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Reconsidering Primitivism, Technology, & the Wild

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2004

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2004

balanced by a revolutionary politics for the present. People living today were born for this confrontation with history. Will we face up to the task?

lapse as a great opportunity for reinventing primitive ways of living free of the institutions of civilization. A few even seem to take delight in the suffering and death that would inevitably accompany such a collapse, apparently forgetting that this suffering and death would not be likely to recognize distinctions between rulers and ruled, between domesticated and wild, between civilized and ‘primitive.’” Wolfi believes that such notions of inevitability excuse anarchists from taking any responsibility for revolutionary action.

The editors of the CrimethInc. journal *Harbinger* look at the likelihood of a disaster differently. In their typically charged prose, the Crimethinkians court calamity. It’s not that they support suffering, but where others see doom and gloom, they see the dawn of a new day. “The free, the fearless,” they write, “ready to live and all too aware of what is insufferable in the everyday, welcome new horizons, disasters included.” These post-Situ punk poets have a point — if the catastrophe is coming for certain (“any environmental scientist can tell you that,” they quip), shouldn’t we find ways to make the unavoidable change into a revolutionary challenge?

But is the end of the world as we know it sheer inevitability? Are prophecies and predictions a form of prone submission to the tyranny of fear? Do radical subjects resisting the industrial machine have any hope of halting the hideous intentions of Capital’s incompetent engineers? Will we emerge from the wreckage freer and less domesticated than we are today? Do our dreams of sustainability stand a chance against a pending holocaust bound to make Dachau look like a day in the park?

As far as my analysis goes, neither the brash denial of such horrible possibilities nor the dire bravado that welcomes the last days like a new video game seem appropriate. Like many, I believe that something big and bad is coming and that we should prepare emotionally, spiritually, ecologically, socially, and politically for a drastically different way of life. But I further recognize that faith and fear about the future should be

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“While they sit in their mansions/ On their plush leather chairs/ And everyone's waiting/ For us to decide/ From dust we were born/ And in dust we reside/ Will we realize the commons/ Is to shepherd and share/ Here in this war zone/ Called land, water and air/ Yes I'm talking to you/ From here at the end of the world.”

From millenarian Christians to eco-survivalist anarchists, people everywhere are anticipating the apocalypse. From the Greens' warnings about global warming to New Age prophecies about the Mayan calendar and a paradigm shift to pop culture's crude capitalizing on critical fears with films as wide-ranging as *Armageddon* or *The Day After Tomorrow* to thought-provoking theories dealing with everything from the science of extinction and the earth's carrying capacity to paranoid conspiracy to fundamentalist fantasies about a final showdown in the Middle East, the End Times are in the air.

Will the neoconservative born-again boldly engineer a nuclear rapture or will the revolution arrive when the last Wal-Mart is wiped out by a natural disaster?

Some radicals see the presumptions of this debate as inherently faith-based and inflexible while others welcome the possibility of impending ecological and political doom as an opportunity to break with the even more calamitous status quo.

Writing in his 'zine *Willful Disobedience*, Wolfi Landstreicher, thinks that this fashionable apocalypse talk is terribly reactionary. In the essay “Waiting for the Apocalypse:

The Ideology of Collapse and the Avoidance of Revolutionary Responsibility,” Wolfi takes on the primitivists who plan for the end.

He asserts, “Those who hold to any apocalyptic view may look upon the coming end with either hope or despair, and this is true of the ideology of collapse as well. Some of the anarcho-primitivists who adhere to this belief look at the col-

It's the end of the world & I don't feel fine

by Anu Bonobo

“Not only religious zealots but economists, social theorists, technologists, nuclear critics, population experts, ecologists and political ideologues agree that an unprecedented shift in man's world — catastrophic or beatific — is inevitable within the next half-century.”

— Richard Heinberg, *Memories and Visions of Paradise*

Deeply troubled by the threat of nuclear war, I used to justify self-centered, adventurist spontaneity on the notion that the world was going to end soon, so why not go down drinking, drugging, dancing, tramping, and fucking.

With humanity recklessly facilitating self-destruction, I sometimes sympathize with Tool lyricist Maynard James Keenan when he howls,

“Some say the end is near/ Some say we'll see armageddon soon/I certainly hope we will/ cuz I sure could use a vacation/ from this silly shit, stupid shit.../ One great big festering neon distraction.”

I also feel folkster David Rovics when he sings,

This issue's theme opens up a universe of vigorous discussion and argument. All three concepts invoked by the title can be defined differently, depending on contexts, philosophies, ideologies, and worldviews. The subject of technology often raises emotional responses as we grapple with our dependence on complex industrial systems that we don't understand or control for survival. The conveniences that technologies provide often go unquestioned, as their penetration into our lives and identities deepen.

Primitivism does not adhere to a single definition. Any person has as much claim to define this concept as any other. Some define it as a philosophy on the origins of civilization — that interconnected web of social, political, and psychological institutions that control and suppress individuality and desire. Those who identify this interlocking system as something to be dismantled often wish to do so as an end unto itself, believing that in the absence of these institutions, cooperative social relations will prevail.

Primitivists often go beyond this assumption, comparing ethnographies of pre-industrial populations to try to identify specific layers of dependency we might question, or even shed, in order to truly liberate ourselves. Others accuse its adherents of a variety of “sins” — everything from misanthropy to indolence — because of primitivism's supposedly faithful dedication to “the collapse.” Our view on primitivism might depend on our motivation: do we seek reform or liberation?

The question of technology continues to be debated by those of us seeking to liberate ourselves from as many layers of dependency as possible. Some see tools and technology as interchangeable, and others see them as opposites. Some see tools as developed from our primal selves, and technology from our civilized selves — or from the mindset of civilization with its complex industrial systems. Others still see technology as a natural evolution of our species — an adaptation for evolution in a “harsh environment.”

The Wild is a rather loaded and nebulous concept, carrying with it a bulging train-car full of cultural baggage. Human societies which exist in what is often described as a “wild” manner do not use this term to identify themselves. So “the wild” functions to name what we are not; it is a concept born in, and relevant to, industrial societies and their civilizations. It can be defined ecologically, as well as aesthetically, as that which is uncontrollable and interacts organically, constantly evolving. It maintains a constant “steady state” that is self-organized and efficient. It is often contained in order to be admired, but not really interacted with.

Hiking in wilderness areas, some of the few places left in the country that are relatively unspoiled by civilization, one might be disciplined by wilderness enthusiasts for eating wild foods, berries, mushrooms, and greens. For these enthusiasts, the wild is something to not be disturbed, or to be part of, the concept of human as part of the wild does not seem possible, and it seems much more appropriate to pull out a vacuum-sealed backcountry meal-pack than to eat of the wild.

For some, wildness is a rude, unkempt, shady element to be discouraged or evolved away from. For others, it provides a positive analogy for everything from cooperative living to feminist empowerment, from radical activism to anarchic rowdiness, from living on land to learning our place in the web of life.

In the midst of raging debates on the origins of domination, a common question emerges: just how many layers do we have to peel away in order to achieve true freedom for all, not repeating the mistakes of the past. Primitivism has the potential to press us to look beyond what we accept as the limit of our liberation and to question our reliance on the current norms and perceptions of nature and humanity. It also has the potential to dictate a rigid prescription for the post-apocalyptic world, depending on who is calling themselves a primitivist and who is doing the interpreting.

survival. Our generation stands face to face with a paradox, and we are truly in a race for time.

other norms of “civility.” Rather than focus on end results of such activity, as is so common among “activists,” primitivists often see them as part of a process of rewilding — of becoming uncontrollable. Perhaps the idea of primitivism as a political ideology is an invention of anti-primitivists. It is a philosophical tendency that informs a praxis chosen by the individual and is always open to change.

Even if we in industrial societies *do* suddenly manage to turn our backs on the trajectory of “progress,” it might already be too late. Some question this assumption as a cop-out, but the questioning could happen in reverse as well: how do we know the shit *won't* hit the fan before we can manage to liberate ourselves economically and politically from the capitalist elite? And in the (highly likely) case of such a turn of events, what will pass on? How will we provide for ourselves and our communities, in the absence of the systems we depend on for our basic needs? Will we merely appear in the streets holding paper mache replicas of “another world”?

And if we in industrial societies do ever succeed in liberating ourselves (and thus, the rest of the world) from the grip of the capitalist elite, how will we, as autonomous social groupings, recover the stolen wisdom we need to maintain the ecological balance?

Primitivists believe this liberated existence is not possible unless mass society and its industrial systems are abandoned. The number of people on the planet cannot be sustained within an agro-industrial civilization. To beckon the abandonment of such systems is not misanthropic, but is actually a call for self-preservation, and for the sparing of future generations from the worsening effects of industrialism.

While industrial systems may plug the dam for periods of time, even mainstream scientists agree that they will eventually fail and require another “quick fix,” resulting in an even more disastrous failure, until there is nothing left to fix. We can't have it all — it's either technological progress, or future

Many of the contributions in this section will remind long-time FE readers of the magazine's “core” ideas. These perspectives challenge industrialism, domestication, and civilization, and these voices remind us to reclaim “wildness.” Indeed, a non-ideological primitivism remains a valuable addition to the evolution of anarchist theory and the necessary creation of anarchy itself. It is an opening to many possibilities, intended to inspire the minds and hearts of those who will choose future directions that have not yet been charted.

These, like all writings, use our rather civilized language to try to discuss the practicality/desirability of concepts that go much deeper in our instincts, bodies, and in “pre”-history than can be reached with words. The challenge inherent in this sort of discussion is to examine for yourself your own relationship to civilized life and technological domination. How the following perspectives are translated into practice is up to our individual imaginations, collective desires, and subversive ambitions.

— Wildroots Collective

Beyond Backward and Forward: On Civilization, Sustainability, and the Future

by Derrick Jensen

When I first connected with the radical milieu in the mid-1980s, certain books and writers changed me. Activists passed around dog-eared, marked-up volumes that would transform people forever. A certain work would be read by everyone in a scene, becoming a sort of collective scripture; backpacks brimmed with propaganda, the tastiest tome like a textual talisman.

Derrick Jensen writes books like that. Lately, his searing nonfiction, particularly the lightning rod *Language Older Than Words*, has captivated countless readers fed up with the abundant hypocrisy and arrogant unsustainability of modern life. Synthesizing stories, research, and experience into seamless narrative swords drawn to skewer the social lie, Jensen channels that rare ability to turn inchoate intuition into articulate ammunition, a language older than words that will dismantle institutions.

In planning an issue on primitivism, we knew we needed to contact Derrick Jensen. We were curious what philosophies and theories attracted him. How would he situate himself in the debates about the fundamental aspects of human folly? Does Jensen call himself an anarchist? What does he think of deep ecology? He responded to our inquiry like this:

forms of ecological/low-impact living; and sharing and building on these skills with others forms a terrain of struggle for many primitivists.

Within these terrains, we can foster an exchange of critical analysis concerning the roles played by the effects of technology, class and race privilege, patriarchy and authoritarianism. These activities all seek to foment a consciousness from which it is hoped that a balanced and liberatory future can be seeded.

Some primitivists go beyond this more personal scope into political realms, involving themselves in the crafting of collectives and cooperatives for direct decision-making, to fulfill basic needs like food and housing, as well as direct physical confrontation.

Reformist-oriented activism, mass protests, and workplace organizing are low on the priority list for most primitivists. They so often fail to address the most pressing disaster that threatens all of our survival: the continued existence of industrial society. This disaster is unpredictable in its timeline and its targets, but is an ever-present inevitability, given the trajectory of civilization.

Social activists believe they must at least *try* to develop an alternative model of governance and economy (“another world”) to replace the current systems, and possibly prevent these disasters. But many primitivists envision a deeper transformation of systems that questions the most basic assumptions about our species’ role in the community of life. Developing more systems merely reproduces the disempowerment of institutional life, domesticating our imaginations and individuality. But self-organization and radical decentralization can mimic the wild flow of relationships. Cultivating our urges to thwart the systems that distort our connection with nature and each other can be an outgrowth of this same consciousness.

Through both strategic and spontaneous direct action and sabotage, instigating moments and situations, people might break free from the repetition of life while breaking laws or

A Race for Time? by Witch Hazel

The accusation calling primitivists gleeful beckoners of “the collapse,” or misanthropic proto-nazis, reflects a clear misinterpretation of most primitivist writing, and even more primitivist practice. Few who generally agree with the primitivist analysis of the origins of civilization, if any at all, envision “industrial collapse” as some sort of political strategy. In one sense, collapse can definitely be seen as nature’s reaction to the pushing of ecological limits by industrial economies, but this perspective is not a value-based judgment. This possibility is but an observation of the predictable nature of wildness to do whatever it must to maintain ecological equilibrium.

The equilibrium is not merely struck among all the “wild” animals and plants out there in the biosphere, but among all species, exempting none from the sometimes dire consequences of evolution itself. Invoking the vision of ecological collapse is not the same as glorifying it. It’s a recognition of a basic, observable physical pattern: “for every action there is a reaction”. There need not be any glee associated with this situation, as it is indeed tragic, and has ultimately been done to most of us humans by a very few.

The praxis that often flows from this supposedly “doomsday” analysis includes infinite elements of resistance and renewal. Much is super-practical, yet subversive, in its unending questioning of the distance between our lives and the web of life we inhabit, including: rediscovering and practicing forager lifeways; fusing this nearly lost knowledge with more modern

“I don’t think so much about primitivism, or anarchism, or deep ecology. I want to live in a world with more wild salmon every year than the year before, more migratory songbirds, more natural forest communities, more fish in the ocean, less dioxin in every mother’s breast milk. And I’ll do what it takes to get there. And what it will take is for us to dismantle everything we see around us. It will take, at the very least, the destruction of civilization, which has been killing the planet for 6000 years. If that’s primitivism, then I guess I’m a primitivist. If that’s deep ecology, then I’m that. If that’s anarchism, then I’m that. But the labels don’t matter much to me.”

Although Jensen wasn’t writing for FE when we first explored the themes that this issue “reconsiders,” we’re certainly glad he is with us now. What follows is an excerpt from a forthcoming book tentatively titled *What Goes Up ...*. To buy some of his books, see our infoshop on page 62. For more information about him, visit his website www.derickjensen.org

— Sunfrog

* * *

Years ago I was riding in a car with friend and fellow activist George Draffan. He has influenced my thinking as much as any other one person. It was a hot day in Spokane. Traffic was slow. A long line waited at a stop light. I asked, “If you could live at any level of technology, what would it be?”

As well as being a friend and an activist, George can be a curmudgeon. He was in one of those moods. He said, “That’s a stupid question. We can fantasize about living however we want, but the only sustainable level of technology is the stone age. What we have now is the merest blip — we’re one of only

six or seven generations that ever have to hear the awful sound of internal combustion engines (especially two-cycle) — and in time we'll return to the way humans have lived for most of their existence. Within a few hundred years at most. The only question will be what's left of the world when we get there."

He's right, of course. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that any social system based on the use of nonrenewable resources is by definition unsustainable: in fact it probably takes anyone but a rocket scientist to figure this one out. The hope of those who wish to perpetuate our culture is something called "resource substitution," whereby as one resource is depleted another is substituted for it (I suppose there is at least one hope more prevalent than this, which is that if we ignore the consequences of our actions they will not exist). Of course on a finite planet this merely puts off the inevitable, ignores the damage caused in the meantime, and begs the question of what will be left of life when the last substitution has been made. Question: When oil runs out, what resource will we substitute in order to keep the industrial economy running? Unstated premises: a) equally effective substitutes exist; b) we want to keep the industrial economy running; and c) keeping it running is worth more to us (or rather to those who make the decisions) than the human and nonhuman lives destroyed by the extraction, processing, and utilization of this resource.

Hyperexploit, deplete, and die

Similarly, any culture based on the nonrenewable use of renewable resources is just as unsustainable: if fewer salmon return each year than the year before, sooner or later none will return. If fewer ancient forests stand each year than the year before, sooner or later none will stand. Once again, the substitution of other resources for depleted ones will, say some, save civilization for another day. But at most this merely holds

It's the absence of electricity that's become a luxury now rather than its almost omnipresence. Every recording is the tombstone of a live performance.

Live by lamplight and you live with the strength and silky texture of a million years of organic life. Live with electricity, and you live face-to-face with a TomorrowLand that never quite arrives.

Some people like Black-Outs; — consciously because they enjoy seeing things fucked up (many children feel this way); perhaps unconsciously because the vast regional web of inorganic vibration — the constant tension of the panopticonical mantra — the filth of dead light and noise (mostly subliminal) suddenly dies with a moan. Other people fear Black-Outs; — for the same reasons. It depends on your relation with night, with darkness and primitivity.

Take Back The Night: Ban Electricity

by Peter Lamborn Wilson

Electricity was known to the ancients. Archaeologists found primitive batteries in Crete — probably based on lost Mesopotamian or Egyptian prototypes. Clearly the old mages kept it deep secret. Franklin didn't discover it, he appropriated it from Hermeticism and gave it to the very politicians and merchants deemed "profane" and kept in the dark by real alchemists for millennia.

Franklin may have stolen the secret from some German Rosicrucian in Philadelphia, someone like Johannes Kelpus the Sage of the Wissahickon. Nor should the Hell Fire Club be considered innocent of true secrets: nor should the Royal Society be considered untainted by occultism. Newton, Boyle, Priestly, Erasmus, Darwin — all crypto-hermeticists. Why not their pal Franklin?

Electricity was meant to be a rare mysterious luxury known only to acupuncturists, illusionists, & philosophers. The Frankenstein Moment might've been avoided. (GE's motto: "Science brings good things to life.") Genies that escape their bottles threaten to destroy Earth. As it stands, electricity — which still eludes exact definition and cannot be "explained" — has polluted most of the world with a constant angst-inducing hmmmmmmmm — and a universal leprosy of mystery-banishing light. The opposite of the Dark Age is the Lite Age.

off the inevitable while it further damages the planet. This is what we see, for example, in the collapse of fishery after fishery worldwide: having long-since fished out the more economically-valuable fish, now even so-called trash fish are being extirpated, disappearing into civilization's literally insatiable maw.

Another way to put all of this is that any group of beings (human or nonhuman, plant or animal) who take more from their surroundings than they give back will, obviously, deplete their surroundings, after which they will either have to move, or they will dwindle (which, by the way, is a one sentence disproof of the notion that competition drives natural selection: if you hyperexploit your surroundings you will deplete them and die; the only way to survive in the long run is to give back more than you take. Duh).

Our culture — Western Civilization — has been depleting its surroundings for six thousand years, beginning in the Middle East and expanding now to deplete the entire planet. Why else do you think this culture has to continually expand? And why else, coincident with this, do you think it has developed a rhetoric — a series of stories that teach us how to live — making plain not only the necessity but desirability and even morality of continual expansion — causing us to boldly go where no man has gone before — as a premise so fundamental as to become transparent?

Cities, the defining feature of civilization, have always relied on taking resources from the surrounding countryside, meaning, first, that no city has ever been or ever will be sustainable on its own, and second, that in order to continue their ceaseless expansion cities must ceaselessly expand the areas they must ceaselessly hyperexploit: the colonies. I'm sure you can see the problems this presents and the end point it must reach on a finite planet. If you cannot or will not see these problems, then I wish you the best of luck in your career in politics or business. Our studied — to the point of obsessive — avoidance

of acknowledging and acting on the surety of this end point is, especially given the consequences, more than passing strange.

Yet another way to say all of this — that our way of living is unsustainable — is to point out that because ultimately the only real source of energy for the planet is the sun (the energy locked in oil, for example, having come from the sun long ago; and I'm excluding nuclear power from consideration here because only a fool would intentionally fabricate and/or refine materials that are deadly poisonous for tens or hundreds of thousands of years, especially to serve the frivolous, banal, and anti-life uses to which we put electricity: think retractable stadium roofs, supercolliders, and aluminum beer cans), any way of being that uses more energy than that currently coming from the sun will not last, because the noncurrent energy — stored in oil that could be burned, stored in trees that could be burned (stored, for that matter, in human bodies that could be burned) — will in time be used up. As we see.

I am more or less constantly amazed at the number of intelligent and well-meaning people who consistently conjure up magical means to maintain our current disconnected way of living (why we would want to do so is another question: another premise discussed elsewhere is that civilization is not only unsustainable and exploitative but radically undesirable). Just last night I received an email from a very smart woman who wrote, "I don't think we can go backward. I don't think Hunter/Gatherer is going to be it. But is it possible to go forward in a way that will bring us around the circle back to sustainability?"

Forward without Dysfunction?

It is a measure of the dysfunction of civilization that no longer do very many people of integrity believe we can or should go forward with it because it serves us well, but rather the most common argument in its favor (and this is true also for

Milky Way?" t-shirts, and handing out awards to multi-million dollar architectural firms for "controlled glare," "good nighttime ambiance," and for "responsible lighting in an otherwise 'light competitive' environment."

Surely, there is something more productive that can be done in the name of darkness besides pressuring engineering firms to use "quality outdoor lighting fixtures" and lobbying municipal zoning boards to install more closed-circuit television surveillance cameras instead of inefficient security lighting.

Look at the satellite photographs of last August's blackout in the northeast US and Canada for inspiration. The night must be liberated from ridiculously over-lit billboards, car dealerships lots, gas stations-convenience stores, those 24-hour restaurants chains that crassly spotlight their oversized US flags, and the other selfish aggressors who are waging perpetual war against it.

There needs to be direct action in defense of the dark.

* * *

The website for The World Atlas of the Artificial Night Sky Brightness (www.inquinamentoluminoso.it/dmsp/index.html) provides up-to-the-minute information on zenith artificial night sky brightness at sea level all over the world.

disrupted (lethally, in some cases) by the endless perpetuation of daylight hours.

This is especially the case for nocturnal and migratory wildlife. In many studies, mutations in plants from plankton to pumpkins have been explained by the proliferation of outdoor industrial lighting, as have fundamentally perilous changes in the spawning cycles of salmon. Elsewhere, on the militarized Texas-Mexico border, floodlights are jeopardizing the survival of ocelot and jaguarondi; in Florida, endangered sea turtle hatchlings are lured into nighttime parking lots instead the ocean; and in the northeastern US, saturniid moth populations have been all but wiped out by artificial light at night.

The glare from inefficient lighting also harms human vision. Researchers have argued that artificial light profoundly disturbs the circadian cycle of neuro-endocrine activity (like melatonin release) to the point where it can be linked to chronic sleep loss, depression, reproductive irregularities and breast cancer. The toxic effect of the night sky's light pollution on the human capacity to create, to wonder, and to enjoy poetry and love-making has yet to be determined.

There are a number of liberal, reformist organizations — such as the International Dark-Sky Association, the British Astronomical Association's Campaign for Dark Skies, the New England Light Pollution Advisory Group, NYC's Sensible and Efficient Lighting to Enhance the Nighttime Environment, the Association Nationale pour la Protection du Ciel Nocturne, Toronto's Fatal Lighting Awareness Project — that are trying to conserve the night sky through the implementation of revised lighting design regulations and through changes to building and zoning codes.

These organizations work with municipal authorities and the biggest polluters of the night in an effort to convince them how dimmer lights might be more efficient and cost effective. The solutions offered by these groups include raising awareness about light pollution among Boy Scout troops, selling "Got

many of its particular manifestations, such as the global economy and high technology) seems to be that we're stuck with it, so we may as well make the best of a very bad situation. "We're here," the argument goes, "We've lost sustainability and sanity, so now we have no choice but to continue on this self- and other-destructive path." It's as though we've already boarded the train to Treblinka, so we might as well stay on for the ride. Perhaps by chance or by choice (someone else's) we'll somehow end up somewhere besides the gas chambers.

The good news, however, is that we don't need to go "backward" to anything, because humans and their immediate evolutionary predecessors lived sustainably for at least a million years (cut off the word immediate and we can go back billions). It is not "human nature" to destroy one's habitat. If it were, we would have done so long before now, and long-since disappeared.

Nor is it the case that stupidity kept (and keeps) noncivilized peoples from ordering their lives in such a manner as to destroy their habitat, nor from developing technologies (for example, oil refineries, electrical grids, and factories) that facilitate this process. Indeed, were we to attempt a cross-cultural comparison of intelligence, maintenance of one's habitat would seem to me a first-rate measure with which to begin. In any case, when civilized people arrived in North America, the continent was rich with humans and nonhumans alike, living in relative equilibrium and sustainability. I've shown this elsewhere, as have many others, most especially the Indians themselves.

Because we as a species haven't fundamentally changed in the last several thousand years, since well before the dawn of civilization, each new child is still a human being, with the potential to become the sort of adult who can live sustainably on a particular piece of ground, if only the child is allowed to grow up within the context of a culture that values sustainability, that lives by sustainability, that rewards sustainability, that tells itself stories reinforcing sustainability, and strictly disal-

lows the sort of exploitation that would lead to unsustainability. This is natural. This is who we are.

In order to continue moving “forward,” each child must be made to forget what it means to be human and to learn instead what it means to be civilized. As psychiatrist and philosopher RD Laing put it, “From the moment of birth, when the Stone Age baby confronts the twentieth-century mother, the baby is subject to these forces of violence ... as its mother and father, and their parents and their parents before them, have been. These forces are mainly concerned with destroying most of its potentialities, and on the whole this enterprise is successful. By the time the new human being is fifteen or so, we are left with a being like ourselves, a half-crazed creature more or less adjusted to a mad world. This is normality in our present age.”

Another problem with the idea that we cannot abandon or eliminate civilization because to do so would be to go backwards is that the idea emerges from a belief that history is natural — like water flowing downhill, like spring following winter — and that social (including technological) “progress” is as inevitable as personal aging. But history is a product of a specific way of looking at the world, a way that is, in fact, influenced by, among other things, environmental degradation.

I used to be offended by the World History classes I took in school, which seemed almost Biblical in the pretension that the world began six thousand years ago. Oh, sure, teachers and writers of books made vague allowances for the Age of the Dinosaurs, and moved quickly — literally in a sentence or two — through the tens or hundreds of thousands of years of human existence constituting “prehistory” before averting their eyes from such obviously dead subjects.

These few moments were always the briefest prelude to the only human tale that has ever really mattered: Western Civilization. Similarly short shrift was always given to cultures that have existed (or for now still exist) coterminous with Western Civ, as other civilizations such as the Aztec, Incan, Chinese,

Support the Forces of Darkness by Luci Williams

“People have a lot more of the unknown than the known in their minds. The unknown is great; it’s like the darkness. Nobody made that. It just happens.”

— Sun Ra

According to *The World Atlas of the Artificial Night Sky Brightness*, human civilization is drowning itself in luminous smog. The Atlas is a joint project of astrophysicists from Italy and Colorado and measures the level of perpetual industrial brightness that is reflecting off the inside rim of the sky.

Their report is horrifying: two-thirds of the world’s population, and 99 percent of the population in the US (except Alaska and Hawai’i) and the European Union, live in areas where the night sky is polluted by artificial light. One-fifth of the world’s population, more than two-thirds of the US population, and more than one-half of the European Union population can no longer see the Milky Way with the naked eye. In many places in the Northern Hemisphere, the shimmering curtains of auroras are no longer visible.

The detrimental effects of outdoor lighting are poorly understood and rarely taken into account. For example, in addition to the environmental damage that comes from burning the fossil fuels needed to run electrical lighting brighter and more continuously, the natural diurnal rhythms of plants and animals are

butchers to yet another distant land. The further invasions of Mars can be stopped.

and so on were given nothing more than a cousinly nod, and ahistorical cultures were mentioned only when it was time for their members to be enslaved or exterminated. It was always clear that the real action started in the Middle East with the “rise” of civilization, shifted its locus to the Mediterranean, to northern and western Europe, sailed across the ocean blue with Christopher Columbus and the boys, and now shimmers between the two towns struck by the September 11, 2001 attacks in New York and DC (and to a lesser extent, Tinseltown). Everything, everyone, and everywhere else matters only as it matters to this primary story.

I was bothered not only by the obvious narcissism and arrogance of relegating all of these other stories to the periphery, and by the just-as-obvious stupidity and unsustainability of not making one’s habitat the central figure of one’s stories, but also by the language itself. History, I was told time and again, in classes and in books, began six thousand years ago. Before that, there was no history. It was prehistory. Nothing much happened in this long dark time of people grunting in caves (never mind that extant indigenous languages are often richer, more subtle, more complex than English).

But the truth is that history did begin six thousand years ago. Before then there were personal histories, but there would not have been significant social history of the type we’re used to thinking about, in part because the cultures were cyclical — based on cycles of nature — instead of linear, or based on the changes brought about by this social group on the world surrounding them.

I have to admit that I still don’t like the word prehistory, because it imputes to history an inaccurate inevitability. For the truth is that history didn’t have to happen. I’m not merely saying that any particular history isn’t inevitable, but instead that history itself — the existence of any social history whatsoever — was not always inevitable. It is inevitable for now, but at one

point it did not exist, and at some point it will again cease to be.

History is predicated on at least two things, the first physical, the second perceptual. As always, the physical and the perceptual are intertwined. So far as the former, history is marked by change. An individual's history can be seen as a series of welcomings and leavetakings, a growth in physical stature and abilities followed by a tailing off, a gradual exchange of these abilities for memories, experiences, and, one hopes, wisdom. Fragments of my history. I went to college. I was a high jumper. I remember the eerie, erotic smoothness of laying out over the bar, higher than my head. I lost my springs in my late twenties. I was still a fast runner, chopping the Softball toward short and beating out the throw every time. In my thirties arthritis stole my speed, until now I ran like a pitching coach, or like an extra in an Akira Kurasawa movie. Twenty years ago I was an engineer. Fifteen years ago a beekeeper. Thirteen years ago I became an environmental activist. Now I'm writing a book about the need to take down civilization. I do not know what my future history will look like.

Social histories are similarly marked by change. The deforestation of the Middle East to build the first cities. The first written laws of civilization, which had to do with the ownership of human and nonhuman slaves. The fabrication of bronze, then iron, the ores mined by slaves, the metals used to conquer. The first empires. Greece and its attempts to take over the world. Rome and its attempts. The conquest of Europe. The conquest of Africa. The conquest of the Americas. The conquest of Australia, India, much of Asia. The deforestation of the planet.

Just as with my own future history, I do not know what the future history of our society will be, nor of the land that lies beneath it. I do not know when the Grand Coulee Dam will come down, nor whether there will still be salmon to recolonize the Upper Columbia. I do not know when the Colorado will again reach the sea, nor do I know whether civilization will collapse

(which carried the ill-fated British explorer called *Beagle 2*), and two NASA current explorers Spirit and Opportunity. As you read this, plans are well under way for launching an even more advanced expeditionary flotilla of NASA Mars craft, such as a reconnaissance orbiter for 2005, the Phoenix lander in 2007, and a science laboratory rover for 2009. The moons of Jupiter — Ganymede, Callisto, Io, and Europa — are under attack by the US as well, as was illustrated by the eight-year Galileo mission that ended last September. Laden with fifty pounds of plutonium 238 (an isotope 300 times more radioactive than plutonium 239, the four-and-a-half pounds of fissionable material used by the US government against civilian targets in Nagasaki), the still-functioning Galileo space probe orbited Jupiter's moons before it was deliberately plunged by NASA into the dense Jovian atmosphere where it exploded as spectacularly as a hydrogen bomb detonation on a South Pacific atoll.

It is not too early to develop autonomous, non-hierarchical, anonymous cells of anti-authoritarian individuals willing to take responsibility for stopping the exploitation of off-world natural worlds. We cannot afford to wait to help educate the public about the vile crimes being committed against the wild spaces of outer space. Nor can we expect others to halt those who will profit greatly from ravaging and destroying outer space.

The rape of the Red Planet by the US armed forces, industry, and the apparatuses of the State is the worse kind of ecological corruption and greedy capitalist speculation. But it is not inevitable or unpreventable. The use and abuse of the Martian wilderness by the US is not a natural outcome — it is not like the rise of the Sun or the fall of rain, or the inescapable effects of those things falling under the jurisdiction of the laws of gravity. For those us stubbornly opposed to imperialism, militarism, and ecocide, we must take our fight against these colonialist

notion or a freak aberration, but rather one more point on a continuum that began when Columbus and his crewmen pillaged, enslaved, Christianized, and infected the Tainos in 1492. Knowing what we know now, what would have green anarchists done when they learned the news of Francisco Pizarro's military mission for gold, God and glory in the Andes? What would have been the anti-civilization anarcho-primitivist solution in 1805 to the problem of the Lewis and Clark expedition? How would have radical, deep environmentalists reacted to what was going on in the Wright brothers' crude aviation workshop? These questions about the abominations of long-lost yesterdays may seem foolish to ponder in the midst of what we are all fighting against today, but we cannot lose sight of what our struggles might very well be tomorrow, regardless of whether or not such schemes seem feasible from a technological, scientific, or budgetary standpoint. Rather than shrugging off the Bush-Cheney regime's audacious plots to militarize, annex, strip mine and contaminate the lunar and Martian wilderness, we should begin considering it to be a sick outrage no less loathsome as their wet dreams for a metropolis of police barracks, oil rigs, banks and churches built in the heart of the 19 million-acre Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

No Compromise in Defense of Sister Mars

In the name of wilderness, wildness, and possibly wildlife, we must work together to put a stop to the US occupation of the Moon and Mars. We need to prevent any further capitalist-productivist, imperialist, and Judeo-Christian contamination of the solar system's open, untamed spaces. For decades, there have been climate orbiters, polar landers, and Mariner, Viking, and Pathfinder spacecraft sent to Mars. In the last year alone, Martian missions have included Nozomi, the Japanese-built Martian orbiter, the European Space Agency's Mars Express

before grizzly bears go extinct, or prairie dogs, gorillas, tuna, great white sharks, sea turtles, chimpanzees, orangutans, spotted owls, California red-legged frogs, tiger salamanders, tigers, pandas, koalas, abalones, and millions of others on the brink.

The point is that history is marked by change. No change, no history.

A huge sigh of relief

And some day history will come to an end. When the last bit of iron from the last skyscraper rusts into nothingness, when eventually the earth, and humans on the earth, presuming we still survive, find some sort of new dynamic equilibrium, there will no longer be any history.

People will live once again in the cycles of the earth, the cycles of the sun and moon, the seasons. And longer cycles, too, of fish who slip into seas then return to rivers full of new life, of insects who sleep for years to awaken on hot summer afternoons, of martens who make massive migrations once every several human generations, of the rise and fall of populations of snowshoe hare and the lynx who eat them. And longer cycles still, the birth, growth, death, and decay of great trees, the swaying of rivers in their courses, the rise and fall of mountains. All these cycles, these circles great and small.

That's looking at history from an ecological level. From a social or perceptual level, history started when certain groups or classes of people for whatever reason gained the ability to tell the story of what was going on. Monopolizing the story allowed them to set up a worldview to which they could then get other people to subscribe. History is always told by the people in control. The lower classes — and other species — may or may not subscribe to an academic or upper class description of events, but to some degree most of us do buy into it.

And buying into it carries a series of perceptual consequences, not the least of which is the inability to envision living ahistorically, which means living sustainably, because a sustainable way of living would not be marked, obviously, by changes in the larger landscape. Another way to say all of this is that to perceive history as inevitable or natural is to render impossible the belief that we can go “back” to being nonindustrialized, indeed noncivilized, and in fact to create the notion that to do either of these is in a larger sense backwards at all. To perceive history as inevitable is to make sustainability impossible. The opposite is true as well.

To the degree that we can liberate ourselves from the historical perspective which holds us captive and fall again into the cyclical patterns that characterize the natural world — including natural human communities — we’ll find that the notions of forward and backward will likewise lose their primacy. At that point we will once again simply be living. We will learn to not make those markers on the earth that cause history, markers of environmental degradation, and both we and the rest of the world will at long last be able to heave a huge sigh of relief.

“abundant resources” of “raw materials” that will one day “be harvested and processed”). Other critics suggested that vain-glorious visions of a massive military-industrial operation to some faraway place without a heavily-armed indigenous resistance movement might help Americans to forget the daily follies and atrocities of the Afghanistan and Iraq quagmires. But a few sharp-eyed antimilitarists were quick to contextualize the proposed Mars mission as a new, interplanetary Manifest Destiny that would include weaponizing outer space with a multi-layered “shield” of Star Wars humbuggery and dangerously poisonous nuclear-powered rocket engines.

Secretary of Defense Donald “Strangelove” Rumsfeld and his Pentagon bully-boys have been nursing on the undead fantasy of Reagan’s rayguns (and the flimsy pyramid schemes needed to pay Big Business aerospace death merchants for building them) for more than twenty years, and a manned mission to Mars by the year 2020 coincides nicely with their own pet project, the USAF Space Command’s “Vision 2020” agenda. As antimilitarist critics have pointed out, the Space Command’s ambitious, self-proclaimed aims of “global vigilance, reach, and power,” of dominating “the space dimension of military operations to protect US interests and investments” and of integrating “Space Forces into warfighting capabilities across a full spectrum of conflict” are congruent with the recent bureaucratic regime change at NASA executed by a presidential advisory “refocusing team” that recommended that the agency be re-organized away from a State-sponsored scientific-experimental orientation towards privatized and even more explicitly military-commercial ends.

In so many respects, the knotting together of God, capital, and weaponry calls to mind countless other examples in human history when, armed with missionaries and artillery cannons, European and US military-commercial expeditions “explored” and ruthlessly colonized other lands. Bush’s diktat for a US invasion and occupation of Mars is not some visionary

vancement from outer space and gain some moral high ground, hence you have seen this message over Palestine.”

Such revolting and empty-headed remarks should serve as a warning of things to come if we do not take steps to stop plans for the US's renewed extraterrestrial imperialist adventurism. Are we going to stand by passively as the madness of monotheistic religious wars, witch hunts, fundamentalist terrorism, genocide and concentration camps are imported onto Luna, Mars, and beyond? Isn't it enough that these military-industrial-statist gangsters have already played golf and erected a US flag on the Moon's surface? Isn't that enough interplanetary poisoning and humiliation for one civilization?

Mars and the star-fields of our galaxy are a wilderness that must always remain uncivilized, free territory. We should begin to adamantly resist any and all attempts by corporate capitalists, technocratic militarists, and dangerously narcissistic statisticians to further their monstrous plans to despoil and colonize celestial bodies.

Praise the Lord & Pass the Ammo

There can be no mistaking the putrefied stink of US Christian triumphalism wafting from the alarmingly pernicious project to militarize and colonize outer space. The matrix of the overlapping motivations of God, capital, and bombing superiority are what frames the future objectives of the US space program, and to not take seriously consider the ramifications of such a pathological perspective is a grave error. Most international commentators simply giggled and dismissed Bush's January 14th speech at NASA as an election-year distraction designed to divert attention away from the latest spastic convulsions of the terminally-ill capitalist market's downward spiral. (Bush actually hailed US astronauts as “spacial entrepreneurs” and openly indulged in lusty flights of fancy about the Moon's

Green Anarchism and Oil Depletion: How close is the Collapse?

by Richard Heinberg

The march of human social organization is essentially the story of how people have found ways of harvesting ever more energy from their environments in order to sustain ever more humans. The story began with the harnessing of fire and the domestication of plants and animals, but it took a fateful turn at the commencement of the industrial revolution when we discovered fossil fuels.

With coal, oil, and natural gas we won the energy lottery: hydrocarbons that had been stored, chemically altered, and concentrated over the course of hundreds of millions of years were extracted and burned in a period of two brief centuries to fuel the creation of by far the most elaborate and extensive society ever imagined by humans.

Of all the hydrocarbons, oil has been the most important. We have used it for transportation and industrial agriculture, which together enabled us to enlarge the human food supply and to deliver food far greater distances. Consequently, our population has grown from fewer than one billion (when the industrial period began) to well over six billion — almost a seven-fold increase in two centuries.

Nowhere was the impact of fossil fuels greater than in America. The oil industry started in the US, which quickly became

the world's foremost petroleum producing and exporting nation. America also, coincidentally, became the world's wealthiest and most powerful nation. However, discoveries of oil in the US peaked in the 1930s, and extraction peaked in 1970; production has been sliding downhill ever since.

The US is by far the world's most mature extraction province; it is the prototype of oil-producing nations. Thus, we should expect to see a similar pattern of production peak following discovery peak elsewhere. And indeed we have: global oil discoveries peaked in the 1960s, and since 1970, over 20 countries have followed the US in undergoing an all-time peak in production followed by a gradual slide. Most of the oil now being exported globally comes from a few supergiant oil fields discovered decades ago, all of which are approaching senescence. Meanwhile, the quantities of new oil being found today are comparatively inconsequential.

The US has maintained its economic clout (after a fashion) since its oil peak through the strategy of importing ever-larger quantities of petroleum from other countries — though the exercise has resulted in unsustainable balance-of-trade deficits and worsening foreign policy dilemmas. When the world as a whole peaks, Earth will not be able to import oil from other planets. The party will truly be over.

The best estimates for current global reserves and discovery rates suggest a global production peak within years, possibly as soon as 2006. Given the centrality of fossil fuels to industrialism, it would appear that our current civilization is on its way toward collapse — which appears to be the standard fate of all complex societies anyway, according to archaeologist Joseph Tainter in his *The Collapse of Complex Societies* (Cambridge University Press, 1988).

I first became aware of all of this in the late 1990s. I had just written a book (*A New Covenant with Nature: Notes on the End of Civilization and the Renewal of Culture*, Quest, 1996) critiquing civilization and especially industrialism, but in it I had

who had been active in a small church in Texas. In a video that Husband recorded for the congregation before the fatal flight, he had declared that his achievements in space were possible “only in America” and “only by the grace of God.” Husband had failed the NASA physical exam four times before he was accepted into the shuttle program; during that time, he said, he dedicated himself to “learning what it's like to live life as a Christian, the way God would want us to live.” When he signed autographs for space shuttle groupies, he would also add quotes from his favorite Biblical verses. Husband had left a note with his church's reverend to be opened in the event of his death aboard the shuttle that instructed the minister to “Tell them about Jesus. He means everything to me.” He was remembered as “a model church member” who sang in the choir and who even went as far as to offer to donate his vintage Camaro to the church building fund.

Also among the dead was a Roman Catholic, an Episcopalian, and a relatively godless Unitarian Universalist *Columbia's* science officer, as it turns out, was a Baptist; after the explosion, his father was certain that his vaporized son was “in a better place than where he would be on Earth.” And then there was Israeli Defense Force Colonel Ilan Ramon, another godly celebrity killed aboard the *Columbia*. Ramon was the State of Israel's first astronaut who kept kosher while in orbit and brought Holocaust relics with him into space, including a Torah that had been used at a concentration camp Bar Mitzvah and children's art from Auschwitz. He prayed aloud when the shuttle's orbit took him over Jerusalem.

But Islam was involved, too. The fact that one of the towns below the Columbia explosion was Palestine, TX was not lost on one of London's most notorious extremist Muslim clerics, Abu Hamza. “It is a punishment from God,” Hamza railed, since Hinduism, Christianity, and Judaism are “a trinity of evil against Islam. It is a strong message for the Israeli. He spoke about the Holocaust and tried to make some religious ad-

shuttle in 1995; likewise, Shannon Lucid, the daughter of missionaries, took sermons with her on the shuttle to the Russian space station Mir and reportedly held daily Bible studies with the cosmonauts. Senator and Presbyterian Church elder John Glenn, who went back into space on the shuttle in 1998 at age 77, said during an in-orbit space capsule news conference that he prays every day and warned that “everybody should.”

The space shuttle missions have also inspired some especially grotesque outbursts of military-industrial theology. USAF Colonel Jeffrey Williams had a six-hour space walk while flying with the Atlantis shuttle in May 2000, and he has since repeatedly explained that deploying top secret military spy satellites while being suspended four hundred miles above the Earth’s surface helped him to see how “we are all an infinitesimal speck in light of the Creator Himself.” This realization “amplified my belief in the Creator,” he crowed, and it led him to conclude that “apart from Christ, we are insignificant.” As for the search for extraterrestrial life-forms, Williams says that his “gut feeling based on studying the Scripture is to doubt the existence of life elsewhere, as Earth and mankind are described in God’s revelation.”

Columbia’s God Squad

Most recently and most egregiously, God was the copilot for the crew aboard the doomed space shuttle *Columbia*. After the spectacular *Columbia* explosion spewed debris over a wide swath of Texas and the southeastern US, one major mass-media conglomerate put a remarkably bizarre story out over its newswire about how the dead crew members could be linked to “an extraordinary variety of faith traditions” (“extraordinary” in this case meaning five different flavors of Christianity, one Jew, and a conservative Hindu Sikh). Shuttle commander Rick Husband was a fanatical Charismatic evangelical Protestant

not even mentioned energy or fossil fuels. However, after reading Colin Campbell’s and Jean LaHerrere’s groundbreaking *Scientific American* article “The End of Cheap Oil?” (March 1998), I began to reflect on just how important energy is to understanding human social processes. Once I had grasped the bone-jarring significance of this new information, I decided to write a book about it — *The Party’s Over: Oil, War, and the Fate of Industrial Societies* (New Society, 2003). While I had no expertise as a petroleum geologist, I was a teacher of human ecology and, by this time, had acquired enough of an understanding of the broad sweep of human history to give context to the oil-peak discussion.

In my book, I discussed energy history, the evidence for a near-term global oil peak, the likely consequences, and the counter-arguments of the cornucopian economists who insist that “the market” will somehow produce more oil (rising demand stimulates supply, right?) and thus solve everything. I also surveyed the alternatives to oil — from coal to wind and solar — and came to the conclusion that no available replacements are capable of supplying the range of “benefits” currently offered by oil and gas.

I’ve heard the “all we have to do is just...” arguments. I get phone calls and e-mails every day from well-meaning folks who are convinced that a few more solar panels will do the trick. People who haven’t done the calculations can be forgiven for missing the cruel truth: Replacing our current energy infrastructure will require immense investment and time; that investment simply isn’t occurring, and we don’t have much time.

The Party’s Over was published over a year ago; since then, the evidence of a looming energy catastrophe has continued to mount. China’s oil imports are growing at a rate of over 30 percent per year, which suggests eventual geopolitical competition with US for remaining supplies. Meanwhile, America is becoming mired in a resource conflict in the Middle East that

threatens to spiral into World War IV. North America's natural gas production has peaked and is dwindling rapidly. And evidence has surfaced suggesting that oil reserves in the Middle East may be wildly overstated, so that when the global production peak does arrive, the subsequent decline in available exports may be rapid.

For many years I identified myself as an anarchist — that is, as one who believes that humans are inherently sociable and cooperative, and that authoritarian systems of government (which, historically, began to appear at about the same time as agricultural civilizations) only serve to constrain human freedom and reciprocal altruism. My initial interest in anarchism was stoked by readings in anthropology, which affirmed that pre-agricultural peoples enjoyed physical and mental health, as well as personal freedom, to a degree equaled only by members of the wealthiest classes of more formidable urban societies that got their food from fanning. In my first book, *Memories and Visions of Paradise* (Tarcher, 1989; Quest, 1995), I even hypothesized that the universal myth of a lost Golden Age might represent humanity's collective memory of the time before plows, kings, and armies.

Of course, I argued, "progress" has brought many benefits in speed, convenience, and hygiene. But at what cost! These benefits are inevitably unevenly spread (a billion live at the verge of starvation while a million drive luxury SUVs), and the side effects of the enterprise entail the destruction of the planetary biosphere. Modern industrial democracies, for all of their niceties, rely on extraction and exploitation in order to deliver their vaunted goods and liberties (ah, what freedom we enjoy! — to choose from a boggling array of consumer products and pre-selected slates of business-friendly political candidates). Meanwhile, species disappear, topsoil vanishes, and the global climate loses its moorings.

Peter Kropotkin, writing at the beginning of the 20th century, had laid the groundwork for green anarchism with his

Columbia blew up while coming in for a landing in February 2003 — Bush quoted from the ranting, spittle-flecked Old Testament prophet Isaiah, adding "The same Creator who names the stars also knows the names of the seven souls we mourn today. The crew of the shuttle Columbia did not return safely to Earth; yet we can pray that all are safely home." Ah yes, once again the fetid illusion of Divine Providence has been conjured up; like the fifteenth-century Portuguese Catholic explorers who built a huge crucifix on an estuary of the Congo River before inaugurating the slave trade, and the crazed, paranoid Puritans who murderously came to North America on the Mayflower, the miserabilist God and His pox-ridden blessings which have consistently ruined environments and ecologies in every corner of the world will be expected on board Bush's armada to Mars.

Christianity, of course, is at least as befouling to wild regions as soiled, disposable diapers in a landfill that was once a forest glade, choking clouds of carbon monoxide smog in the summer wind, and wretched, stagnant pools of Superfund-ready water. The religious pollution of outer space by the US military and defense industry has been going on for decades, beginning on December 24, 1968 when the astronauts aboard Apollo 8 took turns reading from die Bible in worldwide broadcasts as their capsule entered lunar orbit. Even more horrifying, Apollo 11 astronaut Buzz Aldrin self-administered Holy Communion before making his "one small step" into the Sea of Tranquility in late July 1969. Astronaut-turned-evangelical minister James Irwin described his 1971 moonwalk as a revelation of "the power of God"; astronaut Charles Duke returned from the Moon to become a Christian missionary, and frequently sermonized about "walking on the Moon and walking with the Son."

The regularly-scheduled space shuttle missions over the last decade seemed to have led to a renaissance of monotheistic mumbo-jumbo. Astronaut Tammy Jernigan talked about her blind Christian faith during a live broadcast from aboard the

Mars First!

by Don LaCoss

“The tighter that our humanity closes ranks to conquer nature on Mars, the tighter the elements close theirs to avenge the victory.”

— from Aleksandr Malinovskii Bogdanov’s *Red Star* (1908)

It’s easy to laugh off the Bush-Cheney regime’s plans for “establishing an extended human presence” on the Moon and Mars. “We will build new ships to carry man forward into the universe, to gain a new foothold on the Moon,” said Bush, a man who constantly fails to correctly pronounce the word “nuclear” and whose own scientific wisdom has had him publicly defending creationist fairy tales over Darwinian evolutionary theory. “We choose to explore space because doing so improves our lives and lifts our national spirit.” Coming out of the mouth of such a cowardly, belligerent, and proudly ignorant obscurantist like Bush, talk of interplanetary missions sounds as unbelievably silly as the music on a Christian rock CD.

But the issue of Bush Administration’s tendency towards faith-based foreign policy decisions and other deeply creepy manifestations of conservative Judeo-Christian supernaturalism is reason enough to take this ninnyhammer’s threat to the lunar and Martian wilderness very seriously. Take note, for instance, of how Bush concluded his NASA talk: “Let us continue the journey. May God bless.” Compare this to Bush’s remarks at the memorial for the space shuttle crew killed when the

classic text, *Mutual Aid*. Citing countless examples from human history and natural science, he showed that cooperation is not something that has to be enforced; it is innate — in both human and non-human communities. It is with the growth of the coercive state, with its monopoly on violence, that cooperation and freedom have suffered eclipse. As the century wore on, with its World Wars and mounting ecological crises, and with further developments in the science of anthropology, it became possible to mount a general critique of civilization *per se*.

Daniel Quinn popularized this critique in his novel, *Ishmael* (Bantam, 1992), in which he suggested that agriculture disrupted our primordial Edenic condition; with its advent, humanity bifurcated into “leavers” (the remaining hunter-gatherers) and “takers” — herders and farmers who saw nature as consisting simply of a pile of resources. All of history hinged on this fateful moral choice.

In the early 1990s, I joined an academic organization called the International Society for the Comparative Study of Civilizations (ISCSC), and at one of its annual conferences I presented a paper bashing civilization (the reception was not a warm one). Later published as *MuseLetter* #43, (July 1995), my paper, “A Primitivist Critique of Civilization” was later republished by John Zerzan in *Against Civilization* (Uncivilized Books, 1999); it is still posted at various anarchist sites on the web at insurgentdesire.org.uk/civilization.htm.

However, as I learned more from primary sources (visiting aboriginal communities in Australia, talking with Native Americans, and reading early ethnographic accounts), and as I studied archaeology and the principles of ecology, the picture became more complex. I became less inclined to think of civilization as a “mistake” — or a moral choice — but more as an inevitable response, given who we were and what conditions we faced after the close of the Pleistocene.

Our ancestors took up farming and herding not out of greed, but through necessity. Population pressure and resource depletion led to domestication and planting, which in turn led to periodic surpluses. The storage of food meant that some groups suffering temporary privation could survive by raiding other groups' granaries — hence the origins of armies (for both raiding and defense from raids) and of organized war.

The burgeoning numbers of people living in towns and cities led to the need for supervision and redistribution — and eventually for record keeping and bureaucracy. Every step along the way seemed unavoidable and good. Each step changed the way we thought and looked at the world. We justified each transition after the fact with our myths, religions, nationalistic propaganda, and political ideologies. And each adaptation brought consequences that required even more adaptation. The process is continuing still.

People can indeed be cooperative, but they can also be fiercely competitive; it is not only the presence or lack of coercive government that makes the difference, but also ecological conditions: where population is low relative to carrying capacity and people have integrated themselves into their ecosystem over the course of at least dozens of generations, competition is kept to a minimum; when population-resource ratios are less favorable and people are acting, in effect, as an invasive species — that is, when they have arrived in a new territory and have not had time to learn its limits and to co-evolve with other species already present — people can be both overwhelmingly destructive of their environment and also ceaselessly bellicose. Peace and cooperation have ecological preconditions.

Nevertheless, if the foraging life of the Pleistocene was not necessarily a peaceful Utopia, it was, nevertheless, the pattern of existence from which we evolved.

Even for those like myself who think of industrialism as a particularly nasty development in human history, the realization that industrial civilization is almost certain to collapse, and

Greens. After all, Greens spend money too, maybe even lots of money.

If Property Is Theft, Technology is Murder

The automobile, for example, is not accidentally murderous but inherently murderous. It kills not just by “accidents” but by its very existence, first as a source of pollution, but even more fundamentally as source of social atomization and the loss of nature. Speed itself, as Virilio says, constitutes a pollution of both space and time. Replacing gasoline with electricity or methane or tapwater will have no effect on these “invisible” forms of murder.

After all, one needs one's car. One can always plaster its bumper with Green slogans. “I'd Rather Be Fishing”... but somehow I'm not. Some day my Prince Kropotkin will come — but till then I need my cellphone.

Thus, bit by bit all culture becomes a form of mourning.

Since Luddism can't really be practiced alone, the whole question of praxis becomes vexed beyond measure. Overcoming Media Trance may be seen as a kind of spiritual practice, open to the individual — but to discover and live with a technology that that is not “hurtful to the commonalty” there must first exist a commons. Machine-smashing can begin at home, but society can only be changed in a Luddite way by machine-smashing on a social scale. Otherwise... nothing.

* * *

We adopt a supinely passive position toward our tech, our Second Nature: the very water in our fishbowl, the tech-world that envelops and cocoons us. We feel — and rightly — that we have no influence on the world. “Primitive” people worshipped the world they couldn’t understand (storms, animals, fertility, etc.), and we technohumans worship the world we cannot understand, bowing to idols of scale and efficiency, speed and molecularity, cost and price “mechanisms,” techno-war and genetic imperialism.

The next big command metaphor will be derived from genetic theory and engineering. DNA is a life machine, the mechanism of life itself. It can be repaired and improved. It can be commodified and sold. In fact, the Human Genome Project, which presented itself as pure humanitarian research, was driven from the start by visions of trillions. Eugenics failed because its science was faulty, its tech ineffective. Genetic engineering is based on “good” hard science, and GenTech will work.

Its successes are more to be feared than its failures. Its goal is to create a “race” of eugenetic wealthians, gentes of the Imperium who can afford tall blond high-I.Q. learning machines devoid of all taint. Tech will move on from the power to shape and control mere consciousness to metamorphic control over the whole body and the essence of life itself: from the image of life to life as pure image. No wonder Debord committed suicide — even though suicide is just another machine.

Monsanto has decided that “natural” is a market niche, an upscale consumer market, small but lucrative — not a “revolution” to be feared, but merely a “lifestyle option” to be monopolized. The new flexible outsourced downsized corporate matrix can easily supply all sorts of niches. We’ve passed beyond the era of One Size Fits All, or Any Color So Long As It’s Black. Out of 600 or 6000 channels, at least, one can be safely devoted to

that the process has already begun and will dramatically escalate in the next few years as a result of oil depletion, comes as a shock to the system.

It is one thing to look back nostalgically at ancient hunter-gatherers inhabiting a sparsely populated planet and to opine that we should somehow try to recover their personal autonomy and closeness to nature; it is quite another to imagine the chaos that will ensue as 6.4 billion humans attempt to survive when the industrial system that supports them sputters and stalls.

Already grain production per capita is slipping; what happens when we can no longer cheaply grow and transport food? If even a fraction of our current population were to attempt to take up hunting and gathering, what is left of wild nature would disappear rapidly.

I can’t help but think of all of this in personal terms, at least occasionally. Much as I detest cars, cities, cell phones, and industrial agriculture, I am not prepared for what is coming. Despite my solar panels, fruit and nut trees, and double-dug vegetable garden beds, I am thoroughly dependent on the industrial support infrastructure that we have all grown up with. Moreover, I have developed a taste for books, music, and art. I spend hours each day writing, and communicating with other people, via computer.

I have no intention of buying a gun and trying to survive the coming crash by picking off garden poachers. I am resigned to the fact that I am a product of my historical era. My colleagues and I at New College in Santa Rosa teach our young students about primitive technology, renewable energy, and ecological agriculture, but I have no realistic expectation that I personally will live to see the complete demise of our current world system, much less a full transition to a new era of sustainability.

These days, when I see a young green anarchist calling for the overthrow of civilization and a return to the wild, I feel a mix of emotions. I can hardly disagree with the sentiment: it

is even plainer to me now than it was before I began studying energy history that the rise and demise of industrialism may constitute the most destructive events in planetary history. If one can mentally view the human condition from some sufficiently distant perspective, it is easy to say, “Good riddance!” But woe to us who have to live through the actual events.

It appears to me now that industrialism is not something one has to oppose, no matter how horrendous its impacts; I could say the same for globalization and perhaps even civilization itself: these are all verging on collapse — and perhaps within a matter of only years; decades at the most.

It still makes sense to me to actively and vigorously oppose war, corporate hijacking of the commons, forest clear-cutting, the genetic engineering of food, sweat shops, and a thousand other abuses of nature and humanity. We need to save what we can of nature — non-human and human. But even if we do nothing to decry the overarching system that entails these abuses, that system will disintegrate on its own, and soon. Opposing it is like commanding the Sun to set.

Moreover, advertising oneself as an “enemy of civilization” in such circumstances may only provide the suffering multitudes with an easy target against which to vent their rage.

I suggest that we oppose instead the new feudalism that may take the place of the current world system. If the industrial period has been bad, its demise could entail something even worse.

Imagine the scenario: as resource depletion undermines the industrial infrastructure of production, distribution, and communication, people are cut adrift. Bands of looters roam the countryside. In order to maintain control, central governments dispense with niceties and become utterly ruthless in their methods. But, exhausted by resource wars overseas and unable to maintain long-distance command and control, those same governments eventually grow ineffectual and disintegrate. Feu-

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We need a systematic way to wake up from the trance-state induced by the very Mesopotamian notion that only the slaves of the powerful are safe from the dangers of nature and the anxieties of a too-perfect freedom.

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Some friends of mine watch hours of TV daily on the premise that one needs to know what THEY are cooking up. But in truth, one or two little adverts, seen accidentally every year or so, suffice to unfold the entire plan with perfect clarity.

* * *

A letter to the Editor in my local paper quite seriously proposed the idea that “children are ‘learning machines.’” In computer jargon, I believe a learning machine is a kind of dull “artificial intelligence,” not up to SciFi standards: no desire, no humor, no imagination, and, in fact, no intelligence. Nevertheless, we know the universe is like a computer, the universe IS a computer. The brain is a computer, and some day, computers will be brains. Since people are computers they can be treated as learning machines: turned on, tuned in, plugged in, jacked in, downloaded, and virtualized. The rogue educator John Gatto once said that if anyone ever called his children “human resources” he’d go after that person with a baseball bat. But... “learning machines?”

* * *

Of course, technology shapes unconsciousness as much as (un)consciousness shapes technology. “It’s a question of who’s to be master,” as Humpty Dumpty put it. I believe it was Arthur C. Clarke who said that any technology one cannot understand appears to the unconscious as magic.

breakdown as its true content, its “message” (as McLuhan said). Alienation is its true value. The personal computer as glorified TV causes the same range of side effects as other electronic media (with a few new ones like a carpal tunnel syndrome) but it actually produces far more. Marrying CommTech to media produced a malign synergy as both offspring and goal in one box: total absorption of attention, of attentiveness, in machinic representation. This is a high point for technocracy: its triumph over hearts and minds as well as bodies.

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As for the newest new tech, genetic engineering, it may cause Frankenfoods, hideous mutations, new diseases, and so on. But these “inadvertencies” or failures seem far less threatening than the fated successes of the technology, which will produce the privatization and capitalization of nature, the reduction of life itself (including sexuality) to money. In the future, you’ll pay not only for your water and air but even for your body.

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Living without modern conveniences can be much more pleasurable and much easier than most readers (even radical readers) might imagine. Capital has most of us spooked into believing on deep prerational levels that without Civilization we’d all be dead (or worse) within days. We must be helpless, otherwise we wouldn’t buy their false security. We must be taught to associate the organic with death, otherwise we might be tempted to refuse the representation of the machinic as life.

Luddism proposes not martyrdom, but pleasure. Appropriate tech must be by definition sensuous and sensual. Science liberated from Capital would serve Fourier’s ideal of *Luxe*, of pleasure undreamed by the dull customers of mere Civilization.

dal warlords arise, offering protection to those who submit and death to those who resist.

If this scenario at all resembles what is actually in store, those of us who love freedom and cooperation will have our hands full keeping the flame alive.

On the other hand, the period ahead could hold opportunities: during times of intense change, people often become open to new ideas that were previously marginalized. In this case, the potential alternatives range from ecovillages to Permaculture to small-scale direct democracy and consensus decision-making.

For the maximization of both strategies — the defensive and the creative — small cooperative communities will be essential. Some communities could focus primarily on preserving what is worth salvaging of our industrial interval (useful scientific knowledge, history, literature and the arts); others could specialize in the redevelopment of primitive technologies and skills (fire making, flint knapping, tanning, etc.). Still others could dedicate themselves more to activist work, targeting specific environmental and human rights issues.

I believe that anarchists have a choice to make at this critical juncture: on one hand, they can choose to squabble over a political philosophy that arose with the industrial era and may die with it; or they can hew to the essence of that philosophy (autonomy, creativity, cooperation) while adapting and applying it to rapidly changing circumstances.

Those who attempt to do this are in for a lot of hard work, and survival is not assured. However, if anyone is to survive the coming century, and if humankind is to avoid a descent first into fascism and then authoritarian feudalism, new models of social organization will be required — not theoretical ideals, but living examples of service communities that are protected and nourished by surrounding populations because they provide tangible cultural benefits. Such communities will need to be in position to teach survival skills, while acting as repositories of

historical and ecological knowledge, while also being havens for the arts. There is not much time to gather the resources for the creation of such communities, so it is important that efforts along these lines begin immediately.

Luddism Begins at Home: Random Meditations on Overcoming the Media Trance

Tragedy of the Sixties: If you turn on and tune in — such heavily technoplilic metaphors! — you can't really hope to drop out of the technocracy. Too bad turn off, tune out, and secede isn't nearly so snappy a slogan.

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Car ads make great play with our unconscious realization that we need cars to get away to some place where there are no cars. To escape. The “freedom” of the American automobilist is a freedom from community, from place, from the human. It accomplishes all this, as Virilio might say, by its speed, which alienates (or “liberates”) the human from organic connection to space. The car causes pollution, death and disease; it demands paved highways and parking lots. It transforms nature into a tourist destination. It “makes” constant omnipresent noise, global warming and aesthetic blight — to name a few “side effects.” But the car produces social breakdown. This is what people buy their SUV's for. There is the hidden hook in all car ads.

* * *

TV causes stupidity, obesity, anomie, boredom, cultural despair, suicidal depression and so on. But TV produces social

to non-authoritarian social organization. And agrarian radicalism remains (at least potentially) significant for vast numbers of people involved in agricultural economies. One of the sickest things about the US is its complete corporatization of agriculture, eliminating farms and farmers along with nearly every vestige of agrarianism. Even Europe hasn't reached this stage, much less the rest of the world.

Even if our ultimate goal remains some form of victorious reversion to the primitive, it would seem that a strategic alliance with horticulturists and agrarian radicals might prove advantageous.

* * *

These themes are not new to Peter Wilson. For further investigation, we recommend his essay, "Grange Appeal", in FE 360, Spring 2003. Moreover, readers might want to check out the anthology edited by Wilson and Bill Weinberg, *Avant Gardening: Ecological Struggle in the City and the World*, now available from the Barn. See page 62 for details.

Domestication by Peter Lamborn Wilson

The hunter/gatherer school of anarcho-anthropology and the anarchist critique of Civilization (e.g., Perlman's *Leviathan*) proposed the domestication of plants and animals as the first step toward separation and ultimately the State.

Sahlins posed the question: why would any sane free hunter/gatherers voluntarily take up the shit-work of the "primitive agriculturist" (or, by extension, pastoralist)? — the erosion of leisure, the impoverished diet, etc. ? Given his premises, this unsolved puzzle hints at coercion and deprivation. With hindsight we see that domestication leads to misery. We assume it began that way.

Charles Fourier boasted that his was the first coherent critique of Civilization. He experienced his big revelation in 1799 and so invites comparison with other early Romantics such as Blake or Novalis. (All were deeply influenced by Hermeticism.)

Fourier believed in an economy with elements of both gathering and agriculture, one that structurally occupies a time and space between them; he called it horticulture. Fourier associates agriculture with societies, primitive agriculturists such as the Tahitians or pastoralist "barbarians" — all these are to be preferred to Civilization. But whether for better or worse, Civ. has suppressed them all and nearly erased them. After Civilization, in the era of "Harmony," only horticulture will satisfy the Passions of Harmonial humanity for magnificent and excessive luxury (a concept that later influences Bataille's theory

of Excess), as well as ecological harmony and natural beauty. (See Fourier's *Theory of the Four Movements*.)

Thus, Fourier sees a connection between passion and horticulture.

The same theory appears independently in the work of certain ethno-botanists and "plant historians" in the tradition of the great Carl O. Sauer and the Russian scientist N. Vavilov (crushed by Lysenko and Stalin).

In brief, this theory posits that the origin of horticulture lies in a kind of love affair between certain plants and certain humans in the Mesolithic or early Neolithic.

Most gatherers are transhumants rather than true nomads. As the tribe makes its yearly round and returns to the summer camp, they find that their favorite plants seem to have followed them. Plants that prefer disturbed soil thrive in the campgrounds when their seeds are accidentally dropped and perhaps fertilized with feces and midden mulch. Vavilov identified two plants that spread from Central Asia in this manner: hemp and the apple tree.

Women gatherers would've been the first to suss out the link between seeds and availability, and the "secret knowledge" would belong to an almost erotic relation between certain plants and certain women. (Some seeds may have been discovered by men, e.g., tobacco in the New World, which is usually cultivated by men.) Thus the origin of the garden as "earthly paradise."

Is it impossible to imagine something similar between hunters and animals? The first domestication of an animal, the dog, was clearly a sort of love affair (probably the work not of men or women but children). The hunter's magical relation with the game is transformed into a symbiosis, a cross-species solidarity or love, as with the Masai for their cattle or the Sami for their reindeer. Plants and animals are all living beings and living beings eat each other — which scarcely rules out the si-

multaneous and even necessary element of passion. The *Rig Veda* is interesting on this point.

A great deal of confusion rises out of the unfortunate term "Agricultural Revolution" to describe the early Neolithic. In Fourier's sense of the term, agriculture doesn't appear till the end of the Neolithic and then only in connection with metallurgy and the emergence of the State. The Neolithic itself is horticultural and pre-pastoral. (True nomadic pastoralism of the "barbarian" type can only exist in relation to civilized agriculture as its antithesis, as Ibn Khaldun first pointed out.)

The political structure of the Neolithic is based on what Kropotkin would've called the free peasantry and the village Mir.

Sahlins was perhaps a bit misleading in comparing the "leisure society" of the hunter/gatherers to the work society of slash-&-burn agriculturists. A great deal of that "work" consists of pattering around in the garden. There exist wonderful accounts — for example, the Dyaks of Borneo, who grow yams and keep pigs, do a bit of the H/G for delicacies and spend most of their time (when not head-hunting) in feasting, making love, and telling long stories. (See *Nine Dyak Nights*.)

This point needs emphasis: horticulture does not put an end to non-authoritarian tribal structures of the Paleolithic type. On the contrary, it successfully prolongs them under the new economic regime. The State does not emerge amongst gardeners.

One major problem for the primitivist wing of non-authoritarian theory has always been the tragic perception that hunting/gathering no longer appears a viable economy for a crowded globe. It sometimes seems that only a vast ecocatastrophe would make widespread "reversion" possible, and this is an unthinkable thought.

A transition to horticulture however doesn't seem quite so unthinkable. Permaculture, for example, can be seen as a logical extension or updated version of horticulture, entirely suited