of self-repair, inhere in the fact of self-preservation.

Self-preservation is the essential characteristic of all organisms, from complex, conscious ones to single-celled ones. No biology text or course fails to mention this immediately. I remember having this discussion in a class in grade school. Even doctors often admit their dependence on the body’s power to heal. Because Hygienists fully recognize it without exception or contradiction, we admit no substance, treatment, therapist, or practice as the cause of health, only the body itself. The body can only use ordinary conditions of life to both maintain and restore health: fresh air, pure water, work and rest, warm temperature, proper food, etc. All these are passive, inert, acted upon. The organism is the actor.

This also means there is no such person as a healer. Only the body has the power, materials, intelligence, and facilities to heal the body. Thus unobstructed by poisons, uninterrupted by treatment, untaxed by practices, and *unauthorized* by therapists, Hygienic recovery is rapid, effortless, total, and permanent.

It is just that, in Natural Hygiene, this principle has never been fully applied to the recovery of the psyche itself. Even though, as Ayn Rand said, “Consciousness—for those living organisms which possess it—is the basic means of survival,” consciousness has never been fully appreciated as both the seat of our woe and as an organic function capable of self-healing. Consequently, repose in darkness has, until now, remained unknown as the condition the psyche can best use to heal itself.

The explanation of impaired consciousness gets at why discipline is already so lacking in most of us, why the will flags and attention fizzles far short of any real attainment. It explains why we feel something is wrong with ourselves and try to fix it (discipline), get it fixed (management), or avoid it (sedation. See [strifeless](#)). But volitional functions *depend* on unimpaired consciousness. They do not generate it. Any success is partial. The solution is to use the sliver of available will, not to strengthen the will in order to later break into latent energy reserves in the subtle bodies in order to effect transformation (the strategy of esoteric spiritual traditions), but to provide the being the conditions it requires to reenergize itself immediately and so restore its own psychic integrity. This puts the horse before the cart, automatically restoring the will to full function.

Rest is the primary condition of all healing. Darkness provides consciousness the opportunity to rest long and deeply enough to heal. It minimizes both the stimulation of and flow of energy to the “mind”—the habitual state of attention—which otherwise would continue to run all the time, night and day, waking and sleeping. The mind winds down.

Conveniently, darkness also gives the psyche a chance to restrengthen other modes of consciousness. One consciously receives and interacts with data streams different than those of the gross dimension. One enters the dreamworld spontaneously and consciously and awakens to great depths of creativity. Besides being intensely inspiring, this provides much needed entertainment while lying around for days in an artificial cave.

Dream energy from the dreamworld is necessary to create anything. Dream energy is creative energy. It is the fuel of positive imagination. In our society, access to the dreamworld is profoundly distorted. For the normal purposes of living, very little dream energy squeaks through our denial. Only a few can tap into

enough of it to do anything in a remotely humane or vital way. The rest of us are left to fight over the scraps in this unconscious state of artificial scarcity and admire those who somehow got a golden ticket.

Thus anyone in civilization can do great things, but not everyone. There is not enough creative energy available on these savage terms. All that is left in view to the losers is the manipulation of gross matter. Its great inertia, reinforced by the state, discourages attempts to change its conventional forms. The masses develop a culture of resignation and discouragement and become the greatest anchors of the status quo. (Until things get excruciatingly bad, and the whole cycle starts over again. Which is why it is called a revolution. The blood of patriots feeding the tree of liberty and so forth. What a scam that turned out to be.)

When dreamtime is naturally reaccessed, the flow of creative energy surges back through the proper channels of one's own being to serve the life that is there. Not out into the ether where it is collected by spiritual vampires, celebrities, artists, rulers, the rich, and the lucky; or into productive work that the elite materially profit from. Permanent re-engagement with the dreamworld restores one's energetic reserves and balance to the point where you do not need a "market" or a state anymore. You will just need your body, your (extended) family, and the world as it is.

In repose, the spongy tissues of consciousness absorb this dreamy, creative, vital energy. Thus refueled, the healing of consciousness from its injuries accelerates and its impairment and psychosis fade. Sanity and health of the entire organism naturally result, and the exuberantly creative participation in life resumes as if nothing ever happened.

## catastrophe

The catastrophic injury to the psyche I mention in the conjecture deserves some explanation.

Humanity is incredibly resilient and adaptable. So the first cause of this injury would have to be mythic in scale to wreck consciousness. It would have to be something that almost made us extinct. In effect, those who sustained this injury are like the survivors of an airplane crash, wandering bewildered, catatonic, completely disoriented. I believe it was some disastrous event in our distant past that shocked us so badly that we nearly lost touch with reality. Each generation simply passed the mass psychosis on to the next, brutalizing one child at a time. Our society passed it to others through the horrors of conquest. The process metamorphosed into our current, institutionalized catastrophe.

Maybe a comet hit Earth or planets changed position, causing a pole shift and massive geological changes. Not like the pissant tsunamis we have seen lately, but continent-drowning waves (like in the movie *2012*). Maybe the Flood. Maybe not a single event, but a series of events overwhelmed our people's capacity to cope. Maybe surviving grown-ups recovered but *children didn't*. I happen to imagine it as the shock of a mass transmigration of souls from the second dimension (see [myth of three peoples](#) for the whole story).

In my search for joy, I have seen the same suffering all over. It didn't matter if my host was a multi-millionaire or a burger-flipper, the basic pain was the same.

Whatever the scenario, the basic idea is one of trauma: something from the outside causing damage so massive it overwhelmed the ability of everyone's psyche's to register it. It is thus blocked from memory. But it has not disappeared. We re-enact it without knowing or knowing why. I got this idea from [Immanuel Velikovsky](#). He was a psychoanalyst who saw nuclear holocaust as the avoidable fulfilment of our unfathomable collective trauma.

A healthy organism always acts in its own best interest. Therefore, it could not be the source of its own inordinate, chronic suffering. Only an outside force could cause such suffering. Likewise, a healthy organism will never maliciously harm another organism. Since everyone was healthy at one point, this outside force could not have originated with others.

Therefore, it originated with nature, where massive shocks such as supernovas and meteorites are possible. Something like this happened, and we are still dealing with it.

A fundamental principle of Western psychology is that a sick person unconsciously repeats patterns learned in the past. If something is happening now, it is only because it happened before. This idea is not unique to the West, of course. Here is a Chinese proverb about it:

If you want to know your past, look into your present conditions.  
If you want to know your future, look into your present actions.

The catastrophe from our past keeps repeating itself in our daily lives. We experience it as:

- medical birth
- abuse and neglect (including the use of baby holders like cribs, playpens, and strollers)
- slow poisoning by manufactured food and television
- forced schooling
- tragic love
- demoralizing work
- war
- crime or injustice
- chronic illness
- natural disasters we are strangely unprepared for.

Generally, we attribute our troubles to error, evil, ignorance, or a flaw in human nature: ie, some version of the doctrine of original sin, which every civilized religion has. Their solution is always some kind of disciplined effort at which only a few can succeed [for now](#).

Because of my experience of rapture, I do not think what we live with today is just how things or people are. I think it is the result of some kind of disaster. Who knows what, exactly. But it was big. It was impersonal—nobody's fault. And now we seem to have a chance to finally move on.

I do not mean just using darkness. We live in a benevolent universe. It is basically supportive of life. It is a set of conditions in which life exists and therefore can exist to its full potential. So a universe that, for whatever reason, caused the calamity that hurt us so badly 500 generations ago will also eventually provide for our recovery. People are innocent.

The conjecture includes something about accumulating vital energy. This is because only the organism can heal itself, and it needs energy to do it. Darkness is the best way I know of so far to accumulate this energy, because it provides for very deep rest. Fasting is another way, though my experience (including a long fast of 23 days) is that the organism tends to use the energy physically, not psychically. And there are other normal ways of accumulating energy. Sleeping. Relaxing on the lawn, etc.

I lived among Mayan Indians for 18 months. I tried using their calendar, which is really a schedule of various streams of cosmic energy that cycle on short and long timescales. Given their eerie accuracy, I would not be surprised if their idea about 2012 is true. It is that Earth is entering a galactic energy stream, which is beginning to enable everyone's organism to heal. We will gradually go back to ordinary safety, happiness, peace, and harmony. It is a very benevolent idea, anyway.

I believe this is our destiny. Darkness is simply a way to participate in what is happening anyway. It is way to run out and meet it.

## strifeless

A friend, Brian Sullivan, and I chatted about the darkness conjecture. Our conversation brought out the meaning and an important implication of the word *strifeless* (from the subtitle).

**Andrew:** We in civilization endure a terrible internal conflict. You know when you feel like you are going to explode? Or be torn apart? This conflict is caused by an unconscious denial of a subtle, but large part of reality called [dreamtime](#). It is a dimension different than the usual, gross spacetime. Humans are normally aware of it but we are not. Civilization offers us three ways to deal with this conflict:

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1. Sedation (through addiction)
2. Management (popular religion, psychotherapy, self-improvement, coaching, success seminars, spiritual materialism, weekend workshops, etc)
3. Discipline (genuine spiritual practice).

While some have gone far with management and sometimes even sedation, only discipline reliably resolves this conflict. But it does so only for the 1% or less of the population than can handle the intensity of the discipline involved. A solution that works for less than 1% of people is, from the perspective of design, no solution at all.

**Brian:** The rest just need dreamtime?

**A:** Well, everyone needs dreamtime.

**B:** Right.

**A:** What the rest of us need is an easier way to cease denying our awareness of it. What these three ways have in common is the idea that strife is just how life is. Life sucks. Get used to it.

But I am way too lazy and narcissistic to believe this. Always have been. Anyway, I have seen [otherwise](#). Life is not inherently painful, just living like this. There is another way. Something is broken; lets fix it already!

**B:** Very nice.

**A:** I mean, I have fixed bicycles. I have seen scratches on my knee heal without effort. Things can actually work, you know?! So why can't consciousness work again?

**B:** Yeah, I agree, life works.

**A:** Why does something that only took a moment to break need a lifetime to learn to repair? Biologically, it makes no sense. Extended total darkness allows for rest that could be deep enough and long enough for consciousness to unhook itself from gross matter and heal itself automatically. This is the conjecture.

## Afterword

This process will not make a person enlightened or give him back all that he could have had in an untraumatized life. It is a very limited thing that darkness might enable the organism to accomplish. Plenty of wreckage would remain, inside and out, to clean up and repair over generations. This is just a possible way to deal with the knotted core of the illness, yet without the strife that characterizes and perpetuates it. The means is the end. Strife cannot produce ease at ones core.

Moreover, even if the conjecture fails, in its strifelessness, it indicates an entirely new *kind* of solution to the problem of how bad we feel and how rotten things are for everyone in this lifeway. Again, the standard solutions accept conflict as an essential quality of life and then require strife to overcome it. A strifeless solution, a—dare I say it—*pleasant and easy* solution\*, relies completely on the unfailingly benevolent forces of life and the universe, rather than will, to undo what was done. Swiftly, quietly, and permanently, in one shot, like a broken bone properly set and braced.

Darkness is but one such force. It is a normal condition of life. In the retreat, one temporarily extends darkness while convalescing from the long infirmity. It is just as one tends, when ill, to eat less, stay in bed longer and drink more water. I know no more promising a condition for the recovery of rapture and the dissolution of inordinate suffering than darkness. But if it proves insufficient or fails, then we, the [research family](#) I just wrote about, would set about amending or replacing it. I wouldn't mind so much if darkness in particular works or not. But I believe it or something strifeless like it will, and that together we could have an excellent time working that out. (More about this later in the "project" essay.)

\*by this I mean *predominantly* easy and pleasant. There can be difficult, painful moments in darkness, some of which require focused attention to overcome. But these are exceptions, not the rule. The principal actor in the situation, like ones champion in a duel, remains the autonomic organism. This feeling of a great force come to ones aid in a crisis is indescribably encouraging.

## project

Here I would like to relate the history and future of this project.

Since 2006, I have attempted seven retreats, two successful, two semi- successful, three failures [plus seven more retreats since writing this essay]. These results depended entirely on how well the room worked mechanically (not, thank god, my morale or effort during the retreat). I do not think it necessarily tricky to achieve the conditions of a retreat, but it has been for me.

In late 2008, the point of dark retreating became really clear to me and I began focusing on it full-time. My goal has been to do a long (14-day) retreat. Following my first failure at this in March, 2009, I drafted most of the content of this booklet and posted it online.

In Guatemala, between late-2009 and mid-2011, I built and ran a dark retreat in the garage of my house. Nineteen people, including myself, retreated there. Seventeen of us had positive experiences, one neutral, one negative. At some point I will publish comments by retreatants about their retreats. According to them, people generally came out feeling more rested, more in their bodies, more *themselves*. Those who understood the conjecture beforehand said that they still found it plausible.

All of this was instructive and encouraging. But failure has also given me pause. Here is what I wrote about it in my retreat notes, scribbled in darkness in a moment of heartbroken clarity: "Can't do things by the seat of my pants anymore. Too stressful. Too much missed in the meantime. Need proper planning, more participation, more money, better site.

I believe my failure has largely resulted from my exaggerated fear of interacting with other people. In true Catch-22 fashion, this fear has arisen from that which I have been trying to recover from. The cycle has to end somewhere, so the next phase of the project involves republishing a booklet of these writings, discussing the project with close supporters, and giving free public talks. The purpose of all this is to gauge interest, gather support, and invite wider participation. Rather than just invite people to help me do my thing as I have done in the past, I would like to open up the project to others equal participation.

The first thing I am doing in this regard is releasing the content of this booklet so that anyone may [freely](#) copy, distribute, and sell (yes, *sell*) this content in any media. Suggest changes by submitting [pull requests](#). Include this license in your reprints, and I will similarly recognize and link to you on [andrewdurham.com](#). Share 8% of your street price with me or somehow astound me and I will also give you my [endorsement](#), a visible mark to use on products and ads. This deal roughly equals what you and I would make if I were published or self-published, without your having to order in bulk. PayPal, Dwolla, and write me at [info {at} andrewdurham.com](#).

Next, I will make a visit to my close supporters in Scandinavia where we can seriously talk about this project. Thank god for friends. My personal goal remains the completion of a 14-day dark retreat. This promises to entail more than I am used to handling.

Which may be why I have so many other ideas for the application of the principle, it makes my head spin. Especially since my last [retreat](#). The strifeless principle says that a fundamental state of integrity, ease, and joy are natural to human beings, and are restored by a basically easy, graceful approach. This contrasts with the pervasive idea that conflict, struggle and suffering are natural to us and can only be overcome by a great and painful effort.

For me, strifelessness is like a software platform. It is an open source design perspective which anybody

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can use to solve any problem arising from our mass functional psychosis. The strifeless platform is a serious yet relaxed way of approaching, shall we say, exceedingly conflicted situations. The platform itself can emerge within or take many forms: social movement, business, extended family, non-profit clearinghouse, R&D lab, thinktank. Thus any group—existing, new, or ad hoc—can use it to focus on a given situation in an appropriate way.

For example, the Hygienic use of darkness is a strifeless way of approaching the hairy monster of near constant suffering. Since nearly everyone knows this monster intimately, a time may come when every bedroom becomes a darkroom, and dark retreats outnumber restaurants. I would like there to be so much demand for retreats, it could, for instance, pay for the restoration of the hundreds of Mayan pyramids (once used as darkness chambers) still buried in the jungle, as well as the shamans to run them. I would like retreats to take every possible form, from commercial luxury to gutterpunk austerity. It could all spread as easily as bottled water or cellphones but without the attendant waste.

Certain groups and events also seem to have come together naturally:

- The Free Software movement.
- The Rainbow Family and its Gatherings
- CrimethInc, a viral, leaderless, anarchist movement, diffused in anonymous cells around the world, and yet consistent in its message, style, and functioning
- Kickstarter Project-Funding Platform

The strifeless platform would also happen naturally like these. Not to say there is no effort involved, just that the project provides an abundance of the necessary energy. There would be maximum freedom of participation for everyone, from sitting in the corner ignoring everyone to being in a center of action. All the ordinary ways of getting along with people would still apply. Actions, expressions, and ideas belong to those who have them, not the group or any authority. What I know about strifelessness will probably come in handy, but I am not in charge. If I knew exactly how to do this on my own, it would already be done.

The history of design also provides a ton of examples I would call strifeless:

- Dvorak typing keyboard
- Self-Strutting Geodesic Plydome
- seedballs
- Esperanto
- barefoot sandal
- the bicycle, possibly the greatest design of all time

My ideas entail working in some kind of group that, in the most direct and practical way, develops and applies the darkness conjecture, as well as provides information, designs, and support for the radical lifestyle changes necessary to halt forever the juggernaut of catastrophic psychic injury. These include:

- the strifeless platform itself
- a dark retreat and research center built from scratch with work areas and with six darkrooms (several people have asked for this)
- a franchise system for existing retreat centers to add dark retreats to their offerings (a close supporter, Roman, had this one)
- a neighborhood development that radically recognizes the basic human need for freedom (David, a friend with Project Nuevo Mundo, helped inspire this)
- for daily sleeping:
  - a system for elegantly darkening ones shelter at night (current systems are toxic, expensive, and actually leak light)
  - a new lightweight, multi-purpose bed that can transform your lifestyle and livelihood
  - a new kind of pillow based on a simple observation of sleeping positions
  - a sleeping mask that blocks all light and comfortably stays on all night
- a typable, e-paper tablet computer with which to do basic work without injury or distraction (alpha software now available!)

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- a series of documents, electronic and printed, that use clear information design to succinctly explain the essential content and structure of modern tools (like computers or a new foreign language) as well as timeless necessities (like diet and parenting)
- Superhomeless mobile shelter/furnishing kits for living in style as a permanent camper (idea from Laservida Arts Collective, Las Vegas, NV)
- \$500 portable shelter kits and the hydraulic transmission-equipped bicycles and carts to move them.
- color-balanced LED lamps and flashlights
- web-based credit clearing system (Thomas Grecos idea)
- gravity powered motor (old design, new materials)

other needful designs—including those of others—consonant with the strifeless approach to be developed, crowdfunded, and offered until everyone functions so well we no longer need them

Saying all this at this point is an experiment. I hope you find it interesting and inspiring rather than discouraging. Please tell me how you like it. I am just trying different ways of reaching out. Text files are easy to change; discouragement is not.

Basically, I believe there are plenty of people who are in the same boat as I, having declined/rejected /imploded the roles we were offered in this cancerous lifeway. Like me, they look for a viable alternative. They would be glad to participate in it if they thought it might work. Like me, they feel they have nothing to lose. Maybe they find the logic of the conjecture strangely compelling as I do.

That said, the darkness conjecture is just a sketch of a hypothesis. It needs fleshing out and further testing. I make no promises, only a reasonable case for it. I am not bringing a revelation from the mountain, just a sketch of it from the plain. I would like to go there one day. Maybe you're headed that way, too.

Sometimes I think of the group as a family, a research family. We would be a band of refugees from the death-culture, explorers of the future, looking together for a bridge to a human way of life. Each of us has different aptitudes and sensibilities, all of which are necessary to arrive at a genuine solution to the problem we all face: suffering in place of rapture.

Thus I offer these writings to attract interest, support, and participation in a strifeless approach to recovering rapture and the development of a sane lifestyle for those in recovery from suffering. This involves testing dark retreating as a simple, cheap, quick, pleasant, and replicable way of permanently healing from psychic trauma and restoring the basic functions of human consciousness, including waking awareness of the dreamworld. If effective, this would rapidly lead to solutions to every excruciating problem suffered by humanity since the rise of civilization, as well as the reemergence of a humane and regenerative lifeway.

## reports

This series of Hygienic darkroom retreat reports documents my improbable recovery from an ancestral suicide program and the resulting qualification of the [darkness-conjecture](#) as a hypothesis.

- [four darkness experiences](#)
- [6-day retreat](#)
- [5-day retreat](#)
- [2-day retreat](#)
- [7x1-day retreat](#)
- [2x2-day retreat](#)

These are reports by others:

- [lindsey vona's 14-day retreat](#)
- [365-day retreat of 150 year-old yogi](#)
- [dark vader in the 3-day sith bathchamber of sleep, rejuvenation, and lust](#)

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# four darkness experiences

Here are descriptions of my first four experiences in darkness.

The first is a long, enthusiastic letter I wrote friends about my first dark retreat immediately after emerging. Brief descriptions of three other early retreats follow.

## 2006 Feb 10

I just came out of a pitch black room after two days inside. We call it a dark retreat. I feel great.

In the small room is a bed and a small open area with a rug. The building is cob (straw-reinforced earth) with windows that have been thoroughly blacked out for this purpose. There is an electric radiant heater and a composting toilet. This is an infinitely more pleasant update on the chamber pot of old. There is an inversion swing for hanging upside down.

Finn, my host and guide, would come in a couple of times a day to find out how I was doing, and to bring me fruit and anything else I needed. Mostly, I lay in bed. I slept a lot, well, and easily. Sometimes I would stretch or swing. I had my CD player, a U2 album, and a French language course.

From the first moment of turning off the light, I felt a wave of relief. It came from what I had never known until then as the constant assault of ambient light in cities. The rumbling of the city did not go away, but the break from light calmed me significantly.

It also practically erased my appetite. Emotional disturbances were, how shall I put it... more endurable. Normally I just pop out for an ice cream bar or granola. That has long been my main emotional coping mechanism in the light. Food consumes my attention a lot of the time. In darkness, I hardly thought about it. In 54 hours, I had four apples, an orange, and two kiwis and I still feel full.

Last night I started to panic. So I took a 30 minute break from darkness to make unnecessary phone calls. Within 15 seconds of being in light, I wanted to eat. For an hour after reentering the darkroom, I was ravaged by cravings for my usual snacks. Then the cravings disappeared again. Darkness has got to be the single greatest way to disrupt poor eating habits.

I felt disoriented in darkness because I've been very visual and mental in my life, so things I can see function as points of reference, aids in thinking and concentration. My thoughts in darkness simply swam. I felt unnerved and, at times, nauseous. But my discomfort in darkness was still nowhere near as intense as when I've fasted in light (drinking only water while resting). In fasting, my emotions, thoughts, impulses, and surroundings were like an abrasive plague, like living in a tumbling sandpaper world. Darkness is soft. It is still. It is nurturing. It is comforting at the same time that it necessitates tangling with chronic internal discomforts. As Finn says, it is a luxury. Like cool silk sheets on a hot summers day. Like a mother's hand on your forehead when you are sick. Like a clear summer morning in the country with nothing but friends and adventure before you.

By this morning, I was able to maintain a train of thought for more than 10 seconds. And it all started coming together: the possibilities in my apparently stuck, dead-end life. The obvious insanity of trying to make life in a city work for long. The total irrelevance of our lifeways standards and demands. I'm starting a business, or at least, that's what I've been telling myself for months now. Now I don't care. If it works, it works. No more senseless pushing. I will happily go bankrupt now. Or not. Whatever. I'm available again to the Lifeforce. Let it take me wherever, to serve it however. That's how I feel. My massive credit card debt is meaningless in the dark womb of life, which secretly surrounds us all the time.

My main job today is to make a sleeping mask. Of a new kind that is comfortable, healthy, and effective so that I and maybe others can finally get some friggin' rest in this streetlight-infected world. My designs for shelter will change. Since the whole point is rest, what do we need windows in bedrooms for, anyway?

Light feeds the eyes, it is true, but darkness allows them to rest. And with them, so many other parts of the being that it is unbelievable.

Theres no way to tell you how hung up I've been lately by worry and confusion. Now it is obvious that all of it is constantly perpetuated by stimulation from the visual field. This is what disappeared that first night upon unplugging the light. I felt an underlying ocean of pain—at the same moment of being relieved from it. I was unaware I had suffered this way for years. No wonder I have felt so crazy. This, at least, is part of it.

I slept deeply. Many times, I felt a little sleepy one moment and the next, found myself awake after hours of deep sleep. I did not dream. I did not sense passing of time until after waking.

When dreams occurred, they came shortly before waking. They were so intense, they would sometimes continue after waking. After opening my eyes, I twice saw vaulted ceilings above me for some seconds or minutes. The first had a surface of tiny diamond tiles, like a rattlesnake-skin. The second was rough earth, with ancient yet simple pictographs pressed deeply into it, maybe 4cm square. Last night, I saw green light for awhile. This morning, several images of cinematic quality passed before me. I felt the power of art again.

One thing I could do that helped in difficult moments was to follow my breath. Without my visual point of reference, this was very difficult at first. I could not remember to observe my breath for more than two inhalations. But in the dark, everything good happens very quickly. By last night, I could stay with it for several minutes before falling asleep. Breathing is a good reminder of the action of Life upon us.

In following it as it automatically went in and out, I could take refuge in something stronger than my constant, low-level worry and panic. Also, these things were constantly getting undermined by the darkness, without my visual point of reference to sustain them. So they were not as strong. While the apparently positive side of my habitual patterns of awareness also got undermined, what is Real grew in my awareness in an extremely short period of time compared to wilderness sojourns and fasting. However, it would be easy to combine all these for the most amazing rejuvenation process imaginable.

My darkroom had a fresh air problem. Its important to have plenty of fresh air. To have it be warm and comfortable enough to be naked would be great, too. (It was pretty close, actually.) A shower, various furniture, etc, would be cool. Naturally, as I lay there, I was inventing air-to-air heat exchangers with no moving parts in my mind. Oh, also, I was hilariously bombarded with visions of womens breasts. Fractal boobies in three dimensions! Okay, sometimes it was a turn on. Who knew there were so many lovely breasts, sometimes attached to women, in the universe? Okay, I did have an idea about that previously. But this was ridiculous.

Again, I had several fits of emotional disturbance and confusion. They were not easy, but they were much less difficult than in other settings. Many times I also just felt calm. I studied French with excellent concentration for 90 minutes straight yesterday. Normally, 30 minutes is a lot. I listened to U2's new record.

Darkness is the ultimate renewal. It is just the beginning.

## 2006 Nov 20

I had just become boyfriend to a woman. We moved together from Eugene to Ashland and had an opportunity to be in darkness for four days while staying with friends.

Due to poor ventilation, we had to crack the window now and then, so the room was not perfectly dark. And our relationship was very tumultuous. These two factors contributed to the retreat's not being restful or renewing for me like the first one.

## 2008 Oct 25

This was a three-day retreat in another friend's house outside Eugene. Like my first retreat, it was profoundly restful. Again, I felt as if I'd caught up on all the sleep I'd ever lost after 48 hours.

It didn't start so great. I came off an all-nighter trying to get the room ready. On day two, I felt like I was crawling in my skin. I woke up the next day feeling totally rested and curious about what the third day I'd set aside for the retreat would bring.

My mind was fairly clear for a few hours. I felt calm and well. Then my habitual worry about what I should do after darkness returned somewhat. I was able to detach from it more than usual. Nothing else happened till the next morning at about hour 68. I was dreaming when I woke up.

The dream was in hyper-technicolor, clearer, brighter, more vivid than anything I've seen with my two eyes. Just a middle-aged woman's face and a big photographic mural behind her and some flowers in a vase to the side. Except I didn't wake from it. I awoke and it kept going. I opened my eyes and the image persisted for 15 seconds before fading. Really stunning.

The other main thing about this retreat was that, in catching up on lost sleep, I felt like I'd fallen through an internal trapdoor. During my lazy third day, I had a strong hunch that: there were five or six more trapdoors I could fall through; it would take two weeks to fall through all of them; and that doing so would lead to a qualitative shift, a deep and permanent restoration in my being somehow. (Two months later, this sense would return clear, verbalized, and full-blown as *the darkness conjecture*.)

## 2009 Feb 15

Inspired by my breakthrough on Christmas, this was going to be my first long retreat. It took place at another friend's house in Eugene. Due to too much noise in the rest of the house, the retreat was a failure. This positively unnerved me. Somehow I wrote several of these essays about darkness before crashing for weeks with other friends. Then I left Eugene for the last time.

It helped me realize, in yet another way, how I have habitually kept people out of my life. This led me to ignore several warnings that an occupied house might be too noisy for a retreat. Also, I ignored a request from a couple friends to give a talk about the conjecture, which likely would have opened up the project to others participation. Heartbreaking. But somehow I will open up.

## 6-day retreat

2011 Mar 17

My second attempt at a 14-day dark retreat ended after only 6 days on 2011 March 12, Saturday, due to excessive external noise and breakdown of the ventilation system. Stress from mechanical failures of the room accumulated and defeated the retreat. Despite the aggravation, some cool things happened and continue to happen as a result. So it was not a bust, but a semi-success, and I'm glad I went in.

I had planned to get in on Monday, February 28, but as usual, I ran late, then later. After a water system breakdown and countless details, I finally got the light out at 3 am, Sunday, March 6. Yeah, that late.

The first few days, I slept just so-so due to discomfort with my new foam padding. But I did wake up Tuesday and Wednesday feeling pretty refreshed. Some loud construction noise started coming from outside. I also noticed the drone of my fan off and on. This was disheartening because I'd spent a bunch of time supposedly making a quiet system. So it would be back to the drawing board with that. My assistant, Josh, and I had to plug three light leaks. I read afterward these were enough to disrupt the melatonin secretion and set me back days. This would help explain the disjointed feeling of the retreat. The problem

is that the adobe and earthen mortar constantly expanded and shrank with humidity, opening holes and cracks to the outside.

Internally, the noise was mirrored by various nagging questions, torments, and fears, described below. The retreat was not going to plan and I was getting concerned about it. I wrote in my notes, "We could say it [the retreat] is working very well because my fear and apprehension have come right to the surface." Also, "Fear comes from having my primary means of survival [consciousness] disabled/damaged." I felt very afraid about the success of the conjecture, at times obsessed. Telling so many people about it had generated inside myself a lot of pressure to succeed. This was almost unbearable.

There was some relief from a lot of beautiful moving fractal imagery. Millions of vividly colored stellations resembling sea plants continuously exploded out of the blackness, silently penetrating my own space. This seems, in retrospect, to be a function of the nature of the eye itself being projected onto the screen of darkness, absent any ordinary visual stimulation. It got tiresome after a while, and less abstract, more realistic images began emerging. Over a few days, the stellations became breasts, which expanded to whole naked bodies of women. Millions of them. This opened upon a pornographic hell realm of galaxy-sized orgies. This was very unpleasant. I simply cannot recommend it.

Early Wednesday morning, I awoke but the neutral dream I was having continued. This is more like it, I thought. I stared with eyes open at a red brick section of vaulting, mated with a section of grey material, maybe stone or concrete. This vaulting had an unusual compound curvature. Grey-green moss (old man's beard) grew in the mortar. The scene was very well lit and very clear, lasting 30-60 seconds. Again, I was wide awake for this.

The vaulted ceiling imagery is strangely persistent in my and others experiences. Why? Castaneda included it in his descriptions of the dreamworld in *The Art of Dreaming*. It always gives the same impression of objectivity as the more familiar things in the waking world. It is unlike the subjective quality of the unlit modulating imagery, such as the stellations and pornography, playing on the dark screen of the mind.

That afternoon, I awoke from a nap feeling very calm and quiet inside. I felt really hungry and sat down to eat. I was watching the imagery in the darkness and the pornographic hell visions that had plagued me suddenly stopped. I suppose they had accumulated from a lifetime's exposure to porn. They had torn a hole in me somewhere, and had poured out. In my mind's eye, it looked like a tear in magnified tissue. I saw them drain back through this hole which then closed and healed. I'm very glad these stopped. Rough edges of the hole and similar ridges on surface of tissue were, upon magnification, slow-moving lines of real women, all in pretty brown robes.

I had been thinking a lot about the woman I had recently become boyfriend to. I felt pressure to make a decision regarding visiting her on another continent. This pressure let up. I still did not know what to do, but it stopped dogging me. Also gone was the torment of reliving a couple recent negative interactions with others. It had taken four days in darkness to become calm for the first time in months.

I started eating and a few minutes later, noticed I felt good also due to a return of ordinary confidence. As I ate, it slowly dawned on me that what seemed like a four-day recovery from a lifelong porn addiction, without even meaning to recover from it, itself constituted a validation of the darkness conjecture. I started feeling excited again about the possibilities. What could happen in 14 days?

What had seemed to be the main thing going in—whether the darkness conjecture is true—receded in importance, along with my doubts about it. My confidence in it returned at the same time I became aware it had been fading. I feel much more calm and sure that this idea is as fruitful as I imagine it to be. It occurred to me that lots of research has already been done with darkness. I decided to write my sleep and dream PhD associate about it, as well as proposing to pay him to evaluate my conjecture.

What became more important was not doing anything more by the seat of my pants, nor subjecting myself to enervating influences. I wrote, "Can't take noise anymore... Can't do things by the seat of my pants anymore. Too stressful. Too much missed in the meantime. Need proper planning, more participation, more money, better site." I need a family, a functional home. Not more research, but a little bit of time

spent making a business plan and making contacts. Inviting more participation could make this thing fly. I started thinking of another friend who lives nearby because he knows how to organize things socially. (After not seeing him for months, I met him twice on the road in two days after the retreat.)

That night, I finally got the bed foam configured comfortably after half a dozen tries. Besides sleeping not so well, this has been annoying.

I'm eating a lot more than in my very first retreat. I have had zero food cravings since the lights went out. All this watery food is perfectly satisfying. Sometimes, under stresses described above, I have overeaten, but nothing worse.

The next day, another of my wishes for darkness was fulfilled: the return of certain experiences from my early childhood. A sensation of a ten-times thickening and densification in my body, especially noticeable in my arms, as if parts of my body were expanding to occupy each others space. It was exactly like when I was three, four, five years old, before school got to me. It is the most intensely delicious and satisfying feeling of simply being, like expanding like magma under the crushing weight of the ocean.

The day after, I was besieged again with the porno hell visions. And they were getting gnarlier by the minute. I had been pretty passive in regards to the imagery playing on the screen, mistakenly viewing it as entertainment. Finally I put my foot down and started concentrating on the dark screen they were playing on. Interestingly, I found the screen both behind and in front of the imagery. Concentration instantly dispelled them. A beautiful, calming image of Buddha appeared. I had a pleasant sensation of concentration, of denseness in my forehead. I started to meditate for a minute. While some kind of purification of them had taken place a couple days before, it seemed only an act of will would finish the job. Again, I felt a big relief.

Clearly, this swirling, subjective imagery is not to be indulged. It is high levels of melatonin combined with habitual worry and the contents of my shadow in an inaccessible form. Only darkness is what is actually here. Paying attention to the imagery obviously leads downhill. Concentrating on the darkness takes effort. Maybe this dark retreating business is not the piece of cake I have been expecting.

Anyway, the hellish imagery disappeared, the Buddha image appeared. There was a calm, pleasant feeling of concentration, of intensity in my forehead. I meditated for a minute without effort. Maybe there is something to this meditation business.

On Thursday, another vaulted ceiling appeared, again in a dream that continued after I awoke. This time, I could see a whole, large room. (Usually ceilings are narrow, like those of a tunnel.) It was like a painted cinder block Quonset hut. The colors were pleasant pastels, and there were windows.

Something else the room needs: silence. Total, absolute silence. No more questions or hedging about it. The room needs to be totally dark, totally silent. When it got quiet in the evening, I just relaxed and my mind cleared. Just as Mantak Chia has done with his retreat in Thailand, the retreat needs to mimic certain qualities of caves, and these are two of them.

When the ventilation system stopped a second time early Saturday morning, I threw in the towel. The charge controller, it turned out, was preventing the battery from charging fully and discharging sufficiently to allow a good power cycle.

I think all these technical failures point to my chronic, rigid dependence on my mind and my lonesome habits. Still the same lesson over and over. However, the retreat catalyzed some common sense in me, and within a few days, success both in resolving tension with the girlfriend to me and in reaching out to my good social organizer friend. It is good to feel some love and conviviality again.

Especially including its aftermath, this retreat counts as a semi-success. I have not written about it much, but I view the re-emergence of love in a person as a criterion of success of the conjecture. At some point I will dare to call this a hypothesis, not merely a conjecture. But put to the test, much evidence in support of it continues to be generated, and little to the contrary.

# 5-day retreat

2012 Feb 09

I had a depressive breakdown in December and let out a cry on my personal facebook page for help with a dark retreat to recover. Within a few weeks, and with the help of a small, far-flung team of supporters, I did a five-day dark retreat. I am feeling much better. (Fourteen days as planned proved impractical in the location, so I am still psychotic :)

The retreat began Friday about noon local time, two days late due to technical difficulties, which is typical. Then I must have slept 16 hours a day for 2-3 days until I started feeling better.

Strangely, it was not deep sleep. I had a lot of dreams, and only a few vivid ones. I was so tired, I barely noticed at first. But by Thursday, when I woke up from a noisy, nonsensical dream, I started feeling angry and frustrated that I was not resting deeply as I always have in retreats, that yet again I was failing due to foreseeable factors. My instant sense was that in this 17-unit, 4-story modern apartment building, the disturbances were caused—not sonically as expected—but electromagnetically by tons of steel and electrical wiring in the building and psychically by the 30 other crazy people in the building. All of which fairly doomed the retreat for my purposes.

I calmed down after taking three naps and eating. It occurred to me that feeling angry and frustrated were a step up from depressed and resigned, as I would have felt a week before. It was a sign of significantly increased vitality. By that night, however, continuing the retreat seemed pointless. I could not do all I wanted in the room, I had done what was possible with what was available, and it had helped me enough to carry on in the light. So I exited the darkroom after 5.5 days of lots of rest, a few good epiphanies, good frugivorous food (raw fruits and greens) carefully prepared by Sanna, and lots of new ideas for proceeding.

The main thing I gained from this retreat was seeing how I have kept so many things out of my life as a result of my shame about my illness: health, love, money, a home, etc. Nothing good could possibly be for me (thank god some got in anyway). Because I could not accept much for myself, I presented the darkness conjecture itself as a idea to be tested for worldwide salvation rather than something I needed personally. Therefore, for example, I could not accept two offers in Guatemala to build a 6-unit retreat center because I was not sure of the idea and did not want to mislead anyone.

The truth is, dark retreats have helped and interested me and others a lot, and this is sufficient grounds for making a retreat center. It's that simple. Should it prove as wildly beneficial as I project in my writings, groovy, but that is not necessary to proceed.

The lesson: approaching darkness as something I needed personally worked a whole hell of a lot better than approaching it as a world-saving idea in need of testing. Shame about my own psychosis, based on early bad experiences with expressing my suffering, had led to this charade. People, it turned out, care a lot more about me than my big ideas.

The major thing I learned this time about retreating itself is that scheduling sufficient time afterward to absorb its value and readjust to light is critical to a retreat's overall success. So while I did not complete a 14-day retreat as planned, neither did I waste one learning about this, either. Instead, we spent only \$285 discovering this final big piece of the puzzle.

Along with with this major lesson, I learned some useful minor things to be carefully applied in future retreats:

- having warm fresh air is a lot more comfortable than cold air combined with a powerful heater
- even a small amount of exercise really helps the whole process
- audible and psychic noise from the building's 35 other occupants, and electromagnetic distortion from the building's steel and wiring have a huge, negative effect on the quality of rest possible in a darkroom.

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Will soon commence 12th attempt at a long dark retreat, somehow, somewhere.

## 2-day retreat

2012 Mar 30

It happened again.

One of the tears in my being that makes love impossible quietly healed by itself while I napped in darkness. For most of my first day in darkness, I felt tragically sad about losing my chance last year with a certain woman. It was the I'm-gonna-die/torn-limb-from-limb kind of romantic sadness. In late afternoon, I fell sleep, and upon waking, the tragedy was over. Just gone. I still felt sad, but the thought of her didn't wipe me out anymore. Some of the causes of my error occurred to me, and I felt stable again for the first time in weeks or months.

The psyche is tissue, like any other part of the organism. Some of it is subtle tissue, invisible to the eye. But it tears and bleeds and heals just the same. Somewhere near my core, a gaping wound has made the feeling of love so painful or overwhelming that another part of my being sabotages love in my life.

Typically, love short-circuits me. I lose myself, make maudlin mistakes, and lose strength and attractiveness. She tires of me and leaves, and I am left with a bonfire of sadness and shame. Better to avoid it altogether. It doesn't matter if life drains of its color, becomes an agony of longing. Just turn off that other pain.

It has been impossible. Over and over and over, I could not admit what I needed, not feel the shame of needing something, the shame of being sick from being hurt for needing anything, the horrible guilt of being alive and taking up space. And that's what love does. It brings the truth to the surface. The truth about needing to love, about damage and shame, about one's right to be. I wasn't ready for that. So I unconsciously arranged to leave.

But what if one could recover? What if the wounds dealt accidentally between my mother and me in infancy could finally knit themselves closed?

In 40 years of suffering this, and 25 of trying to recover, nothing gave it a chance to heal itself as well or effortlessly as darkness.

So as nervous as I felt before retreating this time, I did it anyway. There is nothing for fidgetiness but holding still, and darkness removes the distractions that make it so difficult. The trouble is actually getting into the darkroom. Fortunately, my friend simply announced our retreats last week, so I didn't have to weigh doing it anymore, just prepare the room.

After I got over the love hurdle, my first thought was to build a portable dome for myself. Then I can live wherever I need to. So I started designing it in my mind. For material, I settled on good ol' cardboard. Free. Non-toxic. Structural and insulative. Quick and easy to work with. A boon to humankind. Pics soon.

I had some random "deep thoughts":

- Why surrender to love? Love is no aggressor. Cease fire! There was never any threat.
- If you're going to "be the change", you yourself are first actually going to have to change. Uh, sorry.
- We are identified with a phony idea of the body. We *need* to be identified with our bodies, with the autonomous self, with all of it. For self-healing to occur, the self must identify with the healer—the body—and be free to operate it completely.
- In Adele's lyrics, "Someone like you," refers to one's lost self.
- What passes for bananas at this latitude is a travesty.

Like my last retreat in this room, I constantly dreamt meaningless, fast-paced dreams. Wretched. God have mercy on anyone who does this in an apartment building—with all its steel, wiring, wireless

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electromagnetic interference, and psychic chaos of other occupants—and imagines he has actually done a Hygienic dark retreat. This requires an empty, small, grounded, natural, quietly located, and preferably round building. One can get relief, obviously. I regained some ground lost last summer and after my [last retreat](#). But even as I hungered for sleep last night, I felt irritated by the interference. I felt tired and irritated upon upon waking, too. So I threw in the towel and slowly opened up the room. It was just before dawn. Maybe I'll have the sense to nap later.

Interesting. Wretched comes from the Old English *wrecca*, 'banished person', related to the German *recke*, 'warrior, hero'. That would explain a lot.

When I came out, I looked around a bit, then started writing this. Stayed on computer most of the day. Had a heavy conversation or two. Felt a bit unsure of things (plans, living arrangements) by bedtime.

Woke up feeling just fine. Clear and motivated. To go from suicidally depressed to excited and energetic in three days is very weird. Even in the first day out weirdness, I felt a thread of rapture running through my solar plexus, a feeling of quiet, precious joy. Richness and color have returned to the world and my life. This usually happens, but its easy to forget just how much.

In two days, I have talked to three other people serious about doing long retreats. Maybe we can fund the whole thing ourselves. Somehow it will happen this summer in Europe. Game on.

## 7x1-day retreat

2013 Jan 10

Just before New Year's, I began the first retreat in the new darkroom. As usual with a new room, it had lots of mechanical problems. And as usual, the self-healing psyche, given an inch, took a mile.

Almost everyday I spent an hour or two fixing something in darkness. Sometimes, Johan also worked on it. Heater elements vibrated, light leaked around the panels, the bed was uneven and too soft, electric circuits had to be mapped and disconnected. The mask sucked. I saw light everyday, so it was like doing seven, back-to-back 1-day retreats. These were considerably less than excellent circumstances.

Nonetheless, I healed from and then saw certain otherwise fatal obstacles to life and love that have plagued me my whole life. Proof that if the conditions of miracles are provided, miracles will follow.

This is the pattern: underlying damage heals insensibly and effortlessly, then intense insight comes. Insight, realization, epiphany get a lot of attention because they are visible. People think they can work directly with their beliefs and actually effect change in the being. But beliefs, being conscious, are on relatively shallow levels of psychic function. If the damage that underlies one's self-destructive beliefs does not heal, then no matter how many insights occur, no matter how much "work" one does upon them directly, nothing will really change.

In fact, trying to work with them re-injures oneself. The belief is like a scab. It actually mitigates the damage of one's wound. The wound must heal from the inside if the scab is to fall off without causing worse problems.

On the other hand, if the damage heals, the insights come naturally. They are really unexpected. They come at the end of the deeper process of healing of the tissues involved. Irrational, destructive beliefs fall away by themselves.

I was strongly motivated to retreat by the relentless, intense pain of a terrible break-up three months before. My breakthroughs centered on early childhood trauma, as usual. (Notes are in quotes.)

## Day 1

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My aim, my wish in this retreat: to recover the rest of myself, the lost part. But it really feels like the retreat might not work this time: "I am at the end of the game. Either life will make me whole now or never. This retreat is the drama of civilization, condensed and reversed in the being of one man. This is my apocalypse, the end of the world inside."

## Day 2

Bruxism: has destroyed my teeth and caused me to fear sleep. After retreat, I learn that bruxism actually prevents restorative sleep. So I never had a chance to recover even a little bit from birth trauma. Lifetime of sleep, health, and social problems resulted. And deep resignation. But what caused tension leading to teeth-grinding in the first place?

Not the crappy bed, but my physical unfitness, causes my back pain. Started exercising daily and pain went away immediately.

Exercise also counters desperation.

Basing Natural Hygienic pathology on trauma rather than toxicity and enervation: now, whatever the problem, look for the trauma. Like William Arthur Evans' psychobiology.

## Day 3

Sex is the part of myself that was lost and forbidden: "Reintegration of my self as sex. Not, 'I am sexual,' but, 'I am sex.' Universe also, is sex. I saw astral scene of a universe-sized orgy. First, I resisted it. Then I allowed it ('what I resist persists'). I feel unified with my sexuality again. I feel familiar pleasant heaviness and density in my body. I feel tons of sexual energy and arousal, but can easily contain it."

So, "imagery takes form of whatever is resisted: sex, money, food, etc." Which is why it becomes hellish.

## Day 4

"No need to get rid of it [suffering] now. There is still sorrow here. Maybe feeling itself is to be reintegrated now. The tingling on the skin is still present." For 25 years, my skin has tingled in meaningful moments. I have always wondered what it is. I realized it is constricted feeling of the lost part of myself, a sign it is still alive.

Laughter dissipates feeling. Must observe laughter habit.

## Day 5

"Received support from Jack [Nuckols, my primary elder, who recently died] and many others. The plan for this incarnation was to put myself in this isolated position in order to feel all this horror and find a solution. My own need for this kind of suffering is very small. I came as a designer to solve the general problem as well as my own. It was difficult for all those elders to turn their backs on me, but that is what I asked and they agreed to this purpose before we all incarnated."

## Day 6

"A new feeling now of being pierced in the chest. The rebirth of feeling? Not just fear in the gut, but pain in the heart. Pain comes from feeling for the first time in years? Is it the beginning of joy again?" This feeling was very brief. It did not have time to develop because I ended the retreat that day.

“Now it is feeling itself, the great crime and danger, that must be recovered. Finding sex again was like coming across a precious, wounded animal, like finding a stream in a valley. Approaching feeling is like coming to the end of the valley to an ocean full of sharks, needing to cross. God help me.”

The aftermath of this retreat went on for several weeks. Due to reconnecting with my sexuality, I became open to PUA (pickup art), which I had always avoided due its sleaze factor. But I saw another side to it when I came across an article about shit tests. My failure at these had figured largely into my break-up. Reading about them, suddenly the pain of my break-up was gone. I guess because I could see there was nothing special about my loss. She and I had been playing the same games as all other couples. She was awesome. I'll never forget her. But I remain and she is replaceable.

I learned the shocking principle of *masculinity as respectful dominance* (see *Tao of Badass* by Joshua Pellicer and *Book of Pook* by Pook). This enabled me to recover from the dark side of feminism: its gender warfare. I laughed harder than I ever have at hundreds of pick-up stories in *The Game* by Neil Strauss and *Get Laid or Die Trying* by Jeff Allen. PUA is super liberating. I am trying this new way of being toward women, alternately succeeding slightly then bombing. Still an [AFC](#), but the ducks are slowly lining up.

UPDATE: The pickup I studied made my “game” more awkward than ever. After eight months of this, I came across the *direct* approach to pickup: telling a woman right away why one noticed her and the romantic purpose one is talking to her for. This is a consistent application of the alpha/dominant idea to pickup. A dominant man needn't hide his intentions behind memorized techniques and lines (the *indirect* approach I had learned).

I got a lot of good ideas from indirect pickup. Some basics still apply. But a lot can be tossed out. For this distinction and its content, thanks to [Sasha Daygame](#) and other teachers he recommends: David X, Alan Roger Currie, Johnny Soporno, Bad Boy, James Marshall. And Pook's focus on the self, on being a sexual man—not because that is what women like, but because that is what one is and deeply wants himself—remains helpful.

## 2x2-day retreat

2013 Mar 28

On Sunday, Mar 24, I finished a shockingly effective dark retreat. Something was different about this one. Here is what happened.

### internal report

The retreat was supposed to start Tuesday night. But it did not start until Wednesday morning because I stayed up all night finishing modifications to the room. I was rushing because I had a date with a woman scheduled for right after the retreat. This also made me restless. I had a bad feeling about both retreat and date logistics from the start.

Sure enough, I came out Friday to find the date was canceled. I hung around on the computer all day feeling like crap. Something was up. I went back into darkness in the evening and felt a little better after sleeping. As usual, I ate, exercised, and laid back down. Then it happened.

Half-awake, half-dreaming, I heard and felt a menacing vibration on my skin. I saw an organic wire-frame circuit overlaying my body and plugged into it, like a computer module. It glowed green, quickly increasing in vibration for a second, then popped off of me and floated away. In a moment of techno-horror, I realized the circuit was a suicide program. My infantile unconscious had integrated generations of family influences into a plan: get involved with a woman, then fail so badly with her I kill myself.

I felt no blame. Normally when I see things that happened with me and my family, I feel mad. I blame my mom and dad. Not this time. What happened to me had happened to all of us. Like we were all caught in

a big wave. It was impersonal and accidental, not intentional. Just a terrible fact.

The suicide program is connected with my usually being broke. Working at something interesting and profitable has made me attractive to women, bringing me one step closer to death. It also set me up for betrayal in business, a pattern of my father's. Thus being weak in the world was not a failing but a survival strategy.

How exactly, did this program enter me? From his spiritual teacher, my father got the idea I was a Golden child. I was ready-made, so he didn't have to do anything about me. Like his father, whom he never met, he left my raising to my mother and their elder. On an instinctive, unconscious level, she interpreted my father's lack of involvement with me as rejection of me.

In the past, a mother in such a situation might have left her child to die in the wilderness (something I would simulate at 19 with a 23-day fast). But in our society, it is "just not done". And on a conscious level, my mother loved me intensely. So rather than kill me herself, she unconsciously set me up to later kill myself over a woman—her replacement. How? I believe this part was done wordlessly, by feeling. By her deep coldness, distance, and unavailability toward me. Sometimes, even a murderous hostility.

She had no choice in this. It was instinctive. It also expressed an incapacity of feeling she had learned from her own parents, who had learned it from theirs, etc. This goes all the way back, I suppose, to our [catastrophe](#).

But Mother also loved me. Fiercely. Desperately. So like Rhea's saving of her child, Zeus, she subconsciously found a terrible way to protect me against the time bomb she had planted in me. She teased, shamed, and discouraged me my whole life about my sexuality and relationship with girls. She was merciless. And she never copped to it when I confronted her.

Consequently, I have rarely felt confident about romance. Love has almost always made me feel like I was dying. I developed myriad ways of avoiding women I liked and destroying things with those who somehow got close. I have watched myself in horror laugh after successfully avoiding or sabotaging a woman's interest in me. Afterward I would pay with anguish when it was too late to get her back and I realized my mistake. But the main goal was accomplished: I was safe. And I could continue racing to find a way to recover from the program.

Why race? Because such programs are powerful things. As I aged, thoughts of death increasingly plagued me. The weight of 25 years of romantic failure was becoming a sufficient motive to suicide. Sixteen months before, I had finally gotten a clear idea of how I would accomplish it. This was part of a serious [breakdown](#). Only knowing I had found, in darkness, a possible way to live saved me.

For years I resented my mother's treatment of me. Mommie Dearest. Why would she admit her errors in only general terms? Because what I resented her for was precisely what had saved me from an even more terrible fate.

I am rewriting this report after six months. This part of my mother's behavior did not come clear to me till now. Apparently, I first had to spend some time acting on the other result of the retreat: a new found ability to take care of myself (described below in "aftermath").

Like my last retreat, when I began, I felt sure I was too hopeless to recover even in darkness. My attitude was like this: "This can't work this time. I'm too far gone. How can this possibly work? But what else is there to do?" Then, like I was talking to the process itself: "I dare you to work. You cannot depend on my belief this time to work. You just have to work no matter what I think or feel."

I felt afraid my tricky ego had adapted to darkness somehow and neutralized my response to it. Thank god I was wrong. Like all my retreats, psycho-physical healing occurred and stunning insights arose, releasing more of my being from bondage, from the concrete body cast protecting me and holding me at the bottom of my little ocean.

Sometimes the insight is merely sad. This time, it was Frankenstein- horrifying. I cried a long time. I no

longer asked, “Why?” about the perpetual failure in my life. Sleep finally came again. When I awoke, I felt not as rested as usual, but emotionally renewed and calm. I uncovered the windows and walked out into light.

## **mechanical report**

The room worked much better this time. I made mutes for radiators that were ringing. A lightproof mask from ski goggles. An odor-free pee bottle. A muffler for the ventilation pipe. The first three worked quite well, the muffler only so-so.

I finally realized the problem with our energy recovery ventilator. The fan motors are integrated with the blades. They are in the airstream, so there is no way to insulate against their noise. The muffler, a box with a pillow in it that the air has to pass through, reduces noise 30%. But the hum and whine of the motors still pierces everything after a couple days of attuning one’s hearing in darkness. A proper fan set-up would be larger low-RPM fans outside the building driven by an external motor in its own sound-insulated compartment.

Projects, projects. Sigh.

I used the mask to go to the bathroom and kitchen. I even made a smoothie while blindfolded. Sight can be a crutch. The pee bottle worked like a charm.



Today, a guy told me about a WWII bunker in his hometown that he explored. It is big, with offices, bedrooms, equipment rooms, gunning rooms, etc. It is perfectly silent two floors down, about 5m underground. The whole room became like a big seashell to his ears. He started freaking out from it and had to snap his fingers to make his hearing work normally.

Now *that* would be a darkroom: a fricking King's Chamber-Sarcophagus set-up without the burdens of a pharaoh.

## aftermath

Since the retreat, I have been functioning close to normal levels without the tremendous conflict I always felt before. Within a day of exiting, I made money for the first time in six months. Enough to pay the dreaded rent. It was easy. I even exercised for several days. For the first time in my life, I feel like an adult [UPDATE: in six months, this feeling has not left me]. Beginning to heal from my suicide program seems to be why. It was, after all, the thing that moved me to avoid being responsible or achieving much success in anything (except, thank god, discovering a means of healing from the suicide program).

extras - [hygienic-darkroomretreat.com](http://hygienic-darkroomretreat.com): profound rest for the self-healing psyche

On the 16th day since my retreat ended, I was making lunch for our second client in the darkroom and felt love for what I was doing. A first? Work has mattered more to me in general. I have constantly felt like working on my book.

I just disabled my profiles on two dating sites that were absorbing a lot of my time and energy. I have known for months that my ex-girlfriend embodied my lost sexual self, that in missing her, in hanging out on these sites, I was really missing myself. But I knowing didn't change how I felt. Yesterday, this missing part of myself snuck up on me. I reeled, disoriented by sudden satisfaction and wholeness.

My still small instinct of self-preservation protected me from my suicide program, and therefore, kept me from women (most of the time). For example, I used what I learned recently from PUA (pick-up art) to sabotage approaches more effectively than before. Now, with a little gap between myself and my hidden agenda, I feel I have the beginning of a chance at relationship. In the meantime, I do not need a woman in the life-or-death way I thought I did. And 41 years of avoiding women is a lot of inertia to reverse.

It is very strange to feel myself as the object of my own longing, that I am the one for whom I have been so desperate. I can't believe it, really. I knew it intellectually since studying Ayn Rand 22 years ago. But it is quite another thing to feel it.

I am avoiding it even now, staying up late to write this. But it doesn't seem to be going away, so I'll get used to it. Maybe even start sleeping properly. [UPDATE: this feeling has mostly faded but sometimes returns.]

Boy, to think of all the years endured without myself, in denial, in pain, thinking it was a woman I was missing. I crashed myself into one after another in order to find someone to kill myself over. Romeo a hundred times over without relief of a blade. In my retreat, I begged god for mercy one way or the other. It has come.

All my retreats have culminated in this one. It is a milestone. Now I can function well enough to begin supporting myself and then get a 14-day retreat organized. What is next?!

## **lindsey vona's 14-day darkness retreat**

[Her vivid account, republished in toto with my comments in [brackets]. Background follows.]

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Dear Family,

This is a detailed description of my retreat in total darkness for 14 days at Sierra Obscura Darkness Center [now defunct].

Recently I've been getting quite a few requests from friends in the community to share my experience so I decided to go all out and offer a candid portrait of my journey through the abyss into self-realization. I don't speak much about the physical environment or daily diet type elements as I feel that they are secondary to the actual evolution of one's inner world while inside of a retreat of this nature. It was very intense and wonderful, and I am looking forward to doing an even longer one possibly at the end of 2010.

Here goes...

In early September [2009], my good friend Danielle Dao hired me to help her develop her dream, Sierra Obscura Darkness Retreats. It all happened so fast. Having a darkness retreat center has been Danielle's dream for several years, after her retreat in Mexico completely changed her life. Danielle hired me to do much of the initial development for the center, and offered me my first darkness retreat as a gift, as well as an opportunity for me to discover whether I would want to continue participating with Sierra Obscura after it's opening, which happened two days before I entered the dark on November 20th.



Although I've been very committed to my own awakening process, consciously for the past seven years, and have had some amazing glimpses of unconditioned reality, beautiful breakthroughs into the heart of compassion and gratitude, and have investigated and plunged through the depth of my own psyche to its core, something still felt incomplete inside of me. After layer upon layer of insights and openings with teachers on the physical plane as well as plant medicine teachers, I have still felt bound by conditioning and fear on a very deep level. My heart was full of questions about the nature of this reality, and I was especially wanting true insight into the nature and causes of suffering and oppression within and without this brief lifespan. My life, despite my efforts, has still felt limited and unsatisfying in so many ways. I have longed for a much deeper liberation and satisfaction than anything this world of desire could satiate, and ached for total freedom from any lingering fear of death or the unknown. This incompleteness in my process of self-realization has haunted me and, on some level, held me back from even fully having you, my world. That is why I did this retreat. I was exhausted from not being able to fully unveil from this illusion on my own terms, outside of any conceptual model, spiritual paradigm, or belief system, especially the ones I have taken on on behalf of my awakening process.

I discovered during my retreat that some of my previous training was actually unfit for helping me navigate the ever deepening territories of the abyss I was now inhabiting. It became clear to me after several days in the darkness that holding onto worldly goals, even spiritually minded ones, was still just more mind stuff and attachment. Eventually, as you will read, this too died.

I also needed rest and to find a way to live a balanced life again, and to release myself from my delicious addiction to caffeine and to the mechanistic habit of endlessly scheduling all aspects of my life. I discovered both of these addictions as defense strategies I was using in an attempt to be happy and free, although previously I thought I was using them in service to actually building the life of my dreams.

My other main desire during this retreat was to begin the process of cleansing my unconscious from much of the media conditioning and imagery that I took in as a child growing up in New York. Before the retreat I was in a meditation with a teacher and we were learning about conscious dying. He told us that if we had taken in horrific images (either from the media, horror movies, newspapers, our lives, war, etc) that they were still lodged in our unconscious, and that at the time of death when traveling through the Bardo you could be faced with all of these images, and that they would appear as real before you. I wanted to delete as much of this as possible and begin the process of transforming universal negativity and the personal and collective storehouse of psychic garbage, back into light. I was fortunate during my retreat to have a message passed on to me from my new friend Rigzin, who is a Buddhist Practitioner. My heart felt open to her insight and offerings, which are simple tools that helped me navigate through much of my retreat.

Now, here is some of how it went down.

(Also, if you are interested in this type of retreat either soon or in the future, I encourage you to read our blog which has a detailed list of the day by day chemical changes that happen inside of your brain when your body is deprived of light and eating a high tryptophan diet. Many amazing changes happen, and by day 10 your brain has released DMT, the same chemical that is released at the time of your birth and death, and which is also activated through drinking Ayahuasca.)

For the first few days I mostly slept and ate only very small portions of raw food, and drank about 32 oz of water with chlorophyll in it every day. For these first four or five days my mind was continuously flooded with flashes of horrific images, flashes of lights and hallucinations, and dances of light and color that very closely resemble much of what is depicted through visionary art and the designs of the Shapibo people. I noticed intricate synchronicity in these images and dreams and started to notice the course of unfolding that my unconscious was taking. It was giving me clues along my treasure map home even amidst watching this endless cascade of horror. A few days before the retreat I bought a post card with a cupid slinging an arrow. When I walked into my room at the center I saw an arrow that had been placed on my altar. The arrow theme showed up again in my hallucinations and dreams. In one dream I saw a tunnel of Native American men slinging arrows into the body of a young boy who now lay dying in the desert, and then, for days, I would close my eyes and see only millions of arrows flowing in unison through the endless void. I like to think now that this arrow symbol was my unconscious mind letting me know that I was preparing to die.

My mind activity was amplified and raging like a train through the night with all of this, though my body was deeply resting in the cozy black womb. I did not feel afraid of any of this at all. Actually I was very curious about it, and began having very lucid dreams and then working with them with different shamanic dream techniques I have learned. This only led to limited and unsatisfying insights and this is also when I got a message that Rigzin had called and suggested that I do the following two things. One, whenever I felt the impulse to habitually reach towards a teacher or teaching, especially dream work, to simply pause, and relax my mind. This simple willingness to relax and return to presence became my most consistent and helpful practice for the entire retreat. I realized in this moment that I needed to surrender everything I thought I knew. She also suggested I sit and pull images that were passing across my mind-screen into my heart, and to work with them in such a way as to transform them back into light. She said that this practice actually helps to transform universal negativity into light, and that it is part of our work here on earth as light-workers. I did this practice for several hours a day until about day 7 or so, at which time the images stopped and my mind actually got very quiet for long stretches of time. In the dark we referred to undetermined lengths of time as "abyss moments," as it was sometimes challenging to have any sense of day and night cycles. At other times it was relatively easy to tell because I became acutely aware of the psychic activities happening upstairs where the chefs and space holders were preparing for the day.

During this first week I discovered astral projection. I found it very easy to distinguish this state of awareness from dreaming or hallucinating, because I could actually see myself ascend up a long dark tunnel and then suddenly find myself peering into the activities happening in other cultures and parts of the world that I have never visited. This process deepened my experience of oneness with all beings and peoples, as I was able to look very clearly into the eyes of people from all walks of life and see myself in them. and feel compassion and excitement as though I was visiting a far off land. I discovered the importance of having shields to protect me on these journeys, as at one point while lying on the floor I saw Bill Gates and a team of scientists looking into my organs with flashlights. I told them to leave my room. Danielle taught me an amazing meditation on how to ground myself and align my energy with the earth, shielding myself from unwanted visitors or energy while traveling. Somehow, this whole thing didn't make me feel like I was going crazy, I felt more like this child with beginners mind, excited to see how for my explorations could take me.

I was also able to visit some of my friends and relatives, both living and dead, on a dream plane and communicate with them, tell them how much I love them, and worked to dissolve any lingering boundaries or stories. My body was also cleansing and I developed a new relationship with my organs and energy systems, especially with my kidneys. I was told that the kidneys are the storehouse for our inherited energy from our parents. This is also where we store most of our fear. I started communicating with them, smiling to them, massaging them and sending them water charged with love and sacred symbols and intentions. I also kept with my chlorophyll program for the duration of the retreat and found this to be very nourishing and oxygenating. It actually gave me tons of chi for my meditations and yoga, to be working with the kidneys in a loving way. As the retreat progressed I found myself becoming more and more still and softer inside, my nervous system quieting, my mind slowing down. My meditations became more visual at this time, hallucinations are constant at this point because of the chemical changes happening, every time closing my eyes or having them open, seeing intricate geometry's, designs, symbols, images, and dances of light like curtains of energy washing before me. Navigating in the dark while hallucinating is quite something. You see shapes and colors in your minds eye pretty continually although you are just staring endlessly into abyss.

I didn't realize how high I was at this point but when I would come out of a long period of being alone meditating and working with myself, and talk to one of the other friends in the retreat, often we ended up hysterically laughing, as well as talking about our process and what meditation techniques we were finding the most useful. My body and psychic awareness continued to heighten until I could feel even small changes in energy in myself and in others in the house.

During this first week I experienced the most challenging passages of my inner process, and was confronted with feelings of anger and hostility and delirium, strange sensations in my head as though my third eye was imploding in on itself. At this point I stopped my cleansing diet and started eating warm grounding food, which helped tremendously.

In my work with myself I became acutely aware of what was left of my negative self-concept and beliefs about life that were still conditioning all of my interactions with the world. I began hunting my inner world, exploring them to the depths and usurping what was left of them. I found this incredibly liberating to do alone in the dark for as long as I needed to, without interruption from the outside world or any distraction. Finally the one that has caused me the most suffering and separation became apparent and I used my tools of inquiry to work it out. In Buddhism this process of self-liberation from outmoded beliefs is called "Shattering the Ridgepole." This process allows us to return to an unconditioned state of awareness, free from all concepts and projections of past and future. Here was the beginning of another level of freedom. I decided then to give birth to myself on my own terms free from the old mythology of my internal life. Here I was, in the womb, cleansing my DNA luggage, beliefs and previously held attitudes, and totally nurturing myself. I began envisioning myself entering the world with fresh eyes and an open heart again, determined to love and play and create a life free from mental bondage. I had help in this process as many of my new friends and allies came to visit me in dreams at this time, dancing with me, splattering neon paint everywhere and reminding me that it is okay to be young and wild and free again amidst this new found stillness, and amidst feeling the depth of concern and compassion for the world that has grown in me through my years of spiritual development. During this time I used our crystal sound bowls and essential oils to clear blocked and held energy in my room and to allow my senses to slowly acclimate to the new being born inside of me. I started fantasizing about how to develop and refine myself as an artist beyond my previously held limits. Through the whole retreat I had also been playing my guitar and singing in the dark, delighting myself in developing new and intricate finger picking techniques and learning how to use chi and trust my fingers on the fret board although I could not see them. I was singing and opening my voice in new ways. The dark is such an intimate space for musical exploration, I felt at many times that I could stay there forever.

Around day 9 the DMT starts releasing and I felt like I was being teased right on the edge of ego death. It is very different than Ayahuasca. The visuals in my meditations began to lessen and my mind basically stopped for long stretches of time. I was awash with black nothing and the occasional passage of thoughts as I lay waiting for the next stages of internal changes.

Somewhere between day 9 and day 11 is when I had my most profound opening into self-realization. I don't remember how long it lasted but this is a fair description of what I remember. At one point in my meditation my head opened and flooded with light. I watched and felt this quiet bliss and gladness take over and noticed my body became pure vibration. I couldn't feel or relate to myself as physical anymore or as Lindsey, in any way, and yet I was still myself but it felt much more real than what we call waking life.

I was absorbed into this light and this light became the entirety of space around me, until I was only this giant radiant light touching void. I was real and home again and bigger than a trillion of our suns. In some way of seeing beyond having physical eyes I looked down and saw the dots that were the earth and sun and solar system and thought of Lindsey. None of it was real. I was the only thing real. The material thing I once identified as and thought of as myself and my world was realized to be a full and total illusion, not even worth defining. Words like spiritual and Lindsey and earth flashed before my awareness of perfect peace, and were realized as inconsequential as though they never existed, were only beautiful idea-pictures already come and gone and dissolved back into my actual self of pure light. I zoomed down to earth and saw Lindsey. It didn't make sense. I was a gigantic bigger than all concept of universe radiant unending shimmering ball of light emanating perfect compassion forever without cause. Even now as I write this I am aware that it's total illusion and ultimately inconsequential. I am holding this paradox while sitting in physical space and time, not quite sure how to relate it to you at all, really.

The nature of reality is not what it seems. Even my experiences of perceiving the maya, of perceiving emptiness and suchness throughout my whole "life as Lindsey" as a spiritual seeker, could not come close to this total absorption into self-remembering perfection of total....er uh...beyond words and description annihilation into truth-light.

During this absorption into light I also realized that I was able to sit on the rug of my room as a perfected vibrational entity, not as "Lindsey" but as my true self, a vibration of perfect Buddha nature. My best metaphor for this is that we are like living vibrating nonphysical Tanka paintings. Already perfected and beyond even concepts of enlightenment or self-realization, perfectly realized, we've just forgotten, and

rightly so because these mind-body-desire mechanisms are not us even though they are. This life is a shadow in a great memory probably already forgotten by unending intelligent light.

I was able to easily shift between my awareness of self as this great unending light, and my awareness as this vibrating perfectly realized Buddha nonphysical self for what felt like forever. I think this realization state lasted several days while in the dark. All fear of death was completely annihilated in this realization. All relationship to suffering or suffering over the suffering of others at this time was not even a laughable possibility. Identification was futile. I was happy to die into this light forever. Part of me wanted to die. Part of me very much did not want to come back into this room, this body-thing as Lindsey. It didn't make sense and yet it happened and here I am. I didn't think about my parents or whether they would miss me if I let myself get completely absorbed in the truth of what I am because I knew that ultimately they are the exact same thing and that eventually whether in this "lifetime story" or at the time of "death" we pretty much all remember because we already are it. I guess I can't really know what is true for you or "anyone" except that you are me and this life is not at all what it seems.

This idea of physicality is still just a concept, and we have very sophisticated sciences now that describe this process of liberation through all of these body energy centers and it's funny that you can get back to yourself through this map called a body but ultimately it is the false identification. What a joke!

It is very much a dream-thought radiating from the one eternal emanation which is also you, right now, beyond the husk of your worldly-identity. The earth herself is a dream and is dreaming and we are all asleep in it right now. Even though I've had this realization, right now, for the most part I am sleeping, because the dense physical plane is the world of attachment and desire and ultimately I am a vibration shape-shifting back and forth between image-vibration and perfect eternal light and identification with the physical which isn't really physical even though it seems so real.

This realization completely annihilated my need to "work on myself" in the way I was for the previous abyss moments of the retreat. I didn't need to feel blissful anymore or have any particular experience or have an identity that I had sculpted well enough to get what I want out of this "Life" from you or anyone or "world." All that was spoiled, and I was free from all fear or notion of death and still am...in this moment It is funny. Right now I am excited about life as well as death, but that's only partially true because I'm right here, and life and death are only concepts. It is a paradox. Amidst this realization as I came back into this husk of illusion sweet self it occurred to me that perfecting human love will do nicely for now, that I am happy to break open into the depth of love with you in this lifetime, and excited for the challenges to come in the hopes that I can maintain these perceptions enough in my awareness to live more gracefully in the truth of the light that we are sharing here together.

I can't really know for sure how my life will unfold from here, now that I am out of retreat. All I know for sure is that I am perfect god light temporarily dreaming Lindsey and World and none of this happened or is real at all. Under this husk of temporarily arising selfish thoughts, preferences, conditions, images, attachments, and desires I am a vibration of pure compassion, which is being itself, already liberated, never born never died, traversing the great void which holds each of us, whether as gods or humans, as my teacher Maniko says, more perfectly than any living element.

A few abyss moments after this Danielle came down stairs and we spoke and she lit a candle next to my bed.

The first time I saw the physical apparition of light in fourteen days. I saw the true nature of reality this time with human eyes. I could only look at HER for a few seconds and then started shaking and crying and needed the candle to be put out for a while I integrated what I saw.

Then I went upstairs to with be with Paskal and the Sierra Obscura team near the fireplace. The blank slate of my awareness free of all concepts. I saw light dancing everywhere and the unborn world radiating and perfecting itself in presence. A thought arose in my mind and I saw how its flash across the screen of awareness literally bent reality around me, a projected thought is a distorted lens that conditions this mind-world. Sitting as source seeing everyone in their God-selfhood by candle light I cried and silently noticed how easily the psychic energies from the minds around me danced and played together, refracting off of the screen. Later this evening I called Rigzin, who I knew had been sending us prayers for

the entire retreat, wanting to share the depth of my gratitude from that pure place with her and with the whole team who served us for those two weeks.

The next morning with sunglasses on Danielle took me for a drive along this beautiful tree lined road on our way into downtown Nevada City. The light was so mesmerizing and it was hard to really talk, just wanted to look at everything.

As I saw this “world” again, I could barely contain my laughter at how unreal it seemed but tried to hold it together in the restaurant.

This retreat was by far the most profoundly important investment I have ever made in this sweet dream thing I now humbly, temporarily, call myself. I am slowly coming back into my “life” and integrating. Although I am mainly silent these last few days, I can feel the conditioned world of concepts and desires dancing again, although without as much power over me as it once had. I am excited that my body/mind is now naturally waking up early and wanting to meditate right away. I understand that many many beings on this planet including, possibly you, have died into this perfect state of self-realization. After all, it is what we are. I’m filled with emptiness and quiet gladness and gratitude in having an opportunity to take this on alone in the dark, in comfort, with so many beings physical and non-physical supporting me. I’m excited to do another retreat like this later on this year. Danielle informed me that next time I can do 3 to 4 weeks. She will likely hold this special retreat for return Darkroom participants wishing to go further.

If you are reading this, know that I’m excited to see you again, with fresh eyes.

Eternally yours, Lindsey

~~

Lindsey Vona is a [graphic artist](#) and [musician](#). Her full account has become difficult to find, so I’m republishing it here from the [archived website of Sierra Obscura Darkness Retreats](#). County inspectors closed the center after six months due to civilization’s sheer insanity a harmless zoning violation. Its founder, Danielle Dao, started an art studio and is studying permaculture abroad and plans to build another retreat.

James Fadiman excerpted the dazzling parts of this account in [The Psychedelic Explorers](#), which led to ~~fame~~ [and fortune](#) [an engaging interview](#).

## 365-day retreat of 150 year-old yogi

*This story was sent me by [Finn Po](#) and seems to have come from [Rhio’s website](#)*

Remember I had told you about the Indian Mahatma who had lived for 185 years and rejuvenated his body three times, growing new teeth, and regaining a youthful, flexible and wrinkle-free body. The book has a picture of him when he was 168. I wish I could put it through this email.

The following excerpt is from *Maharaj, A Biography of Shriman Tapasviji Maharaj, A Mahatma Who Lived For 185 Years* by T.S. Anantha Murthy, 1972. Revised American Edition, The Dawn Horse Press 1986. The excerpt is a description of the second Kaya Kalpa treatment that he took at the age of 150. The first treatment he took at the age of 100 was a 3 month treatment.

The Saint lived happily in his hermitage for many years and grew to be nearly 150. In due course, he began to experience various symptoms of bodily debility. In addition to the general weakness of his limbs, his eyesight had again become dim and most of his teeth had decayed and fallen. He was partially deaf, and his hair had become wholly white or grey. His skin was black and wrinkled and his sallow face proclaimed his extreme old age. The Saint, therefore, decided to undergo the rejuvenation treatment that he had learned from the mahatma of Parashuramkund.

As soon as he decided to undergo the kalpa treatment, all necessary help arrived by Shri Krishna’s Grace.

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The Saint needed two young and intelligent servants to prepare the medicine according to his directions as well as to administer it to him, and two such youths, named Haridas and Laldas, obtained his darshan at that time and agreed to live in the hermitage with him and render every necessary service during the kalpa treatment. He intended to take the medicine for 365 days in order to obtain the full benefit of the treatment, and for that purpose he required an underground cell. His wealthy devotees were glad to assist him. First they built a set of new rooms near the sweet-water well for the use of the attendants and then they built a commodious underground cell close by. Mayi cheerfully agreed to fetch fresh cow's milk every day.

Before beginning the treatment, the Saint instructed Haridas and Laldas, 'My sons, on the appointed day, I will leave this hut and move to the new underground cell. I will keep the jar of medicine with me in the cell. You must see that no one comes near the cell on any account. After I enter the cell, close the door and lock it from the outside and keep the key safely on your person. I will fasten the bolt from the inside and lie down on my bed where I will be either sleeping or in meditation, and so no one should disturb me except at stated hours. Open the door every morning at daybreak and enter the cell with a vessel of fresh cow's milk, leaving it and a measured quantity of medicine by me. Take care that no one else accompanies you when you visit me at daybreak, not even Mayi.'

When Haridas and Laldas had understood these and other necessary directions, and when the chosen day arrived, the Saint left his mud hut and entered the cell. It had no windows or skylight and would be faintly lit only when the door was opened at dawn. It would otherwise be completely dark, and the Saint felt that the cell served his purpose admirably.

Haidas and Laldas followed the strict daily routine described by the Saint for a year, living quietly in their rooms and allowing no one to approach or even speak in the vicinity of the cell. The Saint spent his time either in sleep (which he could enter at will), in meditation, or in repeating a mantra. . . At last, the final dose of medicine was taken on the 365th day and the Saint told his attendants that he would give darshan to all his devotees the next day. . .

The next day, Haridas and Laldas opened the door of the cell and prostrated to the Saint, who was standing to receive them, beaming with happiness. His broad, full face proclaimed his regained youth. His skin was rosy and shining with not even the vestige of a wrinkle from head to foot. All the joints of his old body had become supple and strong and his grey hairs had all turned black. His eyesight had become powerful, his deafness had disappeared, and a new set of teeth had grown in. He felt that he had regained the stamina and physique of a young man of thirty years. Even Haridas and Laldas, who had been privileged to see him day after day, were amazed at their Master's tall, muscular body when he gave them darshan that morning. . .

Four days after the treatment had been formally terminated, a devotee named Jayaval Singh came and obtained the Saint's darshan. Jayaval Singh was wealthy and had served the Saint in various ways. He, too, was astonished to behold the youthful face and features of his Guru, and he prostrated to the Master and said, 'Maharaj, this kalpa treatment baffles my understanding. If a stranger saw you today, he would say that you were only thirty years old. . . No ordinary man can stay in a dark cell for a year in sleep or meditation. I think that the success of your treatment is the combined result of the medicine and the power of your tapas.'

In the description of the Saint's first kaya kalpa treatment, the "medicine" was described as various herbs, but no name was given to them. I had to cut down the previous paragraphs a little, but from what is missing above, it is clear that the "Saint" as he was called, believed that the herbs and other kalpa conditions were secondary - and he attributed the rejuvenation, for the most part, to Shri Krishna. He seemed to want to be rejuvenated only to be able to continue his spiritual practices.

One thing I note is how similar the "cell" where he spent his time is to a womb. It was dark. It was quiet and secluded with minimum disturbance. He seems to only have consumed raw milk and herbs. He seems to have slept a lot with the balance of time spent in meditation and repeating mantras.

## dark vader in the 3-day sith bathchamber of

# sleep, rejuvenation, and lust

[Brian Riggs Sullivan, a close friend\*, just did a short darkness retreat and wrote this entertaining report about his experience.]

Last weekend, I engaged in a 3-day (approx. 64-hour) [darkness retreat](#) in a bathroom in my parents' house. The bathroom has no windows and enough length for me to comfortably lie down on the floor (on top of several layers of wool blankets with a sleeping bag). I found a way to easily create complete and total darkness in the room by wrapping a large wool blanket around and over the door, pinning it to itself in a few strategic places and once to the wall, and stuffing a hand towel under the door to keep it closed: this all prevented any light from coming in around the edges. I turned on the bathroom fan and let it run continuously, which let fresh air in (counter-intuitive as that may seem) and provided white noise to muffle any sounds from the rest of the house. I packed a bag and cooler full of raw food (as I follow [Primal Diet](#)), set an alarm to go off about 64 hours later on my turned-off cell phone, and shut myself in there, vowing not to come back out until then.

I had been spending most of the nights there for the preceding 2 weeks, trying it out and getting used to it a bit before deciding to embark on a longer continuous period of time, and felt confident and excited about the whole thing. During 2 weeks, upon seeing the hallway bathroom door closed and hearing the fan on often (until late into the morning or beyond, sometimes, as I like to sleep A LOT), my Dad had taken to lovingly calling me "Dark Vader," or just "Dark" (imitating fond memories of me mispronouncing "Darth Vader" as "Dark Vader" as a kid who had seen some Star Wars movies).

Yes, my only worry involved my parents, the other occupants of the house: would they freak out? After the first night, I got the first question from my mother through the door: "Brian, are you getting up anytime today???" / "Mom, I'm doing a darkness retreat: I'm not getting up until Sunday night!" / "Your father's going to DIE!! ...have a FIT!!" / "Well, SHIT! I TOLD you guys what I was doing?!" (I then asked her for the time of day, because I had no other way of knowing – it was 2:30 PM). The next morning, my Dad rushed over and said through the door: "BRIAN?!" / "YES DAD!" / "Oh good, I just wanted to make sure you could breathe – there's a danger of suffocation in there!" But bless their hearts, very few other words came through the door after that, and I didn't feel any psychic imposition by them at all. They didn't understand the point of what I was doing – it took me a while to get to this point myself, after all – but I did have their tacit support, which I REALLY appreciated: thanks Mom and Dad! I love you!

With certainty established of non-intervention from my parents, I had already settled into a long summer's nap: fluctuating eons of profound sleep, with strong dreams that would continue into a sort of half-waking bardo. Or maybe the dreams would mostly only happen after I had slightly awakened: hard to say when sleep ended and waking began: waking started to acquire a certainty only when my conscious mind took over the narrative. It turns out that the new moon occurred during the retreat: good timing on my part, as that time has a darker, more inward energy to counteract the much less hibernatory energy of early summer. How often do we get to experience darkness just as thoroughly deep whether we close our eyes or open them, so that we cannot tell the back of our eyelids from our open-eyes field of view? When we do, for at least a few hours (in my experience), it tends to knock us out (in a healing way).

Mostly, the time flew, and I spent it almost exclusively lying down, experiencing surprisingly little boredom. I had brought my guitar inside but never felt inspired to play it, though I did sing a bit. I took one long hot bath during the entire retreat. I ate surprisingly little and had food left over at the end (though I did drink a lot of raw milk: easy to consume in the dark and when drowsy and helps me sleep).

By the second full day, though, during some of that sparse waking time, besides other fairly normal random thoughts and some empty-mindedness that we might describe as boredom, I started to experience rampant relationship and sexual fantasies and memories. I vividly relived experiences and emotions from relationships with several different women, and eventually developed a tendency towards mild obsessiveness (a pattern for me in the past). Because I had taken on the totally irrational idea that one woman in particular might have called me, I turned my cell phone on two or three times (while keeping it in a drawer and closing my eyes to minimize light pollution) to see if it would vibrate to indicate a new voicemail. I have the impression that patterns like these can appear as a side-effect of a sort of rebirthing

of the mind in the womb of darkness which might eventually allow us to embrace the “dark side” of ourselves.

Eventually, during the last day or two, as these thoughts and patterns crescendoed and I wondered what to do about their tiresomeness, I felt inspired to practice “self-observation” (a straightforward but challenging spiritual practice involving – at least in the Gurdjieffian tradition – classifying your body-mind’s events, with maximum attention, detail, and precision, into the categories: thinking, feeling, moving, instinctual, and/or sexual activity or impulses, without necessarily involving yourself in the contents of the thoughts) with a clarity and depth that I had never experienced before. Also, by the last 3 or 4 hours of the retreat, though I hadn’t practiced them yet so far, I felt inspired to practice my [Daoist movement form](#) and [simple meditation](#) and had one of my best practices ever (except for finding it difficult to keep my balance in the dark during some of the movement form’s contortions – how well can you stand on one leg with your eyes closed?). My body had a relaxation and limberness and my mind had a stillness and patience that I had also seldom ever experienced before.

I was meditating in peace when the alarm went off signifying the end of the time I had allotted. I had had what felt like exactly the right amount of time in darkness. It was 9:30 PM on a Sunday night: normally, I might’ve let the retreat continue until the next morning—and I probably should’ve—but I had thought that I wanted to check the markets and my forex trades, as 24-hour trading for the coming week had already started several hours before and I had an open trade (I overlooked the fact that only light trading would occur due to the Memorial Day holiday). Bad idea: next time I will end a darkness retreat in the morning, because in my super-charged vitality and excitement upon re-entering the (artificial) light, I proceeded to stay up all night as I caught up on things on the internet that would’ve occupied some of my time that weekend (and also engaged in some time-wasting). In that “2 steps forward, 1 3/4 steps back” kind of way, a lot of the sleep I had caught up on got lost again as my sleep schedule got fouled up for the workweek ahead (which started for me on Tuesday).

Also, upon leaving the darkness, I had the peculiar experience of feeling dizzy for the next several hours whenever I exposed myself to more than just a little light: not uncomfortable dizziness, just weird. Perhaps a more gradual transition and re-integration period would work better, spending a few hours with the door to the retreat room cracked a bit, for instance.

All in all, I had what I consider an extraordinarily valuable experience with this darkness retreat. I would heartily recommend a darkness retreat to others and I look forward to another one myself (next time, one lasting an even longer period of time).

\*GEEKINESS ALERT: if you even care, I call it the “Sith” bath chamber (rather than relating it to the perhaps otherwise-more-befitting Jedi), because: – the Sith embrace the “Dark Side” of the Force, befitting to a darkness retreat – once called Vader, he no longer affiliated with the Jedi – I don’t exactly know how the Jedi supposedly deal with their so-called “negative” emotions – not very well, perhaps – but the Sith embrace and harness them, which fits my experience here – I don’t mean to especially affiliate myself with “evil” (if I even truly believe in such a thing – one of the points of the whole Star Wars story, I submit) or the kind of deception practiced by the Sith, but I do consider them cooler than the Jedi. :)

\*Brian read my design for [Tribal Housing](#) in 2001 and wrote me. We have been friends ever since. Got to meet him for the first time in 2002. That year, he started Seattle Tribal Housing, which closed after nine months. We also built a [dome](#) together 2007 and his chats with me about darkness led to a few pages here ([dreamtime](#), [strifeless](#), [hygiene notes](#)). Totally rad guy into Daoism and trading precious metals whom some lucky woman will [snap up soon](#).

## the darkness conjecture

*This is a collection of my earlier writings. They began appearing in 2001 on my “secret design” geocities site. Verse dates to 1988. The intro sentence is from the first version of [andrewdurham.com](#) when I left geocities.*

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For 21 years, I have combed the edges of philosophy, health, and design for clues to a sane way to live. Here I describe some of my findings.

- Philosophy
  - [Existence Isn't Everything](#) rethinking Objectivism's first axiom
  - [Sociality Undenied](#) the operative principle of band society
  - [From Where?](#) understanding Daniel Quinn
  - [Nothing to Fear, Even Fear Itself](#) big brother's achilles' heel
- Health
  - [Sanity and Health](#) intro  
(this led to [the darkness conjecture](#) and [darkroom retreat](#))
- Design
  - [Just Living](#) a meditation on design
  - [Mechanics of Mass Slavery](#) a drive-by analysis
  - [ORDO](#) an American art of placement
  - [Tribal Housing](#) a design for a full life on \$250 a month
  - [Gallery](#) photos of my projects (at shutterfly.com)
- Misc
  - [Myths](#)
  - [Poems](#)
  - [Lyrics](#)
  - [The Ashers, a River, and I](#)
- By Others
  - [Bibliography](#) five cranial supernovas
  - [Links](#) others' good designs &etc to learn and sing
  - [Origins of Agriculture](#) a stunning *What if...?*
  - [On a Green Mountain with Masanobu Fukuoka](#) the genius of natural farming
  - [QWERTY to Dvorak](#) typing translator

# Existence Isn't Everything

## rethinking Objectivism's first axiom

*for my friend, Sterling, and for Michael Stuart Kelly and the generous crew at [www.objectivistliving.com](http://www.objectivistliving.com)*

"Do you want to assess the rationality of a person, a theory or a philosophical system? Do not inquire about his or its stand on the validity of reason. Look for the stand on axiomatic concepts. It will tell the whole story." –Ayn Rand, *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology* \_

Words have always meant a great deal to me. And so when I, as a student of the work of Ayn Rand, took *existence* into the deepest reaches of my mind as the sole content of *reality*, two things happened. First, it quickly began to restore the natural but damaged connection between myself and the obvious facts around me. But, second, in a strange and menacing way, it began to short-circuit my person until I could barely move or breathe.

Nothing can be considered at the expense of everything. I had taken existence to be everything. But as I would soon discover, it simply is not.

There is what exists. And there is what is. Existence and being. Just about everyone, including Ayn Rand, has used the words, existence and being, interchangeably. And yet Ayn Rand herself taught that only in slang do different words mean exactly the same thing. In formal language, different words always mean different things, however slight or confounded by centuries of inattention be the difference. The words, existence and being, belong to formal language. Therefore they mean different things.

On some level, *everyone knows this*. Else why have two words? Further, I assert that the ancient meanings

ascribed to these words, because they still provide a vital distinction, live on subconsciously in us. And until we bother to make the distinction conscious again and live accordingly, they will cause us confusion, strife—and schism.

So let us look at these words closely. *Being* is pretty easy, being an inflection, in this case, a gerund form, of the verb, *to be*. Being refers to what is. This is airtight, a tautology. But what of this multi-syllabic, Latin-rooted word, *existence*? Reading these words' definitions, even in the Oxford English Dictionary, one can tell little if any difference between them.

Lexicographers generally do not define axiomatic concepts ostensibly with tautologies. I hope that Ayn Rand's approach will reach them faster than Aristotle's reached Aquinas. In the meantime, where usage or definitions have, over time, collapsed together the meanings of different words, I find etymologies highly useful for pulling them back apart. This is because etymologies often provide the only distinguishing characteristic in the entire entry of a word. In the etymology of existence, the difference between it and being literally stands out. Existence comes from the Latin, *existere*, which means, *to stand out*.

To exist is to stand out. Existence is that which stands out.

In contrast, there is nothing in being that says anything about standing out—or up, or in, or anything else. It just is. So existence is not the same as being after all. Further, it is not \_ as much\_ as being. Existence is merely what stands out.

Reality, which had, for me, shrunk to the size of a room, then a postage stamp, then a pinhead, then to a vacuum, suddenly expanded. I could breathe again.

I wonder how much of the work of intellectuals consists of reclaiming words and reasserting their essential meanings. Anyway, a few implications of the Latin enable further elaboration of the point. First, having discovered that existence is what stands out, the question arises: Stands out... from what?

Well, from whatever stands back, apparently. A thing cannot stand out from nothing. It can only stand out from something else. So even without knowing what is back there, we know \_ that\_ something is back there. It does not exist, yet it is.

Again we find that existence is not the same as being. Existence is not all that is, so it cannot make up all of reality. Existence fails as a word meant to refer to everything and therefore, as an axiomatic concept.

To continue to use the word, existence, to refer to everything—besides violating logic itself as well as a principle of formal language—is to engage, quite contrary to Ayn Rand's claims and intentions, in the non-scientific discussion of cosmology. After all, if we are going to start talking about the precise physical nature of reality beyond the facts that: it is; it is what it is; and one is conscious of it; then we, as philosophers, have crossed over the proper bounds of philosophy and fallen into this ancient mystical trap. Ergo, both the relapsed mysticism and the resorting to physics in philosophical dialogue among Objectivists (and the public at large, for that matter), as if philosophy cannot find its way without the latest findings of quantum physicists.

Second, in the belief in reality as consisting only of existence, what happens to whatever it is that stands back?

That's easy: it gets ignored. It is and therefore, is real, but it is off limits. Of course, no philosophy can keep a part of reality off limits forever, because it keeps crashing into people's lives. As the Bard had warned my father, who, in turn, warned me: "There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy."

Third, and perhaps more apropos in the context of a discussion of objectivity—which this, as a discussion among Objectivists, implicitly is—we could ask the question: Stands out... to whom? For surely everything that stands out to me is not exactly the same as everything that stands out to you. Reality is what it is, not a matter of consensus based on the lowest common denominator of sensitivity.

Personally, it kills me: the irony of basing Objectivism on just the sort of usually delightful variety which, when used for this serious a purpose, can only result in the arch-doctrinaire subjectivism that riddles this school. But this, unfortunately, has become a big part its internal mythology.

For all these reasons and more, I propose a correction to Objectivism at its root, generated by its own methods to meet its own standards. Let us replace the word, existence, with the word, being: as the primary axiomatic concept of Objectivism; wherever the philosophy refers to what is; and wherever the philosophy refers to the content of reality.

Two corollary changes follow from this replacement that must be mentioned here, if not developed fully. One, Objectivism's first axiom becomes *being is*. Two, this axiom enables a formal definition of reality which establishes in one stroke the objectivity of reality, the primacy of being, and the indissoluble relationship between being and consciousness: reality is *being as object*. Being is the object of its subject, consciousness.

In addition to being, we have in the Anglo-Saxon two unequivocal words to use in normal discourse about it: *everything* and its absence, *nothing*. (I see no reason to conceive of "non-being", and no way to do so without "reifying the zero".) Then we have plenty of phrases for being (eg, *what is*) and ways to describe it—as many as there are poets, probably. What happens to existence and its silent partner, *non-existence*? I think scientists, both material and spiritual alike, would appreciate this distinction. It could serve criticism, of course, as it has here. But I think it is not for Philosophy, which precedes these issues.

Some may say, "What's the big deal? It is just how we use language." I would reply, Yes, and look at the schizophrenic culture we live in as a result. Moreover, look at what rigorously equating existence and being has done to Objectivism and Objectivists: chronically split it again and again. As John Galt told Dagny, "...you're free to change your course. But as long as you follow it, you're not free to escape its logic." Look, as well, at the harmony a change such as I propose would restore to thought and culture alike. A great relaxation in communication becomes possible when people cease to exclude from their idea of reality some things in favor of others, probably without even knowing they have been doing so.

We have this sacred word, being, that serves the purpose of denoting that which is with tautological perfection. This idea, existence, is unneeded by the essentially unifying philosophy of Objectivism, and certainly not at its deepest root, fracturing our consciousness of reality and our connection to each other.

It is. I am. At the base of philosophy, at the beginning of metaphysics, I need know nothing else.

*revised 19 Jan 2008*

## Sociality Undenied

### the operative principle of band society

As the ragged beast of civilization groans its last (again), many of its refugees have begun to enjoy success in our search for an alternative approach to social organization. Beyond civilization—and way beyond its pitiful flagship, intentional community—lie far more enduring, fun, and reasonable forms of society worth considering. Lately, tribalism is all the rage, and deservedly so. It has made a fruitful change in how millions of us explore ideas, art, and livelihood.

Yet the primary form of human social organization may actually be what is known as *band society*. A band is basically an extended family functioning as a complete society. In the continuum of social organization, bands stand opposite of civilization, with its fanatical moralism, hierarchy, and conquests, on the far side of its earlier forms, chiefdoms and tribes.

In this essay, I will name the operative principle of band society. This identification makes it instantly possible for anyone to consciously participate in band relationship. "Band" being simply another way of

looking at family, this principle also aids immensely in the restoration of damaged familial relationships.

Besides family, I would like to point out that the feeling of band relationship is also fully embodied in the ecstatic, subversive groove of popular music, which itself is a product of bands. The primal force of band relationship may very well have fueled the worldwide rock-n-roll revolution. In turn, rock-n-roll has re-seeded band society where it wanes most: under the disintegrating influence of industrialization.

Throughout the essay, I also contrast band society with civilization. An eerie consistency in civilization's suppression of life emerges, as well as clues to an unexpectedly simple process of re-expression in bands.

Lastly, when I say civilization, I do not mean just industrial (patriarchal) or agricultural (matriarchal) civilization; or modern or ancient civilization; or Eastern or Western civilization. I just mean civilization: this thing we're supposed to be proud of being members of, whether we push papers, bow to Mecca, or sow rice. In my view, when Gandhi was asked what he thought of Western Civilization and he replied, "It would be a good idea," he was terribly mistaken. Western Civilization is exactly what India had gotten (after being pummeled for the umpteenth time by Eastern Civilization). As far as I'm concerned, it is all the same, and below, I make it as clear as I can why I think so.

~/~

Something happens in a band that makes it a band rather than just an amicable form of civilization. Band and civil society differ in their treatment of a fundamental attribute of humanity: our *sociality*. Bands attend it. Civilizations deny it. Everything else about them arises from this single fact.

This distinction between band and civil social organizations succinctly shows why and how each of them operate, in every detail. In this essay, I tell about the natural propensity for attending sociality—for remaining aware of human connectedness. I show why band people deny it not, and how this non-action leads to their having a lot more fun than civilized people. I also use this idea to expose what and where civilization is, and exactly how one participates, knowingly or not, in its ubiquitous, blasé aggression. Learning this distinction can quicken our decivilization and further motivate us to walk away from its cultural prison—less geographically than in our beings and our lives.

sociality is the inherent, tangible connectedness of people. It is universally felt among members of a family, even if only as an absence, as pain, as numbness. It is a force that holds us together, like gravity. It is often known by touch: an inward, tactile sensation of pressure, often in the gut. It can feel like a magnetic field or infrared heat, a deep vibration or a tailwind. It connects us across time and space and across all cultural and language barriers.

Many other words indicate sociality, including: affinity, attachment, bond, sisterhood, empathy. Band members are aware all the time that *something is here* within us, between us, *as us*. An energy, a presence, a force. It conditions all relating in a band; it is the frame of reference, the ordinary perspective, of the band mind. sociality is the political corollary of a metaphysical principle: the connectedness of all things. As part of attending reality, attending sociality is precisely how to be in a band on a moment-to-moment basis.

Restoring attention to sociality can require different efforts, including: considering the idea of sociality; noticing one's denial of it; remembering it; restoring receptivity to it; restoring awareness of it; observing ourselves, each other, and the world through it. I believe these are some steps that we will take on our journey home: over the wall of and beyond civilization (and beyond tribalism), to a new form of the band ways of our ancestors.

Actually, this key to band society has stared me in the face from within my own definition (of a tribe) since 2001. But still thinking on civilization's terms, I have been blind to its importance till now.

A band is a group of people relating to each other

- on the basis of inherent human sociality
- according to like-activities

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- for the purpose of making a living together.\*

This combines four ideas of alternative social organization: Jean Liedloff's idea of sociality (that we have it)<sup>1</sup>; my adaptation of the essence of the definition of intentional community (from shared values to like-activities<sup>2</sup>); Daniel Quinn's definition of a tribe ("a group of people making a living together"<sup>3</sup>); and John Zerzan's insight that in this essay, I am describing not tribal but *band* society (see Afterword).

For awhile, I focused on like-activity in my thinking, writing, and relationships. But like-activity, I have learned, merely influences a band's *membership*: which particular people are in a band together. Like-activity differs from like-mindedness, civilization's sorting criterion. But what makes the elegant functioning of a band possible, and what makes a band radically different from civilized groups, including intentional communities (!), lies in the part about the basis of its members' *relationship*: their inherent sociality.

Everyone has felt attached to other people. It makes us naturally drawn to and able to relate to each other. It is why the anti-social and awkward among us seem to us somehow ill: divided against themselves because they are divided against us. Their concern, though negative, is still with us. There is no way to beat it. We do not come together. We are already together. Something here connects us (which, again is of the same substance as us). Because it is built in, we do not have to make up or maintain our social nature .

In fact, just the opposite: we cannot help it. Consider, for example, the Stockholm Syndrome: even the prisoners in concentration camps find a way to relate to the guards. Or how appealing to you is the life of a hermit or voluntary castaway? Our bond is real, tangible, and available, especially when we are free of the struggle caused by denying it. Whether we know it or not, it is always at work organizing, guiding, unifying, and harmonizing us. It does this despite the vast machinery of the state, with which we keep ourselves in —how shall I put it?— our peculiar handbaskets. It functions as an independent, common, objective point of reference for everyone, with no possibility of mediation or external control.

While everyone feels compelled to keep others' company, only we civilized people have felt wary of it. Mistrustful, dubious, ashamed, anxious, guilty, guarded. From the band perspective, it is such cynicism, antagonism, and isolation that need explaining. I will begin with my definition of civilization:

Civilization is a group of people relating to each other

- in denial of human sociality
- according to shared ideals
- for the purpose of ending suffering

The civilized view of the world is that, while we need a basis for our relationship, we haven't one, so it must be created. Our lacking something we need means we are inadequate. We must make up the difference, in ourselves and in the universe that so deprived us. The effort always seems characterized by over-seriousness, worry, and racing minds. Its products are codes, rules, commandments, and laws; visions, plans, agreements, and more plans.

These in turn require experts to codify and practice them and authorities to enforce them. As they say, "There's gotta be *some* rules". The rules, based on a falsehood, never fit and so must be constantly qualified or changed. The rules give rise to systems that constantly break down. People compensate with anxiety and blood, and by abusing the world. Once in awhile the masters pay, but mostly it is the peasants. The whole process is characterized by imminent chaos and frantic demagoguery, alternately punctuated by extreme exaltation and extreme horror.

I will state this in a different way, which also explains why it happens. The denial of sociality arises from the universal feeling among the civilized of chronic apprehension<sup>4</sup>. We have been pleased to call it, "The Human Condition". Yet we have always felt compelled to try to explain or resolve this agony.

Both Western and Eastern civilized philosophy explain it with some form of the doctrine of original sin. The only way we could feel so bad is because we *are* bad. Original sin is always connected to the assertion of anti-sociality and what values must be sought to counterbalance it.

Indeed, people usually think of their philosophies in terms of values. Values serve two purposes in this context. They define an ideal, which promises to resolve the agony. And they form the tense agreement people make with each other so they can put down their weapons for a little while. The agreement is designed to encourage the achievement of the ideal. Failing that, to keep people from each others throats. Failing that, to determine how to run the various forms of prison in the society (in chronological order: hospitals, TV rooms, playgrounds, churches, schools, clubs, jobs, prisons, houses, recreational vehicles, nursing homes, heaven/hell).

So there you have civilization's metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, and politics in a nutshell: self-destructiveness, confusion, alienation, and coercion, respectively. To live as a band member is to live in harmony with people and the world as they are, free of the mortal conflict perpetuated in the bodies of people in civilization by its nihilistic falsehoods, emotional pathology, and bizarre practices. This permanent internal strife has always caused social disintegration, terror, and poverty. Now its effects have reached a fever pitch as a complex, global, ecological crisis that threatens nearly all life on Earth. Some of us, at least, will have to understand exactly what occurs in bands if we are to cross over from our civilized way of life to a band way. But our culture has been demonizing and eradicating band society for millennia. We, the civilized, all too easily project our metaphysics onto band society. This metaphysics must be identified and replaced, that we may separate ourselves from it peaceably and leave it behind as the grand—and potentially transformative—tragedy that it is.

Earlier, I wrote that I have thought on civilization's terms all along. What I meant is that I believed the intentional community movement's definition of itself is correctly formulated. I believed in its \_syntax. \_So I modified their "shared values", first to "like interests" (desires for similar things). Then to "like activity". (doing similar things.) But again, this is merely how people get sorted into specific groups, not the essential thing that happens in those groups. The real basis of community, as in all civilized configurations, is still sociality, but sociality denied, suppressed, distorted, turned upon itself.

In the West, we tend to experience our denied sociality as mutual judgment and guilt. These days, this goes mostly unadmitted (except in religion and law), but it is implicit in civilization's structure. It is made up of a bunch of rules that will save you, will reform your sinful nature, if you practice them long enough. Achieve the ideal and you become fit for society and life itself. Or at least, a prison cell.

The band view is that the social structure we need is already here, so just pay attention. Observe. Notice. Listen. Feel. Follow. This means that we need not, as a fundamental approach to living, ideate, imagine, design, and create our social structure, as civilization has us doing all the friggin' time. It means remaining attuned to, in communication about, and responsive to a dynamic situation rather than trying to agree all the time on the damn rules. (In this way, civilization can be seen as a huge cult.)

Attending sociality is thus the operative principle of band society and all normal human relationship. This is what band people consciously do continuously, alone or together. Of course, this kind of attention also happens in civilized people. Without it, we'd all be dead. But generally it happens in an unconscious, muted, and distorted way. Mostly, the civilized are busy suppressing the states that naturally arise from this awareness. The salient exceptions are celebrities and stars. They function as our culture's demigods, somehow knowing how to harness these states in spite of massive attention and pressure. And they become incredibly attractive thereby.

When I, as a band member, look at the universe, I see *something*. It is real. It matters. Indeed, if my congenital relationship to it is undisturbed, I am rapt and awed. I find it intoxicatingly beautiful, powerful, and benevolent. Obviously, it is alive, the whole thing and every part of it, including me. It moves. It calls me to move with it, to play my part and give what I have to its process, to what is needed and wanted. By providing this eternal opportunity to contribute, the whole supports me, and I support it in turn.

If my congenital relationship to universe is disturbed, my emotional state is characterized not by rapture but longing. The something is still there, but I am habitually blinded to it, cut off somehow, aware of it only negatively, as an absence. This breach is often long, painful and difficult to heal (though I'm beginning to think not necessarily so).

Yet the process of reunion is a breeze compared to the alternative of lifelong dissatisfaction. And sure enough, the necessary condition for healing is an aspect of the very band habit of mind I'm talking about, the one thing left to us in the situation, and the basic thing we would be doing anyway were we completely healthy: observation, especially self-observation. I mean this in the Gurdjieffian sense of using one's severely weakened will to: discover oneself as a machine, observe one's pervasive automatism, and record the data for later (mostly subconscious) integration into self-understanding. Generally, this brings both great relief and great sorrow, and wipes out delusions of control of oneself. Eventually, self-understanding comes, restoring strength to will and enabling us to participate in life, to play our part in the world fully, not as mere machines, but as human beings.<sup>5</sup>

This leads to the third part of the definition of a band: making a living together. Paying attention to sociality occurs within the context of making a living. We're not just listening for anything. We have got lives to support. We need indications relevant to that purpose. A whole moment's worth of stuff has to get done *now*. Life is a call to live, to function, to work. Whether that means collecting berries, making money, holding someone quietly as she cries, or watching a ballet, all of life stretches to meet itself through us.

This force between us—call it love, intimacy, sociality, life force, God, the sacred, the Ordering Principle—wants to serve us and for us to serve it in turn. This force animates what I have heard called the dolphin economy: I help you help me help you help me help you... It is funny that everyone feels this without necessarily knowing how crucial it is to our moment-to-moment survival and well-being. Civilization marginalizes it, co-opts it, and blinds us to it with religion, morality, and its grandiose technological projects. Nonetheless, we belong to it. We are it. It is our simple if awkward task to know it again, and to have it weave us back into itself as we continue learning how to follow it.

I feel it now as I listen to my favorite band's new record. Soon, I will see them for the first time. Another fan once told me that at their concerts, the thing is, everyone is happy. The way he said it made it sound to me like people there feel this force among themselves strongly. But they also likely believe that it is just to be reserved for special occasions, not to be sullied with considerations of livelihood and politics. No, for that we have corporations and cops. Besides, what else is there? The concert was wonderful. Now back to the grind.

As a civilized person, I look at the universe and see nothing. At best, a canvas, a field for my imagination and conquest. What I need is not here. So I must make it. It is my job to generate content and impose it everywhere so that I might one day have the proper surrounding. The city, a completely built environment, is the logical consequence of this gnawing sense of life. I lead the way. I am in control. If anything gets in the way (and so much does seem to get in the way), then I must strike it down and trample it underfoot. I am making the world a better place. In dealing with others, I must put myself out there, break the ice, build bridges, create relationship, build community, get to know people, stay in touch, provide leadership, share my vision, etc.

Or build walls against people. Because there is nothing between us, certainly nothing good. No bond. No web holding us together. And anything I make will quickly erode, so I must maintain eternal vigilance. In fact, I must build and continually expand my empire to defeat the ever-advancing disintegrative forces of the universe, which people actually epitomize. And on and on.

Incidentally, some radical legal research shows that a citizen (from the Latin, *civis*, which is also the root of city, civil, and civilization) has the *legal status* of a slave. Combine that with the saying going round lately that, "only slaves love power", and you have a pretty clear idea of the self-hating, escapist motivations of the civilized, whether conscious or not.<sup>6</sup>

In contrast, in a band, we know that no one built our relationship, and that nothing can destroy it, either. We rest in it, serve it — and stay out of its way. Certain of us have found ourselves together by chance or because of the particular things we do. But the condition of our being together is not what we do, but what we are: social beings. Our social nature makes it necessary and possible for us to be together and thus to do certain things together.

If there were nothing between us, we would have to make something up to base our relationship on. This making-up would become our primary activity. And, in fact, in our culture today, it is. It's called law.

However, since there *is* something, we can move within it together now. This, too, happens among us. This is where the operative principle of bands kicks in: in moving together, with our attention on the subtle energetic field we share, as well as the more gross facts of reality, our movements are guided and coordinated for the benefit of us and all our relations. And not by some propped up legal or divine authority, but by reality itself.

We can observe life in its connective aspect as a force—exactly what Obi Wan Kenobi told us about. Being alive, this force has a purpose: to live. It constantly indicates a direction to follow that serves both it and its followers, both as a group and individually. In a band, our basic *attitude* is one of receptivity. All our cues for how to act come from what is and from what is happening. There is no vacuum for us to fill with content, but rather a *plenum* to be aware of. The basic verbal condition among us is silence. When one person notices something relevant that the others have not, she lets the others know, amplifying the signals Universe continually gives us. Which is probably why stories of indigenous councils often mention the silences that prevail among the elders there. Pregnant silences. Vast silences lasting for hours and days. Or so I have heard.

This is an elementary realization. It is philosophic, basic, within anyone's reach. It is just a different way of seeing things, a different habit. It is not hard to see this way, just unfamiliar. In fact, everyone already does see this way to some degree all the time and then intensely in moments. Everyone remembers these moments. It is just that we have just been trained to dismiss them, to ignore them, to discount them, to escape, to misidentify and misunderstand them. The basic friction or difficulty of seeing this way arises from one's denial that there is even anything here to see. (Examples: "It's just a bunch of trees." Parent: "What did you do at school today?" Child: "Nothing." "This will make a great parking lot." "You sure are quiet." "Why won't he look me in the eye?") The denial is habitual, unconscious (though it continually surfaces for conscious affirmation), and reinforced by artificial stimulation.

At first, I felt nauseous as I stared into the fog of my denial. I began to notice how civilization had put blinders on me so I could not see it. This was irritating, but the irritation itself proved to be yet another distraction I'd been preprogrammed to get lost in. I'd been listening to Life my whole life to some degree, but civilization gave the process different names. Like daydreaming, laziness, being a natural, getting with the program, meditation, etc. Some positive, some negative. All meant to interrupt my listening, and to divert my attention from and suppress my awareness of the life force. Or to harness it for civilized purposes.

The real basis of a band—the minute-to-minute, actual process of being in a band—is the living, heartbreaking, mercurial bond between people and the world. I warn you against trying to make what you believe, desire, or do the basis of any relationship. You will merely end up with a cult, a small version of what you were trying to get away from, with tense thought police as members. I tried a few times as both leader and follower. It is always the same.

Likewise, when meetings, planning, ideas, goals, and an urgency to agree (like the weeks preceding a presidential election) dominate meaningful time with others in the group, something is amiss. You can tell you are back in civilization, no matter where you are geographically, when you hear a lot of questions, especially, "what should I do?". The aggressive attitude that often animates such questions is totally at odds with the receptivity, the observant quality, required to know what is really going on in a situation.

Somebody has an ideal. It mutates into an agenda. The agenda, disguised as a question, poisons the atmosphere. How many times have we seen or felt it happen? *Vision* is another common imposition, in which imagination and fantasy have replaced plain *seeing*. Then come the proposals, *ad nauseum*, to fill the void God abandoned us in.

What is needed is silence, an awakening to our pretense and denial, and attention to our amazing bond. It lies at the root of both genuine authority and humility. Good heavens, sometimes all I can see is 400 generations of native peoples looking at me with broken hearts and fingers pressed against lips, shh. Okay, grandparents, I am almost finished here.

Life speaks all the time, and we hear it. Then we either deny it or listen to it. The wicked deny it, then wait in vain for it to raise its voice, to butt into their rants and interpersonal tape-playing. The graceful listen to



it, hear it clearly and follow it closely, with felicitous success. Everyone has made this simple discovery a hundred times, but our mechanical brains immediately adapt to it, just as civilization has trained them. I remember thinking, when things went well, that I had made them go well, and I could do it again. Pride goeth before a fall. I think that civilization's first axiom, its number one message, is that nothing and no one is here. Therefore there is nothing to attend, to know for oneself or with others. One is left with convention: obeying it, rebelling, making up a new one, or giving up. Those are the only options. God, it is such a great game!

This life force and our hearing it is, I believe, exactly what Ms Liedloff speaks of as the continuum and our sense of it. We are heading back into life, I think, and, as always, with our elders' help. Thanks and much love to Jean and Daniel, John, Georges, and Ayn and countless other voices of life pouring out now. I kiss the seven directions and all my relations, including this crazy computer and even,

W.

Yours, Andrew

\_ **\*This just in** \_ (April 5): Though band society is closer to what I have been seeking, somehow the essay does not work since I rewrote it with the word, band. But a slightly different definition of a band just occurred to me:

A band is a group of people relating to each other

- as a family
- on the basis of inherent human sociality
- according to the requirements of the moment
- for the purpose of living

I believe this will help expose and solve whatever the problem is and lead to a much clearer presentation, either in a revision of this piece or a new one. Stay tuned.

**\*\*Afterword \*\*** An idea haunts those of us who acutely experience the misery of modern, industrial civilization:

*"There must be another way."*

For awhile, the way seemed to me to lay in tribal society, especially as presented by Daniel Quinn. I very much appreciate both his mythological analysis of our quandary and his concrete suggestions for restoring tribal society in our current lives. In studying and applying his ideas in prose, relationship, and design, I learned many useful things, and I owe him a great debt.

After working with Mr Quinn's ideas for about five years, my understanding of tribalism came to fruition in this essay. I showed it to John Zerzan, whom I had the good fortune to meet and live near for awhile. He read and liked the essay very much. And he made the astonishing comment that I was not actually describing tribal society, but *band* society. Further, that a tribe's larger population, division of labor, nascent stratification, and widespread longing for a former state of grace may well represent a people's first step toward civilization. He recommended the anthropology of Elmer Service. I read some of Service's *Primitive Social Organization*, which offered detailed support for Mr Zerzan's comment.

In reading about bands, tribes, and chiefdoms, I got to wondering more deeply about natural human society in general. Band society sounded very good. But if I was wrong about tribal society, maybe band society was not really what I was looking for either. I felt there was still something unnecessarily abstract about it. Was there no simpler way to describe natural human society? Let's say we scrape away all the abstractions and just look at people as they are, in all circumstances. What is left? What do we see?

Well, I see extended family. Despite the family-destroying institutions of civilization, people still attract each other, reproduce, and tend to stay together as extended family (including adopted friends). Whatever ideas we form about people, be they political, sociological, anthropological, or historical; and

whatever complex or sinister groups arise among people, I posit that extended family is the essence of human society.

With this insight, I first attempted to rewrite this essay using the word, family, in place of the word, tribe. It did not work. Being from different categories of concepts, family and civilization do not contrast well. A less personal, more abstract idea is actually necessary.

Having found family at the core of band society, I have thus adopted the idea of band society and finally rewritten the essay using the term. *A band is the extended family in the capacity of being an entire society.* Of course, I'm not talking about family as one of civilization's television-and-ice cream-fueled, cannon-fodder production units, ie, the isolated and neurotic nuclear family; but the social structure of the loving, mature, and self-sufficient extended family found in many cultures even today. Of course this is increasingly rare among us anymore, but we can find aspects of it. We can rediscover ourselves, reconnect with elders and relatives, and begin to see our friends in a new light. We can meet indigenous and more traditional peoples who demonstrate more of it.

Close-knit family is our past, our future, and our secret present. When alone, all those I love and miss—or hate and avoid—live on in my mind. They encourage or plague me. Either way, they call me back to my natural life in the close company of others. It will not be all fun and games. Self-knowledge is a fiery mistress. Renewed motivation in one's own atrophied being can be very confusing, even dangerous. But it cannot be any worse than the nonstop domestic cold warfare we already endure.

## Notes

1. Jean Liedloff wrote *The Continuum Concept* and several articles on natural human relationship, especially parent-child relationship. Articles at <http://www.continuum-concept.org>
2. Laird Schaub, former editor of *\_Communities\_* magazine, once wrote there something like, "Community is a group of people living together on the basis of shared values." (circa 1997) This idea is echoed by others on the Intentional Communities website, especially here: <http://www.ic.org/pnp/cdir/1995/05quest.php>
3. Daniel Quinn wrote the *Ishmael* trilogy and *Beyond Civilization*, about "another story to be in."
4. Contrary to a common philosophical conceit, a metaphysics (a view of the nature of woman and world) originates rarely from objective contemplation, but from one's *sense of life*: an inexplicable and apparently irreducible feeling about life itself. The feeling is somehow so close to a thought as to be nearly indistinguishable. When someone says, "That's life," or "Life's not like that," you are hearing her verbalize her sense of life, what Ayn Rand (like Gurdjieff, a great Russian Objectivist) defined as "an implicit metaphysics". An explicit metaphysics rarely does more than verbalize, establish, and *perpetuate* the sense of life of those who accept it. Ultimately, however, one's actual (not merely professed) ideas derive from experience. Thus no change in one's conscious metaphysics is complete until one feels it throughout the body, in the muscles, movements, and cells. And while immersion in the study of rational philosophy (dharma, the Teaching, the Way, etc) is a condition for a change of mind, special conditions must also be provided the body and heart to support the restoration of health in them. It is Aristotle meets Reich and Shelton meets Rumi.
5. Much of Georges Ivanovich Gurdjieff's teaching is faithfully reproduced in *In Search of the Miraculous* by his student, Peter Demianovich Ouspensky. Gurdjieff speaks in depth about attention, especially in the forms of self-observation, self-remembering, and self-unification. In this [cranial supernova](#) of a book, pages 17-22 and 104-115 especially struck me. As you read, feel free to stay with the main, completely understandable narrative, skimming past the sections of esoteric astrophysics and chemistry.
6. The cause of this reciprocal dynamic is another issue. One interesting hypothesis, completely in line with, for example, Quinn's critique of totalitarian agriculture, population growth and the rise of civilization, lies in [The Origins of Agriculture](#) by Greg Wadley and Angus Martin. The authors propose that our malaise began with the adoption of a grain-based diet, by far the most malnourishing, addictive, and labor intensive diet ever adopted by humans. (It contrasts in every way with the frugivorous diet, masterfully taught by Doug Graham in his recent book, *The 80/10/10 Diet*)

revised 5 July 2008

# From Where?

## understanding Quinn, part 2

A year ago, I wrote an essay called, “Understanding Quinn” to help an acquaintance grasp something about Daniel Quinn’s writings. Then, in an online discussion a few months ago, I offered it to Mr Quinn himself as a possible aid to his explaining his own thinking process, which he was pondering out loud. He politely thanked me and said I had not gotten it.\*

When my nausea subsided, I perceived the lack of depth in my essay, precisely where I’d wanted to deposit some. I remembered I had not meant the title to refer to the man himself or his process, but to his ideas. Even so, I had missed the mark. So I put the question to myself, “How does he generate these ideas?” When the answer came, I saw that I had dwelt too much on his ethics when such an explanation lies in metaphysics. Like many readers, I’d gotten caught up in doing when he was really talking about *being*.

I think that Mr Quinn consistently surprises with his ideas, not so much because he proposes a surprising purpose, but because he comes from a surprising place. It is not the, *What for?* that fundamentally distinguishes his message, but the *From where?* In saying again and again that there is no one right way to live, he has deftly said that living is what we are to do here. This implies that he thinks our world supports life.

This holds a deeper key. Mr Quinn sees that we live in an inhabitable, knowable world. A benevolent universe. In his reports to us from his worldview of it, he waves us in, like a friendly grandfather making us comfortable in our own home. A master metaphysician, he demonstrates that what is—life on earth—is itself what ought to be. To me, he speaks in a voice of the planet itself, seducing us back to our place in it.

In his essay, “[Technology and the Other War](#),” he illustrates the strange rule he follows in his thinking: “If they give you lined paper, write sideways.” In logic, this means checking the premises of a proposition. But you cannot see a proposition’s premises if you are so enmeshed in a culture that assumes them that you feel threatened by their exposure. This sort of examination does not threaten Quinn. He declares the imminent doom of the system with all the charm and ease of a neighbor leaning over the back fence, commenting on approaching rain toward the end of a dry spell. He simply sees it from a place other than the one that will, by its own machinations, get washed away in the rain.

A horned, mottled beast of a god, somehow friendly and exciting, not scary, peered through Daniel Quinn’s childhood bedroom window. In a dream about the same time, a giant beetle led him into the woods to learn about the world before human domination. In his youth, he saw for an hour the world consumed in a sacred fire. He has felt the heat ever since. Warm and secure, he rests in this ageless view of the world and, thankfully, has the tongue to speak of it, to transmit clue after surprising clue to we who would find our way back to it. Sir, thank you.

*revised 2 Dec 03*

\*I got a chance to ask Mr Quinn to read this essay; I am glad to report he likes it.

# Nothing to Fear, Even Fear Itself

## big brother’s achilles’s heel

16 Oct 2008

Recently, after a year of reading bad news online, I reached the end of my rope. I needed hope. I’d like to

share with you how I restored mine.

To rationally find hope, one must first know how things actually stand.\* So first, the bad news:

We, the peasantry of the world, are:

1. cluttering the landscape
2. uselessly consuming resources
3. democratically disturbing politics and
4. generally becoming unnecessary due to technology

Thus, the nobility has decided to eliminate us. And not just the Jews, gays, convicts, dissidents, dark people, etc. But all 6.5 billion of us.

How will they accomplish this? By the following sequence of actions:

1. withholding energy supplies
2. escalating genocide through further false-flag terrorism and state responses to it
3. orchestrating worldwide economic collapse by manipulating money supply
4. ever-intensifying martial law
5. disease\*\* and famine
6. shoah techniques (trains, gassing, concentration camps) surgically but massively applied throughout the First World, and finally—but mainly—
7. weaponization of the weather

Here is the good news:

With all the world's wealth and power at their disposal, the nobility still require a spiritual source of energy to fuel their hundreds-year-old plan. Due to its nefarious nature, they cannot get spiritual energy directly from divine sources, as other organisms do. So they psychically leech it from other people, en masse, through fear.

To that end, they have lately promulgated three frightening myths:

1. global terrorism (actually false-flag operations, such as 9/11. I already knew this one.)
2. peak oil (oil is not fossiline, but geological in origin and superabundant, as demonstrated for decades by the ultra-deep drilling practices of Russian petrogeologists)
3. CO2-caused global warming (recent climate variation is caused by sunspots, with specific events caused or exacerbated by the HAARP high-frequency transmission array in Alaska.)

Combined with the already embedded meme of over-population, these new myths not only cause a paralyzing degree of fear in people, but pacify us by making an otherwise unfathomable scale of mass depopulation seem inevitable.

This is good news because it means we are not facing unstoppable forces, such as strangely intransigent Muslims, empty oil wells, rising temperatures and ocean levels locked into positive feedback loops. We are facing a tiny cabal of highly disciplined masterminds whose fragile chance of success depends on a stable and near universal state of fear among Earth's people. This is so delicate a condition that even one person who merely begins to see through her fears disrupts the cabal's apple cart.

How is fear seen through? By the only means any culture has found to address any persistent, debilitating emotion at its root and unearth a real foundation for living: spiritual practice, namely, self-observation and self-remembrance (ie, contemplation and meditation, fasting and prayer, etc). Thus, in addition to being the vehicle of spiritual liberation, spiritual practice is the most powerful activity of political liberation one can engage in. [edit: I now have [a more developed opinion](#) since writing this piece.]

One may learn this for herself by applying the following propositions as hypotheses:

1. Though one is helpless to stop fear, it is basically harmless.
2. Through self-understanding resulting from patient self-observation, the body gradually and automatically releases fear.
3. As fear is released, it frees vast stores of vital energy for other uses, including physical healing and the simple expression of love.
4. Fear can be lived with consciously in the meantime, rather than suppressed. (Beware: this also disrupts the energy source of one's own ego. it reacts by mounting increasingly powerful or subtle resistance to efforts at self-awareness. This provides increasingly interesting data to record during self-observation.)
5. On the other side of emotions—and the rapid thoughts and physical twitches that emotions give rise to—lies the sacred. The sacred can be felt in the gut as butterflies or nausea anytime one places ones attention there, ie, meditates.

Thus, we need not a significant percentage of people to appreciate and live at high levels of activism or sustainability. Individuals and families, one by one, are already awakening to the reality of the sacred, a taste of which dispels all fear. In the face of life's ordinary and extraordinary problems, simple solutions continue to present themselves as they always have. Decreasingly encumbered by fear and the prejudices that accompany it, we become much more able to take up these solutions.

Reality is on our side. In an attack on Life led by a handful of egomaniacs, executed by patsies, and allowed by tenuously ignorant bystanders, which do you suppose will prevail? The egomaniacs need no resistance. They need, and are gradually receiving, love: love in feeling, love in thought, love in action (and, in critical moments, direct action). They are doomed to failure, and we wish not to see our brothers and sisters miss the chance to live as human beings, however benighted and malevolent they may be. Life is wonderful. Thank god for the infinite blessing of life on Earth.

I hope this helps you take heart, as it has helped me. I believe that we live in the middle of a massive upheaval of consciousness, history, and geology; that the river is sweeping us up, one and all; and that there is nothing to fear, even fear itself.

\*A friend recently pointed out that even though he disagrees with this description of the current state of affairs, he finds the analysis of fear in the second half of the essay useful.

\*\*I just read a [comically blatant report](#) about the latest trial balloon, swine flu (which looks like a keeper in the escalating war on the credulous peasantry). Naturally, all the right people, to cover their asses apparently, come out and impotently say that distributing insufficiently tested vaccines should not happen.

## Sanity and Health

[EDIT: This is a chaotic piece written in the chaotic year preceding the emergence of the conjecture. I was desperately grasping at spiritual straws at the time, even more so than in [sociality-undenied](#), which also addresses self-observation, but from a social perspective. Of course it is hopeless for self-observation to deal with such gigantic problems as I thought it could. This is well-known in the spiritual world self-observation comes from, and I was on the verge of learning it the hard way. Anyway, here you go.]

### in brief

Sanity is the basis of health. Sanity is a function of self-knowledge, which results from a certain method of self-observation. Without this method, no amount of pursuit of the material conditions of health, such as diet, exercise, etc, will result in actual health. It is possible to get glimpses of health by these means. But the intensity of emotion, memory, repetitive ideation, and physical habits will slam one back to Earth in

short order<sup>1</sup>. To escape this cycle, one must possess a way of catching up with all this internally.

Basically, to begin, one must first entertain receiving a mortal blow to one's self-image. Namely, that while we have the potential of becoming human being—fully rational, choosing creatures—we begin as machines.

Everything I think, everything I feel, everything I do, is an unconscious reaction to external influences, according to the sophisticated design of my particular machine. I do none of it. It all happens with me.

The only sliver of will I possess inside this contraption is the will to see. Not to analyze or figure out why it happened or what else I should try to do. Not to change anything. Not to do—to originate another action. Just to see what is happening with myself as it is.

This requires no faith. Just the willingness to test this perspective as a hypothesis. In this manner, anyone can quickly learn for herself the true extent of her "freedom". It will bring new meaning to the phrase, "I'm just a poor sinner".

Again, when watching, I am not trying to analyze. While my long term goal is self-understanding, my only power for the time being is to see and record what is happening with myself: my movements, my emotions, my thoughts. The light this perspective sheds on my habits begins immediately to expose them to my awareness. Merely by this light, some habits, which can only live in darkness—in ignorance—begin to evaporate.

Others prove more intractable. These can be dissolved, usually, by crying, by exercise, and by trying to act well.

Still others remain as frustrations to confound the earnest. These only give way to insights and realizations. Genuine freedom begins to surface in one's being. This emotional and mental freedom enables one to take more natural actions, to express self-supportive, rather than self-destructive impulses. Health results naturally.

More on health to come.

If you absolutely cannot wait, read the following key pages of *In Search of the Miraculous* by P D Ouspensky: 17, bottom, through 22, bottom 104, bottom, through 115 —begin and end with spaces in text (or end of chapter) If the style agrees with you, begin reading the book from page 3. Skim through the esoteric science sections. The book goes back and forth from a high-school level conversation to nearly impossible to understand discussions of what seems like a kind of astrophysics or chemistry you never heard of. For example, nevermind most of the text around the diagrams in the book. That's just there to put you off, apparently.

*Introduction to Human Technology* by William Arthur Evans, impressed me with this idea, especially about emotions, which have far more influence than the external conditions of health (diet, sunlight, exercise, etc). His idea connects the methods of Natural Hygiene (see Douglas Graham and Herbert Shelton) with those of all wisdom schools, including Gurdjieff's Fourth Way teachings.

*revised 18 Mar 2008*

## Just Living

### a meditation on design

Having been staying with accomplished designer, [John Cruikshank](#); having been engaged as a designer by his community during my visit; and facing a crossroads in my life around design, it is very much on my mind. So this is a meditation on design.

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I am blessed with the ability to design things. I am also cursed with an accompanying awareness of how badly most things in our culture are designed, as well as a (thankfully waning) compulsion to correct them. In our culture, we have set it up so that our whole existence is dependent on design. Yet it is so fragile a process, so needful of time and listening, that in our rush, we usually do it poorly.

Due its delicacy, I have decided that design is simply not designed to be the foundation of material culture. It has a place in normal life, determined by necessity. Indigenous people, whose culture is largely shaped by necessity, are great designers, generally. Their lifestyle is simple, so they have enough time to design well the few things they actually need that are not there: shelter, weapons, a livelihood, rituals, and war tactics. And even then, they take many of their clues from animals (four-leggeds being twice the footworkers we are, I guess).

So our problem relating to design is neither the predominance of bad design (to be corrected with "education" or "effort" or some other such nonsense), nor is it that design as such is bad. It is just that design is bad as a cultural foundation. (It makes me wonder what isn't. As the physicist, Minos Kafatos, put it, "Everything causes everything.")

Then what is the place of design? My father visited it upon me, so I'm stuck with it. As proficient at it as I am, it is often a clumsy, awkward thing, probably best left to dreams, a little consideration and subconsciously arranged, happy accidents.

And yet, as both a habitual designer and long-time student of philosophy, I am in the habit of thinking in terms of essentials. As someone once said, "Man may not live by bread alone, but he sure as hell thinks so till he gets some." If design has a place in maintaining the order and balance of a normal life, then it must have a place in restoring it, too. Perhaps the nature of our cultural quandary holds clues to that place.

Our quandary is generated and justified by our culture's mythology. Our basic, cultural myth is that the world is incomplete or hostile or both and must be righted. Making it so amounts to building it, and design is the first step in building. This is why I say that design is the foundation of our material culture.

But the hopeless scope of our task is obvious when we compare what we know to what we would have to know to build a world suitable by our culture's standards. Our history compounds the disparity. As one designer of the Los Angeles freeway system later put it, "Each and every problem we face today is the direct and inevitable result of yesterday's brilliant solutions."

Our culture's goal is impossible. The only sensible thing to do in the face of the impossible is to give up. Then, to look for something possible to face. Of course, the possible, in an eternal universe, is the certain. Thus we have only to look around for something we already do and call it a day.

We are a people filled with longing for ideals and disdain for what actually happens. Noticing the stuff we do every day, apprehending the new context we're looking within, will take some time, like coming into the sun after a summer matinee.

While waiting for our eyes to adjust to the light, let us designers drum up attributes to look for. In a nutshell, let our new purpose have good potential to be interesting and enjoyable, and let it be something we do all the time, so we cannot fail at it, even when sad, bored or even occasionally evil. Hey, since our culture has turned over such an important job to us designers, then we at least get to write our own job descriptions. What I mean is, anything that fits these criteria will definitely not overtax our capacity for design. The rest of you can buckle down all you want.

While I'm at it, let it require little or nothing more than already exists in nature. Let our return to it be slow and easy, served by the strange skills we have learned and the amazing things we have produced on our way to Eldorado.

As a last source of clues, let's look to the beasts. What is it that they are all doing all the time, which they seem to find interesting and enjoyable? And what of the humans who approach the joy and grace of the other animals: what do children do? What do the indigenous do?

Now, I'm just a brushdweller from Idaho, and I admit to starting campfires with sage and then farting into them, two of the most stupid and dangerous things a boy can do. But ridin' by on a mule, it looks to me like all these creatures are *just living*.

revised 2 Dec 2003

# Mechanics of Mass Slavery

## a drive-by analysis

We begin with *The Edukators*, an excellent German film from 2009.

EXTERIOR. MOUNTAIN CABIN. DAY.

Twenty-something JAN and his two anarchist accomplices are hiding with their captive, the bourgeois HARDENBERG. Like his kidnappers, Hardenberg was once a young radical.

JAN

How can someone with your past live the way you do? You must have had ideals.

HARDENBERG

My father told me, "Under 30 and not liberal, no heart. Over 30 and still liberal, no brains."

JAN

Yeah, right. But I don't believe that crap. It's the standard excuse of guys like you.

HARDENBERG

It happens slowly, gradually. You hardly notice it.

One day, you abandon your old car. You want a dependable car, with air conditioning, a warranty.

You get married, raise a family, buy a house. The kids need a good education. That costs money. Security! You create endless debts so you need a career to pay them. So you do like they do.

Then one day, to your surprise, at the polls, you vote conservative.

(scene)

In this little myth, which today, billions live out (or want to), Hardenberg gives a neat summary of the mechanics of mass slavery in global industrial fascism, especially in its developed economies.

Though every item he mentions serves a necessary function of life, its form is corrupt, inapt, artificial. All of these forms arise from the mass psychosis of civilization in its modern mode. Life presents no objective demand for these psychotic forms. All of them (see first column) can be retired and replaced by sane, natural systems (in the second column) that are cheaper, easier, more effective, and more enjoyable by 2-3 orders of magnitude:

psychotic	sane
car	walking, backpack, rolling suitcase, handtruck, bicycle & trailer, pack animal, car coop, bus,
	boat, train, zepellin
marriage	love

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psychotic	sane
nuclear family	extended family
house	simple shelter
education	freedom & adult availability
state money	mutual credit, frugality, natural abundance
security	sociality
debt	simplicity, harvest-based livelihood
career	pursuing multiple interests and genuine talents
selling out	selfhood
partisanship	common sense

Throughout my writings, I have tried in various ways to expose the artificial forms and present the natural ones, eg, [Tribal Housing](#). Since the house is the most expensive and isolating item above, it anchors our slavery within this system. The house necessitates the other elements. If you have a house, you must get a job to pay for it. To get to work and psychically buffer oneself against its impositions, one likely requires a car.

The trap is set. The house becomes nothing more than a personalized prison cell entailing 30 years of indentured servitude. Observe that “mortgage” means *death pledge*. Servitude, in the form of a job, leads to time-scarcity and parental neglect. The car is the gateway drug of consumer financing and global devastation (as well as a portable Russian Roulette game for the whole family).

Social isolation erodes security. Fear leads to credit card shopping sprees. Debt engenders dreams of freedom, at least for one’s children. Ironically, parents force these dreams on their offspring. Thus, we arrive at education and selling out. One ends the fiasco at the polls, where one tries to compensate for this lifestyle with a indignantly righteous opinion about who should be left holding the bag.

Inasmuch as these are all more or less corollary factors arising from pandemic [psychosis](#), I suppose the causation could be switched around. One fellow I talked to recently said it is the pursuit of a career that leads to everything else, due to the college debt a career entails these days. I was raised by an architect, and I’m cheap, so I’m biased towards the house argument. Maybe it would be better to start with conformity. Or something not on Hardenberg’s list, like a family disaster: a death, catastrophic illness/accident, or bankruptcy. That’s fine, but these pieces come into play in our lives one way or another. And radical analysis leads to the same conclusion: no one needs any of this crap.

## ORDO

### an American art of placement

Nature structures things in ways that work. These ways translate into methods of arranging built environments that embody order, circulation and serenity. Feng shui, the Chinese art of placement, is one such method. Here, I introduce ORDO, an American art of placement. It is a simple, native way of evoking these often elusive qualities and breathing new life into Western spaces.

ORDO (Latin for *order*) derives from the basic, physical facts of nature and the relationship between them: *there are entities, and space surrounds them*. From this single axiom of ORDO flows its three principles and a handful of clear techniques. Once grasped, they reveal their workings through thoughtful practice. I have expressed them in terms of furniture settings and walkways in rooms, but they apply to any scale of placement, from cities to bric-a-brac, and philosophical ideas to social organization.

The first principle of ORDO is *centered setting*. This means placing a setting toward the center of a space, and confining walkways to the edges. This principle embellishes our axiom thusly: *entities are relatively still, and the surrounding space contains movement*. For example, planets are surrounded by space and satellites; a tree by air and birds. ORDO distinguishes and separates these two elements of a room and

gives each a place because they have mutually exclusive functions. It is why we drive on streets around buildings, not through them. (Sadly, the same sense bears not on the typical room arrangement. In the attempt to gain more space by combining the walkway with footways (areas for feet within settings), people put furniture against the walls. The room's middle, left empty, becomes the *de facto* walkway. Occupants loiter uncomfortably at room's edge, waiting for whatever else is supposed to occupy its center. Meanwhile, traffic, unacknowledged, takes over, disrupting relationship and depositing clutter. This gives most American rooms all the serenity of a train station.)

The other two principles of ORDO are *engagement* and the *compound square*. *Engagement* orients a setting to a room's main feature (usually its main window) and its main entrance. This engages occupants with the pleasure and the challenge of life, respectively. (*entities revolve around larger entities*). *Compound square* puts a setting's pieces of furniture square with each other but at an angle off-square with the room. Having more sides and angles, the room seems more like a circle. And the slight tension thus created between the setting and the walls sets the room in motion (*entities are rounded and they rotate*). This generates stillness in the center, where occupants can finally obtain true rest or focus without obstructing movement; and movement and space at its periphery that does not disrupt the stillness. The subtly energizing results contrast dramatically with the lethargic restlessness of most rooms.

The techniques of ORDO facilitate the execution of these principles. First, determine natural walkways. They lay straight ahead of entries, mostly along interior walls, and opposite a room's main feature. They will lay around or between settings, not through them. Usually, they are 3' wide. Whenever possible, put a room's entrance on the same side as its main feature and in a corner (multiple entrances in adjacent corners). Make inwardly swinging doors latch toward the corner (and vice-versa).

Second, put settings in areas left open by walkways. Border 2-3 sides of a setting with the window and adjacent walls and the other 1-2 sides with walkways. Footways almost always lie perpendicular to walkway. This makes settings orbitable, letting people approach, enter or pass them by without disturbing them. ORDO asserts that your place exists for you: for who you are and what you do. Peel your furniture off the walls; group it in the center of the room; banish the walkway to one side; and finally take possession of your rooms.

Third, face a setting between a room's window and its main entrance. In common rooms, more toward the window; in private rooms, like bedrooms and offices, more toward the door. Start with the main seating of the setting-to-be. Anyone sitting anywhere in an arrangement of a sofa and loveseat should be able to see both the window and door merely by turning her head. Place the setting at an angle off-square with the room, usually 10-15 degrees (which suffices to make the room move again) but as much as 30 degrees. Position the rest of the furniture square with the first piece, perhaps adjusting the angle. (Angling furniture wedges space between furniture and walls, and thus also reinforces the principle of centered setting.) Place little or nothing before windows, especially opening ones. Lying face-up in bed or sitting at a desk, one can see both the door and a window without turning his head. Windows in these cases are more to one's sides. In a large room, shelves (as partitions) and rugs define a setting and are square with the room. In a small room, they are part of an off-square setting (shelves in rooms' corners). A setting includes lights and plants at its corners, where they also function as screens between a setting and a walkway or another setting. Within a setting, place lights toward a room's center, and plants, toward a room's corners.

Fourth, eliminate the clutter the process has exposed. ORDO brings everything out into the open. It necessitates and enables our dealing with hidden and ignored things. Now that the structure of the room does not trap clutter, put it away, throw it away or find places for it (the odd angles of the settings create inconspicuous, convenient nooks for small furniture and bric-a-brac). The garbage bin and resale shop are integral parts of this process. Dispense with what you cannot easily keep in place. Reduce and condense possessions according to necessity. Let ORDO pay for itself immediately through the sale of unneeded stuff.

ORDO will move your furniture and belongings—and your psyche with them—to a degree difficult to believe. It removes the cause of your having to unconsciously change all the time for the sake of unconsciously placed furniture, often left where the movers put it down. ORDO brings *unchange*, a reversion to natural order, an end to the internal and behavioral compensation we constantly make for

poor design and arrangement. It catalyzes a relaxation and surrendering to things as they are. It is a tonic, it is exciting, it is unexpected. It unveils the vitality in you, in your shelter, and in your relationships with the people who share it with you.

*revised 7 Dec 2007*

# Tribal Housing

## a design for a full life on \$250 a month

[NOTE: While the mechanics of Tribal Housing as described below are still mostly valid, my thinking about the social context of TH has changed significantly. While I have slightly edited the article to reflect this change, please read [Sociality Undenied](#) for a full presentation of my new view of social organization (subsequently obsoleted by the ideas in [psychosis](#) and [hygiene/capacity](#)]

## Introduction

After people, shelter is our most immediate need. In our culture, it is also the greatest of our obscene expenses and a heartbreaking damper on our tribal sociality. In this article, I present a design for a new kind of house, which reverses this condition and restores our people, our shelter, and our work to their natural places in our lives.

Tribal Housing is subsistence-scale shelter which a group of people makes together for itself. In other words, it is exactly like the forts you built with your childhood friends, except it takes a bit more time, you can actually live in it, and your friends do not have to go home after dinner. The house's design is a set of principles, attributes, and measurements you can adapt to any setting. A small group can itself plan and build it quickly and for an astonishingly small amount of money. It works in the city and country, with buildings existing and new, owned and rented, and with any material and method of construction.

The house makes room for the basics of human life: companionship and privacy, work and sleep, eating and sex, bathing and elimination, comfort and recreation. In operation, 4-24 people use the space typically occupied by 1-8 in a transformable, tribal way. Transformable means that the interior areas are rearrangeable and of multiple use. They are defined and set with modular, transformable, collapsible, and transportable walls, fixtures, and furniture. Permanent, interior walls and built-in features are in absence as much as possible. The building itself consists of just the floor, roof, exterior walls, and the empty space within. Tribal means that we live together on the basis of innate human sociality, according to our activities, for the purpose of making a living together. In contrast, civilized means people's joining together because they believe the same way (like- minds), for the purpose of achieving their ideal (as in community, that frail counterfeit of communion). A tribe attends more to action at the surface than agreement on fundamentals. This leaves people free to explore the depths when needed, in humility, alone or together, with much less political pressure. A tribe's foundation rests not on the shifting sands of individuals' values—claimed or genuine—but upon the immutable social nature of the human animal.

Tribalism thus diffuses power, mitigating hierarchy and meddling while strengthening both customs and individuals. Cool is its ethos; self-organization its mechanism. Capable, humble leaders emerge, as needed, among people with something to do together. Tribalism embraces and utilizes in people all that civilization would banish (eg, laziness, dissent, capriciousness). One's basic question in a tribe is: How can I help extend the living of the tribe to include myself? Always, there is something simple, obvious, and easy to do. A tribesman shows up and makes herself useful, letting time reveal her gifts. Things tribal neither begin nor end, rather, they are more or less in view. We all live tribally in some ways: from volunteering to, "Help us move, bro, and we'll smoke you out!" to making music in *bands*. It is instinctive and common sensical. It might take awhile to see it. Then it is incredibly fun to let it out.

There are many kinds of Tribal Housing for different environments, lifestyles, and livelihoods. A *dense residence* is in a residential building, like an apartment or suburban house, for people with transitional, nearly conventional, and cult lifestyles and outside, part-time jobs. An *urban micro-village* is in a large, unpartitioned space, usually commercial, like storage, a warehouse or storefront, for people with bohemian, metropolitan, and gang lifestyles; residents run tribal businesses and work at outside jobs. *New Tribal Revolutionary Quarters* is in unused areas of occupied buildings: closets, crawlspaces, stairwells, spare bedrooms, sheds, etc. It is for hyper-frugal entrepreneurs, students, and activists on a mission, living on the edge in small groups, with permission (if not the knowledge) of the buildings' owners. *Street cover* is in abandoned buildings, roofs, sewers, doorways, and tunnels, is for the Tribe of Crow (the homeless—see *Beyond Civilization*), taking shelter without permission or cost. A *rural micro-village* is in the country or wilderness, usually made of small, separate structures, either stationary or portable (even tents), for people with nearly self-sufficient, permacultural, and hunter-gathering lifestyles. A *\_co-shelter machine\_* is a highly efficient, integrated shelter-transport (eg, backpacks, bikes, buses, boats, balloons); its crew capitalizes on fleeting opportunities for money and adventure. In a *circus*, people's quarters and lifestyle are so outlandish, they are their own livelihood. Combinations of these work, too.

Beyond that lay exotic, Seussian, and Hundertwasserian realms filled with a mind-boggling variety of Tribal Houses. They are hexagonal, conical, geodesic, domed, and globular. They are liquid, elastic, spongy, mechanical, gyroscopic, anti-gravitic, and organic. They are underground, in trees, floating, stratospheric, sub-spacial, and submarine. They are made of wood and live trees, stone, metal, and glass; bamboo, mud, straw, fabric, paper, and rope; carbon fiber, rubber, plastic, holograms, and plasma. They are stationary and mobile, set in mountain caves and rockets to the moon, able to be carted by bike or assembled into a pedal-powered glider. As the Doctor might say, "Who knows? Let's go!"

## Tour

*Dense residence* may be the most available form of Tribal Housing. Yet it is usually provisional, so I will talk about it later, along with a little-known fact about Tribal Housing. The sustainable form of it within reach of most of us is the *urban micro-village*, so let's take the grand tour of an imaginary one.

[NOTE: I have changed my mind about this. I now believe a *rural microvillage*, set either in the country or suburban backyards, has the highest chances of success. I have worked on structures for it in the last couple years. See my [photo gallery](#) and [links](#) for more about this.]

It is late spring. We are walking in the old industrial district of a mid-sized city, 10 minutes by bike from its civic, cultural, and commercial centers. We stop before a single-story building that could have been a small shoe factory or a printing shop. We knock and are shown in by a soft-spoken six year-old who then disappears to the right. The space is rectangular and long from front to back. Light streams in through the many, tall, side windows, and a few skylights, over fabric and wood huts in the back. The wood-floored, brick building is clean and in good repair. Interior walls are wood, fabric, and paper. Ornament is eclectic and cheery. Sounds come from every corner of the building: muffled ones from the back and clearer, occasionally loud ones from the front. Through the open windows passes a draft. Somewhere ahead, people of all ages play and talk, and others are enjoying their work in a hushed buzz to the right. Two grandmothers pass by us in silence on their way out. A youth catches up to them with a library book to be returned, which they accept with a smile. The place gives the overwhelming impression of being lived in.

We have entered the space left of center into the hallway. To the left is the cloakroom. It serves as garage and foyer. It has bike hooks, coat, and shoe racks, shelves, mailboxes, and a bulletin board. Opposite the cloakroom and on the right is the workroom. It serves as a workshop, office, and kitchen. It has collapsible, height-adjustable benches, a freestanding sink, hand tool bureaus, and shelves, all with locking casters. There is space for small appliances. Light curtains separate the dirty, clean, and food sections. The dirty section is airtight, ventilated, and has a door to the outside. Beyond the workroom on the right is the living room. It serves as living, dining, and family rooms, library, study, sanctuary, and stage. It has heavy curtains for walls, roll-up carpets, pillows, camp chairs, rolling shelves, and altar. Opposite the living room and on the left (and beyond the cloakroom) is the store. It holds food and supplies. It is curtained and has shelves and one of Papanek's \$9 hand-cranked coolers.

The hallway jogs to the right and continues to the back down the middle of the building. Bathrooms are on the left and right, one per 4-6 people. They have lightweight fixtures, a counter, shelves, and ventilation. They have composting toilets and greywater drainage. Next are the private rooms, on the left and right, one per person. They are on the exterior walls and each has a window and usually contains furniture for sleeping, work and storage. They are small and cozy (like the forts we made as children), made of wood or plastic frames and modular, sound-dampening panels. Every piece of the house's interior is small and light enough that one or, at most, two people, can maneuver and install it.

Public storage lays throughout the house; private storage lays between or above private rooms; all of it usually accessible from the hallway. Plants sit and hang everywhere. Water runs from one or two spigots through the tribe's own half-inch, non-leaching PEX pipe and hose, along the ceiling, above hallways, and then down to sinks and baths. Water drains either directly to planters next to sinks or through 1 1/2" plastic pipe running along the floor and out to holding tank and gardens. Low-tech, solar water, and space heaters face the sun from the roof and windows. Electricity is optional and then routed to just the workspace and not used for lighting (oh, the unimaginable delights of a life unscrewed up by electricity). Phone lines are optional. For light, the design specifies sunlight, oil lamps, candles, flashlights, and night-sleeping; for energy: hand-tools, bicycles, nanohydropower (water pressure), and finger-lifting; for heat: sun, bodies, extra clothing, insulation, and simple heaters.

We reach the back of the house and exit to the outside area. It is at least a third of the size of the space inside. It has an undug garden and workspace, lawn, fountain with pool, mud bath, and a fire ring. There is an awning and a ladder to the roof. We climb up to a resort in a sky forest. There are several, large, potted trees, a flower and vegetable garden, a lounge area, retreat huts, and solar installations. We take in the view and watch people on the street hurry by.

## Background

So where did this come from? And how does it work? Well, there is something of my story in this.

Surrounded by freethinkers, designers, and craftspeople, I grew up thinking, imagining, and making things. Oblivious to the system's horrors, I got caught up in its designs for me. By 16, I had a bad feeling about everything. I constantly wondered what the hell was going on. When I shook off my slumber and perceived the world and its people being devoured by the culture I had been born into, I grasped its insanity. Then all that mattered to me was to understand, to trace what had happened, and to find some other way to live. After my release from school, I left everything I knew to recover myself and experience the world; to be with people and to travel; to read what I wanted; and to think, long and deeply. For years I have wandered, living out of a backpack, an emissary for a way of life I knew little about, just that I would find it.

I was buoyed by a strong memory from church camp at age 14: the experience of social intimacy. And I had a couple, reliable, guiding principles. One was obvious to me: there is nothing wrong with people or the world, and the whole Original Sin thing has been a long, bizarre detour. The other was a secret that led me along by indirection: life is not so much about what we do or how we do it, but what we do it for.

Growing up, I had caught glimpses of how indigenous people live, and an unshakeable question formed in my mind: Coming from industrial culture, how can I experience the simplicity and ease of theirs? Fate led me repeatedly to the work of Daniel Quinn (until I got it). After a devastating yet placid critique of our culture, he suggests living tribally, as the indigenous do: seeking satisfaction in the support of my people instead of the products of the system (aka *The Economy*). How? By making a living together (in a tribal business) instead of making money alone (called, fittingly, making a killing). He calls this modern use of ancient principles New Tribalism.

Over years of visiting a friend who had moved to, of all places, Las Vegas, I met members of Laservida, a band of guerilla artists. They, too, had long sought another way to live: "Way out youth looking for a way out," as one of their stickers put it. I introduced them to Quinn. We knew not what business we could do together. But we knew we needed a place, so in early 2001, four of us rented an unelectrified storefront in crack central, and began a crash course in power-free, New Tribal living.

The space only cost each of us \$115 (about two workdays) a month and right away we had a place to be and to be together. That automatically generated other things we needed: something to work on as well as a place to make art in; the roof to sleep under and on; the food people would show up with; the walls to show art on; the salvaged desks to work at; the candlelit room to play music and dance in; the sanctuary in which to give up control... While I never had \$250 a month, I felt happier (and better rested: no light at odd hours) than I had since I was five. With the help of my companions and elders, I finally saw that it is okay that I feel disinclined to achieve the perfectionistic megalomania known as the American Dream (what I call *More*); that another, simple way to live was finally at hand; and that by making money for two or three additional days each month, I could get everything I need (what I call *Enough*), to say nothing of restoring my waning self-esteem.

Then this summer, in my beloved home state of Idaho, I finally went to a Rainbow Gathering. Besides the love, freedom, and harmonious diversity in evidence everywhere, I was struck by the extreme simplicity of the camp's nearly sustainable infrastructure, built in weeks by hundreds for tens of thousands from onsite and cheap materials. It enabled us to easily feed, bathe, shelter, and entertain ourselves, without exclusivity, social hierarchy or much commerce. I had spent my youth collecting pieces of a shattered way of life, even as I was learning the great principle of order and design, *Group Like Things*. While carrying water to a kitchen one day, a vision of a new kind of shelter and social arrangement lighted in my mind, integrating all the pieces and giving rise to this design.

## Specifications

Those are the origins of the house. Now let's look more closely at how it works. We will measure it in square feet, hours, inhabitants, and dollars. Perhaps we will see in its scale what the American sage, Heinlein, meant when he told us, "A difference in degree makes for a difference in kind."

Roughly then, each person has 150 square feet throughout the indoor areas of the house: 50 for privacy, 30 for hallways, 20 for living, 15 for working, 10 for storage, 5 for bathing, and 20 extra; a person also has 60 square feet outdoors: 20 for garden, 10 for lawn, 5 each for: work, fountain, sandbox/mudpit, and fire, and 10 extra. Any roof area is bonus.

In this rectilinear example, private rooms are 6' x 8' (if you do not know what that looks like, measure it out). Frames are of either small lodgepoles; dimensional lumber with small diagonal bracing; arched, flexible, plastic sprinkler pipe for vaulted rooms (with thick, quilted covers). Panels, quilts, and curtains are of wood, plastic sheeting, cardboard, foam, batting, and/or fabric. Bathrooms are 4' x 6', half the size of private rooms and made of similar frames and panels. Whatever the design, it requires only hand tools; simple, cheap, standard parts; and a sewing machine.

The reason everything is transformable is so the space can change with the group. I mean, what does shelter for a real human life look like? Tribal Housing gives us a chance to find out, to reshape it within hours of reimagining it, unhindered by an interior stuck in one place (we rearranged our space in Las Vegas five times in as many months).

The private rooms, being made of modular panels, are conjoinable for friends, mates, and families. A quadruple room could have its own bathroom. Persons can pay for extra rooms and, for that matter, extra bathrooms. With an awning, floor, and its own fourth wall, a room can also go outside or on the roof. In any case, tribespeople are less than 15 seconds away from each other on foot. We make room for special occasions like concerts and parties by folding up the furniture and partitions of the living and workrooms. Population growth is accommodated first by filling in the space, then acquiring more space, then by division in the manner of cells at a natural, maximum population, which I put at about 24, the size of tribal bands.

Marshall Sahlins, the anthropologist who, 30 years ago and without derision, revealed how much the indigenous actually work for their basic needs (1-3 hours a day), called theirs the "original affluent society." By living in this house with the limited goal of Enough (a small amount, as everyone knows), as opposed to the body-and-soul-eating goal of More, and with the judicious use of our culture's "labor-saving devices", we, too, need only work one or two days a week, four to nine a month. This allows one to

enjoy nearly any kind of work for money and leaves 20-odd days to figure out how to do it better next month, a place to do it, and people to do it with. It is an early retirement, a permanent sabbatical. It allows time to relax; to explore the range of one's interests; to solve one's perennial problems; and to release the illusion of total fulfillment as a human being through career and acquisition. It allows the time to enjoy the nearly constant company of one's people; to again see them as sources of pleasure and support—instead of as irritants and obstacles amidst the distress, shame, and sheer *shortness of time* entailed by the pursuit of an ideal.

This is a tribal vision of life. It is a living we make in this house—a whole living. Most of it comes from just being together. The price of the rest, compared to that of More, is comically low. While living in this house, \$250 a month is all you'll need to make your life go. Experienced DIY punks may scoff at this figure for being absurdly high. However padded, this projection comes out of our time together in Las Vegas and our years of separate experiences in and out of doors, money, groups, and jobs. Consider: a \$1,000 place for three or four people drops below \$100 apiece when split 12 ways. As for food, even a frugivore can eat well on \$90 a month. Put away \$15 for the unforeseeable. Use the remaining \$45 for clothing, transportation, communication, and art. This covers thrift store clothing; maintenance of a good, used, road bike, and occasional bus and plane fares; stamps, phone cards, and library email; books, museums, guitar strings, dancing, and dollar movies. In accord with tribalism's attention to the *what for* over the *how*, we, in New Tribal financing, reduce expenses rather than raise income. We learn and lead a variety of cheap activities, instead of paying to follow a few expensive ones.

The old factories and warehouses are beautiful and neglected, cheap and centrally located. It is fitting that the disenfranchised should find a home in them. If developers have beaten you to it (though it is hard to believe all the buildings are gone), seek further into the historic ghettos. They have always been home to tribal people and shared subsistence in cities. Cheaper than any "affordable" housing, Tribal Housing is also sustainable and repels both poverty and the gentry, making it attractive to locals (whose opinion will matter). Look for rents of less than \$.50/ft<sup>2</sup> and purchase prices of less than \$25/ft<sup>2</sup>.

Just the costs of the repairs and simple improvements to the building and the investment in the interior structures remain. We can both salvage and purchase materials. Builders discard wood by the grove at construction sites; billions of small-diameter conifers in the National "Forests" need thinning; and civilized people abandon tons of useful stuff weekly (just stroll through nice neighborhoods the evening before their garbage day). We'll recover money for materials from both the savings on and proceeds from the expensive stuff in our lives, including cars. For permanent and structural improvements to their buildings, landlords sometimes deduct the costs of materials and labor from rent.

Techniques of [ORDO](#), an American art of placement, are useful in arranging a space: put its entrance in a corner (multiple entrances in adjacent corners); inwardly swinging doors latch toward the corner (and vice-versa); walkways lead around, not through, rooms, and furniture settings, which are toward a room's center; a setting faces the room's most attractive feature directly and its main entrance obliquely; settings are square internally and off-square with the room; clutter is revealed and eliminated. As in nature, still entities are thus neatly toward the center of space and motion.

## Summary

There you have an *urban micro-village* and the elements of Tribal Housing as they occur in one. It is their subsistence-scale and subsistence-function which make room for all of them to be present and to operate together. This is how the indigenous do it. And this is why, as Jean Liedloff observed, "they have a much better time than we do." (But enjoyment, I suppose, befits savages. In their pitiable ignorance, they cannot fathom the glory of our divine destiny: to martyr ourselves in non-stop, isolated servitude to the grandiose mythology of a system that, for 12,000 years, has defaulted on its relentless promises of deliverance from the very loneliness, poverty, and disease it causes. Alas.) Perhaps the most important thing to understand about TH is that it provides shelter, not living space. It gives protection from the elements and basic comforts. Otherwise, it will kick you back outside! Forget the lilies of the field; consider the Eskimos. Now, onward to *dense residence*.

Since most of us live in residential buildings, a *dense residence* is widely and immediately practical.



Basically, *dense residence* is a regular house with less stuff and more people (that these are inversely related must be some kind of sociological axiom). We use ORDO, jettisoning the bric-a-brac and bulky, heavy furniture. The kitchen (minus anything conceivable), the dining room, and the garage become the workrooms. We partition bedrooms, remove their doors, and put two to four people in each one. Any extra room with a window (den, laundry room, large closet, attic), we turn into a bedroom and condense their functions into the main, public rooms. We make composting toilets outside. This way, we can as much as quarter our expenses (and workweek) and quadruple our opportunities and support.

*Dense residence* has a couple, tricky things about it. First, residential structures, with all their walls and specialized features, lack flexibility and tend to continually require remodeling. Second, zoners and developers designed our residences as retreats from much of the activities in which we would engage in them. This will probably cause discomfort, both for us and for neighbors. Yet, we can at least live in *dense residence* while preparing for a move to another form of Tribal Housing.

Now for the little known fact. Tribal Housing is already happening, quietly and on a wide scale. I guarantee that there are groups near you living like this, usually craftspeople, artists, activists, hippies, squatters, and the homeless. If you can find them, perhaps you can make a place for yourself among them. Remember the show-up-be- useful thing, which, finally, is the irresistible approach which evokes the tribal nature of nearly any situation.

That's Tribal Housing. So much for loneliness, inclement weather, and the grind. By working together, as tribes have done for eons, we are immediately able to have what we need. Without selling out. While interacting with the system. Without looking for it to crash. Without waiting for the entire world to get it. There is nothing to it. Get with three or four of your people, keep reading this article and website, and act immediately on what parts of it you now see clearly.

Find the latest version of this secret-dense article and other New Tribal writings online at [andrewdurham.com](http://andrewdurham.com). It is in the public domain; please pass it on. Properly formatted and printed, it photocopies onto the front and back of a ledger-size piece of paper. Below, I have listed books that have informed the design. They are also guaranteed to clean your clock. To request help with design for your group or your inclusion on a Tribal Housing mailing list, write me at [info@andrewdurham.com](mailto:info@andrewdurham.com). To individuals with questions: before asking me, please reread the article a few times, sleep on it, use your own good sense, and talk with friends about it. Please let me in on what you come up with.

There is no, one, right way to create Tribal Housing. We can take minutes or months. We can do it bankrolled or broke, quick and dirty, or slow and precise. We can be few or many, rude or courteous, learned or just plain gung ho. However it happens, this house is a place for us, as we are.

## Bibliography, Influences, Acknowledgements and Dedication

*The Continuum Concept*, Jean Liedloff (tribal relationship); *The Path of Least Resistance for Managers*, Robert Fritz (organizational structure and creativity); *Gardening Without Digging*, A. Guest; *The Geography of Nowhere*, James Howard Kunstler (New Urbanism); *Hundertwasser: The Painter King with the 5 Skins*, Pierre Restany; *Just Eat An Apple!*, Frederic Patenaude (raw diet magazine); *Magical Child Matures*, Joseph Chilton Pearce; *Mucusless Diet Healing System*, Arnold Ehret; *The Moon Is a Harsh Mistress*, Robert Heinlein; *Nature's First Law*, Arlin, Dini, Wolfe; *ORDO: An American Art of Placement* (article), Andrew Durham; *Origins of Agriculture* (article), Greg Wadley and Angus Martin; *The Songlines*, Bruce Chatwin, (aboriginal recalcitrance and worldview); *Summerhill: A Radical Approach to Childrearing*, A.S. Neill; *Teenage Liberation Handbook*, Grace Llewellyn; *Where White Men Fear to Tread*, Russell Means. By Victor Papanek: *Design for a Real World*; *Nomadic Furniture*. By Daniel Quinn: *Ishmael* (another story to be in); *The Story of B* (inclusive human history); *My Ishmael* (concretes and criticism); *Beyond Civilization* (tribalism, business). By Ayn Rand: *Atlas Shrugged* (realist metaphysics, industrial culture); *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology* (logic). And by Frank Lloyd Wright: many books, especially *The Natural House*. My experiences as a guest and with camping, communities, co-ops and raw eating; and my exposure to eco-villages, co-housing, microhousing, feng shui and humanure have also informed the design. Thanks to my ancestors, family,

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*revised 2003 Dec 8*

## myths

### three peoples

*This is a myth I have developed over several years to explain why the situation on Earth, which could be so wonderful, happens to suck so bad at the moment.*

~

A long, long time ago lived the Original People.

They were always happy. They never got sick. They lived for thousands of years until they chose to pass on. They lived in harmony with the creatures of Earth and took their place on Earth without dominating or despoiling it. They were neither hungry, nor cold, regardless of where they lived or traveled. Some of them lived on sunlight and air. Others ate fruit and greens, fresh, ripe, raw, whole. In short, the Original People lived in complete accord with human nature. They lived in peace for tens of thousands of years.

Far, far away, a strange people from another dimension began a long journey toward Earth. These people were strange because they lacked all three dimensions that things on Earth possess. They were cardboard cut-out people. Two-dimensional. They left their dimension because they had learned and done everything they could there. They needed a place to continue expanding themselves as beings. So they headed for Earth where, as everyone in the galaxy knows, you can learn a lot really quickly. Their journey would take thousands of years.

Everything in the universe is made of energy which vibrates at different frequencies. Organisms have very powerful vibrations that travel long distances faster than the speed of light.

As the strangers approached Earth, their energetic vibrations began affecting the Original People. Things that had come naturally and effortlessly to the Original People began to slip their minds momentarily, then for longer and longer periods, until only their oldest and wisest people could remember. They began to cook their food, to hunt and kill animals for food, clothing, and shelter.

However, they maintained a strong connection to Earth, its cycles, its creatures, its spirits. Their elders kept ancient wisdom and secrets alive through unbroken lineages of shamans. The legends of Ancestors—the Original People—echoed loudly in the hearts, minds, and bodies of all of them.

Thus did Original People become Indigenous People: human beings vibrating at a frequency low enough to receive the consciousnesses of the approaching strangers.

The influence of the strangers especially degraded one group of Indigenous People. It was as if they had somehow lost their way as beings and as a people. Confusion, conflict, and sorrow showed on the faces of human beings for the first time in aeons. The wisdom of the people waned generally and became pronounced in a few, who began to make fearsome prophecies of an age of darkness to come. The feeling of inevitable doom began to impinge on the still strong benevolence they had always known.

Among these people, the first strangers incarnated. It was like the weak part of a body where it is easiest for a latent disease to become acute. Thus, few noticed or cared that these new children were different. They could not listen well. They did not understand quickly. They were afraid of ordinary things. They seemed shocked. They acted... stupid.

The elders took it as proof of the prophecies. They kept their confidence in the shamans, and held their children close as they always had.

The children, for their part, pulled away. During an especially lean year, one discovered the edibility of grain, an otherwise tasteless, malnourishing, and indigestible substance. The people began to eat large quantities of it. Psychologically rewarding chemicals in the grain began altering their feelings, their attitudes, their vitality to a profound degree. They felt dissatisfied yet complacent. They felt angry at no one in particular. They grew sick for no obvious reason.

Earth is a seductive, swirling kaleidoscope of impressions. For these strangers, it was a crash course. They knew nothing of being human except the little they managed to absorb from their people. The most developed of them was a thousand times less capable than the least capable Indigenous Person. And by now, the human body was far more intelligent than any of them. Being inside the body, each of these strangers began to learn rapidly how to be human in a few of the most gross and mechanical ways. They remained pathetically ignorant in the subtle ways considered most important by Indigenous People to this day.

What they found most fascinating were the forms and behavior of things. How rocks would fall out of your hand. How a stick would bang against the ground. How the flesh of a man or woman felt in ones hands. How things could be acted upon and changed. Their feelings were overpowering experiences. Frightening mysteries. But objects, at least, were clear. Simple. They began to master the manipulation and production of things.

Thus did these strangers, born of the Indigenous, become the Industrial People, always busy making things.

What drove them to make things? The malaise of persistent deprivation and fear, and their ignorance of the staggering abundance of Earth. Both magnified by their parasitic diet.

The further trouble with unchecked ignorance is that it leads to mounting errors. On Earth, multiplying, uncorrected errors have dire consequences. In this case, physical and psychic injuries. Untended, these injuries snowballed among the Industrial People. For the first time in aeons, human beings began to *suffer*.

Yet this felt somehow right to the Industrial People. An organism too advanced to tolerate Industrial consciousness *needed* further degradation and impairment to lessen the friction between their differing grades of body and soul. Justified in their way of life and ignorant of others, they persisted in it. They took pride in this righteous process of hurting each. They would come to call it *civilization*.

In their suffering, they felt afraid and alone. Their fear led them to feel angry. Their growing mastery over plant production had increased their numbers. Their people needed more land.

So they began to take it from the Indigenous, even to kill any Indigenous who would not join them. Anyway, this killing was strangely satisfying for the small cults that led the fights.

The people began to move farther north and south, where survival became an even greater issue for them. Along with their increasingly sophisticated technology, they began to develop sophisticated ideas to explain their lives. They developed codes and laws. When things went wrong—and they were always going wrong—it was not because their way of life naturally led to disaster. No, now it was someones *fault*.

Many Indigenous People began to die. Earth being their home, they were reborn as the children of neighboring bands. Bringing their recent experience of Industrial People with them, they influenced bands to become tribes—larger, stratified groups with somewhat more ability to defend themselves.

Soon, Industrial People spread throughout the globe. Indigenous Peoples died by the band, the tribe, the nation. As they died, they were reborn, now more and more as the children of their conquerors. The old wisdom they carried began coming out of them in ways simple and profound. As philosophers and saints. As artists and scientists.

As a result of receiving this wisdom from people they considered their own, Industrial People learned faster both how to appreciate life and how to manipulate things. The errors of their ways multiplied along with awareness of their suffering. The extremity of their circumstances intensified as cultural development became more complicated. Saints began emerging more and more to help people ease their suffering. Elders of Indigenous Peoples still living began to reach out to Industrial People as kin, as truly, many of them were.

Indigenous People—both those still in semi-intact indigenous ways and those reborn as Industrial People—also simply grew tired of the absurdity of the situation. They longed for the Old Ways. To restore them, they mounted new efforts.

The sciences of Industry began overturning many of its destructive myths in persuasive ways. For example, the sciences of anatomy and physiology eventually produced a singular discovery: human beings are naturally frugivores. This means humans share the anatomy, physiology, and diet of other anthropoid primates who eat predominately fruit as well as significant volumes of leafy greens and small amounts of fatty and proteinacious foods. In light of 10,000 years of civilized grain, meat, and dairy eating, and tens of thousands of years more of indigenous root, meat, and cultured food eating, most Industrial and Indigenous People found this idea very hard to accept.

But there it is. Out of the Industrial impulse to move forward, and the Indigenous impulse to move back arose a deeper impulse to go nowhere, to be here, to finally discover the exact nature of life in this body, and fall through its trapdoor, hidden here in the open, in a child's relish for fruit.

For some Industrial People, this discovery bore a profound implication: that there had to be a time when all people ate this way. And this meant that there had to be a *third* way of life beyond the Industrial and Indigenous ways in front of them. There had to be an Original way.

Some tried to eat this way. Physically, it felt good. Emotionally, many found it rocky. Some were thus motivated to discover, both through personal experimentation and in spiritual traditions, various ways to help restore the simple feeling of connectedness with Universe and awareness of more of its dimensions than the ever-fascinating physical one.

Small groups of people around the world experimented with long periods of rest in totally dark rooms. Significant rates of success in healing from the ancient psychic trauma of Industrial existence attracted some among the disaffected to retreat in darkness. Entire villages were retrofitted as sanatoria for this purpose. Word of the effectiveness of this approach quickly spread around the globe and quickened the forces of the Resolution.

Masses of Industrial People began awakening to their identity with Indigenous People, to their natural place on Earth. The persistent beauty and wisdom of Indigenous lifeways, combined with disasters caused by the Industrial way of life, spurred some of these awakenings. The old Industrial guard held on to their power to the last. Vast lies and armies propped them up longer than most believed possible. Many more people, animals, and forests died. But the people of Earth—the Indigenous, the maturing Industrial, the rediscoverers of the Original—prevailed in the Great Conflict. This was not due to their greater might, but their greater ability to participate in the cosmic forces that no system or machine could overcome, the forces that had assured from the beginning of the cycle a sane Resolution to the strife that would temporarily overcome humanity following the Catastrophe.

Many years followed of sharing and reconciliation between Indigenous and Industrial People. Industrial People actually learned to become Human Beings. Indigenous People continued to learn and, for a time, use some of the best of Industrial Peoples discoveries. One of their favorite inventions was the geodesic dome. And they were surprised at how glad they felt to stop killing their brother and sister animals just to be fed.

Satisfied with their time on Earth, Industrial People ceased to reincarnate here in order to continue their travels and learning elsewhere. Some Indigenous People left with them to share the terrible adventure. Some Industrial People stayed with the Indigenous to continue Being Human. Because it is wonderful.

Earth began to open up occasionally and swallow the fading Industrial cities, crushing and melting them back into its core. The gigantic wounds and poisonings Industrial People had inflicted on Earth slowly healed. Forests and oceans regenerated. Extinct species began to reappear from the morphogenic fields of the subtle dimensions of Earth. The seeds of fruit were planted by the hundreds of millions until they again covered the globe.

After several generations of living in an increasingly Original way, the first Blindingly Beautiful children were born to the Indigenous. They felt only love for their parents and their people. They instantly mastered everything they were shown and then began demonstrating new abilities. The ancient wisdom and stories of the Indigenous began playing before the people in the persons of these children, the new Originals of the species.

For tens of thousands of years these new Original People flourished around the globe. The paradises of Eden, Shambala, and Eldorado all emerged again, not in cities, but in the persons of the people, animals, plants, air, light, stones and water that inhabited them.

One night, a child spotted a new star in the sky. Over generations it grew brighter. It was red. And the People, first for moments, then days, began to forget certain things they had, as children, learned by heart.

The Great Hoop rolled on, round and round, again and again, forever and ever. Behold: Earth, where life burns bright and fast but never goes out, one generation to the next.

## long return

The people were dying. We had tried everything. Welcoming, guiding, trading, sharing, talking, debating, running, sabotage, hiding, fighting, alliances, dividing, enduring. Nothing worked. The smelly soldiers were never satisfied. Fire and blood did not stop them, and when they had finished us, they would seek more.

So we waited. They would come, and we would fall. We were exhausted. Still, we had to think of the future. It is the job the world gave us. To think ahead, to anticipate, to see, to bring balance in time. We felt something terrible was coming. We had no idea how bad it would be.

All that was left to us was to understand. Why had this befallen us? What was wrong with us that this had come? What moved in the angry soldiers?

Some of us would go and keep our places in the next world. Some would come back. So we thought we would take aim from the next world and return as the children of our conquerors. To grow up among them, always strangers, but close enough to feel in our hearts what moved in theirs. To live and see as they do. And one day, perhaps, to understand our shared tragedy from their side.

As we did so, we would remember who we really were. We would leave our adopted families and somehow find each other again. We would share what we had learned from behind our masks. At last we would find understanding and then, perhaps, a way through, a spot to stand on and bring balance again.

The world is our home. We will not abandon it in its time of need, after the many rounds of peace and plenty we knew. We do not understand this cycle. Not yet.

~/~

## Gallery (my photos, hosted off-site)

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title: Poems

## 1992-93

### Existence

I am full to bursting  
 I am a dandelion drooping with dew  
 I am my swollen lower lip and quaking eyes,  
 lusting for her flesh and loins

I am a cat tensed to pounce  
 I am my skin stretched tight and tingling  
 over clean sinew and bone  
 My muscle strands stream over them  
 Like the river over stone

And it comes  
 Finally  
 To the sea  
 I am awash  
 I am alone  
 I am come to me

### Axioms

Words I cannot hold  
 For the stars shine right through them  
 It is the stars that I contemplate tonight

They are steady and quiet  
 While meteors and eclipses  
 Bustling this way and that  
 Fawn for attention

Their presence is subtle and final  
 To those who look  
 They are indifferent  
 To those who see  
 They are obliged

Seeker  
 Pause  
 There is breath beneath your breath  
 And words  
 Beneath the words which escape you  
 Words that should  
 In every waking moment  
 Hum in your head

In stillness  
 One falls  
 Touches old bruises

Exhaustion  
 Longing  
 And returns to the meanings of those  
 Underwords

## Who Needs It

– to the memory of Ayn Rand

By definition  
 I am conscious.  
 Correct

It can work  
 Only one way  
 It: everything there is  
 What is it?  
 Name it  
 The feeling of identification is pleasure  
 And nothing can alter that fact

I wanted so much to want  
 I could not break any laws  
 Then what?  
 Which way?  
 What had scattered the signs  
 From the roads that lead off from here  
 Could it mark them again

The thing to pull it all together  
 What would it be...  
 What would it be?  
 By definition  
 Philosophy

## My Father Lives in Twin Falls, Idaho

I am not the kind  
 Who can walk down a main street with impunity  
 My body is a monolith  
 My blood stands still  
 The numbness is a forcefield  
 Which a draws a dangerous man close to me

I am going to the open desert  
 For safety  
 To be worn clean  
 So that I may never have to walk down a main street again

## Right Now

The very best thing possible is happening  
 I am living

Food falls down my throat

And my chilled flesh  
 -it does not go to the bone anymore-  
 Warms in this temporarily benevolent fluorescence

I have just enough time to regain my direction  
 And the will to reenter a damp canyon  
 Where again  
 I'll find the courage to sleep

To walk a mile  
 To go from this glow  
 To trees and a moonlit creek  
 Is to crumple into the hand of a giant  
 Who rests a world away

I am ready  
 This was worth six bits

## Disguise

I have collapsed into depravity  
 By way of prodigality  
 I hoped that you are fooled  
 And I hope that you are amused  
 By my efforts to nobility

Mine is the disguise of a spy  
 Who is about to depart enemy territory  
 For the last time  
 He is tired  
 More and more  
 He feels that he did not penetrate it  
 But that his own fatherland  
 Deeply screwed him

Ergo the appearance of a wastrel  
 Yes, I've squandered the money I've earned  
 But what I've been given  
 I've spent well

Now  
 I've laid the plan  
 And collected the gear  
 I am vacating my place here  
 Listen for a whoosh  
 Then a crash  
 An implosion, I think  
 Will be a fitting end  
 To this place and this mask

## Man

No proper adjective  
 No possible qualifier  
 Common: Contradictory  
 Independent: Redundant

Pluralization: Impossible

Exclusion of the unwilling  
 By definition  
 His identity  
 Free, alone, complete  
 A city-state-nation unto himself

This...

...

Quiet, he says  
 The mob absent  
 The comportment of his soul  
 Named

## The Words

Hear now the words  
 Which beseech thee to perceive their origins:  
 Freedom  
 Heaven  
 Life

Dumb and still you were  
 Till their vibrations  
 Cohered inside your head

Flowering language  
 Trumpeted from every peak  
 Drowns if a child whispers them  
 In some lonely glen

The crickets and the wind will cease their own movements  
 And conspire to aid him  
 Lifting his feet  
 And covering their fall amidst enemies  
 Who writhe and languish all around

First the air into the lung  
 To start the friction for the tongue  
 To forge into a rapier drawn  
 Thy thoughts! behold thy foe hast gone

No potent threat can be heard  
 By the one who seeks and speaks these words

## May I have this last dance?

I have my secret  
 And I am going  
 Do you hear?  
 I am going, I am going!

At last the boat docks and I depart  
 The oars and sails are my spokesmen  
 Do you listen?



They bid you adieu

You needn't hear me say it again  
 For I am going  
 A thousand, thousand times you've heard it from me  
 But now it is true

I am going  
 I am going  
 I am gone

## untitled

In the dark  
 In the deep  
 In the stone  
 In the keep

There is I  
 With the key  
 And the sky  
 Envelopes me

The sea's drops  
 The Earth's rocks  
 The jetty heavens  
 Time stops

Breathe in, breathe out  
 The seething din and the shout  
 Resonate in the settling calm  
 The tones, now heard  
 now dancing in my palm

## Planet and World

Never have I considered these things as the same

Here is the planet, Earth  
 I can touch it  
 And live here  
 It sings to me  
 And if I break a limb  
 I bury it  
 And cease eating  
 And rise in three weeks  
 Whole

There is this world  
 —a coalition of polities on a planet—  
 In which people live unsecretly  
 There, we cannot hide what we are, what we do  
 It all comes out  
 It is all there  
 And look at it

Then there is the world that could be  
 Another world  
 Separate or greater  
 A world of freedom  
 That one can found

Tinder gathers on its blueprint  
 Some now aim their sparks there  
 A breeze collects itself

You will see others smeared with grey  
 Some walking  
 Some dead  
 Before the rains, everything will be grey  
 This new world will rise  
 From ashes

## 1999 – present

### Eating Bitter

I see every truth  
 And every falsehood  
 Resolve to truth

Finally I am fed  
 By all this bitterness  
 For it was salt that grew it  
 Salt and humus  
 The blood of so many gone before

Including me  
 Yes I was here before  
 I wept and died here countless times  
 Horses would crush my body  
 And kick it into the canal  
 Where it would catch  
 On branches and barbed wire  
 And decompose into beds  
 For native flowers that never bloom  
 And malva and sheep sorrel and fat hen

That today  
 I sit by the water  
 In the seat of longing  
 And eat  
 And eat  
 Until the hunger is satisfied

Twin Falls 1999 Jul

### Not Quite

What happens

If I tell you  
That ecstasy always plays at my bones  
Catches my breath  
Wipes out history?

What will it be for me-  
Cross or scaffold?  
Do you have any idea  
How much you hate purity?  
How ferociously you cultivate  
the drama of pain and achievement?

But this only provokes  
Your "Work,"  
As if, somehow,  
God left something undone.

## **Grass's benediction**

Grass is benediction  
To my feet

I had forgotten  
Shoes clogged my brain

If you're strong  
You can eat it  
Said the tough-footed boy

Across the valley  
Bare-limbed disiduous trees  
The beard of the hills

And the clouds  
Write themselves  
On paper

## **Audience With Myself**

If I could meet myself  
At this point in my life  
I would place all my hopes in myself

My secret longing for the sacred  
Would find second wind  
In the clues falling from my lips  
In the excited tension throughout my back  
In my sweet wish to make love  
To marry any one  
Of the beautiful, perfectly loveable women I meet everyday  
Everyone of whom I feel myself falling in love with

I would throw myself at my feet, sobbing,  
Deliver me! Deliver me! You are my only hope!  
I would beg all the saints  
Disguised as the ordinary people

Who surround this self of my present  
 Please help him to help me,  
 To remember me  
 Remember all his own failings, which I am  
 Remember everything that led me to this point  
 Remember everyone like me  
 Sobbing at our own feet, Deliver me! Deliver me!

If I could meet myself at this point in my life  
 I would place all my hopes in myself  
 Seal my love  
 For myself, for life, for others, for this lovely Earth,  
 Seal it in wax  
 Feed it to the flame in the hearts  
 Of all ourselves  
 Whom we might now meet at this point in our lives  
 Again and again and again and again

LV 2001 Mar

## 1.19.02 4 b

Did I storm your yard?  
 I bid you relax  
 Then caught you off guard  
 Now I know the facts

Now your face is too much  
 Only your feet can play in my mind  
 These I can see and touch  
 Without going numb or blind

These rhymes spring from love  
 Won't you believe this old heart?  
 Fly to me flitting dove  
 May we nevermore be apart

You are wine, I, a drunken cup  
 The sky opens and you pour down  
 At the first red drops I look up  
 At the receding blue before I drown

## Kamikazes

When love becomes a life and death matter  
 Even sweeping the floor is urgent

In washing the dishes  
 the universe hangs in the balance  
 Swallowing morsels of food  
 stuns and dumbfounds even the quick and articulate  
 A salad is a vision of god  
 And just sitting down is an act of war

Who is the gremlin  
 That gives things meaning?

It occupies my heart  
 It has locked itself in  
 It is making ransom demands  
 It intimates that you are in its care  
 But for how long!

These things cannot, however, concern me  
 I lean back  
 Let the sun hit my neck  
 Like so many kamikazes  
 Coming in

Seattle 2001 Dec

## **The crest and the trough**

Waiting for an opening  
 And then  
 Into the breach

Endless controls  
 Waffling toward zero

I touch a place now  
 where I cannot  
 Move against my feeling  
 Anymore

Satloka 2004 Jan

## **Corduroy Classic 2001**

– for Micha Grainger

Youth, man: that's IT  
 Said Micha

Micha chases a lost rabbit  
 The furbearer of his people  
 Multiplying  
 Soft  
 Despised  
 Elusive

See his comical corduroy cap  
 His flaring pants  
 The missing white member  
 Of Fat Albert's gang  
 Showing up late  
 The party's second wind

Look!  
 Old-school court shoes  
 Improbably shined and flashing  
 Twisting on the carpet  
 Hands waving like daisies

Laughter springing up goofy  
and hip:  
For the people  
For his people

Others chase their own dreams  
Micha chases the dream of his people  
Assured and fleet  
On his lucky furry feet

## Breathe

There is no agency  
—let alone free agency—  
Only one long chain of life  
Binding us all to its winding course

Belong to it!  
Your strains against it  
Only pull it tighter against the rest of us  
Against we  
Who will bear it smiling  
Be assured

For what choice have we?  
Strain, do not strain:  
We belong  
It has us  
Has us

en route to Boise 2005 Aug 11

## The Battle of Wounded Knee

– for Rob Bolman

The traveler of pregnant faith  
Sets foot on the distant path  
God is with him  
God is with him

Sing god's name with his  
God is everything  
And he is only dust  
Yet sing their names together

Many hopes follow on his heels  
Like friendly cats  
Longing pours from his eyes  
Unbearable tension rips his limbs from his body  
But he pulls himself forward by his chin and forehead,  
his abdomen and pelvis

God is with him  
God awaits him  
With prostheses that work better

Than the arms and legs  
Of a born champion:  
This one will be made

Among the six billion cells of Maitreya's body  
This one finds his way home twice:  
in leaving and in returning

Godspeed, traveler,  
Closing his door and already far away,  
Godspeed.

Eugene 2006 Jan

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title: Lyrics

## Exactly Me

Exactly me  
Exactly me

The chains go round and round  
I fill the space with my empty head  
Stumbling and sliding through the night  
Lying painful in my bed

Exactly this moment  
And I'm turning side by fire  
And when I'm alone  
Oh no, again I'm alone  
Where this journey ends  
The sad-filled time expires

Exactly me  
Exactly me

No I see through this dance  
I insist its a trance  
And the moons they plod in their orbits  
The vampires coo  
No, nothing's new  
Still the morning falls all the harder

Chorus

This is nowhere to be  
When I don't know where to go  
I want so much to say yes  
But I wake up shouting no  
Dig in or retreat  
Forfeit or cast away  
Or quiet, hold your head  
There is a way

Chorus

## A Candle for the Sun

I lost a candle to the rising sun  
 Found myself doing things I'd never done  
 I left my life as I knew it to rot  
 I was selling things of mine I hadn't bought

This story begins in yesteryear  
 A child sits in a corner of fear  
 He has one match and a candle to  
 To come up even he knows what he's got to do

He strikes the match and the room is lit  
 His eyes adjust, take in bit by bit  
 He moves the match closer to the candle  
 And when the wick fires, that's his life's preamble

Chorus

He pokes around, asks, What's this place about?  
 Without a word, the bones reply, You should get out  
 This room's a hole in the bottom of a pit  
 But your flame is bright, just keep it lit

He cuts his knee and he wipes his brow  
 He seeks the truth, he's climbing up and out  
 The wick grows short, it burns his hand  
 So what: hear the crack of dawn, feel the gust, it's open land

Chorus

## Overcome

While my body stays in  
 And my soul flies out  
 I wonder why I'm singing  
 When I barely know what I'm about

Brother said, Be cool, go slow, just hang  
 Maybe I'll feel a change  
 I trip, I fall, I feel wholly dumb  
 Still, I keep my pretensions to overcome

It's the method, not the madness  
 Though the words be transcendent  
 Complicated by my false humility  
 Juxtaposed with an arrogant tranquility

Chorus

Beaten and cornered, the boy will fight  
 Then to survive is to know he's right  
 If a door open up, he'll take his flight  
 The wings of his mind free him from his might

Chorus



## The Truth Is Mine to Know

Thank you  
But, no thank you

Oh, heal me, fire in the night  
Close these wounds and banish my fright  
Lead my from the darkness to light I've barely known  
Take this feeble heart and tell me what you've shown

I've given up my upbringing  
And all the lies therein  
I've broken through it singing  
I see my soul robed in the colors of heaven

Tearing through the falsehood  
Bearing all the truth it could  
It's here  
They say the truth is relative  
But the rock ain't relative

Thank you,  
But no, thank you

I'm alive  
I remember

## I recognize I

If these tears are not mine  
Then my path you could define  
But I hear this wail as my own  
And so I cannot fetch your bones

I recognize I  
Until the day I die  
On that day I can no longer see  
I trust you to bury me

There is a picture of you and Father  
King-like he holds you as your eyes stream water  
Perhaps you were tripped as you chased your ball  
And his scepter could not break your fall

Now that we've sailed from his realm  
I think you've seen that one must man his own helm

What do you want of me, won't you just say?  
The sounding of brass must needs drive me away  
Act as my conscience, you'll play to a shell  
This water's poison, find a new well

Chorus

## Will

I don't got it  
 But I want it  
 I don't know what it is  
 I just know that it's there

I will search it out  
 And forsake my doubt  
 I defy the mob  
 And its doctrine of despair

Chorus:  
 I am your child  
 But I am still doing this  
 Picking up what was your burden  
 Gonna find my way to bliss

If you find this song a mystery  
 You probably grew up with hope and history  
 Hope that someday things will get better  
 History of the fact that they never did

You question my anger  
 You are amused  
 It kind of makes me wonder  
 Are your children confused  
 About their desires  
 And why they are here  
 Cause that is just what happens  
 When you're born in love and raised in fear

Chorus

I'm staking my life  
 On a very dangerous thing  
 On a 40 year old man  
 Who knows about what I sing

Who'll give me the rites of passage  
 And show me the work of his hands  
 He'll call forth my spirit  
 And I'll come forth a man

Chorus  
 First verse

## Descend

Gospel mission  
 City street  
 Ancient forest  
 Public beach  
 There I walked and I slept  
 There I worked and I wept

Things fall apart

My sadness  
Sweet with age  
Staled to numbness  
Rotted to rage  
Rage melted to silence  
And silence became my cage

I'm not angry  
I am sad  
From myself it well  
But hiding has broken my back  
I've been shoveling coal in hell

Something bellows in my brain  
Like commandment from god:  
You were injured  
Unearth the pain  
It's buried under the sod

Things fall apart

Though I want you  
I beware you  
I will frustrate you ways of harm  
I am hurt some day I will trust you  
To hold me in your arms

## Farewell

I don't care about getting ahead  
I just want to break even  
Yes you heard me right  
When I said  
After I've paid my debt, I'm leaving  
For good  
Did you ever think I would

So this is my leaving song  
I wish to say farewell  
I'll throw down all my possessions  
By a healing water well  
Watch the face in the shadowy water  
Hear it sing my namee  
Here the sound the I grew deaf to  
While playing this game

To the north woods or the deserts in the south  
Wherever I'm allowed to survive  
If to Earth, I'm a burden  
Let me drown in the river's mouth  
Better dead in harmony  
Than discordant and alive

And I'll be wild as a doe  
And watch the flowers grow

Feel a desert heat wave roll  
Scorching some truth from my soul

I think they planned for my embittered wrath  
Strategically numbing me and diverting me from my path  
So I'm on my way, I'm getting off the beaten path  
Open up to the signs and find my way back

Chorus

## Odyssey

Odysseys  
And time fell on a snowflake

I'm nearly done with farming  
Can you see the pines  
Waving you goodbye  
Citylife?

I am green  
With the sounds my bare feet make  
On the spongy leaves-will-be-humus

I twist at my ankles  
Bugs of joy  
Crawl in anticipation  
Up my tibia and fibia

Odysseys  
And time fell on a snowflake

More pine boughs  
Usher me to sleep  
At the tree's base

At the base of a tree  
In my Odyssey...

## Minstrel's lullaby

Far away, far away  
I must go far away  
There is water whence I go  
Far away

O'er the hill, o'er the hill  
I will climb up o'er the hill  
I will quench my thirst  
I will drink my fill  
O'er the hill

But while I'm here  
Reason makes the rhyme  
The heart keeps the time

The rooster tells us when to fall asleep

It's so simple it's so easy  
You can sit all night and grin  
And when the child knocks, you let him in

## untitled love song

She is ready, she is Tona  
She says, I like you, I wanna...  
You know what I mean

Yes, I know what you mean all too well  
That's the garden where I was forbidden to dwell  
But if you hold the gate awhile  
I'll be along to share your smile  
And I'll bring you a rose  
A cutting for the garden

The sun sets, and you tire  
The wind through the leaves  
Like fingers on a lyre  
But tarry longer  
Let the gold fire wane  
I'm walking straight down the lane  
To bring you a rose  
A cutting for the garden

I come at dark, you look down  
You point the way  
I plant the branch in the ground  
There I sleep  
While you go off to bed  
In the morning  
You'll see the rose is red

And you'll bar the gate  
The entrance to the garden  
Where I want to live  
The rest of my life

## Roots

Where are my roots?

I take off my shoes I take off my socks  
To find with my feet what we what I have lost  
I splash in the mud I roll in the dirt  
I run on the land that for roots must come first

Yeah, Mother  
Yeah, Father  
You gave shelter, clothes and food  
But you missed something  
Where are my roots?

I'm floating up my head's a hot air balloon  
 Can't feel the ground if I don't have any roots  
 I was driving through the midwest  
 Behind a rest stop I ran  
 I dove my fingers into the dirt  
 Into the Earth  
 Into the soil  
 Into the land

Chorus

Walking weary by the edge of the road  
 Thumbing for a ride  
 Now roots for a displaced people  
 Roots for them, they grow inside

Chorus

## The Ashers, a River, and I

for my childhood neighbors, LaVerne and Jack Asher, on their 50th Wedding Anniversary

**2002 Jun 4** LaVerne Asher and Mrs Nielson picked us up that day at the end of our run down the Salmon Falls River in a train of canoes. We, the Boy Scouts of Troop 69, were cold and wet, having endured a stormy spring day on an especially fast river. As usual, I was withdrawn and in shock from the physical demand of our outing. Ten years old and coddled, I was still possessed of the belief that no one should ever bear such trauma; that anyone, such as my Scoutmaster, Jack Asher, who subjected another to it was deeply misled and even dangerous.

It would turn out that life had more in store for me of what I faced that day. Many nights I was to spend alone and afraid in addition to being cold, wet, and tired. For I would choose, at 19, to live outside, off and on for 10 years, as I traveled the American West, contemplating my life and the world. My path twisted—and slowly untwisted me—just as the river twisted ceaselessly back and forth, throwing Mark Nielson, an expert canoer and my best friend, Jack, and me across its screaming currents.

Have you ever flown above flatland and seen a sinewave cut into it, shining and still? After rain in the mountains miles away, that still serpent is a raging dragon, though you would not know it from the air. Down in it, there is fierce water, two treacherous banks, the curves, and a canoe hurtling along, as straight as a cypressy waterway will allow. The only thing that compares to it is Woman Herself, but that's another story.

Mark, thank the river gods, was astern, steering us past the clutches of the rocky, reedy edges of the torrent. Once we cleared a turn, it was my job in the bow to paddle like hell for the other side, to lean out as far as possible over the water, and pull its frigid sinews toward the boat, drawing us to the right, then left, then right again. There was no sense in it, just muscle I've never really had, and a fear surpassed only by a heartbroken hatred for the man riding garbage, calmly guiding us and prodding us around the rocks he'd surely seen the wrong side of many times.

This was Jack, borne by the Spirit That Moves As All Things—across a war, his butcher's saw, the death of a son, and with an incomparably faithful wife—to anchor in me experiences that permanently defied my smallness and tendency to abstraction. Of course, he came for many of us, and I will never know a tenth of it, but that day, Jack gave me a memory that would save my life many, many times. He was God and he was the Devil. He was larger than life and he was a man. He was both compassionate and unsparing, as it was his to be, whether he liked it or not. I think he did.

LaVerne awaited our landing miles downstream in their grey beast of a pickup that usually sat ominously across my street, licking its chops for our next outing. Were we first out of the river? I think so. The

cloudcover raced by in the wind and twilight. The door opened, Jack threw Mark and me in to be tended to by the women, then returned to the river to pull out the other boys and their canoes. With a total lack of the bemusement usually bubbling beneath her manner when she heard my complaints, which was often, LaVerne helped us out of our soaked clothes and into our sleeping bags. She had food and a way home for us. She presided over my return from the dreamworld: my body had sent me there to fetch some force to sustain it after giving out on the river. I commissioned the first daemon I encountered, collapsed, and eventually found out it had done my bidding. Jack had kept the daemon in line, and now Laverne dismissed it by calling my name, telling me how to move in the confines of the pickup seat until I could remember how to change clothes there myself.

Back to the river: it churned brown. It snaked through a long valley near Jackpot, Nevada. There was nothing else but its wet, stinging fire and my comrades for many miles in every direction. Just rocky, sagebrush-covered mountains more forbidding than the water. The only way out was through Jack and Laverne, by the grace of the sacred water that flows in their veins, that flowed into me that day.

revised 3 Jan 2003

## Bibliography

### five cranial supernovas

These are the most important books and authors I have ever read. Each has blown my mind, changed my life, and deeply informed and influenced my methods and thinking since I first read it.

Book	Author	Published	First Read
<a href="#">Atlas Shrugged</a>	Ayn Rand	1957	1990
<a href="#">The Continuum Concept</a>	Jean Liedloff	1975	1990
<a href="#">Ishmael</a>	Daniel Quinn	1992	2000
<a href="#">In Search of the Miraculous</a>	P D Ouspensky	1947	2005
<a href="#">The 80/10/10 Diet</a>	Douglas Graham	2006	2008

I read and liked nearly everything else by Rand, Liedloff, and Quinn. Ouspensky's other books don't attract me. I have just started to study Graham, whose crystalline book on diet I have sought for over 20 years.

An honorable mention as a highly catalytic book that came at a critical moment in late 2006 is *Introduction to Human Technology* by [William Arthur Evans](#).

The book that concretely sums up for me the diabolical process of this culture, while enabling me to finally wash my hands of trying to remediate it, is John Perkins' [Confessions of an Economic Hit Man](#).

There are also few other books that really affected me when I was first reading things on my own, starting at age 15. They prepared me for the books above. They are so close to me, it is hard to assess their monumentality, their greatness. Also, they are so central to my thinking, it is hard to objectify them, to separate them from my perspective as I have done in the above list. They are:

extras - hygienic darkroomretreat.com: profound rest for the self-healing psyche

Summerhill -A S Neill  
 Magical Child Matures -Joseph Chilton Pearce

The Songlines -Bruce Chatwin

Even earlier books, which came to me through my family, were:

The Natural House. -Frank Lloyd Wright

Illusions: The Adventures of a Reluctant Messiah -Richard Bach

The Prophet -Khalil Gibran

## Links

### Good Designs by Others

### Shelter

For their simplicity, ease, economy, strength, beauty, and elegance, I recommend the following designs/methods for shelter construction. (Speed measured in hours, days, weeks):

[Self-Strutting Geodesic Plydome](#) (weeks)

Steve Miller's perfection of Buckminster Fuller's design for a frameless sphere (now proudly hosted [here](#)!)

[Conic Shelter](#) (weeks)

Chuck Henderson's sweeping, simple, brilliant, circled-square construction

[Hexayurt](#) (hours)

Vinay Gupta's 3-hour, \$200, portable pop-up shelter + autonomous infrastructure

[Superadobe](#) (weeks)

Nadir Khalili's giant upside down coil pot shelters elegantly made from war materials

[Straw Bale Dome](#) (weeks)

my design for a frameless, superinsulated, catenary, corbelled, *cheap* shelter, based on superadobe

[Cardboard Geodesic Dome](#) (days)

I started work on improving this. See pics of Seattle and Sweden Domes [here](#).

The above designs are all **shell** constructions. That is, they are frameless. Why? Because frames should not be used to hold up materials that can hold up themselves. There is no integrity in that approach. I mean I find it a shame to put up a frame, then hang on it a rigid or semi-rigid material which can hold up itself and the whole building. While this approach *does* have the advantages of requiring no imagination or economy on the part of the owner, builder, or designer, I have chosen frameless designs that embody: a dynamic elegance bordering on anti-gravity; simplicity any 5 year-old can grasp; and an economy any schmuck can achieve.

extras - [hygienic-darkroomretreat.com](http://hygienic-darkroomretreat.com): profound rest for the self-healing psyche



The two designs below are proper applications of the frame-and-skin method of construction. That is, there is a very lightweight frame that supports fabric or film, a thin, flexible material possessing only tensile, not compressive strength (nor their combination: cantileverage).

#### [Pillowdome](#) (pdf)

Jay Baldwin's perfection of Bucky's Skybreak concept: a very light, "ephemeralized" frame-and-skin geodesic dome, with panels of noble gas-inflated fluoropolymeric (teflon/ptfe plastic) pillows. This ultimately led to the gigantic greenhouses at [The Eden Project](#) in England.

#### [Warmlite Tent](#)

Jack Stephenson's masterful 2-5 person tents. He and his designs have had a huge influence on all my design thinking since 1995. Can you imagine, he went from being an insulation engineer on NASA space rockets to designing camping gear! After 40 years, his stuff is still decades ahead of its time. Only a few of his ideas have started to be copied in the last 5-10 years. I used to talk to him for hours on the phone while buying his gear and materials. Great guy.

## Sites

#### [Tribal Wish](#)

Adrian Wolfe's obscure, 10-year old, growing collection of essays on his 30-year quest to live in organic intimacy with others. This effort evolved into Gooble Dell, his home (and mine a few times in the past) in Eugene, Oregon, one of the oddest human menageries around. If Willy Wonka were a homeless man who camped inside a house inside a public park (true) with his friends (and a couple Oompa Loompas), this would be the house.

#### [EarthBirth Research](#)

Finn Po's site on his multifarious, irrepressible, transcounter-cultural activities and visions. I got my first experiences with both darkness and domes from Finn while living and tinkering together at Maitreya Eco-Village, Eugene, Oregon.

## Origins of Agriculture

## Origins of Agriculture

### A Biological Perspective and a New Hypothesis

Greg Wadley and Angus Martin *Australian Biologist* volume 6: pp 96-105, June 1993 (re-published in *Journal of ACNEM* 2000)

## Introduction

What might head a list of the defining characteristics of the human species? While our view of ourselves could hardly avoid highlighting our accomplishments in engineering, art, medicine, space travel and the like, in a more dispassionate assessment *agriculture* would probably displace all other contenders for top billing. Most of the other achievements of humankind have followed from this one. Almost without exception, all people on earth today are sustained by agriculture. With a minute number of exceptions, no other species is a farmer. Essentially all of the arable land in the world is under cultivation. Yet agriculture began just a few thousand years ago, long after the appearance of anatomically modern humans.

Given the rate and the scope of this revolution in human biology, it is quite extraordinary that there is no

generally accepted model accounting for the origin of agriculture. Indeed, an increasing array of arguments over recent years has suggested that agriculture, far from being a natural and upward step, in fact led commonly to a lower quality of life. Hunter-gatherers typically do less work for the same amount of food, are healthier, and are less prone to famine than primitive farmers (Lee & DeVore 1968, Cohen 1977, 1989). A biological assessment of what has been called the puzzle of agriculture might phrase it in simple ethological terms: why was this behaviour (agriculture) reinforced (and hence selected for) if it was not offering adaptive rewards surpassing those accruing to hunter-gathering or foraging economies?

This paradox is responsible for a profusion of models of the origin of agriculture. “Few topics in prehistory”, noted Hayden (1990) “have engendered as much discussion and resulted in so few satisfying answers as the attempt to explain why hunter/gatherers began to cultivate plants and raise animals. Climatic change, population pressure, sedentism, resource concentration from desertification, girls’ hormones, land ownership, geniuses, rituals, scheduling conflicts, random genetic kicks, natural selection, broad spectrum adaptation and multicausal retreats from explanation have all been proffered to explain domestication. All have major flaws ... the data do not accord well with any one of these models.”

Recent discoveries of potentially psychoactive substances in certain agricultural products—cereals and milk—suggest an additional perspective on the adoption of agriculture and the behavioural changes (“civilisation”) that followed it. In this paper we review the evidence for the drug-like properties of these foods, and then show how they can help to solve the biological puzzle just described.

## **The emergence of agriculture and civilisation in the Neolithic**

### **The transition to agriculture**

From about 10,000 years ago, groups of people in several areas around the world began to abandon the foraging lifestyle that had been successful, universal and largely unchanged for millennia (Lee & DeVore 1968). They began to gather, then cultivate and settle around, patches of cereal grasses and to domesticate animals for meat, labour, skins and other materials, and milk.

Farming, based predominantly on wheat and barley, first appeared in the Middle East, and spread quickly to western Asia, Egypt and Europe. The earliest civilisations all relied primarily on cereal agriculture. Cultivation of fruit trees began three thousand years later, again in the Middle East, and vegetables and other crops followed (Zohari 1986). Cultivation of rice began in Asia about 7000 years ago (Stark 1986).

To this day, for most people, two-thirds of protein and calorie intake is cereal-derived. (In the west, in the twentieth century, cereal consumption has decreased slightly in favour of meat, sugar, fats and so on.) The respective contributions of each cereal to current total world production are: wheat (28 per cent), corn/maize (27 per cent), rice (25 per cent), barley (10 per cent), others (10 per cent) (Pedersen et al. 1989).

### **The change in the diet due to agriculture**

The modern human diet is very different from that of closely related primates and, almost certainly, early hominids (Gordon 1987). Though there is controversy over what humans ate before the development of agriculture, the diet certainly did not include cereals and milk in appreciable quantities. The storage pits and processing tools necessary for significant consumption of cereals did not appear until the Neolithic (Washburn & Lancaster 1968). Dairy products were not available in quantity before the domestication of animals.

The early hominid diet (from about four million years ago), evolving as it did from that of primate ancestors, consisted primarily of fruits, nuts and other vegetable matter, and some meat—items that could

be foraged for and eaten with little or no processing. Comparisons of primate and fossil-hominid anatomy, and of the types and distribution of plants eaten raw by modern chimpanzees, baboons and humans (Peters & O'Brien 1981, Kay 1985), as well as microscope analysis of wear patterns on fossil teeth (Walker 1981, Peuch et al. 1983) suggest that australopithecines were "mainly frugivorous omnivores with a dietary pattern similar to that of modern chimpanzees" (Susman 1987:171).

The diet of pre-agricultural but anatomically modern humans (from 30,000 years ago) diversified somewhat, but still consisted of meat, fruits, nuts, legumes, edible roots and tubers, with consumption of cereal seeds only increasing towards the end of the Pleistocene (e.g. Constantini 1989 and subsequent chapters in Harris and Hillman 1989).

#### #####The rise of civilisation

Within a few thousand years of the adoption of cereal agriculture, the old hunter-gatherer style of social organisation began to decline. Large, hierarchically organised societies appeared, centred around villages and then cities. With the rise of civilisation and the state came socioeconomic classes, job specialisation, governments and armies.

The size of populations living as coordinated units rose dramatically above pre-agricultural norms. While hunter-gatherers lived in egalitarian, autonomous bands of about 20 closely related persons, with at most a tribal level of organisation above that, early agricultural villages had 50 to 200 inhabitants, and early cities 10,000 or more. People "had to learn to curb deep-rooted forces which worked for increasing conflict and violence in large groups" (Pfeiffer 1977:438).

Agriculture and civilisation meant the end of foraging—a subsistence method with shortterm goals and rewards—and the beginning (for most) of regular arduous work, oriented to future payoffs and the demands of superiors. "With the coming of large communities, families no longer cultivated the land for themselves and their immediate needs alone, but for strangers and for the future. They worked all day instead of a few hours a day, as hunter-gatherers had done. There were schedules, quotas, overseers, and punishments for slacking off" (Pfeiffer 1977:21).

## Explaining the origins of agriculture and civilisation

The phenomena of human agriculture and civilisation are ethologically interesting, because (1) virtually no other species lives this way, and (2) humans did not live this way until relatively recently. Why was this way of life adopted, and why has it become dominant in the human species?

#### #####Problems explaining agriculture

Until recent decades, the transition to farming was seen as an inherently progressive one: people learnt that planting seeds caused crops to grow, and this new improved food source led to larger populations, sedentary farm and town life, more leisure time and so to specialisation, writing, technological advances and civilisation. It is now clear that agriculture was adopted despite certain disadvantages of that lifestyle (e.g. Flannery 1973, Henry 1989). There is a substantial literature (e.g. Reed 1977), not only on how agriculture began, but why. Palaeopathological and comparative studies show that health deteriorated in populations that adopted cereal agriculture, returning to pre-agricultural levels only in modern times. This is in part attributable to the spread of infection in crowded cities, but is largely due to a decline in dietary quality that accompanied intensive cereal farming (Cohen 1989). People in many parts of the world remained hunter-gatherers until quite recently; though they were quite aware of the existence and methods of agriculture, they declined to undertake it (Lee & DeVore 1968, Harris 1977). Cohen (1977:141) summarised the problem by asking: "If agriculture provides neither better diet, nor greater dietary reliability, nor greater ease, but conversely appears to provide a poorer diet, less reliably, with greater labor costs, why does anyone become a farmer?"

Many explanations have been offered, usually centred around a particular factor that forced the adoption of agriculture, such as environmental or population pressure (for reviews see Rindos 1984, Pryor 1986, Redding 1988, Blumler & Byrne 1991). Each of these models has been criticised extensively, and there is at

this time no generally accepted explanation of the origin of agriculture.

#### #####Problems explaining civilisation

A similar problem is posed by the post-agricultural appearance, all over the world, of cities and states, and again there is a large literature devoted to explaining it (e.g. Claessen & Skalnik 1978). The major behavioural changes made in adopting the civilised lifestyle beg explanation. Bledsoe (1987:136) summarised the situation thus:

There has never been and there is not now agreement on the nature and significance of the rise of civilisation. The questions posed by the problem are simple, yet fundamental. How did civilisation come about? What animus impelled man to forego the independence, intimacies, and invariability of tribal existence for the much larger and more impersonal political complexity we call the state? What forces fused to initiate the mutation that slowly transformed nomadic societies into populous cities with ethnic mixtures, stratified societies, diversified economies and unique cultural forms? Was the advent of civilisation the inevitable result of social evolution and natural laws of progress or was man the designer of his own destiny? Have technological innovations been the motivating force or was it some intangible factor such as religion or intellectual advancement?

To a very good approximation, every civilisation that came into being had cereal agriculture as its subsistence base, and wherever cereals were cultivated, civilisation appeared. Some hypotheses have linked the two. For example, Wittfogel's (1957) "hydraulic theory" postulated that irrigation was needed for agriculture, and the state was in turn needed to organise irrigation. But not all civilisations used irrigation, and other possible factors (e.g. river valley placement, warfare, trade, technology, religion, and ecological and population pressure) have not led to a universally accepted model.

## Pharmacological properties of cereals and milk

Recent research into the pharmacology of food presents a new perspective on these problems.

#### #####Exorphins: opioid substances in food

Prompted by a possible link between diet and mental illness, several researchers in the late 1970s began investigating the occurrence of drug-like substances in some common foodstuffs.

Dohan (1966, 1984) and Dohan et al. (1973, 1983) found that symptoms of schizophrenia were relieved somewhat when patients were fed a diet free of cereals and milk. He also found that people with coeliac disease—those who are unable to eat wheat gluten because of higher than normal permeability of the gut—were statistically likely to suffer also from schizophrenia. Research in some Pacific communities showed that schizophrenia became prevalent in these populations only after they became "partially westernised and consumed wheat, barley beer, and rice" (Dohan 1984).

Groups led by Zioudrou (1979) and Brantl (1979) found opioid activity in wheat, maize and barley (exorphins), and bovine and human milk (casomorphin), as well as stimulatory activity in these proteins, and in oats, rye and soy. Cereal exorphan is much stronger than bovine casomorphin, which in turn is stronger than human casomorphin. Mycroft et al. (1982, 1987) found an analogue of MIF-1, a naturally occurring dopaminergic peptide, in wheat and milk. It occurs in no other exogenous protein. (In subsequent sections we use the term exorphan to cover exorphins, casomorphin, and the MIF-1 analogue. Though opioid and dopaminergic substances work in different ways, they are both "rewarding", and thus more or less equivalent for our purposes.)

Since then, researchers have measured the potency of exorphins, showing them to be comparable to morphine and enkephalin (Heubner et al. 1984), determined their amino acid sequences (Fukudome & Yoshikawa 1992), and shown that they are absorbed from the intestine (Svedburg et al. 1985) and can produce effects such as analgesia and reduction of anxiety which are usually associated with poppy-derived opioids (Greksch et al. 1981, Panksepp et al. 1984). Mycroft et al. estimated that 150 mg of the MIF-1 analogue could be produced by normal daily intake of cereals and milk, noting that such quantities

are orally active, and half this amount “has induced mood alterations in clinically depressed subjects” (Mycroft et al. 1982:895). (For detailed reviews see Gardner 1985 and Paroli 1988.)

Most common drugs of addiction are either opioid (e.g. heroin and morphine) or dopaminergic (e.g. cocaine and amphetamine), and work by activating reward centres in the brain. Hence we may ask, do these findings mean that cereals and milk are chemically rewarding? Are humans somehow “addicted” to these foods?

#### #####Problems in interpreting these findings

Discussion of the possible behavioural effects of exorphins, in normal dietary amounts, has been cautious. Interpretations of their significance have been of two types:

where a *pathological* effect is proposed (usually by cereal researchers, and related to Dohan’s findings, though see also Ramabadran & Bansinath 1988), and where a *natural* function is proposed (by milk researchers, who suggest that casomorphin may help in mother-infant bonding or otherwise regulate infant development).

We believe that there can be no natural function for ingestion of exorphins by adult humans. It may be that a desire to find a natural function has impeded interpretation (as well as causing attention to focus on milk, where a natural function is more plausible). It is unlikely that humans are adapted to a large intake of cereal exorphin, because the modern dominance of cereals in the diet is simply too new. If exorphin is found in cow’s milk, then it may have a natural function for cows; similarly, exorphins in human milk may have a function for infants. But whether this is so or not, adult humans do not naturally drink milk of any kind, so any natural function could not apply to them.

Our sympathies therefore lie with the pathological interpretation of exorphins, whereby substances found in cereals and milk are seen as modern dietary abnormalities which may cause schizophrenia, coeliac disease or whatever. But these are serious diseases found in a minority. Can exorphins be having an effect on humankind at large?

#### #####Other evidence for “drug-like” effects of these foods

Research into food *allergy* has shown that normal quantities of some foods can have pharmacological, including behavioural, effects. Many people develop intolerances to particular foods. Various foods are implicated, and a variety of symptoms is produced. (The term “intolerance” rather than allergy is often used, as in many cases the immune system may not be involved (Egger 1988:159). Some intolerance symptoms, such as anxiety, depression, epilepsy, hyperactivity, and schizophrenic episodes involve brain function (Egger 1988, Scadding & Brostoff 1988).

Radcliffe (1982, quoted in 1987:808) listed the foods at fault, in descending order of frequency, in a trial involving 50 people: wheat (more than 70 per cent of subjects reacted in some way to it), milk (60 per cent), egg (35 per cent), corn, cheese, potato, coffee, rice, yeast, chocolate, tea, citrus, oats, pork, plaice, cane, and beef (10 per cent). This is virtually a list of foods that have become common in the diet following the adoption of agriculture, in order of prevalence. The symptoms most commonly alleviated by treatment were mood change (>50 per cent) followed by headache, musculoskeletal and respiratory ailments.

One of the most striking phenomena in these studies is that patients often exhibit cravings, addiction and withdrawal symptoms with regard to these foods (Egger 1988:170, citing Randolph 1978; see also Radcliffe 1987:808-10, 814, Kroker 1987:856, 864, Sprague & Milam 1987:949, 953, Wraith 1987:489, 491). Brostoff and Gamlin (1989:103) estimated that 50 per cent of intolerance patients crave the foods that cause them problems, and experience withdrawal symptoms when excluding those foods from their diet. Withdrawal symptoms are similar to those associated with drug addictions (Radcliffe 1987:808). The possibility that exorphins are involved has been noted (Bell 1987:715), and Brostoff and Gamlin conclude (1989:230):

... the results so far suggest that they might influence our mood. There is certainly no question of anyone getting “high” on a glass of milk or a slice of bread – the amounts involved are too small for that – but

these foods might induce a sense of comfort and wellbeing, as food-intolerant patients often say they do. There are also other hormone-like peptides in partial digests of food, which might have other effects on the body.

There is no possibility that craving these foods has anything to do with the popular notion of the body telling the brain what it needs for nutritional purposes. These foods were not significant in the human diet before agriculture, and large quantities of them cannot be necessary for nutrition. In fact, the standard way to treat food intolerance is to remove the offending items from the patient's diet.

#### #####A suggested interpretation of exorphin research

But what are the effects of these foods on normal people? Though exorphins cannot have a naturally selected physiological function in humans, this does not mean that they have *no* effect. Food intolerance research suggests that cereals and milk, in normal dietary quantities, are capable of affecting behaviour in many people. And if severe behavioural effects in schizophrenics and coeliacs can be caused by higher than normal absorption of peptides, then more subtle effects, which may not even be regarded as abnormal, could be produced in people generally.

The evidence presented so far suggests the following interpretation. The ingestion of cereals and milk, in normal modern dietary amounts by normal humans, activates reward centres in the brain. Foods that were common in the diet before agriculture (fruits and so on) do not have this pharmacological property. The effects of exorphins are qualitatively the same as those produced by other opioid and / or dopaminergic drugs, that is, reward, motivation, reduction of anxiety, a sense of wellbeing, and perhaps even addiction. Though the effects of a typical meal are quantitatively less than those of doses of those drugs, most modern humans experience them several times a day, every day of their adult lives.

#### #####Hypothesis: exorphins and the origin of agriculture and civilisation

When this scenario of human dietary practices is viewed in the light of the problem of the origin of agriculture described earlier, it suggests an hypothesis that combines the results of these lines of enquiry.

Exorphin researchers, perhaps lacking a long-term historical perspective, have generally not investigated the possibility that these foods really are drug-like, and have instead searched without success for exorphin's natural function. The adoption of cereal agriculture and the subsequent rise of civilisation have not been satisfactorily explained, because the behavioural changes underlying them have no obvious adaptive basis.

These unsolved and until-now unrelated problems may in fact solve each other. The answer, we suggest, is this: cereals and dairy foods are not natural human foods, but rather are preferred because they contain exorphins. This chemical reward was the incentive for the adoption of cereal agriculture in the Neolithic. Regular self-administration of these substances facilitated the behavioural changes that led to the subsequent appearance of civilisation.

This is the sequence of events that we envisage.

Climatic change at the end of the last glacial period led to an increase in the size and concentration of patches of wild cereals in certain areas (Wright 1977). The large quantities of cereals newly available provided an incentive to try to make a meal of them. People who succeeded in eating sizeable amounts of cereal seeds discovered the rewarding properties of the exorphins contained in them. Processing methods such as grinding and cooking were developed to make cereals more edible. The more palatable they could be made, the more they were consumed, and the more important the exorphin reward became for more people.

At first, patches of wild cereals were protected and harvested. Later, land was cleared and seeds were planted and tended, to increase quantity and reliability of supply. Exorphins attracted people to settle around cereal patches, abandoning their nomadic lifestyle, and allowed them to display tolerance instead of aggression as population densities rose in these new conditions.

Though it was, we suggest, the presence of exorphins that caused cereals (and not an alternative already prevalent in the diet) to be the major early cultigens, this does not mean that cereals are “just drugs”. They have been staples for thousands of years, and clearly have nutritional value. However, treating cereals as “just food” leads to difficulties in explaining why anyone bothered to cultivate them. The fact that overall health declined when they were incorporated into the diet suggests that their rapid, almost total replacement of other foods was due more to chemical reward than to nutritional reasons.

It is noteworthy that the extent to which early groups became civilised correlates with the type of agriculture they practised. That is, major civilisations (in south-west Asia, Europe, India, and east and parts of South-East Asia; central and parts of north and south America; Egypt, Ethiopia and parts of tropical and west Africa) stemmed from groups which practised cereal, particularly wheat, agriculture (Bender 1975:12, Adams 1987:201, Thatcher 1987:212). (The rarer nomadic civilisations were based on dairy farming.)

Groups which practised vegiculture (of fruits, tubers etc.), or no agriculture (in tropical and south Africa, north and central Asia, Australia, New Guinea and the Pacific, and much of north and south America) did not become civilised to the same extent.

Thus major civilisations have in common that their populations were frequent ingesters of exorphins. We propose that large, hierarchical states were a natural consequence among such populations. Civilisation arose because reliable, on-demand availability of dietary opioids to individuals changed their behaviour, reducing aggression, and allowed them to become tolerant of sedentary life in crowded groups, to perform regular work, and to be more easily subjugated by rulers. Two socioeconomic classes emerged where before there had been only one (Johnson & Earle 1987:270), thus establishing a pattern which has been prevalent since that time.

## Discussion

#####The natural diet and genetic change

Some nutritionists deny the notion of a pre-agricultural natural human diet on the basis that humans are omnivorous, or have adapted to agricultural foods (e.g. Garn & Leonard 1989; for the contrary view see for example Eaton & Konner 1985). An omnivore, however, is simply an animal that eats both meat and plants: it can still be quite specialised in its preferences (chimpanzees are an appropriate example). A degree of omnivory in early humans might have preadapted them to some of the nutrients contained in cereals, but not to exorphins, which are unique to cereals.

The differential rates of lactase deficiency, coeliac disease and favism (the inability to metabolise fava beans) among modern racial groups are usually explained as the result of varying genetic adaptation to post-agricultural diets (Simopoulos 1990:27-9), and this could be thought of as implying some adaptation to exorphins as well. We argue that little or no such adaptation has occurred, for two reasons: first, allergy research indicates that these foods still cause abnormal reactions in many people, and that susceptibility is variable within as well as between populations, indicating that differential adaptation is not the only factor involved. Second, the function of the adaptations mentioned is to enable humans to digest those foods, and if they are adaptations, they arose because they conferred a survival advantage. But would susceptibility to the rewarding effects of exorphins lead to lower, or higher, reproductive success? One would expect in general that an animal with a supply of drugs would behave less adaptively and so lower its chances of survival. But our model shows how the widespread exorphin ingestion in humans has led to increased population. And once civilisation was the norm, non-susceptibility to exorphins would have meant not fitting in with society. Thus, though there may be adaptation to the nutritional content of cereals, there will be little or none to exorphins. In any case, while contemporary humans may enjoy the benefits of some adaptation to agricultural diets, those who actually made the change ten thousand years ago did not.

#####Other “non-nutritional” origins of agriculture models

We are not the first to suggest a non-nutritional motive for early agriculture. Hayden (1990) argued that

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early cultigens and trade items had more prestige value than utility, and suggested that agriculture began because the powerful used its products for competitive feasting and accrual of wealth. Braidwood et al. (1953) and later Katz and Voigt (1986) suggested that the incentive for cereal cultivation was the production of alcoholic beer:

Under what conditions would the consumption of a wild plant resource be sufficiently important to lead to a change in behaviour (experiments with cultivation) in order to ensure an adequate supply of this resource? If wild cereals were in fact a minor part of the diet, any argument based on caloric need is weakened. It is our contention that the desire for alcohol would constitute a perceived psychological and social need that might easily prompt changes in subsistence behaviour (Katz & Voigt 1986:33).

This view is clearly compatible with ours. However there may be problems with an alcohol hypothesis: beer may have appeared after bread and other cereal products, and been consumed less widely or less frequently (Braidwood et al. 1953). Unlike alcohol, exorphins are present in all these products. This makes the case for chemical reward as the motive for agriculture much stronger. Opium poppies, too, were an early cultigen (Zohari 1986). Exorphin, alcohol, and opium are primarily rewarding (as opposed to the typically hallucinogenic drugs used by some hunter-gatherers) and it is the artificial reward which is necessary, we claim, for civilisation. Perhaps all three were instrumental in causing civilised behaviour to emerge.

Cereals have important qualities that differentiate them from most other drugs. They are a food source as well as a drug, and can be stored and transported easily. They are ingested in frequent small doses (not occasional large ones), and do not impede work performance in most people. A desire for the drug, even cravings or withdrawal, can be confused with hunger. These features make cereals the ideal facilitator of civilisation (and may also have contributed to the long delay in recognising their pharmacological properties).

#####Compatibility, limitations, more data needed

Our hypothesis is not a refutation of existing accounts of the origins of agriculture, but rather fits alongside them, explaining why cereal agriculture was adopted despite its apparent disadvantages and how it led to civilisation.

Gaps in our knowledge of exorphins limit the generality and strength of our claims. We do not know whether rice, millet and sorghum, nor grass species which were harvested by African and Australian hunter-gatherers, contain exorphins. We need to be sure that preagricultural staples do not contain exorphins in amounts similar to those in cereals. We do not know whether domestication has affected exorphin content or potency. A test of our hypothesis by correlation of diet and degree of civilisation in different populations will require quantitative knowledge of the behavioural effects of all these foods.

We do not comment on the origin of noncereal agriculture, nor why some groups used a combination of foraging and farming, reverted from farming to foraging, or did not farm at all. Cereal agriculture and civilisation have, during the past ten thousand years, become virtually universal. The question, then, is not why they happened here and not there, but why they took longer to become established in some places than in others. At all times and places, chemical reward and the influence of civilisations already using cereals weighed in favour of adopting this lifestyle, the disadvantages of agriculture weighed against it, and factors such as climate, geography, soil quality, and availability of cultigens influenced the outcome. There is a recent trend to multi-causal models of the origins of agriculture (e.g. Redding 1988, Henry 1989), and exorphins can be thought of as simply another factor in the list. Analysis of the relative importance of all the factors involved, at all times and places, is beyond the scope of this paper.

## Conclusion

“An animal is a survival machine for the genes that built it. We too are animals, and we too are survival machines for our genes. That is the theory. In practice it makes a lot of sense when we look at wild animals.... It is very different when we look at ourselves. We appear to be a serious exception to the Darwinian law.... It obviously just isn't true that most of us spend our time working energetically for the



preservation of our genes" (Dawkins 1989:138).

Many ethologists have acknowledged difficulties in explaining civilised human behaviour on evolutionary grounds, in some cases suggesting that modern humans do not always behave adaptively. Yet since agriculture began, the human population has risen by a factor of 1000: Irons (1990) notes that "population growth is not the expected effect of maladaptive behaviour".

We have reviewed evidence from several areas of research which shows that cereals and dairy foods have drug-like properties, and shown how these properties may have been the incentive for the initial adoption of agriculture. We suggested further that constant exorphin intake facilitated the behavioural changes and subsequent population growth of civilisation, by increasing people's tolerance of (a) living in crowded sedentary conditions, (b) devoting effort to the benefit of non-kin, and (c) playing a subservient role in a vast hierarchical social structure.

Cereals are still staples, and methods of artificial reward have diversified since that time, including today a wide range of pharmacological and non-pharmacological cultural artifacts whose function, ethologically speaking, is to provide reward without adaptive benefit. It seems reasonable then to suggest that civilisation not only arose out of self-administration of artificial reward, but is maintained in this way among contemporary humans. Hence a step towards resolution of the problem of explaining civilised human behaviour may be to incorporate into ethological models this widespread distortion of behaviour by artificial reward.

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## On a Green Mountain, with Masanobu Fukuoka

...the Sensei of Natural Farming  
by Jim Bones [archived page](#)

*"The ultimate goal of farming is not the growing of crops, but the cultivation and perfection of human beings."*<sup>1</sup>  
Masanobu Fukuoka

In October of 1994, I traveled to Japan with a team working on a book about the leading methods of sustainable agriculture found around the world. Members included project director Howard Shapiro; writer Catherine Yronwode; myself as photographer; publisher Anthony Rodale; and poet Naomi Otsubo Ash, our guide and translator from Tokyo.

We arrived in Osaka with the unsettled weather that precedes a typhoon. Next morning, under thick

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clouds we flew over the inland Sea to Iyo City on the Island of Shikoku. We traveled by trolley and train through densely populated neighborhoods where dazzling signs advertised many expensive things. Fat marbled Kobe beef was the most astonishing at \$80 a pound. Valuable lots in town lay closely planted with vegetables, rice and flowers. In more suburban areas railside gardens grew larger and more varied in fruit and seed.

We arrived after noon near the sea coast and checked into an old hotel. After a brief rest and tea we prepared to meet the venerable Masanobu Fukuoka. He was born in 1913, of a family that has farmed the region for over 1400 years. Educated as a microbiologist, he is now a Mahayana Buddhist who practices simple agriculture as a spiritual path. He is the father and master teacher, the Sensei of the art of Natural Farming.

A taxi took us to his home at the edge of town where the rice fields and hillside orchards began. We were greeted at the door by Mrs. Fukuoka and politely invited inside. Mr. Fukuoka soon hobbled in on stiff legs bent with age. He was wiry and alert, and wore a loose blue farmer's pants and shirt. With his simple clothes, and wispy hair and beard, he reminded me of white clouds in a midday sky.

We each bowed, and settled onto the floor around a chabudai, a low table in the middle of a simply appointed room. Shoji rice paper doors slid shut from outside, and we were surrounded by an awkward silence.

Mr. Fukuoka looked at each of us, then asked through Naomi, "Why are you here?"

Howard replied, "We have come for answers to a list of questions about Natural Farming for a book on global sustainable agriculture."

"Questions, what questions?" Mr. Fukuoka inquired.

Howard showed him a list of standard questions prepared for those to be interviewed for the book. They were mostly technical details related to such things as design, soil, tilling, mulch, fertilizers, pest and weed control—gardening and farming methods broken down for ease of review.

Mr. Fukuoka took the questions, paged through them, and frowned. "No thank you very much!", he said sternly. "Do you understand anything about Natural Farming?"

"Yes," said Howard, "but we want to hear it directly from you and share your knowledge and experience with the world."

"No," Mr. Fukuoka replied brusquely, "I do not think you really understand. If you wish, take my books, study them tonight, and if you still want to learn about Natural Farming, come back tomorrow morning."

We were bewildered, for we had arrived believing all arrangements had been made weeks before, and that Mr. Fukuoka would answer the questions. Obviously it was not going to happen that day. We returned to town, wandered around the market place, then went to our hotel in confusion. Mr. Fukuoka had sent us away with many things to read, including *The Natural Way of Farming*, *The Road Back to Nature*, and *The One-Straw Revolution*.

Reading through the evening, I learned about the profound vision of Nature revealed to him at age twenty five that led to his holistic philosophy. He recalled how in the depths of doubt and dark depression, a night heron's cry at dawn awoke him to Nature's perfection. He then described experimenting for scores of seasons with farming methods that imitate the natural cycles of birth and decay. Most intriguing of all was his idea of seed balls for promoting plant growth under difficult conditions. He lamented not training more students and expressed concern that simple ways of farming might be suppressed or lost just when the world most needs them.

In the morning, warm heavy air forecast the gathering storm as we hurried along to meet Mr. Fukuoka. He was somewhat more willing to talk when we arrived and wanted to know, "Have you read the books?"

We affirmed so, as much as possible.

"Did you understand?" he asked.

"Yes," said Howard, "but we would like to go over the list of questions just to be sure."

"Shaking his head Mr. Fukuoka said, "If you are still interested in learning about Natural Farming, go with my daughter and her helpers to the citrus orchards, then come back this afternoon."

Naomi, Cat and Anthony rode silently with his daughter, while Howard and I squeezed into a utility truck with a young man who spoke fluent English. He sped up a steep road that turned into a trail through dense forests of mandarin oranges. We soon crested the ridge and stopped in the mist surrounded by trees heavy with green fruit.

The hired orchard workers walked in all directions casually scattering seed. They tossed them under and between the trees, into open spaces and off down the hillsides below. We saw dried radish stalks, clover and green grasses everywhere, even under ridgeline cedars and among the oaks, maples, pines, and acacias.

It took only fifteen minutes to seed several acres. Then we boarded the trucks and rolled into a valley filled with fruit trees, horse chestnuts and huge bamboo. Again workers broadcast seed, and I asked if I could take pictures. One man agreed so I moved in for a shot of his hands. I was startled to see dozens of kinds of seeds, many clothed in the vivid chemical colors of biocides. "How could this be on a natural farm?" I quietly asked myself.

Cold rain came in earnest and we started back. In route I asked about the treated seeds. The worker said the younger family members consider it too risky to practice strict Natural Farming. It is really hard to find people who understand Mr. Fukuoka's philosophy and recognize orchard plants easily. It seems modern farmers no longer work closely with soil, so each day fewer people know how to grow healthy food.

After lunch, we returned by taxi and hurried onto the portal to remove our wet coats and shoes. The door opened and we were let in, then like a whirlwind he gave us a lecture on "Not Doing".

Energetically he said, "Most farmers begin by asking, what if I do this or what if I do that, but only dissipate themselves that way. My approach just the opposite, seek the pleasant, natural way of farming. In order to make the work easier, not harder, I ask, how about not doing this or how about not doing that? By actual practice I finally reached conclusion there is no need to plow, no need to apply artificial fertilizer, no need to use pesticides at all. Most of the work of farming is created by tampering with Nature which causes negative side effects. Very few agricultural practices are even necessary, just scattering seed, spreading straw on the soil and harvesting."

Concerning soil and plant systems, he stated, "The secret of growing grain is as simple as the symbiosis of rice, barley or wheat, and clover." In October he broadcasts clover and barley over the ripening heads of rice. A few weeks later harvesters actually trample the seedlings, but they recover quickly. The gathered rice is dried for three days, thrashed, and the uncut straw scattered randomly back on the field. If ducks or chickens are not free to roam then occasionally he adds a little manure as well.

Before the New Year arrives he coats rice seeds with clay and broadcasts them over green barley, then waits for spring to come. By harvest in May the winter crop is ripe, white clover covers the field, and rice shoots are sprouting from clay pellets. Barley is harvested, dried and thrashed, and the uncut straw mulch is again returned to the field. He then floods for five or six days, just to weaken the clover while the young rice shoots break through. In June and July his field goes dry though his neighbors keep theirs under water. In August he irrigates every week or ten days. "That's about all there is until harvest," he said, "And the cycles begin again."

There was a lull in the discourse so Howard brought up the questions.

"No," Mr. Fukuoka shook his head, "Go to my old hillside orchard. See for yourself. If you are still interested come back tomorrow morning."

Just past the rice fields we found a new asphalt road that ended near the entrance to a forest on round green hills. From there a broken cement lane climbed sharply, then ended abruptly. Only a footpath continued on through deep old woods.

Another way circled back toward a clearing with work sheds and a forty foot high, wide open classroom that spiraled toward an overcast sky. Dark weathered straw covered the platform floor where, placed carefully to one side, lay several clay-coated wooden rollers.

Left in disorder were carved beams, a wooden mill for cleaning seeds, a steel cement mixer, handmade shovels, sickles, rakes and hoes. Everything was covered with dirt and leaves, as though completely forgotten. Feeling the emptiness I thought, where are his students, the future teachers, the ones who once used these rusty tools? When he finally departs, will anyone notice, and save his treasured orchards and farm? Except for the wind, like a voice in my head, all else fell utterly silent.

Chilled, I walked north on a path that tunneled into new growth, strange at first to my western eyes. Then I began to recognize old friends like mulberry, sumac, acacia and fig. I found myself in a small meadow grown wild, and to the untrained eye, abandoned. Iyo gleamed below, new and pulsating, while above, the early autumn orchard possessed a timeless feeling. The wind rose and the light died as a frustrating rain forced us back to town for another anxious night of waiting.

We all went to Mr. Fukuoka's hilltop orchard at first light, although the day was ominous, still and cloudy. I clattered around with my cameras and tripod as the others searched about. I had photographed the pagoda and rollers, and had just moved on to the seed mill, when Howard said simply, "Have a look at this".

Lifting the wet cover from the cement mixer, he reached in and pulled out incredible jewels, just like the ones in the books. Between his fingers were three brown clay balls, half an inch in diameter, each bursting with germinating seeds. The typhoon rains had brought them to life in spite of a prolonged drought.

Excited, we fanned out along the upper path announcing plants we recognized. I knew in my heart we had found no ordinary orchard for it was wild, yet edible, spiritual and nurturing in a way only unbound Nature can be. Around us grew peach, plum, maple, citrus, pine, acacia, melon vines and scores of plants we could not identify. The ground was littered with twigs, straw, clover and grasses, countless emerald leaves that wove a deep tapestry. And there was no bare earth at all!

Cat called out ginko, persimmon, hydrangea, and oak, then asked, "Is this a dawn redwood?" Howard found a cypress copse patiently trimmed for poles, with trees growing straight and tall. Naomi wandered blissfully throughout, exploring the reassuring forest, while I was stilled by the hollow music of silver bamboo gently clicking. Anthony strolled off alone looking for solitude and more open views of the fish pond in the valley below.

As our appointment neared we walked quickly back through neat paddy fields, some with green unharvested rice, others with pale seeded straw fresh cut and hung to dry. Only later would we understand that on the way we had passed Masanobu Fukuoka's natural field of maturing grain.

Mr. Fukuoka received us inside, then inquired, what had we found? He listened as we recited our morning highlights, then asked us one by one about our religious or spiritual background. Attentive to each reply, he sat quietly studying our faces, gauging I think, how much he could share. "Ignorance, hatred and greed are killing Nature," he said. "Down, down, everything goes. As we kill Nature, we are killing ourselves, and God incarnate as the world as well."<sup>2</sup>

"The world is digging itself into a bottomless pit with modern agriculture," he admonished. "The simple hearth of the small farm is the true center of our universe. Scientific thought is leading you away from a healthy life. Even the practice of conventional organic agriculture is a dangerous digression. It cannot be sustained if you have to rob one part of the earth to feed another."

Mr. Fukuoka described his oriental view of evolution, from before the beginning of particle birth to the very present. As the material universe expands, he explained, all Life follows the same harmonious patterns of inwardly spiraling energy toward the Nothingness, called "Mu".

He told how Darwin's linear vision was clouded and incomplete, due to western "deconstructionist" thoughts. Blind to a total reality of Nature, Darwin saw figure and ground reversed and so found only struggle and competition, where unity of function exists. The Great Way, Sensei explained, has no pests, no disease. Only faults when seen in parts.

He told us the evolutionary process itself is not just singular and branching like a tree, but cyclic, more like a multitude of volcanic islands emerging and subsiding from the same sea floor. All kinds of creatures have grown simultaneously, from universal progenitors, according to the rise and fall of their individual genes. Yet by common origin each shares traits that prove the overall Oneness of Being.

The monera, he said, the bacteria and algae, the single-celled creatures so simple in structure, yet no less advanced hold a common bond with the rest of us, as co-descendants from the very beginning. Countless parallel punctuated evolutions, webbed and interconnected, derived the greatest diversity of forms from Ichiban, the original ones, that have always lived within, without, and beside us. When new kinds of food appear, new life forms in turn develop to eat them, and eventually everything becomes food for the Great One, in a perfect, self-balancing way.

Suddenly he left the room, then reappeared with a heavy polished stone. Rippling through it were orange and black bands of oxidized sediment and fossil bacteria, three and a half billion years old. He leaned slightly forward and without a word placed the ancestors in the palms of my hands! "Come back in two hours," he nodded, and dismissed us.

We returned a little early and sat on the porch to rest, but the door flew open and Mr. Fukuoka immediately asked us in. He left the room two or three times to gather books and art supplies. Finally he nodded, spread rice paper on the floor, and with brush and ink, sat ready to calligraph his story.

He began his long discourse simply: "What I want to tell you is that it is not human beings who create and grow plants. I want to talk about the roots of things in the world we cannot express with words, the world we cannot usually see. When we sow seed, we think we will grow plants. But actually plants grow without our knowledge or care. When we accumulate knowledge, we get lost. Accumulation of knowledge brings about our own ruin. I deny knowledge. God creates and grows plants. So, my foreign friends call me, "A Man Doing Nothing." These ideas of mine about Nature came to me when I was twenty five years old. People think that I must have gotten this idea through my fifty years of agricultural study. No! But it is impossible for me to describe the moment that suddenly changed my ideas."

"On this planet we do not have something we can call Nature any more. We have lost it. We do not have Nature we can go back to. What we must do is search for Nature. But human knowledge cannot do it. We can only ask Nature. So we, and especially seed companies in the world, should collect all kinds of seeds on the planet and offer them to God, Nature, and pray. This kind of attitude toward Nature is necessary. Of course, even if we pray, God will not say anything. We may not be inspired, either. But the plants which start growing are God's answer. Nature will teach you.

"Cultivating land is not good. It removes the green cover and exposes the bacteria to sunshine. Just as we need clothes to protect our skin from sunshine, our planet needs green. I have used my farm for fifty consecutive years. There is no need to let it take a rest because I have never cultivated it. If you just sow clay seed balls with one hundred kinds of seeds, do not worry about water. Where there is green, water comes. Do not think I do this, for only God has created perfect things."

He completed a drawing, then as the silence grew long, we asked how he got the idea of seed balls. He replied, "You know that daikon radish seeds are in hard shells, well, I noticed that when they drop on the ground, they decay as they start to sprout. So I realized if they need a shell like that, then clay can be the shell for a ball with many seeds inside."

Amazed, I said, "So they do not have to sprout on the surface, they have the protection of the clay shell to



begin with, and soil and moisture. Its a small earth, a miniature earth, how beautiful, and so simple." He regarded us carefully then said, "Many people are interested in seed balls, but they do not act. I love best to give children boxes of seeds as gifts because they scatter them so innocently."

"Seed balls need at least one hundred kinds of seeds," he then asserted. "One seed eventually makes ten thousand seeds. If you sow seed balls, and wait three years, you will understand what Nature is. It works much better than reading books about Natural Farming. Seed balls are a small universe in themselves. I have written six books, but I was unable to express what Nature is in words. So I decided to manifest Nature in form. A seed ball is a one centimeter model of a Natural Farm, with trees, fruits, vegetables and grains. I do not say my one hundred kinds of seeds are the best. It is just an entrance to Natural Farming."

"God's love grows plants. Nature grows crops. Birds sow seeds. In three years, even the soil starts changing spontaneously. There are no ideas like big or small, strong or weak, rich or poor, in Nature. No idea like 'the struggle for existence'. There are bugs and diseases, but they do not cause problems. Many kinds of bugs co-exist in natural harmony. We cannot know why plants grow. I dare say, God's love. For example, the soil on my mountain is the same as that in the deserts and was not green fifty years ago. But now, even though I have not changed the soil, plants grow there."

"In the beginning, man-made deserts were also green," he cautioned, "And the most important thing is to stop the advancement of arid lands around the world today." He said we can do this quickly by spreading seeds, hundreds of different kinds suitable to each locality, by the ton, from airplanes. His method involves making half inch balls like those we had found, containing hundreds of mixed seeds, microbes and humus, all rolled inside protective clay coatings. Clay shells defend the seeds from drought, insects, rodents and birds that would otherwise eat them before they sprout. Timely rains then release the seeds and no matter where they land something appropriate inside will grow. Once established, the resulting plants naturally reseed themselves with the help of gravity, wind, water, insects and larger animals."

"At first I picked five or six kinds of acacia," he added, "then transplanted them. But transplanting was a big mistake, I do not do it any more. You can check that trees planted by birds are really straight, grow two meters per year. Check how old by branching. Roots like this," he drew out the motion, "Upper parts of tree are the same. If I go to desert now I say, 'I am a foolish old man,' and proceed that way."

"Big trees, between forty and one hundred meters high, and short trees, are also needed," he explained. "If trees grow tall enough, to about one hundred meters, that indicates a one-hundred per cent return of Nature in that area. Anyway we need trees of various heights. But I want to use three thousand kinds of seeds in Africa, because one hundred kinds are not enough. Unfortunately seeds are hard to get. It is easy to make seed balls, but we have to be careful in choosing seeds, especially for Africa. It all depends on the area, type of country, how quickly the desert is spreading and so on. Animals need to eat too, so spread seed balls over as large an area as possible. Otherwise, even as seeds sprout, they will be eaten."

I asked him exactly what clay to use for making the seed balls. "Red clay," he answered confidently, "like for tiles, red bricks, like the soil deep down. Red clays, not white porcelain clays. Point is, clay is shell, seeds should be protected like that. you must hide seeds so animals cannot see them. Diameter of seed balls should vary according to size of the seeds. A layer of soil humus and clay about two and one half times the collective diameter of the mixed seeds should cover the seed clusters. For aerial seed spreading, hardened clay covers all. Bigger seeds means bigger seed balls. Single seed crops like rice may have only one grain in each clay pellet. Huge seeds like coconuts just need to be covered."

"A clay ball has all the fertilizers needed in it, but they are 'sleeping'. Clay is sleeping soil. But water can wake it. People think that red clay has no value. But all fertilizers are in red clay. For example, nitrogen, calcium, many minerals are in red clay, To wake clay up we need 'cutting' with acids from rain and ground water, and acids from plant roots and organisms living around them."

"Many atoms are in seed balls. But they are sleeping, because they have not dissolved. Since they have not dissolved, plants cannot absorb them. Clay catches these components. To the components, red clay is like a blanket. We have to take the blanket off. To do that we need to 'cut with scissors'. The 'scissors' are green growing plants such as acacias and clovers and the carbonic acids produced around their roots. In seed balls, there is everything. You will see it if you check the elementary clay particles."

"Red clay was the first soil when the Earth was made. People think that plants, fertilizers and soil are different. People think that lifeless things and bacteria are different. But all were in clay from the beginning. That is why I say, there is no need for chemical fertilizer. If you look at the elementary particles in clay you will understand. Seed balls have everything. That is the way I think about seed balls. Plants, animals, soil and everything are connected, brothers and sisters, relatives. But human beings are short-sighted and we cannot see that all are connected by love."

"If we do nothing, mountains will be able to get their green cover back. Forty years ago, there were five or six people living here. At that time, my mountain could not easily recover its green. So I did not let people go to my mountain for a while. And trees started growing. Especially, these last four or five years, because I have not been able to go to my mountain very often. I am too old. Trees are growing bigger and bigger. Also more birds have come and they carry more seeds from the trees, and more trees are growing from the seed sowed by birds. These trees have a more natural shape and grow faster. Every year they bear fruit."

"Most of the trees on my mountain are six or seven years old. The acacias are ten years old. I forgot when, but a man who planted trees in the Himalayas for sixteen years, and a man who planted trees in Bangladesh for four years came to me and learned how to make seed balls. Also there was an American woman and a Japanese priest. They came because they realized that they could not keep up with the speed of desertification by planting trees. They cut eight Japanese cypress on my mountain and made a place to stay. Japanese cypress are very expensive, so usually people do not use them to make a temporary lodge. But we did it to let people know that if you sow seed balls, it is easy to build houses made from the trees from your own mountains. You can plant only three hundred trees a day, but you can sow seed balls one hundred times faster. The cost is one-one/hundredth that of planting trees. Seed balls are the only way to catch up with the speed of desertification on our planet."

"Food, clothing and shelter are very easy. If you sow seed balls for just one hour in your life, you can have enough wood to build a few houses in your lifetime. You can make clothes from your plants. You can get food. One day of sowing for trees, one day for vegetables and fruit, one day for grains. If you sow seed balls of rice and barley in an area of one thousand square meters, you can get six hundred kilograms of each grain, which is enough for one family of five people for one year. If you work three or four days a year, you can have a good life."

"The power of Nature is great, because the natural structure is solid, three dimensional, not horizontal or two dimensional. Some of my mountain peach trees have kiwis climbing on them, and above the kiwi vines, there is a kind of melon. So three kinds of fruit exist together at different heights. I get one or two kilograms of fruit from one square meter of ground. This is a good sustainable yield. Natural production is greater than man-made production, because the structure is solid."

"On my mountain there is a place where I sowed seed balls twenty years ago and now it is like a jungle. But there are fruit trees and there are kiwis. Now I know that even in a place like a jungle, kiwis can grow. Humans are just destroying the power of Nature. We have only one-fourth of the growing power of Nature left. We are not increasing fertility or production, but rather trying to prevent production from failing by using fertilizers."

"We are only looking from the outside at Nature, not from the inside. There are a limitless number of points in time and space. For example, there is one point here, another there. You go right and left to accumulate knowledge." He filled a page with symbols and asked, "So, Naomi, where are you in this picture?" Deeply reflective, she replied that she was not there, and he smiled with approval.

He painted a mountain like Fujiyama, covered by streams and trees, with people toiling on the slopes. Then he asked the rest of us, "Where are you on this Mountain of Nature?" He watched us closely as we stumbled through our answers, then laughed, "No! You should be sleeping at the foot of the Mountain. Do nothing. Close your eyes and shut out the external world. This is the way to look at Nature, from inside."

"Sow seed balls with a child-like mind whenever, wherever, without judging the first year. During the second year birds or bugs will carry the seeds from the plants and sow them naturally for you. So in the

third year you will get a natural design. Children sometimes sow seeds in unexpected places, and that brings us to a big discovery that we never even considered. Even if ninety-nine per cent fail, and only one percent succeed, that will take us to new possibilities. If you use human wisdom, you will only achieve the result you expect.”

“I will give you an example, showing how Nature can teach us. After giving a lecture in California one summer I was asked by some young men to teach them how to survive on Natural Farming. They took me to their plain. I was surprised to see it. It was almost desert. I told them that the land was too bad and that I could not help them. But I looked around and saw a spring. I stayed there one night and the next morning, I went to the spring to wash my face. There was a mouse burrow next to the spring, and when people washed themselves, water spilled down the hole. I looked into the hole and found green plants. I realized that the soil there was not dead, the seeds were just sleeping through the heat of the summer, and if we watered them they must sprout.”

“I awoke the young men and started sowing vegetable seeds on the plain and watered the land. In a few days foxtail grass, a weed, sprouted. But in a week, it had all died because of the summer heat, and after that the vegetables also sprouted. So Nature, the mouse burrow, taught me that this plain was turning into desert because only a few weeds like foxtail were covering it. Nature also taught us the way to kill those weeds and turn the desert into a vegetable garden. Human beings have no way of learning except from Nature. Only God has been creating and we have only transformed what God has created. What God creates is Truth, Goodness and Beauty.”

“In Bangladesh, India, Africa, Europe, America, many, many locations, I have demonstrated it is possible to stop the advance of man-made deserts with Natural Farming, and bring back green plants for food and shelter. But some governments interfered, and in places called the people seditious when they became well fed and independent. Although able in one year to re-grow small edible forest, poor people were forced to return to chemically dependent agriculture. No thank you! In Somalia, you brought food with guns, but only those with guns got food, so you should only send seed in future.”

“When I went to Somalia, I looked down on the land from an airplane People say that there is no water, but there is! I found a large, two hundred meter wide, river disappearing suddenly in the desert. Where did it go? Underground! If you dig two meters down, you will feel moisture. So if we sow plants whose roots reach two meters, they will get water and grow.”

“Africa has only three per cent of its jungle left from eighty years ago. Since people in Africa, after European colonization, started growing only a few kinds of plants for export, like coffee, tea, corn and cotton, the desert has been spreading. This unbalanced agriculture contributed to desertification. The governments in Africa take seeds away from people so that they cannot be self-sufficient and have to start producing cash crops that only benefit the leaders.”

“He held up a book and said, “Look at these pictures. People from the government here in Somalia, have been planting only a few kinds of trees such as eucalyptus, and have given them eighteen tons of water, eight times a day. But half of them have died. They wanted to know why. I told them not to water them. It prevented the roots from growing deep because the plants were satisfied with the surface water. I advised them to change the kinds of plants they were using. I suggested acacia, whose roots grow two meters within the week they sprout. And also sow vegetable seeds with acacias.”

“Seed is sentient,” he said. “Very small seed goes down into dirt. It only one who knows how to make plants, fruits. Begin with acacia. Acacia say, ‘Water, no thank you,’ sends root down one meter, two meter, bring up water. Then plant watermelon, sweet potato, daikon in shade. Protect with brush so camels and goats stay out of green belt and in time, with seed balls, all saved.”

“At first, the government did not like this idea. But they allowed people to sow vegetable seeds, but only in gardens. Seeds! Seeds are the best gifts to Africa, in Somalia, I was told by the police not to give seeds to people. Otherwise, I would be arrested. But I did. Children were the first people who came to me to get seeds. When the children sowed them, they sprouted. When the young people saw that, they came and asked me to give them seeds. I, of course did it. They started sowing seeds in the desert. A young man who sowed one of my seeds, watched the seed for three days without sleeping until it sprouted. Watching

one seed! Look," he showed us another picture, "You see, even orange trees grew one meter in two years. So it is easy to convert to fruit trees in Africa."

Changing directions, Cat asked, "What about over-population?" He thought for a moment then answered, "Population, the question sounds important. But it is totally wrong to try to solve all problems by controlling population. Animals do not do this. God has a plan. If God makes people, God makes food for them. There is food and dinosaurs appear. There is food and humans appear. We make deserts. If we make deserts green, we can all eat. How many human beings can be fed by Natural Farming? You have that question because you think human beings make human beings. But we do not even know why frogs or ants are born. When there is enough food for five million people, five million people will be born. God's plan is perfect. But, only when human beings stop destroying Nature, can we survive. Because of the degree of this destruction, we have put ourselves in a situation where we have to control population."

Cat persisted, asking for a comment on whether there would be a temporary food shortage until Natural Farming on a big scale could take off. Mr. Fukuoka shook his head, "No problem. If all Japanese were farmers, not impossible to do. With Natural Farming, in Japan five people can live on one thousand square meters of land. If people see this they cannot say all will get the same results. Not easy, but it can be done."<sup>3</sup>

Cat went on to ask if he had planted a hydrangea with blue flowers in the orchard, to test the soil. He turned to Naomi for a moment, then looked up and explained, "Is very interesting, that flower changed color as soil changed. I planted it to check if soil acid or alkali, but realized that kind of scientific observation is not necessary, so now I just spread seeds and let Nature do the work."

"Very scientific. Natural Farming is described as science beyond science. Natural Farm techniques are based on cycles. If you see how the Natural Farm looks, you will understand. It is Nature, or God's design itself. Ideas and patterns by that fellow, Bill Mollison of Permaculture Design, if he practiced Natural Farming, waste no time, arrive at same thing. If you go home and make seed balls, it will be all right, even if you do not know everything. But if you expect results, you might fail. Just do it. Do not doubt!"

Raising his hand he said, "I know you feel you must ask a lot of questions, but if you just believe, I will show you a secret." He climbed stiffly to his feet, left the room and returned with two rice plants, one tall and spindly, the other short, robust and heavy-headed, both wrapped in newspaper, muddy roots and all. I asked if he had grown them himself. "Yes, this one," he said, pointing to the vigorous plant. "The other is from a neighbor's field." We moved closer for a better look, and I asked how many grains were on each head.

"How many do you think?" he answered, and Howard suggested maybe one hundred to one hundred and twenty five for normal high yield.

"About two hundred grains," he claimed. "Farmers plant one square meter with fifteen plants, count stalks, twenty each plant, thirty thousand grains. I put ten balls in same area, had thirty plants, each plant two hundred grains, best harvest scientifically, sixty thousand grains, also stronger plants. Theoretically, this is the ideal rice production. It is impossible to produce more than that, you see? Because on Natural Farm, plants can absorb one-hundred per cent of the energy from sunshine. No artificial fertilizer, so plants have power to absorb all available sunshine. That is limiting factor on how much plants can produce."

Cat wanted to know if he had developed it by selection or breeding. "First I tried breeding," he replied, "But realized bugs were doing same thing, so I just let them, and now look for new kinds. I always have new varieties of rice appearing in my field. Much of the brown rice you eat in America today came from my field. Yours is brother to mine. Years ago I gave a few grains to two men, but they only took it, bred it and now sell it, without reward to me or using the money for Natural Farming. I only asked one percent of profit be promised for protection of environment, any more must be used for educating about natural ways. But I gave seeds before a contract was signed. They went ahead without permission, I only hope they are using profit in good ways, but I have not heard."

"With breeding by bugs, scientific breeding is not necessary. Now I know human beings are fools. I found

out that what I was doing was not necessary. I have studied for fifty years, I did not need to. When I was twenty five years old, I came to this conclusion. And after fifty years, I reached the same conclusion. We do not need to do anything. But people know it is very difficult to do nothing, when no Nature is left, and desertification is spreading. So, I made seed balls. Sowing seed balls is the necessary minimum that must be done."

I pestered him about when I should put out the seed balls, in fall, winter, or wait until spring. "No time, no place special," he answered patiently. "You have to decide, even if snow is falling, seeds do not sprout. That all there is to it. First roots sprout, different from ordinary idea."

Then he shifted deliberately to the need to reprint his books, most of which are difficult to find. Anthony, whose father produced the first English edition, wanted to know in how many other languages *The One-Straw Revolution* had appeared. At least eleven we were told. "How many of those publishers got permission," he asked? "None, no one," Mr. Fukuoka shrugged. He could not ask the poor countries for money he said, and the rest just published for free. Next time, Mr. Fukuoka said, he would like to republish *The One-Straw Revolution* himself, and then arrange for some kind of distribution.

With an air of finality he looked at each of us, then said, "You cannot compare my ways to those of anyone else by breaking them down. Do not try to mix ideas. You will only confuse people and fail. Give yourself to whatever you do one-hundred per cent or not at all, and do not doubt. Everything will be all right. Just spread seed balls and Nature will do the rest." As we left, Naomi politely told him we would get in touch about books soon, and that we hoped to see him again. He replied, "Take your time. Anyway, time does not exist."

Our last day in Japan dawned calm with thin clouds, so Howard and I ran to the old orchard for a final look. I worked along a narrow path to the top of the hill where Sensei's tiny mud and bamboo hut sat entwined in massive wisteria. Its simplicity was liberating, having only a roof, sliding panels for walls, and an open hearth in the middle. Pots, pans, utensils, hand tools and a futon lay on the floor. High on one wall of the dojo was a single drawing of Nature's Mountain, a distillation of all he had taught us the day before.

Not yet satisfied with the whole view, Howard knocked about inside for inspiration while I desperately searched the orchard for suitable parts to photograph. The edible vines, fruit trees and shrubs were obvious, as were the grains, but where were the abundant vegetable crops? Where were the progeny of the seed balls that replanted themselves year after year?

Howard stepped out and called, "We have to go or miss our flight. I'll give you a hand with the cameras." He started down, and in a panic I shouted, "I feel like its all around me, but I can't quite picture it." He reached for my pack and I asked, "By the way, what are these knee deep weeds, do you know?" As he leaned closer and I kneeled to the ground, thousands of intertwined daikons, sweet potatoes, cabbages, carrots, beans, kudzu, kiwis, and more, began to reveal themselves. "My God, this is it!" I exclaimed, "We are standing on an edible forest floor." Lush green and wet with dew, shining proof of the vision Sensei had, fifty years ago grew everywhere we looked. And for a moment we too were enfolded in the transcendent fruit of a lifetime devoted to bringing people and Nature together again.

### **Books:**

*The One-Straw Revolution*, a philosophy, published by the Rodale Institute, 33 East Minor Street, Emmaus, Pennsylvania, 18098.

*The Natural Way of Farming*, a manual, and *The Road Back to Nature*, a history, published by Japan Publications, Inc., Tokyo, Japan, & New York, U.S.A., distributed by Kodansha International/U.S.A., Ltd., Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 19 Union Square West, New York, New York, 10003.

*The Ultimatum of GOD NATURE The One-Straw Revolution A RECAPITULATION*, an English revision of the original *One-Straw Revolution*, published in 1996, in Japan, available from Mr. Fukuoka at: 201-2 Ohira, Iyo-Shi Ehime, Japan 799-31 Fax: 011-81-8-9983-1892

*Close To Nature Garden*, an excellent video tape about Mr. Fukuoka's early work with Natural Farming in Japan, made for Rodale Press, available from [Bullfrog Films](#), P.O. Box 149, Oley, PA 19547, Tel: 610/779-8226, Fax: 610/370-1978.

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"Light Writings" <http://www.seedballs.com>

[See "The Seed Ball Story" Video Tape](#)

**Foot Notes** (below)

## Mosséri's Fasting Discovery

*The Fast: Nature's Best Remedy* by Albert Mosséri p136, ch19, "A Prodigious Discovery"

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In 1986, I made a prodigious discovery in the field of fasting that forced me to revise my Sheltonian method. This is how I was led to make this discovery:

A 37-year-old man came to fast under my supervision. He had taken 104 different tranquilizers for his nervous state during the past 14 years. As soon as a drug wasn't having any effect anymore, his doctor prescribed him another one, thus the incredible number of different tranquilizers he took. He wanted to cure himself without drugs of any sort, so he fasted for 29 days.

Then he became tense, incapable of relaxing or sleeping and unable to drink water despite an intense thirst and an acute kidney pain. I told him that he could not continue this way, even though he still had a lot to eliminate - his tongue was still very coated, his urine dark, his breath foul and he had pains in the kidneys despite all the water he had drunk.

He responded that he still had a lot of time and that he wanted to complete his detoxification... so i thought that the opportunity had come, for the first time, to make him follow a detoxification diet...

Every time a faster breaks his fast, he only wants to leave and I can't monitor his tongue anymore... for all those that come for a cure, my greatest concern is to facilitate the reintroduction of food, in a manner that avoids all the problems... must ration the quantities each day, increasing them and change the types of food according to each case... I do all this while watching the various symptoms that will guide me in the process.

I rarely have this chance... I was fortunate to have such a determined man in my care.

Three days after breaking his fast, I entered his room to bring him a few small apples. He told me, "Mr. Mosseri, look at my tongue" ... it was charcoal black! It didn't take long to understand this surprise... I had already seen a few cases where the tongue turned black during a fast - but this man was eating again! Yet the color was not accidental... I had provoked it with this "detoxification diet". I had restarted his elimination, the profound elimination of a fast. I also realized that I could have done this much earlier - a week earlier, at the 20th day of the fast.. he thus lost about ten days, during which time his elimination was very weak ... his tongue stayed black for a few days... then it turned a mustard yellow for many weeks, before returning to a healthy rose color ... at the same time, hunger came back - a true hunger - and the kidney pains disappeared... I then fed him a normal diet. I wondered if this case was an exception, or if it could be imitated as many times as possible with other fasting patients... obviously, this

extras - [hygienic-darkroomretreat.com](http://hygienic-darkroomretreat.com): profound rest for the self-healing psyche

half-fast had accelerated his elimination, but one case does not mean much ...I needed verification through numerous, varied cases ....

I started again in the same manner with two sisters that came after the man... the very day after they broke their fasts, their tongues were coated brown ... since then, 90% of my patients develop a colored tongue upon breaking the fast and commencing the half-fast and the other 10% develop it during a second cure ... this half-fast must, of course, be continued as long as the tongue is even a little colored... a black tongue shows that elimination has deepened, reaching into cellular level to root out decades-old drugs and toxins ... other questions came naturally in my mind: at what moment do we break the fast and go to the half-fast? What quantities of raw foods must be given to the patients?

Having observed it many times, I already knew that a day comes when a patient's weight ceases to drop... only now do I understand why! As for the food quantities, with a lot of trial and error, I arrived at the actual rations, more or less according to the height of the person ...

In the classical method, promoted by Shelton, the fast is pursued with water in bed... but when the fast is continued, though the body ceases losing weight, elimination becomes insignificant and time is lost ... when someone noted to Shelton that a faster was only losing 200g a day and that the elimination barely continued, he answered that it was 200g gained and that it was still better than nothing ... he did not see we could jump-start elimination instead of standing about, making no progress ... when the fast is pursued at this stagnant stage, weight hardly falls and elimination barely proceeds because the body does not have enough vitamins and enzymes for it ... the body has just enough to survive.

As we have seen earlier, the body's reserves are imbalanced ... there is always too much fat and toxins and too few essential elements, when they run out, we go to the next phase, the half-fast, and the tongue colors itself in 90% of cases ... for the other ones, it will color at a second fast ... I could not find out the reasons why...on the other hand, with the classic Sheltonian method, it is very rare that the tongue will color itself, even if the fast is pursued to 60-70 days ...

When the tongue colors itself (black, brown, mustard green, beige), the half-fast must be pursued until the color returns to a natural pink, that is, until the end of elimination. Then, the more concentrated foods can be introduced. The tongue becomes pink at the same time that spitting stops, the urine becomes clear, the breath becomes pleasant, and the headaches are gone. The half-fast can last for one week or many, according to the degree of toxemia.

With this new method, the fasting becomes easier, with fewer risks and problems and more efficient. The fast becomes mathematical, precise, scientific and without blind spots or surprises. This important discovery condemns the long fasts as a risky waste of time.

I called this second part of the fast that follows the water fast the half-fast ... but in reality, it's an elimination diet, since two pounds of food is eaten every day, half fruits, half vegetables ...but I preferred to call it the half-fast, to strike the imagination of the fasting person ...otherwise, he would be tempted to think that he's breaking the fast and that he can eat whatever food and in any quantities ...he has to stay with the impression that he's continuing elimination and that his cure also continues, although in another, less intense form than the complete fast.

## the reasons for this method

Whenever we stop eating, elimination starts and is evidenced by a white tongue coated with mucus, a foul breath, a bad taste in the mouth, a loss of weight and other symptoms according to the individual. As the fast goes on, elimination slows down because it uses up the body's stock of vitamins and minerals. Depending on the individual, this stock of vitamins and other essential elements lasts approximately 7 to 20 days. At the end of this period, elimination slows down, as revealed in the following symptoms:

- weight loss slows to 1-2 pounds a week, stabilizing about every three days ... it was 1-2 pounds a day before... the loss of weight signifies a strong elimination of toxins and retained water, which are urinated ...when elimination weakens, we don't urinate much... this stabilization of the weight is the

main signal to begin the half-fast.

- thirst disappears and drinking water is difficult, before, elimination created the need to drink in order to dilute the poisons and expel them in the urine.
- the coating of the tongue is lighter in color and thickness, and the bad taste in the mouth lessens.
- other symptoms specific to each individual can also reveal a slowdown in elimination.
- Thus, when these symptoms of the slowing of elimination appear it must be relaunched, by breaking the fast and replenishing the body with nutrients in the form of raw, natural foods:
- 500 grams of raw fruits, spread through the afternoon, this quantity varying according to the person's height;
- 500 grams of raw vegetables and salad, in two sittings in the evening.

These amounts should not be increased, otherwise digestion will take the energy needed by elimination and bring it to a halt ...

The patient should drink a lot of water between midnight and noon, because that's when elimination is at its strongest... if the person is not able to drink at least one liter a day of plain water, then we flavor it with lemon juice ...

The fruits that I prefer to give are apples, because they act like a good broom in the intestines...

Sometimes, a water-rich fruit, like melon or Watermelon must be given ...

As soon as we switch to the half-fast, rekindling elimination, we must examine the tongue every morning before putting anything in the mouth ... it should not be washed! Within a few days, if not a few hours, it colors itself black, mustard, or brownish red ... the half-fast is pursued until the tongue is completely clear ... it becomes pink and all eliminative symptoms (thirst, bad taste in the mouth upon awakening, bad breath, spitting, etc.) disappear...

It does not matter if, in the meantime, hunger comes back or not, because this Instinct is usually defective amongst civilized people.

**End of excerpt. Read the [whole book](#)**

1. Beginning quote from *The Close To Nature Garden*, a video tape produced by Rodale Press, available from Arthur Mokin Productions, Inc., P. O. Box 1866, Santa Rosa, California, 95402, Telephone: (707) 542-4868. ↩
2. God, Kami or Kamisama is the Divine power found in natural objects and all living things. ↩
3. 1,000 square meters = 9,300 square feet. Natural Farming practice requires a minimum area of about 2,000 square feet per person to live on sustainably with a vegetarian diet. For reference, Biointensive Sustainable Mini-Farming practice, developed by John Jeavons, requires a minimum area of about 4,000 square feet per person to live on sustainably with a vegetarian diet. Permaculture Design practice, developed by Bill Mollison, requires a minimum area of about 6,000 square feet per person to live on sustainably with a predominately vegetarian diet. Modern conventional farming practice requires a minimum area of about 10,000 to 40,000 square feet per person to live on according to diet, vegetarian or meat eating, and is not sustainable. ↩